

BY KATIE PORTERFIELD

# A Farm Stimulus Package

UT officials sow the seeds for research-based reputation

**A** dairy farm turned state-of-the-art research facility? The transformation alone—which involves preserving prehistoric remains and relocating cows—makes for an intriguing story. But long after the infrastructure is in place and the LEED-certified buildings are complete, UT System officials and others in the Knoxville community hope to tell a story in which Cherokee Farm has secured Tennessee’s lasting research prominence on both national and international levels.

“The vision here is to create a technology-oriented campus—it’s not just an extension of the Knoxville campus; this is a new campus. Its primary function will be to provide high-end space for research and technological development,” says UT executive vice president David Millhorn, who chairs the Cherokee Farm planning committee.

A shared resource of the UT, System, Oak Ridge National Laboratory and public and private partners, Cherokee Farm, is also expected to stimulate economic development and create high-tech jobs throughout the region and state. The campus is being modeled after other university-based research parks, such as North Carolina State University’s Centennial Campus, which is home to 130 corporate and government research partners.

“A lot of companies want to be close to the university and to Oak Ridge because of the type of research we’re doing here,” Millhorn says. “We look at this to be a very popular site for companies that need capabilities and access to expertise.”



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In fact, having a national lab involved makes Cherokee Farm a unique university-based research site. Many say it's the successful UT/Oak Ridge partnership—which has already gone a long way toward enhancing UT's national research position—that paved the way for such a project in the first place. That particular chapter in the story gained momentum more than eight years ago when Gov. Don Sundquist and others encouraged UT to submit a bid (with the Ohio-based, nonprofit research and development organization, Battelle) to manage Oak Ridge, which at the time was falling behind the other national labs in relevance.

"We did everything on a bi-partisan basis then—and since then with things Gov. Bredesen



**“What an opportunity to develop UT into the major research university in the world.”** have been created through technology transfer:

— Pete DeBusk, CEO of East Tennessee-based DeRoyal Industries.

has done—to reactivate and regenerate the lab,” Sundquist says. “Oak Ridge is one of the secrets of success for Tennessee, and it’s terribly important to the country.”

Today, UT-Battelle manages \$3 billion in research facilities, equipment and expertise at Oak Ridge—including the \$1.4 billion Spallation Neutron Source and the world’s largest unclassified supercomputer. Plus, more than 60 businesses

change in fortunes for ORNL was the 2004 arrival of UT System President John Petersen, who spent 15 years (in the 1990s) in the U.S. Department of Energy’s Solar Photochemistry program.

“He’s a chemist, not a typical president of a college,” explains Pete DeBusk, CEO of East Tennessee-based DeRoyal Industries. “This is right down his alley, so he thinks to himself,

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‘What an opportunity to develop UT into the major research university in the world.’” (The prospect of elevating the state’s research prowess and educating Tennessee residents about the state’s potential has DeBusk pretty excited, too.)

The idea for Cherokee Farm evolved from UT’s latest strategic plan. Announced in 2006, the plan became a priority for Petersen upon his arrival and highlighted research and economic development. Committed to solving some of the world’s most complex problems, Cherokee Farm’s research will involve the following fields: leadership and network computing, neutron science, nanotechnology and materials science, energy, climate and environmental science, and biomedical science.

“We think this is an opportunity to develop high-end intellectual property that can lead to commercialization, and that’s best done through partnerships with the private sector,” Millhorn says.

Millhorn stresses, however, that UT won’t approve just any opportunity for a private partnership. “[A potential partner’s] research has to fit comfortably with the University’s research—whether it’s researching outcomes to help solve energy needs or helping us understand important problems such as global warming and environmental impacts,” he says.

So far, one yet-to-be-announced private entity has agreed to build a research facility on the 148-acre site that officials anticipate can accommodate two million square feet of building space. Another building will house the Joint Institute for Advanced Materials, a \$45 million UT/ORNL venture. UT has secured both federal and state money for the Advanced

Materials building and \$32 million from the state for infrastructure, but in the face of a budget shortfall, private partners become even more important.

And then there’s the talent that such an institution attracts. Many top scientists already call Tennessee home, but UT officials hope others will see the new venture as a foundation on which to build a research program—complete with unmatched research tools and access to the largest science and energy lab in the country.

“It will allow us to recruit the top graduates in the country, who then will, we hope, choose to stay in Tennessee and add to our technology workforce,” Millhorn says.

And that is key not only for the state but the country, says Jim Haslam, founder of Knoxville’s Pilot Corp., who served on UT’s Board of Trustees for 27 years. With DeBusk, Haslam is launching an initiative to educate Tennessee residents on the state’s research assets.

“If we’re going to prosper, we have to be on the cutting edge of technology. To have Oak Ridge and a comprehensive research university is a heck of a start in building a research center,” he says.

The hope is that, in about 20 years, Tennessee will be home to one of the nation’s exceptional technology research corridors.

“We are sitting on the next Silicon Valley,” DeBusk says.

For state officials and business leaders, that’s a darn good “happily ever after.” **tn**

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