

The News Journal
A Gannett newspaper
W. Curtis Riddle
President and Publisher

OUR VIEW

BUILD ON SUCCESS

Delaware Tech caught financially between enrollment or capacity

Delaware Technical & Community College is doing a booming business. President Orlando George reports its credit programs are operating at 96 percent capacity with 40,000 students now. And a 30 percent surge of enrollment is expected over the next 15 years. The four campuses around the state all need new buildings for classrooms and career training.

There's a price for success. The alternative is eventually turning away students, Dr. George says.

To keep pace with repairs and expansion, the college administration figures it should be putting \$9.8 million a year into facilities. Instead, state appropriations have amounted to \$2.8 million annually. At this rate, it'll take 40 years to do the projects on the boards now.

The college estimates it has a \$38.5 million backlog of deferred maintenance and renovation already.

That is untenable. The college must serve students and employers in current economic conditions. Nurses, police, emergency medical personnel, child care and technical workers train at Delaware Tech's affordable rates to fill job vacancies. Construction costs don't stand still, either.

So as the governor's next budget gets drafted, Delaware Tech has asked for \$15.8 million for capital improvements. That's a big chunk at once, but the needs are legitimate and pressing. Whether all or in part, significantly more money should go to close the college's building gap.

President George goes further, though, and advocates creating a new statewide property tax dedicated to Delaware Tech's future capital investments. Using an equalization formula for property values, he envisions it costing the average household about \$17 to start, rising to \$50 over 10 years. That would yield \$7 million in the first year, he says.

The growing stream of tax revenue would certainly simplify Delaware Tech's planning. But the other solution within reach is legislators' responsibility – and accountability – to allocate funds in accordance with the state's needs. The college is indisputably a proven asset worthy of investment. Its future begins now.