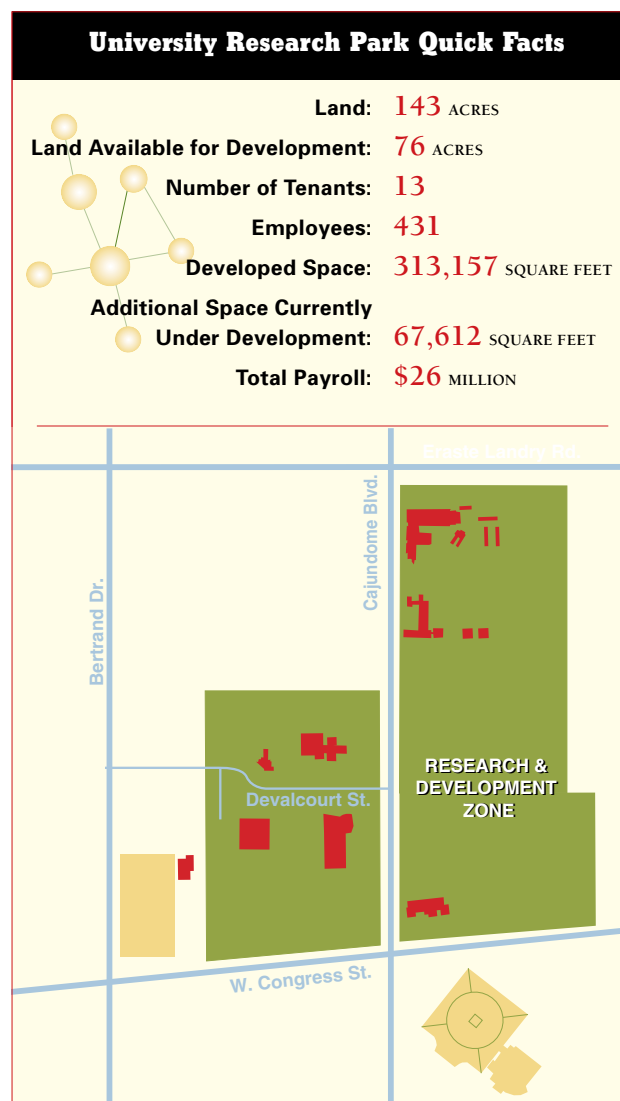


Bold Investment

University Research Park continues to flourish

IN THE LATE 1980s, MOTORISTS DRIVING along Congress Street near Cajun Field saw horses and sheep grazing on property owned by the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

When USL President Dr. Ray Authement looked at the same land, he saw the future. In his mind's eye, the farm animals and barns were replaced by research facili-



ties that would boost the local economy while helping the university (now known as UL Lafayette) elevate its stature as a research institution.

By 1990, the livestock had been relocated to the university's farm in Cade, La. Thanks to some influential friends in Washington, D.C., the first tenant in the 143-acre University Research Park – the National Wetlands Research Center – opened for business in 1992.

Today, the NWRC has lots of company. Its neighbors include:

- the Lafayette Primary Care Facility;
- the Estuarine Habitats Coastal Fisheries Research Center;
- Abdalla Hall;
- the Lafayette Economic Development Authority;
- the Louisiana Immersive Technologies Enterprise; and
- Hilton Garden Inn.

Construction of the Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development is expected to begin soon. Until then, LITE is the newest kid on the block.

With LITE's debut in 2006, UL Lafayette stepped onto the world stage as a leader of technology and innovation. Researchers at LITE use a supercomputer, nicknamed "Zeke," to quickly convert huge amounts of data into 3-D graphical models. Wearing special headgear, they can then immerse themselves in those models. Connections to fiber optic networks enable them to work on projects with collaborators around the globe.

The State of Louisiana, LEDA and UL Lafayette formed a partnership to fund the \$27 million LITE project for the same reason Authement created University Research Park – economic development.

Authement had seen for himself that research can be a powerful economic tool.

His introduction to that concept occurred in 1961, when he spent a year as

a visiting professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. UNC, North Carolina State University and Duke University had already formed Research Triangle Park, which would become one of the most successful university research parks in the United States.

South Louisiana would later experience an outrageously prosperous Oil Boom. By the late 1970s, Lafayette had become the "Hub City" for oil companies, large and small. The price of a barrel of crude oil rose from \$14 in 1978 to \$35 a barrel in 1981. A headline in the *New York Times* in 1981 trumpeted: "Lafayette, La.: Home of a Thousand Millionaires."

But just a couple of years later, the price of oil plummeted, taking with it the oil-dependent economies of Lafayette and Louisiana. So much focus had been placed on the oil industry that other sectors of the economy had been neglected.

When state oil revenues dwindled, Authement was forced to reduce the university's budget. From 1982 to 1988, USL endured eight budget cuts that totaled about \$10 million. There were more reductions ahead.

In the mid-1980s, USL decided to become proactive. "We set a goal to help, to create companies and bring jobs," Authement stated in an article published in the May 1, 2002, issue of *The Times of Acadiana*. Ultimately, he created 17 research centers to help reach that goal.

USL needed to entice an "anchor" tenant in University Research Park, just like a commercial developer needs an "anchor" store for a new shopping mall. One of the first prospects was the National Wetlands Research Center in Slidell, La., which was interested in relocating to a site closer to environmental biology researchers. According to a 2003 news release, NWRC scientists "were the first group to document the extent of wetland loss in Louisiana between the 1950s and 1970s."

Authement had positioned USL perfectly about 15 years earlier by strengthening its Biology Department. One way he accomplished that was by reducing faculty members' teaching loads so they could conduct more research. It was a move that paid off in a big way.

"In 1990, a national team of biologists visited the state's biology departments and chose USLs as the most outstanding, sparking a special citation to the department from the state Board of Regents," stated Dr. Dar-

ryl Felder, head of the Biology Department, in an article published in the Summer 1992 issue of *La Louisiane* magazine.

So University Research Park was a viable option for the NWRC. But other universities across the country were courting that agency, too. So, Authement called for some federal firepower.

"We needed two things: first, funding, and second, the cooperation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Sen. Bennett Johnston secured the funding by virtue of his place on the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. Equally important, Sen. (John) Breaux won over the Fish and Wildlife Service, by virtue of the great respect he commands in the Capitol on environmental issues," Authement said in 1988.

Louisiana's Congressional delegation was probably at the peak of its power, due in part, to its seniority. For the next few years, it continued to help send federal projects and funding to USL.

- In 1996, Johnston delivered a \$10 million EETAP grant, which was the biggest research grant in the school's history.

- USL was named one of only four NASA Regional Application Centers in the United States the same year.

- The federal Estuarine Habitats Coastal Fisheries Research Center opened in University Research Park in 1998. It's owned by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. ■

Research Park Tenants At A Glance

USGS NATIONAL WETLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

Biological research is conducted here to help protect, restore and manage natural resources, especially fish, wildlife and wetlands in the South.

LAFAYETTE PRIMARY CARE FACILITY

This is used to train medical residents in family practice. It represents a cooperative effort by Lafayette General Medical Center, Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center, LSU Medical Center, University Medical Center and UL Lafayette.

ESTUARINE HABITATS COASTAL FISHERIES RESEARCH CENTER

Owned by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, the center houses offices and labs for agencies such as the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

ABDALLA HALL

Occupants of this university-owned building include the Center for Business and Information Technologies and the Energy Institute.

LAFAYETTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Its mission is to contribute to economic growth in Lafayette Parish. It does that in many ways, such as by helping local companies develop markets and by recruiting business and industry.

LOUISIANA IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES ENTERPRISE

Its three-story, egg-shaped glass enclosure reflects the advanced technology inside. LITE gives university researchers and private industry access to supercomputers that can convert massive amounts of data into graphical images. Using special equipment, researchers can then immerse themselves in those images.

HILTON GARDEN INN

This 155-room hotel is also an educational resource for UL Lafayette students who are majoring in hospitality management. It includes classrooms and faculty offices.

CECIL J. PICARD CENTER FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Construction is expected to begin in early 2008. The Center is a multi-disciplinary group of evaluation and research professionals that focus on early childhood, K-12 education and lifelong learning. Applied research is continually conducted in all areas of child education, health and well-being.