HELP FOR KU'S ENTREPRENEURIAL SCIENTISTS

Often the scientist best suited to start transforming an invention into a commercial product is the one who invented it in the first place.

Even in universities buzzing with entrepreneurial activity, however, an inventor is not always inclined to quit his day job as a professor to become a full-time chief executive of a startup business.

Many leading universities have addressed this problem by establishing lab and office complexes for young companies close to campus. This makes it easier for multitasking innovators to dash back and forth between these businesses and their classrooms or academic laboratories.

A proposed lab and office incubator could offer just this sort of help to entrepreneurial scientists at the University of Kansas. The Lawrence-Douglas County Bioscience Authority is leading the drive for an $8 million lab and office project that would be built just across the street from the core of KU’s bioscience buildings on the university’s west campus in Lawrence. “We have had a lot of experience at KU with people starting companies based on their research,” said Kevin Boatright, a university spokesman. “And we have some younger faculty who are wanting to move in this direction. It has been compli-
Candidate returns to local newspaper approach

BY SARAH KESSINGER
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TOPEKA - In an era of soundbite politics, Congresswoman Nancy Boyda will again make use of a campaign medium that's considered a unique tactic in modern-day elections.

Tabloid-sized publications will be inserted into several local newspapers in the 2nd Congressional District this summer as Boyda, a Democrat, campaigns for re-election.

The sections offer a more expansive explanation of Boyda's stands on issues throughout the campaign as well as descriptions of her freshman term in Kansas and Washington.

"Voters are sick and tired of important decisions in our democracy fought out in 30-second ads," Boyda said. "They want real, in-depth information."

This year's first 20-page tabloid, entitled Congressional Update, began appearing Monday and will be published in 48 newspapers by week's end. More will follow later in the campaign as well as descriptions of her freshman term in Kansas and Washington.

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Burdeitt Loomis, a political scientist at the University of Kansas, received his in the local news although he lives just outside Boyda's district, which captures west Lawrence.

Loomis, who has analyzed many campaigns over the years, notes there is no research data on the effectiveness of the tabloid approach.

"There's no academic work on this at all," he said. "But I think the last time (Boyda ran), it clearly didn't hurt. It may have worked very well."

The Boyda campaign gives the small political sections full credit for boosting her successful campaign against incumbent Rep. Jim Ryun, a Republican, in 2006.

Ryun seeks to regain his seat this year: He and State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins will face off in the Aug. 5 GOP primary.

Ryun's spokeswoman, Jacqueline Harrison, said she couldn't reach the candidate late Monday for comment on whether she considered Boyda's inserts effective.

But Harrison said she looked forward to reading the Democrat's explanation of certain issues.

"Since Nancy Boyda took office, gas prices have gone up $1.80, she's voted for the largest tax increase in American history and she continues to use our military as a political football," Harrison said.

In the latest Boyda insert, the candidate chronicles her first term in office. It lists numbers of constituent cases her staff has assisted with, ranging from help in obtaining passports to smoothing out other bureaucratic wrinkles.

It also rehashes Boyda's policy stands and work on certain legislation.

Loomis said it appears a beneficial approach for an incumbent to take.

"It honestly works better for an incumbent because the sheer volume of stuff she's done, the numbers of cases she's done, passports helped with, is pretty impressive," he said.

It's interesting, too, the insert was in Monday's newspaper, he added.

"Monday's paper is very thin, so this kind of stuck out."

In 2006, the congresswoman and her husband wrote every word of the multiple inserts handed out during the successful campaign. This time there was campaign staff to help.

"The ideas and thoughts there are very much hers," said spokesman Thomas Seay.

The tabloids' production and distribution cost about $50,000, he said.

"It's obviously a lot cheaper than doing it through TV. To put that much information into a TV ad would cost millions of dollars," Seay said. "It's a really efficient and effective way to engage and involve voters."

Washburn University political scientist Bob Beatty said it appeared to work.

"I think it'd be great if all the candidates did the 30-page circulars and ran a few TV ads and told voters, 'Make up your mind.'"

He noted that Boyda took an unusual approach last time with low-dollar TV ads that countered the slick politician image.

"The anti-campaign campaign was sort of their strategy," Beatty said. "I think the newspapers did help, though we'll never know how much."

Now Boyda will want to hold onto those voters who read and were swayed.

"If she picked up only a few thousand votes it's worth it, because they're so relatively cheap," Beatty said. "In modern political campaigning that's not a lot of money."
VANISHING BEES | Mysterious decline sparks search for explanations

Empty hives have no easy fix

Record disappearances pose problems for some farmers, and scientists say there could be many causes for the losses.

By BILL GRAHAM
The Kansas City Star

The commercial honeybees pollinating our fruit and vegetable plants — and producing honey — continue to decline in mysterious ways, experts say.

But there’s no straight beeline to a quick fix, they say, because multiple factors may be causing bees to vanish.

Commercial beekeepers in the Kansas City area recently noticed population and honey production drop-offs in hives, said Bob Harrison of Busy Bee Acres near Odessa. That despite ideal spring weather that gave bees a bustling start.

“They were looking really great,” Harrison said. “Two weeks later, I was finding hives without bees.”

Two other beekeepers in the area reported similar problems, he said. Sudden bee disappearance is a growing national problem dubbed colony collapse disorder.

Agriculture officials this winter conducted a national telephone survey of beekeepers that found a record 36 percent loss of commercial colonies.

Last year, the hive losses were 25 percent, and they were 15 to 19 percent in the better years of the 1990s, said Kim Kaplan, a spokeswoman at the USDA’s Agriculture Research Service in Beltsville, Md.

“We did have enough honey-bees for our (crops) pollination this year,” Kaplan said. “But this is a very serious problem. You don’t want to start the research until it’s a critical problem.”

Wild honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies and other creatures also pollinate flowers for fruit, nut and seed production. They are in decline but still numerous enough to pollinate most lawn and garden flowers.

Most at stake are large commercial crops, such as almonds or apples, where producers rely on commercial bee colonies moved into orchards to pollinate the flowers that produce fruit.

Beekeepers and companies that use products that depend on bees — from ice cream makers that use natural flavors to cosmetics firms making lip balm — recently told a House panel that more money needs to be spent on bee research and fast.

A five-year farm bill recently approved by Congress authorizes $20 million in funding for bee research. But that doesn’t mean the money is allocated by Congress and ready to kickstart research. Federal officials are expected to announce a new four-year, $4.1 million research project this summer that will involve several universities.

“Moving bees across the country for commercial pollination causes stress and exposes the bees to new diseases, he said.

But as well, urban sprawl and heavier use of pesticides and herbicides in modern farming are decimating the flowering plants used by bees and other pollinators such as butterflies to gather food.

Harrison said some local beekeepers with losses wonder whether a chemical called imidacloprid, a pesticide applied to the seed of some food crops, is causing losses in the Kansas City area. Corn is tasseling near their hives, and that’s the only change from a few weeks ago, he said.

Imidacloprid has been blamed for bee losses in some European countries.

But Taylor said except for some cases of misapplication of the chemical to seed in Europe, scientists have not established a firm link between imidacloprid and bee losses.

Federal farm officials want the research to look at all possible causes.

“We believe that what we’re going to find is that it’s not a single factor,” Kaplan said, “but that there are multiple factors involved.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Ted Schlenker (left) and Bob Harrlson prepared boxes that will be home to new queen bees Thursday at Busy Bee Acres Apiaries, outside Odessa. Beekeepers around the country have reported increasing numbers of bee disappearances. The problem could threaten growers of certain crops, such as almonds and apples, who depend on bees for pollination.
Mix a train, an elevator, a car, and you get ...

Kansas is looking at a form of transit for Village West that’s unlike anything you’ve seen.

By BRAD COOPER
The Kansas City Star

Kansas is tinkering with a new kind of transit that might make light rail seem quaint.

While the community’s abuzz about the prospects for rail, a team of researchers is working to bring a Disneyland flavor to the sprawling Village West entertainment district in Wyandotte County.

What might the future hold? Envision a fleet of driverless minivans on rubber tires that would speed along on a dedicated runway — possibly elevated — to move people to the various attractions in the Village West area.

It would work almost like an express elevator. Riders could step onto a vehicle, punch a button on a screen and go where they want without stopping for passengers.

The technology has been slow to develop over the years, causing several cities to pass on it because of concerns about cost and implementation. But some experts say its time is about to arrive.

In Wyandotte County, the goal of this futuristic transit line would be to tie together a nearly 2,000-acre entertainment venue that features an 82,000-seat speedway, a minor-league baseball stadium, a shopping mall and eventually a huge water park and quite possibly a casino.

With fields of asphalt parking and some attractions three-quarters of a mile apart, Village West isn’t the easiest place to get around on foot.

That’s one reason it’s hard to plan improved bus service to the area: it’s difficult to get around once the bus drops you there.

“The Village West area is so spread out, it’s difficult for it to be pedestrian-friendly,” said Rob Richardson, planning director for Wyandotte County’s Unified Government.

Transportation planners also want to see how this kind of system might connect to the Woodlands racetrack to the north and Providence Medical Center farther to the east.

There’s no commitment, however, beyond the year-long study funded by the Kansas Department of Transportation and the University of Kansas.

The system eyed for the Village West area is known as “personal rapid transit.” It’s a cousin of the automated transit that move large volumes of people between terminals at major airports.

But personal rapid transit vehicles, which carry two to 12 people, are intended to give you more the feel of riding in a car.

Personal rapid transit, or PRT as it’s sometimes called, tries to ease riders’ angst about mass transit with features like short waiting times (only seconds), express service to your destination and no transfers.

“The actual concept of PRT by itself is a very good one. In fact, I think it’s something that should be investigated a lot more for U.S. cities,” said transportation expert Jonathan Richmond, who’s studied and written on transit extensively.

“Personal rapid transit as an idea has a lot going for it because it mimics what the car does,” Richmond said. “The problem is for it to be effective, it has to serve a wide number of origins and destinations.”

An entertainment area, where there are clearly defined high levels of demand, might be an “interesting” model for this kind of transit, Richmond said.

Studies have indicated that personal rapid transit has the potential to be viable in regional destinations with a demand for local circulation.

“Any area that’s campus-like where you’ve got a lot of people moving around and you have lots of need for parking ... are all ideal for initial PRT systems,” said Peter Muller, a consultant working on the Kansas project.

PRT: System would move on a track but give passengers the feel of a car ride

FROM A1

People who flock to Kansas Speedway each year, said Darren Cook, the track’s director of facility operations.

Any kind of system that would allow people to park once and move about would be a “big benefit,” he said.

“It’s more value for your dollar if you can come here and have a good time at the race and incorporate that into other activities,” he said.

An old idea is new

Personal rapid transit technology has been explored and experimented with for more than 40 years. The only example where it’s running today is in the college town of Morgantown, W.Va.

Built in the 1970s as part of President Richard Nixon’s attempt to push mass transit, the system was intended to help move students between the University of West Virginia’s two campuses, which were about a mile apart and connected by hilly roads.

But the project eventually became a monument to government largesse and waste because of cost overruns. Its price initially was estimated at $15 million to $20 million, but it eventually came in at about $130 million, according to various studies.

SEE PRT A4
While the project did undercut the further development of personal rapid transit, researchers point out that it successfully highlighted the viability of some of its technology.

The 4.5-mile system, with its fleet of 72 eight-seat vehicles, now seems an integral part of Morgantown's transportation network. It has more than 2 million boardings a year and averages about 15,000 a day, university officials said.

Morgantown officials are looking for ways to expand the service, which now stops at five locations along the route. The system's riders pay a 50-cent fare.

The Morgantown mayor told The New York Times last year he couldn't envision Morgan-town without it, and some college students said it was essential for getting round.

Other areas have toyed with the idea, but it didn't advance.

Personal rapid transit service was considered for the Chicago suburb of Rosemont, one study said, but it died in 1999 because of excessive costs and waning political support.

A 1996 study in Seattle concluded that while PRT would be a superior form of transit, implementation would pose a financial and technical risk. It recommended a public/private partnership for funding.

More recently, New Jersey researchers concluded the technology hadn't yet "fully advanced to a state of commercial readiness."

But the technology continues to advance, and transit researchers are heartened by the development of personal rapid transit at London's Heathrow Airport.

That two-mile stretch of track is expected to open early next year. It's costing an estimated $10 million to $15 million per mile to build.

One reason PRT hasn't taken off is that powerful computer programs needed to run the system are only now becoming more available, said Jon Carnegie, a Rutgers University transportation expert who studied the issue for New Jersey.

"We may be at a point where the technology has caught up with the concept," Carnegie said.

**PRT or rail?**

The cost of building a PRT system averages $20 million to $50 million a mile, studies say. There are only three or four developers of the technology worldwide.

By comparison, a light-rail system runs about $50 million to $70 million a mile, according to the New Jersey study.

"Technologically, the question of whether it can be done is almost moot anymore. No one argues whether it can be done. It's whether it should be done," said Stan Young, a project consultant and research engineer at the University of Maryland.

Because of the lack of a proven track record, Carnegie said, it would hard to count on the federal government for money. He said personal rapid transit doesn't fit well with the criteria the federal government uses to score transit projects.

"Systems with a proven track record generally win out, and there's not that much opportunity for innovation that might make PRT appear better from an investment perspective," Carnegie said.

But conventional transit projects such as light rail should look out, warns Muller, one of the consultants working on the Kansas project.

"One of these days PRT is going to start taking on light rail and commuter rail head-to-head, but in my opinion we're not quite there yet," he said.

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HOW A PRT SYSTEM WORKS

Personal Rapid Transit vehicle

A modern system uses a fleet of low power, battery-driven vehicles on a dedicated network of routes.

1. The cars seat four people and have some standing room. The system is available to those with disabilities.

2. The light, small, efficient vehicles can travel 25 mph. A fleet of the vehicles would be on-demand.

3. Cars run on rubber tires in a U-shaped concrete guideway that has power and signal rails along the inner walls.

Journey time: For a typical one-mile journey, the time taken is around 3 minutes.

PRT IN WYANDOTTE COUNTY

- Researchers are looking at how a PRT system can travel throughout the 1,500-acre complex, which includes Kansas Speedway, the Legends shopping mall and a minor-league baseball stadium.
- Possibilities include the transit system connecting with Schlitterbahn Water Park and even to The Woodlands.
- The study team includes researchers from the University of Kansas and Kansas State University. It will look at cost, ridership and possible reductions in traffic, among other things. There’s no commitment to build anything beyond the study.

Source: Advanced Transport Systems Ltd. (www.atsld.co.uk)
$2.9 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT

KU grad students are heading to urban classrooms

The University of Kansas this week received a $2.9 million federal grant to fund a program that will place science, math and engineering graduate students in urban Kansas classrooms. The KU program is designed to give graduate students some middle-school instructional experience.

Rep. Dennis Moore, a Kansas Democrat, announced the grant.

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