

## HERMITAGE

# eCenter exec: Interest high already

Sharon-Herald – Monday, October 03, 2011

By Joe Pinchot, *Herald Staff Writer*



When Yvonne English signed on to be executive director of the eCenter@LindenPointe, she thought that having a tenant in the business incubator as early as January would be “amazing.”

In fact, marketing has not been her focus because officials still are waiting to get the keys to the under construction building, and have been working on setting entrance criteria, recruiting possible mentors for tenant business and other issues.

With the dedication for the center 2 weeks away, Ms. English has had three contacts from potential tenants, and said it’s not out of the realm of possibility that one of them could be moving in in November or December. She said she’s warning potential tenants it will take a while to get in place everything officials are shooting for.

“I consider us a start up for start ups,” said Ms. English, of Hermitage. “Our first customers will need to know that we’re evolving.” Ms. English was hired by the non-profit LindenPointe Development Corp. in the spring for what is currently a part-time job, and wrote the center’s business plan before then. She loves the types of challenges presented by the eCenter, which previously had been called a technology center. She’s worked with business incubators, start-up companies and entrepreneurs before.

“I’m an entrepreneur at heart, so I’ve been with a lot of businesses like that,” said Ms. English, who teaches at Grove City College and is a member of the college’s entrepreneurial advisory council. Despite her Grove City College connections, she will be responsible for bringing in other colleges, something she looks forward to. While many business incubators are tied to specific colleges, such as Gannon University to the Erie Technology Incubator and Pennsylvania State University to Innovation Park, the eCenter is open to any regional school.

“This is unique because it can tie to several colleges and universities,” said the graduate of Grove City High School and Grove City College. One of the obvious tie-ins is Butler County Community College, whose Mercer County campus is on the other side of the Linden- Pointe oval from the eCenter.

A feature of the eCenter that should attract BC3 students is the student suite, which will be open during business hours. Students will be able to use the wireless fidelity service, work on business ideas, meet business professionals and listen to speakers on business topics.

There are several other unique aspects of the eCenter, Ms. English said, from its status as the first certified “green” building in Mercer County - following standards set by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program - its building wide Wi-Fi access and testing laboratory to its large suites, tenant storage areas and locker rooms.

"I had somebody in from Alpha Labs in Pittsburgh and he said, 'I wish we had these,'" Ms. English said of the locker rooms, which will allow tenants to bike to and from work, run on the LindenPointe trails and shower at work.

The basic criteria for tenants are companies within the fields of science, technology, engineering and math that have been around for less than three years and have fewer than 20 employees. "It's going to be a case-by-case basis," Ms. English said. "We have to be flexible because we don't want to be empty."

The incubator also will offer an affiliation program where companies not located in the incubator can participate in services the incubator offers, for a fee.

Novocell Semiconductor, which has been in the neighboring Hermitage Training and Workforce Development Center since being displaced from the building now completely owned by BC3, will be an anchor tenant at the eCenter, meaning it will not graduate and be forced to leave. Anchor tenants are not uncommon in incubators, Ms. English said. Aside from assuring LDC income, Novocell will serve another purpose.

"It's also good to have an anchor tenant who can share its wisdom with the other tenants," said Ms. English, who owns Social Animal Media with her husband, Kyle, a company that helps small and mid-sized businesses with marketing and social media development. Ms. English is compiling a list of possible mentors to help incubator tenants learn how to run their companies.

A training and orientation program is being planned for mentors. "We have a lot of members of our community who know a lot of stuff," she said. It will be her job to attract them to the eCenter.

"Any incubator is not going to do well without community support," she said, noting that a program of activities in and around the eCenter will be set to get people to come into Linden-Pointe who might not normally have a reason to.

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