Duke lends power of name to new center

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PAUL BROWN

Jim Rogers, chairman, president and CEO of Duke Energy, and Clemson President James Barker view the new Advanced Materials Center under construction in Anderson County.

$2 million gift could help Clemson advanced materials facility be a conduit for jobs, officials say.

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ANDERSON — With a $2 million gift, Duke Energy unleashed a powerful asset to spur economic growth and attract jobs to the Clemson University Advanced Materials Center in Anderson County — its name.

A facility under construction to house research and business incubation at the Advanced Materials Center will be named the Duke Energy Innovation Center, Clemson President James Barker said Friday.

"We are extremely grateful for the commitment of this exceptional private-sector partner," Barker said. "It is an honor to have the Duke Energy name associated with this project."

This "remarkable facility" will be "an example for the rest of the country in terms of tying research and development to commercial development and bringing new products to market, and that is so critical in the creation of jobs," said Jim Rogers, Duke Energy chairman, president and chief executive officer.

The innovation center is a joint project of the university and the South Carolina Research Authority. One wing will be a Clemson business incubator to move advanced materials and other research to the

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marketplace, with space for start-up companies and existing companies interested in expansion or a move to the area.

SCRA will have offices and secure research labs in a second wing of the facility that is expected to be ready for occupancy in the spring.

Duke Energy's South Carolina portfolio alone "would make it a Fortune 500 company," U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who spoke at the announcement, told *The Greenville News* to emphasize the strength he believes Duke brings to the Advanced Materials Center that many hope will be a magnet for high paying, high-tech jobs.

"This announcement today has a lot of potential for the future of this part of South Carolina," Graham said.

This is "another major mile-marker" that underscores and recognizes "the potential for job creation, said Chris Przirembel, who recently retired as vice president for research and economic development at Clemson and was instrumental in development of the Advanced Materials Center.

Duke's name "is such a remarkable sign of how far we've come," said John Ballato, interim associate vice president for research at Clemson and a significant force in advanced materials research at Clemson. Research in advanced materials has produced 14 spin-off companies and drawn five existing companies to the area in the past five years. "It validates everything we've done," Ballato said.

The $2 million gift will help build the facility and foster activities in the building, "but the name is forever," Ballato said.

Although no companies have signed leases for space in the innovation center, "there is a lot of interest," Ballato said.

The innovation center holds the promise of jobs for technical college graduates, said Ronnie Booth, president of Tri-County Technical College, who attended the announcement. After research moves from Clemson labs, "at the point of commercialization, we'll be providing the employees they need," Booth said.

Sandra Gantt, a Town Council member in nearby Pendleton, voiced optimism about the potential for growth that could help local businesses.

Clemson University's Advanced Materials Center is off State 187, two miles north of Interstate 85 halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte.