

THE

*Real Spelce*

# AUSTIN LETTER

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Volume 27, Number 41

January 20, 2006

Dear Client:

**UTAustin is a research university. One of the measurements of these prestigious institutions is how much outside money is granted each year for their research projects. And, importantly, what is the source of those funds.**

Would you believe a record \$417 million flowed into UTAustin during fiscal year 2004, the most recent annual funding total available? **\$417 million! This is a 48% increase since 1999**, when the total was \$281 million, and is a 1.3% increase from the previous year. This is serious money, generally won in competition with other universities and scholars.

From the standpoint of the Austin area economy, **these monies came from outside Texas** and were, by and large, pumped into our local economy – to be re-circulated many times. (Well, maybe this isn't totally accurate, because some of this \$417 million probably came out of your pocket *initially*, as most of the university's research funding comes from the federal government.)

Three federal agencies contributed the lion's share of the federal funds that came to UTAustin. **The Department of Defense** was the biggie – granting \$120 million to UTAustin during fiscal year 2004. Next was the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** that sent \$50 million our way and the third was the **National Science Foundation** that funneled \$42 million to UTAustin.

Much of the university's work for the Defense Department has applications beyond military use. For instance, money was provided by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency for a project to produce a **scalable microprocessor architecture** that can accelerate industrial, consumer, embedded and scientific workloads, reaching **trillions of calculations per second on a single chip**.

NIH grants obviously go toward health issues, such as funds to find a better way to get insulin into diabetics. **This could eventually end the need to treat diabetes with daily injections.** And earlier funding resulted in a discovery by UT astronomers of a Jupiter-sized planet that orbits, in just two days, a neighboring star. It was the fourth planet in that system and its discovery was hailed as **increasing the likelihood that discovery of planets like Earth is just over the horizon**. In 2005, the university set the stage for more discoveries with construction of several buildings. More about this in the next item. But you can see these research funds, over and above state and tuition funding, put UTAustin in a world-class category.

**Often overlooked when tracking construction activity in the Austin area is the building boom that seems to continue unabated at UT Austin.**

The soon-to-be most visible new structure on the campus is the Blanton Museum of Art. It will become **one of Austin's showcase buildings** when it opens amidst great fanfare in April (the February opening was recently changed). Located across the street from the Bullock Museum of Texas History, **The Blanton will display art treasures** from UTAustin's collections that have long been hailed as **among the best university collections in the nation.**

But, spinning off our first news item, **other construction on the campus will expand and enhance research capabilities** in several critical areas of UTAustin's mission. Consider:

The 160,000 sq.ft. **Neural and Molecular Science Building** opened during the past year. It is now providing a home for the Center for Learning and Memory.

**The Center for Nano and Molecular Science Building** is scheduled to open in June. This 65,000 sq.ft. building will bring together more than 100 faculty scattered across campus into one facility.

Another facility is the 94,000 sq.ft. building that will house the growing **Texas Advanced Computing Center and the Institute for Geophysics** at the JJPickle Research Campus.

These facilities, as you can see by their names, will provide **cutting edge teaching and research for future industries.** You can bet spin-off companies will emerge from the work that goes on in these buildings and many of those will probably locate and expand in Austin.

But, for now, think about the economic benefit that comes solely from UTAustin's construction. As we mentioned last week, it has been a long dry spell for construction of major office buildings and apartments in Austin. The ongoing building program at UTAustin has helped fill in the gaps by **providing construction jobs – and other related opportunities – for our economy and our workforce.** It is often overlooked, but it should not be underappreciated.

**UTAustin's impact is far-reaching. How about South Africa, where a successful scientific project developed by UTAustin was replicated?**

The largest telescope in the southern hemisphere was recently inaugurated with the help of the UTAustin's **McDonald Observatory**, which operates the **Hobby-Eberly Telescope**, itself one of the world's largest. As result of partnering with them, UTAustin astronomers will have 21 nights per year to work on the South African eye to help answer such questions as what kinds of worlds orbit other suns and what was the universe like when the first stars were formed.

**In a further sign of Austin's surging economy, four new hotels are expected to open in the area in 2006 and several others are completing major renovations.**

By year-end 2005, Austin hoteliers were singing a happy song. Hotel occupancy reached the magic 70% level, indicating the years of low occupancy were mercifully at an end. The entire US travel industry suffered a calamitous blow with the airline-related 9/11/01 terrorist attacks. But **Austin's resurgence has triggered solid hotel bookings** – so much so, hotel developers and operators concluded they could profitably build more hotel rooms.

The area's **newest destination resort** opens in May near Bastrop, according to the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau. It is just 13 miles south of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA). **The Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort** features 491 guest rooms and 50,000 sq.ft. of indoor function space, as well as numerous outdoor event venues. It also boasts of an 18-hole golf course, spa, eight restaurants and a myriad of outdoor activities.

**Three new Marriott properties will also open this year.** In August, Courtyard by Marriott and Residence Inn will add 449 rooms to the downtown hotel inventory. These adjoining properties sit adjacent to the Convention Center at Fourth and San Jacinto Streets. A 150-room Courtyard by Marriott Austin Airport opens in the fall just a short distance from ABIA at 7809 East Ben White Blvd.

The renovations are taking place in some of the area's most venerable properties. The storied **Driskill Hotel, built in 1886, opens a new two-story meeting space in the summer.** It will be called the Victorian Room and it is nestled into the corner at Sixth & Brazos. It will accommodate up to 275 guests and you can utilize either or both floors for your event.

Built more than 40 years ago, the **Lakeway Inn and Conference Resort** will transform into a full-service, four-star resort and spa when a **\$15 million expansion** is completed this summer. Upgrades include a grand lobby entrance, renovations to the 168 guest rooms including the creation of 16 spa guest rooms, a new 5,200 sq.ft. glass-windowed ballroom jutting over Lake Travis and a 5,500 sq.ft. spa and fitness center. The resort is remaining open throughout the project.

**The Hyatt Regency Austin on Town Lake** in the downtown area is embarking upon a **\$7 million room renovation** scheduled to be completed in May. The complete makeover of the 446 guest quarters includes new furniture, carpeting and wall coverings. The Hyatt is also staying open during this renovation.

As the economy continues to rebound, these new properties and the recently upgraded facilities all hope to tap into an expanding travel market. They should also get a nice every-two-year kick when the Legislature returns for its regular session a year from now. This could possibly be enough to **offset the additional inventory of hotel rooms** added this year.

**You think Texas politics is weird. We're going to have to really go off the deep end to out-weird Minnesota, the state that gave us Governor Jesse "The Body" Ventura.**

Oh sure, we've got a former Democrat who was a yell leader at TexasA&M seeking re-election as Republican Governor (**Rick Perry**). We've got another former Democrat, who is now a Republican, but who is running for governor as an Independent (**Carole Keeton Strayhorn**). We've got a Democrat (**Chris Bell**) who made a name for himself taking on House Republican Minority Leader **Tom DeLay**, but quit fighting DeLay to run for governor. And we've got a country singer/comic/mystery writer also running for governor as an independent whose slogan is Why The Hell Not (**Kinky Friedman**). But we don't have a vampire running for governor!

Did you say vampire? As in Dracula? Yep. In Minnesota, **Jonathan "The Impaler" Sharkey** is running for governor on the Vampyres, Witches and Pagans Party saying "Politics is a cut-throat business." I kid you not. Jesse Ventura looks like Ward Cleaver beside this guy.

How did he get his nickname "The Impaler?" Sharkey's campaign promises include executing convicted murderers and child molesters *personally* by **impaling them on a wooden pole** outside the state capitol. He announced his candidacy on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> because that was "my lucky number."

Sharkey told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* that **he's a vampire "just like you see in the movies and TV.** I sink my fangs into the neck of my donor ... and drink their blood," adding that his donor is his wife, Julie. He also claims he respects all religions ("**I'm a Satanist who doesn't hate Jesus**") and, if elected, he says he will post "everything from the Ten Commandments to the Wicca Reed" in government buildings. Looks to me like Minnesota wins the "weird" title hands down!

Speaking of northern climes, **Dr. Louis Overholster** said he thinks he knows how Chicago got started. A bunch of people in New York City said "Gee, I'm enjoying the crime and poverty all right, but it just isn't cold enough. Let's go west!"

NEAL SPELCE AUSTIN LETTER (ISSN 1071-0612) is published weekly, except last two weeks of the year, for \$150 (plus tax) per year or \$249 (plus tax) for two years. To subscribe, call 512-498-9495. Periodical Postage Paid at Austin, TX 78767 by Austin Letter, Inc., 4105 Bee Creek Rd, Spicewood, TX 78669. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Neal Spelce Austin Letter, P.O. Box 1905, Austin, TX 78767-1905.

Sincerely



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