

## Community part of job description for Dr. Kent C. Trachte and Lycoming College

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Since Dr. Kent C. Trachte's appointment as Lycoming College president in July 2013, he has set the college on the fast track to increased community involvement by "fostering a culture of innovation" among his faculty.

Community involvement has been infused throughout the college since its formation in 1812. It began as the Williamsport Academy, created by eight leading men in Williamsport. Located on Third Street, the academy served as the next level of education for youth who had completed grade school.

In the 1840s, it was purchased by a group of Methodists who renamed it the Williamsport Dickinson Seminary, using it as a type of prep for colleges. In 1929 it added the title of Junior College. As World War II came and went, however, many military men and women returned looking for undergraduate education and this spurred the junior college to become a full four-year institution.

The title was changed to Lycoming College in 1947.

The name was chosen as a "symbol of who they thought they were," according to Dr. John Piper, Lycoming College historian and professor of history.

Local people picked the name, because it was the local leadership who created and built it so many years ago.

"It is the community's college, not a community college," Piper said.

The community of Williamsport has been entwined in Lycoming College just as much as the college has been entwined in Williamsport, according to Piper.

"The college would not have survived without the Williamsport community," Piper said.

Over the decades, the college's involvement with Williamsport has fluctuated with the financial stability of the college, according to Piper. Various presidents have needed to focus on the campus, while others, such as Trachte, could venture out into increased community projects.

When Trachte came to the college, a focus on community was part of the job description. Through his previous community experience at Franklin and Marshall College and the fact that his father was a school superintendent in his hometown, Trachte felt a strong sense of commitment to school and community relations.

Standing by Trachte's side through his appointment and presidency has been his wife, Sharon. While not serving in a paid position, Sharon Trachte saw herself as a social and community leader and wanted to invest in Williamsport and the college as much as possible.

### Fact Box

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Today the Sun-Gazette concludes its annual Person of the Year series. Six finalists were spotlighted each day of the past week. Today we salute Dr. Kent C. Trachte and Lycoming College as our 2015 Person of the Year.)



From left: Piper, Tran, Sharon and Kent Trachte, Estomin, McCall, Kulp.  
Photo credit: Mark Nance and the Sun-Gazette.

"People see her as a vital member of the college community," the college president said. "We see ourselves as partners when it comes to community engagement."

With a background as a college professor, she is on the board of the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, which operates a mentoring and after-school program for youth in Williamsport.

Additionally, she was appointed to the Brandon Park Commission and serves as a connection between the park and the college.

It is her goal to create a sense of solidarity between the college and the greater community.

"We stand with Williamsport and we want Williamsport to stand with us," Sharon Trachte said.

One of Dr. Trachte's first tasks as president was to sit down with each department on campus to hear about its immediate challenges and to see its vision for the department.

"I really believe that many of the best ideas for an organization don't come from the president or the cabinet leadership," Trachte said. "In order to foster a culture of innovation, you need to signal a willingness to listen."

The college's most impressive community advancements during Trachte's tenure include the opening of the downtown art gallery at 25 W. Fourth St. and the Lynn Science Center/Planetarium as well as participating in the Old City/East Third Street Gateway Commission.

"He has an open-door policy," said Lynn Estomin, a professor with the Art Department and point person for the renovation of the art gallery. "The gallery would not have happened without (Trachte)."

The art department had been working to expand their gallery for some time, but due to a lack of funds couldn't make it happen. During Trachte's initial meeting with the art department, he asked them what they wanted if money was no object.

The art gallery expansion was forefront on their minds, but they couldn't believe it would actually happen. Trachte soon spawned the idea to create a location downtown and worked with contractors and building management to make the art department dream a reality.

"It was amazing to see it happen quite immediately," said Howard Tran, art professor and department chairman.

Sponsoring various art shows by students and members of the community, the art gallery provided not only a way for the students to showcase their work, but it also gave them a reason to invest in the community, according to Tran.

The gallery showcases student work as well as local artists. Additionally, above the gallery is loft space for art seniors at the college to use as studios for their work. This encourages them to go into downtown for more than just the shows.

"We feel like it's important to involve the community, or give back, or encourage them to be part of the culture of the college," Tran said.

The Lynn Science Center/Planetarium is another way the college is working to invest in the community of Williamsport, primarily through local schools.

The Lynn Science Center was underway before Trachte began his presidency, but it was his dedication that pushed it forward to completion, according to Dr. Christopher Kulp, professor of physics and chairman of the Department of Astronomy and Physics.

"He has a vision to make Lycoming College better than what it currently is," Kulp said.

Construction for the center was completed in the fall and the department is still settling in. There are many plans for how the planetarium could be used to benefit the greater Williamsport community, but right now it's the schools that are getting the most.

The college is meeting with school superintendents and principals in the area to see how they could use the planetarium in the future. Additionally, about 50 science teachers came to a demonstration at the planetarium to see how the software could be used for grade school and high school students, according to Trachte.

Plans for developing programs for the greater public are underway, but since the center still is in its infancy, there is nothing definitive yet, according to Kulp.

"We would love to be able to get the community in," Kulp said.

In addition to projects on campus, the college also is looking to expand out into the community.

The Old City/East Third Street Gateway project would make Lycoming College more accessible and easier to get to, according to Trachte.

The college's goal is to put a college entrance, or gateway, on Basin Street and expand the college east. The admission office on campus is one of the oldest and hardest buildings to find, he explained.

The project will not only create easier access to the college, but will provide jobs for local businesses in the form of contract work while the project is underway, according to Trachte.

His goal is to have it completed within the next five years.

There's more that is getting college students into the community.

Dr. Betty McCall, assistant professor of sociology and anthropology, has been working with STEP Inc. to increase community/student relations since 2005.

Through STEP, McCall was instrumental in the creation of the Lycoming County Americorps Program. After seeing a need in the community she wrote a grant letter which eventually helped fund the program.

"It was meant to bridge the gap on these missing social services throughout the community," McCall said.

Additionally, McCall was a key member in developing Pennsylvania's Empowered Expert Residents, PEER, program for the Office of Aging. The program helps elderly assisted-living residents and their aides learn the best way to care for the elderly and act as an advocate for elderly in long-term care, according to McCall.

"It's so common for people to think that when elderly go into an elderly care facility, they don't have rights anymore," McCall said.

For decades since Lycoming College's first years, it has been filled with leaders in the community. Professors and faculty not only practice their craft with their students, but look out toward their neighbors.

Trachte encourages his faculty to invest in community by participating in city committees, get on boards or find other ways to use their resources to benefit Williamsport and make it a better place.

"What I see that we're doing is not new," Trachte said. "It's continuing what has always been a relationship of mutual benefit between Williamsport, Lycoming County and Lycoming College. And the college has always served community needs at different points in time."