

St. Cloud Times
To a Higher Degree
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On behalf of all of us at St. Cloud State University, I am pleased to have this opportunity to express our gratitude to the St. Cloud community for the many ways it welcomes and supports our students. This is a great university town where city, business, neighborhood and campus partnerships with our campus communities benefit all of us.

Across America colleges and universities are actively seeking collaboration with their surrounding communities on issues and needs that affect us all, and St. Cloud State is a committed participant in this trend. When I arrived in St. Cloud three years ago I was met with enthusiastic support from Mayor Dave Kleis and other city leaders who recognize the university exists within the community, that the well being of one affects that of the other. Neighborhood residents and property owners, leaders in business and the arts and a host of others have joined in strengthening “town-and-gown” partnerships that are making this a better, more enjoyable and safer community. It doesn’t hurt that many of these partners, including the mayor, are alumni of St. Cloud State.

The Welcome Back Students campaign we began three years ago has focused attention on the positive impact students have on the community, providing a solid labor pool and contributing significantly to the region’s economy. Our students also provide thousands of hours of volunteer work in community organizations. St. Cloud State students invest an estimated 1.5 million hours annually in volunteer work on campus and in community organizations including Boys and Girls Clubs, Habitat for Humanity and area nursing homes. Faculty and staff also make significant contributions as leaders and participants in the arts and a wide variety of local organizations.

It’s no secret that the presence of colleges and universities adds significantly to the stability and health of a region’s economy. A July 7 *USA Today* article pointed out that “the relationship between institutions of higher learning and economic development has grown closer in the past decade.” University town leaders interviewed for the article pointed out that their local institutions of higher learning are “buffers” against economic ups and downs. Just as importantly, our local colleges and universities provide immeasurable cultural, educational and entertainment benefits.

In return, it is clear there are multiple benefits for universities to actively engage in community building, problem solving and knowledge sharing with their communities. The greatest may be the example these outreach activities sets for our students. They come to St. Cloud State for their education, but a significant part of that education is gained beyond the perimeters of campus – learning how to live responsibly with neighbors and to make smart choices about

their lives. Many of these opportunities are found in their jobs, their activities and their relationships off campus.

Increasing numbers of students are participating in the campus U-Choose and city of St. Cloud's Impact Diversion Programs to help them make legal, healthy and safe choices about alcohol use. Students selected to provide leadership for the Husky Neighbors Program are building better relations between students and their South Side community neighbors.

At St. Cloud State we have been actively assessing the value and strength of our community partnerships. The university has invited leaders of civic and charitable organizations to participate in our second "Celebration of Community Partners: Moving Forward" on Aug. 17. We plan to host these important discussions every six months in the coming years.

Next month as we begin a new academic year, we also will celebrate our community partnerships with the launch of the St. Cloud State University Welcome Center in the new Coborn Plaza north of campus on Fifth Avenue. This facility will provide easy access to information about the wide variety of opportunities for education and cultural enrichment the university offers, as well as serving as a venue for community-related activities.

All of these initiatives strengthen established relationships and create opportunities for new ones to develop, helping us meet the needs of students preparing for a world of big challenges and bigger opportunities.