

OCMA Next Generation Internship Program – A Great Learning Experience in the Village of Silverton

In support of the International City/County Management Association's initiative to attract individuals to the local government management profession, and to encourage them to join the profession in Ohio, OCMA supports its own Next Generation Internship Program.

OCMA offers financial support to selected communities interested in creating internships and exposing graduate and undergraduate college students to local government management. The program is administered under the OCMA Support of the Profession Committee. The Committee issues a call for nominations from communities who wish to sponsor a college intern during the upcoming year and evaluates applications pursuant to program guidelines. Due to generous member funding, OCMA reimburses the approved local government jurisdiction for up to 50 percent of the hourly wages (excluding any benefits) paid to the intern to a maximum of \$2,000 per approved intern position.

OCMA approved internships this year in the following communities: The Village of Silverton, the City of Norwalk and the City of Norton. This article highlights one aspect of the work done by intern, Chloe Coleman, for the Village of Silverton.



The Village of Silverton is experiencing a new generation moving into its community. This new generation is less diverse than the long-term homeowners they are replacing. Tom Carroll, Silverton Village Manager, charged Ms. Coleman with researching potential strategies the Village of Silverton might use to ensure that it maintains its diversity in light of generational turnover in home ownership. Following are results of Ms. Coleman's study:

Background



Silverton has been an intentionally integrated community since the 1960s. Black families were attracted to the village due to its strong neighborhoods and convenient location. Usually an influx of black residents would lead to white flight but the Silverton Neighborhood Association was formed to open a dialogue and break down barriers. Silverton has been remarkably well integrated for the last 50 years. According to the 2010 Census, the community is 52% black, 45% white, and 3% other. Few communities in our region or even around the county have such even and harmonious concentrations of blacks and whites as does Silverton.

However, Silverton's older residents—and many of the community's original black residents—are aging out of their homes and selling them to a new generation of homeowners. Anecdotally, it seems the next generation of homebuyers have significantly fewer people of color. If this pattern continues, the village will lose its nearly even black-white population and the Silverton community will lose its diversity that has been a key aspect of the village culture for several generations.

This anecdotal evidence begs a few questions: why are white prospective homebuyers moving to Silverton in larger numbers than their black counterparts? Why are black prospective homebuyers not

coming to Silverton in the same proportion? What, if anything, should the Village do to ensure our community remains as diverse as it has been for 50 years?

Research

Bauche, an on-line lifestyle magazine for successful women from modest backgrounds, released a list of the best cities for young, black professionals. Bauche examined factors such as the percentage of black population, diversity as a whole, and the job market. With a black majority population and convenient proximity to large employment centers like Downtown, Uptown, and Kenwood, Silverton is an ideal area for black millennials based on the criteria Bauche identified. Yet, it appears for some reason that young black professionals are not finding their way to our community.

Increasingly, many black professionals are moving to the suburbs such as Mason, West Chester, and other outer-ring locations. The word "suburb" is still associated with the word "affluent" which many in the black community also associate with whiteness. Many suburbs, particularly the outer-ring suburbs created after the 1960's, were formed out of white flight following a long history of redlining and racial housing policies. These suburbs have a reputation for being areas where people of color have very small concentrations, and often feel unwelcome. Historically, some black neighborhoods were formed as a safe haven from the racism black residents experienced in white or racially mixed neighborhoods. Silverton obviously doesn't fit the stereotype people have of suburbs but by definition Silverton is a suburb which could be enough to keep us off black millennials' radar.

Niche, a popular website for neighborhood reviews, allows people to search for areas to live or visit in the Cincinnati area. On this website, Silverton is appropriately classified as a suburb, not a neighborhood of Cincinnati. Yet, many prospective home buyers, particularly young professionals of color, may have a negative association with the concept of a suburb for the reasons mentioned above. When you specify areas that are good for millennials, Silverton does not show up even when you specify suburbs. When you specify diversity as an important trait in a neighborhood, Silverton only shows up when you specify suburbs and take neighborhoods out of the search completely, and even then, Silverton isn't in the top five. According to the Home Buyer and Seller Generational Trends Report 2017, 94% of millennials used the internet to search for homes and 51% of them found the home they eventually purchased online. These factors may hamper the ability of younger home buyers of color to find out about Silverton.

Niche decides what areas are best for millennials based on the number of millennial residents, job opportunities, and access to bars, restaurants, and affordable housing. Silverton has affordable housing and a good location for access to jobs, but the median age in Silverton is 12% higher than the rest of Ohio. According to the American Institute for economic research, young educated people want to live around other young educated people. Around 70% of young college graduates decide where to relocate based on quality-of-life factors like a good restaurant scene. Millennials want to live in a place where they can enjoy a good local social life. That makes perfect sense considering the best ranked neighborhood for millennials on Niche is Mt. Adams. Fortunately for Silverton between the mixed-use development being built and the new brewery and restaurant on the way, Silverton should be on millennial radar very soon.

Despite Silverton being an ideal neighborhood for a younger black homebuyer, our community does not appear that way on the radar, whether it be paper or online. This research has led me to conclude the way to appeal to black millennials is to utilize social media and video. According to Nielsen, 55 percent of

black millennials spend at least one hour per day on social media sites which is 9 percent higher than millennials as a whole. Being mobile friendly is also imperative as 90% of black millennials own smartphones. Given the racial history of some suburbs and what the term “suburb” signals to many young persons of color, Silverton needs to be more overt about our community’s inclusive history and intentionally welcoming civic approach. Being vocal about social issues on social media will get black millennials’ attention.

According to Ad Age, a publication for analysis and data on marketing and media, the black millennial is a consumer who is “hypersensitive about the role of brands; who has a great awareness of self and culture; who is ready to pounce on any person or company who abuses the community, or appropriates without reverence or respect”. The vague and lazy targeting marketing tactics of yesteryear will not cut it with today’s tech savvy and brand sensitive black millennial. This includes a need to not be afraid to address the black community directly because 70% of African-Americans consider their ethnicity a key part of their identity and 82% say they are proud of their ethnic identity.

Conclusion

The issue lies not with Silverton as a village but with the information, or lack thereof, that is available and the perception that black millennials are likely to have based on that limited information. Silverton does, in fact, have all the qualities that would be appealing to a black millennial including affordability, diversity, safety, and convenience. Silverton, thus, should be able to attract both black and white millennial homebuyers. In order to attract younger black homebuyers, Silverton needs to be more intentional with our online presence, especially in terms of social media.

Additional research that will help us target social media seems appropriate. Staff will be determining if Voice of Your Black Customer can help refine this analysis.

According to Tom Carroll, the Village of Silverton will follow up Ms. Coleman’s study with some more in-depth market research using a firm called Voice of Your Customer that conducts focus groups and will help Silverton hone its messaging.

Thank you to OCMA members for their financial support of the OCMA Next Generation Internship Program. The internships provide great learning opportunities and experiences for individuals pursuing a career in local government and benefit both the intern and the community.