

Ellsworth

For entrepreneurs, a Downeast city is bringing together the ingredients of growth



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Above: The Union River Center for Innovation, at 415 Water St., Ellsworth, is a business incubator and coworking facility that serves the area's growing biotechnology industry.

Right: Ainsworth Kohler, a computer system technologist with water-purification company Katadyn, is one of the entrepreneurs working at the Union River Center for Innovation in Ellsworth.

One of the most promising business attractions in Ellsworth takes its name from the waterway running through downtown. But the Union River Center for Innovation, a business incubator and coworking facility, is aptly named for another reason.

The center, at 415 Water St., is a union of space and services, of shared expertise and shared enthusiasm, that creates an ideal home for startups and entrepreneurs – especially those in the biotechnology field.

Even the center's launch in 2016 represented a union of sorts, with support from many private donors and eight founding partners: the City of Ellsworth, the Ellsworth Business Development Corporation, The Jackson Laboratory, the University of Maine, the Maine Technology Institute, the Maine Center for Entrepreneurial Development, the Maine Community Foundation and law firm Eaton Peabody.

Kat Taylor, who heads business development for the center's first resident, GenoTyping Center of America, says, "The Innovation Center is truly a community, a place where businesses benefit from working together. Everyone within these walls is collaborating."

Something for everyone

Inside the 5,000-square-foot building, businesses can find joint workspaces and lab facilities, private offices, high-speed internet access and a conference room equipped with a 60-inch high-def video monitor. Printing, copying, scanning, mailing and faxing services are available, and the center provides reception staffing. There's even free gourmet coffee.

But the center's greatest asset may be the opportunity for businesses to connect with their peers. The center offers access to networking events, workshops and onsite coaching with experienced entrepreneurs and mentors – ranging from intellectual property attorneys to UMaine thought leaders.

And each day, business people enjoy the simple camaraderie of working next to others taking on similar challenges and aiming for similar success.

"There's always a lot going on at the center – we have an innate talent for fostering that," says Micki Sumpter, Ellsworth's director of

economic development. "It creates a wonderful atmosphere that acts as a catalyst for everyone here."

Project-based professionals and vacationing entrepreneurs who occasionally need a workspace often purchase the center's \$30 one-day pass. For other businesses, a \$100 monthly membership provides an ongoing return on investment. Leasing arrangements are also available, and an affiliate program for businesses in other locations is in the works.

In addition to GenoTyping, a provider of genetic testing services, the center's current members include Gel Hydration Technologies, which is developing a biologic product to improve hydration in dogs; Katadyn, which markets a water purification product; and Monoclonals, which makes novel antibodies for use in diagnosing viral diseases.

Jeff Spaulding, an Eaton Peabody partner who serves as a board member for the center, sees its role this way: "The Union River Center for Innovation is already fast becoming the nucleus for technology companies in the city, showcasing Ellsworth's ambitions for growth and helping to drive further investment and job creation in the area."

Location, location

For technology and bioscience businesses, there's an additional benefit to working at the center: Ellsworth's proximity to scientific organizations such as The Jackson Laboratory, and the city's place as a commercial hub for Hancock and Washington counties.

While relatively small, census-wise – 7,700 residents – Ellsworth is the largest municipality in the two counties and is the Hancock County seat. Its professional, cultural and retail establishments serve a population of nearly 60,000, and the city is regarded as the gateway to Acadia, one of the country's most visited national parks.

Another crowd-drawer is The Jackson Laboratory (JAX), the internationally prominent research institution. Based in nearby Bar Harbor, JAX plans to open a research mouse production facility in Ellsworth this summer. The \$135 million vivarium, which broke ground two years ago, is expected to create 350 full-time jobs in the city.

In many larger cities, neighbors like this forge collaboration and creativity, even among businesses whose only similarity is their ZIP code. Now Ellsworth may be sparking the same kind of synergy.

"When you have community-minded businesses together, it creates a magnet for others," says Taylor. "It's exciting to think we're bootstrapping biotechnology right here in Maine." ●

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