# World competition expands research park's reputation

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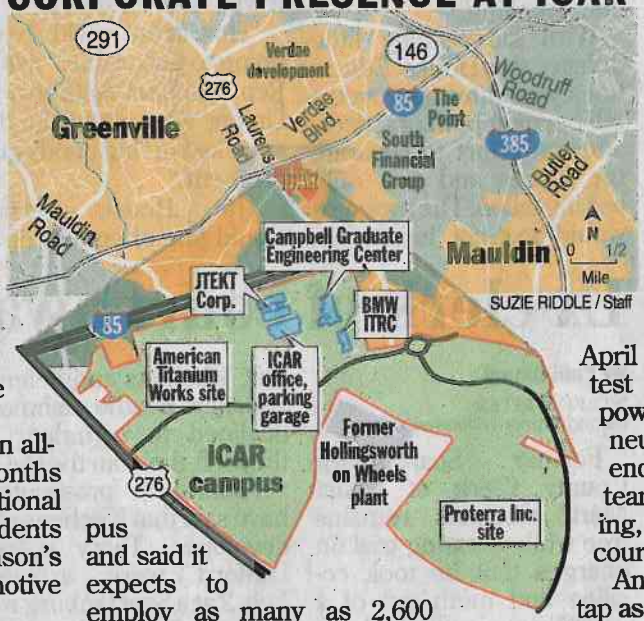
Justin Randall spends his weekends with teammates in a Clemson University workshop building a competitive mini Baja car from scratch.

At first blush, he wouldn't seem to be an important player in the Upstate's highly focused push to expand the region's worldwide influence in high-technology automotive manufacturing and create jobs. But he is.

Randall is team captain for an all-volunteer squad that's two months away from hosting an international competition that will bring students from 100 universities to Clemson's International Center for Automotive Research.

It's another chance for Greenville to showcase itself to the automotive world on the heels of Proterra, an electric bus maker that announced it would build a plant on the ICAR campus and said it expects to employ as many as 2,600 workers over the next seven years.

**CORPORATE PRESENCE AT ICAR**




Randall's team is spending late nights building the frame, engine and suspension on a mini four-wheel, off-road, open-wheel vehicle that they will use to race against others in a weekend-long event in April that will be held in Greenville for the first time.

Baja SAE Carolina, run by the Society for Automotive Engineers, has 100 teams signed up from Canada, Mexico and Brazil, and across the U.S. It will be held April 8-11 and features events to test each vehicle's design, power, acceleration and maneuverability followed by an endurance race that will pit all teams on a suspension-busting, one-and-a-half mile course.

And more events could be on tap as ICAR's presence expands in the automotive industry.

"We will continue to focus more and more effort on bringing these

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kinds of events here," said Suzanne Dickerson, ICAR's manager for business development and marketing.

"It's very valuable to the companies and the CU-ICAR partner network to have significant industry events taking place out here that they can just drive 15 minutes down the road to get to."

Dickerson said with Greenville's amenities, ICAR could become a magnet location where the automotive industry meets.

Todd Bertka, vice president of sales with the Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau, shares her sentiment. Bertka made two site visits at ICAR with potential clients this week and consistently touts the center's business and meeting prospects.

Bertka said ICAR plays a "significant role" in Greenville's development as a host site for conventions, industry meetings and tourism events similar to how the research triangle has affected the Raleigh area.

ICAR is "reaching out to marketplaces that can be the catalyst for bringing business here,' Bertka said.

Events such as the Baja competition add value to the engineering and automotive cluster at ICAR, bringing a recruiting opportunity as hundreds of engineering students are exposed to Clemson's Carroll A. Campbell Jr. Graduate Engineering Center, Dickerson said.

In turn, those visitors will return home and share their experience about the facility and destination.

"Word of mouth and creating of awareness is probably the most critical thing in perpetuating and taking our destination to that next level that we want to get to in attracting national and international meetings, conventions and events like this,' Bertka said.

Close to 1,000 students and countless more fans are expected to descend on ICAR for the event.

Event organizers don't know exactly how many spectators to expect since most Baja events are held in remote or wooded locations, said Jeff Poland, chief organizer.

Universities organize teams, build vehicles with 10 horsepower engines and bring the vehicles to the event, where they are judged by representatives of national companies, such as Polaris.

Local and national companies — such as sponsors Honda, BMW, Briggs and Stratton and Michelin — use the events for job recruitment.

Randall, Clemson's team crew chief and a senior majoring in mechanical engineering, called it an invaluable experience for anyone hoping to break into engineering.

"You're basically running a full race team," he said. "You learn all the ins and outs of more than just racing, because you also have to deal with other companies and requests for funds as well as managing other people and managing your time."

Baja vehicles will drag race and navigate around turns, over logs and rocks and off slight drop-offs, all in view of spectators, Poland said.

# ICAR lands Baja racing project



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

Clemson University mechanical engineering students Maxwell Reichard, right, and Justin Randall work on the frame of their Baja SAE vehicle in Clemson.