

---

## CCRI president aims to triple workforce training efforts

(Tue, Mar 27 07) - Contributed by STERN, J. CHARLES

By J. CHARLES STERN Community College of Rhode Island President Ray Di Pasquale winces when asked if his job is more about salesmanship than education. He doesn't, however, tell you you're wrong, as the president is staking his professional reputation on a series of private business initiatives. If successful, CCRI will see an \$8 million yearly increase in private funding and subsequently enhance student services and programs. Di Pasquale, who was sworn into office Friday (he was named interim president last January and appointed to the post in July), vows to increase college funding by serving as the city's greatest business proponent, even going as far as demanding a seat at the table when the city makes pitches for businesses to locate to the area. "We must triple our workforce development training," Di Pasquale said Monday afternoon in an interview from his office overlooking Warwick and the bay to the southeast. "In three years we should be well on our way and better able to offset state budget shortfalls." Di Pasquale is personally overseeing the college's workforce training program. Under the plan, Di Pasquale aims to convince private businesses to allow his educators to train employees in a variety of workforce programs. The college offers a number of private training courses, including classes in foreign languages, electricity and engineering. Clients include Raytheon, Herff Jones and Capco Steel. Presently, the college realizes \$4 million annually in tuition payments from its workforce training program. For the college to be a success for its students and the community, that number must grow to \$12 million a year within three years. Anything short of that would be a personal failure, Di Pasquale said. To realize his expectations, Di Pasquale is taking on the role of business recruiter, city advocate and private supporter all in one. He's made it a point to leave the campus and visit various businesses. Any business that agrees to enroll employees in classes at CCRI will receive a personal visit from the president. During the visit, Di Pasquale will spend the day touring the company and, if he can, bring the media with him. His job description sounds more like that of a salesman than a president in charge of enhancing student programs and faculty leadership. Di Pasquale admits there is accuracy to the description, though he personally dislikes the analogy. "As president, I have an academic job," Di Pasquale said. "I have to be a community and business partner and very much an entrepreneur. In order to sustain and run a business appropriately, there is a part of that [which] involves selling. I have to make sure the companies know about the outstanding training we offer and the relationships we would like to share." Di Pasquale has already begun working toward attaining his workforce development revenue goals. He's reached out to the Rhode Island Department of Workforce Development, as well as the mayors of the communities of which CCRI is a part. Di Pasquale has met twice recently with Mayor Scott Avedisian. The lunch meetings were more for the two to feel each other out. The getting-to-know-you stage is about to end, Di Pasquale said. "We'll be meeting again soon and I imagine there are some things he would like from me," Di Pasquale said. "He brought me over for the city's St. Patrick's Day celebration, which I imagine was his way of testing me. I know there are some things I would like from the city." Di Pasquale wants the city to allow him a seat at the table during business meetings. If the city is meeting with business professionals, CCRI's workforce programs need to be discussed, Di Pasquale said. Di Pasquale said the partnership is two-way, as he imagines the college can help recruit businesses to the area. Increased business revenue can certainly offset municipal budget woes, the president said. "I am sure there is a lot more I will hear about from [Avedisian]." Di Pasquale said his ambitions are student-based. Should the college be successful in raising funds from the business community, the proceeds would be used to enhance student programs and expand classroom offerings. The college's education expansion plans have been slowed by dwindling state aid, he said. "We are not hiring as many faculty as we need," Di Pasquale said. "Our classrooms don't have all the equipment they should have." Di Pasquale said there are several education offerings that could be expanded with a healthier budget. While seeking to boost workforce development, Di Pasquale has made a commitment to increase graduation rates at the college. He is vowing to see a 10 percent increase in graduation rates within three years. To do so, he has mandated a greater study of incoming freshman. Academic advisors will closely follow the progress of freshmen and intervene if problems arise. Students will also be routinely surveyed about the college and what they find challenging. Again, Di Pasquale said he is banking his reputation on the goal. Students will also be encouraged to work in the community as volunteers. During the college's inauguration festivities, students and faculty volunteered with several nonprofit outfits. The same will occur next year and Di Pasquale said he is considering mandating that students volunteer in the community. "It's something that I've given a lot of thought to," Di Pasquale said. Di Pasquale is 57 and is separated from his first wife. He has one child.