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Wilhelm: Athens is 'killing it' in entrepreneurship

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By SARA BRUMFIELD Messenger staff journalist |

"Why is Athens and Ohio University killing it in entrepreneurship?" That's a question that OU alumnus David Wilhelm posed — and attempted to answer — during the 5th annual BioVenture & Innovation Showcase, held Thursday at the Walter Hall Rotunda on the Athens campus.

Wilhelm — a former political adviser and current CEO of New Harvest Ventures — delivered the keynote speech during the forum that showcased a wide array of technologies and companies, including in the biotechnology, information technology and energy fields.

According to Wilhelm, the attitude surrounding economic development in the region used to be that big outside companies needed to come to Athens to help the economy. Now Athenians are taking matters into their own hands and becoming entrepreneurs.

"We are dreamers, but we are the dreamers of the day who dream with our eyes wide open," Wilhelm said.

Wilhelm said it's not surprising that so many successful entrepreneurs have come from OU, including former CEO of Cardinal Health Robert Walters and Fox News Chief Roger Ailes. He noted that the OU Voinovich School for Public Affairs and Leadership is the only public affairs school in the U.S. that has a strategic partnership with a college of business. He called OU the most efficient biotechnology commercialization institution in the country.

When he traveled to Chicago, Wilhelm said, people knew about Athens, not only because of Ohio University, but because it's a center for sustainable agriculture.

"People knew about Snowville Creamery. People knew about (the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks). People knew that there was something special in the air," Wilhelm said.

According to Wilhelm, the food companies that utilize the ACEnet kitchen on Columbus Road had more than \$28 million in sales last year. He talked about the success of Diagnostic Hybrids Inc. and the creation of the drug Somavert at OU.

Wilhelm said those in the area have learned that the best way to create lasting wealth is to create it themselves.

Six biotechnology and innovation companies were also showcased during the event. Those companies — which have direct or indirect ties to the area — included: Low Frequency Imaging, a company that uses a new form of medical imaging that shows abnormal tissue; Yost Engineering Inc., a company that is dedicated to research and development; SIRE Pharmaceutical Corp., a drug development company; New Polymer Systems Inc., which manufactures and markets advanced fillers for thermoplastics from biomass; Ecolibrium Solar Inc., which has developed a plastic ballasted flat roof mounting system for solar panels; FLARE CODE, which creates multiple mobile websites quickly; and Sanuthera Inc., an Athens company focused on commercializing tinnitus (ringing of the ears) therapy devices.

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