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Erie must have community college

The Erie region desperately needs a community college. There is nothing new about this contention. In consultant Brian Bosworth's 2001 report on Erie County's economic health, the need for establishing a community college was identified as a top priority. The new development here: Erie County Executive Mark DiVecchio is doing something about it.

DiVecchio, other county officials and Erie School District leaders have visited Lehigh Carbon Community College near Allentown. They were suitably impressed.

Pennsylvania has 14 community colleges -- two-year institutions featuring associate's degrees, work-force-development programs and vocational training. So no matter how many dissenters pop up, Erie must have this education asset. And dissenters are out there. A recent, unscientific GoErie.com poll received 1,207 hits. Just under 62 percent answered no to the question "Does Erie County need a community college?"

For Erie's purposes, the positive news must be reinforced. A process is finally in place. Sandi Vito, deputy secretary for work-force development for the state Department of Labor and Industry, is scheduled to be in Erie with a consultant on community colleges on Nov. 30 in an event hosted by the Erie Community Foundation.

"It's something Erie County needs and northwest Pennsylvania needs," said DiVecchio. "Everyone we've talked to is excited about it. (Businesses) just think that is what is lacking in Erie County now."

There are major questions to answer, including how this is going to be paid for. Any answers must include guidance and funding from the state.

The Erie Community Foundation is weighing whether to pay for part of a community college study. But Erie Community Foundation President Mike Batchelor has already properly framed what is needed from the consultant: "What can and cannot be done" with an Erie community college. In other words, focus on what Erie must do to make this community college happen. Because it's going to happen. It has to.

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