



Innovation Center continues to make strong impact on local economy

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by ANDREA GIBSON

Ohio University business incubator generated \$16.9 million in labor income in 2008

ATHENS, Ohio (June 26, 2009) — The silver lining in today's troubled economy? More people aren't waiting for jobs to come to them — they're starting their own businesses.

That's true in Athens County, Ohio, where entrepreneurs in Ohio University's [Innovation Center](#) continued to make a strong impact on the local economy. Three start-up firms in the small business incubator contributed 378 jobs, \$16.9 million in labor income and an estimated \$1.5 million in local tax revenues in 2008, a new study finds. Those figures have held steady for the past year.

"In this economy, people are becoming more innovative and entrepreneurial — they're creating jobs rather than seeking them. The university and the community are working hard to offer them support," said Jennifer Simon, who worked on economic development initiatives for Athens County and Appalachian Ohio before joining Ohio University as the new director of the Innovation Center this spring.

In 2008, the Innovation Center was home to three companies: Diagnostic Hybrids, Inc., which develops, manufactures and markets cellular and molecular diagnostic kits for detecting a wide range of medical conditions; EZ Asphalt, which has developed a device that tests the durability of road pavements; and Third Sun Solar & Wind Power, which installs and custom designs renewable energy systems for residential, commercial and non-profit customers. The first two companies stemmed from Ohio University faculty research.

The amount of labor income contributed directly or indirectly by Innovation Center firms rose over the past year, from \$15.2 million in 2007 to \$16.9 million in 2008, according to a study conducted by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs. These businesses also directly or indirectly generated an estimated 378 jobs and \$1.5 million in state and local tax revenues. Those figures are comparable to the center's 2007 economic impact statement.

The Innovation Center not only continues to have a solid economic impact in Athens County, Simon said, but is poised for additional growth in 2009. The business incubator has welcomed three new clients this year.

Got Game is a technology firm that develops and markets athletic recruiting software for coaches and sports teams. Ohio University's strong sports administration program attracted the company to Athens, Simon said, and the firm expects to provide new internship opportunities for the program's students.

Ohio Consulting is a new company targeting market opportunities for innovations in civil and transportation engineering. The company provides services for communities and new product development and marketing for engineering technologies. The company currently is exploring research and development for a transportation enhancement technology, she said.

Sunpower, Inc., the world leader in free-piston Stirling engines, coolers and linear compressors, has operated in Athens for 35 years. The company now will become an Innovation Center client to expand its business operations. It expects to add 10 jobs at the



Innovation Center

photo by: Rick Fatica

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Additional information:

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Contacts: Jennifer Simon, (740) 593-1803, simonj@ohio.edu;
Director of Research Communications Andrea Gibson, (740) 597-2166, gibsona@ohio.edu.

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incubator building, Simon said.

These and other area start-up firms are supported by a strong university and local entrepreneurial support network, Simon said. Ohio University has a solid focus on bioscience and alternative energy research and a [Technology Transfer Office](#) that works to identify and move inventions from the lab to the marketplace. A new grant from the Ohio Department of Development has allowed the Innovation Center to hire its first Executive-in-Residence, who will focus on providing one-on-one support to the incubator clients. The Athens County Economic Development Council, a city, county and university partnership, has launched the initiative [businessremixed.com](#) to encourage entrepreneurship here.

Though finding financial support can be a struggle for new entrepreneurs, southeast Ohio now has solid footing in this area, Simon said. TechGROWTH Ohio, launched from a state of Ohio Third Frontier Initiative, offers business support for entrepreneurs in the 19-country region. Athens is also home to two venture capital firms, Adena Ventures and Athenian Venture Partners.

"With a strong business plan and a management team, there's money to be had here," Simon said.

In addition to incubating clients that have recently joined the Innovation Center, Simon plans to secure a new tenant for the wet lab spaces vacated by Diagnostic Hybrids, Inc., which now has graduated from the incubator and is housed at the former McBee manufacturing building on East State Street in Athens. A recent USDA survey showed the need for a local research and technology park to help entrepreneurs advance their business operations, and Simon hopes to gain support for the concept in the next few years.

The Innovation Center is part of the Vice President for Research unit at Ohio University.

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research.news@ohiou.edu - (740) 597-2166