

May 04, 2010

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Recommended Citation

St. Martin, Greg, "2010-05-04: President leads tour of Northeastern's coastal research gem" (2010). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 581.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001824>

President leads tour of Northeastern's coastal research gem



President Joseph E. Aoun led a tour of Northeastern's Marine Science Center in Nahant. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill

May 4, 2010

Northeastern University President Joseph E. Aoun welcomed leaders from the public and private sectors to the **Marine Science Center** in Nahant on May 3, providing a tour of the facility that highlighted the groundbreaking research being done off the coastal shores of Massachusetts.

Visiting the facility were state Attorney General Martha Coakley, Senate President Therese Murray, State Rep. Ann-Margaret Ferrente of Gloucester, and Roger Berkowitz, president and CEO of Legal Sea Foods. A senior aide from U.S. Sen. John Kerry's

office also attended.

Geoffrey Trussell, director of the Marine Science Center, told visitors the facility is focused on research that yields effective solutions to global challenges in areas such as health, sustainability and security.

"We are focused on being a near-shore, coastal marine research laboratory, because we think that those issues are most germane to the economy and the stability of the region," Trussell said.

Neurobiologist Joseph Ayers described the vast research he and his team are involved with in the area of robotics. Ayers has developed the robotic lobster and lamprey, which have multiple potential applications including underwater mine detection. He is also working on a project involving robotic bees that can pollinate crops, and developing a non-polluting mariculture system to cultivate food fish in the ocean.

Meanwhile, Purnima Ratilal, assistant professor in the Department of Computer and Electrical Engineering, described her innovative research that uses Ocean Acoustic Waveguide Remote Sensing technology to detect and capture images of shoals of fish — information that is not only critical to marine researchers but also highly useful to fishermen. The technology is capable of mapping thousands of square kilometers of ocean in a matter of seconds, and it can show how these shoals of fish form and how they move.

President Aoun said this work underscores a key research mission at Northeastern — to pursue use-inspired research that meets societal needs. He also touted not only the research at the facility but also the educational outreach and research opportunities it provides for K-12 students and for students enrolled in the University's innovative marine science program.

"What we do is impact society," Aoun said.

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