

## Tannery becoming a living community

BY MELINDA DALTON, RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER — In a room adorned with plush, pint-sized playthings, Sasha Carreiro's dream is blooming.

She purposely planted it in a place that will soon be a hot bed for dreaming and innovation, an area long ready for its creative spark.

Carreiro is the proud owner of Little Tot Spot, a combination drop-in play centre for toddlers and social centre for parents, embedded in the historic halls of the Tannery building.

"I have a thing for old buildings and old spaces," she said, surrounded by vibrant plush blocks imported from Europe and sleek light fixtures. "When the Tannery started doing its redevelopment, I walked through the space and it looked nothing like this. It was just bare bones. But I could just see it."

The Tannery District, as it's been labelled by its Toronto-based owner Cadan Inc., is just beginning to buzz the way the developer envisioned when they bought it two years ago.

About 100 people are now working in the building at about different 20 businesses. About half of those were already leasing space in the building before the \$30 million redevelopment started, but some have relocated to other spaces in the Tannery.

By summer, Cadan expects around 500 people will be working in the former factory, according to Lana Sherman, the company's executive director.

The old space will be firmly anchored in the new — the majority of already signed tenants are high tech firms, including Communitech's digital media hub and Desire2Learn. But, as the Little Tot Spot shows, the building will be about more than just office space, Sherman said.

"We're trying to create a community because all of the people that are in there are unique in some way," she said. "The space is so big, it can really accommodate it and because there are so many different creative people in the same space together, it creates a really nice, positive energy."

Another recent addition to the Tannery community is already firmly rooted in the city's core.

The Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre is inching closer to claiming its permanent home at the building's southeast corner. After nearly a decade at the corner of Duke and Frederick streets, the centre moved into its brand new, custom designed space in February.

The centre is operating amid continuing construction for now. Their former home was slated to be demolished to make way for the new consolidated courthouse and they had to move out before their new space was completed.

They're compensating by running some programming out of off-site space until their first floor, which will be used primarily for meeting space for their community development work, is complete. Even with the unfinished edges of a work in progress, the centre already has the sleek shine of a modern health care facility.

"Our clients and our staff are big boosters of the downtown area and we're supporting its redevelopment," said Eric Goldberg, the centre's executive director. "This building was a perfect representation of that."

When it's completed in April, the space will be about double that which the centre was working with in its previous location. Goldberg said that will allow the centre to grow and expand its services for clients, primarily made of groups who encounter barriers in accessing health care including low-income families, Aboriginal people, new Canadians and the homeless.

The location of the centre, only a block away from the new University of Waterloo schools of pharmacy and medicine, has opened up new opportunities, he said. The centre is also partnering with neighbours even closer to home, namely Pharmasave, positioned around the corner in the same factory space.

The pharmacy opened in October 2009 and owner Ehab Abdel-Sayed said he's seen a steady increase in traffic since more people started filling the Tannery.

"It seems that it's going fast and I believe that it will be a great location," he said. "It's a very nice building — a very historical building. I think the city is very interested in this area of downtown."

Cadan has already leased more than half of the 330,000 square foot factory. They're readying the space now for a pizzeria and high-end coffee shop, both expected to be open by summer. Sherman said the next step will be to attract more retail and services, like a grocery store and a dry cleaner, to the Tannery.

"The people that are in these spaces are not there from nine to five," she said. "This is a very vibrant, 24/7 kind of building ... We want to make sure the services that are there serve the people that are spending so much time there so they're happy and they don't have to stress about kids, laundry or other things."

[mdalton@therecord.com](mailto:mdalton@therecord.com)



Record staff/Record staff

The old Tannery Building at the corner of Charles and Francis Street is rapidly transforming into a very modern community hub.