

Jody Bryson, the president of the South Carolina Technology and Aviation Center, is working to bring more research and development to the area around the site. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

SCTAC HEAD WORKS TO HELP RESEARCH TAKE WING

Jody Bryson wants to see inactive runway turned into test track for ICAR

By Rudolph Bell
Staff writer
dbell@greenvilleonline.com

Jody Bryson didn't hesitate to recommend changes when he became president of what used to be called the Donaldson Center Industrial Air Park.

The former Air Force base is operated as an industrial park by the city and county of Greenville. It has more than 80 tenants and includes a general aviation airport.

Shortly after Bryson arrived in 2007, he led the board in updating the park's name to the South Carolina Technology and Aviation Center.

Bryson also pushed for a partnership with Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research and questioned why an inactive runway with more than 200 acres around it wasn't being targeted for development.

Four years into his tenure, significant change is occurring on the 2,600-acre SCTAC campus south of Greenville.

Two companies — GVD Corp. and Coast Sign — have opened small plants.

The South Carolina National Guard is building a 10-helicopter base, and a company called Pharmaceutical Associates is expanding its factory.

This week, a European company that makes composites for the aerospace industry is expected to announce a new factory at SCTAC.

And Bryson is working with Clemson to develop the inactive runway as a test track for automotive research.

Corporations have donated $600,000 to study the plan, dubbed Project Green, though an application to the U.S. Department of Energy for up to $50 million in grant funding was recently turned down.

Even so, "I think it has the potential for being a huge economic driver for the state," Bryson said.

The 47-year-old Bryson grew up near Moonville not far from where he presently works.

His father was a maintenance technician at what is now the Cytec Industries plant at SCTAC. His mother worked as a nurse in a doctor's office.

Bryson attended Woodmont High School, where he was student body president his senior year.

He also participated in a program that paid for high school students to spend a week in Washington, learning about politics and the federal government.

The industry-funded program was created by former Gov. Carroll Campbell, who at the time was congressman for Greenville-Spartanburg.

Bryson was impressed with Campbell and later worked in the congressman's local office under Knox White, now mayor of Greenville but at the time a field director for Campbell.

White said Bryson has de-

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veloped a range of talents over his career.

"He's worked in government, he's worked in the private sector, so that's what made him an ideal choice for a public/private partnership like SCTAC," the mayor said.

In 1986, Bryson was close to getting his political science degree at Clemson University when he learned Campbell would run for governor.

He took a year off from college to work on Campbell's gubernatorial campaign, organizing fundraisers and grass-roots activity in the 3rd and 4th congressional districts.

After Campbell was elected, Bryson finished his Clemson degree, then moved to Columbia to work in the Governor's Office. His roommate at the time was Max Metcalf, now communications manager for BMW Manufacturing Co. near Greer.

Metcalf said Bryson has succeeded because of his "character, integrity and values."

"But Jody also knows that you can't take yourself too seriously and has a great sense of humor and interjects it at all of the right times," Metcalf said.

John Moore, executive vice president at the Greenville Chamber, went to high school with Bryson and was his roommate at Clemson.

"Jody is the funniest person I know," Moore said. "With over 30 years of inside jokes and experiences together, he has lots of material that makes me laugh so hard it brings tears to my eyes. Yet he's also a very deep friend that I turn to for advice on anything. Though his humor is unmatched in my book, he is also very solid and steadfast and I know I can lean on him as a friend."

Bryson met his wife, Jenni, while working in the Governor's Office. They married in 1991 and have three children.

In 1992, Bryson got a master's degree in public administration from the University of South Carolina.

He's no longer active in politics but says he learned a lot from his experience working for Campbell. He recalled the late governor as particularly persuasive and effective at consensus building.

After returning to Greenville about 20 years ago, Bryson has worked in various executive positions with the Clemson Alumni Association, public relations and engineering firms, the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce and the Upstate Alliance.

He teaches third-grade Sunday school at Buncombe United Methodist Church and also serves on the church's board.

Liz Seman, Greenville County Council's representative on the SCTAC board, said Bryson is a visionary who has "inspired the board, staff and companies at SCTAC to completely embrace the new vision and branding of the center."

Bryson began working on Project Green in early 2009 when he met with Joachim Taiber, a professor of automotive engineering at Clemson who at the time was a researcher at the BMW Information Technology Research Center at ICAR.

Taiber had been using the BMW Performance Center, the automaker's test track near Greer, for experiments with wireless communication in vehicles, but he found it inadequate for the job.

"We ran into some issues in terms of speed that we could reach," Taiber recalled. "We couldn't really go at a very high speed. Simply put, the track was too limited."

Taiber floated the idea of developing a test track at ICAR before he was introduced to Bryson, who was looking to establish a partnership between ICAR and SCTAC.

They talked about whether the inactive runway at SCTAC might be turned into a test track.

"It looked like an interesting match, but we didn't know whether such a track could actually be built there," Taiber said.

They collected $6,000 in corporate donations and hired Alan Wilson, a test track consultant from Utah, who confirmed the feasibility of their idea.

Later, they got encouragement from Pat Davis, director of vehicle technologies at the Energy Department, who visited ICAR and SCTAC to learn about the plan.

"He liked the site. He liked CU-ICAR. He liked Project Green," Taiber said.

If the test track is eventually built, corporate and academic researchers could use it to experiment with clean transportation and networked vehicle technologies.

A conceptual rendering shows a visitors center and observation tower near the track, as well as office space for startup companies and corporate research teams.

Work on the project included the formation of a nonprofit organization called the National Clean Transportation Technology and Innovation Center.

Bryson said Clemson is creating the Institute for Sustainable Mobility as a vehicle to involve original equipment makers.

He's not planning to ask for any money from the state government.

"We've always felt like the private sector would have to drive this project," Bryson said.