
High tech “creative sandbox” to get \$26 million boost

BY LUISA D'AMATO, RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER — The province will invest more than \$26 million in a centre that will be a type of clubhouse for companies, entrepreneurs and researchers involved in digital media to share ideas and help start new ventures.

It's to be a “creative sandbox for technology makers and users,” said John Milloy, Minister of Research and Innovation and also Kitchener Centre's MPP.

High-tech leaders from around Waterloo Region applauded when Milloy made the announcement on Friday. They were at a news conference in the Lang Tannery building in downtown Kitchener, where it is expected the centre will be.

Milloy said the world economy is changing, and Ontario has to be ready.

“Globally, the digital media market by 2012 will be worth \$2.2 trillion,” he said. “Quite frankly, there's a global competition on who's going to be the leader.

“We have to position ourselves for the future. We have to position ourselves to be leaders.”

The term “digital media” can mean everything from special effects in movies, to the ability to send sophisticated images of brain scans to a doctor's hand-held device.

Another example: If you were thinking of buying a laptop computer, the company might use digital media technology to send a message to your cellphone, letting you know that the laptop you're interested in just went on sale, and there's a store just around the corner from you, with that model in stock.

Iain Klugman, president and CEO of Communitech, an organization that promotes local technology companies and is organizing this venture, said it will cost \$107 million to start the centre.

In addition to the provincial amount, which will be spread over the next five years, the federal government gave \$5.4 million and the City of Kitchener, \$500,000. The rest will come from private companies, either in cash or in-kind donations such as equipment and software.

What the centre will do, most of all, is bring together some of the early-stage companies with the larger, more established ones. There will be mentoring, brainstorming and sharing of technology and equipment.

“This will absolutely put Waterloo Region on the map as being a major digital media centre in North America,” said Klugman.

Even though the centre isn't expected to start operating until next spring, there have already been inquiries from Scotland and across the United States and Canada, he said.

Milloy, asked how the province can find the money for this when it is facing a \$24.7-billion deficit, said, “This is about the future, and this is about jobs.”

He said the new centre would boost the economy by assisting new ventures and producing jobs, not only in the high-technology area but also in spinoff effects.

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