

Please provide a two sentence summary of the innovation. This description should accurately and succinctly convey the innovation and its importance. (maximum 45 words)

The Kingsport Higher Education Initiative (KHEI), conceived by the City of Kingsport through multiple partnerships sought to diversify and revitalize an ailing economy in the Sullivan County area of northeast Tennessee by improving the overall education level of the labor force.

Describe the program or initiative. What problem(s) does your program or initiative address? What is the innovation? Please emphasize the results your program or initiative has achieved. (maximum 500 words)

In the late 1990s, Kingsport's strong manufacturing base was in decline. Willamette Paper Mill (now Domtar), located in downtown, announced it would cut 150 jobs. JPS Industries announced cuts of 100 jobs at its now defunct Borden Mill plant. Eastman Chemical Company, then Tennessee's largest employer, announced three possible scenarios: downsize significantly, move corporate headquarters and/or close local operations. The decision was the first layoff (1,200) in the company's nearly 100-year history. With the local housing market stagnant and retail expansion non-existent, more than a few residents set their sights on other communities where opportunities seemed better. One city leader said, *"The last one to leave — turn the lights out."* A city leadership staff member explained, *"It was a hard time to be optimistic about Kingsport's future and no reason to change until significant outside threats questioned our ability to survive."*

In 1999, a city-led "Economic Summit" developed solutions through community-wide participation: training and workforce development, promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit and diversification of the economic base. A common element realized was education. A city-led effort began *"Educate and Grow,"* which offered scholarships to Northeast State Technical Community College (NESTCC) for any city high school graduate meeting entrance requirements. The Sullivan County Commission soon expanded the program county-wide.

Kingsport, a mid-sized city lacking a college campus, then focused on developing an academic village for convenient workforce development opportunities. At the same time a public transit system was being developed. A suitable location was secured allowing the public transit aspect and the first educational facility, the Regional Center for Applied Technology (RCAT) combined under one roof in the downtown area. The five-year goal, 1,000 students, was surpassed in two years.

The current Board of Mayor and Aldermen approved funding a \$4 M, 42,000 square-foot Regional Center for Health Professions (RCHP) adjacent to RCAT. Wellmont Health System, a major healthcare provider (Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky), provided \$1M in scholarship money. King College (private), provides associate degrees to nearly 400 students in areas of nursing and five medical technology lines such as cardiovascular and ophthalmological technology, rivaled by only a handful of schools across the country,

Another facility in the ‘village’ is a venture from two Kingsport-based companies, Eastman and Domtar. A \$2.7 M, 26,000 square foot - Regional Center for Applied Manufacturing (RCAM) was constructed to focus on vocational based education (i.e. welding, pipe-fitting, etc.).

A fourth building in the downtown ‘village,’ a \$13 M city-funded, 54,000 square foot Kingsport Higher Education Center (KHEC) is slated to open in fall of 2009.

Baccalaureate and higher degrees from at least five public and private universities, with all necessary instructional and student support services, will be offered. Like RCAT, RCHP and RCAM, KHEC will be operated by NESTCC.

Mayor Dennis Phillips explains, *“What we are trying to do is get the education level up in Kingsport and Sullivan County by making higher education so convenient and cost-effective that anyone could get an education, therefore, boosting economic development.”*

Cite the best verifiable evidence of the most significant achievements of the program or initiative. (maximum 250 words)

Kingsport's recovery since the late 1990s is a direct result of global thinking about goals and outcome by community leaders. Multiple indicators evidence the remarkable renaissance.

- √ \$164.48 million in new construction for 2007 (a City record), nearly doubling the \$88.5 million total of 2006 - \$14.3 million in downtown private investment alone.
- √ From July 06-June 07, 1,579 families from 35 states moved to Kingsport.
- √ Kingsport ranks 14th in the country for housing appreciation in the *second* quarter of 2008
- √ Forbe's Magazine (4/07) ranked Kingsport 3rd nationwide for lowest cost of doing business in major metros.

In July 2007, Eastman Chemical Company brought full circle the community renaissance through their announcement of 'Project Reinvest', a plan to spend \$1.3 billion upgrading and developing new production capacity at its Kingsport plant during the next 5 years.

While many factors relate to the resurgence, the economic summit proved to be the genesis catalyst. Determined that downward trends would not be accepted as destiny, key leaders began to strategically think about how to pool resources to enhance the business environment of the community.

This turnaround from the late 1990s provided a solid foundation which improves the quality of life for the community residents, not just in the short term, but for generations to come.

<http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=2159> – Appalachian Regional Commission article on Educate and Grow

<http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9003573> – Kingsport Times News Article on Allied Health Center

http://www.alliancetnva.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=2 – Article on higher education center in Kingsport