

South Jersey tech sector remains in growth stage

By **STEPHEN DAILY**
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Due to the high salaries, cutting-edge facilities, and the appeal of their product, technology companies have long been the prized possession of a region's business developers and promoters.

And while the economy has taken its toll on the technology industry nationwide, perhaps the best local indicator of where the industry is going is the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University.

The new park, which sits on U.S. 322 in Mullica Hill about a mile off campus, consists of just one building with two tenants. If things go as well as its organizers hope, it will one day boast 25 buildings, filled with the latest and greatest offerings the technology field has to offer, and will create and attract high-paying jobs in the region.

"The idea is to have companies in the technology park to work with the university and take advantage of resources it offers," said Michele Epifani, business manager at the South Jersey Technology Park.

Those resources include access to the faculty at Rowan University's colleges of business, engineering and science, along with access to the University's facilities including its library, labs and even catering services and the fitness center, Epifani said.

Such a business park would also allow tenants to employ interns from Rowan who are looking for real-world experience.

But local economic development leaders know there is a long way to go before South Jersey becomes a viable destination for technology companies.

While South Jersey has long relied on its service, gaming and pharmaceutical jobs to grow and prosper, technology firms have mainly located in the northern end of the state.

This trend bothers Maxine Ballen, president and CEO of the Mount Laurel-based New Jersey Technology Council, a trade organization that provides business support and networking opportunities to its 1,200 members.

Ballen said the region offers a bargain rate in an

Region competes with mature North Jersey, but offers bargain rate in tight economy



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A view of the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University in October.

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economy that has many businesses tightening their belts.

"The technology sector in Southern New Jersey is not as mature as it is in other parts of the state. This region has not caught on in a way that we would have hoped," Ballen said.

"The realty is you have access to a quality work force that is much cheaper than Central and Northern New Jersey that's easy to get to. The cost of doing



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Senior Todd Nilsen adjusts components on his catheter cooling console test rig.

business here is a good 20 percent less than other parts of the state," she

said. The New Jersey Department of Labor and Work-

force Development does not track employment figures specific to jobs in the

technology industry, but the sectors that consist of such jobs — manufacturing, transportation and utilities — all experienced steep declines in employment in 2008.

The New Jersey unemployment rate for January 2009 was 7.3 percent. As of December, the largest year-over-year losses took place in transportation and utilities (-31,000), professional and business services (-23,100) and manufacturing (-20,000).

The only industries to gain jobs were education and health services, which added 15,500 jobs, and leisure and hospitality, which added 2,100.

As the economy continues to worsen, more and more businesses and municipalities are combining resources to save money on technology expenses.

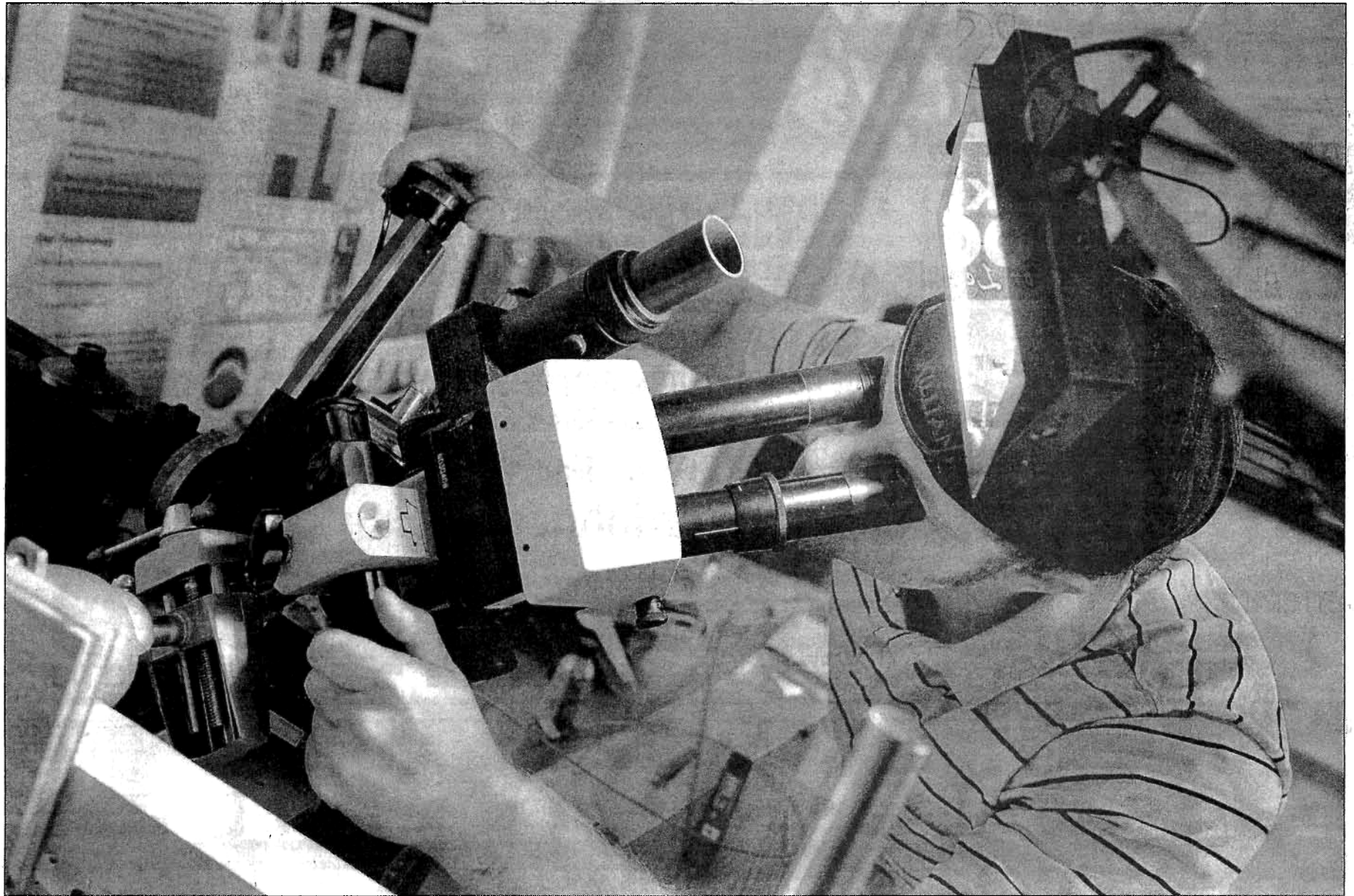
The South Jersey Technology Partnership, created in 2003 at Sterling High School, provides technology services such as monitoring and maintaining computer networks, Web site development, and setting up computer infrastructure for school districts, municipalities, libraries and other non-profit agencies.

"We found many municipalities do not have the resources to maintain Web services. This network provides this service at a cheaper rate than the private sector," said Dr. Jack McCulley, superintendent for the Sterling Regional School District, who oversees the technology partnership.

"It's a little nontraditional, but with the economy the way it is, you have to work to generate funds and work to keep costs down," McCulley said.

All the schools in the district are now part of the technology partnership, along with several municipalities such as Commercial Township, Somerdale, Stratford and Magnolia.

Ballen believes the key to jump-start South Jersey's technology sector is to focus on alternative energies and take advantage of the emerging technology-based destination points, such as the South Jersey Technology Park, the Camden Waterfront Technology Park and the business incubators at Rowan, Rutgers University and Burlington County College.



JOHN ZIOMEK/Courier-Post file

Senior mechanical engineering student Todd Nilsen works on catheter cooling technology at the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University in October.