



## North Carolina Law Life

### Grand Rapids' Answer to a Bleak Economic Outlook: Viral Video

By: Donna Ray Chmura. *Monday, June 6th, 2011*

Guest post by [Erin McNeill](#)

NPR recently did a [story](#) about Grand Rapids, Michigan's inspiring response to a [Newsweek article](#) listing [Grand Rapids](#) as one of America's "dying cities" with a "bleak" economic outlook. Many small and medium business owners can empathize with what the people of Grand Rapids felt in the face of such a stark prediction, as business owners have been hearing from the media for years about how many businesses are failing with more hard times ahead.

Yet, the town of Grand Rapids did something inspiring in response. A small group of filmmakers, business people, and politicians rallied with a downtown production of hundreds of the town's citizens, including prominent business leaders, students, government officials, and local news personalities, [lip syncing](#) to Don [McLean](#)'s hit, "[American Pie](#)."

Watch the video [here](#):

The video went [viral](#) fast, with over a million views on a holiday weekend. What is so inspiring about a town lip syncing?

1. **It is quintessentially American.** To respond to bad news by having a town-wide sing-along of "American Pie," featuring cheerleaders, a pillow fight, a [Nerf](#) battle, the mayor riding in a convertible, and that plucky, small town, everybody-knows-everyone-else-and-we-can-all-pull-together-and-do-something-great . . . well, that is what the indomitable American spirit is all about.
2. **There is a time for grieving and a time for fun.** "American Pie" is a perfect sing-along song, but it is also about overcoming grief and sharing that sadness with the entire community of Americans. As much as the song is about the literal death of musicians, it also stands as a powerful metaphor for the grief a lot of Americans are experiencing in this tough economy, from the loss of a job, a house, or a dream of graduating and getting started on a family. Yet, it

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also inspires a togetherness that leaves most people with a smile on their faces. The song “American Pie” is a great lesson in how to turn grief into community.

3. **Cooperation.** A lot of Americans seem fed up with partisan politics and the division in the country. It is refreshing to see a group of people react to a bad economic outlook not by playing party politics, but by banding together, regardless of ideology, and working to solve the problem by improving the image of their town.
4. **Maybe there really is no such thing as bad press.** The average American is tired of hearing about bleak economic forecasts and how there is no hope for the future. We, as a country, seem ready to face depressing headlines in the press and get outside and enjoy our towns, our neighbors, and have fun this summer, whatever lies ahead. And maybe, just maybe, that “Eh, whatever, let’s go have a pillow fight, then kayak down the river!” attitude in response to tough economic forecasts is just the thing that will prevent them from coming true. Getting out there in response to bad press and inspiring others to do the same certainly got more eyes on Grand Rapids than the hundreds of struggling towns that weren’t on [Newsweek’s](#) 10 Worst list.
5. **Great use of social media.** One lesson that the millions of people who watched the video may not have been realizing they were learning is that this is a fantastic use of social media to promote a “brand.” Too often social media marketing messages are too clearly “pitch” and not enough about the heart and soul of a brand. Small business owners looking to use YouTube or other types of social media to gain eyes (and hearts and minds) through a direct dialog to potential customers can learn a lot from Grand Rapids’ approach. Make your content fun, interesting, inspiring, and tell ‘em what is really at the heart of your brand and you will win new fans.

The Grand Rapids approach has a lot of great lessons for business owners looking for a creative solution to a tough economy. How will you apply these lessons to your own economic challenges?

If nothing else, sharing this video with your staff and colleagues may be a great way to spend 10 minutes energizing your employees and building a sense of community at your workplace.

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