

Matt Williams tells Gothenburg's story and GIC stockholders how to be leaders

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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After a whirlwind three years leading up to and chairing the American Bankers Association, Matt Williams offers a perspective on success.

Williams, a past president of the Gothenburg Improvement Company, spoke to GIC members at their annual meeting last Wednesday at the Monsanto Learning Center.

The president and chair of Gothenburg State Bank recently returned from Japan where he shared the town's story with Japanese bankers.

Williams shared how GIC was born during difficult economic times in the mid 1980s.

Business people, who joined together to form the GIC, had a choice to continue with the status quo or work hard and reinvent the future.

"Change is inevitable," he said. "Reaction to change is optional."

By reacting to change in a positive way, Williams said the GIC started to recruit new businesses, beginning with Baldwin Filters in 1990.

Since then, valuation has grown from \$39 to 185 million.

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“How did it happen?” he asked. “Through hard work, a community vision, a desire to win and to answer every company's questions.”

Leadership, Williams said, starts with core values which people sometimes don't verbalize.

Other leadership tips he offered include:

Recognizing the importance of people.

Conducting oneself responsibly and be doing what's right.

Striving to reach one's potential.

Early on, Williams said GIC and the community was behind passage of a half-cent sales tax to boost economic development.

“And it involved everyone which was key to its success,” he said.

Williams said risks have been taken in spending sales tax money and “we've done what's right.”

The community is reaching its potential and stepping up to meet challenges, such as the recognition of a need for fiber optics and quality of life.

He added that leadership includes the ability to thoughtfully compromise.

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"I challenge you to step up," Williams said.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636