

Officials unveil Power Knowledge Corridor signs

Bounded by McKellips, Pecos, Greenfield and Ellsworth roads, the education and health-care hub includes Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, universities, hospitals and labs. Mesa Mayor Scott Smith recounted the origins of the corridor at the unveiling.

Maria Polletta, The Republic | azcentral.com 12:48 p.m. MST April 4, 2014



(Photo: Maria Polletta/The Arizona Republic)

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Having a buzzing, expanding education and health-care hub is a big deal, according to Mesa Councilman Scott Somers, but it's not worth much if you can't sell it.

Officials and developers need something to point to, he said, a name to drop.

Somers, along with Mesa Mayor Scott Smith, Gilbert Mayor John Lewis and Maricopa County Supervisor Denny Barney, provided both April 3 when they unveiled new street signage along what they've been calling

the Power Knowledge Corridor.

Three bright-blue signs, featuring the corridor's name in capital letters flanked by a logo with a rising sun, have been placed along Power Road at Williams Field Road, Galveston Street and Ray Road.

Unlike other sectors, where the development of a vision preceded the courting of major players, the birth of the Power Knowledge Corridor was a case of realizing what that part of the Southeast Valley already had going for it, Smith said.

Stretching from McKellips to Pecos and from Greenfield to Ellsworth roads, the corridor includes Mesa Community College's Red Mountain campus, Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus, A.T. Still University, Chandler-Gilbert Community College, the East Valley Institute of Technology, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the University of North Dakota's flight-training center. Grand Canyon University also is set to join the mix.

About five years ago, "we looked at a map, and that map showed ... the clustering of incredible education institutions that were either in existence, that were planned or that we dreamed about," Smith said. "We said, 'Listen, we've got to somehow highlight that which exists and that which is going to exist, and recognize what an incredible role this will play as the Southeast Valley grows.'"

"We realized that this represented something special, and in order to represent something special, we had to name it something special," he said later.

Despite the prevalence of schools and colleges in the corridor, the use of "knowledge" over "education" in its branding was intentional. The sector also boasts big names in health care, aviation and other industries.

Smith applauded the innovations pursued by Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center, for instance, as well as the "high-level, classified-type research" he said will be generated by AZLabs, a former Air Force lab that Mesa lobbied federal officials to reuse while maintaining its security clearance.

Somers pointed to the wealth of businesses on and near Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, as well as Mesa's recently opened LaunchPoint business accelerator, which focuses on "adolescent" companies already bringing solid, tech-based proposals backed by research to the table.

"Those are the assets that have been collecting in this area now for the past eight years," Somers said before the unveiling. "Add to that new investments in infrastructure, particularly the freeway system ... and there's an additional benefit. We always knew this area had tremendous potential."

Staying on top of infrastructure needs will be critical if officials want the rest of the corridor to develop, Somers said.

"Among the assets that we have are that dark fiber (unused fiber-optic cables) and power, which is a particularly big deal. If you look at where the power lines are now, we have phenomenal potential to develop up there," he said. "But we are going to need to continue to make investments."

Both Scott, who will step down in mid-April to run for governor, and Somers, who has less than a year left on the council, said they hope their replacements will keep the corridor's momentum going.

"I hope they use this signage, this branding, to build upon something," Smith said. "(I hope) they use it as an inspiration, they use it as a road map, they use it as a starting place, not a finish line, but a starting place to take that which is really incredible and build something even more incredible."

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