

ITGA Larry Abernathy Award Submission

Institution Name: Pittsburg State University

City: Pittsburg, Kansas

Enrollment: 7,200 (approx.)

City Population: 20,398

Overview

Pittsburg State University and the City of Pittsburg have a long history of working together for the betterment of their students and community. The relationship dates back to 1903, when city officials provided the university with its first instructional building.

Pittsburg State University President Steve Scott made the university's town/gown relationship a priority when, in 2009, he was selected by the Kansas Board of Regents to lead the southeast Kansas campus.

As a result, the university took several proactive steps to strengthen its relationship with its community. These included the creation of a new, full-time Community and Governmental Relations position, bi-annual planning meetings with university and city staff and shared plans for future development.

These efforts were in place when, in 2012, the City of Pittsburg hired Daron Hall as its new city manager. Hall understood the importance of Pittsburg State in a city the size of Pittsburg. His municipal experience in southwest Kansas and the Kansas City metropolitan area provided him with the expertise needed to help take the partnership to the next level.

Pittsburg State University and the City of Pittsburg have shared many successes over the past three years.

These include:

- The receipt of a \$300,000 planning grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce for the development of a science and research park at Pittsburg State.
- The exchange of 100 acres of land, valued at nearly \$600,000. The exchange provides the city with much needed residential developmental land & the university with space for future expansion.
- The \$2.1M expansion and renovation of Quincy Street, a major entry point for Pittsburg State.

- The creation of a campus shuttle service through partnership with the community transportation service.

Robert W. Plaster Center

But of most interest is the addition of a \$13M Indoor Event Center on the campus of Pittsburg State University. The Robert W. Plaster Center encompasses 154,000 square-feet and houses a 300-meter indoor track, a 100-yard turf field, an 11,000 square-foot strength and conditioning center, locker rooms for football, track/field and cross country, seating for more than 1,300 and a full laundry.

The center was designed to fit the needs of the university and the community. Pittsburg had long needed an exposition-type space to attract state and regional athletic events (along with larger convention). Working with city officials the architects added kitchen facilities, outdoor access and additional electrical capacity to be able to hold these types of events.

The most incredible part of the Plaster Center is not in its amenities but in the manner in which it was funded. The Center's \$13M price tag was funded through a unique combination of private donors, student fees and municipal investment.

Pittsburg State students started the momentum in the spring of 2012 by overwhelmingly supporting the addition of a student fee. Private donors, the Plaster Foundation and Crawford County Commissioners (through the commitment of a 1 percent transient guest tax) soon joined in the effort but it was the inclusion of a \$5M investment (\$1.5M upfront with remainder paid out over 20 years) by the City of Pittsburg that sealed the deal.

Pittsburg City Commissioners were originally presented with a \$7M plan for the center. Negotiations eventually settled on the \$5M price but with an added requirement to the university. Commissioners asked the university to conduct an informational campaign to ensure community members understood the full scope of the project.

The university agreed and conducted a nearly six month community effort that included multiple town hall meetings featuring President Scott. The community was vocal in its support of the project. The end result was a unanimous city commission vote in favor of the \$5M investment.

The result? – In December of 2013, before the first shovel of dirt had been turned, the NCAA selected Pittsburg State to host its 2016 & 2018 Division II Men's and Women's National Indoor Track & Field Championship. In April of 2015, the National Junior College Athletic Association selected Pittsburg State as the host site for its 2017 & 2019 National Indoor Track and Field Championships. And several regional conferences have booked the Plaster Center for their championships. In all, eight of the first 12 weekends of 2016 are booked with track events at the Plaster Center.

Each of these events will have a major economic impact upon the city of Pittsburg and introduce thousands of parents (and potential students) to Pittsburg State University. It's a major victory for a community the size of Pittsburg and an example of what can happen when universities and their communities take the time to listen to each other ... share their visions ... and work together to turn vision into reality.

Outcome Examples:

[City of Pittsburg approves investment for Indoor Event Facility \(with photo & video\)](#)

[PSU breaks ground on indoor event center \(with photo & video\)](#)

[Plaster Center Weight & Conditioning Center Honors Donor \(with video\)](#)

[Community and Campus Gather to open Plaster Center \(with photo & video\)](#)