

Stephen Kopp: Construction among several signs of growth

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Two years ago, the Center for Business and Economic Research at Marshall University reported that the economic impact of our institution could be placed in simple terms. For every \$1 of public funds the state of West Virginia invests in Marshall, the center reported that we contribute \$8 of additional economic impact.

Today, this investment has increased and the results can be seen throughout our Huntington campus and across the Tri-State.

Perhaps the most important potential future investment that can amplify the annual economic impact of Marshall University was described as part of this year's State of the State address. Gov. Joe Manchin III announced his proposal to create the West Virginia Research Trust Fund as part of a larger scale initiative termed "Bucks for Jobs." The bill (SB 287 & HB 4130) to create the West Virginia Research Trust Fund will give Marshall and West Virginia University the ability to match dollar-for-dollar private endowment gifts made in support of research with state funds dedicated to the Research Trust Fund.

The \$50 million proposed by the governor will match \$50 million in private gifts to enhance ongoing research initiatives at our two research institutions. A similar program has produced amazing results in Kentucky in terms of job growth, new business development and accelerated economic growth.

Another important area of development at Marshall is in the academic offerings that we provide our students. Two illustrative examples involve the rebirth of Marshall's undergraduate engineering major and the start of a Japanese major for our undergraduate students. In a very short time, these new majors have become popular fields of study, which are diversifying the array of programs that attract prospective students to our campus. Combined with freedom provided by 2005's Senate Bill 603, the Higher Education Flexibility Bill, we can now meet the needs of our students and better prepare them for future challenges.

Clear signs of our investment in academics and athletics are visible on nearly every corner of our Huntington campus with several construction projects in full swing. Three of these projects will be completed before the start of the fall 2008 semester.

New facilities on the rise on the north side of 3rd Avenue just a few blocks apart are the Marshall University Softball Complex, located near Joan C. Edwards Stadium, and the 16,000-square-foot engineering laboratory, located across 3rd Avenue from Smith Hall.



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Construction continues on the Marshall University engineering laboratory facility March 10, in Huntington. The lab is one of three construction projects expected to be completed by the start of the fall 2008 semester.

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Coach Shonda Stanton's softball squad has 15 games scheduled on the new field through the end of April. Although the complex is ready for game action, it will not be completely finished until this summer after construction of a new clubhouse.

The engineering lab is expected to be finished by the first of August. Our new bachelor of science in engineering degree program, approved last year by our Board of Governors, will greatly benefit the university, community and state.

The other project that will be finished by August is the construction of two new living/learning residence halls on the east end of campus. The two buildings are part of an \$82 million public-private venture that includes a highly anticipated 123,000-square-foot student recreation center, which is expected to open in February 2009. The recreation center will be an impressive, modern facility that not only will promote good health, but will create another opportunity for our students to become better connected with each other.

The softball complex and engineering lab, along with a new building that will house the university's alumni relations staff and programs and the Marshall University Foundation Inc. and Development offices, are being funded through our Bridge Campaign. This campaign initiative led by the Marshall Foundation has reached more than half of its goal of \$16 million. We plan to break ground on the new alumni building soon.

Although it is still early in the year, 2008 will likely be one of the most significant years in Marshall University's 171-year history. We are building on the foundation and legacies of our predecessors to shape the lives and futures of the next generations of Marshall graduates. That future is now at Marshall University, and the investments that are under way will help fulfill the promise of a better future.

Stephen J. Kopp is president of Marshall University.

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