



**Danville  
reinvented then  
reinvested  
to reinvigorate  
ailing Southside**

**F**ACED WITH SOARING unemployment caused by a steady decline in the local production of tobacco and textiles, the City of Danville initiated an aggressive response designed to bring the region's economy a dose of 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs, research, education and training.

Unemployment rates in Danville skyrocketed to 11.2 percent in 2003. If the decline in low-skill manufacturing jobs continues at its current pace, more than 4,200 jobs will be lost by 2006.

Too many people in the workforce are uneducated, unskilled or underpaid. A staggering 44 percent of blacks and 33 percent of whites over the age of 25 lack a high school education; 20 percent of the region's adults have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. As a result, prospective new businesses that need a well-educated workforce are reluctant to locate in the region.



**The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research was completed in May.**

The erosion of jobs and job skills has devastated the quality of life. The average worker's annual salary sits at an anemic \$19,126 compared to the national average of \$25,288. In Danville, 20 percent of the population lives below the poverty line; in neighboring Pittsylvania County the figure is 11.8 percent.

The statewide average is 9.6 percent.

Compounding the workforce issues was an aging infrastructure ill equipped to accommodate the technology-driven new economy. For example, in 2000 America Online seriously considered building a new center in Danville that would have employed several hundred people in high-paying jobs. The company went



## President's Award Danville

elsewhere because of insufficient high-speed Internet access in the region.

## Assessing the need

In 2000 civic leaders from Danville and Pittsylvania County created The Future of the Piedmont Foundation to address these issues. The foundation created a task force comprised of representatives from the City of Danville and Pittsylvania County, the education community and private businesses. This task force visited communities, studied educational models, and

commissioned a consultant to help evaluate the region.

The consultant's report, entitled *Learning, Working, Winning.*, was completed in the fall of 2000. It defined the scope of the problem, developed defining principles, set measurable goals to track achievements, brought a regional perspec-

tive to issues, and encouraged the development of strategic partnerships.

Once the problem was defined, the task force worked with the consultant to identify five principles that would shape the region's near-term development priorities and guide the Dan River region's long-range investments in programs and infrastructure.

The principles:

- practice inclusive leadership;
- create economic development strategies that strengthen, build on, and modernize existing economic assets in the short term while using them to build a strong base to grow incomes;

- prepare aggressively for a future in which wealth and jobs will grow from the application of knowledge and technology;

- educate every citizen well while holding schools and colleges accountable for meeting world-class standards; and

- think, plan and act as a region to make the most of assets and opportunities to compete with larger and better-financed jurisdictions.

## A partnership emerges

The task force quickly realized that it takes more than education to change the economic plight of a community. To foster entrepreneurship, the task force wanted businesses to develop new ideas to help lay the groundwork for a new economy that capitalized on the assets unique to Southside. Their vision had a name:

The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR). The institute would house state-of-the-art research centers that would attract new technology, new business, and new educational opportunities, while enriching the region's capacity for new business.

Danville leaders realized creating productive partnerships with its neighbors was a crucial component to the success of the region. For years the friction between the governing bodies of Pittsylvania County and the City of Danville was recognized throughout the region. As a new-

needs of more traditional industry that was being cultivated.

Significantly, the city and the county decided to share the developmental expenses and the revenue generated from the parks. A steering committee comprised of business, government and civic leaders was formed. It played an important part in establishing a unified business retention and expansion program geared to attract and support more high-wage, high-retention employment opportunities. This historic partnership brought the two governments together in solid support of the

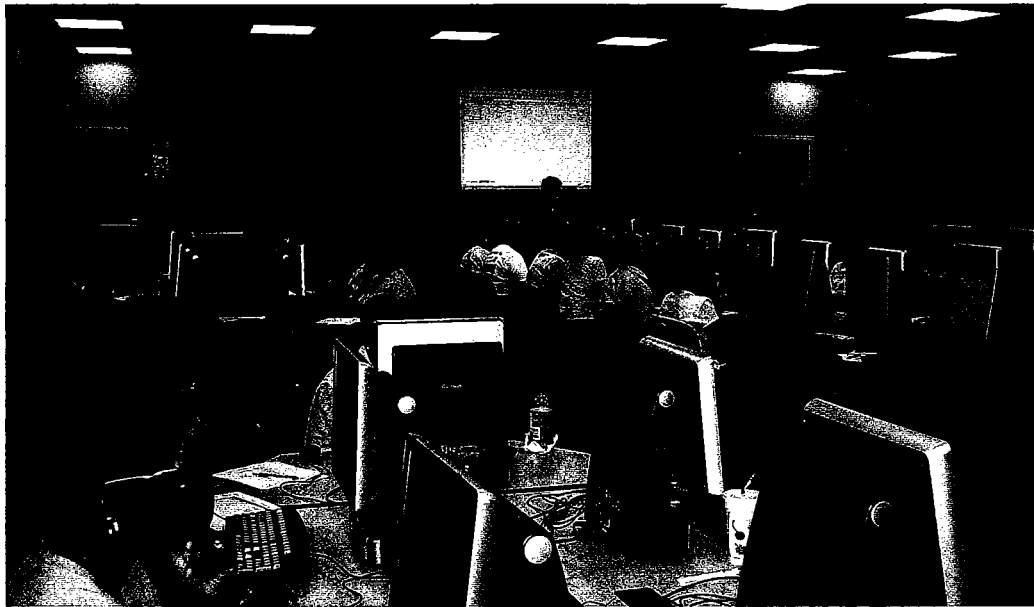
state-of-the-art fiber optic network spanning the city and county. The eDan infrastructure provides open access so that any service provider can offer voice, data or video.

Meanwhile, in keeping with its quest to become a Top 30 research institution, Virginia Tech acted to take advantage of resources unique to Southside. The Virginia International Raceway offered impressive test track facilities perfect for the university's research in transportation and performance engineering programs. Unused farmland met the needs of the high-yield crop research

being conducted in horticulture and forestry. And the vanished textile industry left facilities and know-how needed for advanced polymers research.

Ultimately, the IALR's six centers will conduct research in polymers, bioinformatics, performance engineering, high-value crops in horticulture and forestry, unmanned vehicles and biosafety. The developments that emerge from this new research hub will spur entrepreneurial activity and spin-off business across the corridor. Small and medium-sized companies will contract with the institute for research and develop-

ment leading to permanent location in the Danville region.



**As part of its outreach mission the institute was host for a free month-long computer workshop series for the public.**

comer, City Manager Jerry Gwaltney had the best opportunity to create a new era of cooperation. Gwaltney met with the county administrator and the board of supervisors. He urged them to forget the past and work with the city to improve economic opportunities for all citizens.

After several meetings, all agreed that the best way to create a favorable climate for implementing the *Learning. Working. Winning.* report's goals was to establish two business parks. A cyberpark located in Danville would provide a place where high-tech commerce and education would work together. An industrial park in Pittsylvania would meet the emerging

initiatives while fostering a new, positive spirit.

## Preparing for the institute

Creating an environment conducive to modern-day research and attracting tech-savvy companies requires a sound data infrastructure. With the development of "eDan" (high band-width, next-generation Internet infrastructure and protocols that marry optical fiber and wireless technologies), the region evolved from a consumer of outside information services to a local provider. Virginia Tech along with the institute, Danville, Pittsylvania and Gamewood, partnered to build a

## Bricks and mortar

To build the institute the city, county and task force needed to raise \$20 million. Ultimately, the institute was built with a \$15 million grant from the Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, money allocated to rebuild the future of the region. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development purchased the \$1 million piece of land – the site of Danville's cyberpark. The city and counties provided another \$1 million for infrastructure. Private funds raised \$2 million, and three federal

grants directed more than \$700,000 toward the project.

The IALR provides the region with more than 93,000 square feet of research, classroom, conference, and office space housing more than 25 classrooms and computer labs. A mini Math Emporium, a great hall seating 1,000, a 125-seat executive auditorium, and several high-end business conference rooms accommodate the specialized needs of today's businesses. A cybercafe, an eLibrary, a multimedia development center, and a bookstore offer resources to the community.

Ground was broken and construction of the institute began in 2003. Meanwhile, research and educational programs were already taking shape in temporary facilities throughout the region. Construction of the building was completed and the institute opened officially in May 2004.

## Gaining intellectual capital

Creating a research and technically savvy workforce requires an educated community that fosters a spirit of entrepreneurship and leadership. The partnership between Danville Community College, Averett University and Virginia Tech offers a seamless approach to education by facilitating the easy transfer of course credits and providing compatible tech-based curricula. Through the institute, students can achieve an associate's degree at the community college level, pursue their bachelor's at Averett and a post-graduate degree at Virginia Tech while participating in world-class research right in their community.

The task force created a unified-governance council with representatives chosen from the region's education and employment training institutions. Their job: dramatically improve workforce-training programs




**The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research is located in Danville's new Cyber Park.**

to help improve mathematics, science and technology-based education.

Through the IALR initiative, achievement standards for public school students will be raised with supportive guidance, tutoring and mentoring programs. In order to match these standards, teachers will be equipped with the technical skills they need to implement pilot and model programs. Virginia Tech Math Emporium Model, High Schools That Work (Atlanta), The Education Trust (Washington, D.C.), the Virginia Tech K-12 Partnership Program, and the Dan River Institute Partnership will assist in redeveloping an educational model suited for the science, math and technology needs of today's new research-based economy.

Today the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research rises above the intersection of two main highways in Danville, its distinctive tower of windows reflecting the hope of an entire region. Its laboratories are already busy with new research. Its halls are teeming with the Dan River Region's next leaders.

As Southside Virginia strives to reinvigorate its economy and reinvent its industry, the institute will help guide the way. By understanding and embracing the changing nature of the

global economy, Danville and its partners have created a facility where research, innovation, and entrepreneurship will thrive, and where a community will be reborn. 

### Judge:

"As Southside Virginia strives to invigorate its economy and reinvent its industry, the City of Danville has taken the lead in bringing together partners to create the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), a home that embraces the changing nature of the global economy and a facility where research, innovation and entrepreneurship will thrive and a dedicated community will grow. The Danville City Council and the Pittsylvania County government, economic development organizations and civic leaders joined to establish a unified business retention and expansion program geared to attract and support high wage, high retention opportunities. The work of the City of Danville and its partners clearly represents significant achievement in its incorporation of entrepreneurial principles and success in discovering new ways to improve services and operations."