



Pictured (left to right): Kent State President Todd Diacon and Kent City Manager Dave Ruller

Partnerships Have Redefined Kent State and the City of Kent

Kent City Manager Dave Ruller remembers the day he met Kent State University's then-President Lester A. Lefton nearly two decades ago at the Franklin Square Deli to talk about Kent.

Lefton didn't mince words. He wanted to make Kent State great, he told Ruller, but he couldn't do it with a deteriorating downtown, parts of which he pronounced "a piece of crap," Ruller recalls. "I was like, 'OK, put your money where your mouth is.'"

During their discussion, the seeds of Kent's downtown revitalization were planted and a new era of cooperation between the city and the university was born. The results were substantial.

The city tore down entire blocks of old buildings to make way for Acorn Alley and its shops and restaurants. The university built the Kent State University Hotel and Conference Center. The PARTA bus garage and parking deck were erected. And the Lefton Esplanade walkway was formed to create a gateway that connects the campus and downtown.

Though Lefton retired in 2014, Kent State President Todd Diacon and Ruller continue to maintain the fruitful relationship, which has created a rising tide that lifts both the city and the university.

Today, when Kent State surveys first-year students about why they chose the university, they name the look and feel of its Kent Campus, as well as the city of Kent, among their top reasons for attending, Diacon says. Even so, he acknowledges that there's more work to be done.

Recently, Diacon and Ruller partnered to redevelop East Main Street, or state Route 59, a busy four-lane thoroughfare that borders the front of the Kent Campus and threads through downtown.

The city has committed to improvements that include making the road a boulevard with a landscaped median, linking Horning Road to Overlook Drive and improving pedestrian safety.

The university is building Crawford Hall, currently taking shape as the new home of the Ambassador Crawford College of Business and Entrepreneurship. It faces the roadway, an imposing new presence on the campus.

Diacon says he has a long list of future collaborations—for example, a new, state-of-the-art ice facility and a joint Juneteenth celebration.

However, the following stories highlight some current partnerships the city and the university celebrate today.