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Georgia Southern and Statesboro Partner for Future Economic Gains

June 10, 2014

This week Georgia Municipal Association's Magazine featured a front page article on all the innovation happening at the City Campus Downtown. We are happy to be a part of this publication which goes all to all municipalities in the state of Georgia. They interviewed a couple of our current incubator clients, both of whom are Georgia Southern graduates and students. Take a moment to see what they had to say.

Georgia Southern's partnership with the city of Statesboro has blossomed into a full-fledged business incubator

When the city of Statesboro partnered with Georgia Southern University to open a campus downtown, the idea was to boost economic development, give a stronger presence to the university and to bring more jobs to the area, explained Allen Muldrew, Statesboro's downtown director. That was nearly three years ago. Today the partnership has blossomed into a full-fledged business incubator that will soon occupy two buildings downtown featuring office space and a fabrication laboratory equipped with cutting edge technology and tools.

"The FabLab will be a place where just about any concept or product can be designed, built, manufactured and tested for potential markets which in turn will generate jobs and bring in new economic development to the city," said Dr. Dominique Halaby, director for Georgia Southern's Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development. "If someone can dream it, we can provide the resources and support to help entrepreneurs launch their products and potentially take them to market."

Muldrew added, "What we are hoping is that when a person or business moves out of the incubator they will stay in Statesboro and help create jobs."

Although build-out is underway for the office space and an architect has been selected for the FabLab, there is plenty of activity brewing in the incubator, said Halaby. "For example, in February we hosted a 'Three Day Start-Up' where 40 students were placed on teams to bring their ideas in front of a panel of experts to try out their business ideas and by Sunday were ready to pitch them to potential investors."

Jonathan Chambers, a student at Georgia Southern, and his team of seven garnered plenty of kudos during the event with their "Going Local" mobile app.

"The idea is for a user to log in to find the kind of local events and activities such as art, history or sports they may be interested in attending," Chambers said. "What sets us apart from our competition is visual appeal with our heavy use of photos."

The team went onto to compete and win the "Fast Pitch" competition in Savannah in March. Recently the team signed a one-year agreement with the incubator to give them the guidance and assistance

they will need to bring it all together and begin marketing the app. “Within a year we hope to have our app in three to five cities in the area,” said Chambers.

Brothers Marcus and Malcom Howard, both graduates of Georgia Southern, have been working with the incubator since January to launch a Kickstarter campaign for their gaming production company.

“The gaming industry market is just now really coming into its own and is expected to hit the \$100 billion mark by 2018,” said Marcus Howard. “We are very excited to be working with the incubator on bridging some gaps in our knowledge so we can build a solid business plan. We hope to stay in Statesboro with our company so we can involve students in co-ops and give back some of what we’ve gained from our experience.”

Funding for the expansion of the City Campus FabLab and Incubator was awarded to the University through a grant of nearly \$1.1 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and an \$800,000 financial commitment from the city of Statesboro. The combined funds will expand the University’s City Campus into two buildings on Main Street. Additionally, Statesboro has agreed to provide \$50,000 annually for three years to cover ongoing operational expenses.

The Statesboro FabLab is the first in Georgia and is based on a concept developed out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a way to bring low cost manufacturing to the public.

“Georgia Southern and the city of Statesboro both benefit from a student presence in downtown,” said Mayor Jan Moore. “Their presence is supportive to downtown merchants and encourages a healthy and ongoing relationship between Georgia Southern’s student body and Statesboro. The FabLab will serve as an incubator of business development, which will result in new jobs and economic growth for both the city and county. Innovation is the result of creative thinking which will be very beneficial as Statesboro positions itself for the future.”

Aside from technology, food service, beauty and medical supplies and business services are among the type of companies looking for help at the incubator. “We have 27 businesses on a waiting list for 20 slots in the FabLab and Incubator,” said Halaby. “Our goal is to build the list to 100 so we can pick the very best.”

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