

In a post-pandemic world, the future should belong to Quincy.

For generations, the story of America featured increasing urbanization, with economic opportunities disproportionately concentrated in sprawling and expensive cities. Talent, it was said, would always be drawn to Chicago or St. Louis, not places like Quincy. The big would get bigger, with businesses relocating to ever larger population centers.

The bias against small cities and rural counties, though, has started to diminish in recent years. Specifically, Quincy's river-city status, educational institutions, historic neighborhoods, robust manufacturing base, great employers, access by rail and air, commitment to the arts, and the intangible benefits of civic pride have created the conditions for robust economic and population growth.

The pandemic has the potential to accelerate the pace of positive change in Quincy. COVID-19 has been a sobering reminder of the price of high population density, where disease spreads quickly. Quincy feels safer than larger cities, and not without reason. The pandemic also has taught us that much work can be done without the breathtaking expense of city life, thanks to high-speed internet and video conferencing.

Can Quincy capitalize in this new environment, attracting more and younger people to our city? Absolutely. Here are two ways it can be done.

First, we need a culture of relentless creativity, where people have the opportunity to start new businesses and where capital and low-cost space are available for those with the willingness to try something new. Quincy can become a place synonymous with innovation, a place where computer scientists and engineers, but also history and music majors, can find the ideal conditions for work and play.

Second, Quincy needs a workforce that will attract and retain more employers. Quincy already has the graduates of very good high schools and community colleges, but we lag behind some other high-achieving cities in the number of persons with four-year baccalaureate degrees. We need to build on our successes in K-12 education and community college programs and work toward greater four-year and graduate degree attainment in Quincy.

Not surprisingly, the last point speaks directly to the 160-year role of Quincy University in the life of our community. Other universities in Illinois and Missouri will always play an important part in Quincy, but ours is the only university in the county, let alone in the heart of the city. Quincy's future ultimately will be most secure when a vibrant network of internships, research partnerships, cooperative ventures, fine arts programming and special events more fully connect Quincy University and its students, faculty, and staff with Quincy, the city.

We should not rest, and I will not rest, until every student at Quincy University knows a great job will be available in Quincy following graduation. New graduates should also know they can create successful new businesses in our region. We should not rest until every graduate of Quincy University is tempted never to leave this caring and kind community on the banks of the Mississippi.