

*Funds needed ...*

## ISM is a seed tree for our economy

Most of us are familiar with a “seed tree”—a tall, healthy conifer that helps to assure future generations of healthy forests. This concept also can be applied to bold ideas that assure healthy economies for future generations.

During the last 20 years, I’ve had the good fortune to start six companies here in Spokane, most of them with a high degree of success. Over that time, I’ve developed a sense of knowing a good business idea when I see one. In my opinion, the Institute for Systems Medicine (ISM) is a great idea for Spokane, in part because it will be a wonderful “seed tree.” When in full operation, ISM will transform our economy into a global leader in biomedical research.

Why am I so confident? ISM will be a nonprofit scientific institute with more than 200 world-class researchers focused on improving patient outcomes. It will do this by conducting breakthrough basic research in the important areas of genomics, related systems, and computational biology. Discoveries in these research areas will allow our community to predict disease earlier and treat it more precisely, leading to medicine that’s preventive and personalized.

This shift in medicine will allow patients to partner with doctors to become more participatory in the management of their care. New diagnostic and treatment choices that are proactive rather than reactive will be available through tools already on the near-term horizon. Such tools will, for example, allow physicians to analyze an individual’s genetic composition and forecast a single patient’s health. ISM will work on finding cures to complex diseases such as multiple sclerosis, heart disease, and diabetes that affect so many residents in our region.

I currently serve as a board member of the ISM planning authority, and I am most proud of the collaborative spirit that has enabled the project to succeed. ISM is a true community partnership combining our health care and university assets. Empire

Health Services, Providence Health Care, Washington State University, Gonzaga University, and the Institute for Systems Biology, in Seattle, are the founding partners. Avista Corp. Spokane County, the state of Washington, and SRM Development are the founding sponsors. All are fully committed to the success of ISM. They understand that a research-based economy is important to their own future and the future of the Spokane region.

Other communities like ours have invested millions of dollars in private research institutes. In fact, ISM is modeled after the very successful Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGEN) formed in Phoenix in 2002 through a partnership between the universities there and supported by state and county government. It already has a staff of more than 200 world-class scientists and technicians and has successfully spun off several technology companies. These spin-off companies drive millions of dollars into the Phoenix economy.

As it takes millions of dollars to form an institute, we are pursuing legislation this session, sponsored by Rep. Don Barlow in the House and Sen. Chris Marr in the Senate, to form a special purpose authority that would provide financial support to the ISM and to Project Access, our partner in pursuit of this authority. I am pleased to report that the bills have received initial, unanimous support and continue to hold great promise for future funding.

As an entrepreneur and investor, I am not only certain ISM will create technology companies, I will be investing in those companies as well. They hold the promise to build an economy that continues to attract world-class talent to our region. This is the great economic promise of ISM. It will truly be the greatest seed tree this region has ever seen.



Guest  
Commentary

Fred Brown

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