



The Republican.

Springfield is open for small business

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By JOHN F. KERRY

Springfield may not have won the contest to host the premiere last weekend of the "Simpsons Movie" - and that isn't the only place where Springfield has been getting a raw deal recently. A national business journal recently ranked Springfield 75th out of 75 U.S. cities in small business growth. But anyone who has been downtown recently would know that Springfield is open for business.

Sure, the city's had its tough times and will continue to face challenges of a shifting economy, just like the rest of America. Baystate Medical Center and Mass Mutual will continue to be giants in the community, and the Greater Springfield area will continue to serve as the hub of Western Massachusetts and a place where small businesses can succeed.

Springfield residents value families and a good quality of life, and the businesses in the broader community reflect that. They're dedicated to creating an environment with good wages, workforce development and career paths.

Just look at businesses like Decorated Products in Westfield. Jeffrey Glaze followed in his father's footsteps and took the helm of the light-manufacturing firm 15 years ago and received this year's Pioneer Valley Business Excellence Award.

Manufacturing has been the heart of Western Massachusetts, but Springfield is also paving the way for a growing high tech economy. Keith Parent and Ellen Bembem are leading the charge at the Regional Technology Corporation, which is working with the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, to attract technology-based firms to the region. These new jobs - from information technology to bioscience industries and advanced manufacturing - will help keep the commonwealth competitive in a global economy. And while these are success stories, there are challenges we must address. Massachusetts ranks second in the country in educational achievement, but post-college graduates aren't staying here to work.

As part of the Knowledge Corridor, Greater Springfield's resources for investing in entrepreneurship and training the next generation of skilled workers couldn't be stronger. Springfield Technical Community College's business incubator is providing guidance and expertise to build a successful small business community. According to the Small Business Administration, after six years about 40 percent of new businesses survive, but 87 percent succeed if they have graduated from a business incubator.

The Kitterage Center at Holyoke Community College provides business, professional and workforce development services and hosts an export center for the western part of the state.

We can do more to support and expand these critical educational resources that will keep good jobs here at home. But it will take a coordinated effort at the local, state and federal levels.

The Springfield Chamber of Commerce has launched a successful grant program to occupy vacant storefronts and stabilize neighborhoods. And Gov. Deval L. Patrick has launched a statewide effort to retain our manufacturing jobs and highly-skilled workers. And at the federal level, we're implementing sound tax policies that encourage investments in small businesses, expanding access to capital and providing businesses with essential training and assistance tools.

No online poll or report from a national business journal can represent the reality on the ground. The City of Homes is on a path to becoming the City of Business, too, as we continue the transition from a manufacturing base to a place where technology, education, health care and service industries thrive.

John F. Kerry represents Massachusetts in the United States Senate, where he is the chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

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