

GE To Partner With USM In Composite Engine Project

TIMOTHY R. BROWN

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A \$2.4 million state grant will be used by a General Electric Co. subsidiary and the University of Southern Mississippi for research on composite materials for an engine to power the Boeing 787 and 747-8 aircraft.

Gov. Haley Barbour was on the Hattiesburg campus Monday to announce the partnership between USM's School of Polymers and High Performance Materials and GE Aviation, which has a plant in Batesville producing composite-material parts for jet engines.

The project will last one year. The announcement had been expected for some time. Barbour alluded to the partnership in a speech to Chinese delegates in May.

The grant comes from the Mississippi Development Authority, the state's economic development agency. GE Aviation will spend \$2.5 million on the research.

About 15 to 20 USM students and faculty will work on the project.

"When I was running for governor, I used to say that our universities were economic development gold mines, that we just weren't very good in mining them," Barbour said in the announcement, which was webcast live on the university's Web site.

"We're learning better how to mine these super gold mines and there is no better gold mine than the Polymer Institute here at the University of Southern Mississippi."

The GEnx engine will be the world's only jet engine with composite fan blades, fan platforms and fan case, the company said.

The Cincinnati-based company generated revenues of \$16.8 billion in 2007, employs about 39,000 people and operates more than 50 facilities around the world.

Barbour said Mississippi's universities need to take their projects beyond research and development to commercialization. The GE partnership shows it can be done, he said.

In 2006, GE teamed with Mississippi State University's College of Engineering on an incubator program to demonstrate the production of composite components for jet engines.

"One of the things that we hope to get out of these projects is not only the association with the school, but also the association with the students," said Jerry

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Kroger, a representative for GE Aviation.

Composite materials are when two or more substances are physically combined to create a new engineered material. GE Aviation said the GENx engine will be designed to reduce weight, improve performance, lower maintenance and save pilots 15 percent on fuel consumption.

USM President Martha Saunders said the project is a great opportunity for students to get hands-on education.

"Our industry view of research encourages university and industry linkages," Saunders said. "These connections provide meaningful products to our partners while giving our students relevant educational opportunities."

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