

NCCAR taking shape

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GARYSBURG — A few months ago, it was a cleared rural field. Today, giant earth-moving machines are helping create a state of the art vehicle research facility and yesterday members of the Northeast Commission were given a firsthand look at the progress.

North Carolina's Northeast Commission is a regional economic development organization created by the Legislature to stimulate business and tourism development in the 16-county region. It has been one of the prime supporters of the North Carolina Center for Automotive Research (NCCAR) being built in Northampton County.

Just two months ago, a four-wheel-drive vehicle was almost a requirement to visit what was then little more than 152 acres of cleared land. Yesterday, the board saw a much changed locale.

PLT Construction Co. Inc., of Wilson, is the primary contractor and oversees the entire construction site, coordinating the efforts of all of the on-site contractors. Local company Heaton Construction Inc. is building the structures on the site. The dirt road that weaves back is the temporary entrance to the property. At the PLT trailer, serving as command center for the site, Site Supervisor Greg Snyder ushered the group into the trailer for a briefing on how the project is progressing and what they would be seeing as they toured the construction site.

The 23,350 square-foot Operations and Engineering building being built by HCI, which will house six secure, double-bay client garages with mezzanine offices as well as 11,000 square-feet of office space, has foundation work well underway. HCI Site Supervisor Eddie Slagle told the group steel for the walls of the building will be going up by the end of April. The foundation for the entry security kiosk is also being built by HCI as well.

Once the group motored away from the operations building site onto what will be the track access road, they passed huge earth-moving trucks idled only because of the recent rain. Once out onto the track, or the Ride and Handling course, the next stop was at the lower end of the course where the site drainage system dumps water from the site into a large pond.

Snyder explained the complex site drainage system that was the first part of the project accomplished so that very few work days have been lost due to inclement weather.

He also explained because of the engineered site drainage system, no dirt has been removed from or brought onto the site. There are four stockpiles of dirt around the site and when working with engineered elevation changes, dirt is moved where it is needed from the stockpiles.

Snyder explained the complex system that collects water from the highest elevations of the 620 total acres of property, channeling it through a series of drainage systems that include a centrally located dome collecting and diverting the water to the 150-foot by 400-foot pond where it is dispersed off the property. There are additional drainage systems that flow unseen down both sides of the property.

The first stage of the Ride and Handling course which is now laid out and graded will be 2.03 miles long, said Snyder. That will eventually be expanded to the full size, 4.6 mile course. The course is now at full width and has green grass planted in most areas surrounding the course and drainage system. Snyder pointed out where the Vehicle Dynamics Area will sit adjacent to the main, one-plus kilometer- long straight-away, on nine acres of land. The Chassis Dynamics Lab, a 6,000 square-foot laboratory, will be built next to the VDA, Snyder told the group.

Gary Brown, Northampton County economic development director and NCCAR board member, shared with the group the track will be complete and asphalted by this summer. "We'll be in operation on or before Oct. 20," Brown said. During a brief question and answer session, Commission President and CEO Vann Rogerson mentioned that in addition to automotive industry representatives worldwide, the U.S. military has shown interest in using the facility.

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