

KEEP New Hampshire Strong

By President Ann Weaver Hart



A NEW STATE LEGISLATIVE session has just begun—with the former chair of the University System’s board of trustees as governor—and the biennial budget process is front and center. On the table is the remaining \$100 million for the Knowledge Economy Education Plan, or KEEP New Hampshire, which was approved in 2001. The capital request supports the renovation and reconstruction of several of the university system’s buildings.

Among them are DeMeritt, James and Parsons halls, three important UNH science and technology buildings in dire need of modernization. An adequate physical campus is key to UNH’s future. But how do the rest of New Hampshire and the region at large benefit from this investment?

New Hampshire citizens are proud of, and greatly enjoy, the state’s celebrated quality of life. Sustaining it requires a strong economy and an educated workforce. As New Hampshire’s only public research university, UNH is deeply committed to providing the new knowledge and the highly skilled workforce that the state needs. In his recent “New England Outlook” report, Ross Gittell, James R. Carter Professor of Management, identifies higher education as critical to New Hampshire’s continued economic strength: “Of all the factors affecting the state’s economic performance—including tax burden—the factor with the strongest correlation to a high level and growth in state per capita income is the percentage of the adult population with a four-year college degree.”

Gittell says economic development efforts should focus on New England’s high-tech industry. Long a mainstay of the region, that sector lost 20 percent of its jobs between 2001 and 2003. If New Hampshire is to regain its high-tech advantage, the state will need to build on the existing industry base and assets such as the university’s research and development infrastructure.

UNH, and New Hampshire, depend on the quality of our facilities to help attract the best science and engineering students and professors and to fill the state’s critical need for scientists and engineers. UNH graduates must be prepared to make real contributions as they enter the workforce with up-to-date skills and knowledge. With better facilities, we can also forge valuable relationships with partner institutions and new funding sources.

The potential is vast. Exciting research in nanotechnology, one of New Hampshire’s fast-growing industries, is just one example. Associate professor of chemistry Glen Miller and a team of UNH researchers are already partnering with North-

eastern and the University of Massachusetts at Lowell through a \$12.4 million grant to bring nanotechnology from the labs in Parsons and DeMeritt halls to the factory through the Center of High-Rate Nanomanufacturing. The National Science Foundation estimates that new nanotechnology-based products will contribute 2 million jobs and \$1 trillion in revenue to the world’s economy by 2015.

Deep in the basement of DeMeritt Hall, physics professor Bill Hersman is altering xenon gas to expand the “vision” of magnetic resonance imaging to the lungs, one important area MRIs cannot currently see. Working with experts from Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, he is perfecting this new technology, which could result in earlier detection of lung disease and also aid in the study of cancer, Alzheimer’s disease and atherosclerosis.

One of our partners, Exeter, N.H.-based Bentley Pharmaceutical, has hired its first UNH graduate, laying the groundwork for future collaboration between the university and the state’s largest pharmaceutical company. Material scientist Zhengmao Li ’04G will manage Bentley’s protein and peptide delivery programs; as a graduate student, Li studied intranasal insulin delivery with research associate professor Yvon Durant in Parsons Hall in a project jointly sponsored by Bentley, the New Hampshire Industrial Research Center and UNH.

The university has a proven record of forming productive partnerships that deliver new technology and information to businesses and government at the national and international levels. We are proud of our growth and our ranking among the nation’s top 125 research universities. We can and do attract world-class research with both public and private funding to New Hampshire.

As legislators consider the KEEP New Hampshire request, we hope they will recognize that an educated citizen is the state’s greatest asset. Many of this year’s UNH graduates will join the more than 42,000 alumni who make their homes in New Hampshire and who are engaged in the future of our state. I am confident that by working together, we can keep New Hampshire strong.