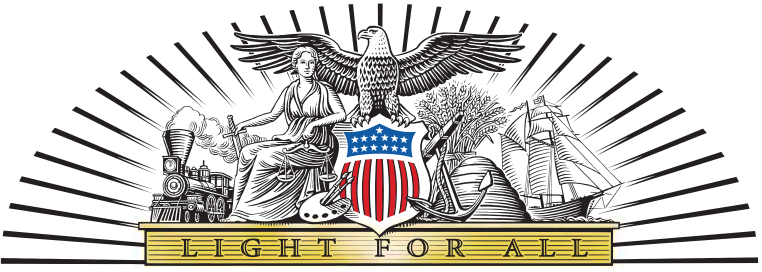


# THE SUN



## UMBC RESEARCH PARK ON ROLL

### The complex, almost seven years old, is meeting a need, growing and realizing its potential

BY JAMIE SMITH HOPKINS  
[SUN REPORTER]

Getting the money was a headache. Coming to a compromise with community opponents, a battle. After all was said and done, the groundbreaking for the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's research park was 9 1/2 years later than originally scheduled.

Just in time for the last national recession. But the nearly seven-year-old complex where business and academia intersect, tucked at one end of the Catonsville campus, is coming into its own.

With 13 tenants and 550 jobs, both of the glassy buildings there are full. A third will be when it opens in August. And construction on the final two should begin in a few months, a milestone for an effort that began in the late 1980s.

"There's a very strong demand," said Ellen Hemmerly, executive director of the UMBC Research Park Corp. "If we had more land, we would be, I'm sure, continuing to develop other buildings."

The appeal of a research park - the reason 130 can be found in the United States and Canada - is that well-run ones have many benefits.



They help universities commercialize technology that faculty members invent. Give companies easy access to researchers and students. Create jobs and internships.

"They're unambiguously good," said Richard P. Clinch, director of economic research at the University of Baltimore's Jacob France Institute. "They improve education, they improve business operations, they improve research."

But despite its many research institutions, Maryland came late to the research park party.

The country's oldest research parks have been around a half-century; many were built two decades

ago, according to the Association of University Research Parks. UMBC's is the state's first, if you don't count a failed attempt by the University System of Maryland years ago on a site not adjacent to any of the system's campuses.

Local officials are making up for that with a flurry of activity now.

The University of Maryland, College Park's research park, started in 2004 around a Metro stop next to the campus, has five buildings that are open or under construction, with at least five more planned. Two biotechnology parks are under way in Baltimore, one affiliated with the University of Maryland, Baltimore and the other capitalizing on proximity to Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Montgomery College expects to break ground on a park in about 18 months, making it one of the first community colleges in the country to join in. And the Johns Hopkins University, which has a research-park-like component on its Montgomery County campus, is in the early stages of planning a sizable park nearby.

It's critical for economic development, state leaders say.

"The day is close to being over in this country where you can simply go out and develop a piece of ground ... and declare victory," said David W. Edgerley, state secretary of business and economic development. "If you want to be competitive with other technology jurisdictions, you've got to have all the missing ingredients that come from linkages with academic institutions."

UMBC has signed large tenants to fill two of the three buildings yet to come. Erickson Retirement Communities, the locally owned retirement community operator, will take the final building for operations such as its startup cable television network. The U.S. Geological Survey's Maryland-Delaware-District of Columbia Water Science Center is moving into the building that opens this summer.

"We're really excited about it," said center director James Gerhart. "We hope to improve the level of the science we do by being that close and interacting with the faculty. And we hope it's reciprocal."

RWD Technologies, UMBC's first and largest tenant, fills up the first building. It was all by itself for three years because it moved there in 2001, during the recession, and park officials felt it necessary to wait out the after-effects of the dot-com bust before starting on another building. The consulting and software company - which employs 1,100 worldwide, including 300 at the park - relocated its headquarters from Columbia to expand.

RWD Chairman Robert Deutsch, a member of UMBC's board of visitors, jokes that he was "coerced" by campus President Freeman A. Hrabowski III. "It worked out well



Ellen Hemmerly, UMBC Research Park Corp. executive director, stands near a building that a water-science center will occupy.

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for us," he said.

The company has had a stream of UMBC interns, hiring some as they graduated, said Mac MacLure, the company's president and chief executive. With offices around the world, he also appreciates the five-minute drive to Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

Piyush Naik, 26, experienced the park from another perspective. While working on his master's degree in computer science at UMBC, he interned at BDMetrics, a technology company that focuses on the trade show industry. It gave him hands-on experience and - because the firm was so small - an opportunity to rub shoulders with executives. When he graduated three years ago, BDMetrics hired him.

"It's been a great experience seeing the company grow from eight or 10 employees to over 80 employees," said Naik, who figures he would have taken a tech job with an out-of-state firm if not for the research park.

Local residents who had grave misgivings about the park are glad it's not almost twice as large, which is what UMBC originally planned. But Berchie L. Manley, a community leader who opposed the project for traffic, environmental and other reasons, said she still believes it would have been much better suited for the nearby U.S. 1 corridor.

"Any time you overbuild, overexpand, it does create problems in old communities," said Manley, a former county councilwoman.

UMBC, which will construct a boardwalk this year as a shortcut between the park and academic buildings, saw value in a campus site. Some research parks are so dis-

connected that they're indistinguishable from a plain-vanilla business park.

"It was clear to us that the closer to the university, the better and

deeper the collaboration," Hemmerly said.

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In the RWD Applied Technologies building, Chairman Robert Deutsch walks with Ellen Hemmerly of the UMBC Research Park Corp. toward his office. RWD was the first tenant in the park.

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