

# St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association



## Overview

The St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association (RCGA) is the chamber of commerce and economic development organization for the bi-state St. Louis region. It was formed in 1973 as a result of the merger of three separate organizations: the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis, the St. Louis Regional Industrial Development Corporation and the St. Louis Research Council. RCGA's mission is to unite the region's business community and to engage business and civic leadership to develop and sustain a world-class economy and community. Today, RCGA is the most influential and prominent business and economic development organization in the region with nearly 4,000 member companies and representing 12 counties.

## Regional Priorities

In 2000, RCGA inaugurated *Shaping a Greater St. Louis*, a campaign that provides strategic direction for regional growth and job creation. Priorities under the campaign are: a united public policy agenda; sound and predictable infrastructure throughout the region; proactive business retention, expansion, creation and attraction; distinctive industry clusters; competitive workforce; central city revitalization; and market-based, business-driven expansion, job creation and investment in the urban core.

In recent years RCGA has focused its efforts sharply on the development of distinctive industry clusters and downtown revitalization. Business leadership recognizes that attracting new businesses and employees to the St. Louis region is essential for economic growth and that a vibrant downtown is a key component in making St. Louis an appealing business location.

The connection between regional industry clusters and downtown revitalization is perhaps most vivid in the plant and life sciences sector. RCGA has undertaken an aggressive campaign to brand St. Louis the "Heart of the BioBelt" and build the economic and physical infrastructure to support this growing industry cluster. Building off the region's 390 plant and life science enterprises, RCGA aims to turn St. Louis into an international biomedical and life sciences stronghold. Strategies implemented to date include the formation of the Plant and Life Sciences Coalition — a partnership of powerful business, academic and scientific leaders promoting the industry; launch of the "BioBelt" branding campaign; and the close of four venture capital funds (at \$280 million) to support new companies.

"Technopolis" is the urban component of this industry cluster strategy. It aims to harness the economic potential of plant and life sciences to strengthen and revitalize the region's urban core. The 1,000 acre development site in midtown St. Louis is

envisioned as a science and technology district with facilities for university researchers and production space for new companies. Technopolis aims to build off geographic proximity to several world-class biotechnology research institutions located in St. Louis' urban core, including Washington University Medical Center, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Human Genome Sequencing Center.

### **Structure and Operations**

RCGA is governed by a Board of Directors representing all sectors of the bi-state St. Louis region. RCGA's eight initiatives rely on the leadership and volunteer participation of its members. They are staffed by employees in RCGA's Public Policy and Economic Development units. The majority of these initiatives are being pursued in close partnership with other business and civic organizations. They constitute RCGA's work plan and shape its legislative agenda. Several of the initiatives and their implementation are based on comprehensive research and reports prepared for RCGA by leading national consulting organizations.