

Obama's manufacturing initiative comes to CMU

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By Len Boselovic / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

President Barack Obama's \$1 billion commitment to make American manufacturing more competitive took another step forward Friday when Carnegie Mellon University and the U.S. Department of Defense announced plans for a \$253 million robotics research initiative based in Pittsburgh.

The center — funded by 220 government, industry and academic sources — is the latest of 14 manufacturing institutes that are researching technologies like 3-D printing medical implants that will help broken bones heal faster; working on new, streamlined ways of manufacturing lightweight metals; and developing breakthrough fabrics capable of storing energy and monitoring the health of the person who wears them.

Mr. Obama announced plans in 2012 to develop at least 15 research centers where government, business, and academic researchers could collaborate on projects that would create jobs by making U.S. manufacturing more competitive. In addition to the \$1 billion in federal funding, private sector partners contribute cash and resources to fund projects that explore new technologies or develop advance methods for using existing ones.

CMU spokeswoman Abby Simmons said the university is involved in five of the other institutes, including the oldest — America Makes.

Launched in 2012 and based in Youngstown, Ohio, America Makes has sponsored more than 60 projects valued at \$100 million, according to spokesman Scott Deutsch.

It has about 200 members, including CMU, the University of Pittsburgh, General Electric and Ford Motor Co. Its area of interest is 3-D printing — a way of making sophisticated products from digital images fed into a printer-like device that manufactures parts without the welding, bending, stamping and other processes used in traditional manufacturing.

Ms. Simmons said Carnegie Mellon is involved in 26 America Makes projects.

Working as a team, companies and universities share the risks inherent with groundbreaking research, as well as sharing the rewards, Mr. Deutsch said. Members have access to the data and results from other projects that they can then use in their own operations, he said.

“One of the beauties of the consortium model is that it amplifies the research,” he said.

He welcomed the launch of the new affiliated robotics research effort at CMU in Pittsburgh.

“It’s encouraging because the government is saying this stuff is important,” Mr. Deutsch said.

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