



## **Social Enterprise Institute established at Elizabethtown College**

Rather than concentrate on profits, social enterprises focus on people and the community. Though revenue-generating—nonprofit or for-profit—these endeavors apply commercial strategies to improve human and environmental wellbeing. The bottom-line goal is social, cultural, economic or environmental outcomes. Though social enterprises might look like a traditional business on the surface, underlying are symbiotic relationships.

Ten Thousand Villages. Tom's Shoes. Warby Parker. Newman's Own.

### **Why Elizabethtown College?**

The social enterprise concept perfectly aligns with the College's belief that learning is most noble when used to benefit others and that students should be educated to lead rich lives of purpose and meaning while advancing independent thought, personal integrity and social responsibility. With that in mind, Elizabethtown has established the Social Enterprise Institute (SEI). The SEI—Real Innovation. Real Solutions. Impacting Lives.—gives back to the community—domestically and internationally—while utilizing the strengths of corporate and business partnerships, students, and faculty and staff members.

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"Social enterprise attempts to solve the riddle of pairing industrial science with social science and embedding it in a business model that enables a sustainable solution to a persistent social problem," explained Jim Reeb, director of E-town's new Institute.

Philanthropy and government programs attempt to solve persistent social problems but universally fail, Reeb said. Philanthropy, he noted, often traps those it intends to help by simply giving but not following through. "This is evident in Africa where there are rusting hulks of things donated that haven't been used." And, government programs are mostly inefficient and ineffective, he said, adding that "neither approach has proven to be sustainable on its own."

Reeb, an impact investment banker, is a managing principal with New York-based TAG Impact Partners. He has more than 30 years of experience in management consulting, supply chain, corporate real estate and manufacturing development advisory services, and he has worked with 85 of the Fortune 500.

"(Social enterprise) is the basis of my values," he said in a phone interview. "My background instilled in me to give back. Happiness comes from enhancing the lives of others." But Reeb said he learned that he was not meant to be on the front line in enhancing lives. "My strength is not to be a nurse, for instance, but to help those who help others to do it more efficiently. "I was given the gift of 'provisioning'."



He sought out Elizabethtown as a home for the SEI because the College was a perfect mold waiting to be filled. “With the motto, stewardship, the focus on peace and enhancing the lives of others, focus on real-world learning and a culture that enables a cross-discipline team, plus collaboration between faculty and adjunct faculty, it was a perfect platform,” he said.

“Jim brought his idea to the Business Department,” said Rick Basom, executive director of sponsored research in the College’s Office of Sponsored Research and Programs. “Sylvester (Williams) saw potential, championed it and brought it to the school. It was a natural fit for the Office of Sponsored Research and Programs.

“It expands our notion of sponsorship. With the federal government it was the same old approach. You submit a grant application and then you take something you care about and shape it to fit the available money.”

SEI, he said, takes a social good and finds impact investors who want the same thing. “We are tapping a new funding source.” As a matter of fact, Basom said, Reeb’s position at Elizabethtown and the Institute, itself, is totally sponsored by outside investors; no money comes from the college.

The SEI, Basom said, really brings to life the mission of the College. “I believe that the best real-world learning occurs when the results actually impact lives in positive ways,” Basom said. “This is the mission of the SEI – to generate sponsored projects that impact lives through engagement with our students and faculty.”

Reeb agrees. The understanding of the concept of social enterprise, he said, must begin in college. “It is imperative that it be a part of a multi-level education,” he said. “We are looking to educate the leaders of tomorrow’s social change. This needs to come from Higher Education, at the formative stage.

“You have engineering in one building and social sciences in another. They don’t often talk to each other. But a social scientist with an engineer can solve a problem in Ghana.”

Basom compared SEI to a pipeline. At one end, he said, is a basic idea for a solution to a social problem; at the other end is the solution. In between is conceptualizing, research and development, a prototype, an alpha test and beta test, the business plan and the launch—all teaching and collaborative opportunities.

In addition to Basom in oversight and Reeb as director, Bill Gordon, Elizabethtown College adjunct business and engineering faculty member, is project manager for the SEI.

Thus far, the projects address “the health of truck drivers in the wealthiest country to the health of the people in the poorest country in the world,” said Reeb. First up is the Trucker Wellness Centers Inc.—the prototype is scheduled to be unveiled at the [Mid-American Truck Show](#) in March.



*A bit more on the director:*



James Reeb has been responsible for strategic planning, business platform design, location analysis, global investment strategies, capital market financing options and infrastructure and facility development. He earned dual bachelor's degrees, with honors, in business administration/ accounting and civil/industrial engineering and an MBA, with honors, in real estate and finance from Temple University. Post graduate, he was executive doctor of business administration from University of Glasgow, Scotland, and a Harvard Business School PMD executive fellowship in Strategic Leadership. Reeb is a certified public accountant, a counselor of real estate and is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.



**About the Author :** [E.A. Harvey](#)

E.A. (Elizabeth) Harvey is the communications manager and news editor at Elizabethtown College. She has worked in the Office of Marketing and Communications since 2008, after more than two decades as a newspaper feature writer. She holds a bachelor's degree in corporate communication from Elizabethtown College.

### **Additional Background Social Enterprise Defined**

The short definition: A social enterprise is an organization that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well-being, rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders. The widest definition: Social enterprises are revenue-generating businesses with a mission. Whether operated by a non-profit organization or by a for-profit company, a social enterprise has two goals: to achieve social, cultural, community economic or environmental outcomes; and, to earn revenue. On the surface, many social enterprises look, feel, and even operate like traditional businesses. But looking more deeply, one discovers the defining characteristics of the social enterprise: the mission is the driver of the organization, with income generation playing an important supporting role. Often but not always a social enterprise is an enterprise, owned at least in part by a non-profit organization, that is using entrepreneurial methods to accomplish social goals and providing its profits to its owner(s) for use in continuing their core missions