

Staking our claim

So much is happening in our community, and I hear optimism for our future everywhere I turn. It's an exciting time for development. Rob Bradham, president and CEO of the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, detailed our positive momentum in a recent article.

United Way is all about building stronger communities and creating a brighter future. In fact, our heritage was built upon identifying and meeting needs in the community by mobilizing people and resources to improve lives. For more than 60 years, United Way has been taking on the most difficult problems and finding the most efficient and effective solutions. We are at the forefront working year-round to fight for the education, basic needs and health of every person in our community — the elderly, families, individuals, children and youth, and our most vulnerable.

In April our Women's Leadership Council hosted Ben and Erin Napier from HGTV's "Home Town." With the work our community is doing through

the Believe Greater Dalton initiatives, we felt the Napiers and what they accomplished in their hometown of Laurel, Miss., would be inspirational. And it certainly was! The Napiers shared their message of revitalizing small town USA with more than 250 women at Walnut Hill Farm. Their discussion energized us! Ben and Erin are two ordinary individuals who decided to use their voice and

talents for extraordinary change. Laurel sounded a lot like our hometown, so we asked the Napiers for advice on how we can effect positive change. They recommended we start with the book "Town Inc."

So we did. Several people in our community have read "Town Inc." and we are energized by what we've read. The book talks about several towns that have staked a claim as the "_____ (fill in the blank) Capital of the World." It struck me personally that we don't have to look far with our proud entrepreneurial heritage and innovative spirit

to draw our own conclusions of what we could be. We are the Floorcovering Capital of the World with an entrepreneurial spirit to move us forward and create a vibrant community.

As a next step, the United Way's Women's Leadership Council and the Young Leaders Society are hosting a community book study of "Town Inc." Brenda Knowles, vice president of commercial marketing and product development at Shaw Industries, and Landon Hair, general manager of the Marketing Alliance Group, will facilitate a book talk during lunch on July 17 at the Mack Gaston Community Center. Bring your own book and join us from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch is \$10. Registration is available at ourunitedway.org and is open to everyone. We are working in collaboration with Believe Greater Dalton to empower our community to stake our claim.

United Way board member Emily Kiker Finkell, CEO of Emily Morrow Home, shared this after reading the book: "I'm awestruck by the perfect timing of when 'Town Inc.' was brought to our attention by Erin and Ben Napier during our WLC Spring Symposium. As

entrepreneurs and residents of Dalton, Georgia, we are rich with far greater resources and talent than most of the cities mentioned in the book. In fact, we have even greater advantages than the examples of the cities used by the author ... we have had some very committed leaders in our community who have worked hard and paid the price for decades to ensure that our floorcovering-centric industry remains strong and competitive both nationally and on a global scale.

"This is not to be taken for granted. Just look at the furniture industry which has been vastly impacted by cheaper labor and materials of overseas manufacturing. This is of such great importance in more ways than many could imagine. Whether it's jobs, career paths for our current and next generations, or simply being able to tap into the ancillary opportunities that surround our industry, we are all better off because of their commitment."

Join us on July 17 and let's continue the positive momentum.

Amanda Burt is the president of the United Way of Northwest Georgia.



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