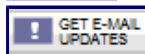
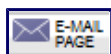


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ODU hopes to plug into bright ideas



The first building in Innovation Research Park @ ODU, at the corner of 41st Street and Monarch Way. L. TODD SPENCER/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

By **JON W. GLASS**, The Virginian-Pilot
© May 16, 2007

NORFOLK - Old Dominion University wants to elevate its national profile in high-tech research while serving as a spark plug for economic growth in Hampton Roads.

With the formal opening today of the first office building in the campus' Innovation Research Park @ ODU, the university has moved closer to both of those goals, officials say.

A chief aim of the park is to provide a place where university scientists and students can collaborate with technology companies to spin off marketable products in such areas as engineering, manufacturing, health care, transportation and the environment - "all the big issues facing the world," ODU President Roseann Runte said.

"It allows us to capture the commercial opportunities and keep them in the region," Runte said. "Companies will be able to capture our research and hire our students, and faculty members doing their research will have companies to validate their work. Everybody wins."

That includes the city, she said. The building was developed and is owned by Wexford Science + Technology, a Baltimore real estate investment and development company, which will pay city property taxes on the estimated \$22.5 million structure. The company is a subsidiary of Maryland-based Wexford Equities LLC.

The five-story, 100,000-square-foot building - equipped with the heavy-duty infrastructure needed to support "wet" labs for biomedical, biochemical and oceanographic research - is a block east of Hampton Boulevard at the corner of 41st Street and Monarch Way.

About 60 percent of tenants leasing offices in the top-of-the-line "Class A" space are ODU research and development centers or groups affiliated with ODU. The remainder is expected to be a mix of private businesses and other research or technology groups.

The university has plans to add at least three more buildings of similar size to the research park in coming years to attract more industry users.

Officials have made a selling point of the park's urban like setting within the 75-acre University Village - a \$260 million public-private redevelopment project that puts research park tenants within walking distance of shops, restaurants and other amenities.

To date, about 75 percent of the building's space has been leased, said Steve Hanssen, a Wexford vice president. The company broke ground on the building in November 2005.

"There's very strong activity for the rest of the building," Hanssen said. "ODU has done their homework, and they've created a wonderful environment for the companies and people that are going to work in these buildings."

While Wexford owns the building, it leases the underlying land from ODU's Real Estate Foundation, a private, nonprofit arm of the university that assembled land for the village. Since the late 1990s, Wexford has teamed with several educational institutions on similar public-private ventures.

"For various reasons, they just don't have the dollars to go out and develop these buildings in quick fashion, and we can come in and be aggressive," Hanssen said. "It allows them to attract the people they want, whether it be key researchers or companies, but they're not having to come out of pocket to build the entire building."

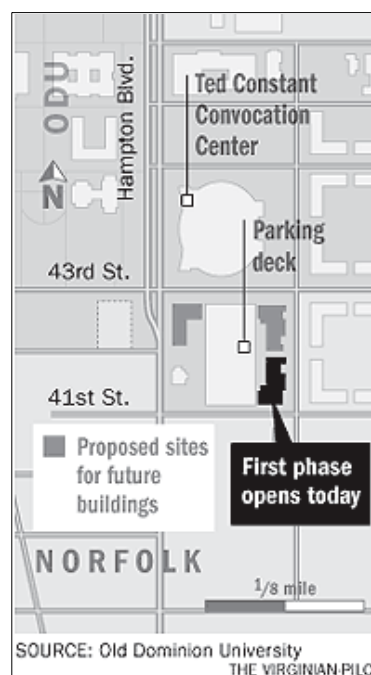
Chuck Rigney, assistant director of the city's Department of Development, said that Norfolk "stands to benefit in a huge way" from the research park, which is creating a new office submarket. Both the city and ODU have amenities to draw companies, he said, including Norfolk's nearby nine-hole golf course, a Marriott SpringHill Suites hotel under construction in the village, a university fitness center and access to high-speed Internet-based research networks.

"It's a new opportunity for companies to explore something that just hadn't existed prior to this," Rigney said.

Because it's so new - and within a corridor once pocked with run-down warehouses and blighted buildings - one challenge has been getting businesses to consider the location, Rigney said.

"This is a new concept, so one of the things we do have as a challenge is to convince people that this new submarket has all these great assets," Rigney said. "Some of the companies clearly 'get it,' and some are saying they never considered that location but will take a look."

For ODU researchers and graduate students who will be based in the new building, the opportunities



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appear to be wide-ranging.

"Taking this university to the next level is what's happening here, to put us among the top universities in the country," said Vijayan Asari, an electrical and computer engineering professor and director of ODU's Vision Lab.

Asari and a team of graduate research students are settling into a second-floor space that is nearly three times as large as the lab's previous office. The lab now has about \$1.8 million in funded research, including work on sensor and imaging technology for the Navy and NASA. It is developing new techniques in facial recognition that could be used in airports or in office-security systems.

It is working with a Norfolk company to develop goggles that could be worn by senior citizens to improve their range of vision while driving.

"This brings the academic close to industry," Jake Foytik, one of Asari's graduate students, said of the research park. "It puts us closer to being out into the real work world."

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Godd news for the region! (hide comment)

Kudos to ODU and the City of Norfolk! This development will only expand the research opportunities of the college and further enhance the reputation of ODU. Next step is to forge a long term partnership with EVMS and Sentara. The possibilities are endless!

- Daniel C. - Norfolk

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