

John Somers

President/CEO

Harmac Medical Products

When John Somers heard that a new training program funded by the State of New York was going to be set up in Buffalo, he was skeptical. Then he spoke with Stephen Tucker, shortly after Tucker was named President and CEO of the Northland Workforce Training Center (NWTC) in late 2017. After that conversation, Somers decided to give NWTC a chance.

Both men shared an interest in seeing Buffalo improve, especially on its East Side where both NWTC and Harmac are based, just two miles from each other.

“Programs like that need leaders like Steve Tucker, who is an approachable, smart, hands-on leader with a lot of energy,” said Somers. “For me, seeing that in Steve was a very positive step.”

Somers saw Tucker as a natural partner because Harmac is always looking for skilled and talented team members. They have since hired three employees from the program.

“Northland does a lot more than just teach people the technical skills,” Somers said. “They give them standard work skills. They teach them how to show up for work on time, look people in the eye, shake their hand, and build relationships. That’s why we’ve continued to evolve our partnership. It provides employment for East Side residents and it fits a need for us.”

Harmac is also a strong supporter of Buffalo’s immigrant community. With over 20 nationalities at its Buffalo headquarters, Somers wants his team to understand one another’s backgrounds, traditions, and values. He fosters a culture of honesty, integrity, and respect. He

teaches his leaders the importance of building employee relationships so that their company can build bridges and leverage that diversity.



“If you don’t understand someone’s culture, just ask them about it and they’ll tell you,” Somers explained. “Those straightforward, simple questions really help to break down barriers and encourage people to share their unique perspectives.”

Harmac values its employees so much that it stayed in the neighborhood instead of moving to the suburbs like many companies in the area have over the years. Buffalo’s East Side is a disadvantaged community, though things are slowly improving. Somers is proud of the decision his team made 12 years ago to keep Harmac on Bailey Avenue.

“We realized that 25 percent of our employees live in our zip code,” recalled Somers. “If we moved, it would have been devastating to them. We just couldn’t abandon them or their families. Instead, we chose to stay and help lead this community in its revitalization.”

They called it “The Bailey Green Initiative,” and began by focusing on the “green.”

They purchased a row of condemned houses across from their facility. Then they removed them and built a park on that land – the first green space on all of Bailey Avenue between the University at Buffalo’s South Campus and South Buffalo.

Next, they partnered with the University at Buffalo’s School of Architecture and Planning, and engaged an international landscape architect, Dean Gowen, who had worked with Buffalo’s Olmsted Parks.

“We wanted to create a visual change to the neighborhood by creating a promenade similar to other parts of the city where they have these great rows of maple trees on both sides of the street,” Somers explained. “So we planted about 150 trees.” Harmac then convinced Habitat for Humanity to build new houses in this low-income neighborhood, something the not-for-profit had not done before, thinking it would not attract any families. Remarkably, of the first five new houses built, three of them became owned by Harmac employees.

“Every employee at our company has a direct impact on the lives of patients who use the devices we manufacture,” Somers said. “Some of these devices are life-changing, and some are life-sustaining. Whether an employee is assembling a product, designing a piece of automation, interfacing with a customer, or cutting the grass, all of them are critical to our ecosystem and in achieving our vision of changing the lives of patients, employees, and the communities in which we work.”

Somers sees the improvements occurring, both within and outside the walls of Harmac. He understands as well that his role as an industry leader is not just to build a profitable company, but to build a healthy community. Though he acknowledges the neighborhood will not completely improve with one grand gesture, he sees value in making many smaller gestures.

“I’m a white guy, working for an international company. We’re in this inner city, but I’ve gotten to know a lot of people in the neighborhood, one person at a time,” explained Somers. “One older gentleman in the

community needed his garage door replaced, and we said, ‘We’ll do that.’”

They shook hands, and a month later Harmac had gradually replaced the garage doors, front steps, and porches of some other residents as well.

“We all need to reach out and build bridges with others,” Somers said. “That’s what we try to do across our whole company.”