

# Public Square Communities Enters Adulthood

A Change in Leadership Brings Challenges, Opportunities

“I see our growing network of communities convening stakeholders to address our toughest regional issues.”

BY LIZ HENDRICKS



Liz Hendricks

**I'm a parent**, and now I'm a president. And maybe the president can learn from the parent.

In my years of working with Public Square Communities as a customer, then as a colleague, I've thought many times about how our organization's growth is akin to that of a person. From infancy where we learned to communicate and function, through teenage years of experimenting and maturing, we've grown into a young adult able to listen and make sound decisions, yet still needing guidance from time to time.



Terry Woodbury

On July 1, Public Square Communities became a “young adult” in the lifecycle of a business. Founded in 2004 by Terry Woodbury, she has grown from just an infant—from an idea in the mind of an entrepreneur—to a young adult, transitioning away from her parent to new ownership and leadership. On July 1, the founder stepped aside as I became the new president. Simultaneously, five colleagues who have “grown up” with the company will become investors/owners of the maturing company

That's the same challenge the 59 towns in our 19 Public Square communities face: transitioning civic leadership to the next generation. To be successful, the transition needs to be deliberate with coaching and support. As president, I am blessed with a true leader in my predecessor, one who anticipated that our organization's vitality necessitated passing the baton to the next generation. I have been working with Terry over the last six months, even though he has been working on this plan for several years. Now as I drive the bus, Terry and my seven colleagues will be on it, providing expertise and suggestions.

So what do I see for this next life stage of Public Square Communities?

I envision more communities embracing the wisdom of gathering all four sectors—govern-

ment, business, education and human services—engaged in every project they undertake.

I believe that purposeful, well-designed community conversations will become more frequently used to connect passionate citizens with institutional leaders in order to advance community-wide goals and actions.

I imagine our colleagues providing third-party, neutral facilitation for a wide range of organizations and regional groups.

I see our growing network of Public Square Communities convening stakeholders to courageously address our toughest regional issues and to take advantage of our biggest opportunities.

I believe new partnerships will emerge as entrepreneurial communities erase old boundaries in search of ways to accomplish new dreams.

Will the leadership transition Public Square is making be without hiccups? Certainly not.

Will communities find it easy to make their next-generation transitions of leadership to younger people and to new residents who came from other countries? No, that's a learning curve for all of us.

And if we stay the course, might we have to sacrifice convenience or even a good night's sleep? I wish not, but know better.

Am I hopeful about our organization's and our communities' futures? For sure.

Whether maturing from a child to a young adult, moving a company from its founder to a new president and owners, or transitioning from one set of civic leaders to the next, the necessary tools are similar: guidance, support and courage.

Stay tuned for Public Square's next stage of the journey. **KCL**

**LIZ HENDRICKS** is President of Public Square Communities, Inc., mom, wife, and Elk County Commissioner.