You don’t need me to tell you that Robert Morris University has changed – tremendously – since it was founded as a school of accountancy back in 1921. Certainly, the last six years have witnessed extraordinary growth and transformation as a result of our transition to a university.

Of course, we don’t want growth for growth’s sake; we want our expansion to be strategic. Urban planners have a term for this – they call it smart growth. It means growth that is sustainable into the future and that builds on a community’s historic strengths and assets.

That principle guides us as we expand our academic programs, and as we seek to contribute to the well-being of the Pittsburgh region. An area in which we are doing both is health care, one of Western Pennsylvania’s leading industries. Despite its world-class medical facilities, the Pittsburgh region’s aging population means that demand for quality health care threatens to outpace supply.

The nation’s nursing shortage has been well-documented, and it was partly in response to this that RMU began offering nursing degrees in 2003. This fall, our School of Nursing and Health Sciences unveiled a Bachelor of Science degree program in nuclear medicine technology. Although a majority of workers in this field have a four-year degree, and licensing requirements will eventually call for one, no other school in Western Pennsylvania offers a bachelor’s degree program.

Pennsylvania also faces a critical shortage of physicians, particularly in fields such as pediatrics, internal medicine and family practice. In 2005, we launched our Pre-Medicine Program, which we’ve recently enhanced through an innovative partnership with Allegheny General Hospital (AGH) and the Drexel University College of Medicine. While still undergraduates, select RMU students will gain valuable clinical experience at AGH and then attend Drexel for their medical degree.

These programs emphasize professionally focused, applied learning – which is nothing new at RMU. Those qualities have been part of a Robert Morris education since we were known primarily as a business school. Of course, our School of Business remains one of our key strengths, and the respect that it continues to earn among Pittsburgh’s corporate community is reflected in recent gifts from the PNC Foundation and the United States Steel Foundation.

Smart growth, after all, means building on your traditions, not abandoning them. After reading this issue of President’s Insider, I think you’ll agree this is exactly what we are doing, and that it will pay dividends for our students and our community for years to come.

Sincerely,

Gregory G. Dell’Omo, Ph.D.
Robert Morris University has long been known for providing a hands-on, professionally focused education that allows students to move seamlessly from the classroom to the workplace. We also have a long history of partnerships with the region’s leading employers and institutions, which have strengthened our curriculum and given our students valuable real-world experience. These partnerships have linked us to the region’s economy, and made us sensitive to the needs of Greater Pittsburgh as well as the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Our new Scholars-Articulation Program builds on both these traditions. It is a unique collaboration between RMU, Allegheny General Hospital (AGH) and the Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia. The program’s mission is to increase the number of highly qualified physicians serving the people of Ohio, Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

A 2005 RMU study found that only 36 percent of the physicians in Western Pennsylvania attended medical school in-state. The study also found that students who leave Pennsylvania for their medical education often do not return. This is a big problem for our region, which is facing a critical shortage of physicians, and it prompted RMU to launch its Pre-Medicine Program in 2005.

"With an aging population and fewer people to care for them, we really need more investment in programs like this," said Connie Cibrone, AGH president and chief executive officer.

The Scholars-Articulation Program focuses on recruiting qualified high school students to enroll in the Pre-Medicine Program in preparation to attend Drexel University College of Medicine. Preference will be given to students from Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and to those who want to pursue careers in family medicine, general internal medicine or pediatrics.

The program, which gets underway this fall, will accept a maximum of five students each year. Applicants must have a minimum SAT score of 1270 (critical reading and math only), and a minimum high school GPA of 3.5. As undergraduates, students in the program complete an internship at AGH, where they have the opportunity to participate in significant medical research.

After receiving their undergraduate degree from RMU, students will be admitted to Drexel University College of Medicine as long as they achieve the prerequisite GPA and MCAT scores. During their third and fourth years in medical school, students return to AGH for at least one required third-year clerkship and one fourth-year rotation.

The Scholars-Articulation Program is just one example of RMU’s new medical school partnerships. In November 2007, RMU signed a linkage agreement with Palmer College of Chiropractic (PCC) in Davenport, Iowa, giving pre-med students the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree from RMU and a Doctor of Chiropractic degree from PCC in just seven years. PCC is among the top chiropractic colleges in the nation and widely accepted as the birthplace of the discipline. RMU also signed a linkage agreement with the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine in Erie, Pa., which will reserve 10 places for qualified RMU pre-med students.

Future plans call for similar relationships with veterinary, dental and podiatry schools. All of these programs represent an opportunity to attract exemplary students who might not have otherwise chosen to enroll at RMU, or even to attend college in Western Pennsylvania.
The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) trading floor has long been an indelible symbol of the American economic system, popularized on the silver screen in films such as *Wall Street*.

On the surface, the NYSE is a confusing landscape where chaos rules. In reality, it’s a purposeful, systematic platform for buyers and sellers to trade shares of stock. It is the barometer of the American business climate. The question for a business school is, how do you explain such a bewildering environment to students when you’re so far away from Wall Street? It’s quite simple, really – you bring Wall Street to your students.

That’s what RMU will be doing with its innovative new PNC Trading Center. Made possible by a $520,000 grant from the PNC Foundation, the charitable arm of The PNC Financial Services Group, the trading center will be a state-of-the-art facility that will offer students dynamic, hands-on experience in financial trading strategy.

The PNC Trading Center, modeled after the NYSE trading floor, will feature a fully functional trading room complete with real-time stock tickers and computer stations with market information and analytical software. The center also will include workstations in a two-story stadium arrangement, allowing for ease of observation and instruction, a feature that will set it apart from similar trading rooms at other business schools.

Thomas K. Whitford, chief administrative officer of PNC, sees the trading center as both a benefit to students and as an investment in the region’s economic vitality, by helping draw exceptional business students to the University.

“The PNC Trading Center will provide business students at Robert Morris University with an exceptional learning experience,” said Whitford. “It will allow them to understand the real-world impact of certain financial trades in a unique educational setting.”

Another exciting addition to the School of Business will be the U. S. Steel Videoconferencing and Technology Resource Center. This high-tech center, made possible by a $500,000 grant from the United States Steel Foundation, will allow the School of Business to provide distance learning and corporate training. It also will link the school’s undergraduate programs in Moon Township to its graduate programs in downtown Pittsburgh.

Multimedia computer workstations, including Dell and iMac computers, will familiarize students with the software and databases that drive modern business decision-making. The videoconferencing center also will serve as an important business and economics research center as well as a corporate training resource.

RMU alumna Susan Kapusta ’81, general manager of the United States Steel Foundation, sees the new center as a benefit to both U. S. Steel and RMU.

“We’re looking for the type of high-quality talent you’re growing here at Robert Morris University,” she said. “Recruiting and retaining quality employees is always a challenge. RMU is helping us meet this challenge. We think this is a great investment for U. S. Steel, and we’re very proud to be a part of it.”

“Completion of the trading center and the videoconferencing facility will enhance the education of every RMU business student,” said David L. Jamison, J.D., RMU provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. “These additions will bridge classroom theory and the real world of high-stakes corporate activity they will encounter in their careers.”
Pennsylvania is hurting for doctors. And that’s not all.

“There are shortages in many health care specialties,” said Connie Cibrone, president and chief executive officer of Allegheny General Hospital. “Obviously, there’s a nursing shortage. But there’s also a radiology technician shortage and a lab technician shortage. In many of our fields, there’s a real need.”

This past fall, Robert Morris University launched two new health care degree programs aimed at addressing this shortfall of medical workers – a Bachelor of Science degree in nuclear medicine technology and a Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) degree, both in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences.

“Having these two unique programs identifies RMU as an institution with vision that recognizes and responds quickly to the expected needs of the health care industry,” said Lynda J. Davidson, Ph.D., RN, dean of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences. “Our administration and faculty are clearly committed to providing an education that addresses community and national needs. We are rapidly building a reputation for quality within the health care professions.”

Davidson was a driving force in establishing RMU’s new D.N.P. program, the first State Board of Nursing-approved program in Pennsylvania. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses whose advanced education and training allows them to provide a wide range of preventive and diagnostic medical services. They are increasingly in demand, in large part due to a shortage of primary care physicians. RMU health care economist Stephen Foreman, Ph.D., believes that rising demand for health care, coupled with skyrocketing costs, will require that nurse practitioners take over primary care entirely.

That means they will need even more training. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing has recommended that by 2015, doctorate-level education become the requirement for entry into the field for advanced practice nurses, including nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and nurse anesthetists.

Similarly, the Society for Nuclear Medicine has recommended that a bachelor-level degree become the standard for nuclear medicine technologists by that same year. RMU is the first school in Western Pennsylvania to offer a four-year degree in nuclear medicine technology. The University’s new Department of Nuclear Medicine, headed by Angela Bires, Ed.D., RT(N), CNMT, is headquartered in the newly renovated Benjamin Rush Center, former home of the RMU admissions office.

Nuclear medicine is a highly sensitive diagnostic imaging tool that allows physicians to detect diseases and study organ function. Because it produces low-resolution images, it is increasingly combined with other imaging techniques, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This so-called “fusion imaging” requires skills that make a bachelor’s degree indispensable, according to J. Scott Sebal, chief nuclear medicine technologist at UPMC South Side.

Sebal will be a clinical instructor in RMU’s nuclear medicine technology program, in which students will complete clinical rotations at UPMC facilities. “I think RMU is going to have the most progressive program in the country when it comes to nuclear medicine,” said Sebal.