

Mississippi Enterprise for Technology

John C. Stennis Space Center



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BUILDING WORKFORCE. BUILDING BUSINESS.

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The new man at the top



Tortorano Publications photo

Charlie Beasley became president and CEO of MsET in September.

Center looks to broaden horizons

Don't blame Charlie Beasley if he looks around at John C. Stennis Space Center and thinks about the possibilities. It has a lot of smart people and unique programs, and Beasley, after all, is trained in economic development. He can't help himself.

The Mississippi Enterprise for Technology, long an incubator and tech transfer office for start-ups, is also looking at spreading its wings through an additional focus on the economic development of Stennis Space Center itself.

Changing newsletter

While MsET is busy developing its new mission, it also took steps to change its newsletter. MsET has shifted to a four-page format published every two months, beginning with this issue. Other 2009 issues will be published in July, September and November.

Make no mistake about it. The incubator and tech transfer aspect of MsET, and the way it nurtures entrepreneurs, will remain the focal point. In fact, it will be beefed up considerably. But the broader development of SSC is a natural fit for the organization.

"We need to position ourselves to be able to take advantage of opportunities," said Beasley, no matter where that opportunity lies. "We can do more. We can also be an economic developer."

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The rewards could be important.

Beasley, 35, who began working for MsET in April 1999 as manager of the incubator, became president and CEO in September 2008 with the retirement of long-time MsET president and CEO Greg Hinkebein.

As is often the case when someone new takes over, there's a shift – sometimes radical, sometimes subtle – in direction, style and character of the organization. Beasley said that in this case it's prompted not by a new personality at the helm, but by changing times.

"We've had a niche of creating high-wage, high-skilled jobs in Mississippi – technology jobs. But we're realizing MsET has the flexibility and experience to have even more of an impact," said Beasley, who credits his predecessor for that expanded view of what the organization can be.

"We can facilitate commerce, create employment and contribute to economic development and the quality of life here in South Mississippi and beyond the borders of the Gulf Coast and the state ... using Stennis Space Center as a catalyst," he said.

Economic developer

Beasley, a Gulfport native, graduated from Gulfport High School in 1992 and spent a year at Mississippi State University, four years at the University of South Alabama and two years at the University of Southern Mississippi. He earned two degrees, one in marketing and one a masters in economic development.

"I have a family history of economic development. My father worked for Mississippi Power's economic development department for years until his retirement and my sister works in economic development right now," he said.

Hinkebein hired Beasley because he wanted an incubator manager with an economic development degree, someone who understood the value of MsET and the process of nurturing companies and creating jobs.

"These companies are building new products, hiring new people and growing jobs in the technology arena in South Mississippi, which contributes to the economic development of the area," said Beasley.

That will continue to be done, but MsET felt it was time to put that experience to work on a bigger playing field.

A goldmine

To an economic developer, Stennis Space Center is a goldmine. Developed in the early 1960s, it became a home for science and technology at a time when the state was better known for backwardness. Its purpose was to test rocket engines for NASA, and that remained its only function until the end of the Apollo program, when Stennis was offered as a location for other federal and state agencies.

Today it hosts more than 30 state and federal agencies, including the Navy's Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, Naval Oceanographic Office and Naval Research Laboratory Detachment. The departments of Energy, Commerce, Homeland Security, Interior and EPA also have operations at Stennis, as do five institutes of higher learning.

But economic development is not a primary mission of NASA, though it does facilitate relationships that do foster economic growth. But the state of Mississippi has long made economic development a priority, and it has always seen SSC as key to developing South Mississippi and the rest of the state. With an additional economic development approach for MsET, it gives the state an on-site tool it didn't have.

"The state program at Stennis that can best be an arm of the state is MsET," said Beasley, who notes that there is no dedicated economic development function at SSC per se. And taking on broader economic development would not be a first for MsET.

MsET already has something of a track record of getting directly involved in the economic development of Stennis. MsET under Hinkebein was instrumental in helping Stennis win the Shared Services Center in a NASA-wide competition. It wound up creating some 500 high-paying jobs.

The timing

An MsET with a development role might very well find itself getting behind projects that hold a lot of promise. Case in point: Stennis is home to the Mississippi Army Ammunition Plant Industrial Complex, with 4,300 acres and 1.6 million square feet of space under one roof. It will go from Army to NASA ownership in 2010 or 2011. An-

other is the Aerospace Technology Park in the northern quadrant of Stennis, a joint project of SSC and the state of Mississippi. So far its only tenant is the Lockheed Martin Space & Technology Center.

Those are the most obvious.

"MsET has been heavily involved in the geospatial industry and we always will be," said Beasley, referring to one of the key technologies incubated at MsET. "But we do have to diversify our focus and be able to take advantage of other technology areas, other hot areas that will be coming to the forefront," he said.

One such area is marine science, which Beasley thinks the Obama administration will focus on as part of the environmental issue. Stennis has one of the largest concentrations of oceanographers, and it has marine science related activities of the University of Southern Mississippi and others. It's also home to the Northern Gulf Institute.

The timing for this new push by MsET may be just right.

Just outside SSC and to the east, Stennis International Airport has been a finalist for several major aerospace projects, and hosts the Joint Airborne Lidar Bathymetry Technical Center of Expertise and Optech International, both of which are expanding. And nearby is the Stennis Technology Park, which is designed to be a home for technology companies that graduate from the MsET incubator.

To the southwest of Stennis Space Center, Michoud Assembly Facility has become a focal point for the Constellation Program. Michoud and the National Center for Advanced Manufacturing are seen by NASA as key in developing the next generation of spacecraft. As part of that, the agency would like to see the 800 acres around Michoud develop as an advanced manufacturing park.

And in recent months, officials from Louisiana and Mississippi have met to discuss ways to take advantage of the proximity of Michoud and Stennis as part of a Stennis-Michoud Aerospace Corridor.

Those are the kinds of developments that fit in well with the Stennis mission, and Beasley said he plans to work closely with economic development groups outside Stennis itself.

Timing is everything.

-David Tortorano



The MsET story



Tortorano Publications photo

It could be considered the granddaddy of Mississippi's geospatial technologies effort.

The Mississippi Enterprise for Technology Inc. at John C. Stennis Space Center is a nonprofit created in 1994 as a business incubator and technology transfer office. The joint effort of the Mississippi Development Authority, NASA and the state's universities was designed to spawn the development of high-wage, high-skill technology jobs.

MsET evolved into one of the first state groups to focus on leveraging the presence of federal geospatial activities, no small matter considering it's a key technology of the 21st century.

Geotechnology is the gathering, interpretation and distribution of geographic data gathered with satellites and aircraft to provide a picture of the world. It involves several disciplines and was once the purview of government. But now commercial companies are big players with products and services evolving rapidly.

The beginning

The state's interest in leveraging federal technologies at Stennis – then called the Mississippi Test Facility – began in 1964 with creation of the Mississippi Research and Development Center. State officials knew they had a jewel in the facility designed to test rockets for NASA.

In 1970 NASA located its Earth Re-

sources Laboratory to MTF to find applications for data acquired from remote sensing equipment. At NASA's invitation, the departments of Commerce, Interior, Transportation, Army, Navy and EPA set up operations at the facility that would eventually be renamed Stennis Space Center.

In 1994 MsET was established to fulfill the role first envisioned 30 years earlier: leveraging the research, development, test and evaluation taking place at Stennis Space Center.

That it wound up involved so deeply in geospatial activities was simply because geospatial technologies had become key at SSC. Three years after MsET was established Congress passed legislation to commercialize geospatial technology. The same year Stennis was designated NASA's lead center for implementing commercial remote sensing.

In 1998 Mississippi formally began its effort to create a geospatial technology cluster with establishment of the Mississippi Space Commerce Initiative, which in 2003 became the Enterprise for Innovative Geospatial Solutions.

MsET today

MsET is headquartered in the 56,000-square-foot Mississippi Technology Transfer Center, designated the Center of Excellence in Geospatial Technologies. Building 1103 is also occupied by universities, nonprofits and commercial companies. MsET

also has space in Building 1210 for a total of 25,000 square feet.

Its mission is to provide an environment where start-ups can turn technologies into products and services through serving as an incubator and technology transfer office.

As a technology transfer office, MsET is a clearinghouse where research at SSC, whether from federal or state labs, can be converted into products and services for the general public.

As a business incubator, MsET is a member of the National Business Incubator Association and provides an environment where start-ups stand a better chance at surviving through providing business and technology-related services, opportunities for joint ventures, entrepreneur training and access to state/federal technology portfolios.

MsET works with a statewide network of offices to offer technology forecasts, business plans, market research, sources of financing/marketing strategies, patent searches and vendor sources.

MsET does not limit itself to a particular type of technology, and the current list of tenants includes companies involved in everything from software development to computer security systems. Long-range plans call for exploring the growth of alternative technology areas.

But its emphasis on geospatial activities at SSC makes MsET a unique organization in the state and an engine for future growth.



Demographics

The John C. Stennis Space Center is a key location for three of five science and technology sectors likely to play a growing role in South Mississippi's future.



South Mississippi science & technology sectors

Sector	Primary centers
Aerospace	Stennis Space Center; Moss Point
Advanced materials	Hattiesburg; Bay St. Louis; Gulfport
Shipbuilding	Gulfport; Pascagoula
Geospatial technologies	Stennis Space Center, Ocean Springs
Marine science	Stennis Space Center, Ocean Springs

Source: Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development/Tcp

Stennis tenant MsET is heavily though not exclusively involved in geospatial technologies.

Current MsET residents

Company	Field
3 Rivers Visual Communications	Business services
3001 Inc.	Aerial imagery
Avery Island Technologies	Systems integration
DQSI Corporation	GIS support
DigitalGlobe	Imagery products
Digital Quest	Education products
DNet	Geoinformatics
Geocent	Geospatial
Helios Systems	Digital media
High Performance Solutions	IT support
Innovative Imaging and Research Corp.	Illumination; agr.
Institute for Technology Development (ITD)	Imaging
Melcorp	UAV products
Mississippi Global Technologies	Navigation; security
Motex Corporation/CORE-ECS	Assurance info
Northrop Grumman Information Technology	Emergency mgmt
Prototyping Solutions	3D printing
Radiance Technologies	Geospatial
Rockwell Collins	Geospatial; UAV
Skylla Engineering	Engineering
Themis Vision Systems	Imaging
WorldWinds	Weather modeling

Source: MsET

MsET tenant residency

Pearl River County	27%
St. Tammany Parish	21%
Hancock County	17%
Harrison County	15%
Other Louisiana parishes	13%
Other Mississippi counties	8%

MsET tenant education

Bachelors	44%
High school	30%
Masters	18%
Associates	6%
PhD	1%

MsET Profile

Most MsET tenant workers live in Mississippi, but 34% are from Louisiana. Sixty-nine percent of the workers have college degrees. Source: MsET

South Mississippi federal/state geospatial research

Organization	Location
Center of Higher Learning/University Research (Consortium)	Stennis
Engineering Research Center - GeoResources Institute (MSU)	Stennis
Engineering & Science Directorate (NASA)	Stennis
Enterprise for Innovative Geospatial Solutions (UM)	Stennis, Oxford, Jackson
Gulf Coast Geospatial Center (USM)	Ocean Springs
Hydrographic Science Research Center (USM)	Stennis
Joint Airborne Lidar Bathymetry Technical Center (NOAA)	Kiln
Mississippi Enterprise for Technology (Mississippi)	Stennis
Mississippi Laboratory/Southeast Fisheries Science Center (NOAA)	Stennis
Mississippi Laboratory, Pascagoula Facility (NOAA)	Pascagoula
National Data Buoy Center (NOAA)	Stennis
Naval Oceanographic Office (Navy)	Stennis
Naval Research Laboratory, Research Site (Navy)	Stennis
Northern Gulf Institute (Consortium)	Stennis

Source: Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development/Tcp