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Downtown Kitchener digital media centre receives $5 million federal grant

KITCHENER – From pharmaceutical researchers studying virtual 3D models of molecules as they develop new drugs to the latest innovations in 3D animation on the big screen – in the very near future, these things and many more in the realm of digital media may be originating right in downtown Kitchener.

That's all thanks to a grant proposal, led by local digital media industry leaders Communitech and the University of Waterloo, which was endorsed with a $5.35 million grant today by the federal Centre of Excellence for Commercialization and Research Program.

The grant application, put forth in September 2008, originally requested $6 million in funding support for the development of the Kitchener convergence centre, and an additional $6 million for the Stratford Institute of the University of Waterloo, which has a digital media content focus.

The Stratford centre was also awarded $5.35 million today – for a total of $10.7 million in funding for the two connected area projects. Additional funds were also awarded to 3 other projects across the country.

The $65-million two-city project has already received funding commitment from industrial partners in the Waterloo region, academic institutions, Communitech, the Province of Ontario and the City of Stratford. The private sector contribution to the project includes $12 million for the Kitchener site.

Earlier this year, the City of Kitchener earmarked $500,000 from its economic development investment fund (EDIF) to be put toward specialized equipment and technical resources to operate a digital media hub in downtown Kitchener.

"This is another example of the economic development investment fund and our economic development strategy paying off significantly for our city," said Mayor Carl Zehr. :"We created the fund partly to support emerging technologies and clusters like digital media, so it is very exciting to see new and innovative projects continue to come to life because of those investments. This project will not only be a boost for Kitchener's downtown core, but there is so much potential for spin-off benefits and new jobs down the road. Right now, that's good news we all want to hear."

"We're really pleased to see that both the Kitchener and Stratford digital media hubs are receiving this kind of investment from the federal government," said Rod Regier, the city's executive director of economic development.

"In Kitchener, these funds will support an emerging, knowledge-based industry in which Kitchener already has an internationally competitive position and it will take the companies in our local digital media cluster and propel them to the next level as global players."

Additionally, said Regier, there are some very important synergies between

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the new digital media hub and the University of Waterloo's Downtown Kitchener Health Sciences campus because of the growing importance of visualization in fields including pharmacology, robotic surgery – and for medical education in general.

Kitchener's Digital Media Convergence Centre is expected to be a place for innovation where business people, researchers, students, artists and entrepreneurs can come together to generate new digital media products, applications and businesses.

Development of the digital media infrastructure is expected to fill an important gap in the community in terms of enabling small start-ups and research companies with creative and innovative ideas, access to the best technology being produced in Waterloo Region today.

When it is operational, the Kitchener digital media hub will also offer the latest visualization hardware and software, technical and business start-up services (i.e. mentors and venture capital services), and studio/office space for innovators in their start-up or pre-start-up phase.

The centre, which builds on a strong Kitchener and Waterloo Region legacy in digital media will be based in downtown Kitchener, and will house digital imaging, projection and studio technologies that are currently only available to large companies and institutions. It will also house researchers, technicians, start-up and existing digital media companies, industry support firms such as legal and finance, and common space to help people of a wide range of disciplines to network.

Together, the Kitchener Digital Media Convergence Centre and the similar Stratford Institute will be part of a network called the Corridor for Advancing Canadian Digital Media, which links Canada's digital media clusters from coast to coast – creating a digital convergence corridor and enabling collaboration between researchers, implementers and entrepreneurs.

Background:
Digital media is created by using visual images and video, as well as sound and user interaction software to create, communicate and use information from large data sources. Some examples include medical imaging, 3D cinema and animation, virtual prototyping in manufacturing and virtual reality environments for enhanced education.

Several local digital media companies are internationally competitive and have been growing in the global market including: Christie, formally the digital projection unit of Electrohome, Desire2Learn, Dalsa, Open Text and RIM.

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