

Global player in nanotech boosts Osceola high-tech effort

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Orlando Sentinel



Imec's headquarters in Belgium. The firm will become a major partner with the Osceola County high tech center known as the Florida Advanced Manufacturing Research Center. (Imec/Handout / Imec)

Heavy hitter in European nanotech will help jump start Central Florida's effort

Osceola County's growing effort to become a hub for high-tech jobs is getting a big boost, with a global player in micro-electronics and nanotechnology opening a new office near Kissimmee with potentially more than 100 jobs.

Belgium's Imec is expected to announce FridayÖ7/8 today for print plans to have 100 scientists and personnel working at the fledgling Florida Advanced Manufacturing Research Center center, near Kissimmee, in the next five years.

Those would be high-paying jobs in an area about 15 miles from Disney World, which is historically known more for T-shirt shops and budget hotels. The European arrival will help launch the Osceola center into active sensor and nanotechnology research and design.

Imec, formerly the InterUniversity MicroElectronics Center, is designing sensors that perform what would have been a miracle just a few years ago, such as those that help detect cancer or analyze pollution in water.

Bert Gyselinckx, managing director for Imec's new Florida effort, said the group considered other locations but chose Central Florida for its research community and technical infrastructure.

We kept getting requests from American companies to become more locally active and do R&D work here,” Gyselinckx said. “We had been looking at that for a number of years.”

Gyselinckx has been managing director of Imec’s Holst Centre in the Netherlands, which has partnered with major brands such as Sony, Hitachi, DuPont and Under Armour.

Imec is headquartered about an hour south of Antwerp, Belgium, in Leuven, and has nearly 3,000 employees worldwide. In 32 years, the firm has spun off nearly 30 companies, including businesses in the fields of brain research, wearable devices, infrared imaging and nanotechnology.

“I consider them to be a well-known international anchor tenant,” said Dave Porter, senior vice president at the Orlando Economic Development Commission. “It’s a step in making this a well-known hub for sensor research and nano-tech development. Coming from Austin (Texas), I know that this is huge, having Imec here.”

Before coming to Orlando, Porter worked at the Chamber of Commerce in Austin, which also transformed into a high-tech hub by attracting tech research and, in turn, companies such as Samsung.

The Florida center will experiment with the design of microelectronic components to develop new sensor-based technology. The addition of a design center for semiconductors clinched Imec’s decision to locate in Kissimmee.

For instance, discoveries could lead to advanced sensors in cars that detect how close a vehicle is to a bus, or diagnostics that can determine a person’s medical condition just by reading his breath. Also at the Osceola facility, UCF, in partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will research textiles that can measure light, temperature, sound and other conditions, according to an announcement from UCF’s Office of Research and Commercialization.

“These are things that can impact people in their daily lives,” Gyselinckx said.

Imec is a not-for-profit research and development firm that licenses discoveries to private businesses. Gyselinckx said he hopes prototypes from the firm’s research near Kissimmee can emerge by the end of next year.

“We are a partnership company,” Gyselinckx said. “It’s in our DNA to set up partnerships. It’s something we really need to be successful.”

Imec becomes the first major global research firm to join the Osceola center located between St. Cloud and Kissimmee, near Jersey Road and U.S. 192.

The center has built a network of partners since it was announced in June 2014. That includes Alabama-based photonics company Photon-X, which was given a deferment of five years of membership dues with ICAMR to locate at the site. In September, Melbourne-based Harris Corp. signed a letter of intent to be the first formal industry member.

County officials’ investment in the center is nearing \$90 million, including \$15 million over five years for programming and research.

“Imec has a proven track record of multiplying any public funds they’ve received, and they are going to bring that to Osceola County. It will act like a funnel that will bring business here,” said Viviana Janer, chair of the Board of County Commissioners.

Chester Kennedy, a former Lockheed Martin executive now leading FAMRC, said Imec will ensure that the new Florida operation has meaningful work immediately.

“This is the reason companies will come and be positioned to take advantage of our capabilities,” Kennedy said.

The research center will house the International Consortium of Advanced Manufacturing Research (ICAMR), a cooperation between University of Central Florida, Osceola County, the High Tech Corridor and other universities. The center will include a semiconductor foundry and lab facilities should be up and running early next year.