

Newark small business center to offer affordable office space, training and mentorship

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By **Stacy Jones/The Star-Ledger**

By



Staff Photographer

Jill L. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer of Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership Newark, hopes the planned small business center will persuade businesses outside Newark to move into the city or open a second office.

Hans Goff's political consulting firm is taking off, but working from home and taking calls on his personal cell phone doesn't make him feel like much of a legitimate businessman.

That's why Goff feels optimistic about the Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership's plans for a small business center expected to open next month at 550 Broad St. in Newark. The center would provide Goff and other budding entrepreneurs with low-cost office space, administrative support, IT training and mentorship.

Goff, who is the founder of Voting Works, drums up publicity for politicians by bringing big name musicians, like John Legend, Questlove and MC Lyte to their events. While working for former Gov. Jon Corzine's reelection campaign, he brought Michael Williams, who plays Omar on "The Wire," out for a barbershop tour in Newark. A video of Williams' appearance generated 24,000 hits to Corzine's website — enough traffic to crash it.

He currently works out of Trenton, but he said a move could help his business.

"If I was based in Newark, it'd be the best of both worlds," Goff said. "I could still work with my New Jersey clients and easily connect with ones in New York City."

The Newark-based Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership announced its plans for the center yesterday during a White House Urban Entrepreneurship Summit at Rutgers University's Paul Robeson Campus Center. The summit drew a crowd of 600, including business owners, students, government officials and advocates. Newark Mayor Cory Booker and Russell Simmons, co-founder of DefJam, also made appearances.

Jill Johnson, the institute's CEO and co-founder, said the center will make it easier for her organization to help small businesses in a collaborative way.

The center, which will welcome businesses on a first come first serve basis, has several price points to accommodate entrepreneurs. For some, the center will provide basics, including virtual support and a business address, while others can sign up to rent cubicles or whole offices at a discounted rate.

Johnson said her organization, which paid start-up costs, plans for the center to be self-sustaining. "We anticipate this will grow to be funded by revenue streams from people who are moving their businesses into the space," Johnson said.

Similar centers, she added, like NJIT's tech-focused Enterprise Development Center in Newark, have succeeded in nurturing businesses until they're established enough to go out on their own.

Michael Blake, associate director of the White House Office of Public Engagement, said an Atlanta-based business center for women entrepreneurs has received positive feedback from the community.

If the Broad Street center is successful, it could solve a common problem that urban entrepreneurs face.

When business owners can't find affordable space they take their operations elsewhere and the city misses out on jobs and revenue, said dt ogilvie, a Rutgers University professor and founding director of The Center for Urban Entrepreneurship & Economic Development in Newark.

"The business incubator, or center, isn't an unusual model. But we haven't had many of them in Newark," ogilvie said. "We need to be bold, step out and take risks. Nothing is given to the timid."

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