

HERMITAGE

A place to create 'economic magic' eCenter opened at LindenPointe

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Folks who attended the dedication for the eCenter@ LindenPointe, a business incubator and testing laboratory in Hermitage, file into the building for tours and refreshments.

Existing businesses need new businesses, said Dr. Craig Columbus, chairman of the Grove City College Entrepreneurship Department. New businesses inject a shot of adrenaline into the business community that can benefit older, established businesses, he said.

“When new business rubs shoulder with existing business, that’s when the economic magic happens,” he said. “That’s what Linden- Pointe is about.” Columbus delivered the keynote address Wednesday at the dedication for the eCenter at LindenPointe, the newly opened business incubator and testing laboratory in Hermitage.

Columbus, chairman of LindenPointe Development Corp., which runs the eCenter and its neighboring Hermitage Workforce Development and Training Center, frequently spoke of magic in his address, in explaining how ideas, disciplined business methods and passion create new businesses and jobs. The eCenter is an attempt to give people with ideas and passion a place to learn disciplined business methods, he said. Startup companies are “job engines” and could get the local economy running, he said.

Assistant City Manager Gary P. Gulla said the country’s economic development system “stinks” because it was created decades ago, at a time when businesses were growing and jobs were plentiful. The system shifts wealth and jobs instead of creating new ones, and pits communities against each other, he said.

“There’s a whole generation that doesn’t remember when this area was an economic machine,” Gulla said. “We have a tremendous asset with our youth. Let’s let them grow here.” Yes, Columbus said, times are tough economically, but business incubation is a positive response to the climate. “LindenPointe is about running toward our problems, not away from them,” he said.

eCenter Executive Director Yvonne J. English spoke of the eCenter as “your incubator,” meaning it is envisioned as a community endeavor, not a tightly controlled toy for a small group of people. It is the job of the corporation and eCenter supporters to make the community part of the operation, Columbus said.

“When people speak of ‘we’ and ‘LindenPointe’ in the same sentence, that’s when you know you’ve made it,” he said. For Steve Warner, the eCenter is his company’s new home.

The president of Novocell Semiconductor, the eCenter’s anchor tenant, said he is looking forward to sharing the building with “like-minded people” who can share ideas.

The eCenter will offer tenants business mentoring on their needs, and Warner said he has embraced his role in that because it will benefit his company, too. “I think it will be good for everybody,” he said. The testing lab should be a big draw for tenants and other companies, Warner said.

“For startups, there’s a lot of expensive equipment you need and you can’t afford,” he said. “This facility will have that. That’s a huge help for a startup.”

The eCenter, which will focus on companies in the science, engineering, technology and math industries, was built with a \$4.2 million federal grant and a \$1.5 million state grant, but officials looked to incubation and business officials from Erie to Pittsburgh and State College to Youngstown in planning the organizational structure, building amenities and philosophy.

Local tech companies were asked for input, and Ms. English noted she’s still seeking sponsors, mentors and service providers. “There is no way to thank all the heroes in this project,” Columbus said. Perhaps, the best way to thank them is to succeed. “LindenPointe is in business,” Columbus said. “Let’s go invent the future.”

The eCenter will be Mercer County’s first officially certified “green” building, although the official certification is likely six months off. A group of students from Hickory High School, Hermitage, were invited to sit in on “green” training sessions, observe construction techniques, and blog about the process.

Junior Kaitlyn Winslow hopes her involvement will make her resume stand out from others when it comes time to look for a job. “It was really nice,” she said. “All of the people I worked with were wonderful. I really enjoyed it. The building really came out great.”