

Business incubator

New Kohler Center space gives entrepreneurs room to grow

By Christopher Stolarski

When the Kohler Center for Entrepreneurship moved from Straz Hall to the fourth floor of the 707 Building, Tim Keane wanted a place where Marquette entrepreneurs would not only have useable office space, but also a venue where they could truly work together.

“Business incubators come in a variety of flavors,” said Keane, director of the Kohler Center, citing examples at Arizona State University and a local Milwaukee incubator, Sprenkler. The former boasts 24/7 access, primarily for software startups, in an academic setting; the latter is a for-profit model.

Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.

Henry Ford

What they, and the Kohler Center, have in common is work space, a collaborative environment and mentoring opportunities.

Since moving in mid-January, the center already has two tenants. SMUG Coffee (www.smugcoffee.com) produces travel mugs equipped with technology so they can be used to pay for purchases at coffee shops, and the Sister Maria Rosa Coffee Company (www.sistermaria-coffee.com) sells organic Honduran coffee to Milwaukee-area businesses, fund-raising groups, schools and parishes. Sister Maria Coffee is run by Kate Novotny, Arts '10, a student in the Graduate School of Management; SMUG is headed by Chris Hallberg, Arts '09.

“I couldn’t have been happier when Tim offered me the space,” Hallberg said. “At the time, I was working out of my apartment. Now I have a place to go every day with like-minded people to kick ideas around.” The time is right for Hallberg to have dedicated space to grow his business. He’s currently negotiating with one of the largest mug suppliers in the industry about licensing the SMUG technology, he said.

Keane, who said he’d also like to see faculty and staff take advantage of the incubator, said Hallberg and Novotny are in the space almost daily, and word has started to spread. Both he and Hallberg noted that other students have come in to talk about innovation and entrepreneurship at Marquette.

“A lot of students are coming up with very creative projects, but they don’t really know where to take them,” said Hallberg, who in 2009 won the university’s annual Business Plan Competition. “The incubator is a great place for them to get guidance about how to transform their ideas into sustainable products or services that will truly be of value.”

Still in its infancy, the Kohler Center incubator’s true value hasn’t yet been realized. Hallberg, though, has already found some intangible benefits.

“When you’re launching a startup, it’s on your mind all day, every day,” he said. “There are so many things that have to go right for you to be successful. Having other entrepreneurs around helps mitigate that stress and makes the startup a lot more fun.”

Excellence in Service

is congested with constant stress, he allows his personable and sunny demeanor to lift us all up when we’re having rough days.”

“Servicing these future dentists and interacting with faculty, staff and students is by far the most enjoyable part of my 27 years working for Marquette,” Karabon said. “I feel my service helps the students on the ground level of their dental education in support of the overall mission of the university.”

DAN SMITH

Information Technology Services

Smith, deputy chief information officer, oversees e-mail, Lync, PeopleSoft, Oracle e-business, D2L and IT-related projects. “It is amazing to me how dependent organizations are on technology, and Marquette is no different,” said Smith, who



Photo by Dan Johnson

Chris Hallberg initially developed the SMUG for the specialty coffee market. He has since shifted his focus to convenience stores, a market he said is less fragmented and generally has the technology needed to use SMUG.

For more information about the Kohler Center’s business incubator, contact Tina Quealy, assistant director, at 8-7337.

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was commended for his leadership, technical expertise and problem-solving abilities by nominators. “I enjoy helping people understand how to use new technology to make their jobs easier or more efficient, as well as the ‘keeping the lights on’ aspect of IT Services.”

An example of this occurred on Marquette’s Feb. 2 “snow day” when the air conditioning systems of the data center failed, threatening to shut down the hub of the university’s information technology. “After working over the phone with numerous departments and his own staff, Dan trudged in to assist, climbing over furniture and using a sledge hammer to help open stuck windows in a valiant effort to cool the data center,” said a nominator.