Third Frontier opened medical-innovation pipeline

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Next month, Ohioans will vote on state Issue 1, a proposed constitutional amendment that would authorize the state to borrow $700 million to continue funding research-and-development projects through Ohio's Third Frontier program. Since its launch in 2002, the Third Frontier initiative has created more than 48,000 jobs and sparked an estimated $6.6 billion in economic activity, according to a study by SRI International.

In 2003, Dr. Michael Knopp, a radiologist at Ohio State University, used a $9.1 million Third Frontier grant to create OSU's Wright Center of Innovation in Biomedical Imaging, which features some of the world's most powerful body scanners.

Project collaborators include Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, the Ohio Supercomputer Center in Columbus and Philips Healthcare in suburban Cleveland.

Jay Mazelsky, a senior vice president for Philips Healthcare, was recently interviewed during an appearance on ONN-TV's Ohio Means Business:

Q: The Third Frontier money affects a lot of people and a lot of companies in different ways. How have you been able to use the Third Frontier funding to affect your industry?

A: It's important to take a step back and understand how innovative medical devices and products are developed. It's really at the intersection of advanced medical technology, advanced engineering and the clinical practice of medicine.

We develop our most innovative products when we work with research partners and clinical partners who bring insights on how to treat patients or on how to advance the state of technology.

We've been able to use the Third Frontier funding to work with partners like the Wright Medical Center at Ohio State -- clinical partners that give us advice on how to solve very vexing problems.

Q: How important is that relationship -- that collaborative effort -- between you and the universities?

A: It's very important to us. As I mentioned, they bring very, very innovative, thoughtful ideas on how to advance the industry. They bring clinical and research insights. They challenge us; they challenge us to think about how to solve problems and advance the entire practice of imaging.

Q: Can you give us an idea of some of the parts that you're actually making in Cleveland?

A: The Cleveland facility is our worldwide headquarters for computer tomography and nuclear medicine, so most of our manufacturing is done out of the Cleveland facility for both product lines.

We have a very extensive work force and engineering resources there -- over 1,100 employees. Probably 500 or 600 work in the technical fields -- our engineers and physicists, material scientists, software engineers.