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ASU's transition to an economic engine humming along

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If ever a place was vulnerable to a *Music Man* huckster, it was metropolitan Phoenix in 2002. The region had sleepwalked through the previous decade and found itself far behind in the race to build a high-tech, high-wage economy. A sharp slowdown made us even more needy for something, anything, to move beyond dependence on housing and population growth.

Enter Michael Crow as Arizona State University's new president and a pledge to rev up the institution as an economic engine. Skeptics quietly wondered if he was "Professor" Harold Hill, here to lead (Salt) River City on a parade to nowhere. *Economic engine, indeed.*

More than four years later, nobody can sing that song. ASU has indeed become a dramatically more important and activist part of the regional economy. Some high points:

- With the Biodesign Institute, the new downtown Phoenix nursing college and collaboration with the University of Arizona on the medical school, ASU is a backbone of the "meds and eds" economic strategy.

The Biodesign Institute more than doubled its grant funding from fiscal 2005 to 2006, reaching more than \$33 million. Its 400 new jobs include leading scientists from around the world. With 11 new patents in the past two years, the institute has also spawned three new companies.

- ASU Technopolis, one of the few incubators in the state, has received more than \$67 million in outside capital to launch new companies backed by ASU research. Technopolis has trained about 500 entrepreneurs representing 290 companies, backed by nearly 700 expert volunteer coaches and mentors.

- Global outreach is wide-ranging. The new research campus in south Scottsdale, Skysong, has started to break Arizona's tradition of looking inward, luring 11 innovation firms from eight countries to collaborate with ASU. Technopolis, meanwhile, has established several collaborations, including with Dublin City University, Tec de Monterrey, Mexico, and Jyvaskyla Science Park, Finland.

- Technology transfer has moved research into the private sector. The university's Arizona Technology

Enterprises over the past three years has entered 80 commercialization transactions, started 13 companies and generated \$8 million in licensing revenue.

- ASU was awarded \$43.6 million by the Army to lead the country's primary industry-government-academic consortium developing a new generation of flexible-display technology.
- Research has been given a huge boost. The university will soon have built or acquired over 1 million square feet of research space in less than three years. "Use-inspired research" encourages faculty researchers to work that will create economic opportunities here.
- Student entrepreneurship has been enhanced with \$200,000 a year in seed capital through the Edson Student Entrepreneur Initiative. The university was one of only two schools selected by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation for a \$5 million University as Entrepreneur Initiative grant.
- A solar and sustainability industry could be built here off the university's efforts, including the solar panel testing lab at the Polytechnic campus, research into nanotechnology in solar energy, and the Decision Theater facility that uses high-tech tools to create and examine policy-relevant models.

ASU has also made a significant impact in our leading industry and not just in its ramped-up real estate and construction management programs. It is developing a downtown Phoenix campus that will be the most significant single effort for a healthy center city. Skysong, formally the ASU Scottsdale Innovation Center, is the essential element of a revived south Scottsdale.

None of this has happened because of Crow alone. For example, he has had a deep-pocket partner in Phoenix. He has attracted many talented lieutenants to carry out the vision. Both voter- and Legislature-approved funding has come. And he built on a foundation laid by his predecessor, Lattie Coor.

There also is a legitimate argument over how much the "New American University" should be driven by business considerations, a debate made more important by the region's lack of competing (real) universities.

But the most successful regional economies around the world are built on great universities. Silicon Valley business connections have meant billions of dollars for Stanford and the University of California-Berkeley. They have been, well, economic engines.

It's a lesson we're learning late. But ASU is proving to be a fast learner.

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