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Kingbridge Hub a magnet for innovative collaboration

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Planting a seed and watching it grow and mature is a magical thing. Equally impressive is helping human ingenuity germinate.That's the mantra behind the driving forces of the Kingbridge Centre's Innovation Hub.?It's almost an altruistic passion to bring together the brightest risk-takers to find solutions to society's biggest problems.And the work, even in these early stages of the Hub and Living Lab, have born fruit.Led by Chairman Prashant Pathak and the Pathak Family Trust, Kingbridge is evolving into King's and York's leading experiential think tank.Pathak noted the Centre is a perfect example of a long-term living ecological collaboration. Plans and projects go beyond a 25-year horizon.Pathak admits there's no crystal ball, but looking at the big picture and five key areas of study will see definite results. The main areas of focus include water, waste, energy, food and agriculture.He has set a high bar for the work carried out at the centre, aiming for nurturing innovative ideas that build on world-class research and development initiatives, to build start-ups and businesses attracting attention on a global scale.The key is bringing like minds together to create leading-edge work. The mission is to tear down disparity and conflict through thoughtful intersections and tapping into the creativity of diverse areas of expertise. Eliminating barriers and building bridges of knowledge, understanding and diverse collaboration will foster and usher in a conversion, maybe even a transformation of sorts.Collaboration, Pathak stresses, is the most effective way to nurture problem-solving mind sets around complex and systems-level issues. Kingbridge Centre is a place where people come together to explore, experiment and push the envelope with some risky ideas, in a safe manner that supports learning from failure. Where solutions yield impactful results, the resources and network of the Centre wrap around the solution, accelerating it to global markets. In that manner, the Centre and its partners will foster sustainable, economic prosperity, in alignment with the U.N.'s Sustainability Development Goals.Towards this end, Seneca College and Kingbridge have teamed up to help drive in a real-world setting unique programs to help entrepreneurs build and scale businesses in the agriculture, food production and processing, energy and environmental sectors.Through shared resources in business development and applied research, Seneca and Kingbridge will help companies grow and solve challenges related to technology, infrastructure and sustainability. The collaboration is the latest addition to the thriving innovation ecosystem in York Region and will harness the unique assets located in King Township.Seneca's contributions to the initiative include applied research infrastructure and faculty expertise and access for aspiring entrepreneurs to HELIX, Seneca's business incubator and accelerator. HELIX has built a strong reputation in York Region helping young business owners with mentorship, infrastructure, access to investors and professional development opportunities.While Kingbridge continues its partnership with York Region Community Services and the Salvation Army to provide shelter services for those affected by the pandemic, the Innovation hub started outdoor projects by launching a pilot project to develop an efficient and ecologically responsible approach to planting trees, in keeping with the federal government's plan to plant one billion trees across the country. Their tree nursery is a forest incubator and includes focus on native species at risk. The incubator involves species migration studies, tracking invasive trees, planning for seed orchards and seed banks and the building resilience in the forestry supply chain, demo sites and more.A total of 1,500 white cedar trees are planted on the property, as part of the tree nursery for native trees and species at risk. Another 9,000 trees of different at-risk varieties were planted in a holding area, to be re-located to Kingbridge in the spring of 2022.Pathak said nature's best 3-D design for carbon capture is the tree. The answer to many climate issues is simply, plant more curated and well designed forest cover. The idea may be straightforward, but the logistics are a bit more complicated. Leading Canadian research has demonstrated that biodiversity of surrounding plants and more importantly, the soil, is essential to ensuring healthy forests. Numbers aside, species and pollinators all have to be examined and protected, while optimizing the complex web of nature that supports trees.Pathak imagined a group ? the ?Climate Corps? for instance ??leading mass plantings among other such ecologically minded projects. If teams can plant 10,000 trees in a matter of weeks, such efforts can bring together environmentally conscious citizens, volunteers and governments in an almost seamless manner. It would be an army of climate conservationists, not unlike nature's best worker bees.And bees figure prominently in Kingbridge's scope. The Centre is also home to hives and some 150,000 honey bees. The hives are located beside the tree nursery, and have access to the naturalized forest and the Humber River which runs through the Kingbridge property. The bee project is part of a focus on protecting biodiversity, local food production and natural ecosystems. The bees are cared for by onsite team members and several volunteers. They recently completed their first honey harvest.Research and study at Kingbridge is done in a natural environment. Staff and volunteers can actually develop pollinators in a

responsible manner.Many industry experts believe sustainability and ?green? methods impact the bottom line adversely, but Pathak is adamant that by bringing all parties and partners together in a responsible manner it can indeed lead to superior economic prosperity.The pandemic has been a sort of double-edge sword for humanity and industry. At the outset, countries closed themselves off, preferring isolation over collaboration. As the pandemic lingered, more and more scientists, researchers, governments and industries came together to ramp up vaccine production and distribution. The work over the past year has clearly demonstrated just how world partners can connect and deliver solutions quickly and efficiently, for everyone's benefit. In fact, Canada recently co-hosted the World Circular Economy Forum with the Finnish Innovation Fund, SITRA. The Kingbridge team were active participants in the forum, sharing ideas and opportunities.It's a top-down process with a sense of purpose, Pathak explained. Collaboration helps drive problem-solving and strong leadership leads to engagement and ultimately innovation.Kingbridge is the catalyst for the key ingredients of the innovation mixture. Absorb the risk, eliminate the fear of failure and encourage teamwork and you have the five-star recipe for success.Kingbridge also provides the incredibly comfortable atmosphere for teams to gather and create. Seneca instructors and volunteers have already been hard at work on several projects, including exploring the potential of offering a Sustainable Business Management micro credential course for small and medium sized businesses, participating in the Green Citizenship conference, and developing a Greenpreneurship workshop to be offered later this fall.Connecting with King Township, the Chamber of Commerce and all other community stakeholders across the region will continue to elevate the centre's foundation and fuel the development of more projects.By bringing the best and brightest together, things can be accomplished quickly, but also in a responsible manner. Again, Pathak stressed, Kingbridge is in it for the long haul, the long game.Pathak is fond of the expression, ?we can't promise success, but we can promise commitment.?It's this mind set of networking and alliances that will end up benefitting King Township, York Region, the GTA and the entire province.Pathak believes that everyone shares a curiosity and desire to improve life. The pool of intellectual and hard infrastructure resources at Kingbridge will lead to the creation of new business models and innovative solutions. Hopes are such partnerships will lead to transferable technologies and processes. By planting the proverbial seed, you can replicate solid results, which are then teachable.Pathak and Kingbridge staff are excited, even though they're heading down a road less travelled. By providing confidence, determination and the stomach for a good challenge, Kingbridge hopes to transcend the closed, ivory tower mentality and disseminate knowledge to the world.With a mandate like that, there's no stopping them.For more, visit https://kingbridgecentre.com/