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New Ideas Born in a Barn

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Nearly a century ago, local engineers Colonel Edward Deeds and Charles Kettering gathered the region's engineers into Deeds' barn to exchange ideas, problems and solutions.

University of Dayton School of Engineering Dean Joseph Saliba hopes the "new barn" he helped raise—the University's new $4 million Innovation Center—becomes what Deeds' barn did for Dayton a century ago. The center is an addition to Kettering Labs on campus.

"One of our goals is to maintain and advance the standard of living in our region. To do so, we need to be creative and responsible partners in fostering the spirit of innovation that always has characterized engineering in the Miami Valley and at UD," said Saliba, who also stresses service-learning in addition to product development and evaluation. "We want to be accessible to everyone and encourage everyone to take risks."

Saliba said the Innovation Center—which the University will dedicate at 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 27—already has the attention of numerous local companies. Much of that stems from the nearly 90 companies that have worked on nearly 400 projects with UD's Design and Manufacturing Clinic.

Emerson, Copeland and Ethicon have agreed to lend support and become educational partners. Former Copeland President and Chief Operating Officer Dean Ruwe has signed on to be the Innovation Center's interim director.

"This is very interesting and fun to do," said Ruwe, who has been involved with UD's School of Engineering as an adviser and teacher. "It's a good school. About 60 of our Copeland engineers came from UD, and they were among our brightest. I'm just trying to make a difference and get the Innovation Center up and running."

Some of the ongoing projects between UD students and local industries include: a low-risk alternative to gastric bypass surgery, improvements in a local food equipment's mixing machines, a pill dispenser for cardiologists and patients to better track medicine dosages and frequency, and a vehicle for the military that can drive itself and supplies into hostile areas without putting troops in harm's way.

"It's really great," said Jeff Kerley, a senior mechanical engineering major from Jacksonville, Fla., who is working on the gastric bypass alternative. "It's great to get out of the classroom and do real work with real people. Plus, we have real good presentation equipment."

The center lacks no detail. Specially designed tables comfortably fit six people without taking up the space of a round table. Floor-to-ceiling dry-erase boards allow space for multi-level diagrams. The product development room, where much time is spent standing, has rubber floors to ease stress. That room also has exposed ceilings so students can see how structures handle loads, data routing and ventilation work. The Innovation Center also showcases the latest in computer hardware and software technology.

"The Innovation Center definitely has improved the process," said Josh Heyne, a mechanical engineering student from Centerville, Ohio, who is working with the local food equipment company. "We have access all the time. We don't have to fight for lab space and it's a central location for computers, equipment and meeting rooms."

Saliba requested floor-to-ceiling windows so anyone walking past Kettering Labs can see what's happening in engineering. He hopes everyone from the UD Research Institute to the School of Law takes advantage of the center.

"There is a philosophy student looking into engineering ethics," Heyne said. "A business major could (use the Innovation Center) to get more information about what goes into their projects. There is a definite cross-over among disciplines."

The School of Engineering will display final projects in the lobby of Kettering Labs.

For interviews, contact Shawn Robinson at 937-229-3391. For more information on the Innovation Center, contact Dean Ruwe at 937-229-2835. For a complete list of University of Dayton national news, see www.UDnews.org. For local news, see www.UDlocalnews.org.