Grace College shares an address with a $38 billion global industry in Warsaw, Indiana, the orthopaedic capital of the world.

What now is international in scope started out with door-to-door salesman and pharmaceutical practitioner, Reva DePuy, who moved from Michigan to Warsaw, Ind., in 1895 and revolutionized orthopaedic practices by changing the common bone splint from a piece of barrel wood to something more practical and comfortable. It was just a small innovation, but it was first DePuy and then his employee Justin Zimmer who started the ball rolling for Kosciusko County to become the epicenter of this burgeoning marketplace.

Now innovators like DePuy, Zimmer and the brains that built Biomet are getting into the business of education, out of necessity.

The Lilly Endowment, an Indiana-based foundation that exists to support the causes of community development, education and religion, hired a research organization called Biocrossroads to do a study of the Warsaw/Winona Lake area and found several initiatives they felt the community needed to focus on. "One of those initiatives was talent pool development," states Allyn Decker, program director for the newly imitated Orthopaedic Regulatory and Clinical Affairs (ORCA) program at Grace College. "Those of us who live here, love Warsaw, but it is very difficult for the orthopaedic industry to bring highly educated professionals to this community if they don't already understand the value of living here. This is where Grace College came in."
The new ORCA program is the world’s first and only graduate program for studies in orthopaedic regulatory and clinical affairs, and it resides at Grace College. ORCA is also the first of the OrthoWorx initiatives to be implemented and thus a chance for this elaborate partnership to prove that it can and will succeed.

“ORCA is the shining star within this initiative,” says Decker, repeating the words of Biocrossroads CEO, David Johnson. “It’s what everybody is watching.” Grace College has done its research and spent the grant money wisely. An advisory board was set up, scouts went out to 12 other schools around the country to observe similar programs, cutting-edge technology was brought in, and, most importantly, a faculty of the most qualified individuals possible was hired.

President Ron Manahan is a leader with a history of community collaboration. In almost a door-to-door fashion of Reva DePuy, Manahan knocked on the doors of Zimmer, Biomet and DePuy, and simply asked “What are your needs?” The immediate and unanimous answer from the company’s presidents? “Training in regulatory and clinical affairs,” that is, an initiative that helps develop industry workers who understand the various processes involved in engineering, testing and submitting successful, safe orthopaedic devices to the FDA for approval. It’s an industry discipline that grows more and more rigorous every year.

Manahan’s outreach for partnership with Grace College was met with resounding enthusiasm and an agreement took root in the form of a $600,000 grant from OrthoWorx — a Warsaw-based, industry/community and education initiative established by funding from the Lilly Endowment.

In terms of all the professors in this program, they’re experts in their industry,” says Mike Wolford, one of the first ORCA master’s students. “You’re talking about people who have chapter-long resumes.” But, he continues, that’s not intimidating because “they’re not so ‘out there’ that they’re out of touch with the students. They make themselves available which is something I’ve really come to trust about Grace.”

The managerial team is par excellence too. Especially Decker, an award-winning innovator in training and professional education whose oversight has produced a well-timed, cutting-edge program that involves a twelve-month, twelve-course schedule, a bi-monthly series of weekend lectures and the convenient access to online participation. The program has been running smoothly since its launch in May of this year and already has a waiting list to get in; it accepts only 30 students per year.

Decker is a man who takes the statistics to heart. He notes that “thirty percent of our country directly owe their living to orthopaedics. If it weren’t here, one-third of our county would be out of work. They are the economic engine of our region.” He goes on to say that, out of the $38 billion worldwide that orthopaedics brings in, Northern Indiana brings in $11 billion.

Success has always been about innovation and anticipating market trends and needs and then stepping up to meet those needs in timely, and resourceful ways through technology and talent. It happened in the orthopaedic industry in 1895, and it’s happening today at Grace College.