Throughout our community, you will find them. They are running businesses, teaching our children, and caring for our sick. They are corporate leaders, bankers, artists, policymakers, entrepreneurs. They are California State University, Bakersfield alumni ... and they are a major power in the economy throughout our region.

Often the impact of the university and our graduates on the local economy goes unnoticed or, perhaps, simply unconsidered. Seventy percent of our 32,000 graduates have opted to remain in our community to pursue their careers and raise their families. They comprise a large segment of the professional work force and contribute leadership in every economic sector.

With the economy grabbing headlines and the threat of state budget cuts looming, understanding how CSUB contributes to our local economy is important. A 2004 economic impact study showed that for every $1 taxpayers invest in CSUB, an additional $4.64 is returned to the local economy. CSUB’s direct annual spending of $152 million creates nearly 4,200 local jobs.

The university and our local economy are irrefutably linked; changes to one cannot help but impact the other.

In his proposed 2008-09 state budget, Governor Schwarzenegger is jeopardizing the success of the California State University system with a $386.1 million shortfall. There is no doubt the state is facing difficult choices and cuts must be made somewhere. But, does it make sense to cut the education system that is positioned to grow California’s work force?

By 2025, California will need to import 3.2 million workers with a bachelor’s or master’s degree to meet the growing demand for skilled employees. Forty-one percent of all California jobs will require a bachelor’s degree. At our current rate only 32 percent of the state’s work force will have those necessary degrees and jobs will be forced out of state. And, in Kern County, the number of college graduates lags behind the state average.

Locally the impact of budget cuts has yet to be specified, but we do know that reductions will have significant consequences.

Our campus is funded from many sources, the largest of which is allocations from the state and student fees. These resources, commonly referred to as “general funds,” support the vast majority of
our instructional programs including faculty and staff salaries. The state allocations are the funds cut in the governor’s proposed budget.

Our budget also includes one-time and restricted funds. These sources include campus-based student fees, lottery funds and income from parking and housing. These funds vary from year to year and are not available for permanent allocations.

However, in order to fulfill our vision for excellence, we must be creative in raising resources independent of state funds. And, we are.

Our students have committed to making the campus a hub of activity and excitement. They have assessed themselves a fee to construct a $21.7 million recreation center scheduled to open this fall. The 75,130 square-foot, two-story building will change the face of the university and provide students with a first-class recreational facility.

Our community is also backing the university’s vision and we are proud to have a growing number of public-private collaborations. Last year more than $10 million in private gifts and pledges were generously donated. The university’s endowment fund, the NCAA Division I campaign, student scholarships, the Walter Stiern Library, and the Facility for Animal Care and Treatment were the major benefactors.

These gifts to the university, and in turn to our community, will enable the addition of facilities and programs that would otherwise be unattainable if we remained dependent on state funding. Innovative partnerships are already being evaluated, including construction of a hotel and conference center, leasing land for office construction along Camino Media, and an on-campus children’s museum.

While mindful to the budgetary challenges the state may impose, our vision for growth will move forward. This spring we opened the doors to a three-story science building, providing much needed laboratories, classrooms, and faculty offices. We just completed a feasibility study for the construction of new residence halls designed for first-time freshmen. The location of the new student housing has already been approved as part of the campus master plan.

We are energized with the progress we make each day toward greater excellence. We are partnering with our community in new ways and investing in the future of our region.

The university and the community are one. Our faculty, staff, students and alumni are your neighbors, friends, employees, and community leaders. What’s good for one, is good for the other.

Remember our connection in the coming months as discussions about budget cuts continue, and let your voice be heard. As you go through your day, keep our contributions to the local economy in mind. You’ll find CSUB is all around you.

CSUB…it’s your university.

###

This opinion article appeared in The Bakersfield Californian on 5/11/08.