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2-7-2014

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Fedderson, Troy, "First NIC facilities roll toward summer finish" (2014). *Nebraska Innovation Campus Materials*. 8.

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First NIC facilities roll toward summer finish



Nebraska Innovation Campus will open for business this summer as the first two buildings and a four-season greenhouse go online.

Construction on the former State Fair Park continues as the two buildings — the former 4-H Building and new Companion Building — are scheduled to open for a June move-in. Work on the state-of-the-art greenhouse will begin soon.

“This will again be a key year for Nebraska Innovation Campus,” said Dan Duncan, executive director of the private/public research campus. “Last year was key because we started construction. Next year will be key as we continue to develop and build. This year is key because we start moving in and setting the culture, forming what we want Nebraska Innovation Campus to be to the world.”

The 4-H and Companion buildings are linked to provide a conference center, commons area, office and meeting space.

The conference center includes a 390-seat auditorium, high-tech meeting rooms and a cafeteria.

Duncan said marketing of the conference facility has not yet started, but the NIC group has tentatively booked an event for June and another for 2015.

The Companion Building will also be home to NIC staff, NUtech Ventures, Industry Relations and the Daugherty Global Water for Food Institute.

The 4-H Building will include a maker space, which will offer a variety of specialized tools and spaces open to faculty, staff, students and the public who wish to develop ideas and products. Alongside the maker space will be the NIC's new business accelerator, led by Terence Bowden.

"By combining those two areas, we are hoping for some good interactions between businesses in the accelerator and individuals developing ideas," Duncan said.

Remaining areas within the 4-H Building are available for lease. Those spaces will be customized per tenant needs.

The four-season greenhouse complex that will be built east of the 4-H and Companion buildings was originally planned for the second floor of the NIC's Industrial Arts Building. However, a UNL decision to shift the Department of Food Science and Technology to the campus caused planners to rethink space usage in the IAB and a yet-to-be-started fourth building with lab space for researchers and startup companies.

"We realized that it would be awkward to have food scientists next to greenhouses reserved for plant scientists," Duncan said. "So, we adapted the plans, moving the greenhouses and congregating the food scientists into one area."

The IAB and lab building are tentatively scheduled for completion in 2015.

Duncan said the \$10 million greenhouse complex will include a head house and 30,000 square feet of space. The new location also allows for expansion, up to 45,000 square feet of additional greenhouse space, as needed.

The greenhouse that will open this year will include a LemnaTec system that uses specialized conveyors and a camera system to take high-resolution images of plants as they grow in varied conditions.

Plant researchers Ed Cahoon and Harkamal Walia will be primary users of the LemnaTec system.

Work also continues to link the Central Renewable Energy System to the NIC. The system will use reclaimed water from the city to heat and cool NIC facilities.

And, demolition has started on the former State Fair Park horse racing facility north of the 4-H/Companion buildings.

"We also hope that, in the next couple of months, we will announce the next company that will be coming to the NIC," Duncan said. "And, in the coming year, we hope to develop plans for additional buildings."

For more information on Nebraska Innovation Campus, go to <http://innovate.unl.edu> (<http://innovate.unl.edu>).

Article by: Troy Fedderson, University Communications

Source

UNL Today (<http://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/unltoday/article/first-nic-facilities-roll-toward-summer-finish/>)

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