UNH Partners with Idea Greenhouse to Provide Creative Space for Entrepreneurs

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DURHAM, N.H. – The Office for Research Partnerships and Commercialization (ORPC) at the University of New Hampshire is taking a unique approach to providing creative space for budding university entrepreneurs, a move that could generate new jobs in the region.

Marc Sedam, who recently took over the university’s ORPC, announced a partnership with the Idea Greenhouse, a combined co-working space, event center and collaborative creative environment to be located in downtown Durham. Sedam’s goal is to make informal creative space available for anyone associated with UNH technology. In making the announcement he noted a recent statistic from the New Hampshire Innovation Commercialization Center (NH-ICC) presentation: in all but three of the last 35 years a majority of new job creation came from new companies.

“This partnership was one of my first priorities when I joined the university,” Sedam said. “Starting a company is a huge commitment in terms of time, effort, and energy. A lot of the time people just are not ready. They need to have the time and the space ‘off the books’ to work out an idea.” Sedam described the space on Jenkins Court as “a creative commons” where researchers don’t have to worry about using official university time and resources before knowing whether an idea will succeed.

Sedam said the ORPC will cover the cost of rent and utilities for one year for its space at the Idea Greenhouse. Anyone interested in using the space will work with Sedam, who said the only criteria is that any work has to be associated with UNH technology and should have potential for commercialization.

“This is a modest way to begin creating an ecosystem of innovation in Durham,” said Sedam. “One of the issues on a university campus is when and how faculty and students can use university space for efforts not traditionally academic in nature. Our partnership with the Idea Greenhouse instantly overcomes this confusion by creating informal space for people to try out new ideas and be surrounded by other innovators. Their ideas might fail, and that’s OK. But we hope many will try, catch the entrepreneurial spirit, and be willing to crystallize their ideas into a workable plan, license UNH technology, and take the jump and start a new company. Ideally these companies move on through this budding ecosystem and grow up and out into space at the NH-ICC or elsewhere. If we can build a cluster of ideas, entrepreneurs, companies, and service providers, it will help attract necessary capital, jobs, and economic opportunities for both Durham and the Seacoast.”

For Idea Greenhouse founder Tom Elliott, UNH is the partner he needs to open a large permanent space to build a community of starters, creatives, and a collective entrepreneurial spirit. The “home” is a physical place that offers a mix of offerings, including office space, cube and desk space, “drop in” cafe-style workspace, rooms for meetings and events, and a hub to connect the community.

“Our partnership helps provide the Idea Greenhouse with much of the financial support we need to get off the ground, while at the same time adding an impressive group of innovators to interact with our other members,” Elliott said. “As a startup business itself, the Idea Greenhouse is honored to have UNH and its leaders validate our belief that entrepreneurs need a home and community to grow great ideas. And as a UNH alum and Durham resident, I’m thrilled to help our great university become an innovation engine and job creator in the Seacoast as well.”

Jan Nisbet, senior vice provost for research at UNH, called the partnership a win for both UNH and the Idea Greenhouse. “This is a great example of thinking outside the box. We want to promote the intellectual property of the UNH community as well as foster partnerships between UNH and the business communities in Durham, in New Hampshire, northern New England, the nation and the world. This is another opportunity for UNH to contribute to job creation in the state.”
The Idea Greenhouse is expected to open to tenants and the public in early 2011. The Idea Greenhouse is the Seacoast NH's center for entrepreneurs. A combined coworking space, event center, and collaborative creative community, the Idea Greenhouse connects the starters who make new ideas grow. Learn more at www.ideagreenhouse.biz.

The Office for Research Partnerships and Commercialization (ORPC) advocates for, manages, and promotes UNH's intellectual property; promotes partnerships between UNH and the business community; and manages UNH technologies available for licensing. The ORPC also hosts the NH Innovation Research Center. http://www.orpc.unh.edu/.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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