



BYRD POLAR RESEARCH CAMP. PHOTO | ELLEN MOSLEY-THOMPSON

## features



TECH COLUMBUS ON KINNEAR RD. PHOTOS | BEN FRENCH

# Four year's later, Columbus' Tech Corridor powers on with new approach

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THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2010

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In Grandview Heights on Columbus' west side, the 90-acre Grandview Yard is blossoming where an empty grocery warehouse once stood. Eventually, the site could contain nearly 2 million square feet of commercial development and a home to new high-tech startups.

Across the railroad tracks to the east, Gowdy Field -- a formerly blighted landfill site -- is today anchored by Time Warner's regional headquarters. Springing up around it are new developments that include the James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute's new \$20-million healthcare center as well as [Ohio State University's](#) Eye and Ear Institute.

In Ohio State's West Campus, [SciTech](#), a not-for-profit research and office campus, is building a new 40,000-square-foot Wireless Communication Building to facilitate collaboration with private industry and faster research-to-commercialization. And the university last year began developing a master plan that could transform the SciTech complex into a high-density research park with as much as 2 million square feet of lab and office space in which faculty researchers and private industry work side by side.

Nearby, [Metro Early College High School](#) is preparing to graduate its first senior class -- nothing special, until you understand that Metro's founding partners included [Battelle Memorial Institute](#), that it focuses on STEM learning (science, technology, engineering and math) and that business-university partnerships have equipped some of those

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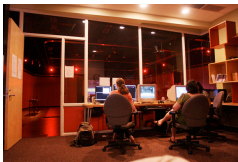
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kids to graduate with as much as two years of college credit.

All are key indications, development officials say, that the bold vision that once was expressed as the "315 Research and Technology Corridor" is alive.

Rolled out in 2006 by a partnership of local government, major research institutions and private industry, the 315 Corridor master plan envisioned one of the largest research parks in North America. It would cover four jurisdictions, span nearly 10,000 acres and stretch more than six miles from north to south. And it would be steered by a central organization designed to coordinate those efforts.

It was a grand concept. Maybe too grand.

"That was such a big idea, that it was almost impossible to get your arms around," says Ted Ford, president of the [TechColumbus](#) incubator, which has invested more than \$11 million in Central Ohio tech startups since its foundation in 2005 and "touched probably over 5,000 people in the region, just since 2007, who have an idea for a company."

Today, Ford and others say, Columbus' future as a high-tech heavyweight will be determined by the quality of collaboration between its research institutions, state and local government, private business and organizations that provide assistance to emerging high-tech companies.

The place to start, they say, is where synergies already exist. Ground zero is the West Campus-Kinnear Road area, where university-business partnerships and assistance by organizations like TechColumbus have built the city's most recognizable cluster of tech start-ups and research facilities.

"I know that the City eventually came to the belief that you had to start somewhere," says Jim Schimmer, Franklin County's director of economic development and planning. "And the corridor was really best defined . . . by TechColumbus and the incubator, and really that corridor that exists right now up along Kinnear."

Schimmer, who was with the city's jobs and economic development department in 2006 and instrumental in forming the master plan, says the process evolved. "I think any effort that has the magnitude and scope of what we were trying to get accomplished, and what we're still doing, starts from a seed, starts to grow, and morphs into some other things."

Michael Stevens, the city's deputy development director, agrees. "That was a great foundation," he says. "It looked at everything we have and how to move the economy, and asked how do we coordinate that acting together?"

To move forward in Columbus, high-tech growth will depend on communication and consensus, say folks like Stevens, Schimmer and Ford -- and on partnerships like the one Ohio State and Battelle formalized last year.

In a joint appointment, the two organizations named Blake Thompson as vice president for Battelle/OSU relations. The collaboration between Battelle -- the world's largest independent research and development entity -- and Ohio State -- which ranks second in the country in terms of industry-sponsored university research -- is seen as a key step. The OSU/Battelle partnership has already paid off. The organizations were awarded a \$4-million federal grant earlier this year to pursue conversion of microorganisms to butanol -- a possible substitute for petroleum-based fuels.

Caroline Whitacre, OSU's vice president of research, sees another key development in the creation of OSU's new industry liaison office in 2008. Since then, the office has brokered new partnerships with industrial players like Honda and GE Aerospace, she says.

"It's been so successful, this central liaison office, that there's a satellite office established in engineering, and there's one in agriculture, and we're getting ready to establish one in medicine as

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well. We want simply to connect industry with applicable researchers."

Meanwhile, OSU is revamping its approach to commercialization. The idea is to collaborate with outside experts for an accurate evaluation of new technologies and then to focus on the most promising.

In the end, local experts say, the vision contained in the 315 Research and Technology Corridor master plan will not occur through centralized efforts, but by the long-term collaboration of entities like OSU, Battelle, TechColumbus and business groups like the [Columbus Partnership](#) -- which has bankrolled an economic development strategy called Columbus 2020 with the goal of creating 180,000 new jobs over the next decade.

"From my position, it's all very positive right now," says Battelle's Thompson, who before his current appointment held a similar position at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. "It was so positive here, the things going on here, it was an attractive chance that I couldn't pass up."

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