

Gift invests in changing fiber of textiles

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\$5.6 million will support Clemson faculty's research in new materials

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CLEMSON — The J.E. Sarrine Textile Foundation,

a longtime supporter of Clemson University's textile programs, donated \$5.6 million Thursday to partially endow two chairs in the areas of glass optical fibers

and advanced polymer fibers.

"The good news: There is a future in textiles. It may not look like the textiles of the 20th century. But it's here," said Mark B. Kent, president of the foundation and a textile leader in the Upstate. "Times have been changing and we, too, must

change. The foundation wants to be on the front end of change."

Research in fibers generated by the holders of the two chairs, both in the School of Materials Science and Engineering, is expected to renew the textile and materials industry in South Carolina, said Clem-

son University President James Barker. It also eventually should spin off companies based on the research and create jobs.

While the traditional textile industry has been struggling with job losses and plant closings in recent years, Kent said a vibrant industry still exists. It is a

niche industry and it has become more reliant on high technology.

"We're seeing a number of companies repositioning themselves for the changing industry," he said. "It's easier for the smaller companies, but large companies

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MATERIAL DIFFERENCE

■ With its \$5.6 million gift to Clemson, the J.E. Sarrine Textile Foundation seeks to fund research in new fibers that could keep the textile industry vibrant in the future. University officials say the research also could lead to new companies and jobs one day.

GIFT

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are looking at that now."

He admitted that the thousands of textile jobs lost in the traditional industry won't return. Some companies may begin hiring, especially as they incorporate new science into their product.

The donation "is the foundation's last great gift to the university," Kent said. "This was an opportunity so large we could not let it pass by. It should have a huge impact. Seeds are planted now for multiple generations to come. The growth will impact jobs and economic development in South Carolina."

Robert Moser, who has served on the Sarrine Foundation board for 20 years, said, "We saw this as a way of helping manufactur-

ing in the future. We are committed to keeping higher-tech manufacturing in the state. This plan will benefit all future generations — my grandchildren, your grandchildren, really anyone residing in the state.

"I can't say we knew exactly what glass optical fibers were the first time we heard about them, but we on the board all know that adapting to change is the key to survival, and we can see that exotic fibers are the future," he said.

Kent said board members voted to dissolve the organization, established in 1944 and a supporter of Clemson for 61 years. It also helped the college build the J.E. Sarrine Textile Building on campus in 1939.

"We really think this will be our legacy," he said, adding that a primary focus of the Sarrine board has been to help South Carolina economically and to create jobs.

Barker said the donation,

which will be enhanced with university-generated funds and state funds for endowed chairs to a total of \$20 million, is a turning point in the state's textile industry and a milestone on the way to South Carolina's economic future.

"In the 1940s, the Sarrine Foundation helped define the manufacturing industry in South Carolina. In 2005, the organization is redefining the fibers and materials industry in the state," he said.

"We need to honor tradition and we need to honor change," he said.

For example, biomedical fibers are being tested for artificial arteries, scaffolds for cell or bone growth and self-healing fabrics to promote skin reconstruction. Fiber-reinforced composite materials have uses in automotive, space, athletic equipment and medical prosthetics markets. Non-traditional fibers are being

used in telecommunications, high-power fiber laser systems, defense sensing and warfare application.

Smythe McKissick, a member of the foundation board and a textile executive, said the gift is an extension of the philosophy of the textile leaders who founded the board.

"The founders always wanted Clemson and other universities to be in front of the industry," he said. "This keeps the university in front."

Bringing world-class scientists and researchers to Clemson will help transform the textile industry in the state and the region, creating higher-value jobs, he said.

He said he expects performance and intelligent fabrics to be the wave of the future in textiles.

"This will be cutting-edge research," he said. "I think it's incredibly exciting."

The endowed chair in glass op-

tical fibers is already approved, and the process of approval for the chair in advanced polymer fibers is under way, Barker said. Both chairs are valued at an endowment of \$5 million. The foundation's gift is split between the two. Clemson will generate the funding to reach the total of \$5 million for each chair, and the state will match the total funding.

Kathleen Richardson, director of the School of Materials Science and Engineering, said she came to Clemson 10 months ago because of the combination of polymer and glass fibers in one school. That's an unusual combination and occurred when the School of Textiles and the School of Ceramics merged in 2001. She said she believes "the interface between glass and polymers will be the future."

"We are combining the old with the new in textiles and fibers," she said. "Because of our long history in textiles and with the J.E. Sarrine Textile Foundation, we know what it takes to make textiles work, both from the educational side and in research."

John Ballato, director of Clemson's Center for Optical Materials Science and Engineering Technologies, is leading the search for the person who will hold the academic chair.

"This position is the centerpiece to growth in this industry," he said. "Our goal is to have national and international partnerships with industry, universities and research laboratories. We are also interested in developing more technology-based spinoff companies that will keep our graduates working here in South Carolina."

Richardson agreed.

Research "doesn't do anything unless it results in products that get out in the marketplace," she