

A Young Leader's Vision

Laura J. Butcher seems impossibly young for her job. But then again, maybe she was born at the right time, equipped at age twenty-nine with the vision and scope to manage a multi-million-dollar technology research park.

"Tech has always found me," she says by way of introduction.

Butcher is a Middletown native who studied communications at the University of Delaware. After graduation, she went to San Francisco and worked from 2000 through 2002 in investor relations, during the dot-com boom and bust. She calls herself a boomeragner, who went west and then came home.

"As much as I loved the big city, there were wonderful things about south central Pennsylvania that I didn't realize you could get anywhere else, including quality of life and cost of living," she says now.

Moving through the legislature and the state Department of Economic Development, she worked her way into a post as Director of Constituent affairs for DCED's technology investment office. There, she built relationships and trust with the people and organizations who were dreaming up a big idea in biosciences research – what is now the Hershey Center for Applied Research. Early last January, before the first building was finished, Butcher started her first day as executive director.

A timeout to define "biosciences": It is, Butcher says, a "generic, inclusive term" encompassing research in pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics and those areas where biology and technology intersect, such as agriculture and food science. "It's a gigantic area of research and commercialization work," Butcher says.

And here, the roundabout story of HCAR's beginnings: Charles D. Dilks, Philadelphia, is a consultant who has helped develop research parks for twenty-five years. His resumé includes Philadelphia's University City Science Center, the nation's first research park. One of his clients is Baltimore-based Wexford Science & Technology, premiere developer of research facilities.

Dilks' nephew is the vice president for real estate transactions for the Conservation Fund, and a few years ago, the Hershey Trust engaged him to advise on the usage of its land holdings. On a Derry Township chart, he noticed the words "research park" on a tract adjoining the Penn State Hershey Medical Center and College of Medicine. He called his uncle, who contacted Wexford, which convened a meeting of Trust officials and other business leaders who had



been discussing the viability of a research park.

"On the one hand, they had a huge desire to do something, but on the other hand, did they have the skills set to do it?" Dilks recalls. "It's not Philadelphia. It's not New York or San Francisco, so how do you pull this off?"

Dilks knew, though, that the ingredients added up to a recipe for success. A research park needs a strong "university generator" for research backing. Penn State College of Medicine conducts one hundred million dollars worth of medical research annually, and its Office of Technology Development helps researchers with licensing and intellectual property issues, as they turn their findings into business opportunities. The college committed to moving its Pharmacology Department into the center's first building.

"It anchors it financially, but it also put the school's imprimatur on it," Dilks says. "It puts relevant things in the building."

A research park requires leadership, and here, "everybody was in the room, not just low-level

people," Dilks says. Those partners are now reflected in the colors of the park's molecule-strand logo, beginning with yellow for the Hershey Trust. Blue, naturally, represents Penn State, and orange is for Wexford, which developed and owns the twenty-five-million-dollar Building One. Red represents the Capital Region Economic Development Corporation, which obtained five million dollars in state grants and loans, and green is for the Life Sciences Greenhouse of Central Pennsylvania, a funder for small, emerging tech companies.

Of course, a research park needs space, and Hershey Trust was prepared to lease out 165 acres of beautiful Derry Township fields. Plus, the location featured affordable lease rates and the region's famous access to the northeast's major cities.

The ingredients combine to create a place where new and established research companies can interact, share ideas and access the resources needed to thrive. "It's important to know that you have an anchor tenant, but you also want to have in it the entrepreneurs that we're trying to support and grow, and often, you need to help them financially," Dilks says.

The first building of the Hershey Center for Applied Research opened in April. Another eleven are anticipated, well into the future, as new tenants are attracted and industry clusters cultivated. To guide the park's growth, Dilks found the right executive director in its backyard.

Laura Butcher says she was working "at the thirty-thousand-foot level on policy and strategic planning" – in a state office in downtown Harrisburg, where ideas, finances, laws and regulations are coordinated to encourage life sciences companies to start up and grow in Pennsylvania.

Now, Butcher is on the ground – literally. She is involved in everything from attracting tenants to planning buildings. She markets the park, develops governance policies, supports the tenants and conducts community relations.

Butcher calls HCAR a "venture ecosystem" – a patch of ground and gathering of buildings where academia, industry, government and support services all coexist and collaborate. A casual observer could be forgiven for assuming that HCAR is part of Penn State Hershey Medicine. It is not, but they are intertwined. Park tenants have access to university amenities, such as the library and costly research equipment, while university professors can channel their research findings into the marketplace, and medical college students get internships and research experience.

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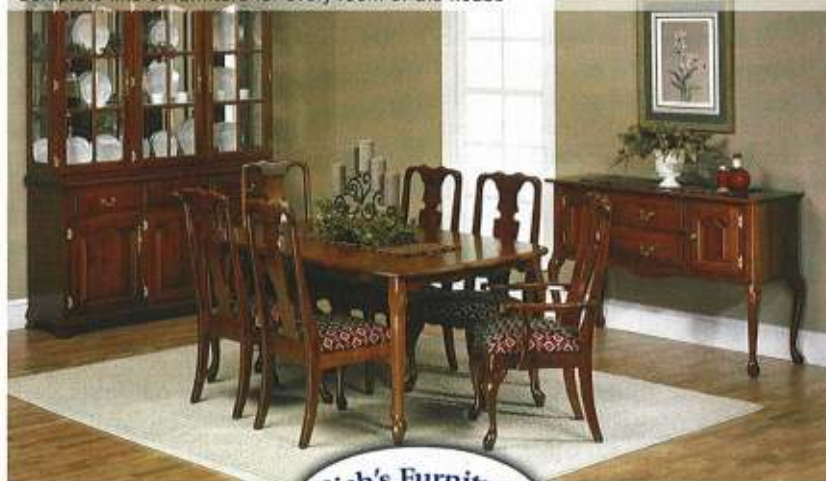
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"The venture ecosystem approach is unique among Pennsylvania's research parks," Butcher says.

"When you've seen one research park, you've seen one research park," she says, explaining that each one is different. Some are incubators for new technology companies, but HCAR supports companies through any and all stages in the business lifecycle, from idea to maturity. The products that emerge from the busy laboratories could include new melanoma drugs from Penn State's pharmacology department, or life-saving medications from Apogee, the park's first tenant, or hydration devices for cancer patients and nursing home residents from a firm considering the move.

"This park is a catalyst and generator for economic development, but more importantly, the companies and the researchers who work here could potentially find cures and therapies and devices that improve human life," Butcher says.

Butcher is learning about the specialized fields she encounters, so she can discuss research issues and space needs with interested tenants. It's her job to place them properly in the eighty-thousand square foot building and to oversee the conversion of raw space – wired and plumbed to state-of-the-art specs but otherwise

empty until leased – into customized research labs. The building also features "accelerator" space – small, adaptable rooms that help start-up companies grow.

"I'm a part of the conversation from beginning to end, as we shepherd tenants through the process," Butcher says.

"It brings confidence and consistency, because people need to come together."

Laura Butcher grew up in a non-profit culture. Her father, Dennis W. Felty, co-founded Keystone Human Services and has been its president since 1972. "He grew it from scratch, similar to this project," Butcher says. "He's a consultant for me 24/7."

Her ground-level role (she has only one administrative assistant) gives her a seat at many tables. The park's master plan foresees two more buildings, adjacent to the first structure, and another nine buildings, clustered by industry, for more than a million square feet of research and office space. The site was planned to minimize its environmental impact and maximize its connection to Derry Township's rural heritage, so a covered stream was "daylighted," natural rock outcroppings became signature features and a historic farmhouse on the site will become a coffee shop.

"Sometimes, when I'm sitting in a construction meeting, I'm thinking, I never thought I'd be doing this," Butcher says.

Ask Butcher whether her youth is a barrier, and she doesn't allow for the possibility.

"I feel absolutely honored to be here," she responds. She looks like a typical young businessperson, in a neat but hardly ostentatious suit. She speaks in straightforward, almost understated tones, but her words have the timeless wisdom of a seasoned CEO.

"I have the opportunity to surround myself with talented people," she says, praising the support she gets from the project's five partners. "As long as I can tap into their expertise and I can provide the leadership based on their guidance and assets, the project will be successful."

Success, in fact, is Butcher's driving force. She works sixty-hour weeks but travels when she can, even if it's just for a weekend getaway with her husband, Dave. Her urban side is committed to life in midtown Harrisburg, in an old home near the river. She intends to stick with the Hershey Center for Applied Research and make it the catalyst for jobs and life-saving research that its founders envision.

"The way I feel," Butcher says, "I'll do whatever it takes to make this project a success." **HBG**



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