

'BRAIN DRAIN' PROJECT

The Greater Salisbury Committee

As a long-term project, GSC is attempting to stop the "Brain Drain" from the Lower Eastern Shore. Our best and brightest are raised in this community and make use of community resources only to leave the area for college or after college graduation because of the lack of higher-paying jobs and career opportunities. This is especially true in the technical fields.

Like it is for many communities in this country, the solution seemed to involve the promotion of more high-tech industries and jobs. However, unlike many communities, the Lower Eastern Shore offers many opportunities for growth of high-tech including:

- **higher education** with three University of Maryland System institutions and a leading community college;
- **quality lifestyle** for young families, including easy commuting;
- **location** within two-hours drive time from Baltimore, Washington, Norfolk and Philadelphia and only four hours from New York;
- **outside of the Washington area** when de-centralization of the federal government is considered as the result of 9-11; and
- **some high-tech** which is already here and the large potential for more.

INITIAL STAGE

The U to U Concept was created, following the model of Triangle Research Park in North Carolina, based on Salisbury University and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore connected by rail commuter between the two and with commercial research campuses in-between. That concept would depend upon large firms.

With the Virginia Commercial Space Flight Center at Wallops, some high tech jobs were already available. GSC saw an opportunity to help grow those. A September 2002 meeting was held for governmental and civic leaders at UMES to introduce the concept and start work.

A relationship between GSC and VCSFC grew to develop the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS) which partnered the states of Maryland and Virginia to launch business and higher education research projects involving space.

Because SU and UMES are both outstanding educational institutions, but not strong research facilities with the lack of graduate programs, the next step was to draw in higher education research funds. That was started by creating the Mid-Atlantic Institute for Space and Technology (MIST) and involving the University of Maryland System chancellor directly in the project, along with commercial space firms and government. Today, that is well on its way to success. GSC is a permanent member of the board.

CURRENT STAGE - Space

It became apparent that the type of tech businesses needed to support MARS would not be the large national firms envisioned in the U to U Concept, but rather small, creative, and entrepreneurial companies with 12 to 50 employees. That means more home-grown

firms that are more risk-taking, more entrepreneurial, and more likely to stay where they are formed than to move here and then be enticed to move from here in the future.

Hence, the vision is now small business “pods” around the area instead of the U to U corridor between the two universities. That area of business “pods’ could be from Wallops to Dover and to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, much like the businesses that support the production of autos in the Detroit area.

MIST currently has a building in the Pocomoke City Industrial Park which is being used for some space work. Northrop Grumman has funded some university interns there. The new Eastern Shore Broadband Project which is connecting Wallops, the Eastern Shore and the Patuxent Naval Air area across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, is also located in that building.

CURRENT STAGE – High-tech support

As the demand for high-tech employees continues, GSC is working in several areas including expanding engineering education for both degrees and high-level continuing education. GSC worked with UMES to get approval for their four-year engineering degree which will stop forcing our brightest students to cross the Chesapeake Bay for their final two years and then graduate them in the middle of major job markets. By their graduating on the Shore, they are more likely to save on the Shore for their jobs.

CURRENT STAGE – Non-space

GSC does not want to “put all of our eggs in one basket.” The space component seems well underway.

Now, we’re looking to develop a wider variety of high-tech industries (not companies) to form on the Lower Eastern Shore. If GSC can create the focus for the industries, then SWED and others can bring current firms here or help grow new firms. We’re seeking the best fits. Candidates now seem to be energy, environmental, health, agriculture, and homeland security. But remember, as Alan Kay once said, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” We’re looking to create what the Lower Eastern Shore needs, not simply doing more of the same.

At the same time, GSC is working with the three institutions of higher education to:

- give current and future university students a good experience here during their student days through a better internship program and better community experiences;
- maintain contact with alumni interested in high tech jobs to inform them of the increasingly better high tech jobs availability in the area;
- create our own Lower Eastern Shore area “monster.com” for high tech jobs.
- Information system, such as a high tech Eastern Shore Monster.com, should be a separate 501(c)(3) organization supported jointly by GSC, chamber, alumni associations, etc. to keep each higher ed grad up-to-date on jobs and living on the Shore, provide job opportunities in high tech in future, and recruit high tech workers.