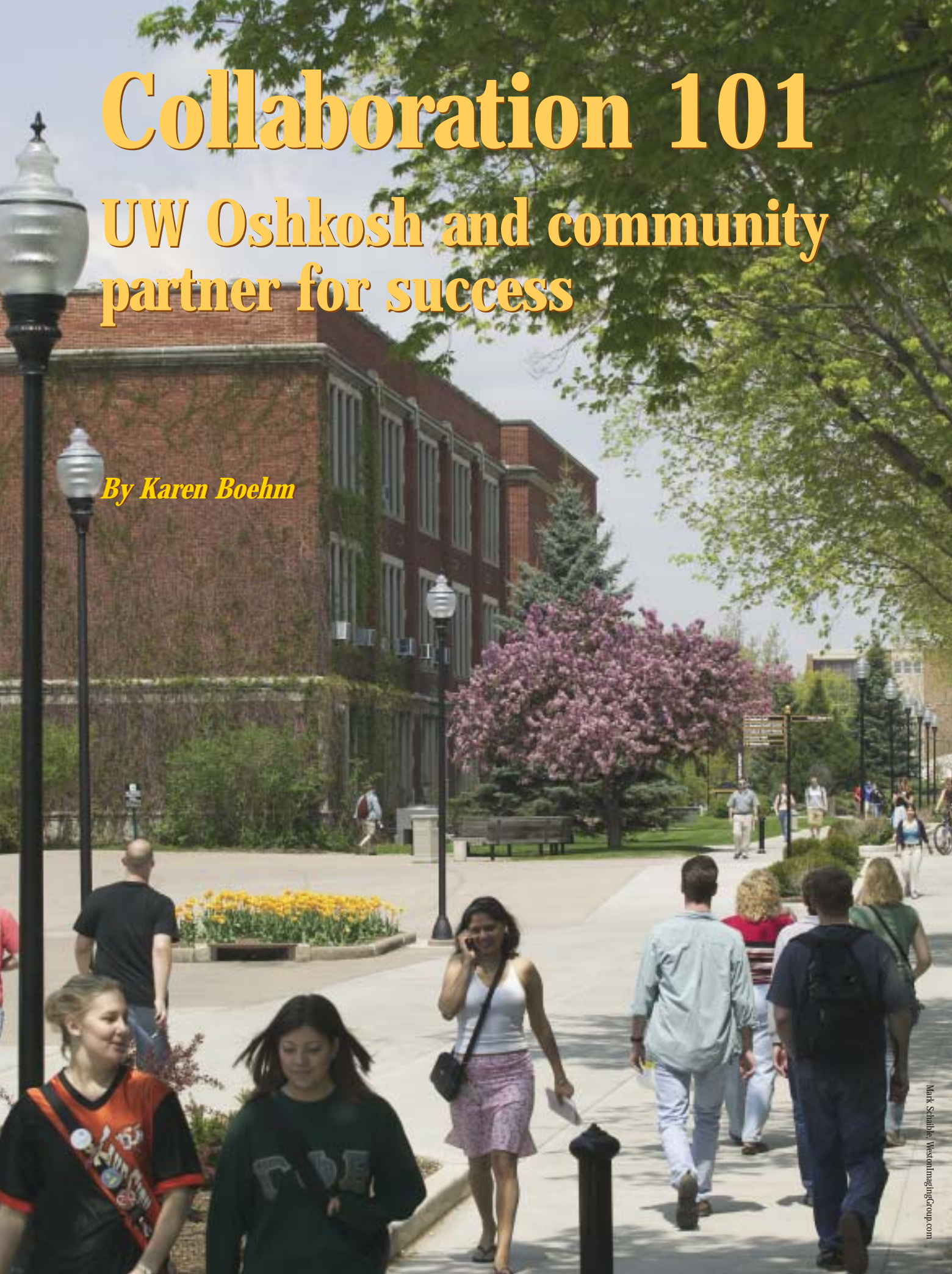


Collaboration 101

UW Oshkosh and community partner for success

By Karen Boehm



Mark Shanley, WestonImagingGroup.com

Growing up in New York in the 1960s, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells recalls an attempt made by the U.S. Air Force to measure its economic impact on the community. For one pay period, the Air Force paid its employees entirely in two-dollar bills. The odd bills eventually made their way into restaurants, grocery stores, businesses, and into the hands of other patrons, heightening the community's awareness of the Air Force's economic significance.

While he doesn't want to bombard the community with two-dollar bills, Wells *does* want to communicate the importance of the university to the community and the significance of the business opportunities it creates. That is why UW Oshkosh is conducting a detailed market opportunity study.

The study will show how the university creates direct and indirect markets for the business community. Direct markets made up of student spending—*independent of tuition and other university fees*—approach \$80 million per year. Indirect markets, which include university visitors and consumers who utilize its facilities during special events, total approximately \$20 million per year.

These figures show it's obvious that the university plays a vital role in our community, but Wells emphasizes that the community is equally important to the university's success.

"Our ability to thrive in the future is dependent on the community embracing the university and vice versa," Wells said.

The university plans to make available the information from the study, which will be completed later this summer, to businesses in the community. The untapped market potential created by the presence of the university is in the tens of millions of dollars, Wells estimated. By sharing the results of the study with the community, businesses can utilize the information to better saturate those markets.

"People will understand the numerous large markets created by UW Oshkosh," Wells said. "The business community can better take advantage of the opportunities available to them via the university. They can make money that will benefit them and the university. Everyone wins."

Market Opportunities

While opportunity exists to explore new markets, many businesses are already feeling the benefit of the university's presence. Wells said preliminary estimates from the survey indicate that the overall economic impact of UW Oshkosh on Wisconsin exceeds \$400 million, nearly double the impact of the Fox Valley's tourism industry, which is estimated at \$220 million. The survey breaks this figure down into market segments, such as food, clothing, automotive repair and housing.

This spending further enhances the economy by the



Heather Zahner, WestonImagingGroup.com

Chancellor Richard Wells, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

creation of new jobs. The survey goes on to state that more than 7,000 jobs are directly and indirectly created by the presence of the university.

Approximately 70 percent of students have a job while they are in college, Wells said.

"This helps fuel the labor force needs—especially the part-time labor force. Students are working in hotels, restaurants, businesses, schools and hospitals. They are well educated, motivated and good workers."

Eastbay, Inc., a mail order company located in the City Center, employs approximately 100 UW Oshkosh students, which account for 25 percent of its staff.

"They have been great employees," Eastbay Recruiter

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Jennifer Landrath said. "Many will continue to work for us through the school year. They are so close that transportation isn't a problem, and we offer flexible schedules. We employ so many people, it gives us a new pool to choose from every year."

Talent and Resources

While student spending and employment account for a significant portion of Oshkosh's economy, the university provides valuable benefits that can't be measured in dollars. Community involvement, cultural and athletic events, philanthropic giving, and educational opportunities all hinge on university programs.

Don Stolley, Stolley Studio

The proposed Living, Learning & Serving Community would integrate residential units, businesses, cultural centers and educational opportunities.

University faculty and staff share their talent and expertise with the community in a variety of capacities.

"At the Oshkosh Chamber alone, faculty have provided meeting facilitation, seminar presentations, program guidance, and committee and board service," said John Casper, president/CEO of the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce.

In the area of fine arts, UW Oshkosh students and faculty share their talents to bring first-class cultural performances to the community. For example, 25 percent to 30 percent of the Oshkosh Symphony members are university students and faculty.

"Many of the university musicians that play with us occupy principle positions," said Oshkosh Symphony Executive Director Kay Qualley. "They add immeasurably to the quality of the symphony and know bright students who can fill out the orchestra when we do larger performances."

The faculty, who have an extensive music background, also work behind the scenes developing programming for the organization.

UW Oshkosh's exceptional athletic program contributes to Oshkosh's and the Fox Valley's events, as well. Its Titan Baseball program, for example, is ranked the Best All Time Baseball Program in the nation by *Baseball America* magazine. It is because of this achievement that the Fox Valley was selected to host the Division III College Baseball World Series, a five-day event which drew nearly 30,000 visitors and fans.

"Year in and year out, we have one of the top ten NCAA Division III athletic programs in the nation," Wells added.

"Appleton would not be hosting the College Baseball World Series if it wasn't for UW Oshkosh's baseball program."

While UW Oshkosh's arts and athletics programs are gaining state and national recognition, thousands more students are gaining recognition for their work in our community.

"UW Oshkosh students are among Oshkosh's biggest philanthropists," Wells said. "They easily raise more than \$100,000 each year for other organizations and provide the equivalent of more than \$1 million in volunteer hours every year."

Educational Excellence

All this while achieving an academic degree. Of course, one of UW Oshkosh's greatest contributions to our community is the value of the education it provides. As Wisconsin's third largest university, UW Oshkosh's educational programs are recognized throughout the region and the country.

UW Oshkosh accounting graduates consistently score among the top 10 percent of students in the nation every year. Its College of Education, which was one of the first teachers' colleges in the state, is a role model for other colleges. The College of Nursing is distinguished by its quality of nursing graduates, as well as its nurse practitioner and accelerated online nursing programs. The College of Letters and Science Aquatic Studies program, which studies water quality, strives to

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better protect our community's natural resources. And its medical technician program compares to that of Marquette University in terms of graduates, national ranking and placement after graduation. However, 80 percent of Marquette graduates leave the area after graduation. This past year, every UW Oshkosh graduate in the medical technician program remained in the area.

UW Oshkosh Alumni

In fact, 80 percent of UW Oshkosh alumni remain in Wisconsin and 10 percent establish roots right here in Oshkosh.

"It's a phenomenon that everyone wants to stay here," said UW Oshkosh Foundation President and Executive Director of University Advancement Thomas Keefe. "So we should make sure they get a good education. A good, well-rounded education makes us better citizens and better voters."

Larry Bittner, partner with Virchow, Krause & Company, earned his business degree from UW Oshkosh and now recruits graduates to work within the firm. Virchow Krause currently employs 40 UW Oshkosh alumni—eight partners, four senior managers and one firm-wide marketing director.

"UW Oshkosh's College of Business compares favorably with any other in the state and with lower tuition," Bittner said. "Who wouldn't want a university in their town? Their payroll impact is among the highest in the city, and they are environmentally friendly and non-competing."

During their college years, students are learning that Oshkosh is a first-class community with professional, educational and recreational opportunities abound.

"If you have lived somewhere else, you realize this is a wonderful university with so much to offer," said UW Oshkosh Executive Director of University Relations Robin Asbury, who recently relocated here from South Carolina. "It's the perfect sized school."

While UW Oshkosh has its share of supporters, some alumni and people in the community have been harder to convince. Only 9 percent of UW Oshkosh alumni financially support their alma mater, according to Keefe. In comparison, 18 percent of UW La Crosse alumni and 50 percent of Lawrence University alumni give back to their alma maters.

"UW Oshkosh has never received a seven-figure gift," Wells said. "However, current students provide the equivalent of a seven-figure gift each year in financial contributions and volunteer hours."

"Charitable giving is an issue of pride," Keefe said. "We hope that the community recognizes and is proud of its excellent university."

At a time when state budget cuts are slicing into university operations, private contributions are relied upon more than ever. Despite budgetary constraints, going door to door with our hands out is not the answer, Keefe said.

"Our mission is more than raising dollars," Keefe said. "That won't balance the budget. We have to communicate to people what we have to offer, then the investment will come. Giving is not based on need. It's based on reputation, success and pride."

Creating Community Partnerships

So UW Oshkosh is making a concerted effort to partner with local government and organizations, and collaborate on programs that benefit the community.

The university's most ambitious initiative to this end is the "Living, Learning and Serving Community" (LLSC), which is the brainchild of private citizens, city leaders and UW Oshkosh. The LLSC would integrate residential units, businesses, cultural centers and educational opportunities so that people of all age groups and demographics would have easy access to a variety of services.

"The university is a jewel. So is the Paine Art Center, Grand Opera House, Public Library and the Public Museum," Wells said. "The LLSC has the potential to be the crown that brings all the jewels together."

The university is also working with businesses to develop programming that benefits local industry. UW Oshkosh is currently working with Mercury Marine to develop a marine management program in Oshkosh—the first of its type in the nation. Oshkosh is also working to develop a manufacturing and technology center in conjunction with UW Stout, which would offer degree programs in manufacturing management, manufacturing technology and manufacturing engineering.

"We have to remember that manufacturing and agriculture are the economic backbone on which northeast Wisconsin was built," Wells added. "We have to do what we can as a university to develop these industries and a knowledge base to support them."

UW Oshkosh has also committed its resources to benefit the community. This summer, a faculty-student research team will test water samples for E. coli bacteria at 62 Wisconsin beaches, including Menominee Park in Oshkosh. The university's biology and microbiology departments obtained funding to purchase testing equipment and to set up portable labs in three Wisconsin counties.

"Our best teaching occurs when students are working on a state-of-the-art project that also benefits the community," Wells said.

In turn, the community can do much to extend its hospitality and resources to the university. UW Oshkosh, the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce and the Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau, for example, are planning the Week of Welcome (WOW) this fall, followed by the third annual Fall Fest. WOW combines the resources of the university and community to welcome the students back to Oshkosh and introduce them to activities.

"We want to give students reasons to shop here and spend their money here," Casper said. "We want to send a message that we're happy they're here."

And once they're here, the university is intensifying its efforts to provide career and educational guidance to students, especially freshman, so they can make informed career choices upon graduation and become productive members of our community.

"The freshman year is a process of exploration and diversification," Wells said. "We want to help students become the people they are destined to be." ☺

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