

Bringing High-Tech Home

Rowan claims \$6 million and South Jersey's first Technology Park

By Mary Galloway
Dovey '75, '96

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Rowan University, it seems, cannot keep still. Only in the first phase of a 10-year, \$270 million campus renovation plan that includes a state-of-the-art \$44.2 million science facility, Rowan triumphed over a field of more than 15 competitors to claim a \$6 million grant from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. The funds will help develop the first of four facilities for what will be the largest technology park in southern New Jersey.

It may not have started out as a contest, but those listening to then-Governor Christie Whitman's January 2000 State of the State address recognized the challenge: revitalize southern New Jersey's manufacturing hub, diversify its economy and draw top-paying technology jobs by building a center to attract and foster the development of high tech industry.

"The governor's proposition for a tech center presented the perfect challenge and opportunity for Rowan," explained Executive Vice President Philip Tumminia, who headed the proposal-writing team. "We've committed to be a regional and national leader in higher education and economic development. Our well-known strengths in developing public-private partnerships helped make ours the most compelling case."

In fact, thriving partnerships between public higher education and private business and industry distinguish Rowan. The University has developed relationships with corporations, private individuals and government agencies to support scholarship and enhance educational experiences for students. Partners benefit from the resources of the University—faculty and students—to conduct research and development, while the faculty and students gain real-world experience in working with clients. The tech center will open

doors wide to more extensive partnerships and expand Rowan's ability to be a regional resource.

A natural leader

A major goal of the technology park, Rowan President Donald Farish explained, is to promote significant economic growth in the region by developing businesses, creating new jobs and transforming new technologies into commercial enterprises. "A state university has an obligation to take a leadership role in the economic development of the region it serves," Farish said, "and the technology park will be instrumental in helping us do so."

It's not difficult to see why the state selected Rowan. With the resources and expertise of the College of Engineering, which in its first five years has already established strong bonds with industry, and the College of Business' growing focus on entrepreneurship, a Rowan-centered technology research park is a natural for southern New Jersey. The South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University will be located on a University-owned 50-acre tract of land in Mantua between Rts. 322 and 55, convenient to Rt. 295, Delaware River ports and the Philadelphia-Wilmington metropolitan corridor.

The tech park will include cutting-edge research facilities and affordable office and laboratory space for firms interested in the research, development and commercialization of new products. Plans also provide space for Rowan faculty and students to conduct more federal- and state-funded research projects. The University hopes to attract corporate partners and venture capitalists to offset the cost of the building, estimated at between \$15

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With site plans in hand, President Donald J. Farish and Alumni Association Board member Kathleen Matteo '56, Executive Vice President Philip A. Tumminia '69 and Doug Zee survey the land purchased by the University to host South Jersey's first Technology Park. The Zee tracts once belonged to Zee's late mother, Elsie Schober Zee '29.

and \$20 million, explained Tumminia.

Business spin-offs

The Rowan plan also calls for the establishment of a business incubator for small and developing companies. University officials expect a decision on a separate funding proposal for the incubator this fall from the New Jersey Commission on Science and Technology, Tumminia said.

"Out of new ideas comes new businesses," explained Ted Schoen, dean of the College of Business. "Our hope is that technology-related business will spin off from the tech center and go into the incubator, giving the College of Business the opportunity to participate at different levels of business development."

Recognizing the entrepreneurial nature of many start-ups, especially

among high tech companies, Schoen welcomes the addition of K. Mark Weaver to the College's faculty in January. Weaver, an internationally recognized expert in small business entrepreneurship, will hold the College's Rohrer Endowed Chair in Entrepreneurial Studies. "Learning about creating a new business or moving into a new market will benefit students in all fields as well as business owners. The timing of our expansion in entrepreneurial curricula and service to future tech center clients couldn't be better."

A special feature of the tech park is the Rowan Alliance for Product Innovation and Development (RAPID). Multi-disciplinary teams made up of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and outside consultants, RAPID will assist existing or new businesses with product development services including feasibility studies, proto-type

development, patents, trademarks and copyrights, as well as market research.

"The tech park will give our engineering college more opportunities to work with industry, while our College of Business will play a key role in growing new business by supplying market analysis, business plan development, accounting, help in securing start-up funding and training," said Rowan Trustee Albert A. Fralinger, Jr., of Fralinger Engineers, Planners.

Fralinger, also chairman of the Delaware River Bay Authority, which in addition to the Delaware Memorial Bridge, operates five airports in New Jersey and Delaware and a business park in Salem County, is committed to economic development in the State. He believes that the tech park initiatives will attract corporate, state and federal research funding through the Departments of Defense, Energy, the

National Science Foundation and others. “The bottom line is that there will be more and better-paying jobs in South Jersey. And Rowan will make that happen,” Fralinger said.

Hands-on benefits

“The technology park fits perfectly with how we do engineering education at Rowan—hands-on, minds-on,” said College of Engineering Dean Dianne Dorland. “Students work on projects virtually every semester they are here and in their last two years, they are particularly focused on industrial projects in their sector, especially in the Engineering Clinic Affiliates Program. With the tech park, we’ll be able to offer them opportunities to work on real projects, current and applicable to business. Both students and industry will benefit.”

Just three years old and serving more than a dozen clients, the Clinic Affiliates Program can expand in both size and focus at the technology park. The proximity of the facility will also give students internship and employment opportunities, according to Dorland. “It makes sense for a developing company to work with us and tap into a whole range of campus-wide services we can provide.”

The tech park facility will provide the space to do large, industrial-scale projects sponsored by corporations, explained Stewart Slater, chair of the Chemical Engineering Department of the College of Engineering. “Bringing projects from bench scale to pilot scale gives students a better understanding of what the real world is all about, increases faculty scholarship and helps industry grow,” he said.

One project Slater hopes to locate and expand at the technology park involves chemical and mechanical engineering research on new types of valves, where students will be developing testing equipment and food processing technology for a major corporation. This and similar clinic projects often involve students from several engineering specialties as well as science and business majors,

he said.

“We can produce engineers in the new and emerging areas who are going to be important to people,” Slater said, citing developments in the food and drug industry as well as green—environmentally friendly—engineering fields. “We want South Jersey to grow and develop, to be where the talent pool is,” said the Atlantic County native.

Many Rowan clinic projects have already earned both the engineering students and their professors national and international acclaim and funding. Student-faculty teams have collaborated with corporations, government agencies and non-profit organizations on projects such as one to test the effect of heat on Kevlar and another to develop a high-velocity impactor for an automated crash notification system. “Research and development projects like these are just the type of work that we could expand in the technology center,” said Dorland.

Idea impact

Southern New Jersey’s technical community has nothing but praise for the announcement of the Rowan technology park. “I am so thrilled that Rowan got this,” said Anne Harlan, director of the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Pomona, one of the country’s largest aviation research facilities. “Between our employees and contractors, we have 3,000 people associated with our facility, and we are always looking for partners who can answer the critical questions as they pertain to aviation research.”

Some of these issues include ways to identify adverse weather, pavement studies, the structure and mechanics of people movers, laser optical systems and light signals. These are all projects Harlan believes might be tackled at the Rowan tech park.

“Rowan’s tech park will help us nourish new ideas. Having both the scientific and technical expertise, as well as the business expertise, is going to make such a difference,” said Harlan, who serves as a member of the College of Engineering’s Advisory Council.

As general manager of ExxonMobil in Paulsboro, Thomas Stein supervises the company’s worldwide research and development of gasolines for cars, diesel engines and aircraft, and its full line of automotive lubricants. In product development, ExxonMobil interacts with lots of small, entrepreneurial companies for new chemistries and new technologies, he said. “We see the creation of the tech park as beneficial in not only fostering innovative ideas we would see as desirable, but in further establishing the technical community and professional societies in this area,” Stein said.

Fralinger, too, hopes that the Rowan technology park will increase the status of technology in the region. “Those of us who live in South Jersey know it and love it, but as an engineering firm, we experience difficulty in getting good talent. It’s hard to recruit here. We’re hoping an influx of technology businesses to the park will change that.”

University officials believe the creation of the technology park will have an impact on the entire Rowan campus. “This is a win-win for us,” Tumminia said. “The whole project has an educational purpose and it will strengthen the entire academic program of the University. We’ll be able to attract faculty members with research backgrounds and expose our students to more first class experiences.” ■