Clarion Review

Social Science

One Square Mile: A Journey of Community Empowerment
John C. (Jack) Shaw
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Jack Shaw's tale of the renewal of a California community is compelling for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how sound business principles can be applied to community development. Second, it is an exceptional example of how a "retired" business executive can craft a second career and find a new avenue of deep gratification.

The story revolves around Oak View, a community originally of one square mile located in Orange County. With a reputation as a drug haven in the 1990s, Oak View was ripe for urban improvement. Since 1995, a number of efforts took place to clean up the community, including the introduction of a youth soccer league, a mobile health program, and a family resource center. It wasn't until 2005, however, that the Oak View Renewal Partnership was launched, and that is essentially where Shaw's journey begins.

The author describes in detail the challenges of implementing a formal development program, discussing every aspect from local politics to personalities to involvement by the community. Shaw structures each chapter in the book in a similar way so that the reader can easily and quickly identify key points.

Perhaps the most interesting section of each chapter is "Lessons Learned – What I Would Do Differently." Here, Shaw reflects on his experiences and offers an honest and insightful look at what he personally gained and what he could have done better. He observes, for example, "I don't think I understood the culture of fear and the consequences of that fear on all that we do. I don't think I fully appreciated how difficult life is for our families. And finally, I am certain that I fully did not understand the 'pull' of families on their children to stay close, to work, and otherwise provide support. That is, the family unit as a basic element of the culture drives everything."

Readers looking for ways to apply Shaw's experience will find the final chapter,

“Scaling Up—Exporting the Model,” a particularly insightful look into “what it would take to transfer [the] pilot organization to other communities.” Shaw describes five key areas—leadership, focus, outcomes measurement, accountability, and capital—that are essential to creating a blueprint for any community development effort. Useful appendices include the Oak View Strategic Plan, a bilingual community questionnaire, an implementation outline, and a resource directory.

In tracing and documenting both the transformation of Oak View and his own personal journey, Jack Shaw has written a book that serves as a textbook case study of a major community revitalization project as well as a memoir of personal renewal. *One Square Mile* is a book that educates, informs, and inspires on many levels.

Barry Silverstein