

Peter Cohan

Jay Foley thinks Worcester is great for his family's 97-year-old company

By Peter S. Cohan, WALL & MAIN

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Worcester-native Jay Foley left academia and returned to Worcester to keep his family business going. And he thinks Worcester is a great place for the company to stay.

A Ph.D. from Cornell University in sociology/econometrics, Mr. Foley explained in a recent interview that his family's company, Foley Engines, was, "founded in 1916 as a local firm supplying tires and engine parts. We have evolved over the years into a national firm distributing industrial engines as well as turbochargers and fuel injection systems for diesel engines. The deregulation of telecommunications and trucking under Jimmy Carter, and later the development of the Internet and search engines, have greatly helped us build a national firm with only a minimal change in overhead."

Foley Engines is benefiting from recent changes in air quality regulations that are creating demand for its products.

As Mr. Foley said, "Recent air quality regulations in California, New York, Massachusetts and other urban states have provided us the opportunity to further diversify into providing diesel exhaust scrubbers for construction and other off-highway equipment. This is now our biggest growth area, and we have shipped scrubbers to not only all 50 states but also internationally."

Running Foley Engines was not in Mr. Foley's original career plans.

As he explained, before joining the company, "I went from assistant to associate professor at the University of South Carolina graduate school. From there, I was associate professor and director, Center for the Study of Middle Sized Cities, Sangamon State University (now University of Illinois at Springfield, Ill.)"

But Mr. Foley had good reasons for taking over the company. "My father was ill, I didn't want to see the firm go out of business, and, after 10 years as a professor, I was seeking a new challenge."

Mr. Foley believes there are many advantages to being located in Worcester. "Worcester is a fantastic place for a national distributor: central location, good local, community-minded institutions, good infrastructure, i.e., heavy power and natural gas for running a light manufacturing facility, good public sector institutions, i.e., responsive City Hall, honest local government and law enforcement, to support economic activity, affordable housing, good labor force, and a central location with 90 percent of the people of the six New England states within an hour's drive," he said.

For Foley engines, utilities matter -- and the city's access to high-voltage electrical service and natural gas are another plus.

Mr. Foley sees the city's cultural institutions as another great strength.

And he is optimistic about Worcester's sources of growth -- and disagrees with Mirick O'Connell partner, Demitrios Moschos, who in an Oct. 21 interview harkened back to Worcester's U.S. Steel jobs of the 1960s.

According to Mr. Foley, "We have a growing economy with an emphasis on higher education, health care, biomedical research, and warehouse distribution. Because it is diverse, it is stronger still. Compared to working at U.S. Steel on Millbury Street 50 years ago, these are dream jobs: clean, green, safe and paying well. Compared to other middle-sized cities, Worcester is doing well and poised for more growth. We shouldn't let an attorney discourage us."

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