BUSINESS

Firm to invest Ross Perot money

New business in Greenville will use part of huge fortune to purchase aerospace companies

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A Rhodes Scholar and longtime aviation executive is launching a new business in Greenville that will tap the Ross Perot fortune to buy aerospace companies.

Bill McLendon, who graduated first in his class at the Air Force Academy, said he takes the helm of Perot Aerospace April 1.

He'll talk about the aerospace industry at the 10th annual InnoVenture business-networking conference on May 8 and 9 at the TD Convention Center.

Also at InnoVenture, Clemson University inventor John Ballato will talk about plans to make South Carolina the U.S. leader in lasers/optics manufacturing and Greenville County Councilman Fred Payne will discuss a plan for testing "green" communities in Greenville for possible commercialization elsewhere.

McLendon said he graduated first in his class at the Air Force Academy in 1981 and attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He flew F-15 Eagle fighter jets and fought in the first Gulf War before becoming an aviation executive in 1991.

McLendon moved to Greenville in 1999 to work for Ranger Aerospace Corp., a holding company that bought and sold aviation companies, and has run other aviation companies since then while keeping his home in Greenville.

He said Perot Aerospace will build a "substantial presence" in the aerospace industry by acquiring companies to hold for the long term "because we believe the aerospace industry is going to experience predictable growth over the next couple of decades, at least."

"We'd like to open branches of great companies here (in Greenville) where it makes good business sense," McLendon said.

McLendon said he's been planning the new venture in conjunction with The Perot Group, a Dallas area company that manages the business interests of the family of H. Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire who founded Electronic Data Systems and Perot Systems Corp. and ran for president in the 1990s.

An executive with The Perot Group said he was not at liberty to comment.