Monday 5-3/2010 Greenville News

ICAR fulfilling its jobs

Campus generating both research, manufacturing opportunities

By Rudolph Bell
STAFF WRITER
dbell@greenvillenews.com

The chief executive of electric bus maker Proterra said the International Center for Automotive Research was one of the biggest reasons his company chose Greenville for a plant over sites in Ohio or Indiana.

The chief executive of American Titanium Works, which plans a titanium mill in Laurens County, said the company wanted to be near ICAR because it hopes to sell its product to the automotive industry.

Their testimony is strong evidence that Clemson University's research park in Greenville has begun to fulfill its promise of attracting not only white-collar research jobs but also blue-collar manufacturing positions.

That's something Chris Przirembel, ICAR's chief architect over the past decade, always predicted, though he didn't expect to see it less than seven years after the research park's official groundbreaking.

Przirembel, who is retiring as Clemson's vice president for research and economic development, said developing ICAR was a cal-

See ICAR on page 7A

exploded
trict.
ence exist
lity by P
ire pursui
cam

mise early

ICAR

FROM PAGE1A

culated risk that he didn't expect to create a lot of jobs for 10 to 15 years.

"As high a hope as I had, this has certainly exceeded my expectations," he said.

Today, about 675 people work or study in four buildings at ICAR, most of them at research centers operated by BMW and JTEKT Corp, said Bob Geolas, executive director of the research park.

American Titanium and Sage Automotive Interiors have announced plans to put 80 more people in two new buildings on the campus.

Recruiting talent

The biggest job numbers for which ICAR gets at least some credit are planned off campus.

American Titanium has announced 320 jobs for its planned mill near Laurens, while Proterra has said it would hire at least 1,300 people over seven years, most of them at its proposed factory on undeveloped land next to ICAR but some at a research office on campus.

Jeff Granato, Proterra's chief executive officer, said his company sees ICAR and its automotive engineering school as a way to stay abreast of technological developments and to recruit talent.

He said Proterra considered an alliance with the Center for Automotive Research at Ohio State University as part of its exploration of an Ohio location but felt it "would be able to get more attention at ICAR."

Already, ICAR researchers are using computer modeling to look for possible improvements to Proterra's manufacturing process, and Geolas said he's talking with the company about creating a testing lab for large vehicles.

Granato said Proterra also was attracted by Greenville's base of automotive suppliers and can-do spirit.

"Unlike anywhere we've seen, the whole community comes together to work for common purposes," he said. "There truly is a shared vision."

Proterra's planned factory in Greenville is expected to turn out 3,000 buses a year, Granato said.



Proterra President and CEO Jeff Granato, left, said the company plans to hire 1,300 in for its new plant at ICAR.

GWINN DAVIS / Staff



GWINN DAVIS / Staff

Bus manufacturer Proterra expects to bring 1,300 jobs to Greenville. Proterra founder Dale Hill likes the research possibilities that ICAR has available.

Faster success

Greenville site consultant Jeanette Goldsmith said ICAR has benefitted from a trend by companies to put research and manufacturing close together as a way to develop new products more quickly.

ICAR provides a place for companies to establish research offices, she said, while outlying areas offer good sites for manufacturing, with low costs and able work forces.

Goldsmith said she expects manufacturing jobs will continue to come with research jobs at ICAR, though, "I won't say it's going to be 100 percent of the time."

Goldsmith, a principal in McCallum Sweeney Consulting who helped American Titanium with its site search, said ICAR has found success faster than she expected.

"I was one of those people who thought it would be a 10-year time horizon before we started to see payoff for ICAR," she said. "Fortunately for Greenville, I was proven wrong on that."

Even so, it's too early to declare ICAR an unqualified success in drawing manufacturing jobs.

Both Proterra and American Titanium are being built from scratch, and neither has broken ground in the Upstate so far.

Thomas Sax, American Titanium's chief executive officer, said his company's plans — announced in November 2008 — were at a "sensitive stage" and he wasn't at liberty to provide an update.

Proterra recently hired the first 10 employees for its proposed Greenville plant.

The workers were assigned to eight weeks of training at its Golden, Colo., headquarters.

Granato said the electric bus company is scheduled to secure $20 million in financing from a Connecticut-based company.

Granato said he backed away from a different financing plan he was negotiating with Chinese investors because he feared they wanted to pirate Proterra's technology.