

DELAWARE WATERFRONT REVITALISATION

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The basic idea was to host an annual water festival to get Wilmington’s citizens and the Delaware leadership excited about revitalization and then attract major investment to rebuild the area.



TURNING \$2,500 AND A BIG IDEA INTO \$2 BILLION INVESTMENT AND THOUSANDS OF JOBS

“As soon as you draw a line in the sand, and pick a time and date, you then take all the action steps necessary to succeed”

– Sam Beard

Background

The Wilmington, Delaware waterfront revitalization is a perfect case study for action and results. A Big Idea and \$2,500 turned into \$2 billion of investment creating thousands of jobs.

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This waterfront revitalization has been central to the Jefferson Awards training. The main point is its simplicity. With students, Sam Beard takes five minutes. “Together we Think Big and settle on the five basic elements needed for our Simple Step-By-Step Action Plan.”

To attract 10,000 people to a water festival we need:

- **Research – become an expert**
- **Food**
- **Entertainment**
- **Water games**
- **A marketing system to attract 10,000 folks.**

Research

Sam Beard had no idea how to rebuild a waterfront. He went to his friends in Baltimore, Maryland – the experts who had pioneered waterfront revitalization and had created a \$4 billion project that draws one million visitors a year. They advised that water excites communities.

Baltimore began by hosting a New Year's Eve black-tie gala with dancing and fireworks right in the middle of the abandoned industrial slum situated on the Patapsco River. They ran water-related volunteer events weekly with two volunteer coordinators. They hired an architect and created a simple development plan. Every year they went to the Maryland legislature to rebuild the dilapidated bulk heading to make the area development-ready.

The Baltimore group suggested that we:

- **Host a water festival**
- **Create year-round volunteer events**
- **Enlist a volunteer architect to create a plan and a motivating model to dazzle decision makers with the view of what IS possible.**

Go to the Delaware legislature to rebuild the bulk heading.

Food

We went to the telephone book yellow pages and called food vendors to provide the food. (That sounds funny today with online access to everything.)

Entertainment

Same procedure. We went to the yellow pages and called local bands to play free. They agreed and we scheduled them.

Water games

We didn't have the simple plan for this so we hosted a pizza party with our board and didn't quit until we had 20 engaging water games. This included canoe races matching the Governor's team against the Mayor's team. Any activity that would get everybody wet.

We built a suspended rope and wooden runway for kids. The fire department provided the hose to douse the kids.

Marketing system to attract 10,000 people

The total project cost was \$2,500. That's all we had.

Our motivating flyer was the key.

Yes...families were invited to have fun, food, entertainment and water games.

But the powerful purpose was the biggest motivator.

The headline was:

Help Revitalize The Gateway To Delaware

500,000 flyers were donated and we passed them out at the most populated areas as people went to and from work, and on the most popular lunch malls.

We created large four-foot by six-foot sandwich boards with blown up flyers on them – all donated – and posted these at major intersections up and down Delaware.



With the \$2,500 we went to Delaware's four major radio stations. For each \$1 we paid them, we asked for \$3 of donated air time. This created a \$10,000 radio campaign in a state that features driving time.

As a volunteer, we enlisted Wallace Roberts & Todd, the Baltimore Inner Harbor architecture firm, to create our plan and marketing model.

Results

The plan worked. 10,000 people showed up the first year. The third year 20,000 people showed up.

Because of the water festival excitement, we raised some money, and hired one professional to mobilize over 1,000 volunteers in monthly water-related projects.

We sponsored clean-ups, planted trees, created a major waterfront mural, and even started the Wilmington Rowing Club with the Girl Scouts and John Kelly, Jr. (Grace Kelly's brother) – a four-time Olympic rowing champion. We worked with the Wilmington Mayor and the Delaware Governor and received \$250,000 per year for five years to rebuild the bulk heading.

The Delaware Theater Company, Opera Delaware, a Beneficial National Bank branch, Delaware's leading architecture firm and an office design firm – all moved to the waterfront. The prize was a credit card company that built their \$150 million headquarters.

A \$2,500 start-up budget led to \$300 million of investment.

This created a whole new vision for the area. The next Governor, Tom Carper, and past Governor, Russell Peterson, picked up where we left off. Total investment now exceeds \$2 billion. Thousands of jobs have been created.

Get started

This is always the key, and in this case, really proves the point.

We had two board meetings. By the end of the second meeting, the board had designed the water festival.

At our May 1982 meeting, the board unanimously approved the project. When we began to pick the actual date for the water festival, a substantial majority of the board wanted to postpone the event to the summer of 1983. The heads nodded in agreement, 'We need more time to plan.'



Sam Beard's experience is that delay in most cases sounds smart, but is an excuse to never proceed. Too often delay is the killer.

Sam reported to the board that we had the plan. Sam asked the board, if we put off the festival until the summer of 1983, when will we really get serious and start the implementation? They thought for a minute and gave me the right answer, "Next May." Sam pointed out that this was May.

So we called the Mayor's office and found an August weekend that did not conflict with any other major community event and Got Started.

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