



# REFLECTIONS ON A VISION:

## Arkansas State University Querétaro Campus

By Charles L. Welch and Doug Whitlock

*“Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.” ~ Victor Hugo*

**D**r. Edmundo Ortiz had an idea and it centered around a huge “what if?” He looked at the city of Querétaro in north central Mexico and wondered what if an American university would agree to establish a campus there. He hoped to bring a true living-learning community to a city and region of burgeoning economic growth—more than 1,300 multi-national corporations are located there. He envisioned an institution that could offer programs especially suited to this increasingly high-tech environment and was specifically interested in engineering, science, business and communication. In 2012 he started to broach the proposition to U.S. institutions and found open minds receptive to his proposal at Arkansas State University. In December of that year, the Arkansas State University System Board of Trustees approved the proposal to begin negotiations to establish a campus in Querétaro. Soon thereafter, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education gave its blessing. The governor of the State of Querétaro has publicly shared his support of the project and his predecessor was a 2014 commencement speaker at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

In the meantime, Dr. Ortiz, who holds a Ph.D. in industrial engineering, was helping to pull together a team of investors headed by Ricardo González—a successful business man and racing driver who won the 2013 24 Hours of Le Mans—to purchase property for the campus and provide the financial support to build the \$100 million campus at no expense to Arkansas State. In February of 2014 ground was broken, and in August 2017 instruction will begin on the 370-acre campus of the



Above: Students on campus.

first American-style, residential university ever in Mexico, and perhaps in all of Central America.

The campus will include 800,000 square feet of residence halls; classroom and laboratory buildings; a student union with a full-service cafeteria, as well as spaces for meetings and social events; a library; a fitness/wellness center; athletic fields; and a botanical garden. It will be a true living and learning environment.

Property adjacent to the campus will be developed as a planned community, including residential, business, recreational, entertainment and green spaces. The A-State Querétaro campus will serve as a magnet to attract this development.

The curricula for the various programs of study will mirror those on the A-State campus in Jonesboro. Faculty will be vetted by the appropriate faculties and academic administrators at Jonesboro and care will be taken to guarantee that the quality of instruction and educational experience at Querétaro will be equal to that in Jonesboro. English will be the language of instruction. At the appropriate time, extension of Arkansas State's accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) will be sought for the Querétaro campus. The HLC has already been apprised of the plans to develop a campus at Querétaro. The program of study at the A-State Querétaro campus will also be sanctioned by the Mexican Ministry of Education. This means that graduates of the Querétaro campus will receive degrees that will be recognized in both Mexico and the United States.

So, why were Arkansas State University and the Arkansas State University System willing to enter into this innovative partnership in Mexico? The answer is easy: When the right thing to do and the smart thing to do dovetail perfectly, you know you are on to something with promise. Our thoughts along these lines include:

- Our partnership is a recognition of the reality of the maturing global economy in which the United States has long been a major actor and in which Mexico is rapidly playing an increasing role. It puts Arkansas State in the forefront of building stronger relationships between the two countries it will serve.
- This partnership will provide rich opportunities for faculty in both countries in all three major mission areas of instruction, scholarship and service.

- Developing international relations, especially within our hemisphere, is extremely important. Anything that builds a bridge between the United States and our neighboring Mexico is both good and smart because both countries will benefit.
- Most importantly, however, are the benefits the Querétaro campus will provide to students—both Mexican and American. We already know, from anecdotal evidence, that there are talented high school graduates in Mexico who desire access to the type of programs that will be offered in Querétaro, but for a variety of reasons are unable or hesitant to study outside of their country. There are Mexican nationals in the United States who might not be able to attend an American university, but can return to Mexico and study at A-State's campus in Querétaro. There will also be rich opportunities for students on the university's main campus in Jonesboro to study for a semester or a year in Querétaro.
- Of lesser, but still significant, importance is the extension of the reach of the ASU System and its flagship institution, the Arkansas State University campus in Jonesboro. A-State already has about five dozen international partnerships, including simple exchanges, dual degree programs, and the offering of degrees on international campuses. This establishment of an Arkansas State campus in another country is a major step in expanding the footprint of the institution.

So the dream of Dr. Edmundo Ortiz Romero is fast becoming a reality. Applications from students who will have the distinction of comprising the inaugural class are being accepted. The first completed buildings will be ready in late January, with others scheduled for completion in April. To see the work in progress is breathtaking.

So while he has been busy shepherding this project, Dr. Ortiz has found time to work on a second Ph.D. This one will also be in industrial engineering, with a specialization in strategic planning in engineering and technology. His dissertation is entitled, "Creation of a Superior Institution as a Model of Regional Development." One wonders where he came up with that topic. **P**

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