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Spokane area expands biomedical research opportunities

Region embraces new models for new outcomes

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by [John Stone and Rev. Robert Spitzer](#)

In the spring of 2003, world-renowned scientist Dr. Leroy Hood provided the keynote address to the Spokane Regional Chamber of Commerce membership. In attendance were more than 1,000 business and community leaders eager to hear Dr. Hood's vision and lessons learned from his esteemed scientific career. Dr. Hood inspired the audience with a message -- that new models are needed for new outcomes. The Spokane community fully embraces this message.

A commitment to new thinking is reflected in Spokane's economic renaissance, including more than \$1 billion invested in downtown in just the past few years. Exciting projects are in the works: creating the University District at the east end of town, with major investments from Washington State University, Eastern Washington University, Gonzaga University and the Community Colleges of Spokane; Kendall Yards, a large mixed-use development located on the north bank of the Spokane River that breaks ground next year; the large-scale downtown wireless Spokane HotZone; and much more.

Spokane is clearly on the move, creating the place and the amenities that will create excellent jobs and opportunities. Yet, more work must be done to create a truly diverse and sustainable economy using new models for new outcomes.

This work requires that the community leverage its most valuable and essential assets. The presence, strength and quality of Spokane's Sacred Heart and Deaconess hospitals provide one cornerstone. The significant and growing research university presence provided by Washington State University at both its Spokane and Pullman campuses with its expertise in biomedicine and Gonzaga University's contributions in computation and information sciences and engineering provide the other cornerstone.

Yet hospital, university and community leaders recognize that to remain on the leading edge of medicine, deliver world-class health care and recruit and retain top health-care providers and faculty, Spokane must expand world-class biomedical research opportunities.

This is why the area's hospitals and universities along with individuals, government and companies are committing resources to form the Institute for Systems Medicine (ISM). Numerous studies conclude that biomedical research will be essential to our economy in the coming decade.

And the creation of the ISM comes at an opportune moment: a turning point in our understanding of medicine.

Medicine is undergoing a paradigm shift driven by many factors including out-of-control costs, the decline in new drugs and the failure of approved drugs to predict toxicity once they are prescribed for a large population.

Dr. Hood, founder of the Institute for Systems Biology, sees the answer in "P4 medicine," or Predictive, Preventive, Personalized and Participatory. The vision of ISM is to incorporate these four pillars to improve human health.

The ISM will be a private, nonprofit research institute located in Spokane. The institute will utilize the principles of P4 medicine, applying the tools of systems biology to gather new insights into disease and to translate these insights into new and effective means of treating human disease.

Through our efforts, an equal partnership has emerged with Washington State University, Gonzaga University, Empire Health Services and Providence Health Services, all of which have committed countless hours and substantial resources to the development and vision of the ISM.

The partnership is also supported by the Spokane County commissioners, who quickly grasped the emerging opportunity. Avista Corp., a stalwart corporate citizen addressing the need for economic development in the region, also has committed significant time and resources. And, thanks to the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, Speaker of the House Frank Chopp and Gov. Chris Gregoire, the State of Washington has made a major contribution. ISM also will be looking for support from the Life Sciences Discovery Fund prior to its 2008 launch and the federal government.

The ISM is currently in the development stage, led by an engaged steering committee and supported by a team from PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, a global consulting firm with expertise in forming translational medicine institutes. Its intellectual plan is being developed under the watchful scientific leadership of Dr. Hood, Dr. David Galas, chief scientific officer of Battelle; and Dr. Michael Skinner, director of the Center for Integrated Biotechnology at Washington State University. It is our goal to launch the ISM in the summer of 2007, with a building and full staffing coming on line in 2008. When operational, the ISM will be a world-class institution governed by a national caliber board of directors.

As a community, we will have to commit significant resources to make this vision a reality. We are confident in our quest with the support of our partners in education and health care, the business community, local, state and federal government, and the many individuals who share our vision of the Institute for Systems Medicine and its importance in building a vibrant, healthy, and innovative new-model economy for our region.

JOHN STONE and the Rev. ROBERT SPITZER are co-chairmen of the Institute for Systems Medicine, which is a sponsor to this supplement of the Puget Sound Business Journal. Reach them at 509-455-3005.