

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Doing well by doing good

In January 1996, Trinity College announced a \$175 million initiative to revitalize the blighted neighborhood surrounding its campus in downtown Hartford, Conn.

The college's new president, Evan Dobbelle, had persuaded Trinity's trustees to contribute \$5.5 million of Trinity's \$208 million endowment to support an urban development project called the Learning Corridor.

Together with local hospitals and Connecticut Public Television, who collectively also contributed \$5 million, the Trinity initiative leveraged millions more in state and private funding to build four magnet schools and a Boys and Girls Club run by Trinity students on a nine-acre former bus depot next to the Trinity campus.

Trinity also worked with a local neighborhood association to renovate existing houses and build new ones for owner-occupants.

Positive publicity

The initiative reaped an enormous amount of positive publicity, including a front-page story in the *New York Times*. Intrigued by the Trinity initiative, a group of Pottstown civic leaders, including Hill School headmaster David Dougherty, visited Dobbelle in Hartford in April 1999.

Dobbelle told them that when he was appointed president, Trinity College was known as a good school in a bad neighborhood. Fundraising was stagnant, and the quality of applicants was declining.

The Trinity Board of Trustees wanted to turn a liability — the college's setting in a troubled city — into an asset by embracing the city and promoting it as a learning laboratory for its students.

Stepping down from the tower

Dobbelle told the Pottstown visitors that Trinity's investment in the neighborhood, which he called "stepping down from the ivory tower," had already paid off for the college.

Besides improving the Trinity neighborhood, the number and quality of college applicants had increased dramatically, as had alumni giving, Dobbelle said.

The Pottstown civic leaders

suggested the Hill School should become more involved in the community, especially economic development efforts.

At that time, the Hill School was in the midst of a \$70 million fundraising campaign (which eventually raised \$85 million) in honor of the school's 150th anniversary.

Toward the conclusion of that campaign, the Hill School donated \$75,000 toward the appointment of a Pottstown economic development director.

Plans and initiatives

In the 14 years since then, the Hill School has helped pay for various economic development plans and initiatives in Pottstown.

The schools' chief financial officer sits on the board of the Pottstown Area Industrial Development Authority, which promotes economic development in the borough.

Two years ago, the school launched a multi-million dollar project to enhance its athletic fields, and earlier this year published plans for more than \$75 million in campus renovations and new construction.

Friday: Investing in Pottstown

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



100-acre-plus campus (tax exempt)
515 students, co-ed, from 27 states and
26 foreign countries
Day tuition: \$36,900
Boarding tuition: \$53,500
\$153 million endowment
\$34 million budget (2012)