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Officials praise technology center funding decision

By JACK STEWARDSON, Standard-Times staff writer

FALL RIVER -- Continued funding of UMass Dartmouth's Advanced Technology and Manufacturing Center means SouthCoast will have a critical economic development tool to help stoke the region's economy, officials said yesterday.

"This is the kind of public-private partnership that spurs development," university Chancellor Jean MacCormack said yesterday at a press conference. It was called to highlight the decision by acting Gov. Jane M. Swift to continue funding the center despite fiscal pressure on the state university system.

"We think there has been a great return on investment already," she added.

The chancellor, Fall River Mayor Edward M. Lambert Jr. and members of the local legislative delegation joined in the press conference and took part in a media tour of the 60,000 square foot, state-of-the-art center.

Open for about a year and built on a 17-acre technology park at the site of the former Kerr mill, the center is geared toward enhancing the competitive position of business and industry in SouthCoast.

It includes a business conference center, a research laboratory and a technology venture center, which provides incubator services for emerging companies.

The local legislative delegation worked overnight recently to convince Gov. Swift to maintain the center's \$1.1 million funding in the present fiscal year. Lawmakers also hope to continue to stress the center's importance when Gov.-elect Mitt Romney takes office.

"I think we all want to make clear it's importance to this region," said Mayor Lambert. "I think we continue to need to educate the people here and in Boston of the importance of the program."

Rep. Robert Correia, D-Fall River, said the center was built "to create a better economy, better wages, more self-reliance for this region."

"It's done a tremendous job in reaching out to our business community," said Rep. Michael J. Rodrigues, D- Westport.

Michael Sullivan, the center marketing director, led the entourage on a tour of the research laboratories, where existing industries work closely with the university to develop new products, and of the technology venture center, where emerging firms find space and support services to get on their feet.

In nearly every case, student interns or cooperative students find jobs while going to school.

Dr. MacCormack said the six incubator firms at the technology venture center have already attracted about \$1.5 billion worth of venture capital.

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"It's really allowed us to move from a dead start and get running very quickly," said John Miller, president of MicroMagnetics, an incubator company that is developing advanced sensor products.

Steven Hemingway, president of International Compliance Systems, has a software development and customer service company specializing in helping companies evaluate, enhance and manage accountability for compliance.

It has developed and is currently mastering Internet applications for managing health, safety and environmental compliance. He said the venture center is a vast improvement from his basement, where he first started his company.

Dr. Gethyn Timothy, who is also an adjunct professor of physics, is an astrophysicist who was involved in developing ultraviolet detectors for the Hubble telescope.

He is setting up an incubator company at the center to explore uses in medical imaging, night vision and other applications.



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