

VORBECK: LET'S ADD DOLLARS TO EXISTING STRENGTHS

By Tom Schuman

Bison Financial Group served as sponsor of the inaugural Indiana Technology & Innovation Council Policy Summit on December 15. Dave Vorbeck is CEO of Bison, which he founded in 1999 with the mission to provide a highly customized analytical investing approach that helps clients define, understand and achieve their goals.

Vorbeck shares his thoughts on the summit and Indiana's role in the technology economy.

Supporting the effort

"Our decision to sponsor the summit is really about our support of the Indiana Chamber. We think the organization is critical to businesses; a statewide organization devoted to economic development and business collaboration. This is important – for the Chamber to continue taking its lead role in promoting business growth and technology; for us to support the Chamber in that mission; and for all of us in business to understand we have a connection to technology.

"It's important that Indiana stake out a footprint in technology development – for the state to say, 'We are going to create an environment through various policy initiatives to support the technology economy and promote businesses that are engaged in things we haven't even thought of yet.'"

Financial equation

"Wells Fargo Advisors is our partner. It does business with about 600 firms like ours across the nation. We are the 10th or 11th largest. We do realize the global resources of Wells Fargo Advisors, resources we are able to bear for our clients. Wells Fargo Advisors is one of the largest purveyors of capital finance. It was important (at the summit) to hear about the financing space for technology, which in many cases presents some of its own challenges."

Indiana's technology environment

"I think that many entrepreneurs, thought provokers, inventors have pretty good opportunities in places like Purdue's Technology Park to license technology that already exists, apply it to new pathways or to create that technology. Purdue, in cooperation with the state, has done a good job of creating that fertile soil. I still think that one of

the biggest pieces missing for a lot of these firms is mid-level capital.

"We see what happens in the tech park, which is amazing. What we don't like seeing is the exit strategy for the emerging entrepreneurial and near enterprise level companies – that exit strategy being some sort of tie-up with an out-of-state company because that draws the employment base away. As a state, I think we need to find a better way to create a broader capital strategy for these companies that both makes it more feasible to find that development level capital and maintain that employment base and corporate structure in the state of Indiana."

Money matters

"Creating this great environment where people from all over the world can come (to start and grow technology businesses) without having an eye on how we lock that enterprise level success into the state is a big mistake." The successful areas across the country not only have that entrepreneurial base, "but they also have intermediate, late stage and final stage capital – at least access to those things. Indiana is a great state to do business in; there's no question about that.

"But the best states to do business in are where you can find the money to do the business. If your exit plan for your new technology venture is to be acquired, which is kind of traditionally what has been happening, the acquirer is more than likely going to move that corporate base out of state."

Workforce strength

"Look for example at what GE is doing here in Lafayette with the LEAP engine. They didn't choose Lafayette because there was an intersection of two suitable highways and nearby rail access. That's certainly important. But those sorts of infrastructure opportunities for a company like GE are found in thousands of places around the country.

"I'm sure what GE is hoping to capitalize on is an employment base that has a long, long, long history of what has historically been advanced manufacturing. The state I think has been in pretty good shape all the way from Studebaker, that was pretty advanced manufacturing for the day, to Fairfield Manufacturing – what Fairfield was doing 30, 40, 50 years ago was cutting edge stuff.

"We have a lineage of labor-ready advanced manufacturing employees. That's phase one. And then secondarily, I think you see companies like Cook doing amazing things with technology – created and perfected right here in Indiana. Cook is an example of one of the biggest success stories statewide: something sort of percolated, and grew and grew and grew – and that's what we want more of."



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– Dave Vorbeck
Bison Financial Group

RESOURCE: Dave Vorbeck, Bison Financial Group, at www.bisonfinancialgroup.wfadv.com. Bison, based in Lafayette, also has Indiana offices in Mishawaka, Terre Haute and Valparaiso.