

THE DEAN'S VIEW

Dear *Tennessee's Business* readers:

I am particularly pleased to present this issue of *Tennessee's Business* at this time. I believe the articles are insightful and balanced across the spectrum of viewpoints. If you read them with an open mind, you will possibly find yourself understanding, if not accepting, opinions you may once have dismissed out of hand. If so, the issue will have been a success.

My job here is not to compete with the authors. I have the luxury of taking editorial license and simply presenting my views. So, here they are!

President Sidney McPhee has repeatedly said MTSU is the economic engine of Murfreesboro and the surrounding Middle Tennessee region. As one of the largest employers, if not the largest, in the immediate area, there is no doubt MTSU plays an enormous part in the economics of Murfreesboro—in the number of people employed, the improvement of the average wage rate, and, of course, the multiplier effect felt throughout the area.

Is this the only or even the major role that MTSU plays? I think not. As the dean of the Jennings A. Jones College of Business, I may be putting myself on proverbial “thin ice.” Some think everything of importance can and should be turned to an economic measure. Let's agree to set aside that paradigm, if only for a moment.

What does a university bring to a community and region? Conversely, what would not be here without the university?

Let's begin with cultural events. What would be the local level of support for the arts without the university? How many concerts, plays, art exhibits, and poetry readings would disappear from the local community? What do these events add to the texture and quality of life in the area? While not everyone places the same value on these activities, many who are not personally involved would agree such things are critical to a balanced social life in a community.

Some not as inclined to the arts have found MTSU a place of great pleasure and involvement in other ways. For example, how many events per year are held in the livestock pavilion? How many will be held in the new horse arena once it is completed? While these are different from art exhibits and plays, they are as integral to the lives of the participants as other cultural events.

Then there are the sports events. While greater numbers could be attending various sports events, for a significant segment of the local population football, basketball, baseball, softball, track, soccer, and other sports on campus are an important part of their social calendar. They help to make community life special.

Continuing education brings courses of interest—from hobbies to professional education—to a wide spectrum of people. Courses in golf, tennis, scuba, marshal arts, painting, management, personal finance, and many other avocations are available through the continuing studies program of the university, not to mention the regular academic courses members of the community may attend.

There are also special lectures and other events. African American History Month and Women's History Month bring speakers of national and international renown to the area. The various Chairs of Excellence have brought professional, business, political leaders, and celebrities to Murfreesboro who would not have come to Middle Tennessee otherwise.

Let me add one other thing—what would be missing from the community if you removed about 20,000 bright, energetic young people? How would you replace the joy of life and the thirst for the future they have? What could ever replace them?

What is the value of the university to the community? Our people in the Business and Economic Research Center are very good, but I don't believe they can actually calculate that value. We measure economic impact, but that is not a complete measure of value. While we would certainly know the economic impact if the university disappeared, I hope we never have to try to measure the value lost to Murfreesboro and the service region if MTSU closed its doors or had to severely limit its programs and services. Without MTSU, middle Tennessee would not be the same great place to live that it is. How can you place an economic value on that? You can't, but you know intuitively that it is something too great to lose.

Sincerely, 

*E. James Burton, Dean
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What would be missing from the community if you removed about 20,000 bright, energetic young people?