
PROLOGUE

Progress Takes Bricks and Mortar, But It's What's Inside that Counts

A former OU staff member now living in east Texas recently sent *Sooner Magazine* a lengthy article from the energy section of the *Houston Chronicle*. The subject was the Sarkeys Energy Center at the University of Oklahoma, more specifically a \$17 million research project that could revolutionize the natural gas industry worldwide.

The project springs from the largest research grant in OU history, \$12 million from the Gas Research Institute of Chicago, to evaluate the fracturing materials and experimental techniques used in the recovery of natural gas. An additional \$4.7 million has been committed to the effort from the University and three private subcontractors, Halliburton Services of Duncan, MTS Systems Corporation of Minneapolis and RE-SPEC of Rapid City, South Dakota.

Energy Center researchers already are in high gear creating a fracturing prototype leading to the eventual construction of the actual facility on OU's south campus. It's not necessary to comprehend the intricacies of the work being done here to understand the importance of such a project to the University's goals for the Energy Center and to the often-stated purpose of becoming a major research institution.

The *Chronicle* article, written by a *Dallas Morning News* staffer, terms the fracturing project "precisely the type of cutting-edge, high-profile research" envisioned for an energy center of international renown. Considering the number of OU's Texas alumni who played key roles in the Energy Center effort, it is gratifying to see this sort of coverage in their home state. It is also gratifying to provide an answer to skeptics who saw this \$50 million worth of state-of-the-art facilities as *only* bricks and mortar.

Well, progress of this type requires bricks and mortar—lots of it—and inside all the sophisticated equipment

modern technology allows. But the most important ingredient in the formula has always been the right people. In this case the right person is Jean-Claude Roegiers, the petroleum engineering professor whose proposal brought the GRI grant to OU.

For years the University has been marketing the idea of the endowed faculty chair. Fortunately, such an endowment was available to help lure Roegiers to Oklahoma after a distinguished career in private industry. This appointment of the first holder of the McCasland Chair is financed by a private gift. In addition, Roegiers directs the Halliburton Rock Mechanics Laboratory, also made possible by private philanthropy. The lab can be found within the Sarkeys Energy Center, built with state, federal and private funds. Now that's partnership, Oklahoma style.

There are other partnerships on the drawing board. At the top of the list is completion of Catlett Music Center, a magnificent undertaking sidetracked by the economic troubles of the '80s. Running a close second is the new Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, long a dream of University planners and destined to be not only an academic treasure but also one of the top tourist attractions in the Southwest. On the Health Sciences Center campus in Oklahoma City, public/private packages are being assembled to finance the Family Medicine Center and the Research Tower.

The state of Oklahoma alone should be able to support an adequate university. But if OU aspires to be anything more than merely adequate, cooperative enterprises must be forged between the state, individuals, business and industry, foundations and the federal government.

The result will be lots more bricks and mortar, and inside, a whole lot more.

—CJB