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"First Leaders," June 3, 2010

Michigan: Be not afraid of greatness

By Ron Kitchens and Heather Smith
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We all know the premise of the century-old tale of "Beauty and the Beast:" a beautiful young girl looks beyond an enchanted prince's beastlike exterior to see the true beauty of his inner soul. For many of us, it is easy to grasp the concept of the "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" idiom. Why? The answer is simple - *beauty* has been made quantifiable for us in the likes of advertisements and billboards everywhere we look. And if we want to be more beautiful, we easily know what we have to our skin or hair.

But what many of us forget while we watch a version of "Beauty of the Beast," whether it be the Disney, Broadway or television adaptation featuring Linda Hamilton and Ron Pearlman, is that beauty is not the tale's focus – rather it is GREATNESS. Greatness is what sticks long after beauty fades. So, wouldn't we want to make ourselves *great* even more?

This past week, leaders from many of the Kalamazoo Region's top organizations met at a regional forum presented by Business Leaders for Michigan (www.businessleadersformichigan.com). Representatives from that group, which is composed of 75 determined and forward-thinking chairpersons, chief executives and most senior executives of Michigan's largest job providers and universities supplying over 300,000 jobs in Michigan, generating over \$1 trillion in annual revenue and serving over 100,000 students, presented their views on where our state of Michigan is, where we should be and how to get there.

They began their discussion talking about greatness because ultimately, that is where we all should without a doubt want to be. Don't you? And, they gave us some examples of current great states and then pointed out four characteristics that are prevalent in all.

Now before we give you these four characteristics, we want to tell you a secret: These four characteristics, if present, will just not make our state great again, but they will make your business great, your family great and any organization that you belong to great. And we guarantee, that great leaders get it right not in just in one area – they get it right in all of them.

So, what are those characteristics?

1. **Competitiveness.** Always be ready to compete. Lower barriers to market. Exceed your competitor's standards. Train, study and get smarter. Require quality checks. Get yourself in the best shape ever. Benchmark your aspirations.

2. **Cohesiveness.** Decide what your goals are and approach those goals as a cohesive group. Target your desired outcome and do not let yourself be sidetracked by distractions. Collaborate with others. Manage your relations with your team members and peers. Do not participate in partisan politics.

3. **Distinctiveness.** Know who you are and use it to your advantage. If you go to Las Vegas, you can see a thousand Elvises but, we all know the truth: There is only one Elvis. Define yourself to attract customers and partners. Retain your brand in everything you do.

4. **Innovation.** Innovation made Michigan. It is what made your company. Innovation is the mother of all. Keep it going.

That being said, we believe that Michigan can once again become a Top Ten state poised for job creation and economic growth as we were just two decades ago. In order to get there though, it will take a lot of hard work to transform Michigan's economy and create jobs that will make a positive and sustainable impact on our future.

We believe Michigan is up for the challenge. So, remember Michigan: Greatness is in the eye of the beholder. In the words of William Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*, "Be not afraid of greatness."

Hey, Michigan! Let's get great again. But remember, we all have to do our part. Let's make our companies great; our K-12 schools and institutions of higher education great; our roads and public infrastructure great; our cities great; and our tax structure conducive to long-term economic growth and company attraction. And then once we do that, let's keep going.

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