

Law Day and the Kalamazoo Promise



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USA Today July 1, 2008:

Promise Energizes Hurting Michigan Community:

People cheered, hugged and wept at the November 2005 school board meeting when the superintendent announced a group of anonymous donors — hoping to energize an economically depressed city — had promised free college tuition to students who graduate from the local school district.

Almaria Miller, a mother of four teenagers who watched from home on TV, did a little dance and sang “Hallelujah.”

On that November day, Dr. Janice Brown, superintendent of the Kalamazoo, Michigan Public Schools (“KPS”) announced that a group of “very, very special people have stepped forward with a willingness to invest in our most important resource—the children, the residents and the parents of KPS.” This “promise” was very simple: go to school at KPS, graduate from KPS, and in your hands there will be a scholarship in the amount of tuition plus fees, based on the number of years that you have gone to KPS.

Since its inception, the Kalamazoo Promise has ignited energy, optimism, and hope in Kalamazoo and other communities which have forged their own Promises. It was a “catalyst,” a “game changer,” and a “supercharger.” Interestingly, the donors intended to do more than educate the hopeful graduates of KPS. They meant to engage in social engineering on a grand scale. The Promise’s collateral benefits include attracting families to seek jobs and homes in the core city of Kalamazoo.

Thus the Promise is “pilates” for Kalamazoo. It seeks a strong core city and the benefits which go along with it.

Who were these donors who offered this astounding no-strings-attached gift to so many? The efforts of the people of Kalamazoo to learn their identities have been unsuccessful. To this day, who they are is unknown and it is unclear even how many they are. Moreover, it appears this persistent and puzzling mystery is part of the donors’ well-thought-out plan. No one can lobby them, no one can debate the fundamental propositions underlying the contribution. The Promise is what it is, and the donors have decided to sit back and wait to see what happens.

Now, five years after this amazing gift was announced, comes the first book about the impact of the Kalamazoo Promise on KPS, its graduates, the city of Kalamazoo, and other cities which have decided to fashion their own Promise for their city’s school children. In her new book, *The Power of a Promise*, Michelle Miller-Adams explains the Promise, talks about the intentions and goals of the donors, measures the progress of KPS and the city of Kalamazoo, speculates on the future and explains the case for creating a Promise in other communities. Ms. Miller-Adams’s comprehensive and well-reviewed book on this fascinating subject is the reason the CMBA and The City Club of Cleveland worked together to bring Ms. Miller-Adams to Cleveland as our April 30, 2010, Law Day speaker.¹

The CMBA wishes to dedicate this 2010 Law Day to a discussion about our city and its public schools. Long ago, we forged a strong bond with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The CMBA and its foundation sponsor 3Rs, mock trial programs, the Summer Legal Academy, internship programs, Books for Kids

and other programs focused on improving education in the public schools.

We also love our city. We remain relentlessly positive about Cleveland's prospects, and we seek ways to do more for our community and our citizens. Education is fundamental to the concepts of freedom and liberty. This undeniable connection is a core value of the CMBA and we believe we should take some time on Law Day to consider not just what we have done, but what is left to be done. In declaring Law Day, President Eisenhower said, "In a very real sense, the world no longer has a choice between force and law. If civilization is to survive, it must choose the rule of law. On this Law Day, then, we honor not only the principle of the rule of law, but also those judges, legislators, lawyers and law-abiding citizens who actively work to preserve our liberties under law." It is in this spirit that we confirm our commitment to our schools.

Many other communities have enacted their own versions of the Promise.² These communities fund their Promises in a variety of ways, both public and private. We are compelled to ask the question, could the Promise be right for Cleveland? Is it do-able? Is a Promise to our city's school children like the one made in Kalamazoo something that would change the way we think about Cleveland?

We hope Ms. Miller-Adams can help us explore these questions. On April 30, at the City Club –the citadel of free speech – we will reaffirm the ideals of free speech and civic involvement, the connection between law and education and the interface between dialogue and community commitment. Please join me for Law Day at The City Club of Cleveland for this inspirational event.

¹ 36 U.S.C. § 113 states, in part:

a) Designation. - May 1 is Law Day, U.S.A. (b) Purpose. - Law Day, U.S.A., is a special day of celebration by the people of the United States - (1) in appreciation of their liberties and the reaffirmation of their loyalty to the United States and of their rededication to the ideals of equality and justice under law in their relations with each other and with other countries; and (2) for the cultivation of the respect for law that is so vital to the democratic way of life. (c) Proclamation. - The President is requested to issue a proclamation - (1) calling on all public officials to display the flag of the United States on all Government buildings on Law Day, U.S.A.; and (2) *inviting the people of the United States to observe Law Day, U.S.A., with appropriate ceremonies and in other appropriate ways, through public entities and private organizations and in schools and other suitable places.*

² Communities which have enacted some version of the Promise are Bay City, Michigan; Carrolton, Michigan; Denver Colorado; El Dorado, Arkansas; Hammond, Indiana; Jackson, Michigan; Northport, Michigan; Orange, Texas, Peoria, Illinois; Ventura, California; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Many other communities are working on their own plans.

SAVE THE DATE

LAW DAY 2010

In partnership with
The City Club of Cleveland

Friday, April 30
12:00 p.m.

The City Club of Cleveland

850 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44114

The Kalamazoo Promise

Innovation in education, community building and
economic development

Speaker:



Michelle Miller-Adams, Ph.D.

Visiting Scholar at the W.E. Upjohn
Institute for Employment Research and
a faculty member at Grand Valley State
University. Author of *The Power of
a Promise: Education and Economic
Renewal in Kalamazoo.*

For tickets, contact The City Club of Cleveland
at www.cityclub.org or (216) 621-0082

CMBA and City Club Members \$18,
Non Members \$30
Sponsor tables available