

Incubator Stays Flexible as It Nurtures Startups

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the Technology Center.

A professionally managed facility offering low month-to-month rent and a variety of offices and conference space was the lure. It provides a reception area, food services, a usability lab, a 40-person conference room equipped with state-of-the-art conferencing facilities including video conferencing and office equipment including telephones, copiers and fax machines.

When the high-tech bubble burst, City officials quickly re-oriented the Center and began reaching out to other startups.

“The technology incubator changed from high-tech to a business incubator,” recalls Community Development Director Howard Sword.

What makes Brentwood’s Center so attractive to startups is the fact that most office complexes require tenants to commit to a five-year lease, something a fledgling business often can’t afford. Monthly rent for a 10-by-10 office is \$360 including office equipment and utilities.

Also, the Brentwood Center’s mixture of office sizes also makes it desirable.

Businesses that require a lot of foot traffic or weekend use are discouraged.

A business incubator, which is what the Center is, helps small businesses grow and develop by providing a range of business support and services, which in time will enable them to become a significant Brentwood company.

Incubators nurture young firms helping them to survive and grow during startup when they are most vulnerable.

An incubation program’s main goal is to produce successful graduates — businesses that are freestanding when they leave the incubator. Sword says that research shows that most business incubator graduates tend to remain in the community where they started and that is true of Brentwood. Although the City breaks even on the rent, it is creating more job opportunities for its residents.

Currently, 30 tenants occupy the Cen-



— Photo by Dick McLeish

A 40-person conference room, above, and a mailroom with copy equipment, right, are among the services provided startups at the Technology Center.

ter. Another 31 have graduated, and of those, roughly half remain in Brentwood.

The current tenants include five technology-based firms, nine mortgage or real estate firms, two former home-office businesses, three construction or architectural offices, three attorneys and eight firms in various fields.

One tenant, a software usability firm lists among its clients several Fortune 500 companies for whom it tests web sites and



— Community Development Photo by Peggy Trudell

software. It accomplishes this by using a variety of people who come in and attempt to navigate a particular web site or use certain software. Their experiences are monitored and recommendations for enhancing the product are based on those experiences.

Design Starts on Lone Tree-Railroad Work

Design work began in late spring in preparation for building an underpass at the Lone Tree Way-Union Pacific Railroad junction.

Barring delays, construction should start in spring 2007, says Brian Bornstein, the City’s Senior Associate Engineer.

The \$18.5 million project involves constructing six travel lanes under a concrete railroad bridge.

It is complicated by gas, oil and utility lines running through the site. Each will have to be dismantled and relocated, Bornstein says, since the roadway for Lone Tree will be lowered over 20 feet below its current level to provide the required clearances under the rail crossing.

A temporary roadway and railroad “shoofly” also will be built to reroute rail

and vehicular traffic during construction of the undercrossing.

Although the design process is more than 30 percent complete, City officials are announcing the project’s status now in response to inquiries about when work will commence.

At the 30-percent design phase, the City submitted plans to all affected by the project, part of which include Union Pacific Railroad, PG&E (22-inch gas line), Kinder Morgan (12-inch oil line) and Chevron (8-inch oil line). Coordination and approvals from the railroad and the Public Utilities Commission may take a year to 18 months.

A City Engineering report indicates that construction would extend into the 2008-2009 fiscal year.