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Improving Relations Between Campus and Community

INTRODUCTION

By Marcia Marker Feld, Ph.D., AICP

Marcia Marker Feld, Ph.D., AICP is a professor of community planning at the University of Rhode Island (URI) and executive director of URI's Urban Field Center, Providence Campus. She served as founding director of the Office of University Partnerships (OUP) at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1995–96. Feld specializes in the development of community empowerment through interinstitutional collaboratives for housing, neighborhood development, and public schools.



Dr. Feld

Shortly after I began teaching community planning at URI, I was invited by the superintendent of schools of Providence to visit with his senior staff and discuss trends in education planning and desegregation strategies. The assistant superintendent of high schools listened carefully to my remarks. Afterwards he said to me, “You’ll last for one project and leave—you academics never stick around.” Three decades later, URI is still working in the Providence schools. Nonetheless, the assistant superintendent had a point.

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) have not always enjoyed cordial relations with the neighborhoods that sit outside their gates. For years, residents living near colleges and universities assumed, often correctly, that faculty and students only wanted to use their communities for research or real estate expansion. At best, communities saw IHEs as bad neighbors; more often we were seen as the enemy. Institutional land grabs and building takeovers—as well as arrest reports made public after student “celebrations”—underscored this perception. In Rhode Island, even municipal planners working for the city of Pawtucket were suspicious of URI at first. One planner, who was a graduate of our Department of Community Planning and Landscape Architecture, often responded to project ideas by asking, “And what will the university get out of this work?”

Universities and colleges have had equally negative views of the communities. Traditionally, applied research and community outreach have received little meaningful support from most schools. These schools typically viewed the university as a generator of research and knowledge for its own sake and placed little value on the work of faculty who were involved in community-based research and technical assistance. As a result, faculty members viewed their communities as low-status areas and assumed that residents were incapable of contributing in any meaningful way to the university’s work.

Most residents know what it will take to revitalize their neighborhoods and many are familiar with the resources that a college or university can bring to bear on community problems.

Here matters stood until HUD decided in the early 1990s that universities and colleges represented an untapped resource that could play a critical role in rebuilding America's neighborhoods. HUD thus opened the door for the establishment of OUP and the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program. Through COPC, universities and colleges have become intimately involved in such local initiatives as community development, service delivery, and public school upgrades. This involvement has changed forever the way that campuses and communities interact.

From the beginning of their grant periods COPCs know that they are expected to have a concrete and measurable impact on their neighborhoods. They also know that, over the long term, every COPC should strive to become a permanent collaborator with community partners that are active and engaged even after federal grants have run their course. The 10th anniversary of COPC gives us an opportunity to examine how successful we have been in reaching these goals.

It is not difficult to see the concrete impacts of COPC-supported community partnerships: housing has been built, new businesses attracted, entrepreneurs supported, community leaders trained, and planning documents developed as a result of HUD's investment in community engagement. But how have the actual relationships between universities and communities changed over the years? Have these partnerships become institutionalized as the developers of COPC envisioned? Or do the partnerships dissolve when the COPC investment ends? There are no easy answers to these questions. Indeed, we may not know the full answers for decades. However, preliminary indications give us reason to hope that the final assessment will be a positive one.

Changes in Attitudes

As the stories in this publication illustrate, we are already seeing positive changes in the attitudes that community members have about their educational neighbors. These stories, and our own experiences, tell us that when an IHE has a long-term commitment to a neighborhood—that is, when residents trust that the IHE will be there when they need it—partnership activities are more successful. This new trust does not just happen. In some cases, it grows out of positive actions undertaken in the community by faculty, staff, and students. In other cases, improved relations are rooted in the

community's pragmatism. Most residents know what it will take to revitalize their neighborhoods and many are familiar with the resources that a college or university can bring to bear on community problems. This knowledge often makes residents more willing to set aside past differences in the hope that improved relations with educational partners will lead to sustained community improvements.

The attitudes of IHEs toward community partners have improved as well, albeit more slowly. Senior administrators and faculty on some campuses are loath



to relinquish the paradigm of research and knowledge for its own sake and to make a commitment to applied research. However, significant changes are occurring on other campuses, where a core group of faculty and staff have been able to convince the college or university to commit itself to an urban mission. These IHEs have subsequently expanded their mission statements to include community empowerment and have backed up those statements with strong strategic plans. They've worked hard to identify changes in the university or college's pedagogy that, among other things, give students an opportunity to participate in service-learning activities and courses; ensure that curriculum content addresses the challenges that urban



areas face; and reward grassroots, community-based research through hiring, promotion, and tenure policies.

Evidence of Change

Changes in the nature of relationships are difficult to measure. However, the growing number of infrastructure changes that are being institutionalized within the university and in the community indicates that both partners are taking their relationship seriously. For example, many IHEs have established positions at the highest levels of their administrative structures to oversee and

coordinate partnerships with local stakeholders. Others have instituted universitywide urban affairs programs or encouraged individual areas of study, from social work to business administration, have a community focus. Cities and towns have also risen to the challenge. They have established special offices—many of which report directly to the mayor—that focus on neighborhood affairs or partnership activities. City planning departments have placed new emphasis on neighborhood issues and are taking steps to upgrade economic development activities in COPC neighborhoods.

These institutional changes, taking place on both sides of the campus gates, are creating administrative centers from which outreach activities can be coordinated and from where individuals from campus and community can come together to interact and work toward common goals. This process of working together, combined with the personal relationships that are forged through that work experience, will, in the final analysis, help create lasting partnerships. And those partnerships, in turn, will play a critical role in revitalizing local communities and ensuring their long-term stability. ■

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University of Wisconsin Parkside

Community Organizer Builds Relationships With Chocolate Chip Cookies



Roseann Mason

Ask Roseann Mason the secret to successful campus-community partnerships and she might just respond with three sweet words: chocolate chip cookies. Mason, who served as the community organizer for the COPC at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (UWP), never attends a public meeting without bringing a plate of cookies with her. During the early years of the COPC, that meant donning an apron 4 days a week, but Mason did not mind the extra effort. She was brought up to believe that the best relationships develop over a plate of food, but she did not realize that others felt the same way until the night she showed up at a community meeting without any food to share.

“For some reason, I didn’t have a chance to make cookies that day,” remembers Mason. “There was a woman who came up to me and said, ‘Oh the only reason I came was because I thought you would make cookies.’ I think the perception in the community was that I cared enough to make cookies, so the least they could do was to come and hear what I had to say.”

Listening to residents of Racine and Kenosha—and getting residents of those distressed cities to listen to her—was Mason’s job. At the beginning, it was a difficult one. Before she could help local residents figure out how to meet community needs for economic development, education, and jobs, Mason had to help those residents deal with their animosity toward UWP. In some cases, residents were angry with faculty members who used the community for research and then disappeared. In other cases, the bad feelings could be attributed to issues that were often out of the COPC’s control. These included hurt feelings when family members were not accepted for admission to the school, political allegiances to university administrators who had left the campus, and a decades-old anger on the part of Racine residents that the university had been built in Kenosha.

No matter what caused the hard feelings, Mason used some basic strategy to deal with them. In meeting after meeting and in scores of private conversations, she listened, let people know she understood how they felt, smoothed ruffled feathers, and tried to help everyone move on. “You have to develop the relationships first,” explains Mason. “That was what the COPC allowed us to do.”

“She’s a wonderful relationship builder,” agrees Anne Statham, director of the Institute of Community-Based Learning at UWP and codirector of the COPC grant. “She was more than willing to meet people halfway and to take the time to get to know people and to hear what they were saying. She is very patient, extremely insightful, tolerant, and open minded. We were so lucky to have her here at just the point when we needed that.”

Healing Process

Mason says she was not surprised to find that residents of Racine and Kenosha did not like the university, but she was surprised at how deep their feelings were and she knew that those feelings would not be healed quickly.

“This is a process,” says Mason. “There’s no way you’re going to get where you want to go within the confines of a 3-year grant. I call it seed planting. I think we planted a lot of seeds in those 3 years, but it’s work that is never done. We had to undo some damage that had been done unintentionally. We had to convince the community that we were long-term partners, not just ‘let-me-use-you’ partners. I think we’re still getting that message across.”

At first, the seed planting involved helping residents find connections between what the community needed and what the university could offer. That search for connections resulted in some concrete programs: computer classes at the local community police station, a community garden, and a host of community-building events, including an annual Christmas party and Earth Day festivities. Although these initiatives were successful, says Mason, their success was not her primary goal. Empowerment was.

“The idea was to get community residents to see the power that they have,” says Mason. “I viewed this as a democratic movement. Democracy is about getting people involved at the grassroots level in their community. Many of the things that happen in communities happen for them and not with them. That little preposition, that change from *for* to *with*, was so powerful. The community came to understand that we valued their input. The idea was to engage people in the process.”

Getting residents to take charge of the process was challenging, says Mason, “because the university is viewed as this place where we figure out the answers for other people. So residents wanted to know why we were asking them questions, because we were the experts. We had to get them to understand that we weren’t going to do this for them. We needed to work together.”

Diversity Circles

Even though she has not worked on COPC projects in several years, Mason is still building relationships in Racine and Kenosha through Diversity Circles, a program sponsored by UWP’s Center for Community Partnership and two local organizations: Sustainable Racine and the Kenosha Coalition for Dismantling Racism. The program brings small groups of community members and students together to examine racism and race relations through open dialogue and action. Mason is reaching hundreds of people each year by holding Diversity Circles with community residents in Kenosha and Racine, in local high schools and prisons, at UWP, and at other colleges around the state.

The Diversity Circles are a natural outgrowth of Mason’s work with the COPC. She’s conducting them in collaboration with COPC partners, and she’s addressing issues that often stood in the way of true communication during the COPC years. In essence, says Mason, she’s asking people to do what she did when she first came to Racine and Kenosha: to care for others and to understand other perspectives. Those two attitudes are the key ingredients of any meaningful relationship, but they are particularly important for campus-community partnerships, she says. “It’s the idea of trying to honor where people are and not getting mad at them because they don’t think the way you do,” says Mason. “And it’s about giving people a chance to trust you.”

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University of Rhode Island

Aide to Mayor Seeks University Help to Improve Neighborhood



Ken McGill

Even as a young high school student, Ken McGill was excited about politics and communities. Now, as government affairs aide to the mayor of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, he has a chance to use his lifelong interests to improve the city where he grew up and where he is now raising his family.

Nowhere is McGill's interest in communities more apparent than in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Pawtucket. In 1995, the neighborhood was severely distressed. The housing stock was deteriorating, there were many abandoned and vacant properties, and the area was plagued by crime.

"Woodlawn was, and I stress was, one of our worst neighborhoods," says McGill. "There was an outcry from residents for help but the residents were not organized." Not organized, that is, except for a small group that had formed the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association.

From his experience as community and neighborhood liaison for the mayor's office, McGill knew that in order to solve these problems Woodlawn residents needed to be actively involved in creating a revitalization plan. He also knew that the residents needed more guidance and support than the city could provide. Coincidentally, while Woodlawn residents were seeking solutions, the Urban Field Center at the University of Rhode Island was looking for partners to establish a COPC. As neighborhood liaison, McGill helped facilitate a partnership among the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association, the Urban Field Center, and the city of Pawtucket and its planning department.

Action Plan

"When we first started the partnership I was worried about the impact it would have on the neighborhood if it did not succeed," says McGill. "Many administrations, even ours, had launched failed efforts to improve the neighborhood. I was worried that the people would just say 'they got us all excited, but it never works.'" Fortunately, the reputation of URI's Urban Field Center and its experience in assisting communities helped allay those fears.

"The field center provided the capacity building needed to rally residents around neighborhood issues," says McGill. "People were willing to participate because it was the state university. The university was seen as an outside agency with no agenda in the neighborhood." Equally important for URI was that "Ken was the gate opener," says Dr. Marcia Marker Feld, executive director of the Urban Field Center. McGill provided a local perspective that was respected by all the partners. And, says Feld, his role extended beyond the partnership's formation.

“He helped facilitate discussions between the partners, secured Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds when COPC funds ended, and helped turn the executive board of the COPC into the Woodlawn Community Development Corporation,” says Feld.

Through regular meetings, the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association, the university, and the city planning department inaugurated their partnership by developing a revitalization plan that addressed the interests of all parties. Residents, for example, were interested in combating crime; the city sought to improve the neighborhood’s physical appearance and housing stock; and the university wanted to build resident capacity to participate in the political process.

“When we started working with the community, Ken was at every meeting,” recalls Feld. For McGill, attending these meetings was just natural. “There are a lot of immigrants and a lot of low-income residents that live in the neighborhood,” he says. “I am a people person and I like to work with people like this, people who can’t necessarily speak for themselves.”

A city-hosted charette was one of the major outcomes of the revitalization plan. The meeting brought together all residents, young and old alike, to plan the future of one of Woodlawn’s main parks, which was deteriorating and overrun by drug dealers. Reclaiming this part of the neighborhood was critical, says McGill, because the park is located in the heart of the community across the street from the Woodlawn Community Center. Residents recommended a plan that included increased police presence in the park and community, redevelopment of the park to meet resident needs, and renovation of the Woodlawn Community Center for youth and community activities.

“We are starting to see a difference in the neighborhood,” says McGill. Crime is down and the housing stock is improving, he adds. The number of neglected and empty lots has fallen. The city has increased policing and the park has been redeveloped. The field center renovated the community center with the help of residents and CDBG funds. The partnership is also identifying abandoned properties for revitalization, organizing resident crime watch teams, and sponsoring dropout prevention programs.

Partnership Benefits

The benefits that the URI-city of Pawtucket partnership brought to the Woodlawn neighborhood are now spilling over to other neighborhoods. “Our partnership with the field center at URI has expanded to Pleasant View, another one of our city’s low-income neighborhoods,” notes McGill. “The center is also working with the city to submit grant applications for programs like Weed and Seed to address the issues of crime that limit revitalization efforts.”

McGill speaks with staff at the Urban Field Center on a regular basis and calls on the center for help with zoning issues and to brainstorm about new ideas being developed by Pawtucket’s mayor. University staff bring to the table good data and good ideas for resolving issues, says McGill. They also “know how to find out what people want and how to go about implementing projects.”

“Without the URI field center, most of the work [in the Woodlawn neighborhood] would not have happened,” says McGill. “The neighborhood is much more organized in determining and addressing problems. They [the Woodlawn Association] have the best-attended meetings in the city. It really has gone from an area of people not caring to one where people do care. This is happening, in large part, thanks to URI.”

For more information, contact Ken McGill, Mayor’s Office, Pawtucket City Hall, 137 Roosevelt Avenue, Pawtucket, RI 02860, phone (401) 728-0500, e-mail kmcgill@pawtucketri.com. ■

University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee

Community Resident Bridges the Gap Between University and Community



Sharon Adams

When Sharon Adams returned to Milwaukee a few years ago to restore her family's home, she was saddened by the deterioration she saw around her. Her once-proud neighborhood of Walnut Way was still home to establishments like Jake's Delicatessen, which represents the community's rich immigrant heritage, but the primarily African American neighborhood was isolated and facing rising crime rates. The housing stock was aging and more than 100 abandoned and vacant lots dotted the 30-block neighborhood.

Having worked in community development in New York and Detroit, Adams did not waste any time before she began trying to improve her community. And, after reading an article in Milwaukee Magazine that featured Walnut Way as one of the worst places to live in Milwaukee, she started getting others into the act.

"This caused a great pain in my heart," says Adams about the article. "I saw value in the people and homes in this community." Through her efforts, a core group of six residents banded together "to make a difference in our community," she says. This core group eventually grew to 75 members, who formed a nonprofit community development corporation called the Walnut Way Conservation Corporation.

Adams' experience in community development told her that if Walnut Way was going to enjoy a revitalization, the neighborhood association would need to form partnerships and leverage outside resources. That search for partners led Adams to the COPC at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (UWM). Walnut Way and UWM began working together in 1998, when UWM's then-chancellor Dr. Nancy Zimpher was emphasizing the need to increase the university's involvement in the community.

UWM and Walnut Way have always been very intentional in forming their partnership, says Adams: "The relationship was facilitated by sitting and listening to each other." During regular meetings at the university and in the community, the parties soon established shared goals, an exercise that Adams says "really required both sides to stretch." For example, Walnut Way decided to focus on offering services for UWM students, a goal that has involved providing myriad learning opportunities in the community. The university has been striving to give community residents access to UWM facilities and programs.

Adams has been a key supporter of these activities, helping both UWM and Walnut Way meet their partnership goals. That job has been made easier by the fact that Adams now serves as the university's community scholar in residence, a position that involves facilitating and coordinating all university partnerships projects with Walnut Way. UWM created Adams' position to enhance its

community development efforts and to bring a community member's perspective to university engagement activities. "For me it is a wonderful community benefit," says Adams. "Without a scholar in residence . . . it can become fragmented."

Dr. Cheryl Ajitutu, associate professor of anthropology at UWM, says she believes that Adams' role has helped the partnership succeed. "Ms. Adams acts as the liaison between the university and the community (and) it improves the experience for both parties," says Ajitutu. "There has to be someone involved in the partnership that is duty-bound for the community."

Capturing Walnut Way's History

The partnership between UWM and Walnut Way has resulted in many successful projects. The university's Department of Architecture and Urban Planning has helped residents develop a neighborhood plan. Campus Design Solutions, a UWM project to improve and enhance the physical environment of both campuses and communities, has worked with Walnut Way residents to design a model street and a community farmers' market. Since 2003, residents have been operating an open-air market to sell the flowers that they grow in community gardens. Construction of a permanent facility for the market, which residents hope will become a destination point for other city residents, is expected to take place in fall 2004. The street design will serve as a guide for future redevelopment efforts.

Chief among the partnership's successes, says Adams, is an oral history project that has been instrumental in helping the Walnut Way Conservation Corporation develop a mission for itself and a vision for its neighborhood. The project is documenting Walnut Way's history, tapping the knowledge of the community's elders, and exposing UWM students to the neighborhood.

"Recent research has confirmed that our neighborhood is rich, but this is not what students see as they move in," says Adams. "Many [students] are from nonurban environments and have not lived in a primarily African American neighborhood. We have been very intentional about bringing students in and making them feel welcomed and part of the neighborhood."

During the community's first oral history project, several students were invited to share a meal at the homes of the people they interviewed and some accepted invitations to return for Thanksgiving dinner. Although these dinners were not a formal part of the project, they helped build relationships and ensure that students do not just come into the community once and then leave, says Adams. Students are also invited back to assist with the community garden bulb planting and flower harvest and to attend a neighborhood festival that celebrates community accomplishments.

Looking to the Future

Not willing to rest on past successes, Adams is keeping her eye on the future. She sees the relationship with UWM continuing and wants to bolster that partnership by developing a sustainability plan. "It is really about developing relationships and making sure that everyone is benefiting," she says.

For more information, contact Sharon Adams, Walnut Way Conservation Corporation, 1216 West Walnut Street, Milwaukee, WI 53205, phone (414) 264-2326, e-mail walnutway@sbcglobal.net. ■

Indiana University-Purdue University

Executive Vice Chancellor Sets the Tone for IUPUI Urban Mission

Dr. William Plater has always been interested in using literature to understand society's pressing issues. This blending of scholarship and activism was the focus of his doctoral dissertation. It has driven his teaching over the past three decades. And it has been the hallmark of his work as executive vice chancellor at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), where he has helped faculty and students become actively engaged in the life of their local community.

Plater's commitment to community engagement took root when he was relatively young. As an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) during the 1960s, he cared deeply about the civil rights movement and helped administrators at UIUC respond publicly to the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. He protested against the Vietnam War and helped to establish the Volunteer Illini Project, a student-run, community-based volunteer organization that is still active at UIUC. When Plater left Illinois in 1983, after earning three degrees and serving for 6 years as associate director of the School of Humanities, he took with him a keen interest in how society could influence what happens in the classroom and vice versa.

Indeed, when Plater arrived at IUPUI in 1983 to serve as dean of the School of Liberal Arts, he was eager to learn about the issues affecting his new community. He was not entirely pleased with what he heard. The area of Indianapolis now occupied by the 270-acre IUPUI campus had once been a vibrant cultural center known especially for its trend-setting jazz clubs. But over a period of more

than two decades, university expansion efforts had virtually obliterated the neighborhood's residential and commercial areas, forcing most residents to find new homes across the White River. Before long, the only thing connecting the university with its former neighbors was a bridge.

Ironically, that bridge provided Plater with an unexpected opportunity to heal the rift that had so long divided the university and its former neighbors. Soon after he arrived at IUPUI, a student in the College of Liberal Arts received an award for writing a play set at this community landmark. Eager to mend fences, Plater invited former neighborhood residents to join IUPUI faculty in viewing a student performance of *The Bridge* at IUPUI and to share a preperformance dinner at Christamore House, an historic community center that had been established in 1905 as part of Jane Addams' Settlement House movement.



Dr. Plater

"We all got together and made spaghetti and we had a discussion about what had happened to the families here," remembers Plater. "Families got up and told stories about how they had been moved out, about the sense of loss they felt, and the fragmentation that had occurred in the community. In some ways, the conversation was heartwarming, but it was also an opportunity to exorcise some demons. Folks who moved from the IUPUI campus to the Westside neighborhood had a very real sense of alienation. And it didn't just affect the people who had moved. Their children and, in many cases, their grandchildren also felt that they had been displaced."

There were other issues as well. Residents complained that there were too few employment opportunities for them at IUPUI. They also expressed the feeling that the university “was not very friendly,” says Plater.

Getting Their Act Together

The lessons he learned at the spaghetti dinner stayed with Plater for years; he says he will never forget the experience. When Plater was appointed IUPUI’s dean of the faculties in 1987 and executive vice chancellor in 1988, he began to act on what had, by then, become a very personal commitment: to help the university become actively engaged with, and more responsive to, its community.

“We began to believe we should take on civic engagement as our mission,” says Plater. “And it was my view that we really had to begin this with our geographic neighbors. We couldn’t take pride in civic engagement in central Indiana and Indianapolis if we hadn’t first demonstrated that we were a good neighbor to the community that surrounded us.”

The timing could not have been better. While the university was thinking about reaching outward, the community was also going through a major transition. Leaders from the Westside neighborhoods of Stringtown, Haughville, and Hawthorne had recently joined forces to establish the Westside Cooperative Organization (WESCO) so they could work together to improve the entire community. WESCO’s first undertaking involved a partnership with the city of Indianapolis that brought the Weed and Seed crime prevention initiative to the neighborhoods. Now the organization wanted to develop an economic plan for Westside that addressed land use, attracted key industries, built the capacity of small businesses, and helped local residents find jobs. The organization also wanted to reestablish neighborhood schools and develop programs for neighborhood children.

“We laid down a strategy and a strategic plan for what we wanted to do,” says Olgen Williams, director of Christamore House and president of WESCO during this period. “We began to realize that we as a community had value in ourselves and

we could make changes. Our community turned the corner. We empowered ourselves and things began to look a little bit better.”

While making plans for the community’s future, neighborhood leaders recognized that they could not move forward without having all local stakeholders, including IUPUI, involved. That’s when WESCO contacted the university.

“We asked them to come and have a conversation with us about ways we could work together to build a better community and to build a stronger urban university,” says Williams. “We decided to reach out, in a civil and respectful way, a hand of friendship.”

The Meeting

Like the spaghetti dinner, Plater’s second meeting with community residents took place at Christamore House. This time, then-Chancellor Gerald Bepko led the IUPUI delegation. While the university was still viewed with some suspicion by community leaders after the meeting ended, those suspicions began to dissipate when IUPUI scheduled additional meetings with the WESCO leadership and promised that the chancellor or vice chancellor would personally attend those meetings. Later on, when IUPUI decided to apply for a COPC grant, the application process and the subsequent grant period sealed the partnership and gave the university an opportunity to regain some of the trust it had lost years before.

“They took our strategic plan and made it the groundwork for the COPC,” says Williams. “From that point on, the relationship has just blossomed to a wonderful relationship, a wonderful friendship. The animosity, hatred, distrust, and dislike are not there anymore.”

Results

When asked about the partnership’s most impressive success, both Plater and Williams point to the George Washington School, a community school



Olgen Williams

“WE BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT WE AS CHANGES . . . WE EMPOWERED OURSE



Students on IUPUI campus.

that IUPUI and WESCO worked together to reopen. The Westside neighborhood has not had a school within its boundaries since Indianapolis started busing minority students to the suburbs as part of a desegregation plan initiated in the 1970s. The city has been phasing out that plan since 1998, paving the way for the resurrection of inner-city schools.

“We were able to work with the city and the school district and the neighborhood organization to reopen the George Washington School and to use education as the organizing principle for the future of that community,” says Plater. “Personally, that gives me the greatest sense of pride because it is a source of pride for the community and it is going to be a vehicle for the community to grow and develop and change. As the students come through this full-service school and through high school, we hope they will come directly to IUPUI for college.”

Plater is also happy that IUPUI faculty, students, and staff seem to have become more aware and more supportive of the university’s urban mission since the WESCO partnership began. “It is now a matter of pride at IUPUI,” says Plater about community engagement. “I’m sure that if you

were to stop faculty and staff, and certainly a lot of students, and talk to them about this, they would be able to say with a surprising degree of articulation what the purpose of the university is. That just was not there in the late 1980s and that is a welcome change. I really think it has been the making of IUPUI.”

Attitudes are changing in the community as well, says Williams. “The people are comfortable that the university is not going to come over across the river

and take this whole neighborhood over,” he says. “And we are now comfortable inviting them to come over and try to do some things in this neighborhood. There is room for us to co-exist. In fact, we encourage the continued growth of the university. That growth can help us. We have trust and communication now, whereas before they ignored us. We are also more educated and knowledgeable about how to do business with the powers that be.”

Keys to Success

IUPUI’s community engagement strategy has succeeded at least in part because Plater supports it. “It is hard for people to say no when the vice chancellor’s office asks them to come to a meeting,” he says. “We don’t let them off the hook easily.” Plater maintains that several other factors have also contributed to making community engagement a popular campus initiative.

First, the presence of strong professional schools on campus—from medicine and nursing to social work and education—has helped move the community

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engagement agenda along. “You can’t prepare professionals in those fields without interacting with clients and patients in the community,” says Plater. “Our professional schools already understood this. So it was really easy to convince them that having a coordinated approach and working together across school lines made sense for everyone.”

Second, as vice chancellor, Plater had the opportunity to influence the allocation of financial resources to the community engagement initiative. As a result, he says, these activities became part of IUPUI’s permanent budget very early in the process, leading to the establishment of the Center for Service and Learning and a large community service scholarship program. “Too often service learning programs and things like COPC depend on temporary money,” he says. “The money runs out and the program ends or it goes from an office to a desk-drawer operation.”

Finally, and most importantly, says Plater, WESCO helped IUPUI “get our act together.” “What made the difference was being able to be in conversation with a group of people who willingly expressed their views of the university, what it could do, what it had not done, what it needed to do,” says Plater. “And we were able to really listen to them and to understand what they were saying instead of assuming that we knew.”

“I learned a great deal,” Plater continues. “I didn’t like hearing some of the complaints about how we had exploited and misused people in the past. I didn’t like some of the accounts of the way in which families were dislocated. I didn’t like the stories about the indifference of the university. I didn’t like finding out that people thought our employment office treated them badly. These were things that we began to act upon, but it required hearing the community speak for itself and taking it seriously. It required us to say that they know more about themselves than we do.”

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