

Third Frontier: A smashing success for Northeast Ohio


BARBARA R. SNYDER

As a university president, I have cut plenty of ribbons to mark the opening of new spaces and programs. But this spring was the first time that someone asked me to swing a mallet in celebration.

The occasion was a gathering to recognize a remarkable achievement by a young Mayfield firm called Quality Electrodynamics, or QED, for short. Launched in 2006, QED last year became one of 20 organizations that *Forbes* magazine dubbed "America's Most Promising Companies."

A developer of complex devices for MRI machines, QED started in a 300-square-foot room on our campus. Its first funding came through a \$500,000 grant from the Wright Center of Innovation in Biomedical Imaging, an organization created through Ohio's Third Frontier. Today, QED is a multimillion-dollar entity that occupies a 27,000-square-foot space and employs more than 50 people. The business is growing so rapidly that QED's founder, Hiroyuki Fujita, predicts dou-

cleveland.com/opinion

 Craig Shular, the chairman, chief executive officer and president of GrafTech International Ltd. Urges passage of Issue 1.

bling his staff within the next few years.

Not every venture the Third Frontier supports makes the pages of one of the nation's most respected business magazines. But the overall results of Ohio's investment in a high-tech economy are undeniably impressive: As of Dec. 31, the Third Frontier has contributed to the creation of almost 55,000 jobs and more than 635 companies. In addition, the \$548 million spent to date has attracted nearly \$4.8 billion from other sources — a leverage rate of roughly 9-to-1. These statistics have made Ohio a model for other states seeking to spur major economic progress and prompted our own legislative leaders to put a \$700 million renewal measure on Tuesday's ballot.

I write today to ask every voter to support Issue 1. The Third Frontier has made a meaningful

difference in Northeast Ohio. Additional dollars will extend and expand that impact.

Consider just one other program affiliated with Case Western Reserve University that has received Third Frontier support. The Ohio Neurostimulation and Neuromodulation Partnership (ONNP) has received grants of nearly \$16 million to bring patients cutting-edge technology to restore function and alleviate suffering. Among the outcomes of this effort is the launch of Neuro Medical, a start-up that uses high-frequency electrical stimulation to block chronic pain. If the experience of another company involved in the ONNP is any indication, economic prospects for Neuro are promising. Two years ago, NDI Medical, the lead industry partner in the ONNP, sold its first product, a device to address urinary incontinence, to health care giant Medtronic for \$42 million. NDI since has applied those resources to spin off additional companies and create new jobs for Ohioans.

These examples underscore the progress possible when ingenuity and drive meet forward-

thinking public policy. As important as financial return is, I also urge voters to think about some of the human benefits of the Third Frontier. Urinary incontinence affects more than 17 million people in the United States; think of what NDI's invention could mean for them. Annual MRI scans, meanwhile, total about 30 million in the United States alone; imagine the advances in diagnosis — not to mention reduced patient discomfort with shortened scan times — that QED's devices will allow.

So why was an old-fashioned tool like a mallet part of the celebration for a high-tech firm like QED? Because Fujita has a powerful sense of tradition. We used mallets to open a cask of sake, enacting an ancient Japanese ceremony that is said to symbolize the opening to harmony and good fortune. Thanks to the Third Frontier, QED and its employees have experienced much of both. An affirmative vote on Tuesday could help ensure yet more prosperity for Ohio — and more jobs for its residents.

Snyder is president of Case Western Reserve University.