

More high-tech jobs may be lured after Clemson center gets OK

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CLEMSON — More high-tech jobs could come to the Upstate and more resources will be available to help Upstate residents cope with growth because of state approval given to two Clemson University centers Wednesday.

One center holds the promise of attracting high-paying jobs in the emerging photonics industry for graduates of area universities and technical colleges. The other already has improved life in the Upstate through efforts including Greenville's Reedy River project.

Clemson's Center for Optical Materials and Science and Engineering Technologies and Clemson's Center for Community Growth and Change received final state approval from the state Commission on Higher Education.

"The state recognition makes me feel more valuable. It will increase our reputations," said Clemson graduate student Lisa Lu, 30.

She came to Clemson for her doctorate partly because she was interested in the work of John Ballato, director of the center for optical materials, on applying new photonic materials that use light rather than electrons to carry information and are used in high-speed Internet networks, computers, cell phones, television components and lasers.

Recognition as a state center will be particularly helpful for international students who want to find jobs after completing graduate degrees because of the increased stature as a state center, Lu said.

Approval by the state Commission on Higher Education as academic centers not only adds stature, but also qualifies the centers to pursue additional state funding to expand their work, said Charlie FitzSimons, commission spokesman.

"We are especially excited about Dr. Ballato's potential with his photonics research. His expertise and national leadership in this field will provide a tremendous opportunity for the state of South Carolina," FitzSimons said.

"The commission's unanimous approval is an example of the level of support and commitment for these types of academic initiatives."

Ballato, an associate professor of materials science and engineering and a youthful fiber optics whiz, already has attracted more than \$13 million in outside research funding to the fledgling center that could move August into its permanent home in part of an advanced materials complex under construction in the Clemson Research Park off Interstate 85 in Anderson County.

More than 70 percent of the world's optical fiber is produced in Georgia and the Carolinas, and the center is the only university research and development lab focused on development of new optical materials. With state endorsement and a state-of-the-art facility, the opportunity to attract industry is "extraordinary," Ballato said.

The two-year-old Center for Community Growth and Change, part of Clemson's College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities, provides research and professional guidance on growth and change and developing strategies to deal with it, said Mickey Lauria, a professor of planning who joined Clemson in August as director of the center.

The Reedy River project in Greenville was one of the center's initial projects, he said.

Current work includes a project called Envision Upstate for the 10-county area. While these projects are local, the center will provide research and guidance to communities across the nation, he said.