



Kellogg, Covance lead way for downtown

Barrett Newkirk • The Enquirer • February 21, 2010

In 2008, Battle Creek launched a major effort to reshape its downtown. In 2009, the groundwork for the plan was prepared.

And in 2010, the physical changes to downtown Battle Creek, a business district where thousands of people work every day, are expected to start to become visible.

"It's a time when we're really going to have and see tangible activity in the downtown," said Karl Dehn, president and chief executive officer of Battle Creek Unlimited.

Efforts to update streetscaping could be under way by mid-summer, Dehn said, and BCU still is trying to determine a suitable location for a downtown events plaza.

Kellogg Co. has requested the closure of a segment of Jackson Street next to its world headquarters, which would bring more changes to the downtown landscape later this year.

From the beginning, a major piece of the downtown redevelopment effort was Kellogg's intention to build a new office tower across the street from its world headquarters.

But the company's new plan -- announced last year -- to lease space in two existing downtown buildings hasn't weakened the vision of a more bustling downtown.

"It's accomplishing the consolidation and creating the critical mass of people we envisioned," Dehn said.

By September, Kellogg could have 600 additional employees downtown, working out of the Battle Creek Tower and the Fifth Third Building.

Dehn said Kellogg's increased downtown presence could lead to announcements this year of smaller businesses, like restaurants and retail shops,

arriving in the city's central business district.

"I think in the end we're going to have a much healthier real estate market," he said.

The change in Kellogg's plans hasn't caused the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's support for the downtown plan to flag, either.

"Even with the Kellogg Company having to change their plans, they still show a huge commitment to the downtown project," said Reggie LaGrand, program manager at the foundation.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has committed \$35 million to the downtown redevelopment effort. LaGrand said so far \$11 million of that amount has been designated to help various aspects of the project.

Other recent developments included the commitment of food testing company Covance Inc. to make a \$14 million investment to renovate a downtown site.

Dehn said Covance workers could be settling into downtown Battle Creek by September.

The project has close ties to the emerging focus on food safety in Battle Creek and the International Food Protection Training Institute in Western Michigan University's Kendall Center.

The institute is using start-up money from the W.K.



Kellogg Foundation and \$1 million from the federal government to train 1,000 food inspectors from around the country in its first year. President Barack Obama recommended in his 2011 fiscal budget that the amount increase to \$8 million.

With the proposed investment, the institute could hire 20 to 25 highly skilled employees and expand programs to serve an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 students in Battle Creek and at least 5,000 students online annually.

Officials are hoping for a long-term commitment of government money.

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