

Wednesday, March 07, 2007

Dean Kruithof
Deputy City Administrator
623 Garrison Avenue
Fort Smith, Arkansas 72901

Dear Dean:

How does one measure the impact of education? How do we measure the value of investment in human capital? As we never have a parallel universe with which to compare the before and after, how do we measure the return on investment?

This quandary is a challenge for everyone involved in the field of education. Webster University's local graduate program offers Master's degrees in Human Resources Management, Information Technology and Business Administration. Of course, the most popular Master's across the entire Webster University system is the MBA. Fort Smith's enrollment continues to mirror that trend. Since the relocation to downtown Fort Smith in 2004, Webster University has graduated a total of 55 students. This year's ceremony will be held on May 19, 2 p.m. at Taliano's Hall. Please extend our invitation to the Board.

What can the community expect from those graduates? Can we expect better decision making in their managerial positions? Can we expect wiser investments throughout all aspects of their lives? Will there be evidence in their lives of improved performance?

Testimonials from graduates continue to support the belief that investing in the Webster University graduate program has "paid off". Mark Shackelford and Ed Ralston, both Webster alumni, have been recently promoted to vice presidential positions with Baldor. Ron Embree, Webster University alum, turned the closing of Moll into a new corporation called River Bend, saving jobs throughout the area. Polly Shoemake, Webster University alum, was immediately promoted to Chief Nursing Officer/Vice President of Patient Care Services at St. Edward Mercy Medical upon graduation. John Fisher, VP of MacSteel and Webster University alum, has continued to build and invest in our community long after graduating from the local program.

I name only a few of the almost 300 graduates. I mention only the most well known, perhaps, in an effort to show how a few of our citizens have succeeded and remained here

to invest and build. The quality of the Fort Smith region is increased each and every time one adult returns to school to improve his/her skills and understanding. The economic impact of decisions made by Shackelford, Ralston, Embree and Shoemake, to name only a few, cannot be accurately measured.

The student body is diverse. Over the past 16 years, as the military participation dwindled, the corporate participation increased. Baldor, Trane, Whirlpool, Moll, St. Edward's, Therma Tru, Rheem, Hiram Walker, MacSteel, Planters, Grainger, and so forth have all sent employees to the Webster University program. The widespread appeal continues.

The Board is always welcome to observe a class and witness the investment made by the local faculty in each and every student. Last night, I sat in on final presentations from those graduating with the Human Resources Management Master's degree. It provides one closing example of what is happening in the Webster University "incubator".

Major Jeff Barrows, the recent interim Chief of Police, conducted his final research project on the possible extenuating factors involved in police misconduct. His research utilized an original questionnaire and an in-depth literature review, culminating in not only an excellent presentation, but also recommendations for improvements in training. What is the value of a reduction in police misconduct cases? What is the value in reduced litigation? What is the value in an even more dynamic and competent police force? Major Barrows' research will continue to have far reaching effects well beyond the parameters of the most recent nine week term. Major Barrows will continue to analyze his environment and suggest improvements for years to come.

As a community, we are not only fortunate to have institutions of higher learning amongst us, but we are truly blessed to have corporations and individuals within those organizations who continue to commit to continuing education. Whether the benefits are direct, indirect or induced, there is no opportunity quite like education. Thank you for supporting our efforts in this community.

Respectfully Yours,

Diane Fagan
Senior Director

Cc: Above mentioned