

A bedrock for future growth

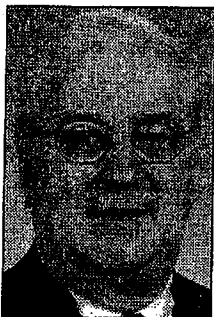
By Joseph Ferretti, Ph.D.

The recent Battelle study by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce pointed out the need for a comprehensive bioscience plan for the state if Oklahoma's economy is to grow and thrive in this century. At the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, we have just recently finalized an essential road map for research on our campus. It is one that aligns well with this most important goal.

Our new five-year strategic research plan targets and builds upon existing research strengths to achieve a vigorous economy and a healthier future for all Oklahomans. Our previous research strategies have boosted total research awards at the OU Health Sciences Center from \$10 million in 1982 to \$124 million in 2004. I believe our new strategic research plan will provide the impetus for equally impressive research growth in the years ahead.

Our overall goals are to propel the OUHSC and our state to regional and national prominence in research and development; to bridge the gap between bench and bedside, rapidly translating new discoveries into new treatments; to promote further economic development for Oklahoma; and to continue to meet the health care needs of this state.

The new strategic research plan has as its key focal areas research involving cancer, diabetes, neuroscience/vision and infectious diseases/immunology. The OUHSC already has a solid core of basic and clinical researchers in these four areas, plus the largest biomedical infrastructure in the state. Through



Joseph Ferretti

recruitment, we continue to grow our ranks of top researchers, including:

■ Several new investigators already on board working in the OU Cancer Institute to find new ways to deal with and potentially cure cancer. They will be working in concert with some of our outstanding cancer researchers, including Dr. Howard Ozer, Dr. Ann Thor and Dr. Marie Hannigan.

■ Dr. Richard Cummings and his team who specialize in glycobiology, which includes the study of cell communication, gene expression, immunology, inflammation and the growth of viruses, bacteria and other parasites that create illness.

■ Dr. Tim Lyons, an internationally recognized expert in diabetes who is leading our research in this critical area for so many Oklahomans. Working with Dr. Lyons in this vital area to Oklahoma's health is Dr. Kenneth Copeland, a nationally recognized expert in pediatric diabetes.

■ Dr. Gene Anderson and his colleagues who are doing breakthrough vision research that impacts everyone from the youngest to the oldest citizens of our state.

The strategic research plan calls for a doubling of our total biomedical research funding and the addition of 100 faculty members during the next five years.

Implementing the new strategic research plan is an auspicious undertaking. It also represents a significant investment in our future. It will take as much as \$40 million to achieve our goals. However, it's an investment that promises great returns for Oklahoma because it provides the bedrock for a thriving bioscience research and development endeavor in our state — one that brings with it more higher-paid jobs, strong economic growth, and biomedical research advances that translate into better treatments and ultimately a healthier citizenry for Oklahoma in the 21st century and beyond.

Ferretti is senior vice president and provost of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.