

## Advanced lab supports food safety initiative

### Covance makes \$14 million commitment

Elizabeth Willis • *The Enquirer* • October 7, 2010

A food-testing laboratory's presence in downtown Battle Creek is expected to advance the Cereal City's reputation as a global hub for food safety.

Covance Inc. opened the doors of its newest and most advanced laboratory to the public Wednesday, where the Princeton, New Jersey-based company spent \$14 million to renovate the former SEMCO Energy building at 55 E. Hamblin Ave.

Employees in white laboratory coats showed the equipment and methods used to test food for its nutritional content and possible contamination from pathogens.

The building is divided into sections based on the severity of the substances being tested and has hospital-grade air filtration and cleansing devices to prevent the pathogens' spread.

Covance's investment is the single largest made by a private company in the downtown area since city developers announced a plan in November 2008 to revitalize the city center, said Karl Dehn, president and chief executive officer of Battle Creek Unlimited.

The company has become a major partner in developing a Food Testing Center of Excellence with the Battle Creek-based Global Food Protection Institute.

It has agreed to open its state-of-the-art facilities for use in training food protection officials and it is interested in developing an internship program for local students.

"It's just wonderful to see that vision becoming reality today," Dehn said. "Covance is going to be a wonderful company and a wonderful corporate citizen in Battle Creek."

U.S. Rep. Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, who is working to secure federal funding to train food safety professionals through the Battle Creek-based International Food Protection Training Institute, said it is appropriate that Battle Creek would again be known for its advancements in food and health.

"Battle Creek has come full circle from when the cereal industry was founded here," he said. "I believe that Battle Creek will be a magnet for food science and food safety jobs."

Already 39 people have been hired to start working in the Battle Creek laboratory and three more will be hired soon. But the building has capacity for 70 to 80 workers, said James Lovett, Covance's corporate senior vice president.

Lovett said the recent closure of a Covance facility in Kalamazoo was due to a downturn in medical research and had nothing to do with the Battle Creek facility's opening, although some of their employees were offered positions here.

About 25 total employees transferred to Battle Creek from other Covance sites and about 15 were new hires, he said.

The company is known for drug development, but it is strategically investing in food safety because of the need for faster and more advanced testing, Covance Chairman and CEO Joseph Herring said.

"Things like food should not be scary," he said. "But unfortunately everyday in the paper we read about things like e. coli in meat and in cookie dough and salmonella in eggs. ... So to me there's no nobler cause than the one that we serve."

Kellogg Co., which has been a Covance customer for 14 years, expanded its W.K. Kellogg Institute for Food and Nutrition Research last year across the street from where Covance is now located.

The Battle Creek-based cereal giant has signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract with Covance and challenged it to turn around food testing samples not in weeks or days, but within hours, Herring said.

"You know what? I think we can do it," he said.

Covance is working to secure other food testing contracts in order to expand its presence in Battle Creek.

"If we reach our objectives, we are going to create hundreds of jobs in Battle Creek," Herring said.

Covance received a total of \$4.3 million in state and local tax incentives. That includes a \$2.8 million state credit for renovating a functionally obsolete building where excessive levels of pollutants existed in the groundwater and soil from previous industrial use.

The former SEMCO Energy building was constructed in 1989 and was reported to have inefficient windows, lighting and mechanicals and a large lobby that had not been used for paying customers since 2003.

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