

## **Pfizer will give Holland research facility to MSU**

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By Shandra Martinez

HOLLAND TOWNSHIP -- The vacant Pfizer Inc. research and development facility will become a university center for research into plant-based fuels, chemicals and materials such as plastics and fabrics, under a plan being announced today.

The world's largest drug manufacturer plans to donate the \$50 million facility to Michigan State University, which will develop a "unique bioeconomy research and commercialization center."

The deal was brokered by Zeeland-based Lakeshore Advantage economic development organization.

At full operation, the facility would employ 100 people, primarily from scientific and technical backgrounds.

Its work is intended to help companies produce goods, services or energy derived from renewable, plant-based sources. It would support West Michigan's sustainability movement, which has been led by companies developing "green" manufacturing practices.

The donation hinges on obtaining operating funds from community donations, state appropriations, private contracts and university resources.

"We are aggressively pursuing state resources and committed to raising private dollars to get this done," said Lakeshore Advantage President Randy Thelen.

He declined to cite a minimum amount needed.

One possible funding source could be a \$12 million Pfizer Assets Retention Fund approved Monday by the Michigan Strategic Fund. That money will go toward finding new uses for 45 Pfizer buildings across the state.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who will be in Holland for her Tulip Time Festival duties today, is expected to discuss the Pfizer project and tour the Holland Township facility.

The project could be good news for Holland Township, where Pfizer once was the largest employer and paid \$2 million in property taxes

annually. The township's share, \$279,547, accounted for 3.8 percent of its tax base.

The facility, at 188 Howard Ave., is one of several operations across the state Pfizer closed or scaled back following the acquisition of rival drug company Pharmacia Corp. in 2003. That same year, the facility's research and development unit was closed, cutting 100 jobs.

In March 2005, Pfizer announced the production side of the operation, which then employed 328, would close at the end of 2006.

On Tuesday, a Pfizer official cited the company's interest in Michigan's future as a reason for the donation.

"As a business with a major presence in Michigan, Pfizer shares a heartfelt desire to help drive education and innovation in the state," said Antoon Brusselmans, vice-president U.S. and Canada for Pfizer Global Manufacturing.

In addition to its own staff, MSU plans to host researchers from nearby institutions, including Hope College and private start-up companies.

The facility will help Michigan State's efforts to advance the state's "post-petroleum" economy, MSU President Lou Anna Simon said.

"This donation will also boost our competitiveness as we seek major federal funding for biomass-related grants," Simon said.

Located at the site of a former tannery, the facility opened under Park-Davis in 1952. Later, ownership switched to Warner Lambert Inc., which was bought by Pfizer in 2000.

When the plant was closed, one of the ideas on the table was donating the research and development unit, said Rick Chambers, a Pfizer spokesman.

"It's a great asset, and we are pleased to make the donation," he said.

Pfizer continues to look for a buyer for the majority of its 45-acre site and larger production facility. The company is looking for a bio-fuel manufacturer that would work with the research center.