



LETTER FROM OHIO

What Republicans Need to Know About Cleveland

Welcome, GOP! Here's a guide to our fair city.

By VINCE GUERRIERI | July 08, 2014

The last time any political convention was held in Cleveland was 1936. The city was the fifth-biggest in the country, and it seemed like the sky was the limit for a town that billed itself as “the Best Location in the Nation.”

It hasn't all been downhill since, but Cleveland's taken its lumps as the “Mistake by the Lake.” Now, people here are pretty excited that the Republicans will be holding their presidential convention here in 2016—thought most of us, to be honest, are more interested in the faint prospect that LeBron James will come back to lead the Cavs to glory.

In 1936, Public Hall, then the city's downtown convention center, was still relatively new (it had opened just in time for Calvin Coolidge to accept the Grand Old Party's nomination in 1924), and had just been wired for sound for radio broadcasts of the 1936 Republican Convention.

It was an eminently forgettable affair, nominating Alf Landon, who didn't even bother to show up for the convention—or the election. His nine electoral votes against Franklin

Roosevelt remain the lowest showing for any major party candidate.

But Cleveland of 1936 was vastly different than the city today. Here is what Republicans need to know about our town:

We take sports seriously, probably more than we should. The Indians will probably be on a lengthy road trip while the convention is in town, and one of the reasons Cleveland was chosen as the site is that the Republicans would be able to use Quicken Loans Arena (unless LeBron comes back and leads the Cavs to the finals).

But being a sports fan in Cleveland is kind of an obligation. The last time any of the city's sports teams won a title, Barry Goldwater had just been thumped by Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 election. It can be agonizing (remember The Shot? The Drive? The Fumble? Cleveland fans do, in excruciating detail). So please, Republicans, do try to feel our pain. And in the name of everything that's holy, don't make the mistake Gov. John Kasich did in trying to rally forces for Senate Bill 5, likening it to Bernie Kosar's comeback to lead the Browns to a championship. (Kosar never won a championship with the Browns, and Senate Bill 5 lost too. It's also worth noting that Kasich's a Pittsburgh native ... and a Steelers fan.)

We've heard all the jokes. Yes, the river caught fire. Yes, the mayor's hair did too (and his wife once declined a White House invitation because it was her bowling night). Yes, the city almost defaulted in the 1970s. Yes, one of our suburbs has been called the Pink Flamingo Capital of the World. Yes, yes, we all love Drew Carey and watch *The Price Is Right* religiously.

And it's only because we've developed a sense of humor about it that we haven't all gone completely nuts. That great blue-collar mentality everyone likes to talk about here? It includes a certain amount of self-deprecation. A local TV host came up with the Pink Flamingo reference. A local comedian made a "Hastily Made Tourism Video." So if you're going to make fun of Cleveland, be original. If it's funny, we'll laugh. On that note...

There are some weird places to see in Cleveland. Like any city of its size, Cleveland has the standard arts and entertainment facilities. It also has some bizarre places that are worth visiting. Playhouse Square, the largest theater district outside of Broadway, is home to the largest outdoor chandelier in the world. In Euclid, just east of Cleveland, there's the Polka Hall of Fame. Case Western Reserve University is home to the Dittrick Museum of Medical History, which includes surgical instruments, medical tools and (gulp) anatomical models. And if you're staying downtown, there's the Cleveland Police Museum in the Hall of Justice. It displays a fraction of its collection, which includes the gun and badge that

belonged to Eliot Ness, who became Cleveland's safety director after his time in Chicago, and death masks from victims of the notorious Torso murderer—who was never caught. The masks hung in the city's Great Lakes Exposition in 1936-37 in the hopes that they'd be identified. They never were.

Presidential history abounds. Ohio has been called the mother of presidents, with a total of eight who were either born or lived in Ohio. James Garfield was born in what is now Moreland Hills, lived in Mentor—where his house is now a national historic site—and is entombed at Lake View Cemetery (the cemetery, called Ohio's Outdoor Museum, is also the final resting place of Eliot Ness, John D. Rockefeller and former Sen. Marcus Hanna, among others). William McKinley was born in Niles and is buried in Canton. Rutherford B. Hayes formed the first presidential library at his home in Fremont.

There are a lot of good things to eat. It's really easy to think of Cleveland as a shot-and-a-beer town with hearty but not flashy meals (and we do have those), but Cleveland's starting to be regarded as a foodie town, with a variety of restaurants for a variety of tastes. The most famous celebrity chef in Cleveland is Michael Symon, who owns a variety of restaurants throughout the area. There are several B Spots, with burgers and other bar food with a kick, as well as Lola downtown and Lolita in the city's Tremont neighborhood. The West Side Market on West 25th offers food you probably didn't know existed. It's also not far from a pair of microbreweries, the Market Garden and the legendary Great Lakes Brewery, which features beer named for famous people and events in Northeast Ohio (there's a Burning River Pale Ale. I told you we could laugh at ourselves). In addition to having delicious, mountainous corned beef sandwiches, Slyman's is a regular stop for campaigning politicians of both parties. Vice President Joe Biden made a point to visit, and George W. Bush partook there as well.

Even if you haven't been to Cleveland before, you've seen parts of it. With a new tax credit, Ohio has been used as a filming location a lot recently. Last summer was "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" and "Draft Day." Before that was "The Avengers." But Cleveland's been a film location for decades. "The Fortune Cookie," the first pairing of Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon, was filmed at Municipal Stadium and St. Vincent Charity Hospital. The wedding at the beginning of "The Deer Hunter" was in a church in Tremont. And not far from the church is the house used for exterior shots in "A Christmas Story." The house is now a museum, decorated to look like the movie, and regularly gets actors from the movie to appear and sometimes give tours. (Sorry to disappoint, but the bulk of "Major League" was filmed in Milwaukee.)

Politics is a blood sport here. It's also a spectator sport. The city is littered with

political figures whose careers have come to sordid ends. Eliot Ness modernized the Cleveland Police Department, but he couldn't catch the Torso murderer, and made a spectacularly unsuccessful run for mayor. Dennis Kucinich was the boy mayor of Cleveland in the 1970s, raising the ire of the local mob to the point that they put out a contract on him. After Cleveland's default, it took Kucinich almost another 20 years to get elected to office again. Jim Traficant, the former congressman from my hometown of Youngstown, went on federal trial twice in Cleveland, defending himself both times in tribunals that were equal parts jurisprudence and spectacle (he batted .500, with one acquittal and one conviction).

So there you have it. We'll be happy to have you in 2016, and we hope you have fun. And hey, at least we're not Tampa—a fact that is made abundantly clear every January.

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