As a public relations and marketing manager, she has also established strong, rooted connections. “I don’t see reasons for leaving. I have everything I need,” she said.

In the battle of fight vs. flight, what side are you on?

By RHONDA CROWDER

Staff Reporter

Many residents of Cuyahoga County, particularly younger ones, find themselves consistently asking ‘why should I stay here?’

Increasing population decline, lack of opportunities, limited nightlife and horrible weather are among the justifications they provide for seeking residence outside of Ohio.

But, the Cuyahoga County Young Democrats (CCYD) has decided to seek answers to the million dollar question through a series of panel discussions dubbed “Why Stay?” in addition to a culminating Why Stay Conference to be held in September 2012.

“I was seeing so many people leave Cuyahoga County,” said Paul Sadler Jr., president of the Cuyahoga County Young Democrats, when asked why the CCYD initiated the Why Stay? program.

He went on to say he even found that some of his friends were leaving only to make less money in their desired destinations; people aren’t even staying for money anymore.

“I began to wonder why people were leaving,” Sadler said.

According to Sadler, Cleveland has lost a fifth of its population since 2000. And, once people leave, it’s hard to get them to come back.

Sadler, who is not a native but grew up in this area, finds many benefits to staying in Northeast Ohio including cost of living, having several arts and entertainment districts as well as three major sports teams. He believes Cuyahoga County has a lot to offer.

“I like Cuyahoga County. You can make $100,000 in Cuyahoga County and live like a king,” he said.

The panel series aims to provide in-depth and often surprising information regarding the state of Cuyahoga County. It is intended to involve and elicit input from the community. The purpose of the conference is to summarize the lessons learned through the panel series and to incorporate them into the county's overall plan for developing community leadership, updating the public sector about growth industries in Cuyahoga County, encouraging current residents to remain in the region and educating new residents to the benefits of a Cuyahoga County address.

All the while, special emphasis is being placed on ways the region can attract and retain members of the "echo generation," the 80 million tech-savvy Americans born between 1977 and 1997 – the largest generation of young people since the baby boomers. And, the CCYD believes, as representatives of the youth and young adults of Cuyahoga County, they must stand up to bring the county back to its glory.

The second discussion of the series entitled, "Media and Self-Esteem of the County," was held earlier this month. Focusing on the county's image in local and national media, the panelists included Call and Post's own Felicia C. Haney, Kenny Crumpton and Angelica Campos from Fox 8, Colby "Colby Colb" Tyner of Radio One and Rocky Robinson of the Plain Dealer. Radio personality Bijou Star moderated the discussion.

During the discussion, Crumpton, Campos and Tyner – all Northeast Ohio implants – provided various reasons for why they enjoy living in Cleveland while all panelists provided examples of information and/or stories of positive things occurring in the area.

It was also revealed that Denver is currently the number one city in terms of attracting the Echo Generation.

Cleveland native Johnnie Dent Jr., minister, author and motivational speaker, thought the panel discussion was good because it allowed for self reflection. For Dent, it was humbling to hear people not from Cleveland talk about how much they love the city.

“I was actually disappointed in myself. As much as I love Cleveland, I find myself projecting that low self-esteem,” he said.

He also said, despite how much people attack the media, it was good to see the representation of media project the city in such a positive light. He learned that, with the exception of nightlife, Cleveland is not too much different than other cities.

“I was introduced to a new Cleveland. It was the end of Cleveland from perspective and the rebirth of an emerging Phoenix,” he said.

Dent also thinks people should stay because “Cleveland is wide open for entrepreneurship.”

“The Why Stay discussion panels have come at such a vital time in our community. For myself, the discussions are definitely bringing a positive outlook and mind set on the future in Cuyahoga County,” said Cynnairia Caver, a native and Cleveland Heights proprietor.

Caver attended the last two panel discussions given by CCYD. The first discussion consisted of local CEOs. She found both inspirational and enlightening.

“Having the opportunity to have open discussion with well-known radio and news personalities, as well as editors and reporters from major newspapers in our community, was a rare opportunity. The discussion panels have created a platform where young Cuyahoga County residents and community leaders can bridge the gap and partner together for a common goal,” said Caver.

She continued, “I must say I have not witnessed a group of people that were as passionate

about the advancement of the echo-boomer generation as the CCYD. Obviously our county has a lot of work to do but as a resident and business owner, it is refreshing to see we have people who actually care about the future of our county."

Vivian Sharp, 79, a native of Knoxville, Ten. also attended the discussion. Sharp moved to Clev eland
in 1991 after several visits and has come to consider it home. Having lived in
Los Angeles
,
Chicago
,
Pittsburgh
and
Denver
, she likes the weather here in
Cleveland
. She enjoys the changing seasons and lack of severe acts of nature.

As a public relations and marketing manager, she has also established strong, rooted connections. "I don't see reasons for leaving. I have everything I need," she said.

She does find it surprising that some natives don't like the city.

"It's a great city. I'm doing fantastic here. My motto is 'don't wait to be discovered, discover yourself.' There's great talent here and not just in entertainment. There's smart business people. Donna Dabs and Alton Tinker are doing a wonderful job with the SOUP network," said Sharp.

She thought the panel discussion was very intelligent and informational as well while the level of participation astonished her. "I didn't realize young people were so involved," she said.

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Fight or flight, what's your approach? Please join the ongoing discussion online at www.callandpost.com