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Bakersfield startup culture finds another home in BC's new Launchpad

BY JOHN COX jcox@bakersfield.com Sep 23, 2019

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A new kind of business center opening Tuesday in downtown Bakersfield is taking Kern County another step closer to the startup culture that has turned many metropolitan areas into miniature versions of Silicon Valley.

Launchpad, opening in Room 106 of the Weill Institute at 2100 Chester Ave., is Bakersfield College's answer to a business incubator and a key component of the city's growing startup "ecosystem." Entrepreneurs are invited in to get help starting a business or building up an existing enterprise.

BC officials say the office's services will include business counseling, workshops and access to computer and other educational resources. Students and non-students alike are welcome, and all services are free, at least for now.

Coming on the heels of Bitwise Industries' recent announcement the Fresno-based tech hub will soon expand to downtown Bakersfield, Launchpad's debut marks the most ambitious effort by a local educational institution to help startup culture — a creative fervor that continues to mint new millionaires on the coast — take root in the southern Central Valley.

Funded by about \$120,000 in state money, the office has won support from local groups including all of the city's chambers of commerce, Mission Community Services Corp., Cal State Bakersfield's Small Business Development Center, the Kern Initiative for Talent and Entrepreneurship and the Kern Women's Business Center.

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BC's new Launchpad to give entrepreneurs a place to start, grow their businesses

No local groups have yet pledged financial support but there's hope maybe they will, said BC's dean of instruction, Emmanuel Mourtzanos.

"We are definitely open to a partnership with anyone who is interested in doing so," he said.

The idea is to serve students from BC, CSUB and the Kern High School District — but not just them, Mourtzanos said. One reason the college chose to open Launchpad downtown, he said, is because it is located amid a small business community that might want to take advantage of the help available at the new office.

Among many other resources at the center, he noted, will be a smartphone app called StartItUp that takes entrepreneurs through the many steps of creating a new business, assessing changing needs along the way and reminding them of things like legal liabilities they might have neglected to address.

"I think the power of the Launchpad is going to be in the dynamic resources," he said, adding that the office will be staffed by a number of BC personnel working there part time.

The office's hours are noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to noon Friday. But as with other aspects of the center, including whether services remain free of charge, school officials said what ultimately is available there will change depending on demand and available resources.

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