
New Kent State Research Park Features FlexMatters Accelerator

KENT, Ohio – Kent State University announced a new era in focused, 21st-century research and economic development today, unveiling a leading-edge research park in the former bus garage on the Kent Campus.

“The Kent State Centennial Research Park is an important part of my vision for the university as it enters its second century, by cultivating and capitalizing on intellectual property,” said Kent State President Lester A. Lefton. “This innovative research initiative fits our mission as a major public research university to promote academic excellence, to provide regional development opportunities and to push the boundaries of discovery for the good of the public.”

The Research Park will provide space and support for specialized companies to thrive and grow near the university and its other partners. Kent State graduate and undergraduate students will have opportunities for research, internships and employment; faculty researchers from the Liquid Crystal Institute and other disciplines will be available for collaborative projects; and the university has entrepreneurial assets available to aid business growth through its centers that specialize in technology transfer, small business development, business innovation and minority-owned businesses.

The anchor tenant of Kent State’s Centennial Research Park will be the FLEXMatters Accelerator, a broad, public-private high-technology collaboration, designed to produce a new generation of advanced materials and promote regional economic development.

The FLEXMatters Accelerator will work with local companies to develop and produce devices that are typically rigid on flexible polymer substrates. This collaboration will lead to production of liquid crystal-based flexible displays, eyewear, electronics and other devices. FLEXMatters Accelerator, the first step for the Centennial Research Park, arose from a partnership between Kent State and NorTech, a technology-based economic development organization for Northeast Ohio that has been a catalyst in building high-tech regional collaboration.

“This region’s strengths in Kent State’s liquid crystals and the University of Akron’s polymer research form a combination found nowhere else in the world,” said Dr. John L. West, vice president for research and dean of graduate studies at Kent State. “Our vision is to turn this education, research and development effort into an industrial cluster that will put Northeast Ohio in the lead of this emerging global technology.”

Kent State ranks fifth in the world and second nationwide among universities in the number of start-up companies formed per \$1 million in research expenditures.

The concept of an “accelerator,” rather than an incubator, came about because the facility and the Research Park will bring together researchers from

universities and new and established companies to “accelerate” the region’s ability to commercialize discoveries, West said.

The FLEXMatters Accelerator is a model for further expansion within the Centennial Research Park.

“The great thing about FLEXMatters is that it brings together three of our region’s strengths – liquid crystals, polymers and manufacturing – in a way that enables us to compete globally in the emerging flexible display market,” said NorTech President and CEO Dorothy Baunach. “Northeast Ohio should be able to capture a significant and important share of this market by building on our strengths, which include the innovative prowess of people like John West and the research communities of Kent State and the University of Akron, as well as local companies like Kent Displays, AlphaMicron and Hanna Micro.”

The initial phase of this project is funded by a portion of the Ohio Third Frontier Research Commercialization Project for the Flexible Liquid Crystal Film Manufacturing Alliance. Led by Kent Displays, the alliance joins AlphaMicron, Akron Polymer Systems and Sheldahl with Kent State and the University of Akron to develop and produce flexible liquid crystal displays and eyewear.

The alliance is supported by an additional \$8 million in matching funds from the collaborators.

Two additional research and commercialization projects have joined the FLEXMatters initiative to help build this emerging cluster and to market the region’s technology assets. The University of Akron-led Commercialization of Functional Polyimide Films and Nanocomposites joins companies from around the state to develop polyimide films for a wide range of products. The Graftech-led Development and Commercialization of Graphite Nanocomposites for the next Generation of Electronic devices will develop the next generation of thermal management films.

All of the collaborators share the goal of developing locally the materials and manufacturing processes for the next generation of electronic optical devices.

Centennial Research Park is located at the corner of State Routes 59 and 261, in the Fiala Building, the former home of Kent State’s student-operated campus bus service, the nation’s largest such operation. Following a partnership with PARTA, the Portage County transportation network, Kent State no longer needed the 44,000 square feet and 10 surrounding acres as a bus garage.

“Now this facility will have a new life serving future economic development in Northeast Ohio, as a globally significant research park connected to a major research university,” Lefton said.