

# Augsburg Deeply Involved in Innovative Effort to Keep Twin Cities Vital

By Jay Walljasper

In the 1990s, futurists widely speculated that cities were no longer necessary. Why would anyone remain in gritty concrete jungles when the Internet allowed us all to work anywhere we wished—deep in the woods, high on a mountaintop, nestled into a cozy small town. Yet today many cities are experiencing levels of growth not seen since World War II—including Minneapolis and St. Paul.

This remarkable turnaround is explained by a host of converging factors, ranging from plummeting crime rates to younger generations raised on city-celebrating TV shows like *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*.

But one of the chief reasons for this urban renaissance is easily overlooked—the proud refusal of millions of city dwellers to give up on the places they call home. Instead of moving out, they dug deeper in their neighborhoods—organizing public safety campaigns, clean-up crews,

restoration projects and other efforts to improve their communities.

Joining in these efforts around the country were many hospitals and colleges. These institutions are adversely affected by problems like crime, blight and unemployment in their neighborhoods. So, for both idealistic and self-interested reasons, they boosted revitalization efforts through what's known the "anchor institution" strategy, which David Murrasse, Director of the national [Anchor Institutions Task Force](#), describes as "enduring organizations that remain in their geographical settings and play a vital role in their local communities and economies."

"Colleges and hospitals are embedded in their community and have a real stake in seeing that it thrives," explains Augsburg University President Paul Pribbenow, who is chair of the [Central Corridor Anchor Partnership](#) (CCAP) in the Twin Cities.

The anchor institution idea emerged in the 1990s when the future of inner city neighborhoods around the country looked dire. But this "Eds and Meds" strategy made a difference in many neighborhoods, not just in reducing crime and curbing urban decay, but in providing jobs to keep communities vital. Anchor institutions are the largest

employer in 66 of the 100 largest U.S. inner cities, according to a study from the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City.

## **Anchored in the Twin Cities**

This strategy works even in places not experiencing the steep decline of industrial cities. San Diego, San Francisco and Minneapolis-St. Paul all sport robust strategies for lifting up challenged neighborhoods, says Murrasse, who visited Minnesota last summer to study the work of the CCAP as part of a delegation of college leaders hosted by Augsburg University.

“I’ve learned a lot from the Central Corridor anchors for our work in Philadelphia,” says Ira Harkavy, one of the pioneers of the anchor strategy at the University of Pennsylvania, who was part of the same tour. The Minneapolis-St. Paul effort stands out nationally, he notes, for the sheer size of its anchor strategy— both geographically, stretching across 15 zip codes through the heart of the two cities, and for the number and variety of institutions and funding agencies involved, Harkavy adds.

The Central Corridor Anchor Partnership was conceived in 2010 by the McKnight Foundation and the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, a partnership among 14 local foundations to ensure that the Green Line light rail project brought tangible benefits to neighborhoods along its route.

Current CCAP members are Augsburg University, M Health Fairview, Hennepin Health, Metropolitan State University, Minneapolis College (formerly MCTC), Regions Hospital/ HealthPartners, St. Catherine University (St. Kate's), St. Paul College and the University of St. Thomas.

Together these institutions employ more than 32,000 workers in the Central Corridor, educate tens of thousands of students and purchase \$2.5 billion in goods and services each year for their local operations, which point to numerous possibilities for anchors to improve the life of inner city residents.

“This is not just do-gooderism,” stresses Pribbenow of Augsburg. “This is moving beyond the charity model. We have real interests that are at play with the neighborhood. For us, this is about our students. It

contributes to their education, their safety and a vital urban environment where they live.”

Augsburg stands out as a leader in the Twin Cities’ anchor institution strategy thanks to longstanding programs that partner students and faculty with the community to increase public safety, boost local education, provide health care services, promote economic development, work with immigrant groups, train neighborhood youth, improve the urban environment and feed the hungry.

Steve Peacock, Augsburg’s Director of Community Relations who works directly with many of the projects, says they fit with Augsburg’s distinctive mission as an urban liberal arts college. “It’s one of the things that distinguishes us. We offer an opportunity for students to be engaged in the neighborhood.”

Even in a relatively prosperous region like Minneapolis-St. Paul, there’s still anxiety about an increasingly globalized economy taking away good jobs, as we saw with the closing of the St. Paul Ford Plant, and the transfer of Northwest Airlines employees when it merged with Delta. But anchor institutions—which are some of the of the Twin Cities’ biggest employers—aren’t going anywhere. Try to imagine a major hospital moving to China or Metro State setting up shop in Mexico.

The Central Corridor Anchor Partnership focuses its efforts in three areas:

## **1. Workforce Development—job training and education opportunities for lower-income residents**

CCAP has been successful at increasing the number of community residents working at member institutions: There was a six point increase from 2013 to 2015 alone, with 19 percent of employees living in Central Corridor neighborhoods. Currently, there are 32,381 partner employees working at facilities in CCAP zip codes.

Many of these jobs are in the fast-growing health care field. This momentum is expected to continue as more young people entering the job market have participated in [CCAP sponsored programs](#).

- ***Metro Scrubs Camp*** is a weeklong immersion in health care careers attended by scores of high schools students

during the summer at Augsburg University and St. Paul College. At both camps, young people get first-hand experience about what it's like to work in the health care field from real-life professionals and college instructors.

“We want to give them a glimpse of what these careers look like, and something of a college experience that makes the possibility seem more real to them,” explains Pribbenow.

Here's what it looks like: a gaggle of high school kids of all races and economic backgrounds swarm onto the Augsburg University campus at an uncharacteristically early hour one summer morning. They are here to be transformed—literally, as short pants, long African print skirts, t-shirts and summer tops disappear beneath maroon-colored medical scrubs. Almost immediately, the noise volume plummets as looks of serious curiosity cross many students' faces.

Two hours later in one of Augsburg's science classrooms, scrubs campers are learning lab procedures about blood cell counts, toxicology and blood types. This is not only hands-on learning, it's surgical gloves-on learning.

An instructor with experience in the field shows them how to use a dropper to apply urine samples onto glass slides for a toxicology study, stressing there is no room for error. “If I report to the doctor that someone has cocaine in their system, there will be some consequences if I am wrong,” she explains.

Students at the Metro Scrubs camp get a feel for emergency medical services, holistic nursing, veterinary medicine, behavioral health, physical therapy, and many other career options.

Metro Scrubs campers are generally a diverse bunch. African American, white, Asian-American and Latinos are all well represented. More than half are from low-income households. In a survey given at the end of the Augsburg camp one year, 83 percent said the camp convinced to think more seriously about attending college.

The scrubs camp faculty is also diverse. “The instructors tell their story of how they got into health care,” says Augsburg’s Steve Peacock, “which inspires the students.”

At the graduation ceremony for one Augsburg camp, speaker Hafsa Hassan tells her fellow campers, “I came here...a shy person, not knowing many of you and not knowing what was in store for me. Now, at the end of just one week, you are my friends and I am excited about college and a job in health care.”

“The graduation is a point of pride to a lot of the families where no one has ever been to college,” says Laura Beeth, System Director Talent Acquisition for Fairview Health Services. “They invite everyone in the family. And the families get to take pictures of their student talking with the president of the college.”

“It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about health care,” remembers Jicarra Holman, who attended Scrubs Camp and was a counselor at the camp the next year, before earning a psychology degree from St. Catherine University. “I just soaked it all in. The science I learned there came in useful later on and having experience as a counselor on my resume has led to a number of other positions.”

Augsburg partners on the program with HealthForce MN, which also runs scrubs camps in other parts of the state.

•**Central Corridor College (C3 Fellows) Fellowship program** provides inner city students at two and four year colleges paid work in health care fields while still in school.

Since 2012, the program has opened the door to careers for students at Minneapolis College, St. Paul College and other schools. Participating firms include Wells Fargo, US Bank, Fairview, Hennepin Health and HealthPartners.

While still in school, inner city students can earn money and acquire skills working in part-time jobs that put them on track for future opportunities. Lower-income students generally can't afford to connect with potential employers through unpaid internships, notes Minneapolis College President Sharon Pierce, so this job opportunity provides them with a chance to showcase their talents.

“The C3 Fellows program has been an effective solution for our students to gain relevant career experience through paid part-time work while they attend classes,” she explains.

More than 300 students have been hired for part-time jobs in the healthcare field as C3 Fellows. Seventy-two percent of the students in this cohort are from low-income

backgrounds, with 68 percent being students of color. They earned on average \$14.44 an hour—almost five-and-half dollars more than the average wage of community college students—while gaining experience in their field of study. In addition, their level of academic success (grades and graduation) were 10 percent higher than their peers.

“As an adult learner returning to study nursing, C3 Fellows not only helped me to hone my resume -- but they've been invaluable in helping me make those face-to-face connections with healthcare employers in the Cities,” says C3 Fellow Adam Cox, who studies at Minneapolis College. “As a result of the opportunities that I've gotten through the C3 Fellows program, I now have a patient-care job at HCMC that I love, and that is willing to work with my needs as a full-time student.”

Besides work that helps pay tuition and strengthens their resumes, C3 Fellows also get mentoring and networking opportunities, assistance in writing resumes, practice doing job interviews and coaching on financial and work skills.

“The wrap-around support is very important. Helping students continue their education can in some cases be as easy as providing a bus card or helping them figure out

child care,” explains May Xiong, Vice-President of Employment Readiness at Project for Pride in Living, a non-profit promoting economic self-reliance that teaches courses in workplace and life skills to C3 Fellows.

“These programs open their eyes to what’s possible,” says Laura Beeth of Fairview.. “This is one way to help bridge the opportunity gap in education and wages we have here in the Twin Cities.”

“It’s a real challenge to meet our future workforce needs in healthcare, and it really matters for our region’s economy,” adds Regions Hospital President and CEO Megan Remark about CCAP’s work. “We need all hands on deck to address this challenge, and we are achieving great results through this partnership that we cannot achieve as individual organizations.”

"Initiatives like these are important to for our region’s economic success,” notes Eric Muschler, Program Officer at the McKnight Foundation, which helps fund the program. “We're heading toward a labor shortage over the

next 15 years as baby boomers retire, so training qualified workers in competitive sectors is crucial to the region's future.”

## **2. Procurement—increasing the share of goods and services purchased by anchor institutions from neighborhood-based businesses**

Augsburg University [won kudos](#) for tapping locally-run firms for ten percent of construction contracts on its new Hagfors Center for Science, Business and Religion. “We spent \$3.5 million with Twin City Glass Contractors, just down the street,” says Augsburg resident Pribbenow. “That’s good for the local economy and the neighborhood right here.” Overall, 15 percent of building’s total cost were contracted to local, minority or female-owned businesses, which amounted to more than \$9 million—exceeding CCAP’s 10 percent recommendation.

Procurement includes a whole range of goods and services from window washing to office supplies to snow removal to locally grown food.

It's estimated that every \$140,000 spent on local foods translates into one more full-time job in the community, says CCAP's Ellen Watters, making the \$25 million annual food budget of participating hospitals and colleges a prime opportunity. CCAP sponsored a local food fair and other matchmaking efforts to [connect anchors with neighborhood producers](#), ranging from an indoor grower of fresh produce to a gluten-free bakery to purveyors of ethnic delicacies. The HealthEast health care system now dishes up 8000 pounds of locally grown vegetables in its kitchens each year, working through its food supplier Sodexo and Good Acre, a food hub located near the Central Corridor.

The burgeoning interest in local food has become a focus for anchor institution strategies all across the country, and Watters lists the reasons why: "The benefits for the anchors start with healthier food for students, clients, patients and staff. It's also fresher and tastier. There's a clear environmental dividend through reduced transportation of food, which helps curb climate change. It creates jobs, which means residents in nearby neighborhoods are better off and lead healthier lives. For the community, the benefits are all about job creation and keeping the money circulating in the local economy rather than being exported out-of-state."

The economic, nutritional and culinary advantages of local food are so apparent that it's difficult to find anyone opposed to the idea. But the devil is in the details, as food service managers and local food producers attest.

The mechanics of food systems at large institutions, which prepare thousands of meals at a time, cannot be transformed overnight—especially in a state where snow covers the ground a third of the year. And then there is the issue of providing local food at a price that students, patients and everyone else can afford. “When you study the food supply chain up close, it's so complex that you wonder how any food ever makes to our plates anywhere,” Watters quips.

Augsburg University now sources 20-30 percent of its food locally during harvest season, notes Josh Ahrens, who until last year handled the Augsburg account for A'viands, the Roseville-based company providing food service for the school. A contract with Bix Produce, which works with many hydroponic farms in the region, keeps the supply of some local vegetables continuing throughout winter and spring.

### **3. Transportation—providing employees and students a convenient, affordable range of options.**

Employees and students at anchor institutions can now ride light rail or buses for less, thanks to a CCAP program in which anchors offer [discounted transit cards](#). At Minneapolis Community & Technical College, transit use jumped 30 percent after the introduction of the program.

Augsburg launched the "Auggie Pass" for all undergraduate day students, which is good for unlimited rides on Metro Transit, in the Fall of 2019. Student government at Augsburg approved allocating "green fees" to support this program and the university also committed funding to underwrite the cost.

Being able to live comfortably with one or zero cars can make a big difference in the lives of many Central Corridor employees. Owning, operating and parking a car, is now the second highest household expense after housing in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. For many middle- and lower-income families who currently need two cars to get around, transportation costs actually outstrip housing costs.

The time has never been better for people across Minneapolis-St. Paul to look beyond the steering wheel for new ways to get around. Not only is convenient light rail and rapid bus service like the A line running along Snelling Avenue and Ford Parkway widely available, but the Nice Ride bikeshare program serves the Central Corridor area particularly well.

It's a well-known fact that the younger Millennial generation, and the upcoming Generation Z—today's college students—are getting drivers licenses at a later age and generally driving in lower numbers than previous generations. Uber, Lyft, plus more attention paid to safer, comfortable biking and walking routes provide other plentiful alternatives to owning a car. Even *Motor Trend* magazine admitted that young people living in cities today are less interested in buying cars and “more likely to spend the money on smartphones, tablets, laptops and \$2000-plus bikes.”

By embracing diverse transportation options, anchor institutions will help ensure their healthy futures in another important way. As the Central Corridor sees successive waves of development, land prices will climb, and supply will diminish to the point where expansion of college or medical campuses will mean building on property now devoted to parking.

