

# 'Prosperous' communities help all citizens

For the past several weeks, I've been wishing people a "prosperous" new year. It seems an appropriate sentiment given the state of world affairs.

One of my friends countered, however, that we need to redefine prosperity. That got me thinking.

At Leadership Tulsa, we definitely consider a vibrant and successful business sector part of our definition of a prosperous community.

Business and industry are the economic engines that drive the success of any community. Wages support families, profits are reinvested, taxes support public services, and charities benefit when businesses and individuals feel successful and confident about the future.

The flagship program at Leadership Tulsa consists of nine days of diverse, themed activities for participants, one per month.

Last month, we spent a business day looking at Tulsa's eco-



## BUSINESS VIEWPOINT

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economic outlook and opportunities. I was pleased to learn that Tulsa is considered the fifth-best city in the nation to ride out the recession. Oklahoma City was third, but I'm not going to get competitive — I'm just going to be grateful that Oklahoma is home to so much potential at this difficult time.

But success in business can't be our only measure of prosperity.

During another class day exploring government and public services, we learn how a working infrastructure, public utilities, safety

and investment in forward-looking city development projects forms a foundation on which the rest of the community can thrive.

A proud community invests in itself and its future. We may not always agree on what that investment should look like, but if we reject the concept of investment altogether then we are no longer a prosperous community.

Education is another topic of exploration at Leadership Tulsa. Whether we're touring public schools, learning about Tulsa's innovative early childhood programs or hearing from a panel of our higher education leaders, I'm always impressed at the investment of time and talent involved here in educating the work force and leaders of our future. Sometimes that means finding mentors for students with few positive role models in their lives, or funding programs to send a backpack of food home with those who are in danger of going

hungry between school meals.

It is always a humbling experience when we explore the topics of health care and social services. It's always an eye-opening experience for our participants to learn more about the daily struggles of the most vulnerable of our citizens. The difficulties these less-fortunate individuals face in trying to get to jobs or services on an inadequate public transportation system highlights a deeper problem of a disconnected, piecemeal mosaic of private and public services.

So many good-hearted and smart people are trying so hard to make a difference in other people's lives, and they often persevere in the face of almost overwhelming odds.

So, my definition of prosperity definitely includes the support of public and private services through philanthropy and volunteerism.

Almost 100 business leaders a year make a commitment to participate in Leadership Tulsa.

They confront head-on both the opportunities and the challenges in our city. And, they often begin or enhance what may be a lifetime of service through their placement as interns on local nonprofit boards.

For me, the enthusiasm I see for helping others here is just one more reason I consider Tulsa to be America's most generous city. Adversity is confronted together and prosperity is shared — because that's what Tulsans do.

And, together, we all contribute to this community's prosperity.

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