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Field of Dreams

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Field of Dreams

To the new executive director of the UNLV Research Foundation, the university's planned research park is 115 acres of opportunity

By Suzan DiBella

When Bud Pittinger first visited the university to interview for the post of executive director of the UNLV Research Foundation, he wanted to see firsthand the site of the UNLV Harry Reid Research and Technology Park.

"I wanted to walk the land," Pittinger says of the 115-acre parcel located in southwestern Las Vegas. "I stood on the site and looked out on to two mountain ranges and into the valley. What a fantastic opportunity, I thought. How exciting it is to have this extraordinary land for the research park. I could feel the adrenaline flowing."

Pittinger, who assumed leadership of the Research Foundation in May 2006, is still excited by the opportunities presented both at the research park and at the Research Foundation. He is actively implementing many projects, including real estate development of the research park and the creation of business partnerships that will benefit the university.

Pittinger, who most recently served as executive vice president and chief operating officer at the Baylor College of Medicine before joining UNLV, brings to his new role here varied management experience in a number of fields, including health care, academic medicine, managed care, pharmaceuticals, and higher education.

He has served as vice president for operations in the clinical sciences and product development division of Merck & Co.; as global clinical research operations officer for Eli Lilly and Co.; as senior vice president at the University of Pennsylvania Health System and CEO of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania; and as chief operating officer at the University of Michigan Medical Center's Department of Medicine.

At Michigan, Penn, and Baylor, Pittinger gained experience in large-scale site and facility development, helping to guide building projects of more than \$1 billion at each institution.

Pittinger's first order of business at the UNLV

Research Foundation is putting such experience to work developing the research park. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management completed the transfer of the research park land to the UNLV Research Foundation in May 2005, and Pittinger has worked since he arrived to establish a research-based business incubation environment there.

The plan for the park, Pittinger explains, is to provide research space to attract research- and development-focused high-tech companies that seek to work in partnership with UNLV and its faculty researchers.

This will mean greater opportunities for faculty to become more directly involved in the development of products in their research areas, Pittinger says. There will also be educational and employment opportunities for graduate students and greater access to UNLV's centers of excellence by the private sector.

Additionally, the commercialization process is capable of producing a considerable revenue stream for the university and its faculty, Pittinger says, adding that the research park will also provide highly valued, state-of-the-art laboratory space. Once developed, it will also contribute to the economic diversification of Southern Nevada.

"We want to attract high quality companies that are compatible with our research priorities and culture," Pittinger says.

The key in the short term, Pittinger says, is taking a systematic approach to the process of establishing partnerships and developing the research park.

"First, it's important that we identify where the university's strongest research programs and related faculty are and which have the most potential," he says. "We are in that process now, and once we have determined those research strengths, we will have a portfolio of assets to bring to the table to discuss with prospective private-sector partners."

The next step is reaching out to the business community – in Southern Nevada, the state, and the U.S. – to locate companies with an existing affinity for those strengths and to begin exploring the

possibilities with them, he adds. He notes that he is making contacts with such businesses through close working ties with the Nevada Development Authority and UNLV's own Research Foundation Board of Directors.

He will be reaching out to the university community as well to demystify the processes of building business relationships while seeking private and government resources to support and fund faculty research and education activities conducted primarily at the park.

"I am absolutely committed to enhancing communication with faculty and staff about what the Research Foundation does," he says. "The campus community must know that the Research Foundation will protect their interests in these business relationships. We are here to support the faculty and to further the endeavors of the university."

In addition to building the research park, he says, the Research Foundation will support the university's technology transfer effort. Pittinger will work with the university's technology transfer office to encourage UNLV faculty to protect their intellectual property and to help them explore opportunities to bring their discoveries to the marketplace and society. Additionally, Pittinger says he will continue to support the transition of the Research Foundation's funded research projects into university academic programs.

While he acknowledges that there is much to be accomplished, Pittinger is clear that the successful development of the UNLV Harry Reid Research and Technology Park will benefit all involved partners. It is a long-term project he embraces with enthusiasm.

"In many of the development projects I have undertaken, the site was landlocked," he says. "There was barely an acre or two upon which to build, let alone 115 acres available to create 3.2 million square feet of research space. The research park site here holds so much promise. I would have to say my enthusiasm for this project – for building both the facilities as well as the research housed there – is unbridled. And it is my hope that the rest of the campus community shares in this commitment."

"We are here to support the faculty and to further the endeavors of the university."

—Bud Pittinger, executive director of the UNLV Research Foundation

Bud Pittinger, executive director of the UNLV Research Foundation, at the site of the UNLV Harry Reid Research and Technology Park

PHOTOGRAPH: GERI KODEY