



prologue.

Just don't call it a "research park," for OU's new Research Campus is so much more.

If you want to sample the excitement surrounding development of the University of Oklahoma's Research Campus, spend some time with Lee Williams, vice president for research and graduate dean. Come prepared for a breathtaking recital of tangible achievements, precise plans, promising proposals and not-so-idle dreams—but whatever you do, don't refer to this venture as a "research park."

This is not a park with vast green spaces separating isolated research units; it is a campus—a research campus, Williams will tell you emphatically. It is an extension of OU's Norman Campus, designed to serve the University's mission of creating and disseminating knowledge. It is a site for intellectual interactivity and interdisciplinary exchange. It is a place where faculty researchers unravel mysteries and their students get an unblinkered view of real-world science and technology—academic research taking place alongside that of collocated private firms and government agencies pursuing related goals.

Site selection was key to this campus concept, beginning with location of the new National Weather Center, the \$67 million federal/state/University partnership facility that also will house University and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration programs. North Campus was an option, where several weather-related facilities already were situated, but it was too far for meteorology students to commute between classes. The Energy Center area was a possibility, but lacked expansion space. South Campus, however, offered 270 acres of largely undeveloped land adjacent to Main Campus, requiring only extension of the CART routes to tie the two together. Suddenly a full-blown Research Campus was a very real possibil-

ity, incorporating the Weather Center with desperately needed research space for other sciences and private firms wishing to partner with University and government scientists.

Bounded by State Hwy 9 on the south, Jenkins on the west, Constitution on the north and the OU Jimmie Austin Golf Course on the east, the Research Campus is a reality. The \$27 million, multi-purpose Stephenson Research and Technology Center already has its first occupants—OU chemists and microbiologists conducting the world-class gene sequencing and functional genomics programs, soon to be joined by the bioengineering program. The Weather Center is racing toward completion, and the first "multi-tenant" building, dubbed One Partners Place, is being built for Weathernews Inc. Initial investment in the Research Campus will total \$100 million and provide 400,000 square feet of research-related space.

The University is not inviting just any company into the Research Campus. New tenants must add value to the enterprise and present opportunities to faculty and students. Weathernews is such a company, its contracts to provide shipping forecasts to the merchant marine industry and aviation weather to commercial airlines making it an ideal neighbor for the National Weather Center.

The same care goes into the new campus' physical development with OU's leadership team determined to maintain the project's integrity. No rooftop air conditioners for the Research Campus, for instance. A separate central chilled water and electrical generating plant serves the current facilities and future expansion. Building the campus from the ground up has enabled the University to install a robust new infrastructure and try out new design ideas not possible on the

established Main Campus. Although more contemporary, the new buildings still blend into OU's trademark look of red brick and stone. And President David and Molly Shi Boren will see that the landscaping reflects the beauty of the rest of the University.

One Partners Place was a design challenge. While typical commercial buildings are built toward a 15-year depreciation, cost taking precedence over efficiency, university buildings are built for a 50-100 year operational life. The design of One Partners Place bridges these worlds—a university-quality structure at a price that translates into market-based rental rates.

Williams terms the Stephenson Center concept "revolutionary," with its multidisciplinary, flexible space for always-evolving research needs. Even the coffee bar is designed for interaction, a place for researchers to take a break, have lunch or hold an impromptu meeting, but also equipped with plasma TV screens, computer plug-ins and library journals.

"Cool things come from hanging out," he contends. "They are going to do their own science anyway—but exciting new ideas can emerge when chemists talk to microbiologists."

Williams shakes his head recalling recruiting superb faculty, who were unable to pursue otherwise attainable grants because OU was out of research space. "Faculty are the ultimate entrepreneurs; they are amazing. You just can't restrict their vision by limiting their space."

Already OU is building a whole new industry in weather information, and who knows where the genome and bioengineering projects may take us? Vision is being nourished, not restricted; opportunities are being seized, not wasted—and it is all happening on a campus, not a park. —CJB