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Stan Ahalt, Executive Director, Ohio Supercomputer Center (Columbus, Ohio)

Posted By marlon On October 19th, 2007 @ 5:15 PM In Ohio Business Climate Improvement | No Comments

One of the great things about Ohio is there are amazing stories of people who are achieving outstanding professional and personal success. Stan Ahalt, Executive Director of the Ohio Supercomputer Center (OSC), has one of those incredible stories. He left college to work at a lumberyard, switched to working at a grocery, discovered a personal passion for engineering, went back to college and earned a Ph.D. and now is running one of the most sophisticated high performance computing centers in the world. And now Stan has a vision to make the competitive benefits of high performance computing accessible to the Ohio business community. Stan has a very clear, very bold professional vision and he is making it happen in Ohio. He is not an Ohio native yet has found himself in love with the life he has been able to enjoy in this state. Stan's story is the quintessential example of why Ohio is called the "State of Perfect Balance."

Q: As I have studied Ohio's history, one constant has been the ability to cost effectively and efficiently move products and services to market. The transportation and logistics infrastructure has always been world-class. But what about our digital commerce capability? What is your opinion of Ohio's technological strengths?

A: I was in California last week giving a talk to an audience of high performance computing experts. In my presentation I made the claim that Ohio has the best "cyberinfrastructure" in the nation and then asked the audience if the statement was accurate in their opinion. The collective perspective was yes. In Ohio, the creation of this world-class cyberinfrastructure has been enabled by a strong and forward-thinking public-private collaboration. In Ohio, we have more than DSL capability to offer businesses. We have a real core infrastructure that enables Ohio-based companies to leverage high performance computing to be more competitive in the global economy. Ohio further differentiates itself from other states through its world-class analytics capabilities. Companies like Lexis-Nexis, the Ohio Computer Library Center, Chemical Abstracts Service and others provide the analytical expertise to capitalize on the ability to rapidly move bits and bytes of information. Executives should definitely evaluate Ohio's cyberinfrastructure and consider the competitive advantage it could represent before choosing any other location for capital investment.

Do you believe a world-class cyberstructure should be a key consideration in making a location choice for capital investment? Take a moment and [1] provide a comment sharing your point-of-view.

Q: I read an article explaining how P&G leveraged high performance computing to solve a manufacturing challenge on the Pringles production line, and routinely uses sophisticated virtual design tools to provide superior products that improve consumer lives. But, P&G is a Fortune 500 company. How does Ohio's cyberinfrastructure translate into a competitive advantage for smaller companies with less financial resources to bring this type of computing power to bear on business problems?

A: In Ohio, the solution is Blue Collar Computing™. It is a service provided by the Ohio Supercomputer Center that makes the potential of high performance computing accessible to Ohio companies. Blue Collar Computing offers the hardware, software and people required to get started in using the technology to solve complex business problems. For example, we worked with Edison Welding Institute to create an online tool that allows engineers to simulate welds without having to learn complex programming codes and languages. OSC developed the Web layout, the middleware, and is hosting the application on its supercomputers.

Because of our charter from the Ohio Board of Regents, OSC can provide the comprehensive solution services of Blue Collar Computing at cost, making it affordable for companies to leverage the power of high performance computing. We enable companies to solve problems more efficiently and effectively, which translates into the ability to more effectively compete for global market share in their business category.

Q: You've convinced me that Ohio has a world-class cyberinfrastructure and an enabling capability through OCS to translate it into a competitive advantage for Ohio based companies. But is the Ohio business climate innovative enough to be a world leader in high performance computing?

A: Ohio has made impressive strides that have established the benchmark for what great looks like within the small (but growing) global community of high performance computing professionals. Ohio's university systems are a driver of innovation, and the relationship between academia and the private sector in Ohio is continuing to strengthen. The $1.6B Third Frontier Project is a great example of a collaborative approach to enabling the continued development and commercialization of higher risk, promising research. We need to keep pushing in this direction to create incentives for industrial research. In my mind, Ohio has a core capability in "practical" innovation. Maybe it is the heritage of the Midwest, but Ohioans like to find ways to translate scientific breakthroughs into products and services that have market value. I think Ohio is definitely on a path to be the global leader in knowing how to leverage high performance computing for practical and profitable applications. I also think OSC will play a key role in making that vision a reality.

Q: What you have been able to accomplish to date professionally is, frankly, remarkable. But have you had to sacrifice your personal aspirations to do it?

A: No. I am not originally from Ohio. When I first moved to Ohio in the late 1980s, I had no expectation of caring as much as I do for this state. In fact, the depth of my passion for Ohio is a constant surprise to me. But the people in Ohio are refreshing. They exude the Midwestern values of honesty, transparency and trustworthiness. I get to work daily with people who are straightforward and practical. I don't have to fight to get from point A to point B in Ohio. Everything is accessible. The state has great resources and room to build. I find it a wonderful place to live. The cultural, recreational, medical and other services that help make a great life are available and affordable. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the point is whenever I am returning from my travel and land in the Columbus airport, I get an overwhelming sense of coming "home." It is one of the best feelings in the world. Ohio is big enough that a person can access the resources required to accomplish important goals, and small enough

that you can actually leave a personal mark with your work. For me, making a real difference is priceless and I can do that in Ohio.

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