



**FITTING IN AT FAU:** Victor Salazar of Boca Raton heats up a turbine to be fitted onto a hub at Jet Turbine Service's facility in FAU's research and development park in Boca Raton. At FAU, Jet Turbine turns former aircraft jet engines into power generation units for ground and marine uses. **Staff photo/Jim Rassol**

# PARK

## Sites offer ample research facilities for fledgling firms

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If you're looking for a place to situate your business, you might want to consider a site where you can be close to other start-ups, draw upon the expertise of college professors and have a steady stream of interns or bright graduates looking for a challenging job.

One possible location is a university research park, where the property and buildings are designed primarily for research and development in technology and the sciences — and where support services are readily available. There are more than 100 research parks in North America, and they vary from 4.5 acres to 7,000 acres.

With the cost of starting and running a business sometimes prohibitive, the research park provides a reasonably priced alternative, especially for start-ups with few employees that need very little space. They provide an opportunity for executives from different firms to share ideas and perhaps collaborate on projects or even merge their companies.

In South Florida, Florida Atlantic University oversees two research and development parks, one encompassing 73 acres on the Boca Raton campus and a 15-acre site in Deerfield Beach. Both parks expect rapid growth in coming years.

"We're looking for the next Citrix here, the next Office Depot," said Scott Ellington, executive director of the Florida Atlantic Research and Development Authority. "No one starts out big — companies evolve from a germ of an idea and often just a handful of employees."

Generally, a research park has an ownership or operational relationship with at least one university. The park plays a major role in aiding the transfer of technology and business skills between the university and industry ten-



"There is a very high concentration of students at FAU who are interested in developing new products."

PETER LOBELLO  
Jet Turbine's chief executive officer



# YOUR START-UP HERE



**TEAMING UP:** Vichate Ungvichian, right, an engineering professor at FAU and director of the EMI Research Facility, and graduate student Thierry Jean Charles check emissions from a prototype radon device. **Photo/Michael Francis McElroy**

ants.

“A research park leverages the strength of a particular university, whether it’s in the physics, business, engineering, computer science or a host of other specialties,” said William Drohan, executive director of the Association of University Research Parks, based in Reston, Va.

In years past, research park sponsors did not stress the importance of ties with the university. These days, though, most parks encourage and closely monitor interaction between the business and the school, Drohan said.

He said the research park concept evolved from what real estate developers once promoted as industrial parks. The first such park, established in the United States in 1905, was the Central Manufacturing District in Chicago. The first research park was established in Menlo Park, Calif. in 1948.

In Florida, aside from the FAU-oper-

## WHY RESEARCH PARKS ARE APPEALING

Research parks have a lot to offer small to medium-sized businesses

**Availability** of the university’s faculty and students to work for the company on a part-time basis

**Libraries** and laboratories often made available at reduced cost

**Customized** educational programs

**Social contacts** with other tenants

**A low-cost incubator** for start-ups with electricity and ancillary service provided.

ated sites, research parks are situated in Orlando, Jacksonville, Tallahassee, Alachua, St. Lucie County, Tampa and at John F. Kennedy Space Center near Ti-

tusville. The firms in these parks cover the gamut of industry, developing such diverse products as lasers, optical filters, polymers, medical devices and even magazines.

“The basic criteria for coming into our parks is a desire to develop a relationship with the university and its people,” FAU’s Ellington said. “Some businesses have very strong ties, while others have somewhat limited contact. But just about everyone is able to benefit from what the university can provide in brainpower and a pool of strong employee candidates.”

**Jet Turbine Service Inc.**, for example, has been at the research park since 1998 and plans to expand. At FAU, the company turns former aircraft jet engines into power generation units for ground and marine uses, but does testing and all noise-generating work at the former naval air station in Jacksonville.

“There is a very high level of interaction between our staff and the professors and students at FAU, ranging from developing scientific applications to marketing our products,” said Peter Lobello, Jet Turbine’s chief executive officer.

Lobello, who has hired several FAU students as interns, said his company is working with the university’s College of Engineering to develop a solar-powered golf cart. The firm is also studying ways to produce electrical power quickly in emergency situations such as hurricanes.

Private companies generally own research parks and run them in conjunction with a university. At FAU, The Innovation Centre is the core of the park and consists of four office buildings, each 50,000 square feet, to accommodate office space, light assembly and manufacture, service and research activities. If approved by the university, potential occupants can lease as little as 2,500 or as much as 50,000 square feet.

But for start-ups with little or no revenue, FAU and many other research parks offer “incubators” that provide office space to conduct business and everything from electricity and janitorial services to shared conference rooms

## The ‘in’ spot for networking

One of the most important parts of a research park is a place where executives from different companies in the park can meet, exchange ideas and even strike deals.

The gathering spot could be a simple restaurant like the Park Cafe & Pizzeria at Florida Atlantic University’s Research and Development Park in Boca Raton or the private, upscale Boffins Club at the University of Saskatchewan’s Innovation Place.

“It’s very beneficial to create a social environment in which company leaders rub shoulders with each other on a daily basis,” said William Drohan, executive director of the Association of University Research Parks. “You’d be surprised how many business breakthroughs occur over lunch.”

When entrepreneurs gather at FAU’s research park cafe, “you can just feel the electricity,” said Scott Ellington, executive director of the Florida Atlantic Research and Development Authority. “It’s really exciting to see who’s talking to who on a given day.”

and restrooms.

At FAU, a new business can move into the incubator for as little as \$500 a month for a 10-foot-by-12-foot office. Add \$150 for a window. Tenants have access to additional communication services at below-market prices, as well as university labs, equipment and experts by special arrangement. And the Enterprise Development Corp. of South Florida is right there to help a company develop a business plan and work on marketing techniques.

“It’s a very practical, economical way to get going,” Ellington said. “You start in the incubator, move into the research park and one day get so big you move into your own building either here or off campus. It’s truly the American dream.”

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