

## **SOUTH CHARLESTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D.

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Thank you Mr. Mayor.

Good afternoon. As President of West Virginia State University, I am very pleased to be here today and to announce the opening of the University's new research laboratories in Building 740 of the West Virginia Regional Technology Park.

I would like to thank Dr. Phillip Halstead, executive director and CEO of the West Virginia Regional Technology Park Corporation for inviting me today to tell the Council about the exciting programs we have underway that are framing the future of research at West Virginia State University!

- Programs that will be realized by our professors and students right here in this beautiful Technology Park!
- Programs that will directly benefit the agricultural and environmental industry here in West Virginia and across the world!

Under the leadership of West Virginia State's Vice President for Research and Public Service, Dr. McMeans, we signed a lease for laboratory and office space to allow room to grow our expanding research portfolio.

Currently, we've established three labs and multiple offices at the Tech Park to house WVSU-led projects, focusing on agricultural and environmental research. Dr. Amir Hass and Dr. Barbara Liedl are working at the facility full-time, along with technicians and graduate assistants.

Dr. Hass is exploring the use of biochar as an additive to improve the productivity of soil on mine sites and in other areas where the soil has been disturbed. Biochar, in case you are wondering, like I was, is a by-product of converting agricultural wastes into energy—most commonly sawdust or paper pulp—or crops grown for fuel production, like switchgrass and poplar trees.

Dr. Hass will also initiate a study to determine if biochar can be used to break down contaminants associated with the extraction of natural gas in the Marcellus Shale.

Dr. Liedl's work will focus on improving disease resistance in crops. She and her team will evaluate tomato breeding lines and help transfer insect- and disease-resistant traits into the crops.

Her research is extremely beneficial to the growing number of West Virginians operating small farms.

Dr. Liedl is also evaluating the use of “high tunnels,” which are essentially low-cost, plastic, greenhouse-like structures, used to extend the growing season for vegetable crops.

Even though we just moved into these labs last month and boxes are still being unpacked, we are already making plans to expand into what Dr. Robert Barney, our associate dean for Research, is already calling the “WVSU Research Wing.”

This expansion will accommodate a soon-to-be-hired assistant research professor of Bioenergy and Environmental Remediation, who will develop a nationally recognized research and outreach program focusing on bioenergy—with an emphasis on using microorganisms to break down biodegradable waste material, in order to produce renewable energy.

Providing solid opportunities for student learning and research is a primary focus at WVSU. I expect each laboratory to have a complement of students, both undergraduate and graduate, and for those students to be mentored in state-of-the-art technologies and research practices. West Virginia State students completing their degrees in these programs will be among the most highly competitive graduates entering the workforce.

West Virginia State University is proud to be a partner with the Tech Park and we look forward to a long and rewarding relationship. Thank you for your support as we position WVSU to be the most student-centered, research and teaching, land-grant university in the state of West Virginia and beyond!