

took an old idea—direct sales—and made it work on a scale never seen before. Fred Meijer, to make shopping more pleasant for parents with kids, installed mechanical ponies in his stores which cost one cent per ride and personally hands out "Purple Cow" cards for free ice cream cones.

Employee relations are also an important part of Grand Rapids' success. "We have 60,000 people working with us," Fred Meijer says. "We need them; so let's treat them like we need them." If any of us makes a mistake, he adds, "we don't need to be bawled out, we need to be helped to succeed." That way, the "job will be better, and everybody will be more productive."

Nor is there an adversarial relationship between business and government. "The best thing government can do is to get out of the way," says Grand Rapids City Manager Kurt Kimball. "To try to create an environment that enables the private sector to achieve its ends. Prosperity for business means prosperity for residents. Then we'll have the resources for quality of life." Says GR magazine editor Carol Valade, "There is a very low tolerance for government here—the attitude is, I will do it myself. And a tremendous respect for the arts of the entrepreneur. It spills over into government. The city removed 98 percent of its effluents from its sewers, without federal funds—the only city in Michigan to do so."

Successful small businesses and small businesses that have grown large but have stayed headquartered here, have helped build Grand Rapids' cultural institutions. Even the banks have remained local. Old Kent is still based in Grand Rapids, though it has spread outward; First Union sold out to Detroit-based NBD, but David Frey, whose grandfather founded the bank, has kept the Frey Foundation here, and 85 percent of its grants are in western Michigan. "Giving money intelligently is hard work," Frey says. "A lot of due diligence is required. But there's the prospect of great satisfaction."

Anyone walking through downtown Grand Rapids can see some of the reasons for that satisfaction. Twenty-five years ago, downtown Grand Rapids looked dumpy, with aging and often empty commercial buildings, and a grubby convention center. Then Grand Rapids' business leaders decided to make it something special. "Always the private sector has taken the lead," says Frey. "And people are willing to put corporate money into projects. Then they would get the city, county, or state governments to forge a coalition." Phase one, in the mid-1970s, included a new Old Kent building and Vandenberg Center, which replaced abandoned warehouses. Phase two included the Amway Plaza Hotel and the Gerald Ford Museum. Phase three includes the recently opened Van Andel Arena for Grand Rapids' minor league hockey and basketball, a new convention center, and a downtown campus for Grand Valley State College.

The secret is leadership and commitment. "We have people who give time and effort and support. They sit at the same table," says Pete Secchia, head of Universal Products, and also a leader of Michigan's Republican Party who served as Ambassador to Italy under Bush. "When we promise something," says Fred Meijer, sitting around a table with other Grand Rapids business leaders, "we don't do it lightly. Not one of us has ever reneged on a promise." If there are problems, someone jumps in and solves them. "The Amway Plaza would be torn down or destitute if Amway hadn't picked it up," Meijer adds.

With no major university or medical school, Grand Rapids has missed out on the boom in biomedicine. But that's likely to change with the building of a Van Andel In-

stitute for nutrition research at Grand Rapids' Butterworth Hospital. Steve Van Andel, who has succeeded his father Jay as co-head of Amway, describes the process. "We watched our fathers build the firm. The second generation got even more involved with the community. The building decision was also made by the second generation of the Van Andel and DeVos families. My dad and family have been discussing it for years. We decided to do something. Dad was always interested in nutrition, so we decided to build an institute that would work on nutrition research and education." He is thinking big. Peter Cook, who owns several big car dealerships and is on the board, says that it has five Nobel Prize winners as advisers and will have 200 to 300 doctors and scientists in a \$30 million building.

Grand Rapids' philanthropists are buttressed not by the liberalism of so many national foundations but by traditional virtues. It's an early-to-bed-early-to-rise town, where people eat at home with their families. "Everyone is doing well but restaurants," says Secchia, "but the breakfast joints are filled at 6:30 in the morning." The churches are busy on Sundays, filled with people from all economic levels; the billionaire Van Anders and DeVoses pray at a modest Reform church not far from downtown. Or as Peter Cook puts it, "A lot of our people have done more than their share in giving. We grew up in a Christian home and tithed, and after that you gave more. We give 30 to 40 percent of our income. . . . That type of thing is very influential. This is a good place to work and live."

Entrepreneurial and religious impulses also inform Grand Rapids' programs to help the poor. Gene Pratt, now retired, tells of raising \$1 million in less than two hours to renovate his community center, and how a kids' gardening project produced City Kids Barbecue sauce, got it stocked in Meijer's and other local supermarkets, and got 5 percent of the market. Verne Barry, head of the Downtown Development Agency, came to Grand Rapids in 1985 after living homeless in New York. With ministries and social service agencies he founded Faith Inc., which won competitive contracts with 25 local manufacturers. Hiring people from close-in neighborhoods, his group got commitments for 10 percent of the jobs on projects like the Van Andell Arena. He claims that more than 50 percent of those with little work experience are now in permanent employment.

Grand Rapids has low crime, low unemployment, and scandal-free local government. But statistics tell only part of the story. For Grand Rapids' leaders have put the imprint of their own personalities on the civic institutions they've built. The Grand Rapids Museum hosted an exhibit of the artist Perugino in 1997-98; Secchia helped set it up using his Italian contacts and the fact that Perugia is a sister city. Fred Meijer took over a 20-acre parcel of industrial property and built the Frederik Meijer Gardens, one of the nation's largest conservatories. Amid the plants and the gardens outside he placed 70 bronze sculptures he has collected over the years. You can see him there some days, smiling and enjoying himself as he leads kids around, explaining the plants and sculptures, and handing out Purple Cow cards for free ice cream cones—the spirit of Grand Rapids in person.●

#### WHAT'LL YA' HAVE? A TRIBUTE TO THE VARSITY

● Mr. CLELAND. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to salute Georgia's beloved Varsity Restaurant for 70 years of prospering busi-

ness and never-ending dedication to its customers and employees. People have come from all around the world simply for a sampling of the Varsity's great food and down home hospitality.

The Varsity was founded by Frank Gordy in 1928. As the world's largest drive-in, the Varsity's hot dogs, chili dogs, hamburgers, chili burgers, onion rings, french fries, and fried pies are the best in the world. The Varsity also sells more Coca-Cola than any other single outlet in the world. Whether you get your "dogs" at Atlanta's North Avenue Varsity, the Gwinnett Varsity off Jimmy Carter Blvd., the Varsity Jr. on Lindbergh Drive or the Varsity on Broad Street in Athens you are guaranteed to go back for more.

The menu is extensive and the Varsity's volume is legendary. Two miles of hot dogs, a ton of onions, 2500 pounds of potatoes, and 5,000 fried pies are served every day. Six 50 gallon pots of chili are made from scratch and, like all specialty items, are prepared from original recipes. Varsity orange is piped from the kitchen to faucets at the serving counter and the popular frosted version is also on tap.

Every time I come home to Atlanta from Washington, D.C., stopping by the Varsity is a must on my agenda. In fact, it is often my first stop after leaving the airport. All Georgians can attest that the Varsity's heavy weight, chili steak, frosted orange or fried pies are unlike any other food in the world. I cannot count the number of meals I have eaten at this Atlanta institution, but the memories of dining at the Varsity are endless.

Mr. President, I ask that you join me, our colleagues, and the entire Gordy family in recognizing 70 years of mouth-watering food and fond memories, and in wishing the entire Varsity family many more successes in the future.●

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

● Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, August 31, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,564,553,479,478.04 (Five trillion, five hundred sixty-four billion, five hundred fifty-three million, four hundred seventy-nine thousand, four hundred seventy-eight dollars and four cents).

Five years ago, August 31, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,403,247,000,000 (Four trillion, four hundred three billion, two hundred forty-seven million).

Ten years ago, August 31, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,575,800,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred seventy-five billion, eight hundred million).

Fifteen years ago, August 31, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,348,374,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred forty-eight billion, three hundred seventy-four million).

Twenty-five years ago, August 31, 1973, the federal debt stood at \$461,845,000,000 (Four hundred sixty-one billion, eight hundred forty-five million) which reflects a debt increase of