

Ted Hardgrove



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Ted Hardgrove grew up in Folcroft, Pennsylvania, a small town bordering Philadelphia. [2] He went to Kings College, a Christian liberal arts school in New York, and attended seminary for four years in Manhattan. He was then ordained as a Baptist minister and later received his master's degree in counseling at the Post-Graduate Center of Mental Health. [2] "My interpretation of my own faith system," Hardgrove said, "was to be involved in community" and to address social issues. During the 1960s, these issues related to the Civil Rights movement, mental health, and the Vietnam War.

His interest in community needs led him to ask himself: "What can I do to both exercise my faith system and also try to deal with issues of community, such as the poverty, organization, and community needs?" [2] Hardgrove found opportunities as the Union County director of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) program and then as the director of the Unified Vailsburg Community Services Organization in Newark. [2-3]

In 1980 a friend sent Hardgrove a *Wall Street Journal* advertisement seeking a president for an organization that was involved in human services, health, education, and neighborhood development. That organization was New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT). [3] Hardgrove was interested despite "the fact that I didn't know much about New Brunswick." [3] He applied, went through a long process that included seven interviews, and was selected as president. Some friends questioned why Hardgrove would leave a "grassroots community organization" and "work within a setting that was dramatically different, that had a corporate focus," involving the revitalization of a small city. [4] He himself questioned the credibility of the New Brunswick Tomorrow vision, specifically that they would try to "connect revitalization and human services and quality of life." [4] Despite the doubts, he was interested enough to accept the position and started in 1981. [4] Hardgrove served until 1995, at which point he worked for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation program office. [8]

Hardgrove went on to work with John Heldrich, the chairman of the NBT board, who taught him about "the connection between economic development, employment and health, and human services." [4] He also met Richard Sellars, whom he described as "a very dynamic kind of man." [5] Both were executives at Johnson & Johnson (J&J).

Hardgrove thought that “J&J appeared to be deeply serious about making more than just a physical and economic investment.” [5]

In his first New Brunswick Tomorrow meeting, which took place at 7:00 a.m., Hardgrove realized that those around the table—Roy Epps, Tony Marano, John Heldrich, Kenneth Wheeler, and others from the City government and Devco—“are verbalizing, they really mean this, and so I began to see that J&J, and through John Heldrich, was really making a commitment.” [5] The commitment of Johnson & Johnson was more than rebuilding its headquarters downtown; it was also “financial commitment to the work in New Brunswick Tomorrow,” Hardgrove said. [5] He commented that the work of New Brunswick Tomorrow “isn’t dramatic in the same public way as building a new hotel or Rutgers building a new stadium, but it was quietly, in my judgment, and incrementally, part of the process that kind of tried, at least publicly, to balance some of the economic development.” [5-6] He added that without the social side, “the community would have really resented the redevelopment.” [6] Still, Hardgrove acknowledged that there “was backlash and there was disagreement.” [6]

Hardgrove said that during his first six months, NBT chairman John Heldrich visited every church in New Brunswick, listened to the pastor, and then “showed the new vision and role of NBT to address neighborhood issues.” [7] Hardgrove noted that this “was really the first time in the history of this process that anybody had knocked on the door of the religious establishment.” [7] The congregations responded with concerns about employment, education, health issues, and the need for a supermarket. [7] Concerns about the hospital cutting back on emergency services led to the creation of the Eric B. Chandler Health Center in conjunction with the City, Devco, and UMDNJ. [7] Another concern was about homeless people: In response, trailers were set up in Boyd Park that provided comprehensive services. [7]

One of the ways community needs were met through development involved the Hyatt Hotel. As the Hyatt was being built, the “issue of employment became a very major priority.” Hardgrove went with John Heldrich to Chicago to meet with the Hyatt leaders; they committed to setting aside one-third of jobs for New Brunswick residents. [8] With this, however, Hardgrove explained how a unique dilemma emerged:

You get someone a job and they are earning more than they have earned before. They used to live in subsidized housing in New Brunswick and so what do they do, they now move over to Franklin or to Somerset because they can afford something different. So what happens is they are back-filled with another family, who maybe doesn’t live in New Brunswick, who have the same economic issues or problems that the initial family did. So there is a cycle there that just a job doesn’t mean you are going to get neighborhood renewal because people who are working move out, and other people move in in the same modest circumstance. [9]

Hardgrove said that Rutgers was involved but “somewhat insulated from the city itself.” [10] Having Kenneth Wheeler and later Nancy Winterbauer on the NBT board helped the organization take student concerns into consideration. [10] Still, Hargrove said that it was “hard to engage the students” and that the two were not integrated. Students would not go downtown, so when the Rutgers Bookstore opened up downtown “it symbolized something” and led to the presence of more students. [10]

New Brunswick Tomorrow complemented City government in certain ways, Hardgrove said. For instance, NBT would spend \$30,000 to \$50,000 on youth summer programs, and then there would be a newspaper article about it. This raised the concern that NBT was “showing up the City, but all of the time the City was a partner with us; unfortunately NBT got more publicity,” Hardgrove said. [11] The John A. Lynch, Jr., administration was represented at NBT board meetings, and Hardgrove would brief the mayor monthly. [11] He said that “not a lot happened without [Mayor Lynch] and his staff; he wasn’t sitting at the table every time making decisions about the program of New Brunswick Tomorrow,” but he would consult on major projects to make sure they complemented the City’s efforts. [12]

Hardgrove spoke of the involvement of the hospitals and how Middlesex Hospital—a small operation when he came to New Brunswick in 1981—has “grown beyond imagination.” [13] He said, “Whatever NBT did with health was done in relationship to their being part of that equation.” [13] NBT also addressed education issues. Superintendents from the private, parochial, and vocational schools, along with community representatives, were involved. One teacher-recognition program—funded by James Burke, the former chief executive of Johnson & Johnson—awarded outstanding teachers \$5,000, which helped boost morale in the schools. [14]

He said that the Eagleton Institute of Politics polls indicated an incremental appreciation of NBT’s work and that residents felt more positive about the future. [15] The survey also provided a way for task forces to better focus on particular issues. In terms of economic development, the survey indicated that “the dream of Leo Molinari and Richard Sellars was becoming a reality,” Hardgrove said. [15]

Hardgrove explained the structure of New Brunswick Tomorrow. Twenty to twenty-four people served on the board, including representatives from Rutgers, businesses, religious institutions, community activists, Middlesex County College, the County, and some neighborhood residents. [16] There was an executive committee with John Heldrich as the chair that included the chairpersons of the six task forces: “youth and education, human services, seniors, teens, and children.” “The board of directors would receive information about each of the task forces, and they would be asked to act on particular issues. If we were going to raise funds or wanted to make a major commitment of funds toward a certain project, the board had to make that decision—the task force would recommend it,” Hardgrove said.

Hardgrove spoke about the concert series, which attracted visitors to New Brunswick. He predicted correctly that it was a “precursor” to what would occur later with the State Theatre. [20] He said that New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco (New Brunswick Development Corporation) had a strong relationship. [21]

New Brunswick did not have a supermarket in the 1980s, Hardgrove noted. It was difficult to attract retailers: The economy “didn’t warrant a market because many of the people who could afford to go to the traditional market went to Somerset, they went to Franklin, they went out to North Brunswick because they had transportation.” [24] Those without transportation had very limited options.

Hardgrove expressed his frustration with how the schools in New Brunswick are often portrayed by the media. Hardgrove said that the schools’ status was complicated because of the presence of many Latino families with English as a second language and a relatively fluid population. [26] He is confident that there are “strong teachers” and “strong education” but it cannot be appropriately interpreted through standardized testing. [27] “It wasn’t poor teaching, it wasn’t kids that couldn’t learn, it was a much greater problem than people were willing to recognize,” he said. [27]

The New Brunswick process is “very transferable if you get the right people at the table,” Hardgrove said. [28] He offered Asbury Park as a contrast: The town was a reasonable size but lacked the corporate player that could absorb initial costs and so has struggled. [29] The revitalization model “would work in that type of city if the players were in place. But I don’t know whether there [are] . . .,” Hardgrove added. He said that including the social side is essential to success for revitalization: “It’s a moral issue that you don’t want to just come in with new buildings and structures without interfacing with the community and getting some input and trying to make them be of benefit.” [29] Still, he acknowledged that the physical-development side is usually a higher priority. He said that although “John Heldrich wanted this economic development with bricks and mortar, his social and broader perspective made the difference.” [30] Finally, he believed that the process is replicable if there is a balance between the social and physical: “Quality of life and a partnership between the public and private sectors are essential.” [31]

KEY QUOTATIONS

[Quotations have been edited for grammar and alphabetized by topic]

Jobs for Residents

You get someone a job and they are earning more than they have earned before. They used to live in subsidized housing in New Brunswick and so what do they do, they now move over to Franklin or to Somerset because they can afford something different. So what happens is they are back-filled with another family, who maybe don’t live in New Brunswick, who have the same economic issues or problems that the initial family did. So there is a cycle there that

just a job doesn't mean you are going to get neighborhood renewal, because people who are working—as they move out, other people move in with the same modest circumstance. [9]

John A. Lynch, Jr. (as mayor and senator)

When John [Lynch] was mayor and subsequently senator, not a lot happened without John and his staff really being a major player in it, and so John was an integral part of the process. Now in terms of an operational sense, he wasn't sitting at the table every time making decisions about the program of New Brunswick Tomorrow. But if we were going to do some major things, we would consult, get some input and make sure it complemented what the City was already doing. [12]

John Heldrich

Not every town has the kind of vision that John Heldrich had, if you don't have the people who really see the balance and are willing to get a person a job as well as build a new building. John did, and it was his vision and obviously Sellars' and others. But twenty years from now, I just hope people can recognize that Heldrich is not just the name of a hotel. [29-30]

Johnson & Johnson (J&J)

I saw that J&J appeared to be deeply serious about making more than just a physical and economic investment. [5]

New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT)

Even though NBT verbalized the vision for quality of life, the vision of neighborhood response to issues of housing and jobs and education, the question I raised inside myself was "Are they for real? Do they really mean to try to connect revitalization and human services and quality of life?" So it was a fascinating opportunity to say, "Well, why don't I go invest a period of time and see whether this group of people who articulated it very well would go through that process of really trying to make an investment in community," which included culture and the arts. It included employment and the things that are traditionally needed in an urban environment. And so, with some anxiety and trepidation about accepting the job, I came [to New Brunswick] in 1981. [4]

At my first meeting I had around the table Roy Epps and Tony Marano, whose goal was to make that happen, along with John Heldrich and the head of the public service, and Ken Wheeler, who was at Rutgers at the time, and a representative from the City and the development corporation. Here are these seven or eight people at 7:00 in the morning in John Heldrich's office, and I'm sitting here saying "They really are verbalizing, they really mean this," and so I began to see that J&J—through John Heldrich—was really making a commitment. Not just down there to spend the millions of dollars but with financial commitment to the work in New Brunswick Tomorrow, which was reinforced over the years by decisions that were made that did affect, in my judgment, the inner life of the city.

It isn't dramatic in the same public way as building a new hotel or Rutgers building a new stadium, but it was quietly, in my judgment, and incrementally part of the process that tried—at least publicly—to balance some of the economic development. I think without addressing some of the socially related issues, the community would have really resented the redevelopment. [5-6]

Redevelopment Process

So I came and I wanted to see things happen, and I would like to see it happen quicker. But over time I began to realize that the revitalization is a process, it's step by step. If you rush it too quickly, it's premature and won't be successful. You've got to do it incrementally, and you also have to have some symbols. [25]

Robert Wood “General” Johnson II’s Legacy

General Johnson—he was a grassroots, street kind of person in the sense that he walked the streets of New Brunswick. And if he saw something that bothered him, he would respond to it. If he saw a house in the Hungarian ward that looked like it needed some help and that person worked for J&J, he would get it painted. He was that kind of person. He came up with about seven or eight projects in New Brunswick that he was identified with: the Kiddie Keep Well program, which is a summer camp for disabled children, and the Salvation Army—and I think there is something for the Catholic nuns. So the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation continues with the programs, and it is for the New Brunswick area. But it also has made major investments in New Brunswick Tomorrow's social programs and still continues to do so. It supports, in part, some aspects of the work of the New Brunswick Development Corporation (Devco). [32]

Social Issues in Revitalization

I believe it's essential to success for revitalization that you have to have [consideration of social issues]—for two reasons. One is it makes practical sense. It's a moral issue that you don't want to just come in with new buildings and structures without interfacing with the community and getting some input and trying to make them be of benefit. And there is a public relations reason. But it is a model that's essential.

In terms of financial and public relations and public awareness, the bricks and mortar gets a higher priority. You need some people behind the scene trying to struggle with what are the issues and what people need. Our process wasn't entirely ideal all the time, but there was a clear intent of the board to try to work with youth and children and families in neighborhoods to see that New Brunswick is more than just bricks and mortar, that the quality of life was deeply being impacted and touched. Even though John Heldrich wanted this economic development with bricks and mortar, his social and broader perspective made the difference.