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## Markham-university tech centre will help businesses throughout region

BY KRISTIN MACKEY  
Special

York University and the National Research Council (NRC) are teaming up with the Town of Markham to create a facility they hope will give smaller businesses more opportunities to grow.

The Innovation Synergy Centre (ISC) — to be located in the town's massive Markham Centre development, once it's under construction — is designed, for a fee, to help existing companies find financial resources along with support and services to expand.

"Once a business has survived and is relatively successful, we will add an insurance policy by the process of bonds; they will give the company a far better likelihood of succeeding," explained Mayor Don Cousens.

Small business owners have voiced concern about the difficulty in borrowing money from banks and finding alternative forms of funding.

"The province has now established an innovation fund with tax incentives for people who want to invest in community businesses," said Mr. Cousens.

The town has formed working relationships with two companies, or 'angels', interested in investing risk capital into Markham's smaller companies.

"We are going to take it as one of our initiatives to help identify those angels," he said.

According to York Technology Association President Doris Fulton, small businesses are struggling to make ends meet.

"The problem is they have to invest in their growth," she said. "Entrepreneurs need advice but it is usually too expensive."

But the mayor promises the ISC fee will be affordable. "It's not something we are out to make a profit on, but it is a way of allowing us to measure the value of it," he said.

**'The council and I have taken down the walls around Markham. Everyone is welcome.'**

— Mayor Don Cousens

With the expertise of York University's staff, students from York's Schulick School of Business and the NRC, entrepreneurs will receive advice on a case-by-case basis from people they can trust, said Mayor Cousens.

Professors and students will

report on the businesses helped, their progression through the year and whether they were successful.

The town initiated the project more than a year ago after councillors faced the question: Where should we be going as a community?

It reinforced the council's desire to improve the local business climate, said the mayor.

The Town received more than \$70,000 from the federal government and is expected to receive more funding from the province.

According to the mayor, federal Industry Minister Allan Rock regards the ISC as a pilot project for assisting business people in Canada. The ISC will be open to all small businesses, even those outside of Markham.

"The council and I have taken down the walls around Markham," he said. "Everyone is welcome."

The ISC is expected to open sometime next spring.

## Volunteer work earns MDHS grad Rotary award

Candice Lee's volunteer work with the Markham Fair, Friends of the Environment and the Heart and Stroke Foundation has earned her the Markham-Unionville Rotary Club's Alan Parker Award.

The award was presented during graduation ceremonies at Ms Lee's former school, Markham District High.

The award, which recognizes

community service, is named for Past-President Alan Parker.

Brother Andre Catholic High School, Unionville High School and Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy are the other Markham schools receiving annual Rotary community involvement bursaries for a graduating students.

— Laura Nelles

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