

# PROXIMITY TO IOWA STATE A PLUS FOR PARK TENANTS

## --Iowa State University Research Park

Since the dawn of the internet age some three decades ago, it has become increasingly more common for teams from distant corners of the globe to come together remotely. What was once novel is now commonplace. With access to an internet connection, a programmer in India can link with an engineer in Indiana and a product specialist in Innsbruck in real-time to push forward any imaginable product or project.

Yes, the internet has made the process of instantaneously connecting specialists from all over the world possible.

But, many businesses are coming to realize that sort of connectivity is only one piece of a larger puzzle in scaling a successful business. For more and more organizations, proximity—to technology hubs, networks of similarly complex organizations, industry talent, and interns—is becoming more of a priority.

In recent years, a number of companies with an international reach have opened offices in the Iowa State Research Park, each of them sharing a common interest in the benefits of having a physical presence in close proximity to the University.

“The primary motivation for many of the tenants opening an office in the Park is having easier access to the incredible things happening at Iowa State,” says Alison Doyle, Director of Marketing at the ISU Research Park. “Having the ability to take a five minute drive up the road to visit with a professor conducting research, or a team of students working on a capstone project or to participate in a job fair is a big draw. Our tenants recognize that Iowa State is a world-class institution and a driver of innovation. They want to be a

part of that.”

But not all companies with a presence in the Park were founded elsewhere. An equally valuable mix of tenants include those who are “home grown” like Parametric Studios, SmartAg, Nebullam and more.

“It is a rich atmosphere for innovation,” Doyle says. “There is a mastermind feel about it. When one company has a successful investment round funded, or launches a new product, or earns a large government grant or contract, it inspires the others. As we continue to grow so does that synergy. It is an exciting time for Ames, Story County and all of Iowa.”

Access to Technology and Expertise Iowa State is renowned as a research institution. From veterinary science to agricultural related pursuits, to a robust engineering program, there are new developments coming out of the University on a daily basis. And companies large and small are paying attention.

“We have a significant interest in research being conducted at Iowa State,” says Kevin Gaul, Pella’s director of legislative and regulatory affairs and a key member of the team that spearheaded the effort to establish the Park office.

Pella is making the most of its presence in the Park by setting aside lab space to assist students working on capstone projects. Gaul, who is an alumnae of Iowa State, says it is a win-win. Pella benefits from the work of students pushing the envelope in regard to technology, and students have access to a dedicated space to carry out their research.

“Back two decades ago when I was doing my senior capstone, it was a real challenge to find lab space to work on it,” he says. “When we finally did find space, we often

had to pack up every day when we were finished. There was always good space for making things but storing them was the issue.”

And Pella isn’t the only organization working to accommodate the groundbreaking work of students and researchers. Vermeer has dedicated the upper level of its building in the Research Park to host startups ranging from the Startup Factory to the Agricultural Entrepreneurial Initiative. It also offers co-working space for rent by the hour, day or month. All of it is aimed at nourishing an environment of innovation.

Mike Hogan, CEO of Calcium Products, says the developments coming out of the Research Park convinced his company to make the leap to Ames. In early 2014, Calcium Products moved its headquarters from Gilmore City to offices in the Research Park.

“As we were growing, we knew that we needed to dedicate additional resources to R & D,” Hogan says. “That was a driver in establishing a presence in Ames. We really wanted to be where the R & D was happening. By having a physical presence here, we could work hand-in-hand with researchers at Iowa State and the USDA.”

A similar judgement on the benefits of having a physical presence in the Research Park was rendered by Kent, one of the world’s largest agricultural feed manufacturers in the world.

“We are all about innovation,” says Jeff Underwood, who manages the Kent outreach office in Ames. “We are looking for science-based solutions that will help us to better serve our customers. We want to work with world-class research universities and Iowa State fits that bill. It was an easy decision to establish a physical presence here.”

Underwood adds that he is optimistic about what the outreach effort in Ames will yield for Kent.

“Yes, our primary reason for being here is access to the talent that Iowa State produces,” he says. “But it also offers an opportunity to keep an eye on the technology being developed here and to move to incorporate the technologies that will help us continue to innovate much quicker than we ever have. We see this office as one more way we are fostering growth organization wide.”

## Access to Talent

Going hand-in-hand with research is talent. Iowa State’s enrollment has exceeded 35,000 in recent years, offering a rich recruitment base for employers seeking the best and the brightest in a competitive market for talent.

Pella’s Gaul says the more opportunities they have available for students, the better.

“What really gets us excited is the opportunity to help students develop skills they can bring to the market and, hopefully, to Pella,” he says. “Expanding on the research being done here will drive innovation even further as students become more familiar with Pella and with our goals.”

Kaly Etten, Leader of University Relations at aviation giant Collins Aerospace, offers a similar assessment.

“We consider our student employees a pipeline for our early career positions and we convert 65-75-percent of our students each year to full time,” Etten says. “Having a site so close to campus gives us the opportunity to engage with students in a unique and consistent way. Even as their internships or co-ops end, we are able to remain aligned as they return for another semester at school, because we are just over a mile from campus.”

Calcium Product’s Andrew Hoiberg, who serves as Vice President of Research and Development, says making it easy for students to find his company is valuable.

“Being here has allowed us to be a lot more visible,” says Andrew Hoiberg, Vice President of Research and Development at Calcium Products. “One of our strategies in moving here was clearly to recruit talent, specifically students.”

## Access to Interns

Many of the companies in the Research Park offer robust internship opportunities to give students a look at what work in the real world looks like, without having to drop their studies for a semester or more.

“Our goal here is to establish a pipeline that will create internships for current students and jobs for recent graduates,” says Kenneth Kyle, manager of TMC’s Ames location in the Research Park. “We started with a small office in Ames in early 2017 and quickly outgrew our space. This has been an incredibly popular opportunity for interns because it offers them a chance to get practical experience, literally minutes from campus.”

“We have had an internship program for years,” Kyle continues. “But having a physical presence in Ames and making it convenient for students to work, even during the school year, takes it to another level. This has been a huge step up for us.”

Katie Knott, an Iowa State alumna and Collins Aerospace Technical Project Manager, says that while her internship experience was remarkable some two decades ago, times have changed. Students want to be able to work while they pursue their studies. Taking a break has become impractical for many of today’s students.

“When I was an intern about 20 years ago, you took a summer or semester off from college to go to Cedar Rapids, or another Rockwell Collins location, to fully immerse yourself in work,” Knott says. “Then, after the 3-12 months working, you fully immersed yourself back in school. It felt disjointed on both ends. Having an office in Ames changes that dramatically. The facility at the Research Park allows students to continue to work on their projects and programs, while staying connected with their teams at our other locations, without sacrificing a whole term of advancement in their coursework.”

## Access to Ideas

There is also a network effect to being located in the Research Park. From consortiums like the Cultivation Corridor to startup specific programs like the Startup Factory, and University-based resources like the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center and the ISU Economic Development and Industry Relations department—to name just a few—form an equally supportive base of resources for new businesses and established organizations opening up shop

in the Research Park.

For large, Iowa-based businesses Pella and Kent discussions with similar-sized organizations helped them make the decision to open an office in the Research Park.

“In conversations we had with Vermeer, we started asking about how their arrangement was going at the ISU Research Park,” Gaul, of Pella, says. “When they shared the benefit they’d seen as a result of having a physical location in the Park, it made it an easy decision for us to move forward.”

“There are so many exciting startups and projects coming out of Central Iowa, and Ames, in particular,” Underwood, of Kent, says. “We wanted to be sure we had a front row seat to that innovation and that we were helping to drive it.”

There has also been a side benefit of having an office in close proximity to outreach offerings from some of familiar companies.

“The environment for collaboration here is so rich,” Underwood says. “I can’t wait to see what the coming months and years bring.”

And the environment of innovation extends to companies that are sometimes just weeks or months removed from the dawn of a new idea. The Startup Factory was brand new when Parametric Studio was admitted to the program in the summer of 2016. Founder Chris Whitmer says it was invaluable to have an immersive and structured program, in a supportive environment, to help get the company off the ground.

“Together, it gave me a clear picture of what we needed to do as an organization if we were going to address the needs of the market, and succeed as a business,” he says.

Gaul adds that the staff at the Research Park does a magnificent job of making the process of finding space simple.

“The Park staff was phenomenal throughout the process,” he says. “We had what felt like a million questions for them and they never balked. They helped us in every way we needed and we couldn’t have asked for more.”

