

Cincy delegation heads east to woo NYC

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Have you heard the one about how Cincinnati, brand capital of the world, is lousy at branding itself?

Executives, arts supporters, civic leaders and at least three chefs plan to end that criticism for good, starting with an unprecedented road trip this week to New York City.

Over the course of seven days:

- Arts groups including the Cincinnati Ballet, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Playhouse in the Park will perform at historic New York venues.

- At the same time, top executives – including Reds co-owner Tom Williams of North American Properties, Carl Satterwhite of RCF Group and Laura Brunner of the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority – will promote this region's revitalized urban core, its emerging startup scene and its 10 Fortune 500 companies to their counterparts in Manhattan.

- Mayor John Cranley is scheduled to appear Thursday on CNBC's "Squawk Box" with Johnna Reeder, CEO of the economic development organization REDI Cincinnati.

- Former Cincinnati Bengal-turned-businessman Dhani Jones will host a party, which CincyTech and Cintrifuse are helping sponsor, for young professionals with ties to this region. The message: Have a blast living in the Big Apple. When you're ready to buy a house and start a family or business, think about the Queen City.

- And yes, there's an official branding campaign, courtesy of LPK: Cincy in NYC. Northern Kentucky University students created the website.

It's a bold initiative, no doubt, but also just the latest twist on a familiar theme: The arts and business community's interests are intertwined.

Meet the cast: [Cincy in NYC players \(/story/entertainment/arts/2014/05/04/cincy-nyc-meet-cast/8689613/\)](/story/entertainment/arts/2014/05/04/cincy-nyc-meet-cast/8689613/)

Cincy in NYC: [Cincinnati chefs add food to trip \(/story/entertainment/dining/2014/05/04/cincy-nyc-cincinnati-chefs-add-food-trip/8689995/\)](/story/entertainment/dining/2014/05/04/cincy-nyc-cincinnati-chefs-add-food-trip/8689995/)

"The reputation of Cincinnati – a Midwestern, behind-the-times city – is not who we are," said Julie Shifman, who is leading the New York effort. "This is not your parent's Cincinnati. This is where you want to be to start your career, to join a startup. The arts are one way to highlight how we're different."

Nobody expects instant results. The return on this and similar investments will take years to measure. Everybody does agree it's time for some calculated bragging.

"This is the most convenient big city you'll ever be in. We are big enough to do and have everything, but small enough that you can actually get around. I know people in New York who haven't been into Manhattan in years and dread the idea of doing it. I used to hear that here: 'I haven't been Downtown in three years.' I don't hear that anymore," said John Barrett, CEO of Western & Southern Financial Group.

"This is another example of how we can tell our story on a nationwide basis about what's going on here, the quality of life here. New York is the best place to strut our stuff."

Putting on a show: [Cincy acts head to Big Apple to show off our Queen City \(/story/news/2013/12/29/cincinnati-acts-to-share-our-queen-city-with-big-apple/4242219/\)](/story/news/2013/12/29/cincinnati-acts-to-share-our-queen-city-with-big-apple/4242219/)

Opportunities for Cincy in NYC just kept growing and growing

Cincy in NYC is the brainchild of Shifman, founder of Act Three, a former Thompson Hine partner and Cincinnati Ballet board member. In February 2013, the ballet started planning the New York trip to celebrate its 50th anniversary and asked Shifman to chair the effort. That meant raising money and getting Cincinnatians to make the trip.

Shifman learned that the May Festival and the Cincinnati Symphony were performing in New York the same week, and the outlines of her mission came together. A few phone calls and one presentation to ArtsWave later, and organizations including the Taft Museum, Playhouse and University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music had signed up.

Shifman saw the potential for more.

"I never wanted this to be just the arts. I knew that the major impact would be highlighting the uniqueness of our city through the fact that we have this breadth and scope of arts that no other city our size has," she said. "The arts were the means to an end. I wanted this to be an economic development project."

The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber and Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau signed on. Lee and Shannon Carter agreed to co-chair a steering committee with Shifman and her husband, Steve, the CEO of Michelman, which has offices around the world.

Steve Shifman is also a member of the Cincinnati Regional Business Committee, made up of executives from the area's mid-sized companies. Those CEOs, along with executives of the Cincinnati Business Committee, who lead the region's 27 largest employers, are ready to play a greater role in attracting business here.

"It's one thing for somebody who's paid to promote Cincinnati to do it. It's another thing if ... hell, Tom Williams is showing up and talking about how great Cincinnati is, and he's just a concerned citizen, he's not getting paid to do it. He just believes in it," Steve Shifman said.

"The other thing is it's far easier for me to attract people to Cincinnati today than it was five years ago. All the CEOs see that. If we want to be able to attract and retain talent to Cincinnati, and we want to have a vibrant community in which to grow and build a business, we need these businesses to come here and invest."

Arts, execs show 'Cincinnati, literally, has its acts together'

Doug Moormann, who runs the consultancy Development Strategies Group, says he's never seen another community do anything on this scale. Moormann said physically showcasing a city's strengths – in this case our world-class arts community – leverages the old saying, "Show me, don't tell me." Physically bringing executives into the mix sends another powerful signal.

"This demonstrates that Cincinnati, literally, has got its acts together. There's cohesion in the community, there's a willingness to work together. That illustrates the type of community that a lot of companies are looking to become a part of," Moormann said. "You want to be part of something that's functional, that's cohesive."

This week is also a coming out party of sorts for REDI and Reeder, whose first day in her new role is Monday. REDI, formerly the Cincinnati USA Partnership for Economic Development, is the front door for companies looking to relocate or expand here. Its mission includes giving all 15 counties in the region a voice in economic development, as well as facilitating CEO-to-CEO engagement.

Reeder was previously a vice president at Duke Energy and deeply involved in that company's economic development efforts. More than anyone, she understands business attraction is a marathon, not a sprint, and she wants to temper expectations for the trip.

"Success would be this: The next time I call a site selector, I don't have to explain why Cincinnati is a great community. They'll have already heard of us," she said. "People do business with people they know and trust. It's important to build those relationships."

The news that GE plans to locate at least 1,400 employees in the region shows what's possible. Toyota's decision last week to move 1,600 jobs from Erlanger to Texas serves as a reminder that economic development is never a one-and-done proposition.

Shifman is also cautious about setting expectations and said post-trip evaluations will clarify what worked and inform future efforts. What's clear, she said, is that, after a 10-year march that includes remaking Downtown and Over-the-Rhine, the region is ready to take off.

"It's like you're pushing this huge boulder up a hill, and then you reach a tipping point and it starts to create its own momentum," she said. "So now all of these exciting things are happening in different parts of the city, and projects like this can happen." □

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Cincy in NYC: Unprecedented week

Here's what's happening to put Cincinnati in the New York spotlight:

Media exposure

- **Wednesday:** The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau, Downtown Cincinnati Inc., Source Cincinnati, the Cincinnati USA Regional Tourism Network and Mayor John Cranley will collaborate to host an event for journalists, business and real estate leaders to raise awareness of Cincinnati and build relationships. The event will take place at Edward's, a Tribeca restaurant known for its monthly Cincinnati nights that feature Skyline Chili, Graeter's Ice Cream, Montgomery Inn ribs and Cincinnati beers.

Some 40 national journalists with ties to Cincinnati have been invited, and confirmed attendees represent outlets including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, "Today" show, PBS News, Mashable and Family Circle.

- **Thursday:** Cranley is scheduled to meet with reporters from publications including Forbes, Fortune, CNN Money, Black Enterprise, CNBC, Fox Business News and the Wall Street Journal to tout Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky's revitalized urban core, emerging startup scene and 10 Fortune 500 companies.

Power couples

For the past 11 months, Julie and Steve Shifman and Lee and Shannon Carter have co-chaired the steering committee charged with planning Cincy in NYC.

- **The Shifmans:** Julie is a former ballet dancer, partner at Thompson Hine and now runs Act Three, an organization for women who are finished raising their children and planning the next phase of their lives. Steve is CEO of Michelman, a global company that makes products including water-based barriers and coatings.

Two of the Shifmans' four children live in New York; a third just moved back to Cincinnati.

- **The Carters:** Lee is the retired president of Gray Advertising, and Shannon is the retired CEO of Crayons to Computers.

The steering committee also includes: Liz Grubow of LPK; Steven Sunderman of the May Festival; Scott Stiles, Cincinnati's interim city manager; Dan Lincoln of Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau; and Peter Landgren of CCM.

The arts organizations

- **Cincinnati Ballet:** Performs at the Joyce Theater, Tuesday-Sunday

- **Cincinnati Symphony and May Festival:** Host party at the New York Yacht Club on Thursday; perform at Carnegie Hall on Friday

- **Cincinnati Opera:** Present music and words with composer Ricky Ian Gordon at new Opera Center; Evans Mirageas, director of Cincinnati Opera, will moderate the talk Wednesday

- **Taft Museum:** Hosts Metropolitan Museum of Art Tour, Saturday

- **Cincinnati Art Museum:** Moderates panel discussion on street photography at Aperture Gallery, Saturday

- **UC College-Conservatory of Music:** Jazz Alumni plays at Lincoln Center on Tuesday; Ariel Quartet performs at 92nd Street Y, May 12

- **Playhouse in the Park:** Presents reading of the new play "FOOL" by Cincinnati native Theresa Rebeck at Pearl Studios, Friday

The business agenda

- **REDI Cincinnati** meets with New York and New Jersey site selection consultants, who help companies find locations to expand or relocate, Tuesday-Thursday

- **Local CEOs** meet with site selection consultants, Wednesday

Not just art

- **Former Cincinnati Bengal Dhani Jones** emcees a young professionals event that's free to Cincinnati high school and college graduates, Friday

- **Local chefs** Jean-Robert de Caval, David Falk and Jose Salazar host a seven-course dinner at the James Beard House, Saturday (see story, **Page D9**)