Site preparation begins at USL survival center

Site preparation has been completed and construction will soon begin on the nation’s first comprehensive marine survival training facility — the USL Marine Survival Training Center at the Lafayette Regional Airport.

The facility is located at a 60-acre lake at the Lafayette Regional Airport and will be used for training personnel for launching and navigating enclosed lifeboat capsules found on all manned movable offshore drilling units (MODUs).

The Lafayette engineering firm of Domingue, Szabo & Associates is consulting engineer on the training center.

“Phase one of the project, excavation and embankment and bulkhead construction, will be put out for bid soon,” says Michael Bergeron, project engineer with Domingue, Szabo. “Subsequent phases will include construction of roadways, parking lots, utilities and classroom facilities.”

Phase one of the center, the capsule launching facility, is scheduled for completion in 1989. The facility is being developed by USL and funded by 27 oil industry firms.

The U.S. Coast Guard has mandated that designated personnel on MODUs are trained to launch and navigate the survival capsules. For this reason, USL and participating oil industry companies formed a steering committee to create this facility which will be available to all maritime oil industry personnel.

Because this is the only facility of its kind in the nation, Lafayette will reap economic benefits.

“After the initial opening, the facility could easily bring $1 million per year into Lafayette through tuition and tourism dollars,” said Dr. Ray Authement, president of USL.

The lake is part of the “borrow pit” for sand used to build the new airport runway. It is 90 feet deep and contains the highest quality of water in South Louisiana. There is controlled access and use of the lake; and, the water depth is controlled by regulating the lake’s overflow into an adjacent bayou.

“We have gotten a great deal of cooperation from the Airport Commission, as well as the parish, city and local businesses,” said Channa Grove, director of the USL Petroleum Training Service.

Area hospitals and ambulance service have volunteered to help outfit a first aid room at the center.

A James O’Grady Memorial Fund has been established at the center in honor of O’Grady, who lost his life in a diving accident.

“The facility memorial fund is a living memory to James O’Grady as the facility is dedicated to the safety of people working around water,” said Grove.