Simon leads 10 years of growth at MSU

LOU ANNA SIMON HAS HELPED MSU BECOME PLAYER IN STATE'S ECONOMY IN 10 YEARS AS PRESIDENT

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EAST LANSING – In as few as five years, the construction workers pouring concrete and raising steel near the corner of Bogue Street and Wilson Road on Michigan State University's campus will be replaced with scientists.

It's easy to believe in the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, a $730 million nuclear science research facility, now that work is happening, said Lou Anna Simon, the university’s president, sitting in her sunlit office on the fourth floor of the Hannah Administration Building.

It's just as easy to forget when FRIB was a long shot. When the state’s congressional delegation was putting pressure on the U.S. Department of Energy to even consider sending the project somewhere other than a national lab. When MSU hung signs on campus that read, "Bring FRIB to our crib."

"If we're going to be a great place, we have to think around the curve," Simon said.

And FRIB, she said, is "way around the curve. We're building things that have never been built before, the pieces. Way around the curve. But you've got to imagine that and then you still work at it incrementally every day."

Simon, 68, has been working in increments for a decade — the start of the year marked her 10th as MSU’s president. But, she says, 21st century technology advancements keep her wondering about the big ideas around the corner. That has made her urgent, yet strategic, in ushering in a decade of rapid growth at the 160-year-old university.

There's FRIB, of course, and the $100 million-plus in other new research facilities on the East Lansing campus. There's the medical school campus in downtown Grand Rapids. There's the research center in Flint focused on improving public health. There's the contemporary art museum designed by an internationally known architect, the floor-to-ceiling renovations of the university’s residence and dining halls, the breakneck globalization of the campus, the efforts to build startups around research.
"She really has transformed (MSU) from kind of a sleepy, mid-level Big Ten college to pushing the very best," said David Hollister, a former Lansing mayor and president of Prima Civitas, a community development nonprofit Simon helped create.

In the process, she helped take MSU from a force in the regional economy to a player in the state economy. Those who know her say Simon understands the university’s role not only as educational institution, but as economic engine for the state of Michigan.

"When all is said and done, Lou Anna’s tenure will equal — or maybe even exceed — John Hannah’s," Hollister said, referencing the university’s longest-serving president, who presided over its transformation from an agricultural college into a research university.

Simon laughs at the idea: "I’m just taking pages out of his playbook."

**SIMON’S IMPACT**

During her 10 years as Michigan State University president, Lou Anna Simon has spearheaded many transformative projects, both on campus and off. Here are five of the biggest:

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**Building an industry around FRIB**

Inside a former school not far from downtown Lansing, workers build superconducting particle accelerators based on technologies honed and developed at MSU’s National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory.
Niowave Inc. has developed its business in part on making advanced laser technology for the defense industry. The Lansing company now has its sights on making radioisotopes, the kind used for medical imaging, in a $79 million facility under construction near Capital Region International Airport.

Bob Trezise loves Niowave. It’s a company that specializes in advanced physics — and, perhaps more importantly, a company that’s already here — at the same time the region is poised to welcome FRIB.

The region’s top economic development expert also knows Niowave alone won’t be able to capitalize on the research that will come out of MSU once FRIB opens. So Trezise plans to mobilize the local business community to build an industry around the science. From scratch.

"It’s like having a 400-person, high-tech company moving right in, and all the derivatives that go with it," Simon said of FRIB, adding that people thought it was a "high-risk big idea" at the outset.

"What made FRIB special is that people believed in it. Even though they didn’t fully understand it, they believed in it," she said. "You just have to work diligently about it to make it happen and be persistent and dogged, because the day-to-day stuff will deflect you away from that."

If MSU were measured by its contribution to the Lansing economy, it might be noted as being the region’s second-largest employer behind the state of Michigan, or for the tens of thousands of young adults who move here every year and spend money on housing, food and entertainment.

FRIB changes the story. The local impact of the project already is massive, and President Obama’s budget proposal calls for $100 million in funding for FRIB for the coming fiscal year.

When it opens, sometime between 2020 and 2022, it will be the most powerful rare isotope research facility in the world, allowing scientists to push farther for answers about the fundamental nature of matter, the birth and death of stars. Work there could have applications in fields as diverse as nuclear medicine and port security.

But Lansing won’t experience the full benefit of FRIB if MSU can’t recruit some of the world’s best scientists to work or stay here, or if efforts to cultivate an advanced manufacturing hub in the region fail to gain traction.

"We’re introducing some urgency into those conversations because I’ve got to recruit people who can go anywhere in the world. It’s that simple," Simon said. "My passion for this is about that talent contest, because I see it as being one of the most critical challenges for this region moving forward."

Retaining talent has been a key challenge for the region’s business leaders for years, a complicated equation that factors in higher education, jobs, wages and benefits and quality of life. Many MSU alumni flock to larger cities, such as Chicago, after graduation.
in search of one or more of those pieces.

MSU isn’t solely responsible for solving the talent problem. Simon’s main priority is to get FRIB working. But neither does she plan to be a bystander. Local business leaders say she has been more active in economic development here than her predecessors.

“We have a talent pool of nuclear physicists who deeply understand particle acceleration, and the larger that pool is, the more industry will see that as a resource and an asset and come here,” said Trezise, president and CEO of Lansing Economic Area Partnership Inc., the region’s economic development arm.

“What we’re talking about is not just a localized industry. It’s a budding, or an emerging, global industry.”

Tim Daman, president and CEO of the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, said Lansing needs to identify the supply chain serving companies like Niowave, as well as brainstorm the possible industries — health sciences, biotechnology — that could use FRIB science and recruit them.

“If we wait until FRIB is open and then start it,” Daman said, “we’re five years behind.”

Medical school expansion

The stretch of Michigan Street NE, just east of Grand Rapids’ downtown, is nicknamed “Medical Mile” for the number of health care institutions that line the road.

Spectrum Health has its main hospital there. There’s a heart center, a children’s hospital, a cancer pavilion, a research institute. And, now, the headquarters of MSU’s College of Human Medicine.

The process of setting up the medical school’s Grand Rapids campus began under Simon’s predecessor, M. Peter McPherson. But she’s the one who carried it through, convincing skeptics that an expansion wasn’t going to pull vital resources away from Lansing hospitals and the East Lansing campus.

But it was possible because MSU drew, in part, on the vast resources of some of Grand Rapids’ wealthiest donors. At the time, Spectrum Health and the Van Andel Institute — a health care research organization founded by Grand Rapids businessman Jay Van Andel in the mid-1990s — pledged tens of millions of dollars to the effort.
When MSU moved its public health program to Flint last year, it found similar support. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which typically doesn’t deal in health care, put up nearly $12 million for the project.

Lansing doesn’t have a lineage of wealthy families like the Van Andels, the DeVoses or the Motts, who can bankroll a major expansion project. The city’s two hospitals are limited in the funding they can give to the university. And MSU doesn’t have its own university hospital, which puts it at a disadvantage compared to peers like the University of Michigan when competing for grants from the National Institutes of Health, the largest source of federal medical research funding.

For its part, Grand Rapids wanted a medical school to complement several local hospital systems, as well as the Van Andel Institute. The $90 million Secchia Center welcomed its inaugural class of 100 first-year medical students in 2010. MSU estimates students have spent $22 million in the city since the campus opened. The university employs 142 faculty and staff members there.

MSU now is planning to build an $85 million research facility on the site of the former Grand Rapids Press building at the corner of Michigan Street and Monroe Avenue NW.

"We now have a cluster of incredible intellectual property and capacity" that was unimaginable 20 years ago, said Birgit Klohs, president and CEO of The Right Place Inc., Grand Rapids’ economic development agency. "That new research facility is just another, if you will, brick in the whole construction of our life sciences strategy."

MSU is a part of that. What’s more, Simon said, the ability to work in specialized areas of medicine, on conditions that aren’t generally treated in Lansing, such as rare pediatrics cases, could help the university land a bigger share of grant dollars and bring more cutting-edge research to the state.

The grant dollars are still a work progress. In 2014, the most recent full year for which data were available, MSU’s College of Human Medicine took in $9.8 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health, which was 102nd of 140 medical schools. The most it earned over the past decade was $15.4 million in 2013.

"NIH money, medical money, is usually a centerpiece of big research universities. You needed a strong research program in order to have a strong medical program for the university," said McPherson, now president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities in Washington, D.C.

"Research is a stimulus to the local economy," he said, although "the economic impact lines aren’t constrained by geographic lines."

Neal Hegarty, the Mott Foundation’s vice president of programs, said Simon was just as interested in benefiting the Flint community by studying public health there as she was advancing in MSU’s mission.

"If we’re going to bend the curve on the cost to all of us for health care and increase wellness, we’ve got to get a hold of those issues across socioeconomic class, and Flint
Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon in conference room near her office last week. The statue of John Hannah, MSU’s longest tenured president, is a replica of the full size one that sits in front of the Hannah Administration Building on campus.

(Photo: Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)

provides us the opportunity to do that," Simon said. "But what we learn in Flint will transfer all across the state. Just like what we learned in the soybean patch in the Thumb translates to everybody who grows soybeans."

MSU and the local economy

Few university presidents spend their entire careers at one institution. Simon has. She earned her doctorate from MSU in 1974 before moving into administrative roles. Simon and her husband, Roy, have lived in this region for decades.

In that way, she has a vested interest in the success of both MSU and the Lansing community.

Locally, MSU is a founding member of LEAP and contributes $35,000 a year to the agency, Trezise said. The university is involved in redeveloping the East Lansing Amtrak station on Harrison Road, where it owns property. It launched the most coordinated effort yet to seek patents and spin off companies from university research.

Simon personally has attended meetings about redeveloping Michigan Avenue from the Capitol through East Lansing, and she tapped faculty member Eric Scorsone, a municipal finance expert, to write a report on the city of Lansing’s finances and train city councils across the state on budgeting.

"I’m not knocking any one of her predecessors, but she’s in a different league," said Joel Ferguson, a Lansing developer and MSU board chairman, who has been on the board for more than 20 years. "She understands every part of the university, which makes her a tremendous salesman."

And MSU’s ambitions have a direct impact on the local economy, whether it’s the $100 million in new research buildings to study bioengineering, nursing and plant science constructed over the past few years or the contemporary art museum built largely with the donations of billionaire alumnus Eli Broad.

Simon, who since 2007 has returned her annual raise, accepted a $230,000 raise this year to bring her salary to $750,000. MSU threw in a $100,000 retention bonus. Simon has not publicly said when she plans to retire.

She plans to continue her work to elevate MSU’s profile, both locally and statewide.

"It’s got to be, the people who could be anywhere, want to be here," she said. "If you set that as the standard, you may not get all of them, (you) may not get every company, but
"Give future Spartans a stronger foundation and the power to do big" says a statement by MSU President Lou Anna Simon in the administration of finances on campus in East Lansing Monday 2/1/2016. Simon is MSU's 20th president.

Lansing deserves that. The state of Michigan deserves that. It's not about Michigan State’s hubris, or my legacy. It's about, this place deserves that."

Simon's impact

During her 10 years as Michigan State University president, Lou Anna Simon has spearheaded many transformative projects, both on campus and off. Here are five of the biggest:

• **Facility for Rare Isotope Beams**

When MSU put itself into the running for the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams in 2008, it had been decades since a major U.S. Department of Energy project went anywhere besides a national lab.

MSU was undaunted. It rallied the campus, along with business and political leaders from across the state. And it beat out Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois.

"You can't be afraid to swing for the fences," Simon said at the time. "The odds were that we were going to lose. But we were able to get assets together ... and work across divisions that don't always work together."

After years of planning and design, and a tense period during with DOE officials raised doubts about the project's future, MSU broke ground on the $730 million nuclear science research last March.

• **Medical school expansion**

Talks to expand the College of Human Medicine began in late 2003 under Simon's predecessor, M. Peter McPherson. The deal was finalized during Simon's presidency, which began in 2005.

The expansion began in the fall of 2007, with the East Lansing campus growing from 100 to 150 first-year students. In 2008, 50 second-year students moved into a leased building in Grand Rapids while the new campus was under construction.

By the fall of 2010, the $90 million Secchia Center opened near downtown Grand Rapids with its inaugural class of 100 first-year students. Another 100 first-year students remained in East Lansing.

• **Eli & Edythe Broad Art Museum**

*Give future Spartans a stronger foundation and the power to do big* says a statement by MSU President Lou Anna Simon in the administration offices on campus in East Lansing Monday 2/1/2016. Simon is MSU's 20th president.

(Photos: Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)
Simon initially had hoped that billionaire MSU alumnus Eli Broad would donate money for the renovation of the Kresge Art Center.

"He told me no — pretty directly, actually," Simon said. She was the university's provost then, soon to be its president. "(He said) it was just a lousy idea and it wasn't something that would rise to his level of interest and I should be thinking much more broadly and much more boldly."

Eight years later, MSU was dedicating the Eli & Edythe Broad Art Museum, an angular building with steel and glass skin designed by star architect Zaha Hadid.

Broad and his wife, Edythe, have given $33 million to found and maintain the museum.

*Research building construction*

The $60.8 million Bio Engineering Facility is under construction near the Clinical Center off Service Road. When it’s finished in December, the four-story, 130,000-square-foot facility will house researchers working at the intersection of engineering and the health sciences.

The $17.6 million, 50,000-square-foot Bott Building for Nursing Education and Research, which opened in 2012 adjacent to the Life Science Building off Service Road, brought together all of the College of Nursing's faculty and students in a single location for the first time in decades.

MSU opened the four-story, 90,000-square-foot Molecular Plant Sciences Building the same year. Simon said at the time that the $45 million building would be key to MSU's continued participation in the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center, a federally funded collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison that brings roughly $10 million annually to the campus and has created jobs for more than 100 scientists, students and technicians.

*Residence and dining hall makeovers*

Since 2005, MSU has invested more than $300 million to update its residence and dining halls.

Eight campus dining halls have been renovated into open-style food courts with multiple cook-to-order stations featuring everything from wood-fired pizzas to sushi. The new cafeterias are found in Snyder-Phillips, Owen, Holden, Case, Shaw, Landon and Akers halls, as well as the six-dorm Brody Complex.

Several residence halls have been updated with new carpet and fixtures, as well as safety features including sprinklers and elevators.

*By the numbers*

Lou Anna Simon became president of MSU at the start of 2005. Some of the ways the campus has grown during her tenure, by the numbers:
Enrollment, fall 2004: 44,836

Enrollment, fall 2014: 50,085

External research funding, 2004-05: $236 million

External research funding, 2013-14: $353 million

Undergraduates from outside of Michigan, fall 2004: 10 percent

Undergraduates from outside of Michigan, fall 2014: 23 percent

Source: MSU

Longest-serving presidents

Lou Anna Simon is MSU’s 20th and first female president. Of them, only five presidents have served longer. They include:

• John Hannah, 1941–69 (28 years)

• Theophilus Abbot, 1862–85 (23 years)

• Jonathan Snyder, 1896–1915 (19 years)

• Robert Shaw, 1928–41 (13 years)

• M. Peter McPherson, 1993–2004 (11 years)

• Lou Anna Simon, 2005-present (10 years)

Source: MSU