

Waterloo a magnet for think-tank synergy

Scholarship and innovation attract UN secretariat

By James Bow
Business Edge

Waterloo Region is known as a high-tech and manufacturing centre, but it's also home to another growth industry – think-tanks.

More than 150 research institutes and think-tanks, ranging from high-tech to political, theoretical to practical and famous to obscure, call Waterloo Region or Guelph home.

Drawn by a culture of scholarship and innovation, they also help that culture thrive.

The synergy is a major reason that the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) chose to set up shop in Waterloo. ACUNS supports graduate-level workshops, a doctoral scholarship and an award-winning quarterly publication, the *Global Governance Journal*.

The secretariat relocates every five years to cities that submit successful bids. Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) won the nomination in 2002 over Yale University and Columbia University and will host the secretariat until 2008.

"Wilfrid Laurier was selected because Waterloo had a growing community of active scholars and researchers working on UN-related issues," says Alistair Edgar, ACUNS executive director.

He adds that in addition to WLU and the University of Waterloo offering "excellent senior administrative support, WLU committed to give me time to serve as the executive director of ACUNS should our bid be successful, which was a significant financial commitment. We also had local financial support from Jim Balsillie at Research In Motion (RIM)."

Among the best-known institutes is the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, an independent research institute hoping to push back the boundaries of theoretical physics, that was established by RIM's other co-CEO, Mike Lazaridis.

Other institutes and think-tanks covering a wide range of subjects are associated with WLU, University of Waterloo, University of Guelph and Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

"One example might be the Institute for Quantitative Finance and Insurance (IQFI)

QUOTE . . .

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– John Tennant,
CEO of Canada's
Technology Triangle

at the University of Waterloo," says John Tennant, CEO of Canada's Technology Triangle, a business organization that promotes the Waterloo Region. He adds that Phelim Boyle, IQFI's scientific director, recently was named financial engineer of the year by the International Association of Financial Engineers.

"An area of internationally recognized leadership for the University of Waterloo is cryptography," he says, "and the Centre for Applied Cryptographic Research brings together faculty and students in computer engineering, physics and pure mathematics."

To Tennant, the think-tanks and institutes represent a thriving local industry, employing hundreds of administrative staff and attracting millions in research funding as well as bringing some of the best minds in the world to Waterloo.

"These institutes bring together and promote collaboration among researchers with common or related interests and goals," he says. "In many cases, researchers associated with an institute have faculty responsibilities and other affiliations with the local universities."

"The Waterloo Region is building toward a critical mass that will attract some of the world's top researchers," Tennant says.

An example, he adds, is the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), a world-leading think-tank examining global governance issues. Its research fellows include Canada's former UN ambassador Paul Heinbecker and former UN deputy secretary-general Louise Frechette.

CIGI was founded in 2001, with its original staff of three housed in a former railway station in Uptown Waterloo. Today it employs 50 people. RIM co-CEO Balsillie was also involved in the founding and supporting CIGI, as was Open Text Corp., the University of Waterloo and WLU.

"Our research is internation-

ally focused, including Canada's role in international relations," says Colleen Fitzpatrick, CIGI's director of media relations. "We advise decision makers, including policy makers, practitioners, researchers, governments, non-governmental organizations and academics."

Fitzpatrick says the centre also serves the community by providing free public lectures each month. Recent speakers have included former federal cabinet minister Marcel Masse, now the Canadian executive director for the World Bank, and John Holmes, Canada's ambassador to Iraq and Jordan.

CIGI also supports youth-education programs in the region, such as the graduate programs in International Public Policy at the University of Waterloo and WLU, as well as an annual Global Youth Forum for high school students, a World Bank seminar for graduate students and a Canada-U.S. youth summit.

"The centre was set up in

EYE ON TECHNOLOGY



SPECIAL REPORT

Waterloo because the area provides a wealth of opportunity for partnerships, especially from the business and high-tech community," Fitzpatrick says.

"We benefit greatly from our relationships with the University of Waterloo and Laurier. CIGI also announced substan-

tial support last fall for graduate programs on international public policy at the University of Waterloo and at Laurier. Our \$3.5-million graduate programs initiative was made possible through a generous donation by CIGI founder, Jim Balsillie."

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FSBO from Page 17

Website's free listings had advertisers' mice clicking

President and CEO Vadim Kirichenko and vice-president Boris Michailov – who have backgrounds in information technology and run other websites – and a silent partner who is an agent, started up with \$50,000.

The group initially planned to operate a real estate magazine enhanced by a website, but the magazine ran into financial difficulties after a few issues because the company gave away free listings.

The site became more popular among advertisers and the magazine stopped printing, says Lawrence, a civil engineer who joined the company and became a co-owner this year.

The site lists a range of properties, but Lawrence says it tends to attract advertisers who want to sell specialty properties, such as waterfront homes.

Yard signs play an important role in attracting advertisers.

"If they see something in the real world that backs up what they see on the Internet, it increases your credibility," says Lawrence.

He contends it's not that difficult to sell your own home or other property – if you give it the exposure that it needs. "It all depends on what kind of a dealmaker you are,"

Gary Bain, a Calgary-based realtor, says an FSBO deal's chances of success depend on the seller's real estate knowledge.

"If it's an arm's-length situation where somebody is dealing with somebody that's reputable, or they've got somebody working for both of them, there's not usually a problem," says Bain, adding a lawyer often gets involved early in FSBO transactions.

Bain, who operates GM Bain Real Estate Services Ltd., has participated in many FSBO deals. In such cases, he says, the buyer may sign a contract, the agent could get paid from the transaction fees, or the commission that the seller pays the agent could be 50 per cent less than usual.

Bayne says many FSBO sellers don't know about, or understand, changes in real estate law that have occurred over the past decade – for example, new rules covering environmental conditions or condominium ownership.

"I find that people (who sell their own homes) have no experience or very little experience," says Bain.

As a result, he says, many sellers whose properties have personal or sentimental value often receive less than they would through an agent.

In FSBO deals, Bain contends, a buyer may be vulnerable because he has nobody acting for him, or a shrewd buyer can fleece the seller.

"The buyer all of a sudden has the upper hand because he knows values or has done this real estate business many times, or maybe the buyer wants to beat up the seller (price-wise) ... and the seller has nobody to protect him," says Bain.

On the other hand, he says, an agent, who could lose his licence if he acts illegally or makes a mistake, is bound to act in a client's best interest.

Bain has seen several FSBO deals fall through over as little as a \$1,000 or \$2,000 difference in the selling price. "The friction or the stress between a buyer and a seller comes to a point where (the deal) breaks

down, whereas if (a agent) were involved, they would be able to bridge the difference because they don't have an emotional involvement."

He says sellers have to understand that an agent's fees are negotiable right up to the time of closing. And, there's "no comparison" between an agent's network of past clients, industry contacts and referrals and an FSBO's potential-client base.

He advises FSBO sellers to hire a licensed appraiser – at least once and possibly twice – to determine the correct property value.

"I don't think any consumer knows the right price," says Bain. "With the way prices have gone up in the last little while, we in the business don't even know the right price."

But Bain stresses that his comments simplify matters, and no two deals are exactly alike.

In Endo's case, the buyer approached him after she saw "for sale" signs on the property. He says one key factor enabled him to sell the house after the agent could not.

"I think it was the fact we had a much more vested interest in it, and we put a lot of time and effort into it, to be honest with you," says Endo.

He also relied on his previous experience selling his late mother's Vernon, B.C. home with an agent, techniques he uses in his sales position with Canada Post, and lessons he learned while observing agents as they showed the house.

"It can be done," says Endo, of selling your own property. "And you can have quite a success at it."

(Monte Stewart can be reached at monte@businessedge.ca)

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Signature style proves to be popular draw

Most customers come to the boutique, although the partners occasionally tend to time-pressed people in their homes or offices. The first step is for the fashion-conscious woman or man (about 10 per cent of Jefferson Sukhoo's client base is male) to describe their taste and the purpose for which they want a garment created. Then they choose which of the boutique's samples most closely resembles what they have in mind.

One or both of the partners then starts sketching how the design of the sample could be altered to best fit the customer's appearance, personality and requirements. A colour and fabric may be chosen at that stage or later on.

The second step is for Jefferson and Sukhoo to create a facsimile of the finished garment in unbleached cotton. The customer tries that on at

the next fitting, when it's easy and inexpensive to alter the fit and details. By the third stage, the one-of-a-kind garment is complete except for any minor alterations that become apparent at the final fitting.

For the same services, a top fashion designer would charge several thousands of dollars per item. At Jefferson Sukhoo, the average price is \$1,500 to \$2,000, depending on the fabric and degree of construction difficulty. The top price for an evening gown, says Sukhoo, is about \$5,000.

For those prices, he says, the customer walks out with a garment concocted in the boutique's signature style of "classic with an edge, very clean but always with an interesting detail or line that makes it different from anything else out there."

(Terry Poulton can be reached at poulton@businessedge.ca)

Toronto group plans in-depth HR study

TFSA to examine financial service sector needs

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The Toronto Financial Services Alliance (TFSA) is planning the first in-depth examination of Toronto's human resource needs for the city's No. 1 industry sector, financial services.

TFSA has hired Deloitte to complete the study. Its goal is to present a supply and demand forecast of skilled workers over five years, and propose a plan to meet the demand. It is scheduled for completion early next year, TFSA said in a release.

"The financial services industry provides direct employment for more than 200,000 people in Toronto," said TFSA executive director Janet Ecker. "Many other highly skilled professionals, such as lawyers, accountants and information and communications technology workers, also depend on the financial services industry for their livelihood. It is crucial to ensure that this industry continues to thrive, and we can only do that if we have a good understanding of the underlying labour market."

The TFSA study has funding support from the federal Department of Human Resources and Social Development and the City of Toronto's economic development division. The government of Ontario is also participating in the project.

The Toronto Financial Services Alliance is a public/private initiative whose mandate is to enhance and promote the long-term competitiveness of Toronto as a North American financial services centre.

DONATION from Page 16

Waterloo nominated as 'intelligent community'

In addition, CIGI recently received \$7 million from the provincial government for its IGLOO project, a global online community which hopes to "bring together great minds from around the world to help find global solutions to the problems facing our world today," Fitzpatrick says.

While the University of Waterloo and the University of Guelph attract a total of nearly \$100 million per year in sponsored research, Tennant says the most important product coming from the local think-tank industry is collaboration and

the innovation that springs from it.

"Collaboration across many disciplines attracts active investors, government funding and it allows research to uncover new opportunities for investment," he says. "This is a key element in the region's entrepreneurial spirit that makes Canada's Technology Triangle a leading region for successful new start-ups. The University of Waterloo accounts for more than 20 per cent of the successful technology-based spin-outs from Canadian universities."

Tennant says the research and

collaboration is already producing breakthroughs such as the environmental work of John Cherry and Robert Gillham of the Waterloo Institute for Groundwater Research who were recently honoured by the Royal Society of Canada.

"They made significant contributions in using sealable-joint steel-sheet pile cells to clean up solvent contamination in our groundwater. This process is now known as the Waterloo Barrier," he says.

Another benefit resulting from the think-tanks and community support was the recent

nomination of the City of Waterloo as one of the seven most intelligent communities in the world by the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF).

The ICF is a New York and Toronto-based non-profit group that focuses on job creation and economic development in high tech.

Waterloo and Cleveland were the only North American cities nominated. The winner will be announced at the ICF annual convention in New York on June 9.

(James Bow can be reached at bow@businessedge.ca)