BING Institute helps put feet to big ideas

1st step: Young leaders roundtable

By Nancy Kaffer Crains Detroit Business

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**Building Innovative New Government Institute board members**:

• **President Emmett Moten:** President, **The Moten Group**
• **Vice President Paul Hillegonds:** Senior vice president of corporate affairs, **DTE Energy Co.**
• **Secretary-Treasurer Mike McLauchlan:** Vice president of government relations, **Ilitch Holdings Inc.**
• **David Lewis:** Chairman and CEO, **Lewis & Munday PC**
• **Denise Starr:** Chief administrative officer, **Compuware Corp.**

Detroit has no shortage of do-gooders, community groups and civic organizations that want to make a difference in the troubled city.

And since Mayor Dave Bing was elected in 2009, the area's business and philanthropic communities have redoubled their efforts to help Detroit succeed.

Making connections among people and groups is where the **BING Institute** comes in.

Optimism about Detroit is almost at a tipping point, said Cathy Govan, the institute's executive director. And the BING Institute -- the acronym stands for Building Innovative New Government -- is an attempt to capture that good will and channel it to productive causes.

"It's a response to the challenge (Bing) has been talking about since his election, that government cannot do it alone," said Govan. "What can we say as citizens, what can we do to help move Detroit forward?"

The institute, granted 501(c)(3) status by the **Internal Revenue Service**, has the stated nonprofit purpose to "promote civic action and social welfare by promoting the common good and general welfare of the residents and visitors to the city of Detroit," with the specific goals of supporting programs to improve the business climate, job market and efficiency of government.

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The genesis of the institute came during Bing's 2009 campaign for mayor, said developer Emmett Moten, president of the institute's board ***Emmett Moten*** of directors. Bing, Moten said, wanted to pull in experts and organizations that could help move the city forward. The may-or does not have a hands-on role in the institute.

"There are a lot of people who want to help," Govan said. "We're a group that talks to people about what they're working on and brings a lot of groups together."

The first such initiative is the **Emerging Leaders Roundtable**, a group of about 40 young Detroiters that meets once a month and includes representatives from **Declare Detroit**, the **Detroit Creative Corridor Center**, the **Detroit Economic Growth Corp.**, **Southwest Detroit Business Association**, **Detroit Young Professionals**, **Open City**, **The Collaborative Group**, **Inside Detroit** and **Detroiters for Environmental Justice**, to name a few.

"You look at leadership in Detroit and in the metro area, we said, "let's get a group of young people, let them form their own group,' " said Moten, who is also president of **The Moten Group**.

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The roundtable is coordinated by Christianne Sims, the former director of **Fusion**, the **Detroit Regional Chamber**'s dormant program for young professionals.

"They are all very, very excited about where the city is going," Govan said.

Bing has attended some of the roundtable's meetings, as have other top administration officials.

The roundtable is encouraged to find and cultivate new ways for Detroit to succeed, said Vince Keenan, executive director of nonprofit voter education resource **Publius.org** and a member of the roundtable, in an atmosphere of creativity oriented toward finding unconventional solutions to the city's problems.

The guidance of the more-experienced institute board members, he said, can shape creative plans into real policy.

One possible idea: working with owners of vacant buildings to convert unused space to temporary studios for artists.

"It's the idea that as long as it's going to be empty let's have some art in it," Keenan said. "To the property owner, it allows for some interest and life to be circulating around their building and make it more attractive in the long haul" as well as providing the security of an inhabited space.

The artist, he said, would get to use the space short term.

"As it becomes saleable, the artists know they don't have a forever lease, they know they're there for a limited period of time to try to keep things safe," he said.

The roundtable has a wide focus, said Phil Cooley, owner of **Slow's Bar B Que** in Corktown, another member of the roundtable.

"Anything from land use to design standards, things like vacant property, ownership, marketing the city," he said. "In my opinion, they're just looking for the voice of the younger generation. It's easy to hear a lot of the more-established voices, but they want to hear from younger voices as well."

Other projects are in the works, Govan said.

In time, Moten said, the organization may focus on issues as diverse as public policy and regional collaboration, in hopes of creating an impact that lasts beyond Bing's tenure.

From its creation in May 2009 through the end of the calendar year, the institute reported $87,002 in total revenue, according to tax filings; a golf outing accounted for more than half the revenue. The institute ended the year with a fund balance of $6,069.

Sponsors for the institute's golf outing, with a $5,000 contribution, included **Metco Services Inc.**, **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan**, the **Detroit Medical Center**, **Park-Rite Inc.** and **Quicken Loans**.

In 2010, Govan said, the institute took in roughly $220,000, ending the year with about $2,500 in cash on hand and about $48,000 in outstanding payables.

The institute paid four contractors $68,150 in 2009, according to the filing: Govan; Sims; Dion Williams, who works on community outreach, attending civic meetings like those held by neighborhood groups and the Charter Revision Commission; and Gary Hendrickson, who researches economic development and job-creation initiatives.

Govan said none of the contractors works full time.

A clear mission is important for any organization that wants to get things done, said Susan Sherer, CEO of **The Heat and Warmth Fund** and former executive director of the **Super Bowl XL Host Committee**.

"I think there's a need for convening the right people around the right issues -- there's no denying that is always a piece of the problem solving," she said.

Such a group should also be differentiated from other organizations working toward similar goals.

"There are several organizations that are operating in the space of engaging young people in leadership, and you can't see how they're connected. ... I think it's confusing for the participants," she said.

It's important that such an organization have not just a clearly defined role with achievable goals but also a set of executable outcomes, Sherer said.

"Otherwise it becomes another forum for all the conversation about how Detroit should be successful," Sherer said. "I think it's great if it has a clear, executable mission and collaborates in an official way with other organizations."