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Richard Telfer . . . "I think it clearly brings us visibility, because we've been in the final game for six years in a row."

More than just pride for this campus town

UW-Whitewater's football success adds economic benefit to city, region

BY KATHY BERGSTROM
Special to The Business Journal

When University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Chancellor Richard Telfer visits an alum or potential donor, he often totes a Division III football championship hat or a mug — some token of the team's success.

No matter whether they're giving to the athletic department or the university as a whole, people like being tied to a good team, he said.

"When we meet with prospective students, when we meet with alumni, when we meet with prospective donors . . . that's a topic that we're ready to talk about," Telfer said regard-

ing the football team's success.

A winning football team boosts campus pride, but it also brings other benefits to the university and community, UW-Whitewater officials say.

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This past season the school's football team won its second consecutive Division III national championship. For six straight years, the team has traveled to Salem, Va., to play in the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl, bringing home the championship in 2007, 2009 and 2010.

"I think it clearly brings us visibility, because we've been in the final game for six years in a row. We're one of two teams in Division III that's been on national television six times in a row," Telfer said.

Whitewater faced the same team from the University of Mount Union of Alliance, Ohio, in all six Stagg Bowl games.

The national television exposure means people in the region as well as across the country have heard of the university, Telfer said. They might also read about the football team in the newspaper or see the commercial the university is allowed to add during the championship game, he said.

The university can't say it's raised more money because of the football team's success, but giving has increased during a bad economy.

The university raised close to \$30 million between 2006 and 2010, a record amount over a four-year period, said Jon Enslin, assistant chancellor of university advancement and president of the UW-Whitewater Foundation.

"I think what we've found is that our people feel really good about Whitewater. And they try to help as much as they can," he said. "I

think the football team's success has led to a positive feeling in that regard."

Dale Kent, executive vice president and chief financial officer of West Bend Mutual Insurance Co., West Bend, is a 1974 graduate of UW-Whitewater and believes the football team's success could bring more corporate sponsorships.

West Bend Mutual bought a sponsorship package four years ago, "and we've been very pleased with the exposure it's given us," he said. "Obviously in light of their continued success and the continued increase in attendance that comes with their success, we're certainly apt to re-up that sponsorship as the years go by."

The university's enrollment also is increasing, and football and other athletic programs are one aspect students consider when choosing a school, Telfer said.

Whitewater's 2010-11 enrollment reached

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a record high of more than 11,500.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Kevin Brunner, Whitewater's city manager, said "there's definite economic benefit when the university football team has games and there are 10,000 to 12,000 people attending those football games. There's a ripple effect in the local economy," he said.

The city can't point to any new business starts tied to the football team, but "I think it certainly had augmented and helped existing businesses quite a bit," Brunner said.

Local businesses also sell a lot of Warhawks championship merchandise, Telfer said.

A study completed by university faculty and staff quantifies the economic impact of the football program and entire athletics department on the tri-county region of Walworth, Rock and Jefferson counties.

The study, which was conducted during the 2009 football season, found that the average travel party attending a football game spent an average of \$35.58 at restaurants, \$17.86 at grocery stores and \$13.66 on gas and transportation items on game days. The survey excluded students.

The study estimated a direct economic impact of \$672,162 on the community from home football games, and a total economic impact of \$924,936.

The entire UW-Whitewater athletic program directly injects more than \$1.8 million into the

local economy with a total of \$2.7 million in total economic impact, according to the study. It also creates more than 40 jobs in the tri-county area.

Russell Kashian, a professor of economics at UW-Whitewater and one of the study's authors, said in addition to the economic impact the team's success creates a national name for the university and that probably helps with student recruitment.

"When young people are looking at universities to attend, it moves them up," he said.

Attendance at football games increases following a championship year, statistics from the university's athletic department show. There is additional benefit if the season is extended with playoff games, although those games are not as well attended because of cold weather and other conflicts, said Paul Plinske, athletic director and also an author of the economic study.

Last fall, the university had five regular-season home games, and attendance set records for two of those games. Attendance totaled 39,848 for an average of 7,970 fans per game, compared with attendance of 36,079 for six regular season home games in 2009 with an average attendance of 6,013.

Attendance in 2009 had declined from an average of 6,827 per game in 2008.

The university raised adult ticket prices from \$8 to \$10 this year, and ticket sales generated \$85,000 in revenue, compared with between \$50,000 and \$55,000 in previous years. The school generated an additional \$25,000 in parking revenue from the home games.



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