

'Long Haul Project' for UML

Although the beginning funding for the University Multispectral Lab (UML) has been secured it may take as much as a year before the lab is up and running, according to David Myers, Ponca City Development Authority executive. The UML is to be a national sensor center.

"This is a long haul project," noted Myers. "The birth of an industry doesn't happen overnight. It takes time but we are in a position that most communities only dream about."

During the interim, UML activities are being conducted out of other offices on the ConocoPhillips campus.

Myers said that as the UML pursues the construction phase, the community needs to prepare itself to attract the professional staff needed. "We have a shortage of housing for these types of positions. In addition, modern school facilities, recreational and facilities and retail options will be critical. Most of these people will come from areas that have an abundance of options in those areas."

The center is projected to have a positive economic impact to Ponca City of \$140 million over ten years, according to economic models run by PCDA.

PCDA Chair Lee Evans said that as impressive as that number is, the real benefits may be from the spin-off companies that will locate next to the lab. "That has been the experience elsewhere with facilities of this type. This is a golden opportunity that few communities ever have," said Evans.

Myers said that PCDA is beginning the process of identifying areas for future companies. A PCDA committee of Evans, Jim Leach and Darrell Stolhand will consider land options that can maximize the sensor project and other economic development initiatives.

Renovation work on the new Oklahoma State University sensor testing center will begin soon, now that funds from Ponca City and ConocoPhillips have been received, officials said.

The center, to be named the University Multispectral Lab or UML, was the recipient of two checks each in the amount of \$500,000 in a ceremony at City Hall in Ponca City on Dec. 13.

Both the Ponca City Development Authority and ConocoPhillips have pledged to provide \$2 million each towards the project.

According to OSU officials,

it was ConocoPhillips donation of the 70,000 square foot Research East building in Ponca City that made the center possible.

The UML has also attracted state and federal funding from different sources. Sen. David Myers led the effort for state funding from the 2006 state budget. Congressman Frank Lucas and other members of the Oklahoma delegation were responsible for assisting OSU receive federal contracts and earmarks which will allow the center to open.

More funding will be sought in 2007 from both the state and federal government to complete the project, OSU officials said.

According to Tim Reynolds, the Project Manager for AMTI, the contractor operating the center, the UML already has 11 people employed and is in the process of recruiting additional personnel. David Myers, Executive Director of the Ponca City Development Authority, said that the recruitment of key personnel is an important step for the project. "We're really at the end of the beginning. Bringing in the highly skilled people that will be the real backbone of the UML could take some time."