

ANALYSIS

Innovation York beneficial to academia and the private sector

The Ontario university community is quickly realizing that it cannot afford to rely solely on government grants in order to continue its research programmes. Through this realization, centres like Innovation York were established to help match up researchers with companies that possess the interest and financial backing to help them complete their respective projects. And at the recent open house, Innovation York got to show off the success of such collaborative efforts.

By SUJATA BERRY

What does Professor Barry Glickman, president of Probtex, a firm that specializes in developing biotechnology, have in common with Wayne Silver, vice-president of Cellstar Corporation, a firm dealing in cellular telephone systems? Normally these two executives would have very little to do with each other, but last Friday both men were attending the Innovation York Open House. Held at the Farquharson Building, the open house, was planned to highlight technologies available to York and those university programmes which interact with the private sector. The people in attendance came from diverse backgrounds including government officials, venture capitalists, licensing executives, and members of the York community.

Innovation York was established in 1985 under the auspices of the Ontario government programme. The aim was to develop Innovation Centres in order to provide access for the business community to the resources, (human and technical) that were available at York University. Since its inception, the Centre has been involved in 70 projects

involving 120 clients. The diverse nature of the various projects is one indicator of the many services offered through Innovation York.

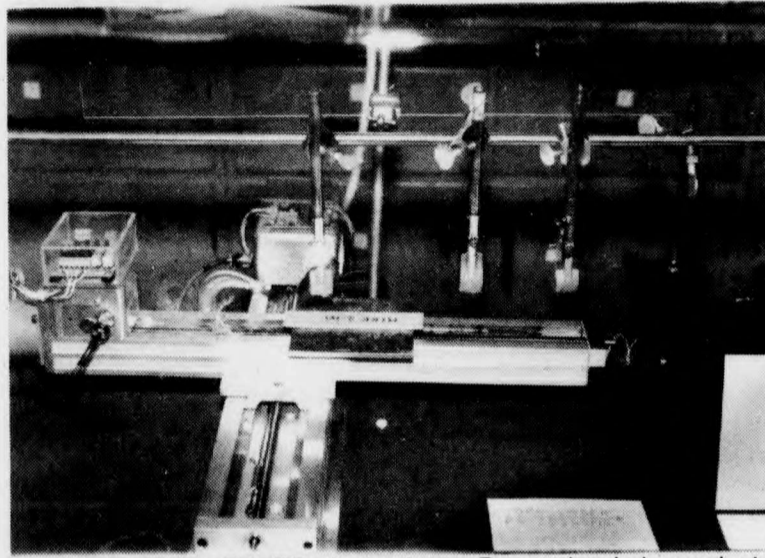
At the Laser Processing Lab, graduate students research the feasibility of using lasers on the assembly line for General Motors Corporation. Innovation York assisted Dr. Walt Duley, the director of the Laser Lab, in negotiating and securing the contract with General Motors. The income generated by doing such contractual work, has allowed the Laser Processing Lab to update its equipment. Most recently, the Lab acquired a sophisticated high-powered CO₂ laser at a cost of \$130,000. Needless to say, in light of the chronic underfunding which plagues the University, such a purchase may have been almost impossible without the contract work.

When Professor Barry Glickman of York's Biology Department decided to explore the commercial possibilities of his research in the area of DNA technology, he recruited the expertise of Richard Adair, the director of Innovation York. Innovation York was instrumental in the formation of Probtex Corporation. Explains Richard Glickman, the vice-president of Probtex, Innovation York "provided the business know-how, the right financial contacts, and the right development role." Currently, Probtex is a tenant of Innovation York, renting office and lab facilities in the Farquharson Building. Thanks to the efforts of Innovation York, the company can list the conglomerate of Molson Companies Limited as one of its many financial backers.

Just over a year ago, Wayne Silver attended a series of talks sponsored by Innovation York that highlighted professionals from various facul-

ties of the business world. According to Silver, now President of Cellstar Corporation, the talks "give you ideas of how to put together everything." Through the programme offered in the talks, Silver struck out on his own and set up Cellstar Corporation. In its first year of business, Cellstar grossed \$5 million in sales.

Under the able direction of Richard Adair and his staff, Innovation York undoubtedly has provided the University and the business community with an essential service. The Open House was a celebration



HELPING EACH OTHER: At the Laser Processing Lab, graduate students research the feasibility of using on the assembly line for General Motors.

of the success enjoyed by the programme. The University has benefited from the good publicity and additional funds generated through the programme. While Private business has procured selected University services at a significant financial saving, academic researchers have received the funding they need to

pursue their research activities. As well, the students have been enriched from the practical hands-on approach provided by the programme. For many in attendance, the establishment of Innovation York was not in response to post-secondary underfunding. Instead they see the programme as a logical progression in the process of increasing positive interaction between business and the University.

Innovation York does breed certain legitimate concerns. Some of these issues were raised during the question period of the panel discussion. Certain questions concerned the manner in which type of conducted research would be restricted to projects that appeal to business in order to attract the private sector funding each project requires. Also, concern was expressed that regular research grants would be reduced due to the presence organizations like Innovation York. Panelist

has not been a problem in our lab and I have not seen these (problematic) tendencies."

The moderator of the panel, Dr. Kenneth Davey, Vice President of Academic Affairs at York University, added that research at York has not been impeded in any way by the activities of Innovation York. On the contrary, Davey stated that the research has continued unabated as funding for research has continued to increase in an extremely competitive environment. However, Davey acknowledged that there exists "a potential danger to which most people at York University are alerted to and which by virtue of having a separate organization (Innovation York) we are coping.

Another question was raised about defining the line between the point at which the University researcher becomes a company employee. For Davey, the question was one that dealt in personal ethics. Professors have to monitor their own activities. A senate resolution required faculty members to report paid activities outside the realm of their University duties. According to Davey, "Monitoring the work a professor does, is not a simple or even desirable operation. I do believe, however, there ought to be a carefully attended set of internal ethics to making sure that you continue to perform your job as a professor . . . When other activities, particularly entrepreneurial ones begin to interfere with that function, I think that you have an ethical responsibility to declare that the conflict is beginning to occur" and the professor should opt to take some time off.

These questions are just the beginning, in light of the permanent changes that are being brought about by developments such as Innovation York and Enterprise York. A definitive with the passage of time. Thus far what Innovation York has accomplished is demonstrating that there exists a viable alternative to other means of funding commercial research. However, our enthusiasm for pursuing such a programme in the future must be tempered by the questions that for now, remain unresolved.

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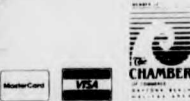
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