GE opens $73M research center

Manufacturing technology will be explored at facility

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General Electric executive Rick Stanley was waiting for the completion of a certain project before retiring — a new research center on the company's Greenville campus.

GE held the grand opening for that facility, called Advanced Manufacturing Works, on Friday, clearing the way for Stanley to retire next week as chief technology officer for GE Power, the conglomerate's largest industrial business with 38,000 employees and customers around the globe.

"I wanted to see it through with the team at the end of my career," said the 58-year-old Stanley, a board member at the Peace Center and State Ports Authority who plans to stay in Greenville following retirement.

"It's really a happy day for me and for the company," he said after joining GE Power CEO Steve Bolze and Gov. Nikki Haley on stage as part of an elaborate ceremony.

GE will use the $73 million, 125,000-square-foot research center just off of Feaster Road to develop new manufacturing processes and rapidly build prototypes for various business lines — though most of the work will be related to the power-producing turbines the company has made in Greenville since 1968.

High-level GE Power executives gave news reporters a tour of Advanced Manufacturing Works, showing them various technologies being explored there. They include 3D printing, laser drilling, advanced ceramic composites and autonomous robots.

Jeff Connelly, GE Power's vice president for global supply chain, said the idea for the research center surfaced after Bolze asked him in 2012 to examine the global capabilities of GE Power.

Consulting with engineering and supply chain leaders, "The common theme that I heard was that we don't have the ability to iterate new ideas when it comes to manufacturing," said Connelly, who worked in Greenville in the early 1990s but is now based at GE Power's headquarters in Schenectady, New York.

So GE decided to create a specific site for exploring technologies with the potential to dramatically change how things are made, Connelly said.



HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

GE Power President and CEO Steve Bolze speaks during the celebration of GE's Advanced Manufacturing Works grand opening in Greenville on Friday.

Kurt Goodwin, the executive in charge of Advanced Manufacturing Works, said the goal is to "keep putting new processes and manufacturing technology in the factories, keep making them competitive, and keep building out jobs there. That's the real payoff."

GE first announced the research center in the summer of 2014. It has filled 48 of 80 planned jobs, Goodwin said.