ENTREPRENEURS OF SYRACUSE PAST EXCELLED AT ‘PROCESS INNOVATION’ — IMPROVING ON OTHERS’ IDEAS — AND THEIR STORIES CAN INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE TOMORROW’S RISK-TAKERS

JOHN WILKINSON (right) and Gilbert Averill (left) are pictured in the first Franklin air-cooled Roadster in 1922. Averill purchased the car and is giving Wilkinson marketing ideas. Wilkinson was an engineer who designed the air-cooled engine. Entrepreneur H. H. Franklin incorporated it into his high-end automobile design, making the Franklin a favorite car of the rich and famous all over the world.

BROTHERS OF INVENTION

THE SHUBERT BROTHERS — Jacob (left), Levi (right) and a portrait of Sam, who was killed in a train accident in 1905 — didn’t invent theater. But their novel methods of promoting and producing theater helped them create the largest theatrical empire the world has ever known.

Central New York has a rich history of entrepreneurs who created wealth with their ideas, innovation and entrepreneurship. Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association Museum & Research Center, recounted that rich history Nov. 18 at Thursday Morning Roundtable. The Post-Standard asked Tripoli to adapt his speech as part of this occasional series about innovation and entrepreneurship in Central New York.

By Gregg Tripoli

The Onondaga Historical Association is, obviously, the repository for many of the artifacts, images and documents that chronicle the entrepreneurial history of Onondaga County. As the past informs the future, the study and the knowledge of our great entrepreneurial heritage can also help encourage and build our entrepreneurial future.

The tremendous accomplishments achieved right here in our community can create pride in our collective past and inspire the determination to build a legacy that is worthy of our rich heritage. They can also inspire individuals to take the risk, work hard and pursue their passions by starting a business.

Our local history is filled with compelling and fascinating people and companies that have had national and international impacts and that provide classic examples of what it takes and what it means to be an entrepreneur.

Here in Central New York, our entrepreneurial roots are deep and wide. It is a fact that most new jobs in any local economy are produced by the community’s small, local businesses. This means that we need to encourage and inspire entrepreneurship on a local level to build our local economy.

Examples from our community’s entrepreneurial history can serve as case studies to encourage and to improve the judgment of those who may be inclined to start their own business in the uncertain environment of entrepreneurial pursuits. They can provide that local connection with someone who started with nothing but an idea, in an economic, legal and social environment that was less conducive than today’s, took the risk and made it work.

Jeremy Levine, a well-known venture capitalist, means that we need to encourage and inspire entrepreneurship on a local level to build our local economy.

Share your stories about entrepreneurial success.
Go to www.syracuse.com/opinion and post them with Gregg Tripoli’s article. You’ll also find a link to WCNY’s Podcast of Tripoli’s full speech and to previous articles by Bob Herz and John Liddy, who wrote about entrepreneurs’ current successes in Syracuse.
History inspires too thinkers

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A capitalist, points out that “entrepreneurs get inspired to take the risk and start a company because they see someone else’s career.” And the likelihood of being inspired goes up significantly when you are in an environment where you see others who got inspired and were successful.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from our own history is that it is not necessary to be a genius to be an entrepreneur. You don’t need much pressure and support is on the mistake side of success. Instead of deriving from invention that new technology or product that you’ve ever thought of before.

The first, fact of the matter, true value creation doesn’t come from that new technology or the new idea. It comes from process innovation—making something better, making it better, and something more valuable.

In OHA’s educational program, “Our Entrepreneurial History,” we highlight the concept of process innovation, as well as the basic rules of successful entrepreneurship, by telling some of the greatest stories from first local history.

Alexander T. Brown, for example, was an entrepreneur/inventor who didn’t invent the typewriter but developed the first “visible” typewriter, which was manufactured under the Smith Premier name. Prior to the Smith Premier typewriter, the typist was unable to see what he had just typed. It was an obvious drawback for the machine operator and prevented its large-scale use. Brown’s improved invention helped create the L.C. Smith Typewriter Company (of which he was president) in 1904, made the machine a step or every office.

Syria is certainly not.

Alexandra Brown was also the man who invented the Syracuse engineering genius John Wilkes text for the great entrepreneur H. H. Franklin.

The Franklin automobile Company was, at one time, the largest manufacturer of its type in the United States. Franklin didn’t invent the automobile, but he was the entrepreneur who incorporated the Willys Knight Company and invented his engine’s high-end automobile design, making the Franklin a favorite of the rich and famous all over the world.

The Sheehan brothers of Syracuse provide another fascinating example of process innovation. They took a basic trolley car design and manufactured over 5,000 of them in their original factory. Once they expanded their plant to 27,000 square feet, they learned that it was time for a change in the manufacturing process.

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OHA’s access is filled with stories of local entrepreneurs who show that the process innovation is at the heart of true value creation in the local economy. These compelling stories not only make up for the lack of historical data but also serve as a reminder of the needs of the public, capitalizing on opportunities, overcoming inevitable failures, and the ability to think adapt and adapt to the future in order to make something better, cheaper, more relevant and more valuable.