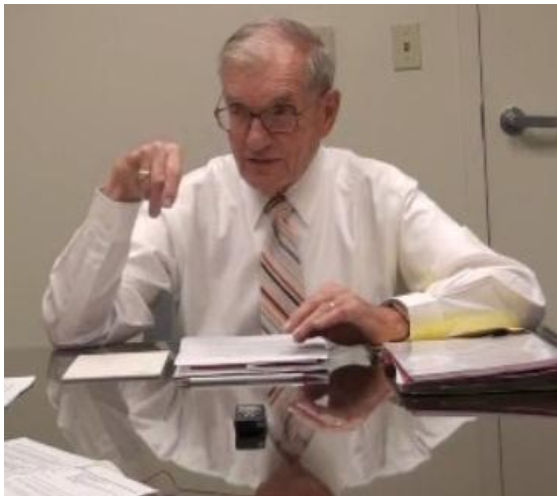


John J. Heldrich



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

John Heldrich is a key figure in the revitalization of downtown New Brunswick. When Johnson & Johnson was considering relocating outside of New Brunswick, he, along with others, helped convince the company to construct its new international headquarters within the small city. Considering the important role that Johnson & Johnson has held in the revitalization of New Brunswick, it is difficult to imagine how that loss would have altered the future of the city.

John Heldrich was born and raised in New Brunswick, the son of German immigrants. He recalls playing baseball near the Johnson & Johnson factories that once lined the waterfront of New Brunswick in the early half of the twentieth century, when the city was still industrial. He was the youngest of five boys; his mother was a widow. Heldrich served America in World War II and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. After returning from the war, he enrolled in night classes at Rutgers, becoming the first in his family to graduate from college. While taking classes, Heldrich started a business and then was hired as a manufacturing trainee at Johnson & Johnson (J&J). [3] He spent twenty years “in manufacturing and ran several plants” for J&J and was later promoted to the Domestic Operating Company, the mother company within the Johnson & Johnson corporate structure. [3] By the end of the 1960s, John Heldrich was promoted to the corporate level at Johnson & Johnson. [4] Heldrich recalled his surprise after seeing New Brunswick when he later returned from running a plant in Illinois. He “couldn’t believe it was my same city because everybody was moving out to the suburbs.” [12]

When Johnson & Johnson began deliberating its future in New Brunswick, John Heldrich was tapped for his knowledge of the local environment. He was picked by the chairman and chief executive of Johnson & Johnson, Phil Hoffman, to organize community leaders to work toward a holistic citywide revitalization. One aspect of this was Project Action to Employment. Through Project Action, Heldrich and his colleagues “developed a coalition between the employment service and the employment ends of our operations here in New Brunswick and Rutgers University.” With local contacts like Roy Epps of the Urban League, the group addressed urban underemployment in the early 1970s. [7]

This led to John Heldrich meeting Leo Molinaro of the American Cities Corporation, a subsidiary of the Rouse Company, a shopping mall and community developer. The American Cities Corporation became involved with various municipalities in the 1970s and 1980s that were attempting to reinvigorate their central business districts, consulting in planning and development. The Rouse Company, which Heldrich called a “very socially conscious developer,” received attention for its development efforts in Hartford, Connecticut, which became known as the *Greater Hartford Process*. The concept of the Process was to revitalize a city by addressing its physical, economic, and social issues simultaneously. [7] “I became enamored with the [Hartford Process and the] fact that they were forming a coalition of the business sector, the private sector, the public sector, and the community,” Heldrich recalled. “So conceptually, it was a wonderful model.” [7-8]

John Heldrich explained the Hartford Process to Richard Sellars, the chairman and chief executive of Johnson & Johnson from 1973 until 1976. He arranged for Leo Molinaro to meet Richard Sellars. [8] After the meeting, as Heldrich recalls, Leo Molinaro said to him, “He’s not ready, John. He’s not ready for what we’re talking about—taking on a whole city. You’re going to have to convince him to [take on the city].” [8-9] “Taking on the city” alludes to the holistic process of redevelopment that characterized the approach of the American Cities Corporation. [8-9]

Some time passed before John Heldrich received a phone call from Richard Sellars “out-of-the-blue one day”: He wanted to meet with Leo Molinaro again. It was then decided to conduct a study to determine the “odds of turning [New Brunswick] around.” At this point, Richard Sellars became “the convener within the community of the key players at that time.” [9] Sellars organized a meeting at the J&J Guest House. Attendees included the mayor of New Brunswick, the heads of the area hospitals, President Edward J. Bloustein of Rutgers, local bankers, and other community members. The group agreed to hire the American Cities Corporation to conduct a feasibility study. John Heldrich was appointed chairman of the group. To fund the study, the members pledged money, and Johnson & Johnson made up the difference, which Heldrich noted was “a major share.” [9-10] In January 1975 the American Cities Corporation released its results from the study. The study held New Brunswick in a favorable light with much potential. [10]

Heldrich became involved with building an administrative structure for the redevelopment process, which included hiring Andy Baglivo, a former reporter and communication director for Governor Cahill, as a public relations consultant. [11]

Important developments in the redevelopment process came in July 1975 and January 1976 when New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT) and the New Brunswick Development Corporation (Devco) were created following the advice of the American Cities study. About these two organizations, Heldrich noted that two NBT members served on the

Devco board and two Devco members served on the NBT board. This was to create, according to Heldrich, a system of checks and balances between the two groups. [13]

Heldrich discussed a Rutgers Eagleton Institute survey that was initiated as a way to measure the performance of the redevelopment agencies over time. He decided to conduct the survey biennially. [17–18] The survey helped leaders determine what the priorities of revitalization should be as well as how residents were responding to the work. [19] Mr. Heldrich was involved in creating Joyce Kilmer Park, which he credits as a “big catalyst”: Residents “started to take pride” in a newer city. [13]

The board members of New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco included major stakeholders in the community. Bringing these different interests to the same table and finding a common cause is the reason John Heldrich thinks New Brunswick has successfully revitalized itself; it is what he calls a “unity of purpose.” [24] He emphasized the “holistic approach” to revitalizing cities and stressed the importance of working with the local government. As Heldrich said, “You have to deal with the physical and the social simultaneously.” [12]

In 1982 Johnson & Johnson commissioned American muralist Richard Haas to paint a *trompe l’oeil* on the side of the PSE&G substation in New Brunswick. About the mural: “We had a couple of people on bicycles that went right into the wall.” [47] He remarked that the artwork “became a place to go see”; however, J&J planned from the beginning for the building eventually to be razed.

John Heldrich spoke about the controversial Route 18 Bridge extension. “A lot of people felt that J&J was being a little hard-nosed here,” he said. However, from the perspective of J&J “it was very critical that the bridge be done.” He recalls a visit from former Governor Byrne who asked about J&J’s future plans in New Brunswick. Heldrich paraphrases the governor as saying, “Well, we can’t accomplish the objectives of building the groundwork for the renaissance of this city unless you deal with Route 18.” [30]

John Heldrich explained the impetus for the redevelopment as a continuation of the J&J Credo (“We are responsible to the communities in which we live and work”) and a meeting that then President Lyndon B. Johnson convened in 1968 of the CEOs of companies in cities with underemployment. J&J contracted with the world-renowned architect I. M. Pei for its new headquarters building (opened in 1983) on Albany Street:

And of course it’s an I. M. Pei building; he was fantastic. So one day I talked to him and said, “I. M., I’d like to see you make a schematic of how you would see New Brunswick in the future.” So I put him on the helicopter and took him on the helicopter around the county and so forth. And he came back, and he drew circles down where the Hyatt is now, and said, “This is your hotel.” And then he went up and we had, of course, the city hall. “This is your government center”—another big circle. And he kept going around, and the performing arts center—he put the State Theatre in, and he said, “This whole

area would be a wonderful performing arts center.” He was a very conceptual guy, so he laid this out. [46]

If you look at the railroad bridge in New Brunswick today, you will notice that a segment of the stone structure is covered with a white facing. Heldrich recalls that the state had planned to cover the entire bridge in this way, but I. M. Pei intervened. “[Pei] said, ‘That’s terrible, absolutely terrible. You are destroying the beauty of that.’ And he got to [chief executive of J&J] James E.] Burke, and Burke called and got my people to call the state—and they stopped. You can still see where they stopped doing that.” [48]

Regarding the fences along the Albany Street Bridge, Heldrich noted that they were erected so that people don’t jump. I. M. Pei said, “Why have we got these things blocking this beautiful bridge”? And I said, “Because people may jump in [the river].” He said, “If they want to jump in, let them jump in.” [49]

Mr. Heldrich noted that a particular strength in the redevelopment process has been continuity of government. Since 1979 New Brunswick has had only two long-serving mayors. [16] He spoke of former mayor John A. Lynch Jr., who in his words was “very smart.” As one example he cites that the mayor “spent a lot of time and effort in getting the infrastructure of the city removed because he was smart enough to see, on the development cycle, that you have old pipes and things, [and] the city was being dug up.” [13]

Regarding the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Heldrich stated that 90 percent of its funds go to issues directly related to health. A portion of the funds is directed to issues where health is indirectly affected by the environment. As an example, Heldrich explained that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation gave a million dollars to support the forthcoming performing arts center in New Brunswick. The rationale for a health foundation granting funds to a performing arts center is that the center will create jobs, bring in visitors, and improve the general environment of the city. [21-22]

Heldrich has visited more than thirty-two cities throughout his career. “I became a student—not an academic student—but a student of the urban [scene].” [22-23]

At the time the interview was conducted, Heldrich noted that he had been retired for twenty years. He continues his pro bono involvement with the New Brunswick community in an office provided by Johnson & Johnson. [34] In 2007 his commitment to New Brunswick was honored when The Heldrich, a new hotel and conference center in downtown, was named after him.

KEY QUOTATIONS

[Quotations have been edited for grammar and alphabetized by topic]

American Cities Corporation Report

[The American Cities Corporation] said, "We're in better shape than we thought." We had no mass destructions. We had disturbances, and we knew we had to define what the issues were. We were the home of the state university, the home of Johnson & Johnson. We were the county seat. [10]

Hartford Process

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Johnson & Johnson (Role of)

[Johnson & Johnson] had many meetings and discussion of what our roles should be in the current environment. Our decision-making process was driven by the third responsibility of our Credo, which reads "We are responsible to communities in which we live and work." Our decision to stay in New Brunswick and build our new world headquarters was the catalyst that contributed to the renaissance of our city, which has led to an urban model that has a national reputation. [4]

The following was written by John Heldrich in response to a letter sent by the chairman of J&J to all employees, asking them to reflect on the Johnson & Johnson Credo. John Heldrich's response, extracted below, was chosen to be published:

In 1968 our nation was rocked from coast to coast and many of our urban cities by riots and disturbances. At the federal level, President Lyndon B. Johnson convened a meeting in Washington of the CEOs of our major corporations. The outcome of the meeting was that the prime cause of the riots was underemployment and that we form a national alliance of business to work toward workforce solutions. Our hometown, New Brunswick, was fortunate in that we experienced only protest and minor disturbances. Johnson & Johnson moved rapidly and established Project Action.

During this period Johnson & Johnson was considering a new world headquarters. There was grave concern within the community that Johnson and Johnson would move out of New Brunswick as many other corporations were relocating to the suburbs.

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Local Government and Consensus Building

Don't bypass local government. It's their city—and when you start, don't get into confrontational mode. I mean, cultivate the city. Even if you don't like them, cultivate them and work with them because we have to do these things together. [16]

Perception of Physical versus Social Improvements

Part of my objective was to keep people excited and feeling good that things are moving, you know, and the polls will show over all of the years, of course, the physical improvements are always higher because people can see it. And the social, the other side, is a little more difficult because you can't see it all the time. It's a matter of watching trends or their attitude toward certain institutions. [46]

Richard Haas Mural

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Route 18 Bridge

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