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Cities conference gave leaders ideas to grow

The Lowell Sun

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LOWELL -- Hosting last week's 2010 Innovative Cities conference not only gave Lowell a chance to share its story, but gave local leaders a chance to learn from the experiences of others.

"It really reinforced the idea of Lowell as a city where people from other cities come to talk about how cities work," said Paul Marion, executive director of community and cultural affairs for UMass Lowell.

Representatives from Ann Arbor, Mich., and Portland, Ore., were among those sharing their success stories.

Adam Baacke, Lowell's assistant city manager, was struck by Portland's story, "which started out as an effort to improve the lives of the people who lived there. They worked to make it the best they could for the residents and when it became successful it turned into a tremendous economic development story. Other businesses and residents were attracted to its livability, a place people wanted to be. It drew entrepreneurs and there's a nice symbiotic relationship between retail and residents."

Making one's city livable is "a very common-sense thing," said Marion, "but it can be a strategy, too. They also said they have a 12 percent bicycle commuter rate, far above the national average. And they're trying to get it up to 33 percent."

He said that's "very much in line" with city planner Jeff Speck's "pedestrian-friendly" vision for Lowell.

Marion is also impressed with Ann Arbor, Mich., and its "emphasis on talent."

"Some 60 percent of people

living in Ann Arbor have college degrees. That's double the national average," he said.

Such an educated core draws research, business and other talents and "it's a replenishable resource," said Marion. "And that's in line with what (UMass Lowell Chancellor) Marty Meehan is talking about of Lowell. It's enhancing the idea of when you have a college in town, making it a real education center."

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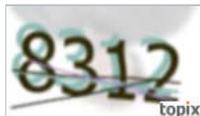
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