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LCCC Breaks Ground on New Richard Desich SMART Commercialization Center for Microsystems; Helping Companies Accelerate Commercialization of Sensor Products and Grow Jobs

Where California is home to the Silicon Valley, Lorain County could soon be home to “MEMSville” with the development of the Richard Desich SMART Commercialization Center for Microsystems on the campus of Lorain County Community College, said Mark Kvamme, Chief Investment Officer and President of JobsOhio, which is the state’s private, non-profit corporation designed to stimulate economic growth.

MEMS is a micro system platform that employs both mechanical and electrical properties that can be used to measure or actuate a response that can be easily managed by conventional electronics.

Kvamme called Lorain County the perfect place to establish this mecca for micro electronic mechanical systems (MEMS).

“I think it’s great to see a man like Richard Desich, who has been so successful, give back to the community. I challenge all of you – let’s give back and make sure in the future people are talking about ‘MEMSville’ right here in Lorain County,” Kvamme said.

“Everything I have ever tried to help with at this college has been a partnership: A partnership with the state, a partnership with the college, a partnership with private industry. With partnerships, things can happen,” Desich said.

The SMART Commercialization Center is named in honor of Desich, a Lorain native and member of Lorain County Community College District Board of Trustees for 34 years, serial entrepreneur, renowned national speaker, and philanthropist and community leader.

Kvamme told the crowd who gathered Friday for the groundbreaking on the new Richard Desich SMART Commercialization Center for Microsystems that with its manufacturing history Lorain County is uniquely positioned to take on this mantle.

“Sensors are the heart of everything,” Kvamme said referencing the medical, manufacturing, aviation and energy industries. “Whether it’s cars or your cell phone, it’s all about sensors.”

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U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown concurred. “The SMART center will help to make Ohio the go-to place in the United States for sensor commercialization support. It makes sense. This is in an important manufacturing area of an important manufacturing state. Ohio is the third leading manufacturing state in the nation,” Brown said.

The SMART Center is a unique multi-user, shared resource facility focused on commercializing sensor products by utilizing the manufacturing processes of Micro Electronic Mechanical Systems (MEMS). This includes the critical stages of packaging, reliability testing and inspection of Microsystems and sensors.

The SMART Center is scheduled to open in spring of 2013. Until that time, the SMART Center is open for business in a temporary home on the third floor of the LCCC Entrepreneurship Innovation Center (EIC). It is supporting customer projects in an 1,800 square-foot, class 10,000 clean room, with a complete set of Microsystems packaging, inspection and test equipment along with an adjoining 1,800 square feet of software labs, customer space and administrative space.

“This capacity represents extraordinary opportunities for business and job creation in high growth industries as well as training opportunities for LCCC students,” said LCCC President Dr. Roy A. Church.

Instruments and Controls is the electronics sector that includes sensor technologies, along with the ability to measure and react to those sensors. This industry is estimated to be in excess of \$100 billion worldwide. Ohio has the highest concentration – 50 percent – of Instruments and Controls as part of its electronics industry as compared to any other region or state worldwide. Furthermore, sensors and Microsystems that incorporate them are an enabling technology supporting sectors such as biomedical, alternative energy, manufacturing, aerospace and defense.

The new SMART Center is an outgrowth of economic development initiatives and partnerships, like GLIDE, created in 2001 by the Lorain County Commissioners, Lorain County Chamber and Lorain County Community College, and the Innovation Fund. The SMART Center adds another critical resource that makes the region and Ohio a place that fosters innovation. “As a result of the resources of SMART and LCCC, we decided to relocate Spectre Sensor’s manufacturing facility to Lorain Country from New York, along with a few million dollars of revenue and 10 jobs. The resources, commitment, and professionalism of LCCC’s GLIDE and SMART Center people, along with support from the Ohio Third Frontier have convinced us that this is the right place to grow our company,” said Jack Keller, CEO, Spectre Sensors.

The SMART Center fills a gap in the commercialization process and is complementary to other micro-fabrication facilities at universities across the Midwest. More than 90 percent of the SMART Center lab time will be utilized by industry partners and support the commercialization of new technologies created by Ohio’s robust research universities. “This resource builds a bridge between the research and discovery expertise at regional universities and industries and the marketplace. It fills a much needed gap in the continuum and positions Lorain County as a hub for this activity in the Midwest,” Church said.

The new SMART Center will be a three-story, 46,000-square-foot facility that will include class 100, class 1,000 and class 10,000 clean rooms, general lab space and customer incubation areas. It will be connected to LCCC’s Entrepreneurship Innovation Center.

“At introduction, SMART is one of the nation’s premier facilities for microsystems packaging. When completed the SMART space, equipment and programs, will be a tremendous resource for the microsystems, MEMS and sensors industry,” said Church.

Lorain County Community College conducted an extensive “listening and learning” engagement process with industry leaders around barriers to commercialization. The process demonstrated a pent up demand for regional infrastructure that supports MEMS-based product development, Church noted. “MEMS technology has been recognized as an industry with high growth potential in Ohio. Lorain County Community College is prepared to support this industry with facility infrastructure, training opportunities, and academic curriculum,” Church said.

The microsystems industry has taken notice. Fifteen companies have already expressed their plans in writing to utilize the SMART Center. These include the WCSSE partners of Asence, Greenfield Solar, R.W. Beckett Corporation, Case Western Reserve University, along with current and future users ABS Materials, CoreTech Consulting, Crane Aerospace, Emerson Thermotronics, Emerson Ridge Tool, GrafTech, Nordson, NexTech Materials, Scientific Monitoring, Spectre Sensor, Traycer Diagnostic Systems.

Additionally, 13 highly visible organizations in the microsystems space have documented their plans to recommend the SMART Center as a prime resource for product commercialization. These include, ASM International, the Electronic Device Failure Analysis Society, Libra Industries, Midwest Micro Devices, The Ohio State Nanotech West Lab, the University of Michigan Lurie NanoFacility, the Notre Dame Nanofabrication facility, Purdue University’s Birck Nanotechnology Center, Nortech FlexMatters, the Ohio Fuel Cell Coalition, the Surface Mount Technology Association and Valtronic.

In addition to SMART’s extensive tools and resources for industry, SMART will wrap a number of programs around its offerings, including:

- Engineering services in Microsystems packaging
- Managed interns program
- Microsystems education and training
- On-site office space
- Access to other LCCC programs like the Innovation Fund, the Great Lakes Innovation and Development Enterprise, the LCCC FabLab and the Sensor Integration and Technology Testing Center (SiTT).

Last fall LCCC was awarded a \$5.5 million Ohio Third Frontier grant through Cleveland State University’s Wright Center for Sensor Systems Engineering (WCSSE) to outfit the SMART Center. Additional support for the SMART Center comes from federal, state and philanthropic grants and gifts, including the Small Business Administration (SBA).