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## Place in McKinney provides space for entrepreneurs to 'collide'



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After the Plano incubator Gravity Centre shut down in mid-June, entrepreneur Gerard Ibarra quickly found another home for his startup.

Ibarra's is one of 13 early-stage companies at the new Collide Center in McKinney.

"Timing worked out," said Ibarra, co-founder of Secure Quorum, a startup that helps organizations quickly respond to emergencies. "We're very happy. We like the space and the entrepreneurs here."

The Collide Center combines the elements of a co-working space, business incubator and coffeehouse. It was designed to provide affordable office space, support and resources for entrepreneurs and startups.

The space is a collaboration between the McKinney Economic Development Corp. and Curious Complex, a McKinney startup that also has offices at the Collide Center.

"If you get creative minds in one place, exciting things can happen," said Jim Wehmeier, McKinney Economic Development's president and chief executive.

Collide Center joins a growing list of resources and programs for entrepreneurs in North Texas.

In June, the Dallas Entrepreneur Center opened in the Design District to help people turn ideas into high-growth companies.

Two new accelerators, VentureSpur and Health Wildcatters, will launch their first classes later this summer.

Curious Complex CEO Jason Adams spearheaded the effort to develop the startup hub in McKinney and be part of the region's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

"Our goal was to initiate the inertia to get it going. Now the city has stepped up and is leading the charge," said Adams, whose startup recently raised \$855,000 in seed funding.

For McKinney Economic Development, the Collide Center is an expansion of its existing emerging technology program, which provides rental assistance for startups.

The rent reimbursement, however, posed a challenge because most startups at their early stages don't have the financial wherewithal to get office leases, said John Valencia, director of business retention and expansion and emerging technology at McKinney Economic Development.

Since the program started in 2009, it has helped 12 companies with rental assistance. In contrast, the Collide Center has already attracted 13 startups, Valencia noted.

The center will act as a bridge until startups can grow into their own spaces and qualify for rental assistance on their own, Valencia said. "We want them to grow in McKinney."

McKinney Economic Development has allotted \$48,000 to help pay Collide Center's rent for the next 12 months. Curious Complex is paying for other costs such as electricity and Internet access, Adams said.

Resident companies are accepted into the center's incubator or accelerator program, which provides free space for up to three months. Fees then increase to \$50 a month.

At a grand opening celebration Wednesday, Adams and city economic development officials showed off the 6,500-square-foot Collide Center to entrepreneurs, public officials and visitors.

The space is at the Cotton Mill in McKinney, a former denim manufacturer converted into office space and event rooms.

To help create an entrepreneurial community feel, the Collide Center has no cubicles. Desks are spread throughout the open space.

"The whole concept is not to separate but to collaborate," Adams said.

The Collide Center will host workshops and programming, such as pitch sessions and meetings with investors and other business leaders.

Nolan Clemmons, founder of Wufasta, a rewards platform for online gaming, said having office space beats working at a Starbucks table or other similar places.

"I get to interact with other residents," Clemmons said. "If I have a problem, I could walk over to the next desk and ask about it."

Follow Hanah Cho on Twitter at @hanahcho.

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