

# Revolutionary R.I. rises up again

Last summer, I became aware that the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, chaired by Gov. Gina Raimondo, was seeking RFPs (requests for proposals) for a new branding and tourism campaign for the state. As a writer and photographer who was born and raised in Newport and now lives in Providence, I was interested.

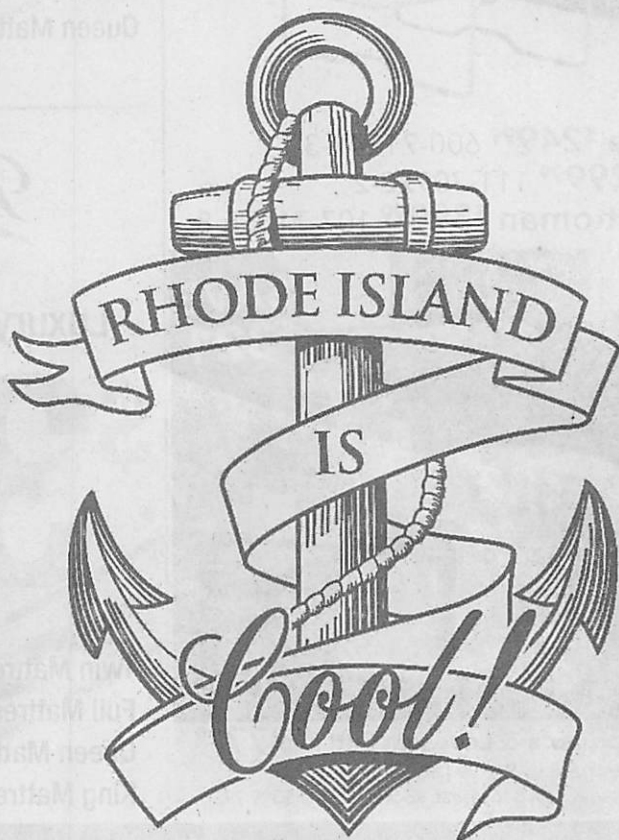
Within hours I had my slogan: "Rhode Island Is Cool." In one short phrase, it captured our past and present, our climate and people. Comparatively cool, comfortable temperatures in an age of global warming. Cool, in our colonial past, our Gilded Age mansions, our colleges, coastlines, towns, and on and on. Cool in the diversity of people who live here, our work and pastimes.

On its heels I conjured the companion image: the words "Rhode Island Is Cool" on a banner threaded through a tattooed anchor, evoking our state's naval and nautical history and the tattoos I saw on sailors in Newport and, many years later, on young people. An anchor is central on the state flag. My logo was complete.

Enthused, I went online and looked at the Commerce Corporation's application and hard reality hit: they were obviously looking for an agency that had the muscle to roll out an entire campaign, or so it seemed. But wait, there was hope!

Only days later, I ran across a news item that said Bob Jeffrey, CEO of J. Walter Thompson in New York, one of the world's biggest advertising and marketing firms, was acting as a special adviser to Governor Raimondo about the campaign. Bob was not only from my neighborhood in Providence, but I knew his mother, and his sister Patty had recently interviewed me for her blog, Patty J. Maybe I could get his ear!

I emailed him, telling him I'd like to converse about what I thought was a great idea for the tourism campaign. He got back



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to me right away, directing me to contact his assistant to set up a phone call between us.

The short of it was, every call time that was agreed upon ended up being short-circuited on his end.

Meeting this, tied up that. Finally, it became apparent he was blowing me off. The deadline for submissions passed. Oh, well. Who did I think I was, anyway?

Flash forward to last week. I, and the rest of the state, woke up to the news of the state's new logo: "Rhode Island: Cooler & Warmer," the words bracketing a stylized "sail" that could be any corporate image. In fact, if you Google "highway logo" under images, see how much a sail looks like a highway. See how derivative and generic the image is.

Adding insult to injury, this muddled message was created by Milton Glaser in New York, to the tune of a whopping \$400,000! Dollars from the pocket of Rhode Island

taxpayers. And he collected all of it, as it had won the approval of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation before it was foisted upon the people of the state.

To our everlasting credit, the reaction of the populace was pure Revolutionary outrage. On this very soil from whence Rhode Island was the first colony to, in 1776, proclaim its independence from King George III, Rhode Islanders once again renounced the imposition of repugnant conditions, in this case being forced to pay for something that they neither want to see, nor have represent them.

And that act of rising up and forcing the governor to withdraw the offending material and fire the person who oversaw its acquisition is not only historic and right, but very, very cool.

— Charles Pinning, an occasional contributor, is a writer and photographer living in Providence.