



The right space for startups

Local incubator offers flexible short-term leases at a reasonable price

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By [ALEXIS FITTS](#)

THE GAZETTE

David Schoenberger was like Goldilocks in need of office space, looking for something that would be neither too big nor too small, but "just right" for his technology startup.

And he didn't want to sign his fledgling company, RTL Payment Systems, to a long-term lease without knowing whether his company would succeed.

"Everyone wanted a three-year lease or longer," said Schoenberger, whose company provides software for electronic payment processing. "But we didn't want too big of a space and be stuck with it, or too small of it."

After doing research, Schoenberger turned to the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator, a Monument-based landlord that provides flexible short-term leases at a reasonable price for a new company. It turned out to be a perfect fit. Schoenberger's business grew after entering the incubator; his company expanded into a neighboring room, then into two spaces.

The model of the business incubator has been around for half a century, but the idea grew to prominence in the late '80s. By providing affordable, short-term office space, incubators are a godsend for fledgling businesses unsure of how much space they need, or how quickly they might grow.

The National Business Incubation Association estimates there are more than 5,000 business incubators world- wide. More than 1,400 are in North America, according to an association study in October 2006. Though the Tri-Lakes Incubator operates for-profit, most incubators are nonprofits, and many operate off government subsidies. More than just providing office space, the incubator provides crucial support to new business owners, such as mentoring through a board of directors and monthly business seminars.

"I was just really surprised at all the services they offered and support they could give me for a fledgling business," said Claudia Edam, owner of Yarn Sisters, a yarn distribution company that has been using the Tri-Lakes incubator for storage. The incubator staff helped Edam unload merchandise and set up her inventory, and she's used the conference room several time for meetings.



Beyond getting the services included with a lease, fledgling businesses also benefit from being around other startups.

"There's always excitement when you see other (new) businesses, even though they're doing nothing like what we're doing," Schoenberger said. "And likewise, it's encouraging to see that even out of that middle step you can take the plunge into more corporate America,"

Leases at the Tri-Lakes facility start at \$275 a month for a 115-square-foot space and top out at \$1,250 for a palatial 3,000-square-foot multiroom suite. The incubator provides reception space, conference room rental, and mail services to all occupants. Other business needs, such as notary, tax and technical services, are available on a piecemeal basis.

Alison Brown, Tri-Lakes Incubator president, opened the facility in January, remembering her struggles to find appropriate office space for a home-based business she once ran.

"It was a huge deal when I had to move out of my basement," Brown said. "It was a big commitment ... and one of the things that's great about an incubator is you're not alone - there's other people who've gone through the same process."

The incubator experience is turning into a success story for RTL Payment systems. Schoenberger and staff have settled in their new cushy offices in downtown Colorado Springs, which provide them with some room to grow - and he's even signed that dreaded three-year lease.

But he isn't worried.

"I think we have a nice solid future," Schoenberger said. "We're going to be around for awhile."

INCUBATOR

The Tri-Lakes Business Incubator is at Woodcarver Suites, 14960 Woodcarver Road. More information: 481-4877, ext. 100