

# PLEASE FOLLOW THE NARRATIVE



## DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

Since the last column, I have been involved in some level of controversy, which has put my professional judgment at odds with a narrative. My credentials in the area of aberrant behavior are substantial — In both my behavior and the behaviors I seek to change. Although much has changed in my personal life, the memories of what would be a potentially good place to be aberrant are fresh in my mind.

Attendance at Mardi Gras every year in the seventies allowed me to be myself. Bourbon Street was a wide-open atmosphere where aberrant behavior was the norm. I learned to be internationally aberrant during my time in the Andes and later in the Amazon. While visiting the Amazon in Iquitos, Peru, I learned that pasta was not an Italian dish.

Managing aberrance in the City with Mardi Gras and the Greek Picnic gave me insight into police procedures and the perceived consequences to those not following the rules. I represented the bar

owners and fought the good fight on their behalf. Because I had led a thug life, I recognized the brilliance of the Philadelphia Police and the State Police. I could cogently explain to the bar owners what I thought were amicable solutions.

I currently work for Manny Demutis in Phoenixville. He is planning 400+ new apartment units with corresponding retail, and I am working on the remediation, asbestos removal, and demolition. I was also instructed to do "good works."

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## DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from page 51)

I never really involve myself in the local issues or how the street is doing. I buy stuff downtown, get coffee from Steel City, and meet clients in my room at Molly Maguires. I smile and say “Yo” to old friends.

So, one day, I got a call from Ellie over at Ellie’s Choice asking them to attend a borough committee meeting. Unfortunately, I could not make it because I could not get back to Chester County fast enough to attend the meeting. I sent a position paper that she presented.

The meeting was about closing the (Bridge) street at 2 PM Friday until Monday at 7 AM. I was asked to meet with the merchants — some of my closest colleagues are from the Wild West days of Phoenixville. They complained that the street closures were killing the retail businesses by reducing foot traffic.

One merchant called the press, and I ended up on the front page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, saying the following:

*“When we started the revitalization, we went with an arts-and-entertainment economic development strategy,” Cassidy said. “It’s changed now to a more alcohol-based strategy.”*

We hear the usual denials from those putting on the event. There is a “new vision,” and people have to adjust to the change. I would say it is a narrative without regard for where it leads. But that is not really what this article is about. It is about opposing the narrative.

It was nice to be on the front page, and it outlined my time in Phoenixville from the days of saying “my corner” to the corner boys, to the music series. My in-laws were in town over the holiday weekend, which made my wife, Kitty, proud to see the article.

So fast forward a week or so. The story went national, with other papers picking up the story, particularly in Georgia, where other towns struggle with issues. Then, after that, I started to get alerts about my story locally. Montco Today now has a Barry Cassidy page with this story and the story about how I originated the idea of a SEPTA, Reading to Philadelphia idea.

Then things got a little weird. I had given an interview once about my spaghetti sauce recipe, and that showed up in the Google search “Barry Cassidy Phoenixville.” Although the recipe is

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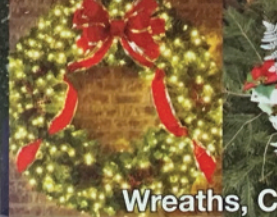
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good, I never thought I would see that article high in the rankings.

The hearing transcript of my testifying in front of Dwight Evans committee pleading to reinstate the line item for downtown revitalization that I got through under Casey. That has to be circa 2009 showed up. I never saw that one before, and I do check regularly.

My friends were telling me that on social media, people were saying I had no room to talk because I had given out shots of tequila in my Bridge Street office during First Friday. Which is not true... I gave out shots of mescal. Mescal was

very important to my aberrant days when I was told that if you took the last shot, you had to eat the worm, and I would tell people that when they came into my office. What my first wife called OBS "Old Barry Syndrome."

But then something really weird happened when I suddenly got a page of four links in the *Mercury* of columns I had written in 2007 for "The Phoenix" that included me inviting people to my office for a shot of mescal. I thought about how these particular links ... and I must have written 100 articles ... were suddenly relevant. It occurred to me that this could not be a random event. It did not meet the stochastic formula that I apply when judging things that seem to happen for a reason rather than randomly.

So, let me double down. Ted Mack told me the hour was almost over. The borough leadership is moving in the wrong direction with the street closures. The "new vision" that the borough manager vaguely articulated will lead to ... in my professional and personal opinion, a decline in the street in the regional marketplace.

The President of Phoenixville Council had asked me to help people agree to the street closures during the pandemic. I got on social media, calmed the masses, and took questions concerning saving the business district. I did that because it was the right thing to do.

I am saying what I am saying because it is the right thing to do. Unfortunately, it opposes a narrative. The "new vision." has led to aberrant events this past summer. It is time to recognize that street closure and open container actions were more to address a COVID-19 protocol, and the "new vision" is a mirage.

Once you kill the golden goose you were entrusted with, the doubts will always be there that it could rise from the ashes again.

*Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at [barrycassidy@comcast.net](mailto:barrycassidy@comcast.net).*

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