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Penticton Western News

Funding fuels new innovation



Peter Haubrich, founder and president of the Okanagan Research and Innovation Centre, thanks MP Stockwell Day for the \$170,000 the federal government invested in their Penticton facility.

Steve Kidd/Western News

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By [Steve Kidd - Penticton Western News](#)

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Getting your technology-based business up and running in the South Okanagan is about to get a little easier.

The Okanagan's own technology incubator, the Okanagan Research and Innovation Centre, is getting ready to expand once again, with plans to open their third campus in Penticton next month.

One of the problems with starting a technology-

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based business is getting to the stage where you have something to bring to the market, or to show to investors or bankers to prove your idea is viable. Incubators like ORIC help with the process, allowing them access not only the space necessary but connection to business and technical expertise.

The not-for-profit society got started in 2005 establishing their base of operations at the Dominion Radio Astronomical Observatory at White Lake, adding a second campus in downtown Kelowna last year. Earlier this year, they announced plans for their third operation, to be located in the new centre of excellence at Okanagan College's Penticton campus and due to open in March 2011. Now, with an investment of \$170,000 from the federal government's Community Adjustment Fund, they'll be opening their third centre, which will focus on clean energy technologies and wireless startups.

"We're growing with unbelievable speed and we have a lot of companies that are interested in working with us," said Peter Haubrich, founder and president of ORIC. He said they're just finalizing lease arrangements and will announce the new location soon.

"Maybe we'll keep that location if we have enough demand. We'll have the college in 2011 and downtown running in parallel; that's a possibility."

Stockwell Day, MP for Okanagan Coquihalla, said the federal government is looking for opportunities to invest in communities.

"One of the innovative suggestions that has come up has been this great group here, the Okanagan Research and Innovation Centre," he said. "We need to identify possibilities where high-tech jobs, clean industry can get moving and provide for long-term economic benefits moving into the future."

Joseph Pierre, the Penticton Indian Band's councillor responsible for education and technology, said the new incubator will benefit the band as well as the City of Penticton. He thinks it will provide a valuable bridge for the PIB's own economic development

“They kind of do the incubator thing on the reserve right now, but they can only go so far with what they have, especially with advanced technologies,” he said. “So having the two resources, with the incubator and our development corporation, band members will be able to create their own jobs and their own high tech businesses.”


“It’s done with the recognition that in many cases these business can flourish if they can get a good start,” said Day. “This project will help create jobs and maintain employment in the Okanagan Valley.”

Haubrich said that investment in incubators has a high return for the community, amounting to an economic return of \$30 for every dollar spent.

“In ORIC’s short life, we’ve supported the creation of 45 high-paying jobs and we expect more to come in the future,” he said. “With this funding we are able to strengthen and diversify the South Okanagan by stimulating and attracting companies in wireless and clean energy technologies.”

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