have backed the life sciences too; in 2007 they approved a constitutional amendment that authorised the state to issue $3 billion in bonds to support cancer research and prevention.

Tom Kowalski, president of the Texas Healthcare and Bioscience Institute, reckons that life sciences are a good choice for public investment. The technology is complex, meaning that early support is crucial, and the sector is already growing strongly. His group estimates the industry's annual economic impact to the state at $75 billion, and employment in biosciences in Texas, according to a study by Battelle, a non-profit group that promotes R&D, grew by 19% between 2001 and 2010. Further investments will be needed, in the state's community colleges as well as its universities. But the returns are already being seen.

The Kodak name is still a draw. Monroe Community College will move into the old Kodak complex on State Street. Companies like IRT Elexis, which developed software used by Google Earth, have also taken space in old Kodak buildings. Economic diversity helped too. Rochester has more than 100 food and drink companies, including Wegmans, a supermarket chain and the region's second-biggest employer. The University of Rochester is the biggest, with an economic impact of $143m in sales tax, income tax and property taxes. Five of the top ten private-sector employers in the Finger Lakes region, where Rochester lies, are in higher education and health care.

Higher education is also a big employer in Buffalo; the University at Buffalo is the second-biggest employer. It has been moving its medical centre downtown, and changing a whole neighbourhood as it does so. Howard Zemsky, a local businessman, has had a similar impact. A decade ago he began to redevelop one of the city's oldest industrial areas, known as the Hydraulics district. Today, around 30 dilapidated or abandoned sites have been transformed into office and residential space called the Larkin District. Even an old petrol station has been converted into a restaurant. Groups such as Partnership for the Public Good are working together to make vacant plots into community gardens. The Centre for Urban Studies at the University at Buffalo and the city's housing authority are combining to help a neighbourhood in need. Collaboration is essential, says Byron Brown, Buffalo's mayor. “Right people! Right place! Right time!”

And timing and place are both part of the reason that Andrew Cuomo, the governor, pledged $1 billion earlier this year to help revive the economy of Buffalo and western New York state. Mr Katz is helping the region develop a plan to use that $1 billion effectively. “This is about the long term,” he says. “It will be the gift that keeps on giving.”