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Mackinac Policy Conference

University Research Corridor director named

Marisa Schultz and Nathan Hurst / The Detroit News

Mackinac Island -- The University Research Corridor, an alliance of the state's three largest universities, named its first executive director Thursday, a move that will accelerate the corridor's efforts to spark economic development and raise its international profile, leaders said.

Jeff Mason, senior vice president and chief business development officer for the Michigan Economic Development Corp., will become the first full-time employee of the URC on July 6.

Formed in 2006, the URC is an alliance of Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University aimed at better collaboration on research, economic development, and luring business and grant money to the state. Mason will be based in Lansing and report to the three URC presidents.

Mason's hiring would jumpstart the corridor's efforts to attract more research dollars to Southeast Michigan, MSU President Lou Anna Simon said.

"These are significant assets for our economy, and a team sport," Simon said.

The announcement of Mason's appointment came at the Mackinac Policy Conference, where URC officials also released a new study about the importance of the state's biotechnology industry. Among the findings of the study conducted by the Lansing-based Anderson Economic Group:

- Michigan's life science jobs sector grew 10.7 percent between 1999 and 2006, when the state lost a quarter of its manufacturing jobs.
- Wages for life science industry workers jumped 29 percent during that time, averaging \$83,494, well above the state's overall average.
- While the industry employs roughly two percent of Michigan's work force, it pays 4.4 percent of the state's overall payroll.

"It's an incredibly important industry that's going to continue driving growth in Michigan," said economist Patrick Anderson, who headed the study. "There's a lot of potential for the future."

URC institutions will continue to be drivers of growth in the life sciences sector with major investments in people, innovations and facilities, U-M President Mary Sue Coleman said. Wayne State is investing in the state's first stem cell commercialization lab, MSU is reviving a former Pfizer laboratory in Holland and U-M bought the former Pfizer property in Ann Arbor.

"We need to take full advantage of Michigan's life sciences sector," said Wayne State President Jay Noren.

mschultz@detnews.com (313) 222-2310

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