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Exec: Tech jobs key to future

Davis warns that technology jobs will come slowly

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By Rick Moriarty
Staff writer

Boston's famed Route 128 technology highway has it. So does Silicon Valley in California. And now Syracuse can, too, says R. Leland Davis, executive director of the New York Indoor Environmental Quality Center.

Davis told about 40 people at Syracuse University's Thursday Morning Roundtable forum that a key to job growth in Central New York is teaming the area's universities with technology companies.

He said partnerships between academic institutions and technology companies led to explosive economic growth along Route 128 and Silicon Valley. And it can do so in Syracuse, too, he said.

"This is what we're going to leverage and build our future on in Central New York," said Davis, speaking at Drumlins country club in DeWitt.

The Metropolitan Development Association, a group that promotes economic development in Central New York, oversaw the creation of the Indoor Environmental Quality Center last year. State grants provide its money.

The non-profit center is charged with helping companies commercialize indoor environmental technologies developed by a consortium of Central New York universities.

Member companies focus on developing and marketing systems that detect and remove airborne pollutants from homes, offices, schools, hospitals and other indoor environments. In addition to developing better air-filtration systems, the center also is looking for ways to develop building materials that give off no harmful gases.

The center is the industrial commercialization arm of the newly established state Center of Excellence in Environmental Systems, based at Syracuse University.

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It will soon adopt the name of the Center of Excellence.

Davis said the Syracuse area has the ingredients needed to become the nation's hub for indoor environmental technologies. It has many research centers, including SU, Upstate Medical University, the Institute for Human Performance and State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

And it has technology companies such as Carrier Corp., O'Brien & Gere and Syracuse Research Corp., he said.

One of the Indoor Environmental Quality Center's first projects is the experimental use of an advanced air purification system on two floors at Pace University's campus near the ruins of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, Davis said. If the system works well, it could be used in many other buildings affected by airborne pollutants generated by the World Trade Center's collapse, he said.

"The market is potentially huge," said Davis, former chairman and chief executive officer of Galson Corp., an environmental consulting, engineering and technology company.

Davis warned, however, that the jobs won't come fast. Technology hubs take time to develop, he said.

"The thing we have to be is patient," he said. "We're not going to see a silver bullet. We're not going to see a tremendous number of jobs tomorrow."

And the task is not without its challenges, he said. One of the hardest parts of his job, he said, is bringing together academic and corporate cultures.

"In industry, there's a recognized hierarchy," he said. "At universities, the faculty are much more autonomous. They set the agenda, as opposed to being dictated to by the university."

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