Greetings,

Everyone wants to get in on the “ground floor” of a promising opportunity - whether it's an investment, a business or a new club. This month's EDAB e-news highlights The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford. It's the ground floor for budding entrepreneurs. Not only is it a chance for fledgling businesses to collaborate in a common space to foster growth, it's also an occasion for growing and mature businesses to gain new clients or mentor young companies. They can share their experience by partnering with the entrepreneurial services the County offers to pave the pathway to success for new entrepreneurs. The GROUNDFLOOR, Entrepreneurs Edge and the Harford Business Innovation Center are designed to support the small businessperson. Don't miss the details in this edition of EDAB e-news.

If you'd like more information or would like to get involved in EDAB, please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Eric McLauchlin
Chairman
Harford County Economic Development Advisory Board

To Get to the Top - You Have to Start at the Ground Floor

By Jim Richardson
Director, Harford County Office of Economic Development

Entrepreneurs come in all shapes and sizes, with all types of work habits and ideas. They work at home, in tiny spaces they've managed to turn into offices or storefronts, and in coffee houses and eateries. They all have one thing in common: they are trying to build a successful business.

Entrepreneurism is a driving force for the local economy. More than one quarter of all Marylanders have founded or partnered in a new business during their careers. About 15 percent of Marylanders are actively thinking about starting a business. Whether it be starting in your kitchen with a piece of paper and a pen or in a restaurant with ideas written on a napkin, a small business needs room to grow - physically, financially and conceptually. It requires opportunities for collaboration and networking.

Harford County's newest entrepreneurial support program, The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford, is designed to give entrepreneurial technology application developers that opportunity. Another step in the already rich support system for the County's entrepreneurs and small business owners, The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford is literally the ground floor for application and cyber-security content development. The facility provides a single large room filled with unlimited potential for collaboration. Located in Havre de Grace's Swan Harbor Creek Village near Aberdeen Proving Ground, The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford is modeled after successful entrepreneurial work spaces in Austin, TX, Silicon Valley, CA and New York, NY. Referred to as "co-working" spaces - where people who need a more structured and interactive environment than a home office can come to work - these facilities offer table or desk space, WiFi networks, high-speed internet and conference rooms for brief meetings or private phone calls. But the lure is the camaraderie, idea generation and out-of-the-box thinking. The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford aims to offer the same innovative environment.

Thanks to partnerships with Betamore and bwtech@UMBC, The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford has the support of already successful start-up businesses, and it has the potential to draw resources from Baltimore and surrounding areas. Guided by these successful business models, local service levels are flexible depending on client needs. For example, full access to the facility can be obtained at a monthly rate of $100. Daytime, partial month and weekly rates are also available.

While participating at The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford, clients can also take advantage of Entrepreneurs Edge, Harford County's training and resource program for new businesses. From the educational and informational resources of the Harford County Public Library, Harford County Chamber of Commerce and Harford Community College (HCC) to the training and development resources of the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) and the Office of Economic Development, the Entrepreneurs Edge guides new businesses toward profitability and...
growth. Once on its feet, the small technology business can move from The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford to the County's incubator program, the Harford Business Innovation Center (HBIC), before taking flight on its own.

The popularity of co-working environments across the country has already fueled local interest from both entrepreneurs clamoring for a space at The GROUNDFLOOR table to successful start-ups who are providing services and training. Savvy small businesses see the potential for growth - both economically and professionally. Harford County companies like Web IXI, e-Moxie, and Net 2 Sky have already partnered with The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford to offer website development, social media and networking solutions for its clients. The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford will open its doors in mid-May with local entrepreneurs Under 21 and Bazooks already on board, and the goal of 25 members by summer's end.

Getting in on the ground floor is an opportunity for any size company to thrive by mentoring, sponsoring or collaborating. It's how we'll keep our economy growing and build more successful businesses.

Source: Maryland Department of Business & Economic Development website http://www.choosemaryland.org/factsstats/Pages/Rankings.aspx

Business Spotlight: WebIXI

From a tiny technology company with the goal of connecting people in the community through on-line bulletin boards to a full-fledged web marketing company, WebIXI is a perfect example of the entrepreneurial growth and spirit in Harford County. Founded in 1995 by Patrick J. Chambers, WebIXI had the vision and the plan for putting technology to work in the community. They were the first to connect Harford County Public Schools to the World Wide Web, and that success allowed their business to take flight with the addition of several customers in Northern Maryland.

As the company grew, Chambers added a variety of internet and computer application specialties both by acquisitions and partnerships and brought his two sons, PJ and Steve, into the business. Today, WebIXI is now recognized as the fifth most active website design firm in the Baltimore area, as well as the 24th largest in revenues, according to the Baltimore Business Journal Book of Lists.

"When I started the business, I picked up the phone and called 10 of the top business people in Harford County and asked if I could take them to lunch and pick their brains," Chambers said. While Chambers said there was nothing formalized like The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford when he started out, "the spirit was still there and the businesses in the community really helped each other."

Located in Churchville, Maryland, WebIXI has diversified its services to include its own successful formula for website development and mobile application development, as well as online marketing services including social media and e-mail marketing and search engine optimization. In an effort to give back to the community that supported the growth and development of their business, WebIXI hosts a variety of programs that support local non-profits. Its e-marketing Crash Courses give businesses of all sizes the opportunity to learn more about e-marketing, with proceeds donated to selected non-profit organizations. WebIXI is also working on an ambitious online application called MentorNation. A prototype of this social media-based online training system will be rolled out late this summer.

WebIXI has been honored with the Harford Award for research and development in technology by the Harford County Chamber of Commerce. In addition, the company holds the Blue Ribbon Small Business Award and is ranked among the nation’s Top 100 Small Businesses by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Co-Working Fast Facts

- The GROUNDFLOOR at Harford is modeled after other successful co-working spaces, like New Work City in New York. New Work City has over 50 members at one time, and the price ranges from $30 to $500, depending on the package.
- Worldwide, co-working spaces have doubled every year since 2006.
- Survey respondents ranked interaction with people and flexible work time as the most important aspects of co-working for them, at 84 and 83 percent, respectively. Other important factors are random discoveries and opportunities, knowledge sharing and a basic infrastructure.
- Over half of people who are now co-working transitioned from a work-at-home scenario. About 22 percent were regular office workers.
- Sixty percent of respondents said they use their spaces three to four times a week. Just about half have 24-hour access.
- 71 percent of co-workers responded that their creativity was better since joining a co-working space. About 62 percent said their standard of work had improved.

Sources: coherecommunity.com, coworking_works_infographic; deskmag.com; deskmag.com via fast company

David R. Craig, Harford County Executive

The Harford County Economic Development Advisory Board consists of a number of subcommittees - including technology, workforce development, finance, tourism, and land use - dedicated to the positive growth and Economic Development of Harford County.