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By Bob Strattan

Fab Lab Coming to Tulsa

Establishing a Fab Lab in Tulsa is well underway and is one of Tulsa Engineering Foundation's (TEF) initiatives for this year. This article will give a brief discussion of the concept and potential for Fab lab and some suggestions about how you can learn more and help make it a success.

Fab Labs were developed less than a decade ago at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with the purpose of putting advanced technology in the hands of the general public. The goal was to first, simultaneously bridge the divide between intangible digital information and the physical world and secondly, to create a network of creative learning workshops to foster the opportunity for diverse minds to investigate, experiment, innovate, and to inspire one another.

The Fab Lab (fabrication laboratory) concept originated in 2001 from an interdisciplinary initiative between the National Science Foundation and MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms (<http://fab.cba.mit.edu/>) and has spawned over 30 Fab Labs in the developing world as well as European and U.S. locations with many more in the development stage.

A Fab Lab brings modern open-access prototyping capabilities to underserved communities to encourage and facilitate students, resident citizens, inventors, artists, entrepreneurs and industries to innovate, explore and share knowledge, ideas and techniques in a user friendly educational environment.

Fab Labs have become widely popular and their success is shown by their ever increasing numbers. Several Fab Lab websites exist to showcase the creations of local "fabbers" and network with other labs.

We were first introduced to the Fab lab concept when Matt Norris, PE gave the April 20 presentation "**MIT Fab Lab: A Model for Open Source Innovation and Prototyping**" at the EST's weekly Monday luncheon meeting. He was accompanied by representatives of MIT in Tulsa doing a site survey to investigate Tulsa for further development. Since then a committee led by Mr. Norris is progressing nicely toward the goal of having the Tulsa Fab Lab operational within the next year.

Kendall Whittier, Inc. (KWI), a non-profit 501 (c)(3) serving the Kendall- Whittier neighborhood, will house the program within their organization and is working with a dedicated volunteer group to bring a Fab Lab to the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood.

Kendall-Whittier neighborhood is located approximately one mile east of downtown Tulsa and west of the University of Tulsa. KWI was founded to identify, address, and counter the deterioration of the local neighborhood that was unfolding in the late 1960's. KWI has worked with neighborhood institutions and the city government to improve the neighborhood's infrastructure and the quality of life for its residents particularly children.

The first public exposure of the Tulsa Fab Lab occurred this fall with a feature article in the September 27 Sunday Tulsa World's Business Section followed by an

October 5 community meeting at the Tulsa Educare Center located within the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood. The capacity crowd expressed great enthusiasm for the project.

Mr. Norris and his associates described the Fab Lab concept and project status at the recent October 29 TEF Quarterly Meeting. Several ways for TEF and its member societies to assist were identified and more information will be communicated to the member organizations in the coming months. TEF encourages its member societies and the Tulsa engineering community to learn more about the Fab Lab and lend support and encouragement to its launch and development.

The Fab Lab committee is seeking sponsorship, volunteer assistance and a location in the Kendall Whittier neighborhood with a goal of having the facility open in the next year. More information is available at <http://www.kendallwhittierinc.org> > UPDATES & EVENTS. A Tulsa Fab lab specific web site will be operational soon.

TEF challenges each of you to invite the Fab Labs volunteers to present a description of the Fab lab concept as the program for your monthly meeting or other interested groups and consider ways that you might help ensure the Tulsa Fab Lab's success. Critical items at this juncture are the identification of a suitable building in the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood to house the Fab Lab and the completion of the funding sponsorship. As a reminder to those over age 70 ½, the tax free donation directly from an IRA or 401(k) to a 501 (c) (3) non-profit has been extended through the end of this calendar year. Contact Matthew Norris, PE, the engineer leading the initiative, at (918) 346-8591 or mnorris@innovationworksllc.com; or Trinna Burrows, Executive Director of KWI, at (918) 743-9559 or tburrows@kendallwhittierinc.org for more information on sponsorship.

TEF is committed to support the initiative through communication to all our members. We plan to have an article about Fab Lab in each monthly edition of the Tulsa Engineer.