



Posted on Mon, Jan. 28, 2008

## Come Home to Kansas initiative seeks to lure back high-tech workers

By JASON GERTZEN

Kansas leaders want scientists and high-tech workers who once wrote off career prospects in their home state to take another look.

A burgeoning cluster of bioscience and other high-tech ventures ranging from startups to established corporations such as **Garmin** and **Perceptive Software** are actively seeking top talent.

Yet, the search for highly skilled professionals to fill those jobs often can extend to six, nine or 12 months, and sometimes longer, said Angela Kreps, president of the **Kansas Bioscience Organization**.

Members of the state biotechnology trade association increasingly are citing this problem as a top concern, Kreps said.

A group of state technology organizations banded together in launching a new initiative last week that is intended to address this issue. The goal is to lure back many of the Kansas-trained scientists, engineers and other professionals who moved out of state after graduation.

The Come Home to Kansas campaign, with the [www.comehometokansas.com](http://www.comehometokansas.com) Web site at its core, has an online tool that automatically will scour job advertisements from some of the state's most attractive high-tech companies and display them in single spot.

In addition to a rich base of information about what it is like to run a business and live in Kansas, the Web site aims to help prospective recruits realize that high-tech industries here have advanced substantially, Kreps said.

"A job seeker can see this critical mass of opportunities," Kreps said.

The concept of industry clusters is not just a mumbo-jumbo phrase that excites economic development specialists.

The idea is that companies in similar lines of work benefit from being close to one another. They can collaborate on development projects, for example, or allow executives to share various problems to see how another company solved a similar matter.

It also can be extremely important for high-tech professionals.

When an out-of-state scientist or high-level executive considers taking a new job, obviously he or she starts with optimism that the career move will work out. In case the company does not succeed or the position turns out not to be a good fit, however, the worker wants to know whether finding a new job would require an additional cross-country move.

The Web site and an associated advertising campaign will attempt to make that case, Kreps said.

"As I build my career, there will be more opportunities in the future," Kreps said.

Executives said they could use some help.

"If you are in the Midwest, in a place like Manhattan (Kan.), it is more difficult to grow a high-tech business than if we were in Silicon Valley," said Olga Koper, chief technology officer of **NanoScale Corp.**, a spinoff using technology initially coming from **Kansas State University**. "It is a challenge to get people to Manhattan."

The companies and the communities often have the enticing career and good quality of life to close the deal with a recruit if they can get his or her attention in the first place, Koper said.

"There will be much more awareness that there are good things going on," Koper said. "It will help bring people back to Kansas."

This initiative can be viewed as another sign that the state's bioscience and high-tech economic development efforts are evolving to a new stage, said Tracy Taylor, president and chief executive officer of the **Kansas**

### **Technology Enterprise Corp.**

More work needs to be done in expanding research and attracting high-tech companies to the region.

But making sure that the labs and companies that are here have access to the workers they need is evidence that many parts of these industries already are starting to mature, Taylor said.

### **www.comehometokansas.com**

The Come Home to Kansas initiative's Web site provides details about high-tech job openings, business climate and life in Kansas. Organizers are seeking out-of-state professionals and investors interested in biotechnology and other high-tech fields.

The effort is a joint initiative involving the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp., the Kansas Bioscience Authority, the Kansas Bioscience Organization, KTEC Pipeline and the Kansas Department of Commerce.

---

To reach Jason Gertzen, call 816-234-4899 or send e-mail to [jgertzen@kcstar.com](mailto:jgertzen@kcstar.com).

---

© 2007 Kansas City Star and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansascity.com>