

Q & A WITH JOHN TRUEMAN

TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.

This month is the 17th installment in the series: John Trueman, TWA Board vice president.



John Trueman, an experienced property appraiser and TWA Board vice president, has been evaluating land on the waterfront for 35 years. A business owner for 24 years, he has been actively involved with the Stadium Business District, the Old Town Business District, the Ruston Point Defiance Association, the Cross District Association, and Tacoma Neighborhoods Together. Over the years he has observed the area surrounding Commencement Bay evolve from vacant or marginal warehouse buildings with dim futures to an appealing blend of upgraded marinas, office space, retail shops, condominiums, and apartments. This shift, from industrial use to attractive commercial and multi-family use, has been significant, especially on the Foss Waterway.

Q: What is the impact of this shift?

A: A changing perception of Tacoma. At the Friday evening boaters' event during the recent YachtoberFest celebration, more than half of the 55 boats present were from other areas — Seattle, Poulsbo, Olympia. Attendees commented to me on how delighted they were to discover the city's cleanliness and attractiveness. If we continue to grow that perception, word will get out and we'll attract more people.

Q: What else is needed now for downtown to thrive?

A: Residents living downtown. I think about the difference between Tacoma and Seattle at night. Downtown residents will make the area feel safer. The University of Washington will bring more people and Tacoma will continue to grow. It is not clear how much of that will be downtown. Completion of the shift to clean and modern will take time. We may see it in the former Brewery District which has not yet transitioned to other uses. It takes saving some historical buildings and tearing down others in order for the usage—and the perception of others—to change. I understand the challenge of restoring and preserving older buildings because my wife and I live in a 1935 house. The upcoming U.S. Open Golf Tournament next spring will help to bring in new people to see what we have.

Q: How does the Port of Tacoma factor into your view of this future for the city?

A: The port was in transition when I arrived here in 1979, it is now, and will continue to be as we see upgrading and growth. For long-term sustainability of the area the port needs to stay competitive. It needs to get ready for the new larger ships and to provide the necessary services its customers require. The change in recent decades to serving container ships requires upgrades in roads and rail to handle the increased amount of cargo moving off the ships. The older rails and roads do not allow for today's volume and required speed of movement. The newly planned Seaport Alliance formed between the Tacoma and Seattle ports to market and operate the shipping terminals and maritime assets of the two organizations has never been done before. It creates an operating alliance between two entities that have been aggressive rivals for decades. This is forward movement.

Q: What is a good day in your world?

A: My work (as an appraiser) takes me into the field part of the time—for taking photos, doing walkthroughs, securing outside measurements of land and buildings. The people I deal with on a regular basis are a joy. I like a sunny day, but another part of my work is doing research on properties, so I can be selective and move inside when the rough weather sets in. If the rain starts to get to me, all I have to do is remember Minnesota where I grew up. The rain beats ice and cold any day.

Q: Where are the challenges?

A: Mine is a service industry. Sometimes things take longer than a client would like or a property value is different than expected. It is an inexact science.

Q: What leads you to participate in the work of the multiple business districts you have been associated with over time?

A: It has always made sense to me. You can accomplish more in group versus individually. Business districts are good examples of this.