Taking the “No” out of innovation: University Innevation Center opens downtown

By Jane Tors ’82, director of communications

A laser-cutting, rather than the traditional ribbon-cutting, marked the Sept. 22 opening of the University of Nevada, Reno Innovation Center, Powered by Switch, in downtown Reno. As a packed room full of guests that included Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval ’86 (English) and City of Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve looked on, the laser cutter from the facility’s new makerspace cut out an intricate image of The Innovation Center logo.

What is The Innovation Center? “A collaborative space that will stimulate ideation, creation, incubation, mentoring and acceleration of start-ups and new ventures. It is an important addition to the vibrant, knowledge-based ecosystem taking hold in Nevada,” said Mridul Gautam, University vice president for research and innovation.

Switch, a recognized world leader in data-center development and mission-critical operations, generously provided $500,000 toward the facility’s interior build-out. It is similar in style to The Innovation Center in Las Vegas, created and built by Switch founder and CEO Rob Roy. The two centers – named to take the “no” out of innovation – create a new foundation for economic collaboration statewide.

“We are excited to serve as a catalyst for the continued resurgence of Reno’s Downtown and Midtown Districts and to see our community increasingly embrace what comes with being a University Town,” said Heidi Gansert ’90 MBA, University executive director of external affairs.

Housed in a 25,000-square-foot building acquired from the City of Reno through a lease-to-purchase agreement, The Innovation Center will bring the University community together with entrepreneurs, investors and commercialization experts. Located at 450 Sinclair Street, approximately 1.25 miles from the University’s main campus and blocks from Reno’s City Hall, it offers co-working, conference and meeting space, along with a makerspace that has resources and equipment to support development of prototypes and minimize design-cycle time. The Innovation Center extends mentoring by industry executives and experienced entrepreneurs, plus the opportunity to make connections with external networks and access to capital. A welcome center on the ground floor offers University information and a Wolf Shop satellite location.

The Innovation Center is home base for three industry-focused University initiatives: Nevada Center for Applied Research, a stand-alone applied research and technology service center focused on making Nevada businesses internationally competitive by leveraging the state-of-the-art laboratories and intellectual assets of the University.

Nevada Industry Excellence (NVIE), a statewide Manufacturing Extension Partnership hosted by the University to help Nevada companies become industry leaders by providing resources to improve processes, efficiencies and productivity.
Nevada Advanced Autonomous Systems Innovation Center, known as NAASIC (“nay-sic”) is supported by a $3 million grant from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development Knowledge Fund to advance technologies and partnerships in autonomous systems, which includes land-based, aerial and stationary robotic systems; advanced manufacturing systems; and autonomous road vehicles.

In addition to being available to University faculty, staff, students and alumni, the resources of The Innovation Center are available to individuals and businesses through a membership model. For more information about the University’s Innovation Center and memberships, visit www.unr.edu/innovation.

Located at the edge of Reno’s Midtown District, the exterior of the University’s Innovation Center, Powered by Switch, is identified with a bold, large-scale Block “N” logo.

What They Said
Innovation Center opening buzz

State of Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval ’86
“What a proud moment. We will look back and say this was the beginning of something really big. This new building is symbolic of the new Nevada and the emergence of the University and of a new economy for Nevada.”

City of Reno Mayor Hillary Scheive
“We’re not just saying it, we’re doing it. We are becoming a University Town now more than ever. I am thrilled to see Switch and the University join together to further solidify downtown Reno as an emerging, energetic center.”

Chairman of the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents Rick Trachok ’74
“From the moment you walk into this building, you realize that it is a collaborative environment. It’s a place where it’s very easy to imagine University students and faculty and researchers coming together with entrepreneurs, investors and community leaders all working toward the same goal: innovation that will transform how we work together toward a common purpose; innovation that will transform how we do business, including the incubation and the know-how needed to nurture and create emerging new industries; and innovation that will lessen physical boundaries and serve as a magnet for further partnership between this city and its university.”

Switch Vice President of Strategy Adam Kramer
“We have been able to bring the community together (through The Innovation Center in Las Vegas). When we had the opportunity to partner with the University of Nevada, Reno to create this Innovation Center, we didn’t hesitate.”

Switch Executive Vice President of Awesomeness Kristi Overgaard
“Rob Roy started The Innovation Center in Las Vegas to be a collaborative workspace to drive Nevada’s new innovation economy. With the addition of The Innovation Center at the University of Nevada, Reno, we will now be able to collaborate statewide. This will make Nevada an example for the rest of the country.”

University President Marc Johnson
“Today we celebrate the grand opening of The Innovation Center, Powered by Switch. In many ways, though, we’re also celebrating the University’s responsibility to a rapidly changing world that craves innovation ... and our University’s responsibility to a rapidly changing community that is positioning itself as an ecosystem for that innovation.”

University Vice President of Research and Innovation Mridul Gautam
“Our entire state will be one big innovation hub: this building, the Start-Up Row just up the street, the University campus, the University’s Applied Research Facility, the nationally renowned Del Ahmadi Library, the Ozmen Center for Entrepreneurship, Carson City, Sparks, down to Vegas. Everybody in this region – the University, the city, the Governor, GOED, EDAWN, entrepreneurs, the Sierra Angels and other investors – everybody is pulling the wagon in the same direction. You don’t see this very often, if at all.”

This delta shaped 3D printer, made by DeltaMaker, is printing a flower vase designed by Jake Mestre ’12, the Innovation Center’s innovation and transformation coordinator.