

UTSI plans major changes in shifting focus to research

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Major changes are in the works for the University of Tennessee Space Institute as its focus shifts from providing graduate education to promoting economic activity in the region.

A name change for the institute is planned, although the new name has not been announced.

Dr. John Caruthers, associate vice president of UT and chief operating officer for the Space Institute, discussed the institute's revitalization plan, among other topics, at a UTSI Support Council meeting Tuesday.

Caruthers, charged with painting a picture of UTSI for new members, presented a history of the institute, a run-down of its revitalization plan and a progress report.

Dr. Bill Kimzey, Support Council chairman, introduced new members and explained the major byproducts of UTSI — better educated people and useful research products for the good of the nation and communities.

While UTSI has long oper-

ated primarily as a graduate educational institution, more emphasis will now be placed on research and obtaining research funding, he said.

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—Dr. Bill Kimzey

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The revitalization plan, which Kimzey said has been approved by the UT Board of Trustees, includes the following:

—Major rapid reconstitution of faculty — one position has been filled; four remain open.

—UT executive vice president Eli Fly to guide jumpstart of large research programs.

—UTSI to report administratively through UT executive vice president.

—Name change to mark beginning of new era.

—Business development office and effective federal representation in Washington added.

—Number of academic degree programs offered reduced from 12 to eight.

—Economic development mission emphasized.

—Research focus areas identified.

In addition to placing a greater emphasis on research funding, UTSI is also focusing more on support through legislation.

A \$2.2 million congressional appropriation is expected to net the institute up to \$1 million per year, if approved by a conference committee, Caruthers said.

He said Congressman Lincoln Davis and his staff are working hard to help UTSI obtain the support it needs.

Caruthers announced the institute expected to lose four faculty members to retirement.

Dr. Joseph Majdalani recently joined the engineering faculty as the second Jack D. Whitfield Professor of High Speed Flows, demonstrating UTSI's ability to attract the most qualified professors despite its rural location, Caruthers said.

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"We will not hire anyone but the best," he said.

Caruthers shared UTSI's history with new members.

"Most know the institute is here because AEDC is here," he said. The Arnold Center, Caruthers said, was established in 1951 to ensure the United States never lagged behind any other nation in aeronautics, especially supersonic aeronautics.

Germany had made significant progress in supersonic flight and it was feared only months remained until Germany would have air superiority.

At that time, plans were to associate a university with Arnold Center. Ultimately, that became UTSI, founded in 1964.

UTSI has helped make aircraft lighter and more efficient and played a role in landing the first man on the moon in 1969 — Neil Armstrong.

"We've learned how to use lasers to do remarkable things," he said. "There are many points of pride at the Space Institute."

While academically, UTSI is part of the graduate school at Knoxville, its aviation systems department is unique. No undergraduate programs are offered at the institute.

During the 1960s, '70s and 80s, the institute was in a growth mode, driven by a large population of part-time students. That trend peaked about 1985, with

the enrollment of 300 students, Caruthers said.

During that time, UTSI landed a large single technical contract that brought in more than \$110 million during a 20-year period, the equivalent of about \$225 million in today's dollars.

However, during the past eight years, research funds declined and professors have retired, Caruthers said.

"We weren't able to replace the professors — the lifeblood of the institution.

"Members of the Support Council gave us the support we needed to live, thrive and grow again during weak times at the institute," he added.