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Startup City

by Mike Fitts

Looking around New Orleans today, the contrast is stunning. It's not just 10 years that remove us from the bleak days after Hurricane Katrina. It's a shift in mindset, a heightened energy, a renewed hope. A spirit of innovation pervades New Orleans and Tulane University.

We see items in the news that would have seemed far-fetched in the past, such as technology visionary Steve Case, co-founder of AOL, visiting the city and declaring, "I think New Orleans is poised to re-emerge as one of the great startup cities in the country, maybe even the world."

This has been exhilarating for me to watch as a new resident and new president over the last year.

Tulane contributes mightily to this atmosphere. It also draws from it. This is where we will find the key to making the next 10 years even more inspiring. At Tulane, we embrace this passion for entrepreneurship and creativity that we find around us.

It helps inform our own drive for innovation in the education we deliver, as we encourage idea sharing across disciplines and enterprising projects from our schools. The lively context of our home city will help propel us to leadership in educating nimble thinkers, to sharpen our competitiveness and to thrive in a changing landscape for higher education.

The kernel of this already is in place. A study on the economic power of Tulane in the New Orleans region found that patent applications filed annually by the university's Technology Transfer Office rose from seven in 2008 to 42 after five years. The number of inventions reported by Tulane researchers rose from 28 to 57. During the same period, 11 startup companies launched to market technologies developed at Tulane. Alumni, faculty and students started dozens of other companies operating around the New Orleans region. Tulane also fueled the workforce, providing about 30,000 graduates, or 21 percent of all college alumni in the metropolitan area.

While these dynamics benefit the city, they also cycle back to enhance the Tulane experience. Take one startup in town that developed a system giving manufacturers a technological window onto chemical reactions as they take place. Having that window lets manufacturers

INNOVATIVE WAYS

New Orleans and Tulane are driven to find new ideas and new ways of doing things in a post-Katrina environment.

adjust for quality in the midst of production, cutting waste and saving time and energy.

The company works with polymers, which are chemical compounds found in a sweeping range of products, from consumer electronics to aircraft to clothing. Polymer manufacturing is a vast industry, at more than \$1 trillion, said Alex Reed, CEO of the company, Advanced Polymer Monitoring Technologies (APMT). The company's system could save individual operators millions. Its leaders are dedicated to growing in New Orleans.

Tulane and the company have a close relationship. The firm rose from discoveries at the Center for Polymer Reaction Monitoring and Characterization at the Tulane School of Science and Engineering. Its entire executive team has Tulane ties as alumni or faculty. It licenses technology from Tulane.

Without help from the university, Reed said, the costs and risks of conducting the necessary research would stifle a small startup. Perhaps what's most meaningful for Tulane's success, however, is that APMT has worked with Tulane student interns. The university sparked an enterprise that offers students experience in entrepreneurship and innovation.

These kinds of experiences play out across our campuses. The Tulane Business Model Competition tests students in pitching their startup ideas. This year we hosted our first Novel Tech Challenge, funded by the Burton Morgan Foundation, calling on students to present ideas for improving the environment, health, education and urban infrastructure.

Tulane teams won the international Neuro Startup Challenge for medical inventions. The National Science Foundation named Tulane an Innovation Corps Site. The Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking and the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation have been launched.

Universities have long been a natural source for innovation. Tulane belongs to the Association of American Universities, which has reported sparking thousands of patents and hundreds of startup companies in one year alone. When you combine Tulane's energy with the incredible dynamism New Orleans is showing, you get a potent mix.

As a newcomer, I stand in awe of the promise I've found in the city and at Tulane. We've moved past the raw recovery, past the period when the future of New Orleans was dark and uncertain. Now, we've entered an age of renaissance.