

Making a Positive Urban Impact

Part One by Tom Harvath

Like so many other midwestern industrial cities, St. Louis, MO, saw its manufacturing base decline over the past 40 years. Led by the automobile, shoe manufacturing, and defense industries, that decline was coupled with a notable decrease in the city population. From 1950's high of 850,000 people, the city dwindled to ~350,000 by the 1990s, although its metropolitan area grew to >2,000,000. Accelerating growth of high technology in the 1990s had minimal impact on St. Louis; the "old industry" the city represented simply did not attract technology innovators and knowledge workers who were flocking to cities such as Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, and San Jose. The urban core of St. Louis was seemingly trapped in a rust-belt spiral of industrial decline, population decrease, and tax-base erosion.

At the beginning of the 21st century, local business people, political leaders, and academics began to coalesce around the idea of an initiative that would build on the strengths of three major universities: Washington University (WU), Saint Louis University (SLU) and the University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL). The concept of building private enterprise based on university research was not new. California's Silicon Valley was sparked by research coming out of Stanford University, for example. As Stanford spawned new private companies, they in turn created new ventures in a cycle of innovation and reinvention that continues even now. St. Louis leaders realized that the most marketable academic strengths of WU and SLU were their medical centers and associated life-science/biomedical research.

THE CORRIDOR

WU Medical Center is located to the immediate east of Forest Park, which contains more park acreage than New York City's Central Park. SLU Medical Center is about two miles farther east. The area between them, generally connected by Forest Park Avenue, contained many underused and vacant parcels. So the nonprofit Center of Research Technology and Entrepreneurial Exchange (CORTEX) was formed to act as a development facilitator for two redevelopment areas: CORTEX West (173 acres) and CORTEX East (73 acres). Their combined acreage was envisioned to ultimately contain life-science research and development buildings, medical facilities that support translational research, retail stores, hotel and conference facilities, and other service businesses.

Initiative and Participants: A consortium of leaders drawn from WU, SLU, and UMSL, as well as Barnes-Jewish Hospital and the Missouri Botanical Garden, created a partnership to control that combined 246 acres and facilitate development of the life sciences corridor. These CORTEX partners represent major local institutional entities involved in the life sciences. Some venture capital firms, appreciating the long-term potential, took financial positions in this development. CORTEX garnered additional funding from state and federal grants. As development was getting under way in 2005, US\$60 million had been committed from various sources, and the early success attracted

other civic, higher education, and industry organizations. CORTEX was becoming a significant member of the life sciences "dream team" for St. Louis.

CORTEX sought and obtained developer-of-record status for CORTEX East and West in 2005, when the St. Louis Redevelopment Corporation evaluated developer proposals for the area. The group began preparing parcels for new buildings and marketing the corridor to public institutions and private companies. By 2009, five major life science facilities were constructed or under way either within the zone or immediately adjacent on the campuses of its two anchor institutions.

DOISY BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH CENTER

Needing to upgrade the quality of its campus research facilities, the Health Sciences Center at SLU performed a major evaluation of all current medical research facilities on campus. Building on its nationally recognized strengths in neuroscience and aging, cardiovascular and pulmonary function, and immunology and infectious diseases (as well as emerging strengths in cancer and molecular biology), the university planned to accelerate its growth in both basic and clinical translational medical research.

The centerpiece of that plan is the Edward A. Doisy Biomedical Research Center, a new 206,000-ft² health science building that brings scientists from several sites together to pursue collaborative, multidisciplinary research initiatives in one state-of-the-art facility. Plans also include consolidation and renovation of ~75,000 ft² of existing space in the School of Medicine building to create a clearly defined, high-quality research area for improved security, productivity, and internal communications. Programs will flourish in biodefense, virology, immunology, neurosciences, liver disease, molecular biology, cancer, and cardiovascular/pulmonary diseases, as well as burgeoning programs in genetics, proteomics, and genomics. A large ground-floor wing of the building is a clinical trials center to enhance translational research effectiveness. The NIH-funded Center for Research in Emerging Infections and Vaccines is also located in the new facility.

Cannon Design planned and designed the new facilities featured here, as well as the further examples discussed in my conclusion next month. 🌐

Tom Harvath, AIA, is principal and director of the Science and Technology Practice at Cannon Design, 2170 Whitehaven Rd., Grand Island, NY 14072; 1-716-773-6800, fax 1-716-773-5909; tharvath@cannondesign.com; www.cannondesign.com.

