

David Sam

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As with many other employers in our area, Germanna Community College has had to tighten its belt during the recession and slow recovery. And there wasn't much slack in our belt before the economic downturn.

Our system-wide re-engineering seeks to reduce costs and increase effectiveness. We must work in partnerships with other educational institutions, the private sector, and nonprofits because we do more together than we can separately, especially in tough times. So far, we've learned that pulling together, maintaining a can-do attitude, working hard and working smart can carry us through tough economic times.

Our mission is to offer quality higher education that's affordable. That's important to our community because more local people are able to earn degrees and get training that makes the area's workforce—and its businesses—more competitive. A skilled workforce also helps attract new employers and improves the quality of life for everyone, even changing lives and family histories in the process.

Since I was hired as Germanna's president in 2007, our enrollment has jumped to an annual enrollment approaching 15,000, increasing at an average of about 10 percent a year, while funding has ratcheted down at about the same rate due to the economy. We've learned, though, that members of both houses and parties in Richmond do value us as a community resource and needed infrastructure.

We are gratified that Gov. McDonnell has proposed reinvesting \$100 million a year in higher education as necessary infrastructure to keeping Virginia and the United States competitive. In the face of tough budget decisions and a slow growth economy, he has made a difficult but courageous choice. We hope the Assembly will support his proposal; that combined with our efforts at re-engineering and cost control will help keep tuition at a more affordable level.

As the governor notes, even if this proposal passes intact, we will need support from businesses. We've learned that only with close working relationships between Germanna and local business can we supply them with more skilled employees and work with them to fill their specific needs.

- With support from the Stafford County Economic Development Authority, Germanna is responding to the needs for more highly skilled automotive repair service technicians by moving its Automotive Program to a new facility, doubling the program's capacity.
- We have added a new Executive Business Administration Accelerated Degree program that will allow students to work full time and still earn their degrees quickly on weekends.
- We are offering and developing more courses that will help students obtain homeland security jobs, which are plentiful and pay well.

- We are soon opening new programs in EMT/Paramedic and dental assisting, and must constantly look for other new programs for new careers.
- We've started an engineering program that's a "feeder" for the University of Virginia, making degrees in that important field more affordable.
- We've doubled the size of our widely-respected nursing program.

We are the community's college and we keep relearning what that means. According to a recent study:

- An estimated 75 percent of Germanna students remain in the area, keeping the skills they've learned here, contributing to economic growth by generating higher earnings.
- For each tax dollar invested in Germanna, taxpayers see a return of \$2.50 in the form of higher tax revenues and lower social costs.

Our forecast for the coming year? We see our area's economy continuing to improve, albeit slowly. We expect that the amazing growth at Germanna will slow or level off for a while. We cannot keep growing at a 50 percent rate every four or five years. As the economy gets better and unemployment slowly drops, fewer people will have emergency needs for our services.

We predict that Germanna will grow as the area grows, responding to changes in business needs. And our students and graduates will continue to play a key role in the economic and social well-being of our area.