



Science makes cents

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Delore Zimmerman helps the region's science- and technology-based enterprises grow and flourish.

He's coordinator of the Grand Forks, N.D.-based Red River Valley Research Corridor Coordinating Center.

The corridor dates to 2002, when Sen. Byron Dorgan,

D-N.D., championed it as a way to bring more federal research money to the state.

Federal funding for research and development rose

106.7 percent in North Dakota from 2001 to 2005, according to a National Science Foundation report.

Federal R&D spending

nationwide rose 29 percent in the same period.

The coordinating center was established in 2004. Its role includes tracking and working to acquire federal research funding, marketing the state's research and technology assets outside the region, and linking state colleges and universities, commercialization teams and business investment capital.

Zimmerman, a Wishek, N.D., native, has a doctoral degree from Penn State University. His work focused on mobilizing territorial-based alliances for economic development.

He's president and co-founder of Praxis Strategy Group, a research and economic strategy company.

Praxis – which manages the coordinating center – has offices in Grand Forks, Fargo and Duluth, Minn., and has six employees.

Q: How would you describe the coordinating center's role?

A:

It's really to help raise the visibility of what's going on here, getting the word out to other parts of the country and other research organizations about the possibilities here.

The action summits that we do here are a big part of that. We just recently did a life sciences action summit that brought in people from around the country to see what's going on here. We try to showcase what's happening here, create new partnerships between the researchers and the companies here. Making the connections is what it's all about.

The thing about the action summits we do with Senator Dorgan and the research corridor – they're becoming national in scope. That's really encouraging.

Q: Can you give a specific example or two of how the corridor has helped?

A: Alien, which is the (North Dakota State University) Research Park now.

That's a project Senator Dorgan worked on as part of the research corridor effort.

(Alien Technology provides radio frequency identification products and services.)

Packet Digital, some of the funding they've received for research on their batteries.

(Fargo-based Packet Digital designs, develops and markets advance power management, "smart" radio frequency identification and wireless solutions.)

Q: Do you run into skepticism elsewhere in the country about research and high-tech enterprises here?

A: Yes, I do. I'm quick to point out we're making big strides.

Q: Fargo and Grand Forks, with their state universities, clearly can benefit from what you're doing. But how about smaller communities in the state?

A:

I think we've seen some real positive linkages, such as with Killdeer (N.D.) Manufacturing. They've gotten a lot of projects going as a result of the research corridor.

So we do have examples of smaller towns where companies are science- and technology-oriented and they're able to link up just like a company from Fargo.

Q: The opportunities for science and technology – and economic development – are growing faster than ever, right?

A:

The amount of information is doubling every two years. That creates a whole host of opportunities. We just need to be adaptive and take advantage as they emerge.

Q: Area businesses regularly complain about difficulties in finding enough employees. Is that a big problem with high-tech enterprises?

A: I hear that everywhere I go.

It's a rapidly changing world. Technology changes so fast.

There are all these things converging in ways that never converged before – bioelectrics, biomechanics, things you never would have thought of five years ago.

Innovation is what makes the world goes around.

Q: You're confident more high-tech companies will spring up in the Red River Valley?

A:

Oh, yeah. I see under the radar screen all these things that are happening. It just takes a while for them to germinate. But they're out there, no doubt about it.

We've got great schools, (both universities and K-12), relatively affordable housing compared to many parts of the company now.

I see a pretty bright future for the area because of all those things.

I think we've done a much better job in the last five, six, seven years of linking the science and business side.

That's something that's been coming a long time. We're not an overnight success.

The good thing is, we've got momentum. Companies, work, research kind of gravitate toward where things are happening, where you have those nodes of technology and skilled people – and we've got that.

I think we're positioned very well for the future.

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