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MERI begins expansion project that will add training space and facilitate new programs

Memphis Business Journal - by [Toby Sells](#) Staff writer

The **Medical Education and Research Institute** is in the middle of a \$10 million capital campaign to support its current expansion, enhancements to the existing facility and for some new programs.

Crews from S. Webster Haining Co. are at work at MERI adding 2,000 square feet to the dock at the rear of the building for additional morgue and storage space. The **Crump Firm**, Inc., designed the project. Construction is slated for completion by September.

"That's the first step, and that kind of has a chain reaction around the building and it will create space on the other floors to increase our lab space," says Diana Kelly, MERI's manager of institutional development. "To support the level of training we have projected over the next five years, we have to create that space."

MERI director Elizabeth Ostric says as the medical device industry grows, so does MERI. Participant numbers there have continually risen over the years and, she says, once the expansion is complete, MERI can double the amount of participants it can host on weekends.

The second phase of the project will bring upgrades to the facility and free up space. The auditorium will be expanded from 60 seats to about 85. Enhancements to MERI's dining facility will allow it to become a training space as well. That would allow two large MERI courses to be conducted simultaneously.

The second phase will also add infrastructure and equipment to MERI's off-site training abilities. Kelly says MERI has experienced a 200% increase in courses off site and can now support 26 orthopedic training sessions simultaneously. The

expansion of the program would bring new imaging equipment, medical equipment and new transport vehicles.

Also, MERI is looking to begin courses using human simulators: machines that look, feel and medically behave like humans. These machines would allow medical professionals or trainees to practice medicine without the fear of harming a real patient.

Robotics are also in MERI's future as it hopes to acquire a da Vinci surgical robot to train local doctors. Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp. and **Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare**, Inc., have both invested in such robots, though only a small handful of Memphis doctors are trained to use them.

AutoZone, Inc., founder and Memphis biotech industry supporter J.R. 'Pitt' Hyde III calls MERI's mission "critical" to Memphis' success.

"With all of these new medical devices and medical equipment, physicians need a place they can train and do research," Hyde says. "(MERI) is a key component of the whole program to promote and encourage the biotech industry here in Memphis."

Ostric says MERI has issued \$15 million in donation requests and that the campaign will probably wrap up next year. MERI's board has given the nod to go ahead with projects well before all the money is in.

According to an economic impact study by **University of Memphis** health care economist Cyril Chang, MERI brought \$22 million to Memphis, directly and indirectly, in 2005.

Ostric forecasts that number to grow to \$45 million by 2010.

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