Economic development leads the way
From Phuture Phoenix to future grads, community development is what we do

There are many ways UW-Green Bay contributes to the state’s workforce and economic development.

As just one example, I’ll cite the award-winning Phuture Phoenix program and the thousand or so fifth-graders who descend on campus each October.

From the opening assembly at the Weidner Center to the closing snack with me at the University Union, children explore campus in small groups led by current UW-Green Bay students. They delight in the view from the Cohen Library’s eighth floor, shoot baskets at the Kress Center and pop in on classrooms and labs where faculty members welcome them with creative experiments and activities.

Laughter, smiles and even cheers are commonplace. It’s great fun, but with a serious purpose. The children are urged to study hard, learn their lessons and graduate from high school. They’re introduced to the idea that college is possible.

As a Chamber member and chief executive officer of a regional public university, I have seen firsthand that economic, workforce and community development are interconnected. We need every citizen to maximize his or her talents. Educational attainment correlates strongly with regional prosperity, and our community (at about 20 percent) trails state and national averages in the percentage of adults with four-year degrees.

UW-Green Bay graduates 1,200 students annually, and it’s arguably not enough. We have worked to close the gap by partnering with NWTC and others to make it easier for working adults to turn two-year associate degrees into bachelor’s degrees. Our Adult Degree Program and related online offerings promote career advancement. A collaboration with UW-Oshkosh will soon attract new students in the high-demand field of engineering technology.

The economic return is substantial. Most UW-Green Bay students come from the local area and stay here after graduation. About 33 percent of alumni live and work in Brown County, 70 percent in Northeast Wisconsin.

More than 20 percent of our graduates complete degrees in science, technology, mathematics or health fields. Nearly that many major in business administration or accounting. All our students, regardless of major, benefit from an interdisciplinary, problem-focused, liberal arts approach — we call it 360° of Learning — that prepares them to think creatively.

With Phuture Phoenix we are addressing a long-range challenge. Many of today’s K-12 schoolchildren come from households of modest or very limited means, where neither parent has had college experience. Higher education isn’t naturally on their radar screens.

By reaching these children (more than 12,000 to date) as early as age 10, when study habits and attitudes toward education are formed, and extending Phuture Phoenix to include ongoing tutoring and mentoring work in middle and high schools, we’re finding success.

UW-Green Bay graduates are numerous among this region’s business, industry and governmental leaders, teachers, nurses, social workers, planners, scientists and citizen leaders. We’re proud to be continuing that trend with the next generation.

* Tom Harden, chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, HardenT@uwgb.edu, 920.465.2207