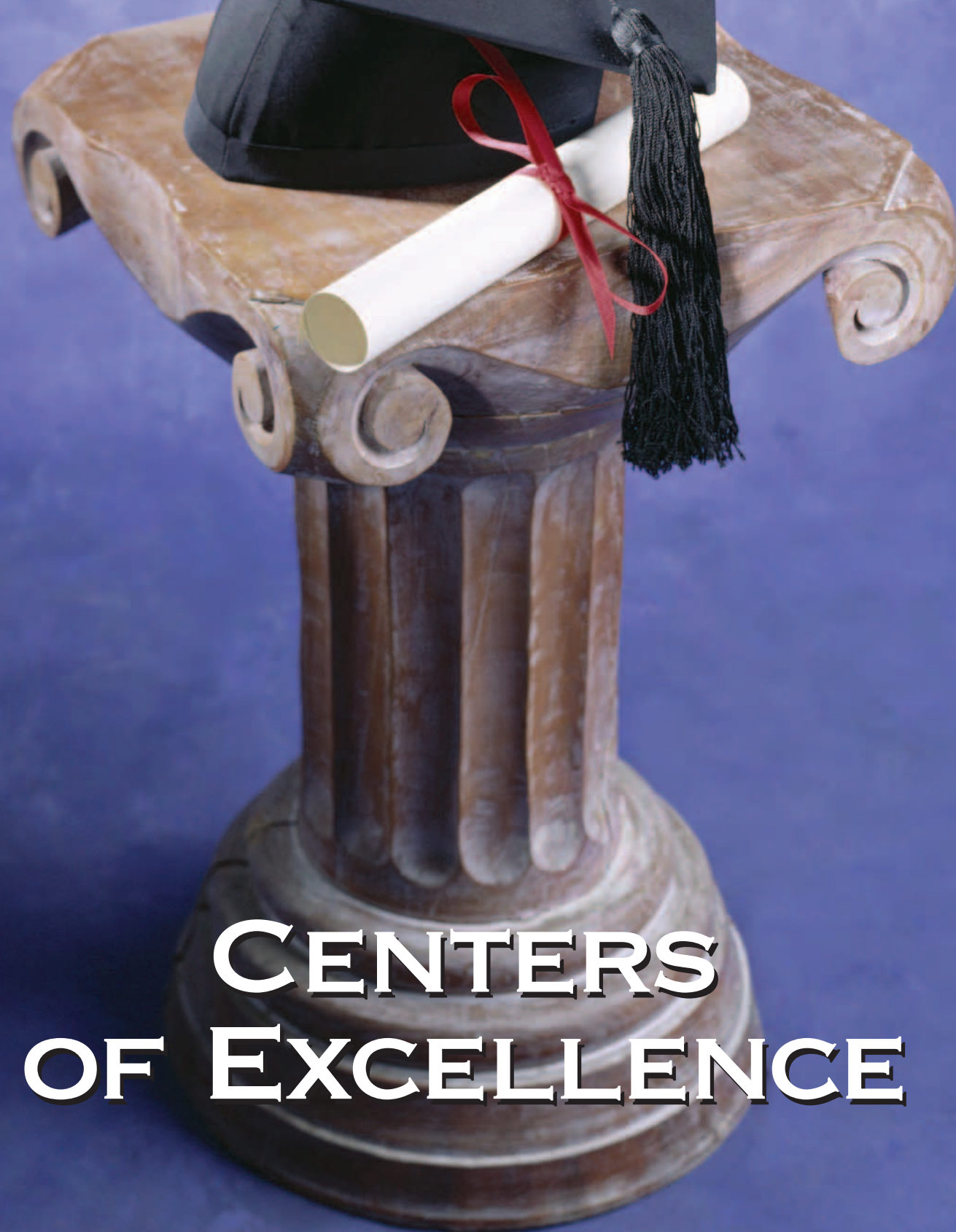


Tennessee's

BUSINESS



**CENTERS
OF EXCELLENCE**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In 1984, the Centers of Excellence for Tennessee public higher education were created. Their goal is to provide service to Tennesseans by expanding the state's research base, as well as enhancing the stature of Tennessee's public universities. This issue of Tennessee's Business highlights seven such centers.

—Horace E. Johns, Editor

The Centers of Excellence Program is a particularly innovative and productive investment in Tennessee's public universities. The 12 Board of Regents and University of Tennessee campuses house the 26 centers.

The Centers of Excellence directly benefit Tennessee in multiple ways. They:

- enrich learning opportunities for all students;
- offer research opportunities for graduate students;
- produce critical research;
- yield professional publications and presentations; and
- generate external funding from government, foundation, and industry sources.

The annual state appropriation for the Centers of Excellence provides “seed money” to help universities attract additional outside funds. Universities must provide a \$1 match for every \$2 the state provides. In addition, the Centers of Excellence attract external support. Tennessee's centers generated an estimated annual average of \$89,411,000 in external funds between 1995 and 2000. Based on the fiscal year 2003 state appropriation of \$18,707,600, that represents an annual return on investment of \$4.78 for every state dollar.

The rich diversity among and within the Centers of Excellence reflects the abundance and breadth of scholarly talent in the state. Every center incorporates multiple programs that include academic, pure or applied research, public service, and/or performance opportunities. Each center has an overall focus. Highlights of the centers' emphases include:

- a center that is developing improved pediatric drug therapies;
- three centers that train early childhood workers or provide resources for Tennessee's K-12 math and science teachers;
- seven centers that address technical and engineering needs of industry;
- six centers concerned with healthcare for humans or livestock;
- one that predicts earthquakes in the New Madrid Seismic Zone; and
- still others that focus on the preservation of Tennessee and Appalachian history.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) lists all university Centers of Excellence at <http://www.state.tn.us/thec/ACADEMICS/Centers/Excellence.html>.

Governor Lamar Alexander proposed funding for this program in 1984. Each state-supported university then developed proposals for campus Centers of Excellence. These initial proposals received competitive scrutiny and campus visits by national experts. All the centers build on campus strengths and must use their state funding to enhance, rather than supplant, existing programs. Every Center of Excellence has achieved excellence at the regional or national level.

High standards and continuous scrutiny ensure the continued success of the centers. Every center submits annual revenue and expenditure information and prepares comprehensive annual reports of past accomplishments and future goals. THEC must reauthorize each center every five years.

The University Centers of Excellence Program exemplifies the importance of state investment in higher education.

—Ellen Weed, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs,
Tennessee Board of Regents

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