

# Small business climate improving — Ross

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By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Quiet progress is being made on one of Gov. James Blanchard's economic recovery programs, said state Commerce Director Doug Ross.

One is called "technology transfer" — the case with which college professors can make money from their research and inventions. The other is a streamlining of state franchising laws.

"We and California led the nation in research and development," Ross said Monday at Schoolcraft College, where Livonia business and city officials discussed an industry retention project.

"IN TECHNOLOGY transfer there is opportunity on two levels," said Ross in an interview.

"First is to get professors tolerant with entrepreneurs over inventions with commercial possibilities," he said.

To do that, the state is setting up a computerized technology transfer network linking his Department of Commerce with five universities, including Wayne State and the University of Michigan.

The network will contain an inventory of college professors and their areas of expertise. "We're taking applications for the network," he said.

SECOND, he said, "We have initiated discussions with universities to have them review their own rules on proprietary involvement of faculty and patents."

Blanchard in 1983 said Michigan trailed other states in translating university research into productive inventions because of laws inhibiting professors from licensing their research. Blanchard held up the state of Minnesota, where he went to law school, as a model place where professors can reap

maximum economic advantage of their inventions.

The administration now says, however, that amending university rules will surmount the problem.

Ross, a former Democratic state senator from Southfield (1978-83) and founder of the Michigan Citizens Lobby in the mid-1970s, said the area along the freeways from Oakland University in Rochester Hills to the U-M in Ann Arbor is emerging as a high-technology center of national prominence.

Ross said the belt — along I-496, I-275 and M-14 — has three major advantages: educational resources, quality of life and proximity to industrial customers.

"WE REALLY did a job with the franchising laws," said Ross.

Franchising is a procedure whereby a national firm grants a local busi-

nessperson a name and method of doing business for a fee. Examples are fried chicken restaurants and shopping center printing shops.

"Michigan has gone from one of the most difficult states to establish a franchise to what the Wall Street Journal called the most accommodating," Ross said. "I don't know yet what the impact will be on franchising."

Blanchard won amendments to the state Franchise Investment Law eliminating the time-consuming review system by the Corporations and Securities Bureau. The changes were suggested to Ross' predecessor, Ralph Gerson, who left the Commerce post earlier this year, by the Governor's Commission on Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Among its members were Judd Freeman of American Speedy Printing Inc., Birmingham; Richard May, attorney in Bloomfield Hills; and Fred Woodworth,

Birmingham lawyer with a Detroit firm.

Franchised businesses have a very high success rate after two years, while a majority of independent businesses call it quits in the same time frame.

ROSS TOLD the Livonia gathering Michigan will recuperate economically — despite Texans' predictions that "you're turning into a big Greenfield Village, a museum to industry."

"They missed something vitally important — that this is the most powerful industrial system ever created in the world. They forget we know how to change. They forget we know how to compete."

The success formula, he said, will be a partnership between government and business, an end to the "old confrontive relationship" between business and labor, and expansion by existing small businesses.



Doug Ross  
Commerce director

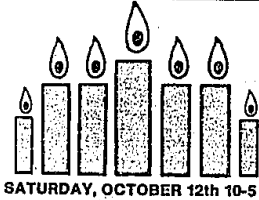
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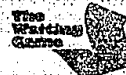
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