



The College And Its City

By Leo I. Higdon Jr.

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Recently, I was inaugurated as president of Connecticut College in a moving ceremony filled with musical and dance performances and greetings from faculty, students, staff, trustees, higher education officials and city and state officials, including New London Mayor Beth Sabilia.

Mayor Sabilia's remarks, about the connection between the college and the city and the positive future we share, were a thoughtful and insightful commentary on the mutually beneficial relationship both entities envision. And I thank her for that.

My wife Ann and I arrived in New London in July. Over the past several months, we have taken advantage of the wonderful weather here and walked the different neighborhoods throughout the city. We have been impressed by the excitement and vitality evident in the downtown area.

We came to New London directly from the city of Charleston, which has many similarities to New London, including strong historic roots and a community that is closely tied to its local college. As president of the College of Charleston, I fostered a relationship between the city and the college that developed in a very positive way.

I've been asked frequently about how I envision this college's relationship with New London.

To date, I've met with a wide variety of community leaders, including a presentation to the New London Rotary Club, and discussed this issue and others with Mayor Sabilia. Together, we are working to build a mutually beneficial relationship in which everybody wins.

As I said during my inaugural remarks, Connecticut College is very proud of its connection with New London. And, consistent with our educational mission, the college will continue to be a good neighbor in this city that was so instrumental to our beginning and will be so much a part of our future.

We're building on a solid foundation. Nearly 100 years ago, New London residents and business leaders provided the critical support needed to start this college from scratch. Why? Because their foresight told them having a prestigious college in their city would yield positive outcomes they couldn't even imagine at the time. They were right.

Today, Connecticut College provides more than 30,000 hours of community service to New London and its residents. Consistent with our educational

mission, our students, faculty and staff are involved in a variety of programs that benefit New London school children and others.

As Mayor Sabilia noted during her remarks at my inauguration, Connecticut College students are in the community teaching local school children in reading, art, music. They are mentors, critical friends, environmental ambassadors and more. The Connecticut College Children's Program, serving toddlers and young children of diverse backgrounds in southeastern Connecticut, is another example of public and private entities working together to their mutual benefit.

And we want to do more.

Other ways to work together

In addition to discussing opportunities to help New London with teacher training, and providing use of our facilities and expertise, we are looking at involvement in other programs, such as community event planning and marketing and grant-writing support that benefits both the city and the college. We want to be visible, supportive advocates for "our" city.

Connecticut College is a strong asset to this community. New London is a strong asset to the college. More than one quarter of our faculty and staff live in New London, our students and their families support the many fine restaurants, hotels and retail shops and, as a community, the college supports the variety of cultural events and activities offered in the city.

We know that to have a true impact, the college leadership also must be visible in the community. Expect to see us in and around the city, at meetings or in restaurants, or supporting community efforts, such as the recent Henry Louis Gates, Jr., evening at The Garde, in support of The Let's Read Fund of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut, which my wife and I enjoyed so much.

Our efforts will be consistent with our educational mission and will positively and directly impact the city. And that, in turn, benefits the college. At Connecticut College, our mission is to educate students to put the liberal arts into action in a global society. By our involvement in the community – giving our time and our expertise – we are helping build on a mutual history of which we can all be proud.

Leo I. Higdon Jr. is the 10th president of Connecticut College since its founding in New London in 1911