New tech center has big plans for small devices

Chris Warner

While much has been made about a possible “Silicon Valley East” springing up in New York City and other east-coast locales, one county in Ohio has put a unique approach into motion to become a technology hub. This week I learned about an exciting new facility that promises to help microsystems vendors meet their manufacturing challenges head-on and get their devices to market faster. Lorain County Community College’s (LCCC) SMART Commercialization Center for Microsystems (www.smartmicrosystems.com) hopes to turn the Cleveland suburbs into “MEMSville”, or as U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown put it, “the go-to place in the United States for sensor commercialization support.”

I had a chance to meet Matt Apanius, Director of the SMART Commercialization Center for Microsystems to hear about the facility’s success and its plans for the future. Vendors work with the SMART Center to meet commercialization challenges for sensor products while using the facility’s MEMS manufacturing equipment. Once the chip is designed, the SMART Center is there to work with partners on the critical stages of packaging, reliability testing and inspection of microsystems.

Presently supporting its partners in an 1,800 square-foot, class 10,000 clean room, the SMART Center broke ground last year on a three-story, 46,000 square-foot facility that will include class 100, class 1,000 and class 10,000 clean rooms. LCCC President Dr. Roy Church proclaimed, “this capacity represents extraordinary opportunities for business and job creation in high growth industries.”

By all accounts, the SMART Center appears poised to offer nothing but success for both for its customers and the economy of Lorain County and the surrounding area. For vendors that collaborate with the SMART Center, they can leverage its impressive array of services and equipment when they need it the most – after a prototype or wafer- level device is developed when the project demands the most time and resources. And the three-pronged relationship between LCCC, the state of Ohio, and the microsystems industry aggressively brings more resources to the table than a typical public-private partnership to yield better products, a more seamless transition from wafer to manufacture, and a more vibrant local economy. Combined, these benefits will keep the wheels greased for an industry and region that promise exceptional growth for years to come.

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