



September 30, 2009

Kellogg serves up research expansion

Officials laud \$54M downtown project

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The Enquirer

Kellogg Co. invested in innovation with the expansion of its W.K. Kellogg Institute for Food and Nutrition Research in Battle Creek.

The \$54 million project created 157,000 square feet of additional space for about 300 employees at its Hamblin Road facility. Company officials and local dignitaries celebrated its official opening on Tuesday.

The expansion brings together for the first time all of the cereal and snack maker's Battle Creek-area food scientists and developers under one roof.

Margaret Bath, Kellogg's vice president of research, quality and technology, said the first in a series of new products invented in these expanded facilities could hit the shelves within the next year.

New products created in the last three years accounted for 15 percent, or about \$2 billion, of the company's sales last year, said David Mackay, Kellogg's president and chief executive officer.

Since the institute's grand opening 12 years ago, Kellogg has introduced successful products that have built on its core brand names, such as Special K protein meal bars, waters, shakes, crackers and cereal flavor varieties, Mackay said. It also has allowed the company to reduce sugar and sodium in many of its products.

"I'm confident that all this good work of the past will pale in comparison to the renovations and innovations we can expect now that Kellogg has the premier product development center in the industry," he said.

Now with nearly 400,000 square feet devoted to product development -- including laboratories, research facilities, a flexible experimental production area and an improved pilot plant, a place where products can be tested before they hit full-scale production -- Bath said the company expects to accelerate new product creation.

"I think you will see some things that will be very pleasing to consumers in the next few years," Bath said.

Allowing employees to bounce ideas around the room is important, so there are no enclosed offices at the facility, Bath said. Her desk is situated at the center of the institute where she encourages the open, collaborative and equal sharing of ideas.

"It's the little things that you wouldn't even think to say to somebody that you hear being in an open environment," she said.

The expansion is certified by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and

Environmental Design. It has a white roof to reduce heat load and 700 tons of construction waste was recycled.

A small, grassy area will be planted beside the institute's Hamblin Avenue entrance, on the property formerly owned by salon owner Joe Ferrari, Bath said. A final plan for the enclosed space will be decided upon later.

Although no new jobs have been created as a result of the expansion, innovation is expected drive growth for the company.

That is good news for charitable organizations that look to Kellogg for major funding, said Chris Sargent, president and chief professional officer of United Way of Greater Battle Creek.

"Without business development, you can't have the other elements of a strong community," he said.

Karl Dehn, president and CEO of Battle Creek Unlimited, the city's economic development firm, said the institute's expansion aligns with the city's plan to transform downtown by developing food safety, testing, technology and education. Battle Creek could become the nation's food safety and development hub, he said.

"This is a great opportunity for Battle Creek," Dehn said.

The expansion is a part of Kellogg's overall plan to consolidate its employees to downtown Battle Creek to further encourage the creation of fresh ideas.

Within about the next eight months, it is likely that Kellogg will lease and occupy about 200,000 square feet of existing office space in downtown Battle Creek for about 600 workers from its Porter Street complex, Dehn said.

Tuesday's dedication marked an important milestone for Kellogg, Mackay said to local dignitaries, past company presidents, board members and staff.

"Kellogg Co. was founded very near here 103 years ago by an extraordinary man with a far-reaching vision," he said. "Mr. Kellogg's values and commitments drive us -- to this very day -- to be the food company of choice. This expanded facility is another important step in continuing to fulfill his vision.

"We can only imagine how very proud he would be today."

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