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SU becomes founding partner of UVC

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SYRACUSE — Upstate Venture Connect (UVC), a nonprofit aiming to encourage the development and growth of more small, innovative companies in upstate New York, has a new partnership with Syracuse University (SU).

SU recently signed on as Upstate Venture Connect's first founding partner. Upstate Venture Connect launched earlier this year.

The group is trying to increase connections among investors, mentors, entrepreneurs, and those interested in working for young, growth-oriented firms. Group leaders also want to spark more collaboration among business groups, universities, and economic-development organizations.

Colleges and universities will be a major part of that effort, says Nasir Ali, CEO of Upstate Venture Connect. As a founding partner, SU is making in-kind commitments to the organization as well as contributing undisclosed funding.

Ali expects a small number of other colleges will sign on as founding partners, but the organization wants to have relationships with every school in the region.

"A big part of this effort really involves getting the buy-in of leading academic institutions who have the ability to access their alumni and who are increasingly looking to identify and be supportive of the entrepreneurs that are in their midst," Ali says.

Tapping into networks of university entrepreneurs, students, and alumni is critical for Upstate Venture Connect's success. The group's broad goal is to help entrepre-

neurs and those that can help them connect with each other no matter where they are located.

So a faculty member launching a new venture at SU might find an ideal partner or mentor at another university, Ali says.

The idea is to share across many organiza-

tions. "By having these opportunities visible to students and alumni in a somewhat institution-independent manner through [Upstate Venture Connect], you increase the likelihood of startups finding talent and mentors beyond the immediate limits of that particular institution's student body or alumni base," Ali says.

By connecting colleges and universities throughout the region, Upstate Venture Connect can also help them learn best practices and new ideas for fostering entrepreneurship and innovation on their campuses, he adds.

SU had a successful relationship with Ali when he was with the Syracuse Tech Garden and so it made sense to partner with Upstate Venture Connect, says Bruce Kingma, associate provost for entrepreneurship and innovation at SU. The organization's efforts will help create a strong communication channel across universities, entrepreneurs, and incubators throughout the state, he adds.

"We've had informal networks," Kingma says. "But putting some structure around it I think is a good thing. The power of the network rises with the number of nodes. And it rises even more



Ali

when someone organizes the nodes."

He also notes that many universities like SU have similar problems. They can also learn a great deal from each other and Upstate Venture Connect will help foster that activity, he says.

A key to Upstate Venture Connect's effort is its website (www.upstateventureconnect.org). The site will eventually provide resources to help individuals and organizations connect and collaborate with each other more effectively.

Organizers want the database to include entrepreneurs, potential employees, possible investors, mentors, colleges, research groups, incubators, and more.

The initiative is focused on all of upstate New York and will cut across all industry segments.

The group's advisory board includes representatives from the Tech Garden in Syracuse, the Center for Advanced Biomedical and Bioengineering Technology at the University at Buffalo, the Center for Economic Growth in Albany, High Tech Rochester, and the Cayuga Venture Fund of Ithaca.

Martin Babinec is Upstate Venture Connect's founder and chairman. Babinec, a resident of Little Falls and an upstate New York native, founded TriNet HR Corp. in 1988. The Silicon Valley-based company provides payroll, benefits, and human-resources services.

It serves more than 8,000 small businesses in the U.S. and Canada. Babinec was CEO until 2008 and served as chairman of its board until last year. □

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