

Butler Eagle

Downtown presence could help BC3 serve the public Oct. 21, 2017

Bringing vibrancy back to our cities might be the greatest challenge confronting the next generation. Towns like Butler could be on the brink of revival — or on the road to ruin — depending on the decisions made in the next few years by political and business leaders.

This realization came to light during the recent candidates forum, when it was disclosed that Butler County Community College would like to establish a presence in downtown Butler. BC3's 100-acre main campus is south of the city in Butler Township.

A BC3 downtown location makes all kinds of sense — a public institution of post-secondary education, dedicated to job training and accessibility, should be available to the people most in need of its offerings.

In fact, one of BC3's eight core objectives is community engagement: to "Strengthen community connections through economic/workforce development, public safety training, life-long learning, and educational/cultural partnerships," according to the college's statement of mission, vision and goals.

To put an even finer point on it, the downtown would provide both classrooms and laboratories for potential students. The college and city would mutually benefit.

As a culture we are constantly redefining ourselves. Since

the 1950s, American demographics have been marked by suburban sprawl as businesses, residential developments, schools, shopping centers, churches and recreational venues located on the perimeters of existing cities. The outward growth led to urban decay in many metropolitan areas.

But it's never that simple. Industrial mainstays leave a city or state or country. There are sudden shifts in energy supply and demand, such as wind turbines and Marcellus Shale-based natural gas. Spiraling medical insurance premiums drain municipal budgets.

And the digital age has imposed paradigm changes in us as consumers, citizens and neighbors. In the traditional mode, we did business with a neighbor based on his or her reliability and reputation; now, just go online and see how they rate with other customers.

These conditions are developing across America and around the world, yet they unfold differently in every town and region. BC3 instructors can help us optimize planning decisions by analyzing what's being observed and tried elsewhere, and applying the information that aligns with Butler's unique work ethic and values.

The concept is not that far removed from apprenticeship. It's a time-honored concept which, with some modernization, could still be used effectively by communities like Butler to harness young energy and develop creative talent.