The new $70 million Smart Energy Research and Development Facility at Binghamton University will be 114,000 square feet and house the physics and chemistry departments.

VESTAL – Binghamton University broke ground Wednesday on its Smart Energy Research and Development Facility, a project expected to create hundreds of jobs and serve as a state-of-the-art research hub for the development of energy-efficient technologies.

The new $70 million, 114,000-square-foot facility is scheduled for completion in 2017 and is a direct result of the NYSUNY 2020 initiative.

"It certainly is a milestone in the university's history," BU President Harvey Stenger said. "Its regional economic impact is going to be expanded as a result of this facility. It will serve as a home for remarkable research."

The Smart Energy building will house Harpur College of Arts and Sciences' physics and chemistry departments. The research in the new building will include making solar power economically competitive, reducing and using the thermal energy generated by computers and other electronic devices, and developing mechanisms for the storage and transmission of energy through high-capacity batteries, fuel cells and ultra-capacitors.

According to BU's Office of Institutional Research & Assessment, the facility will have a direct economic impact of $78.5 million on Broome and Tioga counties during its construction.

The research office also said the Smart Energy project will support more than 500 local jobs, including about 200 construction jobs, during the construction phase.

After construction, the office stated, 18 new faculty members and researchers will generate $2.5 million of economic impact annually to the local economy. This figure does not account for additional staff and teaching assistants who will be hired to work at the Smart Energy facility.

"This is a huge thing for Binghamton University and the Southern Tier," Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy said Wednesday after the groundbreaking. "It's going to create jobs. It's going to create excitement. It's going to draw — hopefully — a lot of other companies and people seeking the benefits of this R&D facility.

On Aug. 8, 2012, Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the BU NYSUNY 2020 challenge grant, officially approving a comprehensive plan that included the development of the $70 million Smart Energy facility. According to BU officials, NYSUNY 2020 allowed the university to implement a "rational" tuition program. New tuition revenue allowed BU to launch a plan for growth and pursue the new Smart Energy facility, the university said.

For the Smart Energy facility, the state is providing $20 million, the State University Construction Fund is putting in $15 million and BU is providing the remaining $35 million, Stenger said.
The Smart Energy facility will be a brick, metal and steel two-story building that will feature ornate custom steel in public areas and a green roof. The facility will also include 125 fume hoods and 45 faculty offices.

LEED Platinum standards will be followed throughout construction — the highest certification possible, BU said.

"If you're going to build a Smart Energy building, you better make it LEED platinum," Stenger said.

To Anne McCall, dean of the Harpur College of Arts and Sciences, the real impact of the Smart Energy facility won't be realized during construction, but when the new building opens its doors in 2017.

"This investment in science and technology will advance our knowledge of chemistry and physics — yes, a resounding yes," McCall said. "It will also lead to new jobs, new products, new solutions that will benefit people in New York state and well beyond."

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