UL Lafayette, Cleco break ground on alternative energy facility in Crowley

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette's College of Engineering and Cleco Power, an electric utility subsidiary of Cleco Corp., announced plans to build the Cleco Alternative Energy Center at the Industrial Park in Crowley, La.

The center will be used to study and develop alternative energy technologies using renewable energy sources, which benefit the environment.

Cleco Power will build the facility with the help of a $1 million stimulus grant from the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources' Empower Louisiana Renewable Energy Grant Program. The state created the grant program with money received from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Once complete, Cleco Power will maintain the facility, and UL

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Lafayette will operate and staff it.

“ By building this research center, we can collaborate with the university’s faculty and students and utilize their test data to help develop alternative energy solutions for our customers,” said George Bausewine, president and chief operating officer of Cleco Power. “We could not be more pleased about this opportunity to partner with a Louisiana university and to invest in a community like the city of Crowley.”

“ The creation of this facility is another example of how UL Lafayette is fulfilling its role as a research university. It will open new doors for students and faculty to explore alternatives in energy and product development, while strengthening the university’s relationship with its community partners,” said UL Lafayette President Dr. Joseph Savoie.

UL Lafayette will research a range of alternative energy technologies at the facility; however, its first project will involve a pilot-scale biomass gasifier that they are hoping to one day market when the biomass gasifier prototype is complete.

A biomass gasifier converts biomass materials such as woodchips, rice chaff, bagasse (sugar cane byproduct), manure and certain grasses into synthesis gas or syngas. The syngas can be used as a fuel to generate electricity or converted into important liquid fuels and chemicals.

“ If you have enough of these biomass feedstocks available, you can make valuable products,” said Dr. Mark Zappi, dean of the College of Engineering and Chevron professor of Chemical Engineering at UL Lafayette. “When you look at the abundance of agricultural waste products in the Acadiana region, Crowley is an ideal location for this facility.”

Gasification technology is not new but has evolved during the last decade due to additional research. Gasifiers extract energy from many different types of organic materials, including biomass, coal

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Cleco Power and UL Lafayette are working with NorthStar Resources of Jasper, Texas, to commercialize the biomass gasifier.

“ This partnership is an ideal model for Louisiana,” said Zappi. “Educators are stimulating economic development by exploring the applied aspects of their work and partnering with businesses and private investors who are extremely knowledgeable about commercialization.”

Construction on the facility is scheduled to begin in early 2011.

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