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JoCo Research Triangle makes a powerful difference for entrepreneurs
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REDIVUS HEALTH
Dr. Jeff Dunn, CEO and co-founder of Olathe-based Redivus Health

It's been just more than 10 years since Johnson County voters approved the one-eighth-cent sales tax to support the creation of the Johnson County Education Research Triangle (JCERT).

The initiative, which dedicated financial resources to expanding Johnson County's higher education programs in engineering, science, business and technology as a means to drive economic growth, is making a powerful difference for entrepreneurs.

For health tech startup Redivus Health, its ties to the K-State Olathe campus helped it complete a key research and development study, which validated the effectiveness of its mobile clinical decision platform and helped it secure funding. To date, it has raised around $4.5 million.

JCERT's triangle includes the KU Clinical Research Center in Fairway, the Kansas State University Olathe campus and the University of Kansas Edwards Business, Engineering, Science and Technology (BEST) Center in Overland Park. The initiative generates more than $15 million a year and has expanded K-12 science education programs, provided college scholarships and aided the construction of the $28 million K-State Olathe campus and the $23 million BEST Center.

Without JCERT, Carl Gerlach said he doubts K-State's Olathe innovation campus would have come to fruition. The initiative has succeeded, especially taking into account the number of students taking advantage of JCERT-sponsored courses, said Gerlach, who is chairman of JCERT.

K-State Olathe, for example, saw a 37 percent enrollment increase in the 2015-16 school year, the most recent year for which data is available. JCERT is collaborating with organizations such as the Mid-America Regional Council to begin tracking data and progress on a regular basis, Gerlach said.

JCERT benefits Redivus

Redivus still offices out of the Olathe campus, which gives it access to big tech amenities, including teleconferencing and meeting rooms, Redivus co-founder and CEO Dr. Jeff Dunn said. It's helped the startup come across as a large, established company.

"Being aligned with an academic institute like K-State has given us resources to be able to lift up our company," he said. "It's been a great springboard for us to be able to foster a great culture here, and it's been an invaluable resource."

K-State's assistance with its R&D study marked the first step in propelling the company forward, he said.

"When you're creating a disruptive technology, especially in health care, people want to know what is the data behind what you're doing," said Dunn, who is part of Pipeline's 2019 class of fellows. "It's very much a research-oriented industry, and the end user doesn't want to use something that is not going to be effective."

The validation also helped it continue building out the platform, which has expanded beyond cardiac arrest events to include stroke and sepsis. It's also nearing a version for heart attacks. Its platform helps medical providers make the right decisions during high-mortality scenarios. Dunn likens it to turn-by-turn navigation that can lead to better patient outcomes and save money and lives.

Redivus has nearly 10 hospital customers in Kansas and Missouri, including Saint Luke's Health System. It also is in conversations with larger health systems interested in its platform. Dunn expects big revenue growth in 2019 and aims to add several thousand end-users, he said.

Ag company plugs into program

Livestock Lens also set up shop at the Olathe campus, which connected serial entrepreneur Manoj George to valuable insight.

K-State is plugged into the animal health community, and George can get his questions answered in minutes, he said. If he had to do that research solo, it could take weeks or months, and in the meantime he could be spending money chasing the wrong things.

Professors have offered their domain expertise and helped the Livestock Lens founder pivot to a better business model.

"We were trying to build a solution for feedlots to keep track of their animals (and their health), and we were completely going down the wrong path," George said, whose career previously centered around human health and digital ventures.

Professor Dan Thomson helped Livestock Lens simplify its plan: Instead of installing video cameras throughout the feedlot, which is expensive, the company needed a camera only in the chute, he told George. The professor sat down with George for two hours and made a world of difference, he said.

Livestock Lens' platform helps ranchers track animals' date of birth, latest weight and other data, which play a role in going to market and getting the most out of their investment.

"We are trying to help our customers get better pricing for the cattle, which is fundamentally what they're after, because it's a very low-margin business," George said.

Eventually, he plans to incorporate K-State's database of medication protocol into its platform.

"We're starting to do pretty well," George said. "We have finally pulled together a solution that makes sense."

Leslie Collins, Staff Writer