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Life Science: Our Past, Our Present, Our Future

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With all of the talk these days about life sciences, it seems I get questions everyday about why we as a region focus so much effort on this one sector. Well, the easy answer is we do not just focus on life science, we also focus on advanced manufacturing, back office, and logistics, but these three sectors are in many ways not as sexy to discuss.

However, we have existing companies in life science that do represent advanced manufacturing, like Stryker; or back office, like Innovative Analytics; or logistics, like Kenco Logistics that ships hospital beds all over the nation.

The truth is the real reason we focus so much time and effort on life sciences is that it not only covers so many areas, it is also our heritage. While communities, regions and states all over the globe spend their time trying to establish a life sciences cluster, West Michigan has a 125-year history of that. Our history takes us from Kellogg's to Kalexsyn from Stryker to the Van Andel Institute. Not to mention the more than 200 other life sciences companies that today call West Michigan home.

Still need more convincing that life science is part of our future? Consider this: since 2003 some 27 life science companies have been launched in Kalamazoo alone. At a time when it seems every day that we in Michigan are losing companies, these jobs are that much more important. In just the last six years we have seen more than \$64 million in private investment in life science. Seems like a pretty important growth area of our economy to me.

Most of the start-ups in Kalamazoo fall squarely in the discovery and development stages of the pharmaceutical sector, precisely where the 2004 Milken study on the pharmaceutical industry predicted the jobs and growth would come. Our efforts are augmented by the distinction that Kalamazoo is the only region in the nation where a drug can go from discovery to testing to manufacturing to distribution.

A long history in life science is not enough to ensure a strong future. Access to both facilities and capital are also essential ingredients for life science growth.

The good news is the Kalamazoo region is meeting those needs. The Southwest Michigan First Innovation Center is a 58,000-square-foot; wet lab incubator/accelerator that is home to 16 startup life science companies. Based on Western Michigan University's Business

and Technology Research Campus, the Innovation Center will be the catalyst for growing companies for decades to come.

Capital formation is also a key to the success of growing the life science sector in West Michigan. Currently there are five locally-based venture capital funds and a large group of active angel investors. The newest venture fund is a \$50 million Southwest Michigan First Life Science Venture Fund, which recruits companies from all over the nation to move to Kalamazoo if they wish to receive funding.

These are just a few examples of the real results that have come from a community that has not only embraced its life science heritage but has also leveraged its locations, financial and academic strengths to ensure the development of a sustainable life science initiative.

So next time someone asks you why life sciences? Tell them, "Because it is our past, our present and our future."