



What does Forbes know?

With TCMC groundbreaking, Scranton still electric

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

A few years ago I witnessed the relighting of the Electric City sign atop the Scranton Electric Building in downtown Scranton. A grassroots effort by organizations and individuals had raised the funds needed to repair and refit the sign that had been dark for decades. Scranton Tomorrow, the City of Scranton, PP&L and numerous others sponsored a campaign to relight the sign as a symbol of the rebirth of Scranton following years of decline in jobs and population. Worse yet, a negative self-image by area residents seemed to have become pervasive.

The people standing on Courthouse Square on that chilly night shared a sense of optimism and belief that Scranton was experiencing a renaissance. The sign would once again be a beacon announcing that Scranton was a vibrant and "electric" city. It was an emotional moment when the lights went on, a vindication for those who believed that Scranton was coming back.

Last month hundreds gathered at a vacant lot on Pine Street in East Scranton to be part of what many believe to be the most significant event to occur in this City in our lifetime. The groundbreaking for the new Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC) opens an era of major economic development. The school will establish an innovative model of medical education, and it will be the catalyst for thousands of jobs and many spin-off businesses, educational programs and real estate investments. Scranton is building....not only bricks and mortar, but also a future filled with possibilities.

Since Dr. Robert D'Alessandri arrived as the founding dean in April 2007, the school has moved from concept to reality. It has a name, a management structure, an exciting and unique curriculum, a staff and faculty growing by leaps and bounds, and the approval by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to issue graduate degrees. It seems like light years since the sign on Linden Street announced a new era for the Electric City.

It did not happen overnight, however. The idea for a medical school in Scranton had been germinating for half a decade, nourished by Dr. Robert Naismith and Dr. Robert Wright, two visionary leaders who had organized and led a small brain trust who met at 7 a.m. every week for several years. This breakfast group worked tirelessly to investigate the possibilities and to plan and strategize each step. Their determination moved the project forward, and they approached Sen. Robert Mellow with their idea.

Sen. Mellow, skeptical at first, became a believer and successfully persuaded Gov. Ed Rendell to commit the commonwealth's financial resources to launch the first new

allopathic medical school in Pennsylvania in 50 years. When Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania stepped in with a substantial financial pledge, the possibility of success increased exponentially.

The recent change in attitude of the residents of northeastern Pennsylvania is remarkable. One can sense a new optimism and sense of possibility. Visitors to the area observe this, leading to investments in business and real estate by people who have never lived here. The sense of community, the quality of life, the cost of living, the cultural and recreational opportunities, the proximity to the major cities of the East, are all part of the attraction. The availability and accessibility to high-quality medical care is another important incentive. The coal and textile industries may be gone, but an economy driven by information transfer and professional services, a dynamic and creative community, are moving forward to replace them. This is great news for all of us!

So where did *Forbes* magazine come up with the idea that Scranton is going down the tubes? Evidently they looked at some statistics but never did further investigation, let alone come for a visit. Numbers simply do not tell the story. Our newspapers clearly report many more obituaries than births every day. Yet our population is holding steady. Scranton is gaining new residents of all ethnicities, creating a microcosm of the most interesting and diverse large cities in the country. More than 40 languages are spoken in the Scranton School District, reminiscent of the days when coal was king and European immigrants flocked here for jobs. Today's immigrants enhance the fabric of our community. LHVA sees this as a great opportunity to enjoy and celebrate new heritage.

As Sen. Mellow observed in his remarks at the TCMC groundbreaking ceremony, all cities that have medical schools are thriving. Scranton, as well as Wilkes Barre and Williamsport, with their satellite campuses, will do likewise. A visit to this area in a couple of years will have the readers of *Forbes* scratching their heads.

Please be a believer and an ambassador for our region. Don't be shy about telling people... Scranton is lighting the way again!

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