

MC plays hardball with Matthews comment



Chris Matthews

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Michigan City is fighting back after some negative on-air comments were made by one of TV's most famous pundits.

According to June 28 transcripts from Hardball with Chris Matthews on MSNBC, Matthews had some not-so-great things to say about Michigan City in reaction to Gov. Mike Pence's vice presidential acceptance speech.

Specifically, Matthews said, "... And he was talking about his own state of Indiana. If you go to places like Michigan City down at the bottom of Michigan, Lake Michigan there, you see cities with nothing left, but maybe a Blockbuster that's gone now. Maybe a diner is still there. They've been hollowed out."

But some people who live in Michigan City want Chris Matthews to know that his comments are not only incorrect but offensive as well.

Candice Silvas, 2nd Ward council member, said she was shocked to hear such talk about her city – even taking her opinion to social media by sharing a video of Matthews' statement and calling him out through Twitter posts.

"As a respected journalist, he made the comments with absolutely no research or investigation ... Anybody with his sort of platform has a responsibility to research before they spout off," she said.

However, Silvas has done her own research – finding a couple other occasions that Matthews has denigrated Michigan City.

On June 10, 2005 he said, "... If you go through places like Michigan City in Indiana ... Most of America, all the way across the North and center part of the country is filled with small town with not much happening anymore, except the Blockbuster movie theater and a small restaurant."

On April 16, 2015 he said, "... If you look in particular areas – Michigan City, a lot of Midwestern cities have nothing less than a Blockbuster and a diner left, if they have the diner, and if they have the Blockbuster. They're hollowed out cities."

Matthews visited the city back in 2001 as a speaker for the Sinai Forum – but officials are wondering why the city left such a bad taste in his mouth. And if he's been back since.

Not only has the Blockbuster store been gone from Michigan City for years, but there are hundreds of businesses – including diners – currently open in Michigan City.

The city has come a long way in the last decade or so, City Planner Craig Phillips said in a phone interview. If a person were simply to do an internet search of Michigan City through Google or Instagram, he said, he could see the improvements that have been made.

Michigan City is known for its beach, kayaking, arts, culture and recreation, Phillips said, particularly the flourishing Uptown Arts District. But the city also boasts large tourist attractions like Blue Chip Casino, Lighthouse Place Premium Outlets and Washington Park.

With ongoing revitalization plans like the Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy and a new branding strategy, the city continues its upward swing. Michigan City was named a top Chicago day-trip by Architectural Digest, Phillips said, and has won a number of awards for planning initiatives.

As for Matthews' comments about merely a diner and a Blockbuster existing in the city, Mary Jo Orlowski said his comments were misinformed and off-base.

As executive director of the Michigan City Area Chamber of Commerce, Orlowski said, "Michigan City, Indiana, is a thriving community with a vibrant downtown that has excellent restaurants, shopping and entertainment ... The amenities here are beginning to rival those in Chicago and the natural beauty of the area is a draw from well beyond the state of Indiana."

In their reaction to Matthews' comments, city officials invite him to return to Michigan City to witness firsthand the improvements that have taken place.

"We would love to show him that progress is possible when we come together as a city, despite our state's obstacles and challenges," Silvas said.

And Orlowski agreed, saying, "If you're going to put Michigan City on the worldwide map, please get your facts correct. I invite Chris to visit our community so he can understand why his comments were erroneous."

Mayor Ron Meer also would like Matthews to return to Michigan City. But in the meantime, Meer and his team are crafting their own response to Matthews' on-air criticisms.

"Michigan City is on a full rebound with so many great things going on – economic development, the Promise Scholarship, crime is down – so for him to say all we have is a diner and a Blockbuster is not accurate," he said.