# VIEWS & VISIONS

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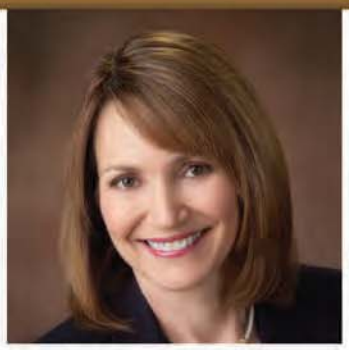

# TechConnect WV: Working to Ensure Growth of the State's Innovation Economy

Anne Barth, Executive Director
TechConnect WV

Anne Barth is executive director of TechConnect West Virginia, a nonprofit innovation-based economic development organization with broad representation from higher education, the public sector and industry.

Ms. Barth directs programs to foster entrepreneurs and start-up companies, leads organizational development, and participates in educational, cluster development and workforce initiatives in the state and region.

In 2011, West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin appointed Ms. Barth to the Southern Technology Council of the Southern Growth Policies Board. She serves on the NASA West Virginia Space Grant Consortium, the Board of Directors of Teaming to Win, the Charleston Area Alliance Vision 2030 Innovation/ R&D committee, and is co-chair of the Environmental Issues Team for Power of 32. She was awarded the U.S. Small Business Administration District Director's Award in 2012.

Before joining TechConnect WV, Ms. Barth worked for the late U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd as his state director. She serves as a member of the Congressional Education Foundation Board of Directors, which administers the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies on the campus of Shepherd University. In 2012, she was elected to the board of trustees of West Virginia Wesleyan College.

She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in corporate and organizational communications from West Virginia University.

*An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.*
–Benjamin Franklin

Important discoveries in science and research have fueled our nation's economy since Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals, created the modern odometer and conducted his famous kite experiment. As the prime driver of our economy, innovation creates good jobs and a high standard of living. It addresses the challenges we face in meeting national goals in energy, health care and defense.

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TechConnect WV, a coalition of partners from business, education and the public sector, was founded to support and foster the innovation economy in the state. Our goals are to diversify the state's economy, promote economic prosperity and create high-wage jobs in fast-growing industries. We work to encourage the launch of start-up companies and to enhance their chances of success.

Simply put, we want to get research out of university labs, or an entrepreneur's garage, and into the marketplace. A quick look around the state demonstrates that in West Virginia, the innovation economy is not just a concept, it is a reality.

In Morgantown, Protea Biosciences is a spin-out firm of West Virginia University, employing nearly 50 highly skilled workers who have developed an award-winning medical instrument technology – the LAESI DP-1000. In 2012, LAESI was hailed by *R&D Magazine* as one of the 100-most technologically significant products introduced in the past year.

Huntington is home to a growing bioscience cluster featuring technologies ranging from large-scale DNA replication to biopolymer production to bio-therapeutics and more. Firms like Vandalia Research, Cordgenics LLC, Progenesis Technologies and MIST Technologies are all working in this revolutionary space and all are spin-outs from Marshall University.

In the Kanawha Valley, MATRIC is helping companies across the country improve and create technologies in the chemical process, technical engineering and advanced software fields. The organization's adaptive business model is designed to accelerate the speed at which innovations are introduced into the marketplace.

Our state also is home to Marshall's Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing, one of the nation's leading centers for composites and 3-D printing. Experts predict that 3-D printing will lead to the "Third Industrial Revolution," transforming all aspects of the economy.

North central West Virginia is home to the FBI's high-tech crime-fighting complex and a nexus for identity intelligence companies and firms.

*The West Virginia Regional Technology Park, located in South Charleston, West Virginia*

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's new supercomputer, at the I-79 Technology Park in Fairmont, adds a new dimension to the federal presence in this region.

Finally, West Virginia lies in the center of the energy/ethane boom, which stands to regenerate the region's chemical, plastics and manufacturing industries and to help lead to new products and services for all aspects of the natural gas and liquids industries.

However, for an innovation economy to thrive, additional elements must be in place. Innovation requires ongoing development and attraction of intellectual capital, which is found in universities and national or private laboratories, where research generates new knowledge. In West Virginia, legislators approved creation of the West Virginia Research Trust Fund, which so far has matched $50 million in state dollars with private donations to encourage university research and leverage private giving. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of state leaders and university researchers, academic research funding in West Virginia is growing.

Another key to the innovation economy is mechanisms for transferring that knowledge – from a university lab, a shop floor or someone's garage – to the marketplace. The INNOVA Commercialization Group, an initiative of the West Virginia High Technology Foundation in Fairmont, provides critical business support services to help create successful entrepreneurs and new ventures.

Physical infrastructure, including high-speed Internet access and technology parks, is a necessity. In South Charleston, the West Virginia Regional Technology Park has singular scale-up pilot plant facilities and lab and incubator space, all complemented by the presence of the state's community and technical college system.

Perhaps most importantly, the innovation economy requires access to capital, to help entrepreneurs and start-up companies move from early stage ventures to growth firms.

Strengthening the connections between these critical components of the innovation ecosystem is key to creating jobs in the future. By forging stronger partnerships between researchers and entrepreneurs, streamlining the pipeline for commercialization of new products, providing infrastructure, and identifying more sources of risk capital, West Virginia can more fully engage in the innovation economy.

Experts at the Brookings Institute, the Kauffman Foundation and the Milken Institute all agree that states must nurture and develop innovation assets in order to diversify their economies to sustain future growth. This is why TechConnect works every day to be a champion, catalyst and collaborator for the state's innovation economy.

Thanks to the support from West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin, the West Virginia Legislature, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and the U.S. Economic Development Administration, TechConnect WV has the resources and capabilities for this mission and will advance policy positions and proposals to ensure future successes and growth. Learn more at **www.techconnectwv.org**.