

Marquette University: Names John Knapp first executive director of Innovation Alley

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MILWAUKEE — [Innovation Alley](#) at Marquette University, a partnership between the College of Business Administration and the Opus College of Engineering, took a significant step forward today with the naming of its inaugural executive director. [John Knapp](#), director of external relations for the College of Business Administration, has been named to the role, effective May 1.

As executive director, Knapp will be charged with developing a five-year strategic plan to take Innovation Alley from concept to a centralized developer and convener of programs that develop leaders in innovation on campus and within industry.

“I am excited for John to take on this key role as a leader and a connector across campus to help foster innovation on campus and throughout our business region,” said Paul Jones, vice president for university relations and general counsel. “John has demonstrated success at Marquette and beyond in driving new initiatives, experiential learning opportunities for students and developing strong employer relations. What’s more, he has great ability in breaking down silos, which is important to executing on the vision for Innovation Alley.”

Given its unique cross-college focus and its goal to ultimately serve all colleges on campus, Innovation Alley will live within University Relations with strong strategic oversight provided by the deans of business and engineering.

“While we will certainly miss John’s leadership and enthusiasm in the college, he is absolutely the ideal person to take on this new role to advance Innovation Alley,” said Tim Hanley, acting Keyes Dean of the College of Business Administration. “I’m

looking forward to working with him to develop and implement a strategic plan for Innovation Alley.”

“I had the opportunity to work closely with John on a new Innovation Alley program, and his ability to connect people and deliver real outcomes will be exciting to watch as we take Innovation Alley from concept to reality,” added Dr. Kristina Ropella, Opus Dean of Engineering.

“I’m honored and humbled to assume the leadership of Innovation Alley and to continue to serve and work in close partnership with my colleagues in the College of Business Administration and the Opus College of Engineering,” Knapp said. “Although this inaugural role is an important step for furthering the development of this unique initiative, I’ve already seen firsthand throughout my tenure the innovation talent here at Marquette among our students, faculty and staff. I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues as we continue to push the boundaries of what is possible.”

About Innovation Alley

Fully donor-funded through the generosity of alumni couple [Chuck and Karen Swoboda](#) and the [Fotsch Family Foundation](#), Innovation Alley develops and manages innovation leadership programs for emerging and rising leaders on campus and with industry. Innovation Alley’s stated vision is fourfold:

1. **Develop leaders** who use their talents in the service of and with others, to think creatively, act boldly and deliver value by addressing the world’s most significant challenges.
2. **Challenge conventional thinking** about innovation by creating a platform to uncover and share new ideas that push boundaries and embrace the Jesuit idea that we are best served learning how to think, not what to think.
3. **Transform interactions** between faculty, students and industry to promote creative collisions that increase learning while also producing more innovative and novel solutions to real world problems.
4. **Change the face of innovation**, because if we are going to solve the problems of the world, we need to look more like the world we serve.

Although the original concept for Innovation Alley was a physical facility connecting the engineering and business schools and providing space for industry to co-locate, Ropella explains, Innovation Alley is focused more on programs that will help

develop innovation leaders on campus and within industry while also producing innovative solutions to real world challenges.

“One of our goals is to not overly define and structure Innovation Alley such that there is no longer innovation happening,” Ropella says. “Innovation should always be a little messy, and we want the initiative to create opportunities for us to experiment with, fail and learn more about innovation leadership and how to create cultures where innovation happens.”

Current Innovation Alley programming includes:

- “Innovation scrimmages” in technical sales, where teams engage with market facing professionals to challenge their ideas to help them flourish.
- [The Igniting Insights series](#), a newly launched seven-week virtual professional development experience designed to help rising talent unlock the mindset and skillset to lead innovation in their organizations.
- The extension of the Opus College of Engineering’s nationally recognized [E-Lead program](#) to include corporate talent development.
- M-Teams, a concept in development where multidisciplinary student teams help develop solutions in partnership with corporate and community partners. Unlike applied course projects that may align with the challenges of a specific discipline (e.g., applied procurement, product design), these challenges are intended to be multidisciplinary in nature.

Moreover, Innovation Alley will focus on engaging industry and creating new opportunities for students who have not previously had access to programs that promote innovative thinking and collaboration.

About John Knapp

Knapp joined Marquette in 2019 as director of external relations for the College of Business Administration, where he helped drive the development and writing of a comprehensive five-year strategic plan for the college, working closely with the dean, the college’s executive council, and college faculty and staff. During his time there, Knapp was instrumental in helping the college move forward on many of its key strategic initiatives, including developing a corporate relationship strategy with the dean, leading the college’s communications efforts and helping the college attain its reaccreditation.

Additionally, he managed dean's office engagement with advisory boards, including the college leadership council and the College of Business Administration Alumni Association board.

Prior to Marquette, Knapp was director of employer relations, experiential education and new initiatives in the Office of the President at Lakeland University in Plymouth, Wisconsin. Previously, he served as director of the Kellett School - Milwaukee, Lakeland's school for evening and online courses for nontraditional students.

Knapp earned a bachelor's degree in American studies from Carleton College, a top-ranked liberal arts college in Northfield, Minnesota, and a master's degree in administrative leadership in higher education from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. He is currently a dissertator pursuing a Ph.D. in urban education from UWM.