J'Den Cox, senior psychology major and recent Olympic bronze medalist 24
Clockwise from top left: History major Conor Fagan; military science sword ceremony, 1938; C:1/141/6, courtesy of University Archives; recent Broadway production in which alumna LaCretta Ross appeared.
Incubating Blue Sky

BY JORDAN YOUNT

In 2002, a group of St. Louis civic leaders toured a biotech innovation hub in Boston known as Kendall Square. Initially funded by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the innovation district replaced an area of the city that had become blighted. The St. Louis leaders recognized the potential for a similar innovation district in the Gateway City and began talking to potential partners. Later that year, Washington University, the University of Missouri—St. Louis, St. Louis University, BJC Healthcare, and the Missouri Botanical Garden joined forces to create the Cortex Innovation Community (CIC) in the heart of the city.

Since its inception, Cortex has completed or is in the process of rehabilitating one million square feet of space totaling $350 million of investment and generating 2,500 technology-related jobs. The Cortex master plan calls for more than 4.5 million square feet of mixed-use development, including research, office, clinical, residential, hotel, and retail space with 13,000 permanent technology-related jobs.

A&S Joins the Team

Seeking a greater presence in the metro St. Louis region, the University of Missouri’s College of Arts and Science opened an office on the CIC campus in fall 2015, led by former Mizzou football star Howard Richards, BA ’88 communication.

“Mizzou is the state’s flagship university,” says Richards, who was a first-round pick of the Dallas Cowboys in the 1981 NFL draft and worked 13 years for the Central Intelligence Agency after retiring from professional football in 1987. “We’ve needed to have a greater presence in Missouri’s largest city so that we can strengthen relationships, better connect with underserved populations, and grow our research partnerships.”

Cortex CEO Dennis Lower calls the relationship between Cortex and A&S mutually beneficial.

“It’s very important that we connect with our academic partners all across the state,” Lower says. “We have a lot of Mizzou graduates here, so the connection between those MU grads and our start-up companies is important since we are a technology innovation district with over 200 companies. It’s all about intellectual infrastructure, and it’s all about talent acquisition and recruitment. I think we are just at the beginning of exploring this relationship.”

Hanging on to Talent

Lower says one aspect of that exploration is fostering relationships with innovation centers across the state, including the Missouri Innovation Center in Columbia. The Missouri Innovation Center started as a small organization, but in 2009 the center was selected by the University of Missouri to operate and maintain the MU Life Science Incubator at Monsanto Place. Lower says growing the number of technology-related
Ideas

Jobs throughout the state will provide an opportunity for MU graduates to stay closer to home.

"Whenever I talk to rural audiences, I always ask them if they have kids, if they have grandkids, and whether or not those kids and grandkids move away when they grow up," Lower says. "The answer is yes to all three questions, so we're trying to create stay-at-home jobs so your children and grandchildren will be able to get jobs close to home. MU is a great partner in educating some of our brightest and best kids in the state, and I think by us collaborating with A&S, we can find ways to keep those kids in Missouri."

Pipeline Entrepreneurial Fellowships: Building Networks

For the past decade, Pipeline Entrepreneurial Fellowships in Overland Park, Kansas, has been working with entrepreneurs to create jobs in the Midwest. Founded in 2006 by Joni Cobb, BA '88 economics and political science, the organization invites 10-12 new entrepreneurs to join as fellows each year. These budding innovators participate in a year-long business leadership development program designed to help them expand their networks of advisers, investors, and peers.

The Pipeline fellowship year is called an "immersion experience" that is meant to be a life-altering encounter for the entrepreneurs that changes the direction and trajectory of their companies while connecting them to lifelong friends and allies.

In 2010, Pipeline received a matching grant from the Kauffman Foundation that allowed the organization to expand to become a regional non-profit serving entrepreneurs throughout the Midwest. A&S is one of Pipeline's educational partners, along with Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Kansas, and the University of Nebraska.

In spring 2016, A&S hosted the first in a series of panel discussions at Cortex called "Beyond Campus—Bringing MU to St. Lou." The interactive series is designed to raise awareness and foster collaboration with the St. Louis entrepreneur and corporate communities and with individuals who have an interest in the college's educational endeavors. Programs focus on topics of importance to the St. Louis region and create a space where the natural synergies of talented entrepreneurs, business professionals, faculty, and students can come together to take advantage of what each has to offer.

Legal Clinic Prepares Students, Helps Entrepreneurs

One of the main hurdles entrepreneurs have in creating a new business is navigating the legal shoals that can quickly sink a new venture. Intellectual property rights, licensing, regulatory requirements, and employment issues are among the most common legal questions confronting those who want to take their ideas to the marketplace. Innovators within the university's entrepreneurial ecosystem can now receive free legal advice from the the School of Law's Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic (ELC), run by Jim Niemann, JD '93. "We're a service-based offering, and like medical schools use residents, we use upper-level law students. So we're providing hands-on training for students while providing free legal help to clients," Niemann says. During each of the spring and fall semesters, Niemann recruits eight upper-level law students to participate in the ELC, and each student receives three credit hours for his or her work that semester (soon to be increased to four credit hours). During the summer months, the ELC is staffed by six students.

A Vision for Growth

At some point, Niemann would like to see the ELC expanded to become a collaborative campuswide resource responsible for facilitating the innovation and entrepreneurial efforts of every college on campus. In fact, two of the clinic's earliest clients work in the College of Arts and Science. Niemann says Exploring Physics', founded by physics professors Meera Chandrasekhar and Dorina Kosztin, created a milestone with the ELC by being the clinic's first clients to achieve trademark registration of their business name. "You've got very entrepreneurial people in Arts and Science—scores of them, and connecting them with people who have the legal mindsets and the technical or business mindsets—that's the recipe," Niemann says. "The recipe is not staying in your silos; it's getting everybody together."