The struggle is real in the Midwest when it comes to creating new jobs, retaining talented young people and maintaining industrial districts where the industry of yore has closed down. But St. Louis has confronted the problem head on with Cortex, an innovation community started in 2002 thanks to a $15 million lead investment from Washington University. Other institutions joined WashU, including BJC HealthCare, the Missouri Botanical Garden, Saint Louis University and University of Missouri–St. Louis, and the coalition took a 200-acre, blighted industrial complex in St. Louis’ Midtown and turned it into a hip, mixed-use urban technology district that is home to more than 400 companies.

Now, Cortex is a regional center for innovation and entrepreneurism that has brought in more than 5,800 jobs and $342 million in direct payroll, and the district just keeps on growing.
4220 DUNCAN

THEN
Parking lot

NOW
A 180,000-square-foot office space and lab complex developed by Wexford Science and Technology and home to professional services firm Aon and Microsoft’s regional headquarters (as well as the Chocolate Pig, a restaurant that serves things like sweet potato pie milkshakes and beet ceviche).

CRESCENT BUILDING

THEN
Rotogravure printing press for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

NOW
Rehabbed in 2013, this warehouse-style building is now home to Boeing, Ascension Technology and Husch Blackwell, to name a few tenants.

COFACTOR GENOMICS

THEN
Light industrial manufacturing building where components of MetroLink stations were built

NOW
Home to a company that provides full genome sequencing, DNA sequencing, RNA sequencing … you get the idea.