

# Collaboration Redefines Milwaukee's Future as a World Water Hub



Global Water Center ribbon-cutting ceremony

By Dean Amhaus

Spanning the partnership between business, government and academia, The Water Council (the only organization of its kind in the United States) joined together with both national and international partners on September 12 to celebrate the grand opening of the Global Water Center. Located in Milwaukee, WI, the facility is a first-of-its-kind collaborative business and academic research and commercialization facility focused on freshwater technologies in the country. The opening of the Global Water Center is one of the most significant steps for The Water Council since the organization was originally formed as a subcommittee of the Milwaukee 7, an economic strategy group for the seven counties in southeastern Wisconsin. Since that time, The Water Council has set out to transform the Milwaukee region into a World Water Hub for freshwater research, economic development and education. Having reincorporated as a stand-alone agency in 2009, The Water Council consists of more than 116 member organizations, linking together global water technology companies, innovative water entrepreneurs and acclaimed academic research programs.

With more than one-fifth of the world's population lacking access to clean water, Milwaukee is home to more than 150 water technology companies that span the full range of water use, from manufacturing components to water delivery and purification. The region holds a \$10.5 billion (USD) stake in the market, which accounts for four percent of the world's total water business. The opening of the Global Water Center provides The Water Council and its members with the unique opportunity to harness the economic talent and technology development of industry and

academia under one roof to position Milwaukee as a World Water Hub to address global freshwater needs.

Originally built in 1904, the seven-story warehouse was renovated from a facility that was once used for seatbelt storage to one that is now home to more than 24 water-related technology and support companies. The Global Water Center will also serve as an accelerator space for new and emerging water technology companies. The 98,000-square-foot building features common area amenities, including a 44-person lecture hall, exhibition space for new prototypes, as well as high-tech, shared core facilities. One of the key features of the first floor includes a \$500,000 state-of-the-art water-flow lab that provides tenants with the ability to conduct highly accurate testing of water samples in real time, something that historically has been outsourced; the open, collaborative concept is critical to supporting water research and product development. Tenants include a mix of industry, academia and government expertise and resources.

Understanding that it is impossible to address the entire water ecosystem by focusing on one issue or by one organization, The Water Council acknowledges that there is a need to create a strategic confluence of ideas and innovations. That is why the Global Water Center is not only home to The Water Council but also large multinational companies, small-business solution providers and academic research programs—all which offer tangible opportunities to create new products, solutions and companies. Serving as the first physical building block in the long-term development for The Water Council, the building's redevelopment has also served as a catalyst for the development

of the Reed Street Yards-Global Water Technology Park, which is a mixed-use urban office, educational, research and technology zone focused on the international water industry.

Over time, the 18-acre zone will be the physical hub and brain of an international water cluster. With urban bio-swales, porous pavement, purple pipe, etc., the infrastructure for the technology park will serve as a global showcase for water management. The facility is also located 1.3 miles north of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Freshwater Sciences, which is undergoing a \$53 million expansion of its water research facility and will open in approximately May 2014. In addition to established water-related companies, the facility will also serve as an incubator space for water technology startups through the Global Freshwater Seed Accelerator Program (GFSA). The GFSA is one of the world's first mentor-driven seed accelerators focused on startups that are working to address global freshwater challenges. Participants in the program receive a \$50,000 grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, low-cost space in the Global Water Center, business model and operations training from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, access to academic faculty, as well as mentorship from dozens of water technology experts and access to capital funding sources.

Current tenants of the Global Water Center include: The Water Council; Alga Bionics, LLC; A.O. Smith Corporation;

Badger Meter; Envolus, Inc.; Fund for Lake Michigan; Greater Milwaukee Committee; Grundfos Pumps; Hanging Gardens; H2OScore; Michael Best & Friedrich; Microbe Detectives; Noah Technologies; Pave Drain; Rexnord; Sloan Valve; Stormwater Solutions Engineering, LLC; UWM School of Freshwater Sciences; UWW Institute for Water Business; Veolia Environnement; Wipfli; WEDC; Xela Innovations and Zizzo Group Marketing, PR and New Media. Working together, The Water Council and its members are helping the region to shed its Rust Belt identity and be recognized as a magnet for the world's most creative, talented and innovative water professionals in the industry.

### **About the author**

◆ Since March 2010, Dean Amhaus has served as the President & CEO of The Water Council. His diverse 30-year background in multiple sectors encapsulates a wide-range of expertise in government relations, branding, fundraising, economic development and non-profit management in Washington, DC and Madison, WI. Amhaus has also served as the President of The Spirit of Milwaukee, which is dedicated to enhancing Milwaukee's image, as well as the President of Forward Wisconsin, the state's economic development organization, and Executive Director of the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Commission.



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**A.O. Smith Lab in the Global Water Center**





**Above: Global Water Center flow lab**  
**Below: Reed Street Yards**

*Photography by Thomas Edwards, courtesy of A.O. Smith*

