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Cereal City hires marketer

Museum hopes consultant can turn around fortunes of ailing attraction

Jenny Rode
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A consultant who specializes in “destination” marketing will lead the effort to attract more visitors to Kellogg’s Cereal City USA.

The downtown cereal museum, which is struggling with low attendance, recently finalized a contract with Jon Schallert, a Florida-based consultant, to evaluate and overhaul its marketing strategy.

Although city leaders have shifted Battle Creek’s downtown efforts away from tourism, Schallert plans to focus squarely on attracting more nearby and far-away visitors.

“My background is to work with businesses to turn them into dynamic destination, pulling people from hundreds and hundreds of miles away,” said Schallert, who owns a consulting firm in Orlando, Fla. “Consumers nationally respond to Cereal City. We know that from the visitors who come in, from journalists who write about it and from magazines that feature it as an attraction.”

Schallert visited the area twice last summer when he was hired by Battle Creek Unlimited to talk to local retailers about marketing.

He also remembers touring the Kellogg Co. factory as a child, which is the experience the five-year-old Cereal City is designed to replicate.

The Kellogg name is at least one reason why Schallert, who worked in marketing for Hallmark Cards, believes Cereal City can attract more visitors.

“If a local business that doesn’t have the brand power of Kellogg’s can do it, I know Kellogg’s can do it,” Schallert said. “This is a world-class facility and a one-of-a-kind. There are literally hundreds of cities that would beg to have it, and you’ve got it here.”

The news about Schallert was welcomed by some downtown business owners, who stand to gain new customers if Cereal City’s attendance goes up.

Donnie Fields, a downtown café owner who met with Schallert last summer, was enthused.

“There couldn’t be a better choice,” Fields said. “I think he knows exactly what he’s doing, and I think it’s exactly what Cereal City needs. He’s progressive, aggressive and smart.”

Mike Wood, owner of Team Active, said anything positive for downtown is positive for his business.

“Do I want them to succeed? Absolutely,” Wood said. “I want everybody to be just rockin’ down here. You don’t want toe dominoes to start to fall – and Cereal City is a pretty big domino.”

Burrell Stults, president of Cereal City’s board of directors, said

Schallert’s work will have three stages: Evaluating current marketing and the retail store; redesigning the Web site and customer database; and developing a written marketing plan to attract local, regional and national visitors.

Stults declined to say how much Cereal City is spending to hire Schallert.

Other developments for Cereal City include expanding its board from seven to 12 members, Stults said, and naming Beth Turner executive director.

She had been interim director since April, when Willie Calloway left.

Turner said she looks forward to working with Schallert.

“I think he’ll bring a brand new perspective to our business,” she said. “He’s a positive, motivating type of person and I believe his enthusiasm – and our staff’s willingness to do anything to succeed – will be a great combination here.”

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