

Tennessean.

Jun 30, 2014

Steve Case Lauds Nashville as Startup Hub

Michael Burcham - Guest Columnist

AOL co-founder Steve Case said he liked what he saw in Nashville, his last stop on a four-day trip to cities with thriving startup cultures.

The Rise of the Rest tour was based off the theme that nontraditional startup cities are beginning to emerge as potential players for the future. All morning Case and his entourage toured startup offices around Music City.

A luxurious tour bus carried Case and his associates to the different startup sites, which included Marathon Village and the Trolley Barns at Rolling Mill Hill.

At one stop, Evermind is developing sensors that tell customers when they have left appliances on at home. Another, Deavor, is a startup workplace: an open area outfitted with Yazoo beer on tap, a well-stocked coffee bar, a filming studio and inspirational quotes lining the walls, perfect for leasing out to creative minds. Another participating company, Redpepper, calls itself a "startup accelerator." It is set to launch 200 other startups in the next five years.

Case said the main purpose of his tour was to celebrate these startups, voice his support and increase their visibility by attaching his name to them.

Michael Burcham, CEO of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center, said Nashville was chosen as a tour city because it nurtures startups. The EC, for example, has presided over the formation of 114 startups in the last five years, which have earned a collective \$100 million in revenue so far.

Burcham also said Nashville was chosen because it has become increasingly well-known as a startup and tech hub of the South. "It used to not even be a name that came up, but now it's on all the top five lists (for startups)," Burcham said.

The startup locations Case toured — Bow Truss Building, Marathon Village and the Trolley Barns — were historical buildings left in disrepair for years and just recently renovated and filled with entrepreneurial and startup tenants.

To get funding to renovate the Trolley Barns, for instance, the Nashville Entrepreneur Center raised funding from private and federal government sources and then asked the city to match this funding, instead of asking for city funds first.

"(That made it) an easy yes for the mayor," Burcham said, "because there was no risk involved."

Case said he has discovered how well-positioned Nashville is, especially in the health care industry. He urged it to use its advantageous position to become a global leader in health care, which makes up one-sixth of the U.S. economy.

Gov. Bill Haslam, who also attended the tour, said the thing he likes most about Case is his concern for people. "It's not just about creating jobs (with him), it's about the communities created around them," Haslam said.