This February I announced the third major Initiative of my presidency, focusing on the University and its relationship to the surrounding community.

Since the founding of Salisbury University in 1925, the area community has played a significant role in ensuring the existence and success of our campus. Over the course of SU’s 79-year history, the media, business and political leaders, and citizens of the city of Salisbury and the region often have stood up for and supported the University.

Were it not for this support, SU would not be the exceptional institution it is today. SU’s mission has always been to serve the people of the Eastern Shore by training teachers, educating citizens, serving as a cultural center and acting as a prime mover of the regional economy.

Still, the relationship has not been trouble-free. Conflicts between communities and their universities are not unique to the Eastern Shore nor are they new. The very notion dates back to 13th century Oxford and Cambridge universities where students dressed in academic gowns and thus were distinguishable from other townspeople, creating a “we/they” perception.

Nevertheless, what unites us in Salisbury is far greater than what separates us.

At an open community meeting, I announced a series of initiatives to improve relations between the larger community and the University. They are:

- Increase student housing.
- Enhance student interactions with the greater community.
- Identify ways to mentor proper student-neighborhood behavior.
- Establish a Town-Gown Council.
- Work to resolve friction between students and area residents.
- Develop multifaceted community recreational and educational opportunities at SU that will bring more local citizens and their children to campus on a regular basis.
- Promote ways in which the Salisbury University Police can work effectively with other police departments.
- Provide additional scholarships earmarked for local high school students.

Much has already been done toward improving University-community relations. On February 18, area residents and community leaders including Salisbury Mayor Barrie P. Tilghman ‘73; Stephanie Willey ’82, president-elect of the Chamber of Commerce; Hugh M. Laughlin, chair of the Greater Salisbury Committee; Glenn Bury ’98, president of Urban Salisbury; Salisbury attorney and community activist Mark Tilghman; and George “Rocky” Burnett, neighborhood association leader, enthusiastically endorsed this program. They spoke with genuine goodwill toward the campus and the role it plays in our region. I am grateful for their endorsement.

The students, faculty and staff of SU, nearly 8,000 in number, represent a third of the population of the city and nearly 10 percent of the county. The economic impact of the University is conservatively estimated at $140 million annually. Without a doubt, SU is a driving force in the regional economy, and we want to contribute to the region’s growth and success.

If you would like to find out more about the planned initiatives, visit the SU Web site at www.salisbury.edu/admin/prez/speeches/TownGownInitiative.pdf.

If you are an alum living in the area who would like to become involved, please let us know. I look forward to making the Partners for Progress initiatives a reality in the months and years ahead.