



JIM FISHER

is the CEO of IMST Corp in Houston. For more than 20 years, IMST has provided comprehensive site analysis and sales forecasting to a wide range of convenience retailers. Reach Jim at jfisher@imstcorp.com

Going Beyond Opportunistic Blight

“My,” you say, “how can blight in any shape or form present opportunity?” Well, it does appear to be happening, to the surprise of many through the promise and actions of aggressive pathfinders and visionaries. We have been fortunate to work with many of these individual and company pathfinders; the journeys have always proven to be educational, informational and enlightening.

Blight has been defined this way: “Urban decay (also known as urban rot and urban blight) is the process whereby a previously functioning city, or part of a city, falls into disrepair and decrepitude.” It seems appropriate that the definition can be extended to “neglect, governmental experiments resulting in the ruination of the lives of human beings for multiple generations, while aiding in the robbery of the soul of a city. To turn what was majestic and inspiring into decay and abandonment.”

Through the visions and actions of business and community leaders (certainly eliminates politicians and bureaucrats), what were large areas of some of this country’s major core urban centers are being reborn via the mantra “Enough is enough.” Hundreds of thousands of acres are being identified as opportunities that have been dormant for multiple decades after having the life and promise squeezed from them. Some of our finest urban gems—D.C., South Boston, Detroit, Nashville, Los Angeles, St. Louis and Chicago—have been subjected to the experiments of ruination. It’s a privilege that we have been asked to advise and assist various companies and pathfinders during the reclamation process to restore and rejuvenate what once was.

Urban Pathfinders

The regeneration and redevelopment actions on such grand scales can be attempted for many reasons: to restore history, to bring economic potentiality to areas of despair, to return to one’s roots to restore what meant so much during life’s journey, or simply to ensure a sense of history will exist for generations to come. These all are admirable reasons we can appreciate and witness as justified. But in



the long run, it is reason and results that must rule in the process of determining validity vs. myopic vision. Results are easy to determine; one can observe the betterment of lives and physical spaces while ensuring profits and sustainability.

Performing the duties and responsibilities our clients require of our company, we are exposed to areas, circumstances and environments where one would never decide to (or want) to be inserted—core urban areas in cities where you might have lived for years and would never venture into by choice. These are areas where we now go on behalf of others to identify opportunities, perhaps change lives, achieve positive results, reverse paths, and

help enable sustained, moral profit for those who see, who care, who serve and who commit to making a difference.

We are frequently asked how we view this industry and if there are any opportunities for growth, expansion, creativity, etc. We purposefully and positively always answer with a resounding, “Yes, opportunities exist in multiple ways via many directions and venues that must remain fluid and transformational.” Being an urban pathfinder is such an opportunity; to be able to see and comprehend what can be from what was lost and buried (many times, literally).

We are fortunate to work for aggressive companies, forward-seeking community leaders, focused developers, citizen organizations and other interested, purposeful parties/groups to foster and create urban climates of growth and prosperity. These regeneration and redevelopment projects involving tens of billions of dollars will take generations for all phases to be completed. It will take decades to see fulfillment and completion that is real, sustainable and multigenerational for those who will see the pathways of dreams realized, to the betterment of all.

It brings pleasure to us when we are aware that we have been asked to assist in the creation of projects that will significantly and positively improve the lives of many, even though we know that we will not see such fruition and completion in our lifetimes. Joy through thoughtfulness and clarity of purpose can bring much to many. Goodness, we live in the greatest country ever created.

Do opportunities exist? You betcha—every day. ■