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Working Together

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Working together

The people and partnerships that brought NBAF to Kansas

The National Bio and Agro-defense Facility construction site, Manhattan, Kan.

“Our guess was that the Department of Homeland Security wanted the consortium to have the sort of expertise that would be needed for various infectious disease threats, and so we got together with the Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute, the Midwest Research Institute, the Animal Health Corridor and essentially got every research university in a 300-mile radius to be a part of the Heartland BioAgro Consortium. Our belief was if the selection was done on the merits of the community, **we were going to win.** And we moved forward with that expectation.”

— Ron Trewyn, Kansas State University vice president for research

If it takes a whole village to raise a child, then it takes a whole region to acquire and support the National Bio and Agro-defense Facility. It also took an intricate combination of local leaders, research universities, bioscience organizations and politicians coming together with one goal in mind: Get NBAF to Kansas.

When the Department of Homeland Security announced its search for a location to replace the aging Plum Island facility in 2006, Kansas State University Vice President for Research Ron Trewyn and his research team knew creating a massive web of partnerships would be the only way Manhattan, Kan., would have a shot at winning. And so the Heartland BioAgro Consortium task force was born.

The Heartland BioAgro Consortium submitted proposals for two Kansas locations: Manhattan and Leavenworth. Both sites made it to the final 17, and if the Department of Homeland Security had not determined that there could be only one finalist per state, Leavenworth would have joined Manhattan in the final five. It was this partnership that stood out to the reviewers, Trewyn said. Instead of competing against each other, representatives from Manhattan and Leavenworth supported each other, realizing the benefits and opportunities NBAF would bring to the entire region.

Sen. Pat Roberts, Gov. Mark Parkinson, former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, Kansas Farm Bureau, the Kansas Livestock Association,

dozens of scientists, scholars and both local and regional executives rounded off the list of more than 50 task force members. But it was the partnerships in Manhattan that were at the epicenter of the two-year push to get NBAF.

It was this synergy that brought the \$650-million, 500,000-square-foot facility to Manhattan, and it will be that same synergy that keeps enthusiasm and support thriving — even though NBAF will not be up and running for at least five years.

As Manhattan evolves to fit NBAF and brings the ensuing wave of scientists and up to 40 additional businesses and laboratories into an already bustling community, these close relationships continue to grow. One such partnership was forged between Manhattan Area Technical College, K-State and the city of Manhattan. When word about the NBAF proposal got around, MATC President Rob Edleston realized that there was something missing.

“The 100-to-1 support staff that you may need for one major scientist — all those technicians, the receptionists and everybody else — the planning committee really didn’t think about that,” Edleston said. “K-State’s job is to create the scientists, but somebody sets up and keeps track of those experiments, somebody washes all those pipettes, and somebody is working the midnight shift — those are our graduates.”

And so MATC, with the support of K-State President Kirk Schulz and various

other leaders in the region, was recently granted a \$366,000 loan from the city of Manhattan to jumpstart a lab technician program that will enhance and complement future NBAF and K-State experiments. Edleston has estimated that with this loan, the resulting local lab tech graduates will bring Manhattan about \$20 million in 10 to 12 years. Courses are slated to begin in January 2011, with the full curriculum going into effect by that fall.

The community has more than cooperated in recent years for various other projects, like the expansion of Fort Riley, the re-establishment of jet service out of the Manhattan Regional Airport and the planning and construction of the new Flint Hills Discovery Center, said City Manager Ron Fehr.

“We’ve been fortunate to have good partnerships here in Manhattan, even before NBAF, and it really helped us cultivate that partnership coming together and expanding even more,” Fehr said.

It’s projects like these that keep excitement high for the facility that will have a lifespan of at least 50 years once it opens in five years. Although it will be a while until NBAF becomes a physical reality beyond the sign that marks the construction site, it’s clear that the partnerships that got NBAF here will only strengthen through 2016 and beyond.

“**Everyone who has a stake in this state came together.** At the local level in Manhattan, there certainly has been a synergy of support among the units of government, city and county. There was synergy for NBAF; there is an existing synergy in the community; and Manhattan was a strong partner in that statewide effort to win NBAF.”

— Bruce Snead, mayor of Manhattan, Kan.