**Vindy.com**
**The Valley's Home Page**

Vindy.com → News, Local & Regional → Story

Published: Sunday, January 6, 2008

# Opportunities emerge for 2 local companies

Two fledgling companies are slated to replace a successful incubator tenant.

By ANDREW GAUG

VINDICATOR STAFF WRITER

YOUNGSTOWN — Helping new businesses hatch is just part of the plan for the Youngstown Business Incubator this year.

Changes to the downtown incubator are coming because its biggest tenant, Turning Technologies, is about to move to the Taft Technology Center next door. The incubator has been scouting new companies to replace Turning, which occupies more than 50 percent of the West Federal Street building.

Two new tenants already are signed. Eris Medical Technologies, a Canfield-based hospital software developer, and Visual Impact Imaging, an Akron-based landscape design software company, are scheduled to move into the incubator this spring.

Taft Technology Center is scheduled to open in April, but incubator officials are planning expansion elsewhere downtown.

The Tech Block project is designed to renovate buildings as well as create new parking and green space areas. The incubator, city and Youngstown Central Area Community Improvement Corp. are involved in the planning.

Planned renovations this year include creating parking and green space on West Federal Street in the old State Theatre and Armed Forces building areas as well as renovating the Semple Building into a high-tech facility.

The incubator also will be part of collaboration to develop the Center of Excellence in Industrial Metrology & 3D Imaging Research. Involved are Youngstown State University, M-7 Technologies, which is a Youngstown precision management company, and the Columbus-based Ohio Supercomputer Center.

The center will be used to help create software and hardware that uses a three-dimensional, laser-based imaging to measure things such as roads and structures for helping people such as scientists, engineers and soldiers.

Jim Cossler, incubator director, said one of the YBI's portfolio companies, Zeuthus Software, will be developing the software.

The Taft building also is an important part of the Tech Block, Cossler said. It will allow a better transition for Turning Technologies than past graduated companies experienced, he said.

"Prior to the Taft Technology Center, if we ran out of space, we were typically graduating companies out of city limits," Cossler said.

Cossler cites former tenant X-Vision Audio, which moved to Boardman. The distance caused a loss of communication between the two, he said.

"It was kind of like out of sight, out of mind," he said.

Julie Smith, the incubator's chief development officer, said the incubator and Turning Technologies will work together to help nurse smaller companies.

"Our intent is to keep them within a management cluster," she said. "They still offer an array of experience and resources for other companies."

Because of Turning Technologies' size, lots of space will be available for prospective companies when the company moves. Cossler said Turning Technology's staff of more than 120 was a large number compared to most of the incubator's two-person, start-up companies.

The incubator's two new tenants employ just two or three but are looking to increase after they settle in.

"The incubator has an environment that is exciting and allows for lots of innovation," said Anne Behner, president of Visual Impact Imaging.

Both Visual Impact and Eris Medical have been working externally with the incubator. Cossler said both businesses should do well once they establish themselves inside the incubator.

He is using a lengthy screening process to select other tenants as well.

The process involves making sure the company's concept is feasible, testing its product, then asking some of

the companies in the incubator's network to examine it and make sure there's a market for it. If the product passes these tests, the company will be put under consideration by the incubator's board.

Cossler and Smith said it varies on how long it takes a business in the incubator to establish itself.

"There's no tried-and-true formula that says it goes from 12 to 18 months," Smith said.

Both mention that although Turning Technologies was still in the development phase when it joined the incubator, it took less than a year for the company to produce revenue.

"In that particular case, they were taking an idea and working with it," Smith said. "Some companies are using brand new concepts and have to take more time."

agaug@vindy.com