

The \$1 Million Proposition — 10,000 Times Over

By SALLIE A. GLICKMAN
FOR THE BULLETIN

Competitive economies have always been driven by talent and innovation, but today these things are increasingly measured by college degrees — for the individual and for the region.

With more than 80 institutions of higher education, the Delaware Valley should count among its strengths a highly credentialed workforce — but it doesn't. The region consistently ranks among the lowest nationwide in percentage of adults with college degrees. The reasons behind this statistic are complex and the topic of many a debate.

Now, we are poised to do more than talk; we are ready to act.

With the support of new Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, the time is now to bolster our workforce — the biggest source of untapped capital we possess. Consider this: More than 200,000 of our region's residents in prime working age have some college experience but no degree.

A college degree can increase a person's lifetime earnings by \$1 million. Lots of people with college degrees can transform our econo-

my through increased productivity, spending and strategic positioning of our region.

Mayor Nutter has called for 10,000 new college graduates just in Philadelphia, and for good reason. If just 10,000 of those 200,000 people earned a degree, our research shows city tax revenues would increase nearly \$4 million the first year, while consumer purchasing power would increase \$35 million and up to \$10 million in social services expenditures would be saved. Our low percentage of college-educated workers relative to other regions would be a thing of the past.

Thanks to leadership funding from the city of Philadelphia and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the "Graduate! Philadelphia" initiative is moving toward achieving that reasonable goal.

On Feb. 5, Graduate! Philadelphia, a joint initiative of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, opened a resource and guidance center in the newly renovated College Access Center at The Gallery at Market East specifically tailored to help adults who want to

go back to college. The Philadelphia Education Fund and nine area colleges also are partnering in the effort — the first of its kind nationally.

Visitors to the center can get one-on-one assistance in finding and filing for financial assistance and academic advising to help identify the best college program and create a plan for completing their degree. Returning-to-Learning workshops will be held at the center on a variety of topics that concern adult college students, including assessing how prior college credits can count toward a degree now. A toolkit for returning adult students, peer mentoring and information on getting college credit for life experience are other available services.

We just might be at the edge of our region's renaissance. A better-educated workforce would generate higher-paying jobs, which would generate more economic power for the region, which would generate more wealth, stronger communities and greater prosperity for all.

We owe it to ourselves, each other and our future to make the Graduate! Philadelphia College Access Center a success.

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Sallie A. Glickman is CEO of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and co-founder of Graduate! Philadelphia. The Graduate! Philadelphia College Access Center can be reached at 215-574-1341.