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A Partner with the City of Cleveland

By Robert L. Niehoff, S.J.

John Carroll University was founded in 1886 as Saint Ignatius College on Cleveland's west side. Almost 50 years later, our campus would relocate about 10 miles east to the suburb of University Heights, Ohio. Even though Carroll moved from Cleveland proper, our success has remained inextricably tied to the city's well-being.

During the past five years, we have benefited greatly from the Forest City's increasingly prominent place as a health care and cultural hub – not to mention the recent excitement generated by the return of LeBron James to the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers. We are certainly heartened by recent economic developments that are helping the city move forward to a more promising future.

Cleveland still faces challenges many other cities grapple with – declining revenues from a shrinking population base, educating students from a wide range of socioeconomic situations, urban blight, and the continuing challenge of slower job growth, to name a few. Many of these issues stemmed from the decline of the city's traditional manufacturing base over the past few decades. Ohio lost 614,000 jobs between 2000 and 2010, while JCU

enrollment declined by 15 percent during that same period. To be sure, the situation was exacerbated by the 2008-09 recession and the job losses which predated it. These events created real hardships for families and significant enrollment and budget challenges for Carroll.

In order to respond to the loss of jobs and income in our region, which began well before the recession, we have dedicated the financial resources to ensure access to Carroll for students from low-income families. In 2007 we made a commitment to students receiving Pell Grants that they would pay no additional tuition at John Carroll. JCU enrolls the third largest number of Ohio students at any private college in the state. As the recession took hold in 2009, the State of Ohio largely eliminated state financial aid for students from low-income families at private colleges; this resulted in a three million dollar reduction in Ohio aid to JCU students. We recognized that many of our students and families would need additional financial aid support to keep these students here and make their dream of a John Carroll diploma a reality. Between 2008-09 and 2013-14, our total aid budget went from \$39 million to \$60 million, over a 50 percent increase. We have increased tuition by about 23 percent over these

years. Our net tuition per student remained relatively stable during these years even with the additional financial aid expense.

In 2009, in order to fund the student aid, previously provided by the state, we reduced our operating budget by five million dollars through a series of reductions in staffing, benefits costs, facilities adjustments, and travel and entertainment. Although enrollment has grown in recent years, net tuition growth has been small, and expense budget increases have been limited to compensation, enrollment, and advancement investments.

Even so, affordability concerns and competition for talented students continue to be intense in Ohio as the region adapts to a double digit percentage decline in high school graduation numbers. These issues of affordability and access continue to be significant for us. In fact, student aid is the cornerstone of our current *Forever Carroll* capital campaign and has achieved its \$35 million goal.

Robert L. Niehoff, S.J., has been president of John Carroll University since 2005; before that he was associate provost and vice president for planning and budget at the University of San Francisco.

This commitment to access has not come at the expense of the quality of our students or our commitment to a liberal arts core. We did not change our academic expectations for admissions. Indeed, our John Carroll Access Initiative included the support structures to ensure that we not only enroll high-need, Pell-eligible students but also help them persist and graduate at nearly the same rate as non-Pell students. John Carroll now has one of the best four-year graduation rates in the state. While we provide some additional supports for these students and have worked to assist academic advisors and campus staff in understanding the special challenges that low-income and first-generation students experience, our expectation that all students can succeed has helped many students realize the four-year graduation goal.

At the same time, we also have partnered with Cleveland and other urban public school districts and worked to build their students' skills and expectations for college access and success. As I detailed in the September 2014 issue of *AJCU Connections*, we have played a key role in Mayor Frank Jackson's Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland. This collabora-

tive program seeks to significantly increase number of Cleveland Metropolitan School District students who earn college degrees.

John Carroll makes many meaningful contributions to the local economy through our service learning and community service programs. Two-thirds of our students participate in community service. One of the new and exciting student-initiated service programs is the Carroll Ballers, a unique service opportunity for John Carroll students that combines the game of basketball with mentoring and educational programming for residents of the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center. Many of our most impactful service programs are focused on helping educate Greater Cleveland's youth, exposing them to opportunities that will benefit the region and might help them see college success as a real possibility for themselves.

The professional pursuits of our alumni also have generated valuable industry connections and innovative programs for our students. For example, our new health care information technology program grew out a relationship between computer science professor Daniel Palmer, Ph.D., and JCU alumni working at the Cleveland Clinic. A few years

ago Cleveland Clinic doctors were exploring ways to connect health care and information technology with a JCU graduate. An alum suggested the possibility of working with Dr. Palmer's students. That connection sparked the development of course projects, and then additional courses and, a few years later, a new health care information technology major which responds to one of the Cleveland Clinic skills needs.

Challenging economic times often lead to questions about the value and utility of a liberal arts education. The education Carroll provides creates opportunities for students to develop as whole persons – their mind, body, and spirit. As we make a difference in the lives of our students, we produce graduates who think critically and analytically and are ready to advance into the corporate world and contribute to our global society.

This is what Cleveland needs. John Carroll cannot succeed without helping Cleveland succeed. So as Cleveland and, more broadly, Northeast Ohio improve economically, we're grateful to be a partner in the work of re-energizing our region and in better preparing our students for a diverse and interconnected world. ■

