

## Digital media will soon come alive in the Lang Tannery building

BY ROSE SIMONE, RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER — A century ago, it was a thriving hub of leather exports for the British Empire.

Now the main Lang Tannery building on Charles Street is coming back to life with workers again, as digital media centre businesses move into the space.

On Wednesday, politicians and high-tech company officials got a “sneak preview” of the transformation that is rapidly taking place inside the main tannery building as Toronto developer Cadan Inc. continues the \$30 million redevelopment of the tannery complex that has been underway for three years now.

The Hub, the name given to the Communitech Digital Media and Mobile Accelerator centre, will be moving into 30,000 square feet of the building in July.

It will house early stage companies developing new digital media products. Established local technology companies such as Christie Digital, Research In Motion and Agfa Healthcare will also use the space to showcase their technology and collaborate with talented people in those early stage companies.

Meanwhile, Desire2learn, an e-learning software company in Kitchener, will be moving into the third and fourth floors of the building in August. John Baker, the founder and chief executive of Desire2learn, said the staff is excited.

“We were looking for a great space that would allow us to attract top talent, have room for expansion and will inspire creativity,” Baker said.

One wing of the complex is already occupied by about 20 different businesses, including high-tech companies, a child care centre, a health care clinic and a pharmacy.

Now, much of the interior reconstruction in the main building is also complete, with the old characteristics of stone and brick being blended with a modern-day open design that allows for a great deal of natural light and views into the courtyards.

The digital media hub will also include high-tech features such as a virtual reality projection room to allow companies to try out digital modelling of new products, as well as a video conferencing room and state-of-the-art presentation screen.

Iain Klugman, chief executive of Communitech, a Waterloo Region technology association, said the transformation of the tannery space has been exciting to watch. It will be “a major piece of the downtown core,” Klugman said.

Phil Deck, executive chair of MKS Inc. a Waterloo-based software company, said even though his company won’t be moving into the building, the stimulation of small technology companies is important to the entire technology sector.

“You have to have all sizes of companies to create an ecosystem for the technology economy. It allows for labour mobility and brings a lot of skills and innovation,” Deck said.

John Milloy, Ontario Minister of Research and Innovation and Kitchener Centre MPP, said the Ontario government has invested about \$26 million in the new digital media centre.

He also used the opportunity to say that new harmonized sales tax will lower the cost of doing business in Ontario, thus creating a more competitive economy and more jobs. “Thousands and thousands of jobs will come from this hub here,” Milloy said, adding that the high-tech jobs will create many spinoff jobs.

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Mathew McCarthy/Record staff  
Phil Deck, MKS chair (left) and John Baker,  
Desire2Learn CEO, toured the Communitech Hub at  
the Tannery Building Wednesday.