

# IF YOU BUILD IT ...

**AN ADVANCED WATER TREATMENT PROJECT** that generates electricity while preventing nitrogen from entering the Chesapeake Bay; a downtown revitalization strategy for Warren, Pa., in which buildings are updated with geothermal heating and cooling; and a partnership with Clarion County to improve the availability and affordability of carrier-class broadband services.

These are just a few of the projects that Penn State is working on with the nonprofit Pennsylvania Alliance for Cooperative Innovation (PA-AFCI) to improve critical infrastructure within the Commonwealth and to stimulate local economies by creating new jobs.

“Investment in the building, rebuilding and maintenance of our nation’s critical infrastructure are among the most important things we can do to ensure economic prosperity and the health, safety and welfare of all Americans,” said Dr. Theodore Alter, Penn State professor of agricultural, environmental and regional economics, who is involved in the PA-AFCI projects. The PA-AFCI is a member of the national AFCI, whose mission is to help its members develop and implement critical infrastructure projects—the physical structures and



*Improving infrastructure is the aim of a new initiative.*

organizational systems that support such necessities as water, energy, transportation and communication.

Last spring, Penn State’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development, a unit of Outreach, hosted and co-sponsored a Critical Infrastructure Summit with several colleges and units across the University, including Extension, which focused on identifying additional ways the University can work with government and private sectors to respond to issues regarding critical infrastructure. Alter was centrally involved in organizing and planning the summit with William Shuffstall, a senior Extension educator.

## DIVERSITY IN LEADERSHIP

**HAVING A DIVERSE POOL OF POTENTIAL LEADERS** in the Capital Region is the goal of a new effort, the Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Development Institute.

The leadership institute, which graduated its first class last spring, aims to train a multicultural group of individuals to be prepared to take on a leadership role if called on by the community. Penn State Harrisburg Continuing Education helped launch the institute, directed by Joseph Robinson Jr.

“The region needs leaders with various backgrounds, ethnicity and educational achievements to provide diversity and

new approaches to problem solving,” said Erin Shannon, acting director of Continuing Education at Penn State Harrisburg.

To become a candidate for the institute, individuals must be identified and sponsored by local community leaders. Students meet once a month for 10 months at Penn State Harrisburg’s downtown Eastgate Center and learn leadership skills through lectures, discussions, a group project and readings.

Harrisburg’s Interdenominational Ministries Conference, Prudential, WITF Public Television and Penn State all played key roles in preparing the first group of 24 participants to complete the program. For

example, students of the inaugural class hosted a community-wide forum, broadcast on WITF, with leaders from business, government, education, religious and community organizations to identify the challenges facing Harrisburg and begin to develop a strategy for confronting those challenges.

“The institute trained us to ‘think outside the box,’ to be involved in our community and to make a difference,” said Rae Talley, a member of the institute’s inaugural 2009 class.

This fall marks the beginning of the second group of students to go through the program.

# On the (LOCAL) Level

*Struggling economies around Pennsylvania need a fresh start. University-community partnerships can help*

**LOCAL OFFICIALS IN PENNSYLVANIA COMMUNITIES** facing hard times often don't know where to turn for help reviving industries, attracting a talented workforce or transforming vacant lots. A new Penn State initiative aims to partner with such regions across the state to support innovation and spur economic growth.

PA Prosperity Partnerships is an effort of Penn State Outreach's Office of Economic and Workforce Development to "convene regional groups, identify strategies and link Penn State campuses and resources around a shared agenda to drive entrepreneurship and innovation," said Dr. Tim Franklin, director of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. "The idea is to help develop, draw and retain talent and technology so that these communities can become more competitive."

## **Big Group Means Business**

The first forum of the effort was held in Fayette County in the spring. A multidisciplinary range of more than a dozen faculty and staff represented Penn State and more than 65 state and local government officials, and industry and community leaders met in a town hall-style forum to share ideas about the region's opportunities, strengths and weaknesses. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fayette County has an unemployment rate of 9.5 percent, compared with the 8.5 percent state figure.

While the team will initially work in a few pilot regions, the goal is to help in every location where Penn State has a campus. Forums have also been held in New Kensington and York.

"The focus will be on economic renewal in small industrial-based cities that have population and infrastructure assets but need to strengthen their economic engine," Franklin said. "It's in Penn State's best interests to help promote prosperity in the communities where it operates." He added that he hopes successful deployment in the pilot regions will contribute to a model for university-based economic development and regional transformation.

A Web site, **www.PAProsperityPartnerships.org**—which offers a brief Penn State Public Broadcasting-produced video, featuring speakers such as former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge and National Association of Manufacturers Senior Vice President Emily DeRocco (and Penn State alumna)—will track efforts of the initiative.