

High-powered access

UNT to open \$2.2 million computing facility in August

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By Candace Carlisle / Staff Writer

The computing power in Denton will increase tenfold this August as the University of North Texas installs a new \$2.2 million, high-powered computing facility.

And the local business community is invited to access that power, said Vish Prasad, vice president for research and economic development at the university.

"By building the center, we will allow the imagination of any group to grow," he said. "We are helping the imagination of people ... so those people are able to take advantage" of the computing facility.



DRC/Gary Payne

Vish Prasad, University of North Texas vice president for research and economic development, is shown in his office on Thursday in Denton.

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Whether they need to render 3-D! graphics or look at materials at the atomic level, individuals who need a high-powered computer will be able to access the facility.

That access will have a fee based on rates, which the university attempts to keep to low, but most often, with university involvement, they are minimal, he said.

The facility will be the highest-performance computing system in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and one of the 500 fastest computers in the world, Prasad said.

The computer is 3 feet wide, 6 feet high and 22 feet long and will require 80 kilowatts of power operating at maximum capacity, according to information released from the university.

And the opportunities for collaboration are endless through both local businesses and other universities in the area, he said.

UNT currently has nearly \$3 million in grants and contracts to provide infrastructure like microscopes or technology to local business and government for their growth, Prasad said.

Those current partnerships include Lockheed Martin; Peterbilt's parent company, PACCAR; NuconSteel; and the city of Denton, among many others, he said.

And the money from grants and contracts will continue to increase as the computational power grows, he projects.

Several potential small business owners could benefit from more computing power, said Pam Livingston, certified business development specialist operating the Small Business Development Center in Denton.

"There are a lot of inventors out there with ideas for new products that need a way to bring to market or flesh out an idea," Livingston said. "If there's a computer that will help them, that would be great."

NuconSteel has partnered with the university for several years, with the company's engineers conducting material tests on their products at labs in Discovery Park, which has been a successful collaboration, said Courtney Hanson, manager of market and product development for the company.

"We've done a lot of testing with them. It has been a fantastic partnership and a wonderful relationship for both of us," Hanson said. "We got a lot of benefit, and it gave the university a platform to build a test lab."

Already, the UNT library system will have use for the computing facility as the library tries to keep critical information handy in an online archival system and in computer library storage, he said.

"They require huge storage," Prasad said. "This will help that group in terms of providing storage. They will be able to do what they aren't able to do now."

The university's investment into the facility was vital for UNT to achieve the research it wanted to achieve, said William Moen, professor of library and information sciences and director of research for the College of Information.

"High-performance computing capabilities are essential for us to make sense of enormous sets of data," Moen said.

The facility will be housed in a computing lab in the General Administration Building on the Denton campus and a new air conditioner is being installed to help regulate the heat created by the computer, Prasad said.

The computer was purchased from Dell.

The \$2.2 million computer was primarily purchased with state incentive funds and some internal funds.

The computer will be operational in August, before fall classes, Prasad said.

"Once word spreads around, we'll hear from companies looking to get into more high-level research and development," Prasad said. "All kinds of people in research and development will have the use [for the computer] and see where they'll benefit. We expect broader collaborations in the DFW area."

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