Message from the Interim President

An exciting new university and civic partnership is drawing on the brain power, creativity and connections of a number of WCU alumni, including Carolyn Comitta, mayor of the Borough of West Chester. The Center for Community Solutions was created by Mayor Comitta and former University President Greg Weisenstein to serve as central point of contact between community members or organizations that have a problem and University faculty, staff and students who can help solve the problem. The center was formally launched last year.

"Faculty, staff and students at the University have always been out working in the community on various research studies, community service projects and collaborative partnerships," notes Lisa Montgomery, '92, MBA'01, interim director for External Operations at WCU. "What our center does is to provide 'one-stop shopping' for community members seeking assistance. You don't need to call department after department trying to find the right person. We can tell you whether a University resource will be able to assist, whether you're a nonprofit looking to improve your mobile app or a township that needs help eradicating an invasive beetle from its woodlands."

The examples Montgomery gives are recent success stories. West Chester's Uptown Entertainment Alliance received help with its mobile app and East Bradford Township obtained student support to control the destructive Emerald Ash borer beetle. And they are just two of more than 25 projects completed since the center opened last year. Other completed projects include a mentoring program that pairs WCU students with high school students, work with the Chester County Department of Community Development to provide transportation to low-income areas, and social media marketing for a local fitness center. Additionally, there are 29 projects currently under way or in development for local nonprofits, municipalities, school districts, government agencies, and others.

In the summer of 2013, Mayor Comitta and Matt Bricketto, who recently retired from the position of WCU vice president of Student Affairs, attended the International Town and Gown Association's annual conference. Comitta says she was struck by the words of keynote speaker Michael G. Gartner: "If you have a university in your community, the first question you should be asking when a problem surfaces is, 'I wonder how our university can help us.'"

"People know I'm a West Chester alum and that I have a strong relationship with University administrators, faculty and staff. So I was always getting asked about how the University could help with different issues," says Comitta. "While I was happy to offer assistance, I also knew I wouldn't be mayor forever. Listening to Michael Gartner made me realize we needed to formalize the process and institutionalize this knowledge. Greg Weisenstein was in complete agreement, and made the decision to move forward with the Center for Community Solutions."

"We are getting a tremendous response from the community," notes Montgomery. "People are eager to tap into the considerable expertise that exists at WCU in many different fields and disciplines." Each project request is evaluated based on several factors, including whether resources exist at the University to assist in the problem; the size and scope of the issue; and whether the project is sustainable after the University has completed its work.

To learn more about the Center for Community Solutions contact center liaison Susan Argentieri, '75, at 610-425-7431or sargentieri@wcupa.edu.