

*TRENDS +
TENSIONS*

HIGHER
EDUCATION

*STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP*

SERIES

PARTNERSHIP:
SAINT FRANCIS
UNIVERSITY AND
THE CURRY SUPPLY
COMPANY

BHDP

CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS



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SERIES OVERVIEW

BHDP, an award-winning international architectural firm, is recognized for innovative and inspiring solutions in architecture, planning, interior design, experiential graphic design, project management, and strategic consulting. BHDP serves seven markets—Workplace, Higher Education, Industrial, Discovery & Science, Healthcare, Community & Government, and Retail from its offices in Cincinnati and Columbus, OH, and Charlotte and Raleigh, NC.

Over the past year, BHDP solicited higher education leadership of independent colleges and universities around the nation to participate in an exciting endeavor—to submit their stories that represent powerful and constructive Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and College-Community Collaborations (CCC) through a case study survey.

These submitted stories of strategic alignments between the institutions and private, public, and/or government partners in the community served as a launching point through which BHDP identified the most compelling case studies and best practices to be featured and presented in the higher education industry. Upon receiving many impressive submissions, three colleges were identified and selected for the outstanding stories of their successful

business partnerships that greatly impacted their institutions, corporate entities, and their communities. The three independent colleges are Saint Francis University in Loretto, PA, Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA, and Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA. As the BHDP team took a deep dive into the inner workings of each project, it was discovered that each of these outstanding institutions implemented very dynamic, yet unique strategies that resulted in outstanding projects with successful outcomes.

Upon further evaluation and through various interviews with the institutional, government, private, and public partners who were instrumental in each project, it was evident that these strategic partnership models could be replicated across the higher education industry. During these unprecedented and tumultuous times for the higher education communities and across the global spectrum, strategic partnerships such as these may be an answer to the question of economic instability that colleges and universities face.



INTRODUCTION

Saint Francis University, the oldest Catholic-Franciscan college in the United States, is located in Loretto, PA. Holding true to their mission of helping students grow into compassionate, successful professionals through a culture of faith, generosity, respect, discovery, and joy has always been their priority. As with other private, independent colleges across the country, these unprecedented times have prompted a look into new ways to enhance growth. Strong administrative leadership at the helm has helped navigate the uncharted waters. Currently in his 9th year of the Presidency (21 years at the University), Fr. Malachi Van Tassell brings to the table a business background as well as a heart for the mission.

Beginning as a faculty member in the Shield School of Business, Fr. Malachi has a strong background in public accounting, taxation, and finance which gives him a unique perspective to see the business side of academia. As stated in an interview with the BHDP team, Fr. Malachi reiterated, "Looking at the institution through a business lens, I realize the importance of some of the basics, surplus versus deficit, but also the importance of revenue streams, diversification of revenue streams, especially for a small school like us. We're a small Catholic school. We want to be in business for many, many years because we want to educate young people of faith to go into the world and be light in the darkness. So, the mission is my primary thrust, but the business background that I bring has really helped, in many ways, to move us forward."

MOVING FORWARD

This thrust forward has resulted in a dynamic strategic partnership with the Curry Family of Businesses. This partnership is strengthening the academic experience for the students and paving the way for the future financial health of the University, resulting in an increase in the University's presence in the downtown Altoona community.

When evaluating options for strategic growth in this economic climate, Saint Francis University recognized that diversifying its strategies as an organization was a must. Searching for innovative partnerships became a strategic growth mindset that they worked to achieve, but when the time came to act, they realized that one of the most organic strategic partnerships they cultivated over the years was with the Curry Family of Businesses.

This was due to the fact that, in 2018, after emerging from a restructuring, Fr. Malachi charged Dr. Frank Montecalvo to be the VP of Innovative Partnerships. The University emerged with an innovative spirit, and in searching for new streams of revenue, Fr. Malachi gave Dr. Montecalvo three criteria when looking for innovative partnerships. The partnerships had to bring new students, additional revenue, and/or create employment opportunities for graduates. Over time a relationship was built with The Curry Family of Businesses that fulfilled all three of the criteria.

The Curry Supply Company is a generational family business celebrating its 90th year in 2023. What began as a general store facility in Martinsburg, PA, selling supplies to the local farming community, has expanded into a manufacturing and industrial company serving many industries across the country.

As the strategic planning at the University level moved forward, simultaneous events took place. Because of the relationships SFU had with the business community, they saw that downtown Altoona was in the midst of a revitalization. They knew they always wanted to have a greater presence in Altoona due to the University being perceived as "on top of a mountain." The downtown location would bring that greater geographic footprint they sought.

Past success with streamlining students through Curry's businesses for internships and jobs laid the foundation from which a new level of their strategic partnership formed. According to Curry Representatives Mark Ritchey and Ron McConnell, the strategic partnership was a great fit for them as well. At the time, they were in the market to relocate their corporate headquarters, and the downtown Altoona location looked very desirable due to the economic development the area was undergoing. Additionally, their relationship with Saint Francis University was identified as a partner with the same values and mission that could help resolve some of the issues the company could address through the research and development arm of the University. Furthermore, Curry saw the goals and strategic needs of the leadership team with Saint Francis University align with their own goals for growth.



FR. MALACHI VAN TASSELL

DR. FRANK MONTECALVO

As a result of the strategic discussions and planning, an opportunity arose that was presented by the Curry Company to Saint Francis University during the pandemic to invest a significant amount of money to revitalize the property located in Altoona's historic district on the 1400 block of 11th Avenue. The building was originally constructed as the first Sears Roebuck & Company and JC Penney stores in the city's commercial corridor. This section of Altoona began experiencing an economic renaissance, and the building was designated as part of the City of Altoona/Logan Township Enterprise Zone.

Ultimately, the Curry Company decided they would be moving their headquarters to the newly renovated building. Since they were interested in SFU serving as their research arm and the relationship between the two organizations became more solid, Fr. Malachi and the SFU leadership team decided to take the risk, and in May 2022, Saint Francis University opened the Curry Innovation Center in cooperation with The Curry Supply Company.

According to a press release by Erin McCloskey, VP of University Communications and Marketing, "By bringing together forward-thinking entrepreneurial leaders, SFU and Curry have developed a partnership that has resulted in various interesting outcomes." These outcomes that are emerging from the Curry Innovation Center are stated by Erin McCloskey and Dr. Frank Montecalvo:

“ What started on a paper napkin was a vision from both SFU and Curry leaders, seeking what they have in common and different that they can put together to create something unique. The two entities have formed a relationship with strategic innovative leaders at the top who were willing to take an educated risk. ”



Sears, Roebuck & Co. Opens August 1929



CURRY Innovation Center Opens April 2022



Curry Supply Holdings

CURRY INNOVATION CENTER



THE IMPACT

This has resulted in the success of the strategic partnership that led to working towards a common goal and a commitment to delivering results designed to positively impact career placements and workforce development, product research and development, advanced manufacturing processes, and professional development throughout the region.

SFU's Curry Innovation Lab will provide hands-on, real-world experiential learning opportunities to SFU engineering, environmental and business students, and their research will help Curry employees solve real-world problems. Among the projects are a Blue Knob Mapping and Modeling Project with Environmental Engineering students, a Lube Tank Mechanical and Hydrodynamics Study completed with General Engineering students, and a Data Visualization Inventory Project that partnered with Saint Francis' Shields School of Business. These are studies to help ensure that sloshing of liquids doesn't compromise the structural integrity of tanks on lube trucks; studies to help improve inventory management for the fluid power arm of the firm; and fermentation studies to enhance the production of beer, wine, and cheese for the firm's Levery Brewing arm.

The Curry Innovation Center will also host Youth STEM education such as the STEM Powered Summer Camp,

adult degree programs through Francis Worldwide: School of Continuing Studies, the residency portion of SFU's newest program: Executive Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership and Innovation, and a place to address Workforce Development needs such as healthcare job training from entry-level to executive leadership.

"The Curry building project cost between \$7 million and \$8 million," according to Steve McKnight, CEO of the Altoona Blair County Development Corp who stated this in an article by the Altoona Mirror. According to the University Leadership, the financing was a collaborative effort between the Curry Supply Company and Saint Francis University via donors, internal and external investors, public subsidies, grants, and tax credits due to the building being in the downtown historic district.

To date, the strategic partnership has made a positive impact on enrollment and other outcomes for both Saint Francis University and The Curry Company. The strategic partnership that resulted in the Curry Innovation Center has benefitted the University and the student academic experience and has become part of the institutional strategy in all divisions of the University. In addition, it has enhanced business relationships in the region, as well as fostered economic growth for the community.

ABOUT BHDP

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To learn more, connect with colleagues, and get involved in a future roundtable, please reach out to Paul Orban.

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