

Trent has a role to play as the north end grows

By Peterborough Examiner

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During my first six months as the president of Trent I have been thoroughly impressed by Peterborough. By its role as a cultural hub; by its connections to the GTA on the one side, and its role as the gateway to Eastern Ontario on the other; by its breathtaking natural beauty; and by its potential as an economic driver for employment and prosperity.

If I were to pick an example to demonstrate the role that universities can play as economic drivers, I would point to Waterloo. Over the last 20 years, its emergence as the prosperous heart of Canada's "technology triangle" is founded on the activities of two universities: the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier.

Trent already contributes to Peterborough in many ways. With more than 1,500 permanent, contract and student employees, we are one of the community's key employers, contributing almost \$400 million to the economy each year, supporting more than 4,200 direct and indirect jobs. Our graduates make up 7% of the local workforce.

But we can do much more. Recently, Peterborough Economic Development (PED) released a new five-year plan "to ignite Peterborough's long-term transformation into a high-performing sustainable economy, which is required to attain the goal of increased prosperity for the region."

Trent University can be a key catalyst in this transformation. To do so, we must begin by making Trent as successful as it can be. In challenging times for universities, this means that we must begin by finding ways to maintain a healthy undergraduate enrollment.

At a time of fierce competition for students, this is something that must be accomplished by offering something special that prospective students want. We have a good basis, being a smaller interactive university which provides students with an exceptional opportunity to interact with faculty, other students and researchers; with many intersecting disciplines; and with local and broader communities.

But we have challenges as well. At a time of declining applications to universities across Ontario, we are working to broaden our range of programming in a way that better speaks to the aims of today's student. A second important challenge is our location in an area of the city which is characterized by its lack of development.

A visiting consultant recently told me that he was astounded by the beauty of our campus, but also by the lack of amenities around it. As he pointed out, students at most universities can walk, in five or ten minutes, to innumerable shops, restaurants, services and facilities.

In Waterloo, I counted over one hundred restaurants in easy walking distance from its two universities. At a time when experts say that one of the keys to happiness is a community which allows its members to walk to what they want, most of Trent remains a place where one must get in a car, bus or some other sort of vehicle.

Trent's new Student Centre will be a positive step toward better student life, but we have more to do in Peterborough North to make the Symons Campus an ideal place for students, and for their recruitment and retention. As the mayor takes the lead developing a plan for downtown, we are interested to explore opportunities there as well, but those are welcome additional possibilities, not substitutes for the need for development around the Symons Campus.

The more students we attract and retain at Trent, the more activity they will generate downtown, in the social heart of the City. If one looks at Waterloo, the development of university communities on the edge of the city has not detracted from, but supported the success of its downtown.

We can build on healthy enrollment with partnerships that will make Peterborough successful. The assets we bring to the table include remarkable human capital; our willingness to work with business, the social sector, government and the arts community; and our endowment lands, which can be developed in myriad ways to support the entire community.

The latter can make the Symons campus the most comprehensive centre for indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities in the region; allow the development of an industrial research park that would extend our renown in environmental science; and permit the construction of a sustainable village on the Otonabee which could include an element of retirement living that reflects our expertise in healthy communities and aging in society.

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It goes without saying that there are obstacles that must be overcome if we are to do all that we can to make the Trent/Peterborough partnership as productive as it can be. As we celebrate Trent's 50th anniversary and look forward to the next 50 years, this is a time to pursue the available opportunities with a new energy and boldness.

Leo Groarke is President of Trent University.