

November 2008

Greetings from the Office of Research and Economic Development! Recently, the SEC Cross Country championship was held here in Starkville, with our men finishing in sixth place and the women finishing in ninth place – and both teams finished ahead of Ole Miss – so a successful day all the way around.

I would like to remind everyone that ORED has a “safe travel” briefing for those of you who are traveling outside of the U.S. that meets on the first Wednesday and second Tuesday of each month. This briefing does not take long – and it has great travel tips. If you are planning on traveling outside of the U.S. – then please make it a priority to attend one of these briefings each year. For more information, contact Neil Lewis at nelewis@fso.msstate.edu.

Some faculty and staff kudos to pass along –

* Dr. Kari Babski-Reeves (Industrial and Systems Engineering) received the Alexander C. Williams, Jr., Design Award at the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society 52nd Annual Meeting in New York this fall. The national award recognizes those who have made outstanding contributions to the conception or design of any product, service, or system that has had a significant impact on users and exemplifies the excellent use of empirical human factors/ergonomic design principles.

Like many people of my age, I grew up watching Disney movies – and many of you may remember these – classics like the “Computer Who Wore Tennis Shoes”, or “The Island at the Top of the World”, or “Flubber”. In many older movies, college professors are shown as very entrepreneurial – where faculty members were involved in inventing the newest “cool thing” – like “flubber”. Over the last decade, there is an expectation that public universities need to be economic engines – helping to create jobs and to play a major role in economic development projects.

If I look into my crystal ball – I believe that the Starkville area will be the “technology hotspot” for the State of Mississippi, very similar to the role played by Austin, Texas (for Texas) and the Research Triangle (for North Carolina). In order for this to happen, we need to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem here in the Starkville – Golden Triangle Area. What sorts of things need to be present for this to happen?

While there are certainly some aspects of building an entrepreneurial ecosystem that are unique to Mississippi, we can use best practices gleaned from other universities with highly successful entrepreneurship programs. Mr. Bill Aulet, Senior Lecturer and Entrepreneur-in-Residence in the Entrepreneurship Center at MIT, is helping us to put in place a world-class entrepreneurship program at MSU. Why MIT? In a study performed a decade ago to determine the impact of innovation and entrepreneurship at MIT, it was estimated that 4000 companies with over 1M employees and \$232B in annual revenues had come out of MIT. If these companies were considered collectively, it would be the

24th largest economy in the world. In my mind if you are going to use “best practices” in higher education, you may as well use the best ones you can find!

Mr. Aulet mentioned that there are seven key elements to building an entrepreneurial ecosystem (listed in no particular order) – government, demand, invention, funding, infrastructure, entrepreneurs, and culture. There is no one single item that stands out as necessarily more important than the others – all must be present in some form to start to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem. So, what are we doing here to continue to build such an ecosystem?

I posed this very question this summer, and convened a summer working group to develop a vision and plan for enhancing our entrepreneurial environment at MSU. Dr. Gary Butler, Assistant Vice President for Research and Technology Development, is chairing a group that is formulating a comprehensive plan to map out what MSU needs to do to continue our success in helping to build businesses spawned from research at State. Members of the working group include - Gary Butler (Committee Chair), Jim Chrisman (Business), Mike Mazzola (Engineering), Gerald Nelson (Hatcher Chair/Engineering), Donna Reese (Assoc Dean/Engineering), Chuck Rivenburgh (Director, Technology Commercialization), and Ron Taylor (Assoc Dean/Business). We are still working on the details of the center, and will make sure to include more information on this as we develop a finalized plan.

The addition of first-class space has been a critical need for smaller high technology companies, particularly around campus and in the Thad Cochran Research, Technology, and Economic Development Park. We took a big step forward to create some much-needed new space with the recent groundbreaking announcement of a new 42,000 square foot multi-tenant building in the park. Shaffer and Associates were selected as the architect, and we expect actual construction to start in March of 2009 with occupancy projected for January of 2010. So, who will go in the building? We are currently in preliminary discussions with several companies that have resulted from MSU research who are probable tenants, as well as some of our newer university research centers, and hope to have a fairly complete tenant list by mid-summer of 2009.

For many of our start-up companies, funding has also been a critical need. Over the last several years, several major companies and university friends have donated funds to establish the Thad Cochran Endowment for Entrepreneurship (TCEE), which provides seed funding to assist faculty and student start-up companies with small grants to develop business plans, build prototypes, and other needed expenses involved in moving a high technology company forward. We are hoping to build this endowment up to \$10M over the next several years, which will provide critical funds to assist our budding entrepreneurship center in moving forward.

So, we are faced with a unique opportunity. I am a firm believer that Mississippi State University is one of the primary drivers for the future growth of Mississippi. If we can develop a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Golden Triangle Region focused around the innovation and strong research efforts of our faculty, staff, and students, it will

go along ways towards our desired recognition as a Top 100 Research University. I am certainly ready for the challenge – how about you?

Go Dawgs! Beat Bama!

Kirk.