

# The Business Journal

Updated Frequently Every Business Day The Valley's Business Matters

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## T-Shirt Buyers 'Defend Youngstown'



Phil Kidd says his T-shirt is designed to be a symbol of motivation for residents of the city he loves.

By George Nelson 28.NOV.06

Phil Kidd may have grown up in Pittsburgh, but Youngstown is the steel city that has his heart, and he wants everyone who feels as he does about the city to show it.

Kidd, an administrator in Mahoning County Common Pleas Court and a graduate student at Youngstown State University, came up with the "Defend Youngstown" line of T-shirts and vinyl decals. He has sold more than 2,000 of the all-cotton shirts bearing the logo, he reports.

The shirts, priced at \$15 each, feature a laborer swinging a long-handled sledgehammer.

While attending YSU, Kidd recalls, he enrolled in its ROTC program, later transferring to a military college and joining the Army. But he had fallen in love with Youngstown as an undergrad and returned to the city after leaving the Army. "I kept in touch with everything going on," he says.

Kidd was attracted to the Youngstown 2010 project and felt the city "finally had a plan," he continues, and eventually became involved with it. That led to his becoming involved with the successful mayoral campaign of 2010's chief spokesman, Jay Williams. With Williams' election, Kidd believed the city at last had "progressive leadership" and needed some kind of symbol of motivation.

Youngstown, a "very blue-collar town," needed "something striking," he says. He came up with the basic idea and got in touch with an artist friend from college, Matt Jackson of Reading,

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Pa., to execute the design.

More than half his sales originate outside Youngstown, Kidd reports. Local sales tend to be one or a few shirts at a time; customers outside the area buy them in larger numbers so they can give them to family and friends. In addition to his Web site, [www.defendyoungstown.com](http://www.defendyoungstown.com), the shirts are sold at the Bean Counter in downtown Youngstown and at the Youngstown Sports Grille in Boardman.

"When you leave, you miss the positive things about the city," Kidd says. Former residents who look him up "love the message and want to support this."

Williams, elected mayor in November 2005, recalls he often heard "unsolicited comments" and the "stereotypical jokes" that disparaged his city when he worked for the Federal Reserve Bank in Cleveland. "Interestingly enough, those individuals who had been to Youngstown know that it's a quality place, not that we don't have our challenges," he says. He described himself as "thrilled" when Kidd presented him with a shirt several months back and wore it when he ran in the International Peace Race last month.

"I had no idea how big this would become, but that speaks to the genuineness of it," Williams remarks. "It's not glitzy. It's straightforward. It speaks a very powerful message, and the fact people are buying these things up speaks volumes as to what people genuinely feel about the city and the greater Youngstown community."

The mayor has a few of the shirts and plans to get more.

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, D-17 Ohio, is one of his biggest individual customers, Kidd adds. The congressman, seen sporting one of the shirts at a pre-Election Day event in Boardman headlined by his colleague, Sherrod Brown, has bought 20 of them. Brown is Ohio's senator-elect.

Having sold out his stock, Bean Counter owner Jason Logero is waiting for a new supply. Logero says his restaurant typically sold 10 to 15 shirts per week, depending on what activities took place downtown. Most who buy the shirts are middle-aged or younger, individuals who grew up in Youngstown after the demise of the steel mills.

"We're just trying to remind people that downtown is very safe," Kidd says, with crimes in the city usually occurring far from downtown, contrary to perceptions. If someone gets robbed in Boardman, he asks rhetorically, do people stop going to the Southern Park Mall?

"The image of Youngstown is not something that my generation created," he remarks. "We're trying to change the image created by the generation before us."

Kidd, who anticipated finding a "select audience of very diehard Youngstown supporters," admits demand is stronger than projected.

"I'm not surprised people are this supportive," he says. "They haven't had a way to express it."

He also concedes that many people in the Mahoning Valley "love

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that negativity fix," but has found that is slowly turning. "That has got to go," he declares.

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