

## RANDOM SAMPLES

# TOLEDO FANS CAN WEAR THEIR HEART ON THEIR T-SHIRTS

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My New Year's resolution is to save Toledo — with a T-shirt.

Lucky for me because T-shirts make up most of my wardrobe. They are mementos from the Yale Bologna Festival in Michigan and Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest in New York, and they sport logos for my favorite athletic teams.

My chest is a billboard for where I've been and what's important to me, which is why it seems the perfect venue for trying to turn the tide of negativity that threatens to drown my adopted hometown, especially during this recession.

This probably isn't the first solution that comes to mind for most local leaders. Instead they might suggest that I join a young professionals group to fight brain drain. I could hand over my savings to the Marina District project and provide my own economic stimulus. Or I could make a major movie here, as then-mayor (and now-mayor) Carty Finkbeiner suggested in 1998, earning him an appearance on *The Daily Show*.

But I'd rather save Toledo with a T-shirt.

It's a black one with a picture of a muscular arm (not mine) that has the outline of Ohio stamped like a tattoo on the bulging bicep. In the corner of the state, right where Toledo would be, is a small red heart. The shirt reads: "Strong for Toledo," a nod to the city anthem.

I designed it myself and I believe the results are much better than my previous attempt at shirt-making, a white undershirt on which I wrote "LeRyan" in black marker. I wore it to Cleveland Cavaliers basketball games in tribute to LeBron James until it got so tattered that my wife told me I had to throw it out.

My new shirt — made with a little clip art here, a little Photoshop there — was prompted by the recent creation of ToledoLand Apparel. It's a T-shirt and sweatshirt Web site ([toledolandapparel.com](http://toledolandapparel.com)) started by two Toledo natives, Steve and Sarah Streicher.

Here's how it works: Anyone can submit designs that are then sold through the site, which fronts the costs of set-up and printing. The designer, in this case me, gets a couple of bucks for each item sold, and 10 percent goes to support a local non-profit. The remainder should allow ToledoLand to break even.

The point is not just to encourage regular people to create cool designs. It's to take all the positive feelings people have on the inside about Toledo and bring them to the outside.

"We want to help create a grassroots rebranding of Toledo through ideas of Toledoans and the people that care about it," said Steve, 29, who just finished an MBA at the University of Toledo. "We wanted to kind of tap into people's ... creative energies and help them come up with a way to kind of project what Toledo means to them."

A former Peace Corps volunteer, Steve founded the site in October with his younger sister, who lives in California these days. He said it's no secret that the city has struggled lately and could use an economic makeover. It still has a lot going for it, though, and much good can come from focusing on that.

"There are things that are in our control and there are things that are out of our control. One thing that is in our



control is how we perceive the place where we live,” Steve said. “That’s really what ToledoLand can do.”

It’s one thing to see a sign around town proclaiming “Toledo Pride” and quite another to express it yourself. Imagine the impact it would have if everyone walked around town wearing a shirt that reflected what they love most about living here.

Andre Agassi wasn’t all wrong when he said, “Image is everything.” Which is why I plan on saving Toledo one T-shirt at a time.

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