

Coming Together

New Partnerships Erase Boundaries

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Indiana State University Foundation President Gene Crume says, “We wanted to create a defining presence here,” when discussing the downtown space planned for Barnes & Noble and the foundation offices.



It's an all too familiar scenario. A loved one must be rushed to the hospital. Traffic lights turn red, spitefully it seems, as precious time ticks away. If you're among the 30% of Hoosiers who live in medically underserved rural areas, emergency efforts may be compounded by a scarcity of doctors.

According to an Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM) study, the entire state will experience a shortage of approximately 2,000 physicians in the next seven years. The problem, however, will be more severe in rural areas.

Addressing the problem locally is the Rural Health Innovation Collaborative (RHIC), one of several partnerships taking place in Terre Haute involving the city, educational institutions and health care industry. It is comprised of Union Hospital, IUSM, Indiana State University (ISU), Ivy Tech Community College – Wabash Valley Region, the Terre Haute Economic Development Corporation and the City of Terre Haute.

The RHIC was formed last year to enhance access to health care in rural areas (encouraging medical students to think beyond metropolitan borders), as well as spur neighborhood revitalization and economic development throughout the two-mile corridor between the Union Hospital and Indiana State campuses.

Boundaries of another sort are being whittled away downtown, thanks to a variety of partnerships between the city and ISU. What adds to their significance is that many are taking shape at Cherry Street, traditionally viewed as the invisible line defining community and university borders.

Why cross that line now?

“The shortest answer is exceptional leadership,” asserts Gene Crume, president of the ISU Foundation. “People thinking creatively and not feeling constrained by real or perceived boundaries in the past and folks simply saying, ‘Why not?’”

“It's almost a whole new generation of business leaders saying, ‘Yeah, we get that this is the Terre Haute we grew up in, but there's no reason we can't do these things.’”

Expanding medical training

IUSM-Terre Haute launched a rural medicine program last fall that, for the first time, allows students to complete all four years of study at the campus. Previously, only the first two years were offered, with the last two years of training taking place at the Indianapolis site (this is still required of IUSM's other regional campuses.) Now, students will gain hands-on experience participating in clinical rotations at hospitals in Terre Haute and surrounding areas.

“We pair students with rural physicians from the first semester,” explains Dr. Peter Duong, assistant dean and director of IUSM-Terre Haute. “Once a week, they work with physicians in the rural area. We also pair them with a rural patient they follow for four years. We're hoping they'll understand better the conditions the patients live in and how to best serve them from a health point of view.”

Students also spend one week at West Central Community Hospital in nearby Clinton. In addition, the rural medicine program incorporates educational sessions covering topics such as Medicare, Medicaid, telemedicine and farm injuries.

Kyra Reed was one of 24 incoming freshmen at IUSM-Terre Haute last fall and among eight admitted to the rural medicine program.

“It will be really great for us to talk with rural physicians who are in that position already and not only get the hands-on clinical experience, but also ask them specifically what problems they run into



or what is the most difficult thing about being a rural physician,” she confides. “And, you’ve already built connections here your first two years, so that will be another advantage.”

Currently considering a family medicine or internal medicine specialty, Reed shares why a rural health career appeals to her.

“I grew up in a small town (North Vernon, which has a population of approximately 6,500),” she notes, “and I have a lot of family (members) who, for many generations, have been in that area. I feel like I have a close tie to that (rural) lifestyle and to the culture.”

Innovation corridor

One of the RHIC’s goals is to create an educational site that blends training for a variety of health care professionals, ranging from physicians and nurses to social workers/case managers, respiratory therapists and pharmacists.

“Instead of training them in separate silos, why not train them all together at the same time?” Duong suggests. “Then, they will have a better idea when they graduate of the perspective of the other side. Hopefully that can launch in the next few years.”

Another focus of the RHIC centers on the two-mile “innovation corridor” between Union Hospital and ISU, which will ideally serve as a hotbed for developing health care companies and serve as an incubator for life sciences research.



Medical school student Kyra Reed: “It will be really great for us to talk with rural physicians ... and not only get the hands-on clinical experience, but also ask them specifically what problems they run into or what is the most difficult thing about being a rural physician.”

“If you bring in some software companies that develop products for the health care industry, that would be a perfect fit for rural health,” Terre Haute Mayor Duke Bennett declares. Plus, neighborhood revitalization efforts will potentially appeal to students who are exploring enrollment in the rural health program.

David Doerr, president of Union Hospital, emphasizes that the initiative is a long-term plan that “won’t happen overnight.” He cites lower wages and less sophisticated technology as two of the challenges in recruiting practitioners to rural areas.

“Most medical schools and residencies are in large, urban hospitals that, generally, have all of the latest technology and diagnostic treatment tools available to (trainees),” he reflects. “If you move them from that environment to a rural setting, they don’t have that anymore and don’t know how to work without it. Therefore, there is a reluctance to put themselves in that position.”

He emphasizes, “We can’t just focus on physicians. The average age of our nurses at Union Hospital and around the country is in the mid-40s. These are folks that if it weren’t for today’s economy, a lot of them might be dropping out of the workforce now.”

A new chapter

Downtown Terre Haute landed its first new national retail development in more than 20 years with a Barnes & Noble bookstore. The 30,000-square-foot facility will stand at the corner of Cherry and 5th Streets. Business leaders are hoping it will spur additional retailers to set up shop.

Barnes & Noble will occupy the first floor, while the ISU Foundation will anchor the second floor.

“It helps us create a new front door for the university by putting our offices there,” Crume comments.

He contends that relocating ISU employees to the downtown area will boost business at nearby restaurants during the lunch and evening hours. In addition, many retail establishments will likely extend their hours to accommodate individuals visiting the bookstore.

“It also ties in with an initiative we have in downtown Terre Haute called Riverscape, which is developing the whole Wabash River corridor (ISU will renovate its baseball field to serve as an anchor). And that is a very exciting process. Even though this isn’t on the river, anchor retail like this in downtown will spur growth in that area too.



Union Hospital stands at the north end of the corridor targeted for economic development and neighborhood revitalization as part of a rural health initiative.

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"There is a lot of great retail already in place: restaurants, boutique shops. Now it's finding other entrepreneurs to come in and fill those areas."

Crume attributes new leadership at the ISU Foundation and ISU in the last few years with triggering collaboration between the university and city.

"When you look at institutionally related foundations across the country and how they support the institutions, a great deal of the time their energy is put into doing economic development projects (involving innovative capital projects)," he remarks. "That model had never really been a part of the structure with the ISU Foundation, and we worked really hard to redefine that."

Such development projects are especially important in light of recent economic setbacks in Terre Haute. Boral Bricks (the nation's largest brick manufacturer and distributor of masonry products) invested in a \$60 million brick manufacturing facility last year, but has temporarily halted production. In addition, Direct Brands Inc. will close its local facilities this year due to consolidation of its music and book club distribution operations.

Crossing Cherry Street

Along with the Barnes & Noble project, the university and city worked together to build a new parking garage on Cherry Street that opened last year. ISU is relocating its College of Business to the existing federal building downtown, and a new 14,000-square-foot structure for bankruptcy courts and other federal agencies will be built on Ohio Street.

Crume recalls a comment made by a member of the city council.

"When they approved funding for our (Barnes & Noble) development, he made the comment that, 'Much like the federal building, this project makes that magical leap across Cherry Street and people no longer look at the university being confined to this boundary.'

"We can do innovative things to really integrate town and gown."

INFORMATION LINK

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