

BRIDGING THE BERKELEY/BAYER DIVIDE



In 1990, Bayer Corp. (formerly Miles Inc.) – the largest industrial employer in Berkeley and a nearly 90-year occupant in the city – discovered the problem of invisibility when the company’s plans for a total redevelopment of its nearly 30-acre site needed city approval. To move forward in identifying the community’s and city’s concerns and determining how to address them, Bayer contacted Fern Tiger Associates. Initially reluctant to work (for the first time) with a large corporate client – rather than the nonprofit and public agencies with whom the firm had built its reputation, FTA’s concerns dissipated as it became clear that Berkeley and the community had much to gain from a true partnership with Bayer.

After several preliminary meetings, research into the biotech field, and a meeting with Bayer’s union, FTA agreed to assess city and community concerns and apprehensions about the company and about the emerging field of biotech. From there, the consultants would coach Bayer staff on community relations and produce a bullet-proof outreach strategy stressing accuracy, openness, and sensitivity to Berkeley’s needs. In reality, the project became much larger – an eight-year endeavor producing one of the most innovative and recognized business-community collaborations in Bay Area history.



On the path to a landmark Development Agreement, FTA established roundtable discussions between Bayer management and a broad range of community organizations, ensuring the company would understand local issues and the context for its long-range plan and enabling nonprofit leaders to establish relationships with the company. Bayer and FTA attended more than 100 public meetings in just one year. They met with city staff and community leaders repeatedly to assess the company's capacity to meet the city halfway on issues ranging from the need to train local residents for lucrative jobs in biotech to its interest in having environmentally safe facilities with little risk of accidents. Weekly meetings with the company provided updates based on what had been learned about community concerns and needs. FTA also encouraged the company to keep its 750 employees informed about the process, with presentations at site meetings.

Getting press attention proved difficult as reporters pegged the Bayer story "an unending saga" that they would cover at its conclusion (which they predicted would be dire). To attract media interest, FTA developed a list that depicted "the process," noting more than 50 steps. Each week a copy of the list was sent to the media with check marks showing the current status of the effort.

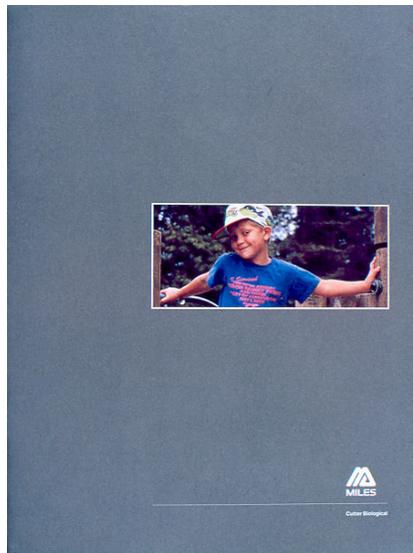
The night of the City Council decision on the landmark Development Agreement, a list of more than 100 public and community meetings Bayer had attended in an effort to understand local needs (with FTA at every one of these meetings), was rolled down the aisle, red-carpet style. After the successful vote on the issue, that night a group of residents (some of whom had been opponents of the project), local nonprofit leaders, city staff, and Bayer officials went for a beer to celebrate the win-win outcome for all parties.

BAYER CORP. (formerly Miles Inc. and Cutter Biological) is a \$9.3 billion company with headquarters in Pittsburgh, PA, and is a subsidiary of Germany's Bayer AG, a \$30.6 billion pharmaceutical and chemical company. Bayer employs more than 140,000 people in 150

Researching options to enable Bayer to think about how it might use its resources to help the community, producing communications materials, handling media relations, and overseeing a multifaceted public information and community outreach campaign, FTA was instrumental in the negotiation of the Development Agreement and in changing the public image of Bayer (for which the firm won numerous national and regional awards). In one notable case, FTA enlisted Bayer staff volunteers to go door-to-door for a postcard-signing campaign, where residents from the neighborhood closest to the Bayer site demonstrated their support for Bayer and its plans. In 1991, the City Council voted unanimously in favor of the project. But FTA continued to monitor community concerns, assisting with implementation of community programs, establishing ongoing neighborhood and citywide communications about Bayer's activities, evaluating results of the company's community relations efforts, and providing ongoing consulting and technical assistance. In the end, FTA's experience with its one corporate mega-client proved infinitely rewarding, helping a company recognize its potential to be socially-responsible in an extremely demanding community, and helping a community learn the potential benefits it could gain from a large company.



countries worldwide. Its 30-year Development Agreement with the city of Berkeley awarded Bayer certain zoning and permitting rights for its site, while providing Berkeley residents more than \$12 million toward specific community projects.



Annual Report



Newsletter

