

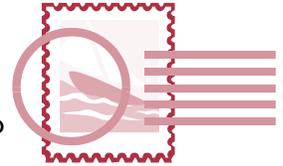
Urban Insights

JOINT Urban Studies CENTER

A partnership between College Misericordia, King's College, Luzerne County Community College,
Penn State Wilkes-Barre & Wilkes University

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Letter from the Future

It is the year 2014. This is the letter I hope to be writing to former colleagues in California about the City of Wilkes-Barre.

Dear Friends, It has been 10 years since I left California for Northeastern PA. I'll admit that when I arrived I was concerned for this region's future. But deep down, I knew that this area's potential was great. The "place," geographically speaking, was situated perfectly in the north-east US. While somewhat blighted, the area's amenities still shone through. It was a place where values, family and quality of life rank high. That is why I came back! Unfortunately, I had to leave this area in order to really appreciate it! And now, ten years later, this and future generations won't have to leave, we have it all!

Ten years ago when I walked down the street, there were vacant store fronts, buildings falling apart and houses in ruin. Yet flanked on either end of downtown were three very strong, vibrant institutions of higher learning. These schools were responsible for bringing in thousands of students for a quality education. Their families visited our communities as tourists. Yet they picked up their kids and left downtown for lodging, restaurants and shopping. Business people in downtown offices took their cars at lunch to shop and eat in adjacent communities. The streets were empty except on Farmer's Market day.

Ten years later, there are children playing near the fountain on the square. College students and business people mingle as they walk or sit near a planter full of flowers. We have been successful in connecting both higher education institutions' campuses to downtown. Trolleys to neighboring colleges bring students back and forth to socialize and take classes at other institutions. Regardless of what artery you take from the Square, you encounter people walking by; stores, coffee houses and restaurants of all kinds exist. As you continue down the streets lined with planters of flowers and trees, you also see people riding bikes on bike paths. You pass a theater complex, a new museum, a convention center with travelers being off loaded. You make a turn and you see historic houses with children playing in the front yard, more bikes, a few cars. You notice that many of the storefronts have activities on the second floor, where restoration has turned them into offices or apartments...Wilkes-Barre has its own "urban villages." Turn down another street and as you approach the river, there are restaurants and kiosks of art and benches where people watch the canoes and kayaks going by.

What a metamorphosis! Can it happen? How can we get there? Yes, it can happen. Wilkes-Barre has incredible potential to be the vibrant, bustling community it once was.

The keys to successful revitalization include everything from community support, reinvestment, regionalism and changes in public policy.

First, what does community support mean? It means we must embrace change. Changes in the way we live, work and do business, accepting of diversity and a new, different physical development. It means citizens need to become active stakeholders in leading initiatives, implementing new ideas and new strategies and taking part in goal setting.

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Did you know?
The five colleges and universities in the Wyoming Valley area have nearly 10,000 full time students enrolled per year.



Letter From the Future (continued from Page 1)

Next, let's discuss reinvestment. This region is the recipient of more state and federal dollars than it contributes. We are not a donor region. This means new money is flowing through the area to enhance roads, housing, buildings and social service programs. The reinvestment of this region needs to be focused on developing the urban core, the downtown...the major cities. Once the downtown is strong, it will spur new investment to support it and its surrounding communities.

Now, let's examine regionalism. Regionalism simply means cutting across jurisdictional boundaries to address common problems. Developing land use policies, transportation efforts or perhaps working out shared services agreements or even joint privatization of city services. This should all be done in an effort to make the most efficient and effective use of resources both financial, environmental, real property and human capital.

Finally, let's examine changes in public policy. Policy needs to be geared toward investment and reinvestment as opposed to redistribution of existing wealth. Policies should be inclusive, rather than exclusive. Policies should be pro business and probably toughest of all, policies should be created to address challenges that we will face in the future that can be mitigated through careful planning in the present. What we will create are Smart Growth principles that are economically sound, environmentally productive and socially just.

The JUSC will produce published studies using empirical and applied research as well as best practices. JUSC will provide communities with policy recommendations and strategies for implementation to assist in revitalization.

“Once the downtown is strong, it will spur new investment to support it and its surrounding communities.”

Urban Studies is the systematic study of a community, city or region and all aspects of it. This includes such things as transportation, economics, healthcare, housing, jobs, zoning, community and economic development, sprawl, regionalism, quality of life, arts & culture, urban social relations, taxation, demographics, civic culture, population, immigration. It includes any study that would focus on a community's image and design.

Teri Ooms
Executive Director
Joint Urban Studies Center



What is the JUSC?

The Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC) is a collaborative effort of the five local colleges and universities (College Misericordia, King's College, Luzerne County Community College, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and Wilkes University) in the Greater Wilkes-Barre Area. Based in the new Innovation Center at 7 South Main Street in Wilkes-Barre, the Center's goal is to provide essential research, planning, analysis and implementation approaches for small to mid-size cities aiming for full participation in the new economy of the 21st century. JUSC also relies on active participation with faculty, staff and student interns from its member institutions. Many of the products JUSC releases will demonstrate where a community is and what it can aspire to given its unique set of attributes. The reports will study history and trends, assets and gaps and best practices. JUSC will also provide action plans and propose outcomes. The center has a full time staff of four and five student interns.

Recently Completed Projects

CityVest

JUSC has recently completed a report on urban housing for CityVest, the nonprofit Wilkes-Barre community development corporation. CityVest is dedicated to housing and commercial development projects that will advance the economic revitalization of Northeastern Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley, particularly the downtown urban centers of Wilkes-Barre, Nanticoke, and Pittston. This comparative housing study was done to analyze data from two prior studies, one done by Diamond City Partnership and the other by Urban Workshop. Results of this study will help CityVest to make strategic decisions about future acquisitions of properties that they will rehabilitate and resell.

Brookings

A report will be released in November that will analyze The Brookings Report, "Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania". This report will focus on the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/ Hazleton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), and recommendations to help this area grow and prosper.

On the burner....

Look for upcoming studies on "**WHY AREN'T WE AVERAGE?**" **Past, Present and Future: Reasons, Consequences and Goals** as well as **The Impact of Arts & Culture, Recreation & Venue on Community Revitalization**.

Meet the Staff...

Teri Ooms became Executive Director of the JUSC in March. Teri is a Scranton native who recently returned to the area from Riverside, California where she was CEO and President of Inland Empire Economic Partnership. She brings to the Center valuable expertise in management, fiscal management, fundraising, marketing, communication, public policy, government affairs, planning and economic development. Her responsibilities at the Center include day to day management of the center, development of high quality research and analysis, planning and consulting to constituencies engaged in urban revitalization in small and mid-size cities. Ooms is a graduate of the University of Scranton where she obtained both her undergraduate degree and a Masters in Business Administration.

Marla Mensch Doddo, Development Coordinator was hired in July. She is a Danville native who has spent much of her adult life in the Wyoming Valley. Marla brings to the Center experience in higher education, banking, direct sales, marketing, office management, grant research and writing. She has attended Elizabethtown College and King's College. Her responsibilities include research and grant writing, editing, coordination of interns and marketing. Marla serves on the board of the White Haven Area Community Library.

Joseph Boylan, Research Analyst is the newest member of the JUSC. Joe was the Center's first intern and joined the staff in September. He is a Wyoming Valley native. Joe will graduate from Penn State Wilkes-Barre in December 2004 with a Bachelor of Science

degree in Business with specialization in Marketing and Management. Joe has been actively involved in running his family's business since 1994. He currently volunteers for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Lori Solomon, Office Assistant joined the JUSC in late June. Lori is a Northeast Pennsylvania native and Wilkes-Barre resident with valuable expertise in sales, marketing, and office management. Her responsibilities at the Center involve office management, administrative support to the executive director and coordination of meetings and conferences. She is also responsible for editing the JUSC newsletter. Lori is a graduate of King's College and is currently enrolled in Wilkes University's MBA program. She serves on the board of her congregation and edits their newsletter, as well.

Our Advisory Board

A big "Thank you" to those who have worked hard to make JUSC a reality.....

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Mr. Russell Roberts

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

Mr. Eugene Roth

Rosenn, Jenkins & Greenwald

Mrs. Susan W. Shoval

GUARD Insurance Group

Mr. William B. Sordoni

Sordoni Construction Company

7 South Main Street,
Suite 201
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701

t: 570.408.9850
f: 570.408.9854

info@urbanstudies.org

www.urbanstudies.org

Teri Ooms
Executive Director

ooms@urbanstudies.org

Marla Doddo
Development Coordinator

doddo@urbanstudies.org

Joseph Boylan
Research Analyst

boylan@urbanstudies.org

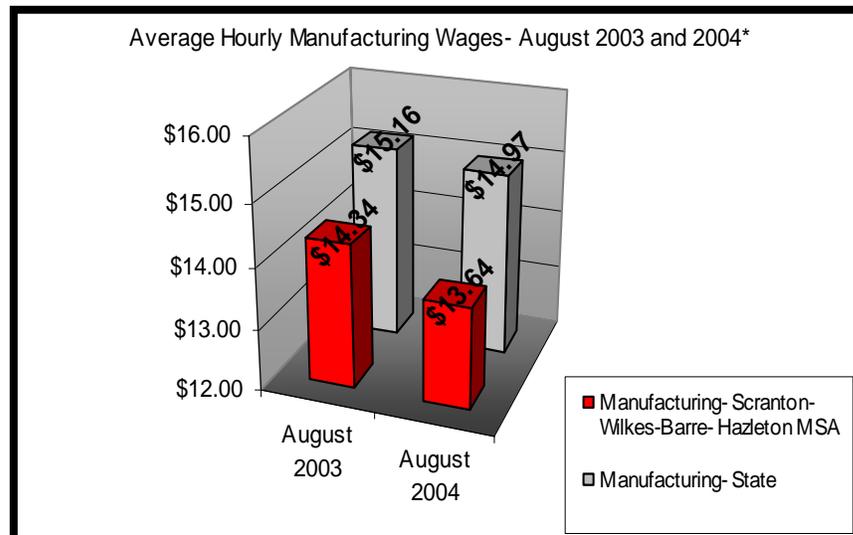
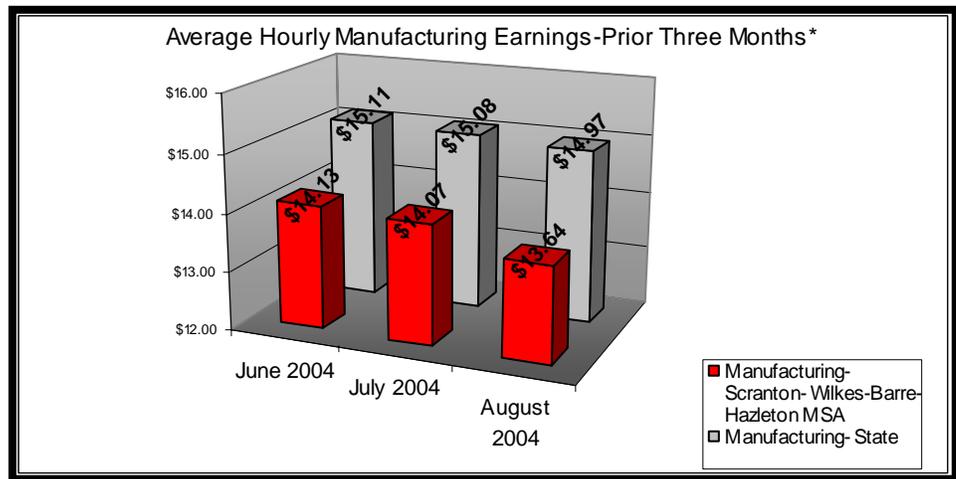
Lori Solomon
Office Assistant

solomon@urbanstudies.org

Local Average Hourly Earnings Falling Faster Than State Average

In this and future issues, JUSC will present information on economic indicators and other statistical measures which impact our region, both positively and negatively. According to data provided by the Center for Workforce Development, PA Dept. of Labor & Industry, the average hourly earnings for manufacturing have fallen during both the previous three month period as well as when comparing August 2003 to August 2004. The average hourly earnings have fallen at both the state and local level; however, the local figures show a decrease greater than the state level. In August of 2003, the local average hourly earnings were \$14.34, or 94.6% of the state average of \$15.16. In comparing August 2003 to August of 2004, the state average had fallen to \$14.97, a drop of 1.3%. The local average had fallen more sharply- a 4.9% drop to \$13.64- leaving the local average at 91.1% of the state average.

Unfortunately, this picture is likely to get worse before it gets better. The recent loss of better paying manufacturing jobs at companies like Techneglas and Schott Glass will exacerbate this trend unless new quality manufacturing employment opportunities are created, and that is not likely to happen overnight. The Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton MSA already lags behind the state in several economic indicators and can ill afford further decreases in average wages.



*Source:
Center for
Workforce
Information and
Analysis, PA
Department of
Labor &
Industry