BIOMED TECH EVENT SHOWCASES WICHITA'S GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

By Emily Barnwell

The Partnership's Talent Team, in collaboration with the Wichita Foundation and NXTUS, hosted Biomed Tech: Building Wichita's Innovation Future on Sept. 29 at Cargill Protein Headquarters.

Part of Launch Week, the event brought together national thought leaders, local innovators and community partners to explore how Wichita can build a connected ecosystem around the new Wichita Biomedical Campus℠.

Foundation for Growth

Keynote speaker Cameron Cushman, ecosystem builder and co-founder of 1 Million Cups, drew on lessons from his work to highlight what it takes to build movements around entrepreneurship.

Using the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles as a playful starting point, Cushman reminded attendees that history's great movements often began with smart, creative people gathering in the same place.

He emphasized that people must be at the center of innovation, and that companies founded in Wichita are more likely to stay here and fuel long-term transformation.

"Good ideas live everywhere," said Cushman, noting that Wichita's challenge and opportunity lie in bringing together diverse thinkers, building networks that matter more than hierarchy, and committing to the long game.

"Innovation takes time," he added. "Being part of this conversation is an important step, but we have to keep building and keep including people to witness meaningful change."

Karim Mikhail, senior advisor at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and global pharmaceutical executive, brought a national perspective to Wichita's efforts. Visiting the city for the first time, he described this as a "unique moment" for the region and shared why collaboration with the FDA is essential for accelerating biomedical innovation.

Mikhail offered the audience an "FDA 101," breaking down how pharmaceutical drugs are approved and the agency's priorities, which include ensuring foods are healthy and safe to eat. He also encouraged local stakeholders to leverage FDA resources, noting that Wichita is entering an era of incredible biomedical innovation, with the R&D pipeline nearly doubling

in size each decade.

Conversation on Innovation

A diverse panel of leaders from academia, industry and entrepreneurship took the stage to discuss how Wichita can build a thriving biomedical ecosystem. Moderated by Cameron Cushman, the conversation highlighted opportunities, challenges and the bold vision for the region. Panelists included:

- **Dr. Matthew Byerly**, Associate Dean, Research, KU School of Medicine-Wichita
- **Rob Gerlach**, AVP of Tech Commercialization and Industry Engagement, Wichita State University
- **Dr. Matt Leming**, Co-Founder, Winnow Bioscience
- **Dr. Monica Lounsbery**, Senior Executive Vice President and Provost, Wichita State University
- **Dr. Kevin Mills**, President, AdAstra BIO (the NEW BioKansas)

Panelists shared insights on the resources, partnerships and talent needed to accelerate Wichita's biomedical and biotechnology ecosystem. Key takeaways included:

- **Innovation**
  - Innovation is not just about ideas; it's about turning research into real-world products and services.
  - Wichita's institutins are collaborating in new ways, creating an environment where discovery can thrive.
- **Existing strengths**
  - Wichita's advanced manufacturing and FAA-regulated industry expertise provide a strong foundation for building FDA readiness.
  - Success stories like WSU's COVID-19 testing lab show how quickly local partnerships can create high-impact solutions.
  - The connectivity between WSU, KU and global industry partners offers a powerful platform for growth.
- **Opportunities for growth**
  - Build a more robust clinical trials infrastructure to support biotech development.
  - Increase awareness and action. Momentum depends on community-wide support.
  - Position Wichita as a destination for cutting-edge care and novel therapies, including new opportunities like a proposed dental school.
- **What success looks like**
  - State and federal investment in biomanufacturing and workforce development.
  - Wichita is recognized as a household name for innovation, health care and opportunity.
  - A growing pipeline of innovative startups is beginning to attract national attention.

- **The big picture**
  - Success requires intentional collaboration. This includes more than new buildings. It includes purposeful connections between people, ideas and resources.

Looking Ahead

The event concluded with remarks from Dr. Kevin Mills, President of AdAstra BIO, who reflected on the day's discussions and shared a vision for Wichita's future in biomedical innovation. Mills highlighted three key themes: preparation, convergence and innovation. He emphasized that the region is laying fertile ground, from the investment in the Wichita Biomedical Campus℠ to the collaboration between WSU, KU and WSU Tech.

Mills encouraged the community to think boldly about the city's unique opportunity.

"We don't want to replicate what other cities have done. We want to align Wichita's strengths with where the world of bioscience is going. This is our chance to build something new that transforms healthcare, research and the economy. I see Wichita becoming a hub for biomedicine, biomanufacturing and innovation over the next decade," Mills shared.