

NEWS-LEADER

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Health facility is booster shot for downtown area

When public dollars poured into Roy Blunt Jordan Valley Innovation Center a few years ago, one promise was that the research center would spawn commercial manufacturing of products developed inside it.

If spin-off businesses should be in the center's vicinity, JVIC would also stimulate private growth in downtown Springfield, its supporters said.

Today, officials of Missouri State University -- which owns JVIC -- need point no farther than the building across the street as proof that the research center is delivering.

St. John's Research Institute, a tenant inside JVIC, has launched a new for-profit venture -- Inveno Health Inc. -- in the former Park Central Flea Market to license, market and distribute products developed by St. John's physicians and researchers.

"It'll be an outlet for our products to reach patients outside of Springfield," said Pete Miles, executive director of St. John's Research Institute.

Inveno, which starts with one employee, plans to expand in the future, and the business will count royalties and product sales as its incomes, Miles said.

One of the products is Povinol, a special antiseptic eye drop developed by Dr. Wendell Scott.

State funding for this project has helped St. John's start Inveno to commercialize the eye drop, but Inveno will also sell other St. John's products, such as a cleanser developed by Dr. Roger Huckfeldt and an infant surgical positioning device by Dr. Bharat Shah .

Miles credited JVIC with St. John's new venture, saying product research and development would otherwise have been impossible.

Two private businessmen are equally pleased with St. John's commercial venture.

As Inveno's landlord, Nathan Taylor and J Martin get to collect rent for the building they bought in February and renovated.

Such private investments, MSU officials say, are what they hope JVIC and IDEA Commons will help make downtown Springfield a thriving place that blends academic life with city amenities.

Building on the success of JVIC, MSU last year announced its plan to acquire five city-owned parcels in the vicinity and establish IDEA Commons, an extended campus that will eventually grow to 30 acres.

IDEA stands for innovation, design, entrepreneurship and arts -- the overall theme for MSU programs in downtown Springfield.

In May, MSU bought the 3.5-acre Willow Brook property south of JVIC. This week, it will host a free exposition to promote its downtown plans, which have been a boon for Taylor and Martin.

Owners of the home-furnishing company BridgeBlue, they bought a building on West Phelps Street in 2007, when JVIC just opened across the street. The two were most interested in a bigger space for their growing business, but to protect their core investment, Taylor and Martin also bought surrounding properties at Phelps and Boonville and even spruced up a city sidewalk at their own expense to open up a retail store.

Other business opportunities began to beckon.

They leased out seven luxury lofts and the former flea market to Inveno, which pays \$3,800 in monthly lease, according to Miles.

Taylor said negotiations are under way to bring a new restaurant and coffee shop to the building at 503 Boonville, directly across the street from JVIC.

"We are very pleased to have MSU as a neighbor," Taylor said. "It's been very beneficial."