John Parkstook over the reins as executive director of UK’s Coldstream Research Campus on April 1, 2004. Two months later, UK announced the purchase of the Lexel Corporation’s property at Coldstream. Parks comes to UK with extensive experience directing university research parks, having launched the University of Illinois Research Park in 2000 after heading up the Iowa State University Research Park Corp. and the Iowa State Innovation System.

Q: John, you really hit the ground running with the purchase of the Lexel building, now renamed the Coldstream Center. Tell us what that means for Coldstream.

A: It means a lot of things actually. Lexel Imaging Systems has been at Coldstream for over 10 years. They use a technology in the manufacture of cathode ray tubes that will be displaced over the next several years and so are in the process of reinventing themselves. In April they had just a year remaining on their lease, and since they needed only half the space in the 163,000 square-foot-building, were looking to relocate. The owners of the building were interested in selling. So we bought the building and renegotiated their lease, saving 105 high-tech jobs. The purchase also signaled a new period of collaboration with UK researchers, and we gained valuable lab space, including a “clean room” and infrastructure that will be attractive to various companies and a couple of our research centers on campus.

Q: What enticed you to come to Coldstream?

A: I knew a little bit about Coldstream from my associates in AURP, the Association of University Research Parks. But no one prepared me for the beauty of the setting and the beauty of the Bluegrass. At 735 acres, Coldstream is larger than the average park and the 220 acres for recreation is an amenity most would love to add to their parks. And there’s quite a bit of infrastructure—a substantial road system and complete utilities—and significant tenants.

Q: What about Coldstream’s relationship to UK?

A: UK’s commitment to build a new $12 million Center for Pharmaceutical Science & Technology (CPST) at Coldstream is another reason I was attracted to Coldstream. It is a statement by UK that they’re going to be active in this research park. One thing this means is that more researchers are on-site, in close proximity to the companies that are also there. Many faculty are actively engaged with the companies, and this is really what a research park is about.

Q: What is the connection between research and economic development?

A: A university’s research base is critical to economic development. At UK, the Executive Vice President for Research Wendy Baldwin has been very active in developing relationships with industry. The IP and tech-transfer issues are important. Start-up funding is important. Sponsored research is important. Government-funded projects matched with private funding are very important. All of this, including Coldstream, falls under the umbrella of research at UK.

Q: How important will UK’s CPST be to Coldstream?

A: The CPST has a very strong potential to attract small and medium-sized pharma-companies, perhaps even device manufacturers. When you have a partner like the CPST, looking for interactions with corporate partners, it gives us tremendous marketing opportunities to attract new business. The CPST will be a strong magnet for Coldstream.

Q: Explain what you mean when you say Coldstream is ready to achieve critical mass around certain types of technologies.

A: Our first focal area—pharmaceuticals and biomedical engineering—will be centered around the CPST research in medicine and pharmacy. A second area is Ag related: we’ll be looking for biotech-based companies that could partner with our research in natural products and plant-made pharmaceuticals. The equine industry also has a significant presence at Coldstream that we can build on, not to mention the research at UK’s Gluck Equine Center. A third theme will center around manufacturing systems and processes, and UK’s College of Engineering.

Q: How will you use Coldstream’s location in your marketing efforts?

A: We want to capitalize on the whole cultural aspect of a great environment to work in, live in and play in. If you draw a circle around Coldstream, you see a lot of amenities in this area that are very significant such as new housing developments, golf courses, the Marriott resort and Embassy Suites, the Kentucky Horse Park, Spindletop, the Center for Applied Energy Research, and Toyota and Lexmark. There’s a lot going on here, and Coldstream will be part of state and local economic development efforts.
Q: What do you say to people who expect instant results at Coldstream?
A: We need to get the message across that it’s not going to happen overnight. We can make excellent progress in the near term (the next three to five years), but we’ve got to keep our focus and realize we’ll measure progress and success against where we want to be in 10 years—and in 20 years. We’ll measure success not just by the number of jobs but also by the kind of jobs that are created here, the tax base that’s generated, what that tax base returns to the community and the state, and what it does for employment options for people we graduate from this institution. We have the potential to add great value to what’s already strong in Kentucky.

About Coldstream Research Campus

Once a prominent Bluegrass horse farm, today’s Coldstream provides a synergetic research campus environment for science and technology-focused businesses, and UK faculty, staff and students. A current complex of six buildings, called the Kentucky Technology Center (KTC), houses 14 technology-based companies. Other tenants include IBM Global Services, Lexel Imaging Systems, RAAM Global Energy Company, and the Embassy Suites Hotel. Over 600 people are employed at Coldstream. UK’s new $12 million Center for Pharmaceutical Science and Technology building is scheduled to open there in March 2006. For more information, see UKColdstream.com.