

# Southern Miss marks kickoff of construction at Innovation and Commercialization Park



What promises to be just the beginning of bigger things to come at the University of Southern Mississippi's Innovation and Commercialization Park was the focal point of a groundbreaking ceremony during May for the park's first facility.

University and public officials, including U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran, joined for the event to mark the site of the new 50,000-square-foot National Science Formulation Laboratory, which will include state-of-the-art lab equipment and instrumentation. It is designed to provide the space needed for companies to convert the work of university researchers into high-demand products for industry.

"This is an important day in the life of the Innovation and Commercialization Park," said Southern Miss President Dr. Shelby Thames. "We appreciate the hard work and commitment of Sen. Thad Cochran and our congressional delegation to secure this initiative."

The laboratory will support throughput formulation and formulation science for addressing issues in such areas as marine composites, coatings, smart films and a myriad of other applications while developing and disseminating the enabling techniques required to sustain American competitiveness in high performance materials and polymers.



Public officials ceremonially tossed the first shovels of dirt for the National Formulation Science Laboratory, the first building to be built in the University of Southern Mississippi's Innovation and Commercialization Park in Hattiesburg. Pictured from left are Johnny DuPree, mayor of Hattiesburg; Angie Godwin, president of the Area Development Partnership; Billy Hudson, president, Forrest County Board of Supervisors; USM President Shelby Thames; Sen. Thad Cochran, Dr. Cecil Burge, USM vice president for research and economic development; Joey Deason, CFO of the Mississippi Development Authority; and Dr. Jay Grimes, USM Provost.

Southern Miss Vice President for Research and Economic Development Dr. Cecil Burge said the key to the effectiveness and attraction of the facility is its design.

"We spent a lot of time asking ourselves, 'How can we make it (the laboratory) as flexible as possible?' We wanted it to have space highly configurable for the projects that will be undertaken there," Burge said.

Burge said a builder for the facility has been selected and construction should begin within this month. "Now we can see our efforts come to

fruition. This will be a major draw for innovation based companies to move to Hattiesburg," he said.

The attraction of the university's Mississippi Polymer Institute, a state-funded manufacturing extension program for the polymer industry, helped drive the creation of the park. In 2003, Hybrid Plastics moved to Hattiesburg to create an association with the advanced research taking place at the university in this field.

That's the kind of response the university is anticipating the park will

foster in the future, as more companies learn about the advantages offered through a relationship with the cutting-edge research taking place at Southern Miss.

The park will also be a key actor in the I-59 Technology Corridor concept, which identifies the network of technological and industrial facilities and higher education centers, along with key infrastructure, along the stretch of interstate as the foundation for development of the region's high-tech economy.

"High growth regions around the country are being led by high-tech companies, and innovation and commercialization parks are the tools that economic developers use to make that happen," said Dr. Ken Malone, chair of the Southern Miss Department of Economic Development.

Les Goff, president and CEO of Noetic Technologies at Southern Miss, also hailed the new facility as another important step in the university's efforts to identify and partner with companies and researchers whose ideas have commercial viability.

"It's a critical piece of the puzzle for the development of entrepreneurship and economic development," Goff said. "It will provide the incubator space and opportunities for entrepreneurs to help realize their dreams."

Rendering by Eley Associates/Architects