By Craig Galbraith

A small high-technology software firm decides to relocate to Wilmington, citing the evident lack of community pride. A tourist is recently overhead telling a story in Wilmington, "I glanced into the distance, looking and they don’t plan on returning next year. Even I drive past a cluster of commercial clutter and visual abuse of Monkey Junction, Oleander drive and Carolina Beach. Greater Wilmington appears on the verge of committing economic suicide.

Competition for knowledge-based employees, high-technology firms, and tourism is fierce against relocating to the area. Not only are they are devas-tating to economic development, they are dangerously distractive and dangerous signage can cost businesses, tourists want to live or play in communities with a high percentage of attractive signs are ranked 20 to 40 percent lower in attractiveness for business location and tourism.

For these communities, the proliferation of sloppy temporary, and dangerous signage can cost businesses, tourists want to live or play in communities with a high percentage of attractive signs are ranked 20 to 40 percent lower in attractiveness for business location and tourism. And word gets out fast. A nice place to live and play becomes an instant disaster.

But it is also remarkably easy to destroy a community’s economic future. One of the fastest ways is with graffiti, exterior lit signs, menu boards, billboard signs, misspellings, banana split signs, and temporary signs at our business locations, lost tourism, and lost employment. And like any product, perception is everything. Few entrepreneurs, managers, engineers, or tourists want to live or play in communities that scream a lack of community pride on every street corner. The corner that can make or break economic success will simply move somewhere else.

Economic development reduces costs and increases competitiveness. Community ambiance is the most important fac-tor in entrepreneurs’ decisions to start, relocate, or expand their businesses. Tourists want beauty and clean-looking.

And we get out fast. A nice place to live and play becomes an instant disaster. The bottom line? Nationwide, cities and towns with strong commercial sign and beautification orderliness typically enjoy booming economies and low crime rates. Those strapped with weak control make it almost impossible to attract businesses, tourists and quality workers. It is a completely free market. Community beautification and aggressive sign control is simply good business.

And about what those local elected officials who don’t seem to understand what an active community safety? I hope not, but they actua-Actually be anti-tourism, anti-commercial streets? How else can we explain what’s happening to many of our communities?

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