

PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Southern Minnesota
Creating economic development strategies for regional strength.

Ag & Food | BioScience | Health Care | High Technology | Manufacturing | Renewable Energy

Partner Update

Spring 2010

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Save the Date

- June 21, 2010

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Success Story: MinnWest Technology Campus

What to do with an old healthcare campus? Imagine using it to bring together 252 employees in 19 companies with diverse, yet compatible, specialties. Imagine them sharing facilities and grounds to form a partnership that brings success to the individual companies and to the region. On second thought, don't bother imagining—it's already happening at the MinnWest Technology Campus in Willmar, Minnesota!



Jim Sieben

In 2006, the small company, Nova-Tech Engineering, felt the need to step up from their existing space. Vice President and General Manager, Jim Sieben, explains that it was “an impressive facility—a pole barn on the west end of Willmar!” Nova-Tech then partnered with Life-Science Innovations (LSI) to purchase the campus facilities. Sieben now also serves as President of the MinnWest Technology Campus.

The collaborative effort on campus is evident, as several of the companies share a mutual accounting group and human resources services. One of many examples of shared amenities: Nova-Tech owns a rapid prototype machine that can receive a digital mock-up of a part from an engineer's computer screen and turn out a plastic version of the part to test its fit, form, and function right in the palm of one's hand. Such a machine would prove too expensive for a start-up company, but can be used for a nominal fee, offering leaps ahead in production.

Campus facilities on-site include a fitness center, gym, indoor pool, a daycare center, and catered dining area—helping employees to focus on health and family life in addition to work life. On any given weekend, employees can use the location to host anything from pick-up basketball games to birthday parties.

Their success in doing business with 26 countries worldwide won Nova-Tech the 2008 Governor's International Trade award. That's regional thinking with global impact!

The companies which are currently housed on campus utilize approximately 25 percent of the 500,000 square feet of available space. MinnWest is able to offer extremely competitive lease rates that run 30 to 40 percent lower than space in the Twin Cities. MinnWest is a perfect example of what is possible, as stated on its website, “where innovation meets collaboration.” Check out the details at their website:

www.mnwesttechnology.com

Partner Interviews

How do you see legislators and other government officials playing a role in the Partnership for Regional Competitiveness?

If you're going to reach your full potential, you have to work in partnership. You're trying to create a strategy for the 21st century. You have to have the resources of 38 counties, the state government, and the federal government moving together. You have policies dealing with farm, manufacturing, energy, and education that all need to be moving in the same direction on the same road.

What direct impact do you anticipate as a result of the Partnership – for Southern Minnesota, and beyond?

If the partnership is successful, it lays out a model for Central, Northwest, and Northeast Minnesota to show the people in those regions how you came up with a plan that got everybody moving together. I have been a champion of having a statewide plan, so I'm hoping that your region leads the way, so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

You can improve economic vitality and stop the outflow of young people from your region to the metro areas, whether that's Omaha, Minneapolis/St. Paul, or Chicago. We have invested our time, energy, and money into developing great citizens with a good work ethic and we want them to stay here.

Also you know what your strengths are, for example, tying wind energy into farming and infrastructure planning. Then you have less costly, more efficient government because government and business are always working hand-in-hand.

How do you see the Partnership's future unfolding?

With great fanfare! – I see you developing goals you can reach, so people see successes. You attain the goal, that collaboration builds upon your strengths, and you set yourself up to be ready when another opportunity presents itself. You never know what might be the next business that comes along and transforms the area. It sets out a blueprint for you to be successful.



Representative Tim Mahoney

Minnesota House District 67A

“You never know what might be the next business that comes along and transforms the area.”



Did You Know...?

Report Released by Mark Drabenstott

If the name Mark Drabenstott sounds familiar, it may be due to the fact that, as the Director of the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness, he led the research that has resulted in the Partnership for Regional Competitiveness – Southern Minnesota.

Mr. Drabenstott has published a report on regional competitiveness that highlights the work in Southern Minnesota. The report is sponsored by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and is titled, ***Past Silos and Smokestacks: Transforming the Rural Economy in the Midwest***. It is available on The Chicago Council's website through the link provided below.

www.thechicagocouncil.org/hottopics_details.php?hottopics_id=166

We thank Mark for his coaching that brought us to the work we have initiated here in Southern Minnesota.



John Monson

Vice President, AgStar Rural
Capital Network

“People need to “take their space”—to create leadership in areas they know best.”



How would you describe your role in the Partnership?

It has evolved. Initially my role was to help convene a group of investors—public, non-profit, and private—and lead funding to hire the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) to do the analytics and asset-mapping for the regional competitiveness process. Since then, my role has evolved into focusing on pulling together a capital network to help fund new opportunities across the region.

How do you envision the economic benefits created by the Partnership?

The economic benefits will be obvious: jobs, although it will be a challenge. There will be high-risk, high-reward opportunities. In bioscience and even in renewable energy, where new technologies are emerging, there’s no background, no history in how they will perform.

We’re connecting dots where we haven’t before because our partnership is wide-ranging. We should invest where synergy is created between areas of opportunity to make a strategic fit across the Southern Minnesota region.

How do you see the Partnership’s future unfolding?

I think it will strengthen. The key is to think, work, and act regionally, not just locally; not competitively, one small town against another, but collaboratively to use the region’s assets. With no federal funding, we have to rely on our own brain power, action, and engagement to make it happen.

To become globally competitive as a region, the goal is to think about how to align the core characteristics of initiatives. People need to “take their space”—to create leadership in areas they know best—about the locality they live in, about the partnerships they have.

The Center for Rural Policy and Development has a key role in this. As the facilitator, by asking the right questions and engaging the right people, the Center can ensure this process sustains itself. It will provide guidance and accountability in what we’re attempting to do. That’s as important as anything right now.

Did You Know...?

The Minnesota Cup – the Future of Success

The Minnesota Cup is an annual, statewide competition that seeks out aspiring entrepreneurs and their breakthrough ideas. We are looking for the next great entrepreneurial success story in our state.

This competition is for all entrepreneurs, whether your breakthrough idea is high tech or no tech, whether you are just putting your ideas into a business plan or if you've been out building your venture.

Here is the link to the competition:

<http://www.breakthroughideas.org/>

The Minnesota Cup will award over \$100,000 in seed capital. Visit the site today—entry deadline is **Friday, May 21, 2010**. Let’s get ready to celebrate the future success of Minnesota’s entrepreneurs!

How do you see post-secondary education playing a role in the big picture of the Partnership?

Post-secondary education is the fuel that drives the economic engine. We're turning out a skilled workforce, we develop leaders, and we provide applied research—to test, retest, certify, and provide the educational component to support the entrepreneurial efforts in the global marketplace.

We should be blurring the boundaries. In the old days, silos were in existence. Not today—we're all in this together. We were a part of the regional competitiveness study because we *should* be a part of that. With competency-based and experiential education, we're teaching students about the cutting edge of what's happening in the world, *and* we're giving businesses opportunities to find the best and the brightest. It's a win-win for both sides.

What direct impact do you anticipate as a result of the Partnership – for Southern Minnesota, and beyond?

We will have the talent pool and the learning resources available for economic development. We will be integral to this part of the state. Businesses will look to us for training and development. Entrepreneurs will look to us for the business and marketing plans they can plug into, bridging them to the next level.

How do you see the Partnership's future unfolding?

I think it's a requirement. There is absolutely no way we can approach our future without partnerships—cooperating and collaborating. Financial resources are, and will continue to be, limited. Businesses know what they need; we know how to put it together. There is value in that.

We have to be close to the Center for Rural Policy and Development because they can make things happen through research and development. We need to support them and bring value by applying the research and providing the learning opportunities—that's our forte, our mission. We need to be in an effective partnership.

Save the Date

for the "One Year Later" regional competitiveness event

Monday – June 21, 2010

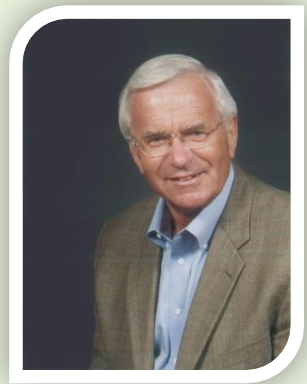
11:30 AM – 2:00 PM

Centennial Ballroom, Student Union, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Come hear what progress has been made since May, 2009.

- What has transpired in creating the framework for implementing this project
- What partnerships and projects have evolved from the Partnership
- Where do we go from here

More details will be sent early May.



Bob Hoffman

Vice President, Strategic
Business, Education and
Regional Partnerships

"We should be blurring the boundaries. In the old days, silos were in existence. Not today—we're all in this together."



MINNESOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY, MANKATO