

Trenton: a great college town

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By George A. Pruitt

Trenton is a college town. West State Street is not lined with residence halls or classroom buildings, and there are no collegiate sports teams based in the city, but Thomas Edison State College has called New Jersey's capital city home since 1979, when we left Princeton to come to Trenton. Today, Thomas Edison State College remains Trenton's only senior public institution of higher education.

We are proud to reside in a city that boasts a legendary past and a promising future.

In January, Trenton made national headlines on the NBC-TV "Today Show," when noted real estate expert Barbara Corcoran named it one of the top 10 cities in the nation for home values and called Trenton one of the country's "next up-and-coming areas."

I applaud and share this type of enthusiasm and optimism

for our city. At Thomas Edison State College, we take our responsibility as a steward of the city very seriously.

As we face unprecedented budgetary challenges, it is important to recognize that decreased public funding in higher education should not reduce an institution of higher learning's role in serving its own community. In fact, partnerships with local businesses and civic organizations can help state colleges and universities maximize their ability to improve the cities and towns where they are located.

Any college or university and the community it is located in are dependent on each other. Public institutions should serve as a catalyst for bringing positive changes to their communities that go beyond offering degrees and certificates. In this time of fiscal uncertainty, the way that state colleges and universities engage with and improve their own neighborhoods is more important than ever.

Across the country, public institutions of higher learning have provided their resources and expertise in partnership with their host communities to achieve a wide variety of civic-related goals.

Here in Trenton, Thomas Edison State College is proud to be a founding member of the Capital City Partnership, which also includes Capital Health, Shiloh Baptist Church and the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce as founding members. Our focus is to leverage public and private resources to enhance and promote redevelopment initiatives to revitalize the Canal Banks area of Trenton, which encompasses West State Street, West Hanover

Street, Capital Alley, Willow Street and Calhoun Street.

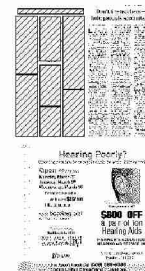
Since our incorporation in 2007, we have been working with local businesses and residents to develop an agenda and action plan. Some highlights of this work include a street light enhancement project and developing long-term parking solutions for the area.

Improving the physical landscape of our city is a tangible way to make an impact. At Thomas Edison State College, we have a long history of conserving the historic buildings that make up our campus, including the landmark Kelsey Building and five mid-19th century townhouses that adjoin the Kelsey Building on West State Street. We re-established our commitment to Trenton with the development of the Canal Banks Building in 2005, which is located on West Hanover Street on the Delaware and Raritan Canal; and through the college's acquisition in 2009 of the early 20th century Kuser Mansion, located on West State Street near Calhoun Street.

There are no fraternities or sororities at Thomas Edison State College, but we are home to social programs that foster leadership and achievement.

One is Leadership Trenton, a program of the college's John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy. Now in its eighth year, Leadership Trenton provides a 10-month program of seminars, lectures and projects for civic leaders who are interested in the greater Trenton community and who live and work in the area.

The program has had a positive impact on the city in many ways, such as the creation of a mentoring program at Tren-



ton Central High School and a network of civic leadership that is coordinating support for key programs and projects beneficial to the city and the region. Many of Trenton's current civic leaders are Leadership Trenton graduates.

We are proud of this record, and we know that serving our city means more than construction projects and the conservation of historic places. It also calls for bringing an institution's resources to support the people who bring this great city to life.

After all, Trenton is a great college town.

George A. Pruitt is president of Thomas Edison State College and chairman of the Capital City Partnership board of directors.