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NE Ohio gets a high-tech boost

Clinic-led effort is one of 6 in region sharing \$113 million \$113 million in Third Frontier cash to go to six projects

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Plain Dealer Reporters

The state will pour more than \$113 million in Third Frontier money into Northeast Ohio, including \$60 million for a Cleveland Clinic-led effort that could create hundreds of jobs and establish the city as a hub of biotech innovation.

Six research and commercialization projects will split the Third Frontier money, a state panel decided Friday.

The second-largest award, \$23.8 million, will go to a project led by Cleveland State University.

Elsewhere in the state, three projects received money, bringing the statewide tally to nearly \$168 million.

Most of the money comes from a bond initiative approved by voters in November 2005 as part of the 10-year, \$1.6 billion Third Frontier project. The effort to create high-tech jobs and economic development began in 2002.

The Third Frontier Commission decided on the most recent grants after hearing recommendations from the National Research Council of the National Academies.

The Clinic won the state's first grant for a mega-center, an institution focused on creating businesses and attracting venture capital.

Working with more than 20 collaborators locally and nationally, the Clinic will establish a Global Cardiovascular Innovation Center, whose main clinical focus will be heart failure and its two major causes.

Dr. Steven Nissen, the center's leader, said it will develop technologies and spin off new companies.

The technologies could include anything from a minimally invasive method of removing patients' replacement heart valves after they fail to new diagnostic tests that determine patients' responses to therapies, Nissen said.

"I think we have a great shot at being a hub of biotech innovation," Nissen said in a phone interview Friday. "We've always been strong in cardiology. Why not take our strength and turn that into an opportunity for economic development?"

In addition to the Third Frontier money, Nissen said, the center will receive \$180 million already committed by industry leaders.

The center will be housed in a facility built, owned and managed by the nonprofit Fairfax Renaissance Development Corp. Vickie Johnson, the corporation's executive director, said the redevelopment of the Fairfax neighborhood is an added benefit of the Third Frontier award.

Bob Yuan, a member of the National Research Council's staff, said the Clinic's mega-center proposal was by far the best of seven submitted.

But council staffers criticized the center proposal because it lacked the appointment of a full-time chief executive, as well as ways to encourage consortium leaders to be loyal to the center rather than their own institutions.

John Wendt, another council staffer, said that deciding which mega-center to push forward came down to how many jobs the center could create, how realistic its estimates appeared to be and the probability of a return on investment.

Chris Coburn, who leads the Clinic's technology transfer and commercialization arm, said he and others expect the Global Cardiovascular Innovation Center to create several hundred jobs in the first five years.

During a standing-room-only news conference on the Cleveland State campus, Gov. Bob Taft said the six Northeast Ohio projects are expected to lead to more than 3,600 jobs over the next eight years, 1,200 of which will be created within three years, he said.

Taft also praised the grant applicants for their commitment to collaboration. Cleveland State, for example, has teamed up with 32 partners. And the Clinic-led project includes University Hospitals Case Medical Center.

"It's truly phenomenal," Taft said. "It bodes well for the future economic growth of this region."

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