

SPRINGFIELD

INNOVATIVE

Missouri State teams with private partners on Jordan Valley Innovation Center

BY ERIC ECKERT

Don Landy, an administrator for Fenton-based Crosslink, was in Springfield late last month poring over plans for 3,800 square feet of new office, laboratory and research space.

Crosslink, a technology development company specializing in commercial applications for electroactive polymers, plans to base two of its U.S. Department of Defense projects in Missouri State University's new multimillion-dollar Jordan Valley Innovation Center (JVIC), slated to be completed in April 2007.

"We really are excited about the facility," said Landy, the company's vice president of government relations.

JVIC, which will be housed in a refurbished Missouri Farmers Association mill in downtown Springfield, will be the headquarters for Missouri State's Center for Applied Science and Engineering (CASE), as well as four private partners: Crosslink; Rolla, Mo.-based Brewer Science Inc.; Nantero, based in Boston; Carbon Nanotechnologies Inc., based in Houston; and Phoenix-based Pantheon.

The work conducted at JVIC will focus on applied research in biomaterials, nanotechnologies, advanced technologies, genomics/proteomics, biosystems software engineering and biomedical instrument development, said Ryan Giedd, who serves as the center's executive director and director of CASE. Ultimately, JVIC will help create new opportunities in the region's job market and serve as the economic redevelopment and research hub for the downtown area, Giedd said.

The first of four construction phases calls for a \$12 million renovation of two buildings on the 2-acre site to be completed by this time next year. U.S. Congressman and House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R, Indian Point) secured \$7.64 million in Department of Defense funds for the project; the remaining \$4.4 million comes from additional federal funding. Missouri State will occupy four floors and will lease the remaining four floors to the private research firms.

Landy said Missouri State offered the private companies something that other universities traditionally do not: retention of intellectual property rights. Giedd, who has worked with private



Don Landy is opening a research facility for Fenton-based Crosslink in the JVIC.

research companies for more than a decade, said the university chose to forgo those rights to make JVIC more attractive to private partners. "We allow companies to retain those rights in exchange for royalties on products that reach the marketplace," he said.

Homeland security and defense needs since the attacks of Sept. 11 have encouraged the government to devote more resources and funds to the type of research that JVIC will conduct, Giedd said, adding that "the timing was right and the community was supportive."

The city of Springfield, the Springfield Business Development Corp. and the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce all played a part in advancing the construction of JVIC.

The project fits perfectly into the city's downtown redevelopment plan, said Tom Finnie, Springfield's city manager. The overall redevelopment plan, devised a decade ago by a group of citizens and city leaders called Vision 20/20, includes connecting Drury University and the city's government plaza to the heart of downtown, located several blocks south. But, Finnie said, the abandoned Missouri Farmers

Association mill had always proved to be a large and unsightly obstacle.

"The city bit the bullet and bought the mill," Finnie said. "And when we heard that Missouri State had a partnership and was looking for a place, we said, 'You know, we've got this mill, and we can make you a really good price on it.'"

Finnie said the city has worked to bring people back to the downtown area to live, but it's been more troublesome to bring high-paying, professional jobs downtown. JVIC, he said, is a step in the right direction. Giedd said the industry jobs he foresees will pay at least \$50,000.

Giedd said he and other university administrators continue to work to find other private companies in the defense and homeland-security areas to partner with.

"I think that when I talk to other companies, they see definite advantages to moving here to Springfield," he said, "because it's a good place to work, it's family friendly, it's progressive, and it offers a lower cost of living."

Eric Eckert is a Springfield freelance writer.