

ELLEN HEMMERLY '78

Fresh from a national conference of the Association of University Research Parks (AURP) in Washington, D.C., Ellen Hemmerly '78 had jobs on her mind.

It's a subject she knows something about, as immediate past president of AURP, an organization that supports over 200 research and technology incubators worldwide, and as executive director of the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Research Park Corporation, which oversees a 600,000-square-foot research and technology park that currently hosts 30 emerging technology firms employing 550 people.

Research parks are not new, but they have taken on a new significance as the need to create and retain jobs in the United States has come to the forefront of public discussion. At the AURP conference, members of Congress from both parties expressed concern about the growing outsourcing phenomenon.

"The biggest issue for us as a country, other than defense, is jobs," Hemmerly observed. "We're losing more jobs than we're keeping. If it makes sense to go offshore, what will replace them? What is the impact on this country to offshore jobs? We may have to start looking at legislation that addresses the problem."

Research parks are coming into their own as economic development models because they provide incentives to developing home-grown businesses, and keeping them. Because of their role in technology transfer—taking cutting-edge research from academic and government labs and helping start-up firms turn them into commercial applications—research parks are powerful engines for spawning new jobs. The parks provide state-of-the-art physical infrastructure, assistance with business plans, access to research collaborations between faculty members and entrepreneurs, and other networking opportunities. But it's not a free ride for the budding businesses.

In return for all that care and feeding, Hemmerly said, firms must make a commitment to give something back. Contracts have included stipulations that firms remain in the community for at least five years after they "graduate" from the incubator, and give an equity position to the state. Some enterprise districts also provide tax credits as companies add jobs to their payroll.

For a time in the 1980s and '90s, competition for business was so fierce that it sparked a new kind of "war between the states," in which local governments gave away so many tax breaks and other concessions, they wound up giving away the store, only to have many businesses leave anyway, before they paid a penny of tax. Today, technology, originally hailed as the savior that would replace lost manufacturing jobs, has ironically helped facilitate the export of "thought-worker" jobs to other parts of the wired world.

Increasingly, communities are following the model set by the research parks and demanding more reciprocity from the private sector. Baltimore led the nation in devising creative incentives to

promote fair wages and employment; in 1994, it became the first city in the United States to include a living wage provision in its municipal service contracts.

Hemmerly, who earned her undergraduate degree in her hometown, Bethlehem, PA, has been in her current position with UMBC since 1995. Her career has combined a mix of public- and private-sector experience that prepared her ideally for

Incubating Jobs



COURTESY OF ELLEN HEMMERLY

her current role. After six years as a banker with Mellon Bank, Hemmerly went into commercial real estate development, investment management, and venture capital with K.S. Sweet Associates/TDH, in Philadelphia. Her work led her to Baltimore, eventually to become vice president of the City of Baltimore Development Corporation, where she marketed the city to high-tech businesses, and in the process started up the city's first business incubator.

New initiatives in the life sciences and national security area, as well as UMBC's proximity to Johns Hopkins University and federal research labs, have been a boon to the research and technology park. Two of the park's largest tenants, Cognate Therapeutics and In Vitro Technologies, are biotech firms grossing millions of dollars in revenues. The park was 90 percent leased within nine months of acquisition in 1996, and has maintained a 90-95 percent occupancy rate since.

Hemmerly is optimistic about a resurgence for technology since the dot-com bust. "Companies are more real now. Investors are much more skeptical, and demand solid business plans." There is still much potential to be tapped, however. "We have terrific research going on in federal labs and research universities, but we can do better turning that research into jobs," she concluded.