

## Tech initiatives deserve attention

National honors bring focus to region

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Two recent announcements concerning leading technology-based programs in north Louisiana are stellar examples of forward-thinking programs and evidence of important progress toward a technologically diversified economy.

The first is the national ranking of Louisiana Tech University among lofty company -- several large, prestigious institutions -- chosen by Small Times magazine as the best of the best for micro and nantechology education.

The second: the selection of the Biomedical Research Foundation of Northwest Louisiana for the 2006 Louisiana Innovator Award from the Southern Growth Policies Board. Both kudos are well deserved and both elevate attention to the innovative offerings in Shreveport and Ruston.

Ranked third nationally, after the Universities of Albany and Michigan, in the category that covered educational programs for the tiny technologies, Louisiana Tech is playing an increasingly dominant role in this relatively new area of engineering.

In a separate listing including a wide range of categories -- funding, facilities, patenting, research and industrial outreach -- Tech was listed 15th nationally. Among those 15, the only universities in the southern region given more overall points than Tech were Rice in Houston and the Universities of Virginia and North Carolina.

Since the founding of Tech's biomedical engineering program in 1972, the university has continued to refine its expertise in micro and nanotechnology. Its Institute for Micromanufacturing opened in 1996, its new nanosystems engineering bachelor's degree program began admitting students late last year and its new Biomedical Engineering building will open around the first of the year.

The Biomedical Research Foundation emerged as an award winner from more than 200 nominees from across 13 member states in the South for exemplary initiatives in technology and innovation. The foundation fosters technology-based growth in the region by recruiting technology companies, collaborating with local research institutes and networking with the area's higher education institutions. Additionally, it has established several venture capital funds, pushed science and technology in local school programs and shared existing specialized facilities and equipment. So far, the biomedical foundation has helped to recruit 12 technology companies to Shreveport that provide some 80 jobs and an estimated annual payroll of \$4 million.

Its InterTech Science Park, which cultivates technology-based businesses that are the brain children of young entrepreneurs, is the testing ground for many technological innovations for companies that will subsequently go forth and prosper, all the while diversifying the local economy. The Consortium for Education Research and Technology that grew out of the biomed endeavor is now helping nurture a digital media initiative and has had visits from firms interested in the entertainment and educational programming potential.

Both honors are the result of the hard work and foresight of those who looked to the future and addressed the challenges of a new era. Many of the challenges are yet to be imagined, but the groundwork is laid for important contributions from north Louisiana.

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