

# **Lehigh University and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: Partnering to Transform a Steel Town into a College Town**

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## **Abstract**

Since Lehigh University was founded in 1865, it has been inextricably tied to the City of Bethlehem in eastern Pennsylvania. Rich in history and steeped in cultural tradition, the area continues to be an outstanding home for the university. In the aftermath of the fall of Bethlehem Steel, Lehigh and community partners are working together to forge a prosperous future.

## **Introduction**

A university brings intellectual vibrancy and collaborative opportunity to its home town. The possibilities for cross-cultural, cross-generational, and cross-socioeconomic progress are great and need to be seized. By working closely with the “town,” those in the “gowns” benefit from experiences that will alter their life trajectories. Lehigh University (Lehigh) is striving to be the resource its community is looking for, and the launching point for graduates’ lives of serving others. With that in mind, Lehigh is developing a strategic initiative that will truly make it an anchor in the community, a role that is relatively new for this institution.

Since Lehigh University first opened its doors in 1865, it has been inextricably tied to the City of Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley region in eastern Pennsylvania. Rich in history and steeped in cultural tradition, the area continues to be an outstanding home for the university. Lehigh University’s history is closely related to the rise and progress of the United States as an industrial power. The vision of Lehigh’s founder Asa Packer—an industrial pioneer, entrepreneur, and philanthropist—created the foundation for generations of students to learn and live among the nation’s most distinguished scholars. Like other universities started during the industrial revolution, Lehigh University was founded with a mission of creating an educated workforce that was imbued with a useful, commonsense education and that could contribute to the building of the nation (*Yates, 1992, p. 22*). In pursuing that mission, Lehigh formed a close relationship with its community and region.

As a major steel hub, Bethlehem has followed a trajectory similar to that of many other U.S. industrial towns. The rise and

fall of the industrial powerhouse Bethlehem Steel Corporation left Bethlehem at a crossroads. As a result, the city continues to undergo a tremendous transformation, seeking to invigorate its neighborhoods, redefine economic prosperity, and address a full range of critical social issues in order to strengthen the community. The bankruptcy of Bethlehem Steel left a sizable void, but in close partnership with other organizations, Lehigh University has helped to fill that void and become a leader in the community's renaissance.

Although Lehigh University has a long history of collaboration with members of the Bethlehem community, it has recently developed a more formal framework for community engagement. More important, Lehigh's commitment to the community is a major component of a 10-year institutional strategic plan ([http://www.lehigh.edu/2009plan/LU\\_strategicplan.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/2009plan/LU_strategicplan.pdf)) that was approved by its board of trustees and adopted in 2009. The framework for the Lehigh-Bethlehem partnership includes four strategic priorities:

- Clean and safe environment
- Support of public education
- Commercial vitality
- Neighborhood revitalization

This four-priority framework allows Lehigh's leaders to discuss tangible goals with interested parties in a more meaningful way. These goals include partnering with local school districts on the improvement of student performance in local elementary and middle schools, assisting local businesses in improving commerce, and reducing crime through partnerships with local law enforcement.

Lehigh is communicating the four broader strategic priorities to its core constituencies, including local organizations and non-profit organizations, government officials, area businesses, faculty, staff, students, and trustees. The framework identifies areas where Lehigh can play a role in each of the priorities and allows for a discussion about what that role might be, what partners might be involved, what other resources might be available, what is the best timing, and what actions among many possibilities should take priority. In this process, Lehigh works to ensure that we are collaborating with community leaders rather than imposing ourselves on them. Through the university's partnership with the Bethlehem community to address the four community needs, Lehigh is now

considered a leader in the community, and well on its way to becoming a committed anchor institution.

Lehigh's greatest contribution to its community lies in its human and intellectual capital. It is Lehigh's belief that this capital can be used to benefit the Bethlehem community, while simultaneously providing value and important life experiences to students, faculty members, and staff members. In order to better understand what Lehigh is doing to contribute its human and intellectual capital to become an anchor institution, readers need to understand the evolution of the City of Bethlehem over the last 150 years, particularly the area south of the Lehigh River known as South Bethlehem, where Lehigh University is situated. The area had been a hub of industrial activity since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Lehigh's roots are grounded in that activity.

### **Setting the Context: In the Shadow of the Steel**

In 1865, Asa Packer, president of Lehigh Valley Railroad, made a \$500,000 gift to build a university that would contribute to the "intellectual and moral improvement" of men in the Lehigh Valley (*Yates, 1992, p. 22*). It was the largest donation of its kind to any educational institution in America at that time. The site that Packer chose for his university was a railroad junction across the Lehigh River from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a community founded in 1741 by Moravian missionaries. The site was selected in part because it was within walking distance for managers of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

Packer laid the tracks of his Lehigh Valley Railroad along the Lehigh River to bring coal and raw materials from the Pocono Mountains to the markets of New York City and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By 1857, the Saucona Iron Company—later called the Bethlehem Iron Company—was formed in South Bethlehem along those tracks. Steel was first produced at this plant in 1873, and the company later officially became the Bethlehem Steel Corporation (*Venditta & Hilliard, 2010*). Bethlehem Steel Corporation grew to become the second-largest steel producer in the world and held tremendous influence over the city and its citizens for 140 years. Lehigh University grew in the shadow of Bethlehem Steel Corporation over that same period and was a passive neighbor to the South Bethlehem community as it focused on its educational mission.

Lehigh produced thousands of graduates, many of whom would matriculate into positions within the steel company, but it

never wielded the influence that Bethlehem Steel Corporation did within the community. Bethlehem Steel Corporation was responsible for developing the structural steel that raised the New York City skyline, for producing the steel that supported such U.S. structural icons as the Golden Gate and George Washington Bridges, and for producing the battleships and armaments that saw the U.S. through two major world wars. Lehigh was so entwined in the influence of Bethlehem Steel Corporation that classes at Lehigh started at 10 minutes after the hour to allow those working a shift at the steel plant time to get to their class—a practice that continues to this day.

By the 1960s and 1970s, Bethlehem, like so many other cities across the United States, had seen a population shift toward suburban communities, drawing both merchants and residents away from the urban commercial districts that thrived during the first half of the century. Bethlehem's city administration was determined to follow the direction other cities had taken to "re-urbanize" by tearing down the commercial core of the city, and building a modern office and commercial district to draw business back.

Bethlehem has two distinct commercial districts, one north of the Lehigh River in the oldest section of town, and one south of the river that grew around the Bethlehem Steel plant. In the late 1960s, Bethlehem's city leaders focused their efforts in the commercial district north of the Lehigh River and began by leveling major portions of it to build a modern commercial complex. By the mid-1970s, a different path was taken when Mayor Gordon Mowrer recognized the historical significance of this district and put redevelopment dollars into reviving it as a visitor destination. The transformation was successful and this area, now known as the Historic District, remains a vibrant shopping and dining area today (*Mowrer, 2010*).

While the north side appeared secure in its historical setting, the survival of the commercial district south of the river and adjacent to Lehigh University and the steel plant—commonly known as South Bethlehem—remained dependent on the influence of the thousands of Bethlehem Steel Corporation employees who lived in and walked to work through its streets. Minimal community and economic development dollars were put into the South Bethlehem commercial district at that time (*Mowrer, 2010*). After all, its future was secure as long as Bethlehem Steel Corporation was operating.

By the 1980s, however, Bethlehem Steel Corporation employed a fraction of the workers that it had 10 years earlier, and the expansive steel company that once ruled the town and had a significant influence on the development of the country was

slowly dying. By the mid-1990s, steel production ceased in Bethlehem; ultimately, the company filed for bankruptcy in 2003. The influence, power, and even dominance that this major corporation had over the city cannot be overstated; its decline and bankruptcy left a significant void in Bethlehem and had an even greater effect in South Bethlehem. Today, South Bethlehem is confronted with an array of challenges all too familiar in many urban settings: crime, limited access to healthcare, public education challenges, poverty, unemployment, and declining economic development.

## **A Shift in Influence**

South Bethlehem's decline became evident to Lehigh University's administration. It was time for Lehigh, situated high on the side of South Mountain, to begin expanding its vision toward the community at the foot of the mountain (*Bauman, 2003*). In 1999, Lehigh engaged Sasaki Associates, Inc. of Boston to develop a campus facilities master plan. A key charge of the plan was developing a strategy for better integrating with the surrounding community and "for addressing some of the issues and opportunities in the neighborhoods on the Southside" (*Sasaki Associates, Inc., 2012, p. 7*). Lehigh recognized that South Bethlehem could develop in a manner suitable for an institution of higher learning only if the town itself played a role. A number of notable initiatives followed that solidified Lehigh's interest in the surrounding community.

### **A city master plan.**

One of the more evident outcomes of Lehigh's work with Sasaki Associates was a collaboration with the City of Bethlehem on the development of a South Bethlehem master plan called Vision 2012 (*Sasaki Associates, Inc., 2012*). The synergy between Lehigh and the city was a critical element of the plan, and community partnerships were the best formula for successful community development. Representatives from Lehigh and the city co-chair the Vision 2012 Steering Committee. The plan set the course for dozens of community improvements, and has recently been renamed Vision 2014 thanks to additional financial commitments by the local private sector through 2014.

### **A campus square.**

One of the greatest visual impacts illustrating Lehigh's transition to a more community-minded way of thinking was the planning and building of the Campus Square complex in 2002

(see Figure 1). Campus Square blended the border of the town and the university by placing 250 student residents, a public parking garage, and a small retail sector that included the Lehigh Bookstore on a section of campus that abuts the city's commercial district. Community leaders had said Lehigh was turning its back on the community since all the buildings constructed in the 1960s and 1970s faced away from the community. Campus Square became a gateway to the community; significantly, it was the first new construction in decades that faced toward the community. That symbolic gesture was a watershed moment in sending the message that the isolationist philosophy at Lehigh University was changing.



**Figure 1.** Campus Square served as a great transition from the campus to the community when it was built in 2002.

## **Debit card for use in the local community.**

Following the construction of Campus Square, the Lehigh GoldPLUS debit card was introduced for students, faculty members, and staff members to make purchases at merchant businesses outside the Lehigh campus. Local merchants fully embraced the program. Today, Lehigh students' meal plan dollars can be spent in local establishments; over 75 local merchants accept the GoldPLUS card, which introduces close to \$1 million of commerce into the local economy annually.

## **University innovation and support from the commonwealth.**

Universities are known for their innovations and inventions. Creative students, faculty members, and staff members develop myriad ideas, some of which can be translated into practical enterprises. Lehigh University is a model of this, and has pursued economic development opportunities with essential help from state and local governments. For example, in 2004, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania created the Keystone Innovation Zone program as an economic stimulus tool to create jobs and attract technology-based companies to locate near institutions of higher learning and their intellectual resources. Lehigh partnered with the city of Bethlehem, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, Northampton Community College, and other local businesses and organizations to form the South Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone—the first such zone in the state. As a result, technology-based companies within the defined boundaries of this zone have access to financial incentives, including internship support and tax credits tied to increased research and development expenses from one year to the next.

Lehigh University experienced the benefit of this jobs initiative early on; the program proved successful in attracting and growing new high-tech businesses in South Bethlehem. The South Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone continues to be a leader in the state and was the first program in the state to be awarded additional years of funding because of its success. The tax credits feature of the program is a major stimulus for businesses deciding to locate within the Keystone Innovation Zone. More than \$2.7 million in Pennsylvania tax credits have been received by South Bethlehem companies since 2004, and 27 active companies with more than 150 employees call South Bethlehem home as a result of the initiative.

Just one example is EcoTech Marine, an aquarium-technology company founded by two Lehigh alumni, which was recognized as the 302<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing company in America and ranked 18 in the category for top consumer products and services companies, according to *Inc.* magazine's 2010 survey of the nation's top 500 and 5,000 private companies (<http://www.inc.com/inc5000/list/2010/industry/consumer-products-services>). Lehigh graduates Tim Marks and Pat Clasen conceived the idea for the company through their participation in Lehigh's Integrated Product Development program, an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to engineering design. They, along with University of Oklahoma alumnus Justin Lawyer, cofounded EcoTech Marine, which has established itself as one of the United States' leading manufacturers of reef aquarium propeller pumps. Revenue jumped from \$343,000 to more than \$3.8 million from 2006 to 2009—the company's first three years of operation.

### **Other endeavors to support Bethlehem.**

In addition to developing new enterprises, Lehigh's partnerships with the city, local businesses, and local organizations were becoming standard practice in the mid-2000s. For example, Lehigh purchased a sidewalk sweeper operated by the city to keep the South Bethlehem commercial district sidewalks clean and presentable. Lehigh's grounds maintenance contractor was assigned to plant and maintain the flower pots in the commercial district adjacent to campus, and Lehigh purchased banners to help the district create an identity. Street festivals and mural projects in the city became part of the local landscape, with Lehigh taking a more active role in these initiatives to help make them part of the community culture. Lehigh was becoming embedded in the community, and the community was responding positively.

Lehigh academic partnerships were also evolving during the mid-2000s. The South Side Initiative was formed in 2007 to bring together Lehigh faculty members, staff members, and students with the people of Bethlehem to share knowledge, foster democracy, and improve the quality of the city. As part of the South Side Initiative, courses have been developed that focus on past, present, and future issues of the city. The initiative supports working groups to conduct research and sponsor events and lectures that inform members of the community on critical issues. In 2011–2012, areas supported by the South Side Initiative's working groups included South Side community gardens and urban agriculture, public history, digital media and documentary film, environmental sustainability, and



public art. The South Side Initiative's community gardens working group is stimulating, coordinating, and supporting a wide range of Lehigh curricular and research projects conducted by Lehigh faculty members and students focused on local and global food systems, hunger and obesity, community gardening, and related public health issues. Ongoing courses include an Integrated Product Development course, co-taught by faculty members in engineering and business, which focuses on infrastructure development for the Lehigh Community Garden and the nearby Broughal Middle School greenhouse. A graduate-level history class worked with the local public broadcasting station to produce documentary films related to the South Bethlehem area. A course in research methods in sociology led to a research project on food insecurity in South Bethlehem, and a summer course on urban architecture featured a civic engagement component that truly fostered a sense of local and global responsibility and citizenship.

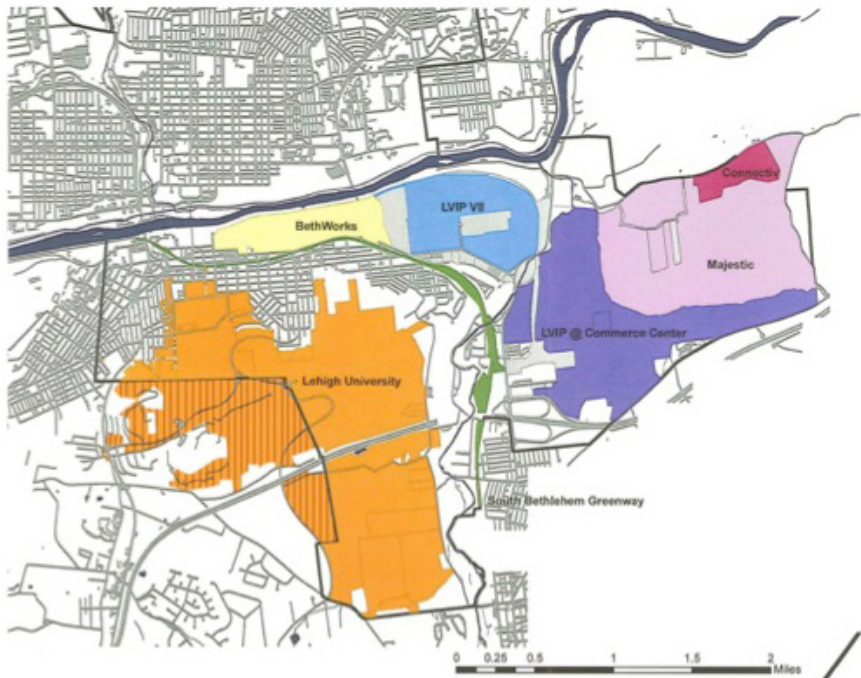
### **A Strategic Plan for Progress**

The Lehigh University community was becoming integrated into the local community through programs and initiatives, but the current administration saw the need for a more unified strategic, long-term approach to build on existing efforts. In January 2007, Lehigh initiated a long-term strategic thinking process in order to define overarching institutional goals. The university administration, under the leadership of Lehigh president Alice P. Gast, formed a steering committee charged with asking community members about their vision for the university's future. Hundreds of members of the Lehigh community stepped back from their daily work to consider and discuss the possibilities. The resultant overarching message was that Lehigh needed to move forward as a unified university with integrated plans.

Lehigh also looked outside the campus boundary, and in September 2007, established the South Bethlehem Development Study Group to determine strategic approaches for Lehigh to take in the context of the rapid development occurring in the South Bethlehem region and make recommendations. With steelmaking no longer a part of Bethlehem and the subsequent sale of approximately 1,800 acres of the former steel plant in South Bethlehem, major changes would be coming to the community that Lehigh University had called "home" for more than 140 years.

The former Bethlehem Steel Corporation property is one of largest privately owned contiguous brownfield development

projects in the country, and it represents 20% of the taxable property in the City of Bethlehem (Figure 2). It is a significant parcel on the national scale and monumental to the City of Bethlehem. What had once been a 24-hour, 7 days per week operation of a major industrial manufacturing giant was now being subdivided into commercial, industrial, retail, entertainment, gaming, and mixed-use properties with multiple owners—all within the South Bethlehem Keystone Innovation Zone. The magnitude and nature of this development could be transformational for South Bethlehem, and Lehigh University saw the opportunity to take a leadership role in that development.



**Figure 2.** Map of South Bethlehem showing relationship of Lehigh University to the various development projects planned and existing for the region. Note: crosshatched portion of Lehigh University is in Lower Saucon Township.

It became clear throughout the study that what was unfolding in South Bethlehem paralleled some aspects of development in other cities, but at a scale far exceeding that of the changes found elsewhere. The sheer magnitude of redeveloping nearly 1,800 contiguous acres of a former heavy industrial site in an urban setting was unique. That this site had attracted three “billion-dollar”

international developers is testimony to the magnitude of the changes that were beginning to occur. Las Vegas Sands Corporation, a resort company that specialized in casinos, introduced gambling to Bethlehem in 2009 by building an \$800 million-plus casino and hotel complex literally across the street from residential neighborhoods.

In 2007, the Majestic Realty Company, a nationally known commercial realtor based in California, acquired another 440 acres of the site and broke ground on its first building in 2012. A 1,000-acre portion is being developed by a successful, local non-profit commercial developer, Lehigh Valley Industrial Park, Inc. The company brings to this project more than 50 years of experience in six other commercial and industrial parks in and around Bethlehem. The company was formed in 1959 through an initiative of the Bethlehem Area Chamber of Commerce to create an alternative labor force to that of Bethlehem Steel after residents witnessed the significant impact a Bethlehem Steel Corporation labor strike had on the local economy. It is for that reason that placing a high percentage of jobs per acre is built into the Lehigh Valley Industrial Park company covenants in all their parks. Bethlehem was clearly at the forefront of a transformation of the local workforce from a heavy industrial management and labor model to a more diverse business and high-tech workforce.

The South Bethlehem Development Study Group found that no other area adjacent to colleges or universities contained all of these variables, which included the introduction of a gambling casino and upscale retail shops, the mix of low- and high-tech jobs, and the evolving socioeconomic infrastructure. The area was undergoing a significant transformation from a town that was highly dependent on one industry (steel production) into an area that would need to support more diversified business and employment options. It was also clear that the university could play a pivotal role in this transformation, and that the evolution to a thriving business area with appealing neighborhoods was a mutually beneficial proposition. The recommendations of the study were that Lehigh University should

- take an active leadership role in the transformation of South Bethlehem by pursuing an integrated planning process in partnership with local government and community-based organizations;
- re-evaluate its campus master plan, incorporating the changes in vision that were identified as a result of the

strategic thinking/planning process, and taking into consideration all the new South Side planning and developmental information available;

- develop a system to coordinate new and existing community-based initiatives and to cultivate interactions between students, faculty members, and the community;
- develop a three-pronged approach to manage the possibility of problematic gambling among Lehigh University students, faculty members, and staff members, including education, monitoring, intervention, and counseling; and
- continue to foster the relationship between the Lehigh University police and City of Bethlehem police to monitor crime and provide input for staffing and operational decisions. (Aronson *et al.*, 2008)

In 2008, Lehigh University's board of trustees met to discuss these recommendations based on the South Bethlehem Development Study and to formulate the basis for a strategic direction for Lehigh. *Advancing Our Intellectual Footprint* ([http://www.lehigh.edu/2009plan/LU\\_strategicplan.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/2009plan/LU_strategicplan.pdf)), a strategic plan for Lehigh, was approved by the board of trustees in 2009, and became the strategy for Lehigh's future. The comprehensive plan focused largely on Lehigh's intellectual initiatives; however, playing a leading role in the renaissance of the local community was also a major component of the plan. In response, Lehigh administrators established the framework of four strategic priorities discussed earlier. It is important to point out that the community partnerships and interaction between the university and the South Bethlehem community since the 1990s helped lay the foundation for the four strategic initiatives. The strategic plan set the tone for the entire campus community to embrace community relationships and embed its human and intellectual resources in the community in a way that raised the overall quality of life for the South Bethlehem community. The following sections describe some examples of the Lehigh University-Bethlehem partnership's progress.

### **Strategic Priority I: A Clean and Safe Environment**

The Lehigh University Police Department (LUPD), one of only five campus police forces accredited by the state of Pennsylvania,

works in concert with local police, fire, and community organizations to ensure that South Bethlehem is a safe neighborhood. In 2010, Lehigh formed a cooperative community policing program with the Bethlehem Police Department. The program places officers from the Lehigh University Police Department (LUPD) in the neighborhoods surrounding the university to promote safety and quality of life for Lehigh students, faculty members, staff members, and neighborhood residents. This community policing model relies on partnerships with residents to address issues that give rise to crime and other public safety matters (e.g., noise, litter, parking). The program also assures a more obvious police presence in the neighborhoods where Lehigh students reside.

In 2011, Lehigh implemented a program called Hawk Watch. A neighborhood watch program, Hawk Watch recruits and trains students living in neighborhoods surrounding Lehigh's campus to be cognizant of suspicious activity and to serve as additional eyes and ears for the Lehigh and Bethlehem police departments. Initial interest has been high and the initiative is supported by the student senate. The LUPD reports that students are increasingly more engaged partners in identifying suspicious activity in their neighborhoods and are more aware of preventive safety measures.

Security cameras are becoming more common in urban environments, and Bethlehem is no exception. Bethlehem and Lehigh police have installed multiple cameras on and off campus, and have linked them through a common monitoring system. In this way, the Bethlehem and Lehigh dispatch offices have access to each other's cameras, adding a critical layer of surveillance capability to each office. The success of this type of partnership was demonstrated by a December 2010 incident in which the LUPD and the Bethlehem Police Department apprehended two individuals who had attempted several robberies after tracking them to a residence via surveillance camera.

The viability of the commercial district adjacent to campus is important to Lehigh University. The sustained period of economic instability that followed the stock market crash in late 2008 continues to exert a negative influence on many of the district's merchants. Although the overall appearance and feel of the district is evolving, there is still room for improvement. Lehigh is dedicating human and financial resources in a joint effort with the city and local property owners to form a neighborhood improvement district that will provide cleaning and security ambassadors for the district to create a positive identity. In addition, Lehigh plans to make capital improvements to enhance the appearance of

the district. It is hoped that business attraction and retention efforts will keep the district fully occupied. Similar clean and safe commercial districts have been successful in communities across the state, such as West Chester, Lancaster, and Manayunk.

## **Strategic Priority 2: Support of Public Education**

An important focus in any neighborhood revitalization project is educating the neighborhood's youth. A foundational underpinning of the community school approach is that schools, by themselves, cannot address all the needs of today's students. The community school movement makes this concept real by placing family support services in health, employment assistance, and adult education right in the school. Next door to Lehigh University, the Broughal Middle School has built a space precisely for this mission (*Quinn & Dryfoos, 2009*).

### **Broughal Community School.**

In the Broughal Middle School, Lehigh College of Education faculty members and graduate students put theory into practice. Lehigh is working with the Bethlehem Area School District, candy manufacturer Just Born, Inc., and the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley to create a university-assisted community school at Broughal Middle School in South Bethlehem. The College of Education and its Center for Developing Urban Educational Leaders has taken responsibility for the management and measurement of the after-school programs that are focusing on improving the students' academic preparation. As a community school, Broughal benefits from a model designed to meet the specific needs of its students. Academic support and enrichment programs, coordinated tutoring, the creation of special interest groups, coordinated health and wellness, and enhanced parent education are hallmarks of the Broughal community school environment. The "ribbon tying" ceremony for this new partnership took place in 2010; the first year has resulted in improved student attendance, increased participation in after-school programs, and reduced disciplinary action. The results are indicators of improved academic achievement.

A similar program was introduced at the Donegan Elementary School on Bethlehem's South Side in October 2012. It is the fifth community school in the Bethlehem area and the second to be associated directly with Lehigh University.

## **South Bethlehem Neighborhood Center.**

The South Bethlehem Neighborhood Center provided a safe educational environment for South Bethlehem schoolchildren to receive help through afterschool homework clubs. When the economic climate forced the center to refocus its resources in 2009, Lehigh stepped in. Lehigh's Community Service Office (CSO), which had been providing training for student leaders and tutors, assumed management of the entire program. Today, the CSO operates homework clubs for three area schools. The school students participating in the program not only receive the help and guidance they need, but are also exposed to a path that could lead them to college. Lehigh sophomores are paired with sixth graders in a mentoring program so each mentor-mentee pair will graduate the same year. Working side by side with college students who are themselves succeeding in an academically rigorous environment, the younger students are forming relationships with positive role models.

## **Community Outreach by Athletes who Care about Helping (C.O.A.C.H.) program.**

Lehigh student-athletes contribute to Bethlehem's public education through the Community Outreach by Athletes who Care about Helping (C.O.A.C.H.) program. Student-athletes dedicate time to local students to inspire them to succeed in school and in life. The program was founded in 1991; in 2009, the program joined forces with Donegan Elementary School and St. Luke's Hospital Partnership for a Healthy Community to create the Reading Rocks program. During the school year, approximately 50 Lehigh students regularly participate in the Reading Rocks after-school program, spending time each week at Donegan to read, play games, and forge friendships. The program helps middle and high school student-athletes and their peers make informed choices regarding their education, drug and alcohol use, and other issues. Lehigh student-athletes act as "coaches" by making presentations, offering education-themed sports clinics, sponsoring group outings to Lehigh athletic events and facilities, and other activities.

## **Strategic Priority 3: Commercial Vitality**

Based on a recommendation in the South Bethlehem Vision 2012 plan, the city secured funding to purchase space and build a linear park along an abandoned Norfolk-Southern railway line that weaves through the commercial and residential neighborhoods of South Bethlehem. When complete, the 60-foot-wide park with a

paved path and lighting will run more than two miles through South Bethlehem, from the Bethlehem Union Station to Saucon Park. The city was looking for partners to enhance the park, now known as the South Bethlehem Greenway. Lehigh took “ownership” of three blocks of the Greenway that run through the commercial district by pledging human and intellectual capital, along with \$225,000. It was a natural partnership due to the proximity of the section of the Greenway to the Lehigh campus. Lehigh administrators believe that the partnership will have a positive impact by encouraging commercial vitality.

Lehigh engaged students in its Integrated Learning Experience program to develop ideas for this section of the Greenway. Students in the program come from a variety of academic backgrounds, including civil engineering, architecture, and economics. For the Greenway project, they interviewed residents and community business owners and drafted a report with architectural renderings that could be included in a grant proposal. Among the improvements considered were a community garden, a playground, outdoor classroom space, and art and performance space that were designed to create a sense of “place” on the Greenway.

In 2012, Lehigh began working with the city and the landscape design company to take the preliminary plan that was drafted by students to final architectural plans and construction drawings. In addition, the South Side Initiative has collaborated with the city, the Banana Factory (a local art organization), and Vision 2014 to introduce native plantings around a new sculpture that was dedicated in 2012 in this “adopted” section of the Greenway. The native plantings should provide a low-maintenance environment for this extensive park, something the city parks department advocates. It is hoped that these types of partnerships will inspire local businesses, organizations, and other private entities to collaborate with the city to improve other sections of the Greenway.

#### **Strategic Priority 4: Neighborhood Revitalization**

This fourth strategic priority, neighborhood revitalization, is being developed. Lehigh has made strides in partnership with the city of Bethlehem to improve the quality of life in areas adjacent to campus where many university students live by introducing enhanced security, addressing litter and noise nuisances, building community gardens, and more. Lehigh’s work with neighboring schools serves to improve the educational opportunities for the community youth. Lehigh’s support of the local economy helps



those in the neighboring community that work locally. The university upgraded its Mortgage Assistant Program, which provides forgivable loans up to \$10,000 for Lehigh employees who purchase and live in a home proximate to campus. The purpose of the program is to encourage home ownership, and therefore, neighborhood stability in the community near campus.

Neighborhood revitalization, however, calls for a much more comprehensive plan. In 2012, Lehigh began working with a consultant to develop a comprehensive facilities master plan that incorporates a strategy for meeting the goals of neighborhood revitalization to effect a renaissance of the local community as stated in the university's strategic plan. To this end, Lehigh's planners have met with city and school district officials, community organizations, and local developers to understand how they are thinking about South Bethlehem in order to incorporate that thinking into the facilities master plan. They had informative conversations concerning student housing options, additional partnership possibilities, and current development opportunities. As the university considers accommodating future student housing needs or incorporating some of its programs and operations at off-campus sites, the needs of the community will definitely be a part of the decision process.

## **Conclusion**

Through efforts such as the construction of Campus Square, the creation of myriad community and academic partnerships, and the development of a strategic plan to engage positively in community development initiatives in South Bethlehem, Lehigh has brought a new level of excitement to the campus and community alike. Lehigh is no longer that reclusive institution of higher education sitting quietly on the side of Bethlehem's South Mountain. Lehigh's leadership recognizes that in order to fulfill its mission of teaching, research, and service, the university needs a thriving community. With major business contributors and the urban landscape constantly evolving, it is now the responsibility of anchor institutions, such as Lehigh University, to work with state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide the necessary support and to create partnerships that can work toward the collective goals of the community. The transition will take time, but the direction established in a strategic process will ensure that ongoing dedication to the community will continue beyond the university's current administration and board of trustees.

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