

GeekWire

Welcome to TechDwellers: An inside look at Seattle's newest tech incubator

March 22, 2011 By [John Cook](#) [View Comments](#)



Lisa Goodman, John Carleton and Larry Benaroya at the new TechDwellers space in Georgetown

There's a Les Schwab tire shop across the street. A flower distribution warehouse around the corner. And a distributor of hydraulic fittings and hose next door. Welcome to Georgetown, the hip neighborhood for tech startups?

Located about 10 minutes south of downtown Seattle, the industrial neighborhood best known for the old Rainier brewery and Boeing Field isn't the first place that comes to mind when you think of Seattle's burgeoning tech industry.

But the Benaroya Company is hoping to change that image with [TechDwellers](#), a new high-tech incubator that's just starting to come to life at 4th Avenue South and Michigan.

We got a sneak peak on Monday, taking a tour of the fifth-floor office space with real estate developer Larry Benaroya, venture capitalist John Carleton and marketing director Lisa Goodman.

Just one tiny startup is currently located in a sliver of the 40,000 square foot space, which is still undergoing improvements. But over time, [Larry Benaroya](#) envisions a bustling ecosystem where as many as 40 or 50 startups could thrive.

The space is huge, and diverse. Some rooms have carpeting, others have bare concrete floors. The walls are painted in various colors, and depending upon the room you may get a view of Mount Rainier, planes approaching Boeing Field or the Seattle skyline.

Floor plans are divided into chunks as small as 300 square feet and as large as 10,000 square feet. Individuals also can rent a single desk for \$295 per month.

Lease rates for the larger spaces are set at \$19.75 per square foot, which Benaroya says is comparable to what you'll find in Pioneer Square or other areas where tech startups tend to congregate. But the big difference with TechDwellers, he says, are the amenities that come along with the office space.

In addition to free high-speed Internet access, private meeting and event rooms and an on-site cafe, TechDwellers also boasts "The Fun Room" complete with X-box 360, 60-inch plasma TV, ping-pong table and a custom-made beer pong table (Proudly constructed by a WSU grad, I am told).



"It is an unbelievable deal," boasts Benaroya, adding that flexible lease terms are designed to attract fast-growing startups who may need to grow rapidly.

And then there's the parking — loads of free parking.

Benaroya wasn't shy about pointing out the more than 500 parking spaces that surround the building, a perk that he thinks will become even more valuable as tolling takes effect in May or June on State Route 520.

Of course, with all of the excitement, there remains one big challenge. Tech startups tend to cluster in pockets, say Pioneer Square or South Lake Union.

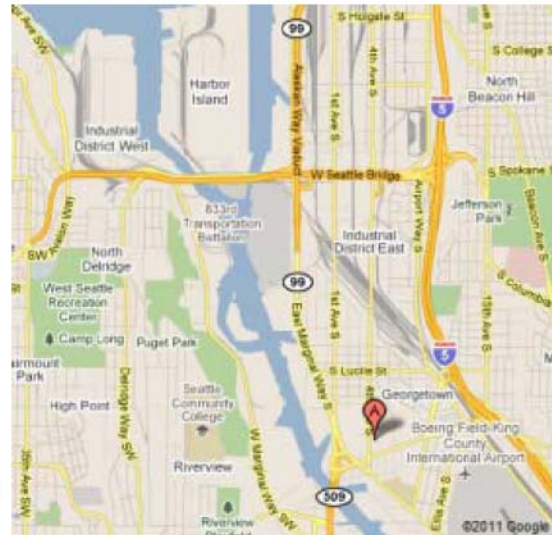
Can TechDwellers convince entrepreneurs to head south?

That was certainly a concern of Sparkbuy CEO Dan Shapiro, the well known Seattle entrepreneur who previously co-founded Ontela. Shapiro, and his team, are the only tenants at TechDwellers, occupying small space near the elevators with a view of orange and blue shipping containers at a nearby port facility.

A Green Lake resident on Seattle's north end, Shapiro said he was a bit worried about the commute. So, prior to moving in, he drove the route a couple of times.

"I clocked it at 14 minutes door-to-door," said Shapiro, adding that it took just as much time to travel to the old Ontela headquarters in Pioneer Square.

"Comparing it with my old Ontela digs, it's cheaper, the parking is free, the commute is the same length, and the facilities are much better suited to startups," he said. "It doesn't seem like a big thing, but having a kitchen, meeting room, and common area provided, means we had to pay for about a third less space."



Sparkbuy is a portfolio company of Benaroya Capital, the venture capital arm of The Benaroya Company which owns the building. Carleton, who oversees the venture capital portfolio, said he'd love to have his companies utilizing the space "if it makes sense for them" and even said they might cut some nice deals for those startups.

It will take some education to inform entrepreneurs of what's going on in the neighborhood. But Benaroya thinks the space will catch on with cost-conscious startups, creating an alternative to offices other parts of the city.

"Once we get a few more people in here, I think we will start getting a little synergy, and hopefully it will come together more quickly," Benaroya said.

To get the word out, TechDwellers plans to host or co-sponsor events in the new space, including tonight's eDate event put on by the Northwest Entrepreneur Network. It also has regularly hosted the popular Poker 2.0 parties for startups.

Here's a quick look around at a small portion of the space, with Lisa Goodman of The Benaroya Company serving as tour guide.

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