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Editorial: City's can-do spirit goes beyond the Packers

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The Green Bay brand

Decatur, Ill., is the Soybean Capital of the World. Akron, Ohio, has been a center of the rubber industry for many years. Rock Island, Ill., is best known as the main hub of the late Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, immortalized in an old song about the "Rock Island Line."

They all are small cities not unlike Green Bay with something in common with us: These cities hosted charter members of the American Professional Football Association, which has become known as the National Football League.

By the mid-1920s, however, the teams in those other cities had folded or moved elsewhere. But there was something about Green Bay that enabled the Packers to survive and, eventually, thrive.

A legislative committee and the state Department of Tourism are working on separate attempts to develop a new "brand" for Wisconsin, and a coalition of business and government leaders are doing the same thing on a local basis. Appleton state Rep. Steve Wieckert sounded a common theme: "We are the Green Bay Packers. We are a great agricultural state. We are America's Dairyland. But we are more than that." It almost sounds like an apology.

Especially considering the achievements of this year's team through Saturday evening, what "more" do you need?

"No one needs to apologize for the Packers or any of the other good things about this area," Mike Hildebrand, co-chairman of the Greater Green Bay Branding Initiative, assured us. "We should be proud of all of those things and tell people about them."

Most people know the Packers, Hildebrand said; not many people know Green Bay also has received national recognition as a great place to start a business and raise a family. Thankfully, he agreed we should never downplay the Packers' part in all of this.

Because after all, the Packers are the shining example of the spirit that makes Green Bay, and Wisconsin, great. Throughout recorded history Green Bay has been a "can-do" place.

Good things, unique things, happen here, because of that "can-do" Green Bay spirit. Morgan L. Martin drafted the Wisconsin Constitution on the dining room table at his home, Hazelwood. Fort Howard Paper Co. pioneered the use of recycled paper instead of virgin pulp in tissue manufacturing. When the municipal wells started going dry, the city built a pipeline to Lake Michigan. Schreiber Foods helped develop production of individually wrapped cheese slices into a worldwide industry. Schneider National was tracking its fleet of trucks with satellite technology 20 years ago.

It's no surprise, then, that of the dozen or so small cities that had NFL teams, only Green Bay could compete at the major-league level for more than a few years. The Green Bay spirit of sheer

determination fueled that 1919 meeting in the Green Bay Press-Gazette editorial room — where George Calhoun and Curly Lambeau organized a football team.

The spirit sparked the community stock sales that kept the team alive through a series of challenges.

The spirit built and rebuilt Lambeau Field, one of a handful of sports shrines and the greatest in football.

The spirit motivates hundreds of people to come shovel out the stadium after a snowstorm for \$8 an hour.

The spirit made the Packers the best story in professional sports: The only team that's owned by its community.

Green Bay did not become a unique place because of the Packers; the Packers thrived because Green Bay is a unique place.

These new "brands" should not shy away from the Packers, the cheese or even the cold weather. Wisconsin farmers make the best cheese on the planet. Cold weather means sledding and skiing, gentle snowfalls, and a full appreciation for a cup of hot chocolate. And the Packers are America's football team.