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Laurier Brantford's community innovation hub lauded by city officials

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News

Hub a think tank for entrepreneurs and social innovators

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With its bright, spacious and colourful interior, Brantford's newly-opened community innovation hub is ready to inspire people to

think outside the box.

The Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at Wilfrid Laurier University hosted the grand opening of the community hub at 67 Darling St. on Tuesday morning.

With large windows overlooking Victoria Square, the newly-renovated building that once housed a grocery store and then a bank will serve as a meeting place of the minds.

“This is a centre that brings together some of the best aspects of Laurier,” said Joanne Benham-Rennick, executive director of the Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation at Laurier.

“Students and community members have access to mentors, advisers, tools and technology that can support their learning.”

The collaborative space will be used by students, staff, faculty, alumni and the community to facilitate social innovation and entrepreneurship activities. The Schlegel Centre’s programs include LaunchPad, Neighbourhood Changemakers and Start@SIVC, all of which are run from the community hub.

“These types of work-integrated learning programs help people develop the skills they need to gain meaningful employment or start their own enterprises,” Benham-Rennick said. “The community innovation hub provides a space to take a trial-and-error approach in a low-risk environment.”

Renovation of the facility was made possible by a \$125,000 donation from Wilfrid Laurier University’s Alumni Association. The hub includes Smart boards, isolation pods and vivid green and orange furniture.

“Here at Laurier we strive to inspire lives through leadership and purpose and this new community innovation hub is integral in bringing that goal to life here in Brantford,” said Brian Rosborough, senior executive officer of the Brantford campus.

“It’s a wonderful continuation of the rich tradition of innovation and socially-minded projects that this campus is known for.”

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Mayor Chris Friel lauded Laurier for embracing the community through education and innovation.

“Innovation is really a product of life and community and you have to have the right kind of environment to create innovation,” Friel said. “You have to have the right kind of community and support and resources and that is what this partnership over the years has meant to our community.

“We watch and learn and hope to be involved in the innovation that we see from Laurier Brantford. We look forward to many, many more years of this wonderful partnership and some incredible innovation. These young minds in this very space are probably going to change the world and we will probably be sitting there in our rockers and thinking, ‘I was there.’”

Since introducing LaunchPad at the Brantford campus in 2015, the program has attracted 48 participants. Some — like Matt Watkinson, who developed Joycult fingerboard wheels, and Crossing All Bridges’ Shredding Barriers venture — have found great success.

Since it began last spring, the Neighbourhood Changemaker workshop series has empowered more than 30 community members to solve existing challenges within their region with new initiatives.