

experts said the park faces an uphill struggle if the name needs to change.

"At least there is a certain level of awareness about Hard Rock Park out there," said Jim Futrell, historian for the National Amusement Park Historical Association. "So if they all of a sudden change their name, they're going to have to start from ground zero."

Representatives of FPI MB Entertainment, the company that bought the \$400 million park out of bankruptcy in February for \$25 million, say they are confident their marketing plan will yield results. And many experts said the park still

got a much better cash position now."

The park opened last April to much fanfare, leasing the Hard Rock brand for \$2.5 million a year. It closed in bankruptcy in September, having failed to attract the 30,000 people per day it said it would, and its previous owners said a lack of marketing dollars contributed to the downfall.

FPI MB Entertainment says it will open the park by Memorial Day, but it must first settle discussions with Hard Rock International on whether the brand can be kept. The company has agreed to destroy branded merchandise — \$5 million worth

soon as possible. Meanwhile, the park has been working with other local businesses to coordinate marketing and attract tourists to the park who would come to Myrtle Beach anyway.

John Stine, director of sales and marketing for the park, said free or discounted tickets could be offered as a promotion along with room reservations.

The uncertainty about the name means the park has yet to roll out a marketing campaign of its own, but Stine said it already was working on where to place advertisements and will be ready to do so shortly after a decision on the name is reached.

help erase some of the negative publicity the park received during the bankruptcy, some said. The success of a new name will depend on the park's marketing efforts.

"Advertising, of course, is very important, and word of mouth is particular," said John Gerner, the managing director of Leisure Business Advisors, a consulting firm. "That begins with building credibility and comfort with the local population, which the previous operation really didn't work hard to do. This group really has to reach out to the community."

Brad Dean, the president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, said the

ing on the main thoroughfare, into and out of the destination," Dean said. "Most visitors arriving to the Grand Strand will drive by the park one or more times, and that will certainly give them an opportunity to attract attention."

But Dennis Speigel, the president of International Theme Park Services, another consulting firm, said the location is a drawback. It's too far away from the beach, where most of the tourists spend their time. And two months does not leave much time to promote the park.

"They've got to hit the grand slam home run, and they're two months away from open-

also declined to say how big their marketing budget was and to discuss the pros and cons of keeping the Hard Rock brand.

Baker had said the park would add a handful of children's rides to increase the park's family appeal and reduce the ticket price, which was \$50, to between \$35 and \$40. He declined to add any more details Thursday.

"We've listened to some of the complaints from last season — there was not enough to do or it wasn't quite family-friendly enough, a little bit too Hard Rocky," Baker said. "When you take a look at what we're doing, we're trying to focus on something for everyone."

MIDLANDS REPORT

Authority plans business center

BY JEFF WILKINSON
The State

COLUMBIA — The S.C. Research Authority is planning to build a \$4.5 million high-tech business incubator in downtown Columbia.

The authority is negotiating with Columbia landowner William Gregg for a 73,000-square-foot brick warehouse at 1000 Catawba St. across Assembly Street from USC's Swearingen Engineering Center. The building is notable for the "Cockaboose" railroad car that has been for sale in front.

The Innovation Center, as it is to be called, will be the third the authority will construct in the state by 2010, CEO Bill Mahoney said.

The others are in Charles-

ton, aligned with the Medical University of South Carolina, and in Clemson. The Columbia facility will be aligned with USC. The centers, mandated by the General Assembly in 2005, are intended to help budding companies leverage research being done at the state's institutions.

The center will be larger than other incubators in the Midlands and be the last step for high-tech start-ups before they move to their own facilities. "Many of these companies are now in smaller incubators, garages or the corners of other businesses," Mahoney said.

SCRA was created in 1983 by the General Assembly with \$500,000. It has since become a global, independent nonprofit juggernaut

whose charge is to help South Carolina grow their own high-tech, knowledge-based companies.

It provides grants and capital for new high-tech businesses, then makes money for other projects, in part, through stock ownership when those companies become successful. "We don't take a dime of taxpayer money," Mahoney said.

About half of the business for the new products, such as hydrogen fuel cells being developed at USC, is with the federal government, particularly the military.

So far, SCRA has helped launch 130 start-ups, with only two failures, Mahoney said. "We want companies to come here, grow here and stay here," he said.

SCRA vice president John Gregg said a purchase of the Catawba Street facility is being negotiated, but he is confident a deal can be struck.

"There is still some due diligence to be done," he said. "But we hope to start renovations by July or August."

The building has 8,000 square feet of offices and 65,000 square feet of warehouse. It could house 10 to 15 companies, Gregg said.

The centers will charge new businesses about 50 percent to 60 percent of market rate for space.

Mahoney said the project will move ahead despite the economy. "We have a debt-free balance sheet," he said. "Banks are competing (to offer a loan for the project), and we have a list of tenants."

Local Stocks

NAME	TICKER	CLOSE	DIV	P/E	CHG	%CHG	YTD %CHG
AVX Corp	AVX	9.00	0.16	11	-10	-1.1%	+13.4%
AirTran Holdings	AAI	3.60	...	dd	-23	-6.0%	-18.9%
Alcoa Inc	AA	6.54	0.12m	dd	+14	+2.2%	-41.9%
BB&T Corp	BBT	17.35	1.88	6	-19	-1.1%	-36.8%
Bank of America	BAC	6.19	0.04m	11	-74	-10.7%	-56.0%
Bk of SC Corp	BKSC	10.50	0.64	14	-16.0%
Beazer Homes USA	BZH	.75	...	dd	-26	-25.7%	-52.5%
Blackbaud Inc	BLKB	10.02	0.40	15	-47	-4.5%	-25.8%
Centex Corp	CTX	7.34	...	dd	-49	-6.3%	-31.0%
Cummins Inc	CMI	23.48	0.70	6	-77	-3.2%	-12.2%
DR Horton Inc	DHI	8.37	0.15	dd	-50	-5.6%	+18.4%
DuPont	DD	20.66	1.64	9	-85	-4.0%	-18.3%
Duke Energy	DUK	14.22	0.92	13	+05	+0.4%	-5.3%
Fst Fin Hldg	FFCH	7.88	0.20m	6	+51	+6.9%	-61.1%
Force Protection Inc	FRPT	5.31	...	8	-24	-4.3%	-11.2%
Google Inc	GOOG	330.16	...	25	+22	+0.1%	+7.3%
Hill-Rom Hldgs	HRC	9.72	0.41	9	+10	+1.0%	-40.9%
Home Depot	HD	22.16	0.90	17	-28	-1.2%	-3.7%
Lowe's Cos	LOW	17.03	0.34	11	-58	-3.3%	-20.9%
MeadWestvaco Corp	MWV	11.25	0.92	21	-27	-2.3%	+0.5%
Nucor Corp	NUE	37.47	1.40	6	-61	-1.6%	-18.9%
Progress Energy	PGN	35.32	2.48	11	+07	+0.2%	-11.4%
Prudential FncI	PRU	16.89	0.58m	dd	-207	-11.0%	-44.8%
Ryland Group	RYL	14.59	0.12	dd	-146	-9.1%	-17.4%
SCANA Corp	SCG	30.09	1.88f	10	+10	+0.3%	-15.5%
SCBT Financial	SCBT	21.67	0.68	14	-102	-4.5%	-37.2%
ScanSource Inc	SCSC	18.38	...	9	-59	-3.1%	-4.6%
Sonoco Prods	SON	20.64	1.08	13	-53	-2.5%	-10.9%
South Financial Grp	TSEF	.79	0.04	dd	-29	-26.9%	-81.7%
Southcoast FncI	SOCB	5.00	...	cc	-39	-7.2%	+19.6%
Spectra Energy	SE	14.03	1.00	8	-07	-0.5%	-10.9%
Synovus FncI	SNV	3.09	0.04m	dd	+11	+3.7%	-62.8%
Tidelands Bancshares	TDBK	3.15	...	dd	-20.1%
WalMart Strs	WMT	49.59	1.09f	15	-36	-0.7%	-11.5%
Wells Fargo & Co	WFC	13.99	1.36	19	-143	-9.3%	-52.5%