

## A LETTER FROM SPEDA'S PRESIDENT AND CEO

# Our community, state and country will prevail

Memorial Day weekend is always a good time to reflect on the sacrifices and service of American soldiers and veterans. A time to remember our loved ones who have passed from this world. And a time to reflect on the greatness and resiliency of the United States of America.

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the nation in 1933 during his inauguration, our country faced one of the darkest economic times it has ever known.

The task of consoling the American people was daunting — "... The withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone," he described — and yet following those dismal words he delivered one of the most memorable lines of his presidency.

*"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."*

While speaking frankly about the state of the nation, President Roosevelt laced his address with comfort and optimism, courage and resolve, during a time in which Americans indeed feared for their livelihoods. I can't help but think of The Great Depression and President Roosevelt's address today, as we experience yet another frightening time in our economy — only now, some believe there is more to fear. According to many who work in the medical and healthcare field, our lives and our health are at risk.

But President Roosevelt was right — fear is counterproductive. We cannot allow fear to be more catastrophic than the virus itself. This is not the first time our country and world have faced a pandemic like COVID-19. We have suffered millions of deaths caused by destructive viruses over the course of history. The COVID-19 pandemic isn't a traditional crisis — it is a public health crisis, and one that is having devastating effects on families and the economy. Our thoughts and prayers are daily with those who are suffering.

There have been pandemics since the beginning of time and as history shows us, we do rise again. I am confident our public health efforts, along with the fortitude of American capitalism and strong work ethic, will prevail in helping us do so. This is merely another speed bump in our nation's history.

I am also confident in the ability of Somerset and Pulaski County — my hometown — the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the entire United States of America to rise again from the unbelievable economic dilemma we face as a result of COVID-19. The Somerset-Pulaski Economic Development Authority (SPEDA) will play a role in helping our community, our state and our nation recover from this unprecedented shutdown.

The greatness of America — the greatness of my hometown — is its people, and from the beginning, SPEDA's focus and tagline have been "making business about people." That has never been more important than right now. We have turned our thoughts to how our community heals; how we pull together to become stronger than ever.

We must protect our most vulnerable while at the same time allowing millions of healthy Americans to resume the pursuit of the American dream. This can be done. It will not be easy. It is not without risk. It is not without criticism and second-guessing.

While maintaining our No. 1 priority as the health and welfare of our people, it is imperative we turn our attention to the existing challenge of reopening our economy. America has experienced an unprecedented \$22 trillion economic shutdown and our communities are reeling.

I have been advocating for the need to have serious and informed conversations about how and when to reopen our economy for some time. As the saying goes, we can chew gum and walk at the same time. The next three months will be more important than the past two. We must allow our medical and healthcare community to help guide us, but we must move forward with Kentucky's business, medical and government leaders opening our free markets and economy sequentially and in stages.

SPEDA has been engaged daily during this crisis in various ways. Since its inception more than a year ago, we have made taking care of existing businesses a top priority. We are doing our best to disburse important information to businesses and industries of all sizes and are working behind the scenes to assist them in any way possible. And we will continue to do so.

However, through those daily engagements, we hear constantly from small business owners, restaurateurs, factory managers, and independent contractors such as barbers, dentists and chiropractors. And we have advocated on their behalf to help them get back to earning a living, providing their services under proper guidelines while pursuing the American Dream.

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Within my community I have seen a surge in unity, collaboration, and togetherness. Our local leaders, first responders and healthcare workers are second to none and it is truly inspiring to see the work they are doing to serve and protect our community.

Our community is united, as should be our Commonwealth and our country. And it will prevail from this crisis. At SPEDA, we have made it our mission to work on building a diverse economy at the local level. We have focused on building a sustainable community. One cannot look to build an economy for all sunny days, because when a rainy period comes, it will fail. But Somerset and Pulaski County are resilient. The Commonwealth of Kentucky and America are resilient.

I do not envy the decision-making taking place by our leaders at the state and national level. In fact, I sincerely pray for them, as well as all people in leadership roles, on a daily basis. I also pray that out of these lemons, we will make lemonade.

There is always a silver lining if one looks hard enough. Within the business community there will be creative innovation, entrepreneurship, and a repurposing and refocusing on one's life. With that refocus, there will be blessings of more family time, a recognition of the importance of parental involvement in a child's daily life, and a reminder of how time in itself is a precious commodity.

On this Memorial Day weekend, in addition to honoring our soldiers, veterans and loved ones, I also urge everyone to remember what made the United States of America truly great. What will lead us over the coronavirus speed bump facing us is honesty, hard work, responsibility, fairness, generosity and respect for others.

In the words of President Roosevelt, "... this great nation will endure as it has endured; (it) will revive and will prosper." I, and the SPEDA organization stand ready to help in that race of endurance.



**Chris Girdler**  
SPEDA President  
& CEO

