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New tenants help New Mexico Innovation Hub on midtown campus reach capacity

★ Follow Mike Easterling

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Josh Heebner with Bandelier Technologies looks up at a drone approaching him Monday at the firm's new office space in the New Mexico Innovation Hub at the midtown campus.

Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

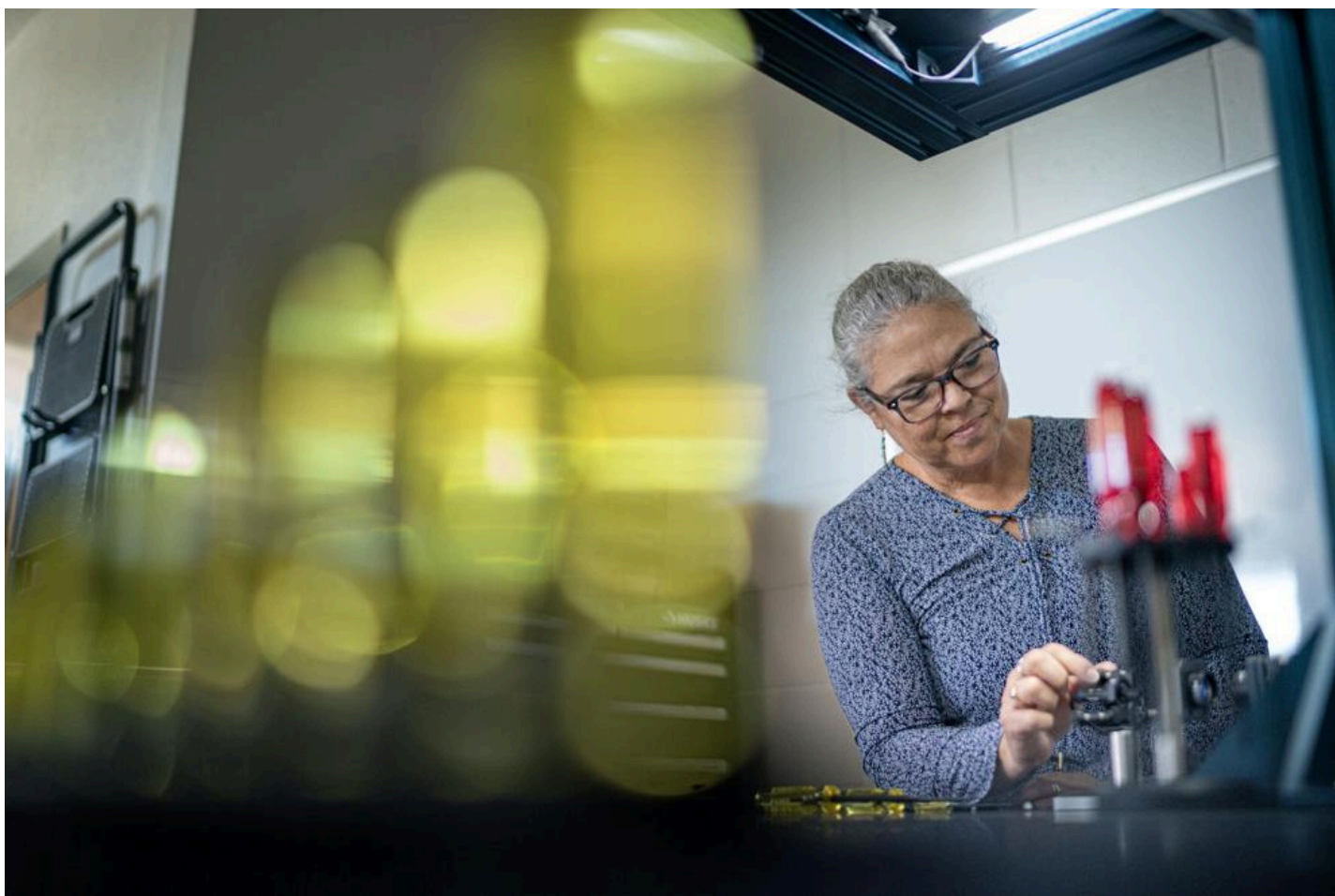


High-tech companies have filled the 50,000-square-foot New Mexico Innovation Hub at Santa Fe's midtown campus, prompting the founder to start looking ahead at his project's next phases.

David Perez, who opened the Innovation Hub in January at Aspect Media Village on the former college campus on St. Michael's Drive, announced earlier this month the addition of several new tenants.

“I’m pleased with how quickly this happened,” Perez said.

He had believed there was significant demand in Santa Fe for the kind of facility he envisioned; still, he was caught a little off guard by the speed with which the facility filled up.



Adriana Reyes-Newell, a senior research scientist with Bandelier Technologies, works on a quantum imaging setup Monday in the firm's new office at the New Mexico Innovation Hub.

Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

“I thought it would take about a year,” Perez said. “It happened in six months.”

The final group of tenants to sign on to the hub — Perez prefers to call it an "ecosystem" — includes Prometheon Development Group LLC, Liberty Fusion, Bandelier Technologies, Santa Fe Community College's nonprofit Mosaica Inc. and Slazer AI. Those organizations join the previous residents, New Mexico Consortium, Woodruff Engineering, New Mexico Angels, the New Mexico Fusion Igniter and the New Collar Network Fab Lab.

'Important milestone'

Perez estimates the hub's enterprises will employ 40 people, bringing new life to the midtown campus, which largely was devoid of activity until the city's redevelopment of the site gained momentum a couple of years ago.

The Innovation Hub is anchored by the 32,000-square-foot Benildus Hall but includes space in other buildings at Aspect Media Village — a mixed-use project on property that developer Phillip Gesue purchased from the city.

"I think the hub has had a great impact on the atmosphere in midtown," Perez said. He described driving up to Benildus Hall in the morning and seeing a parking lot filled with cars.

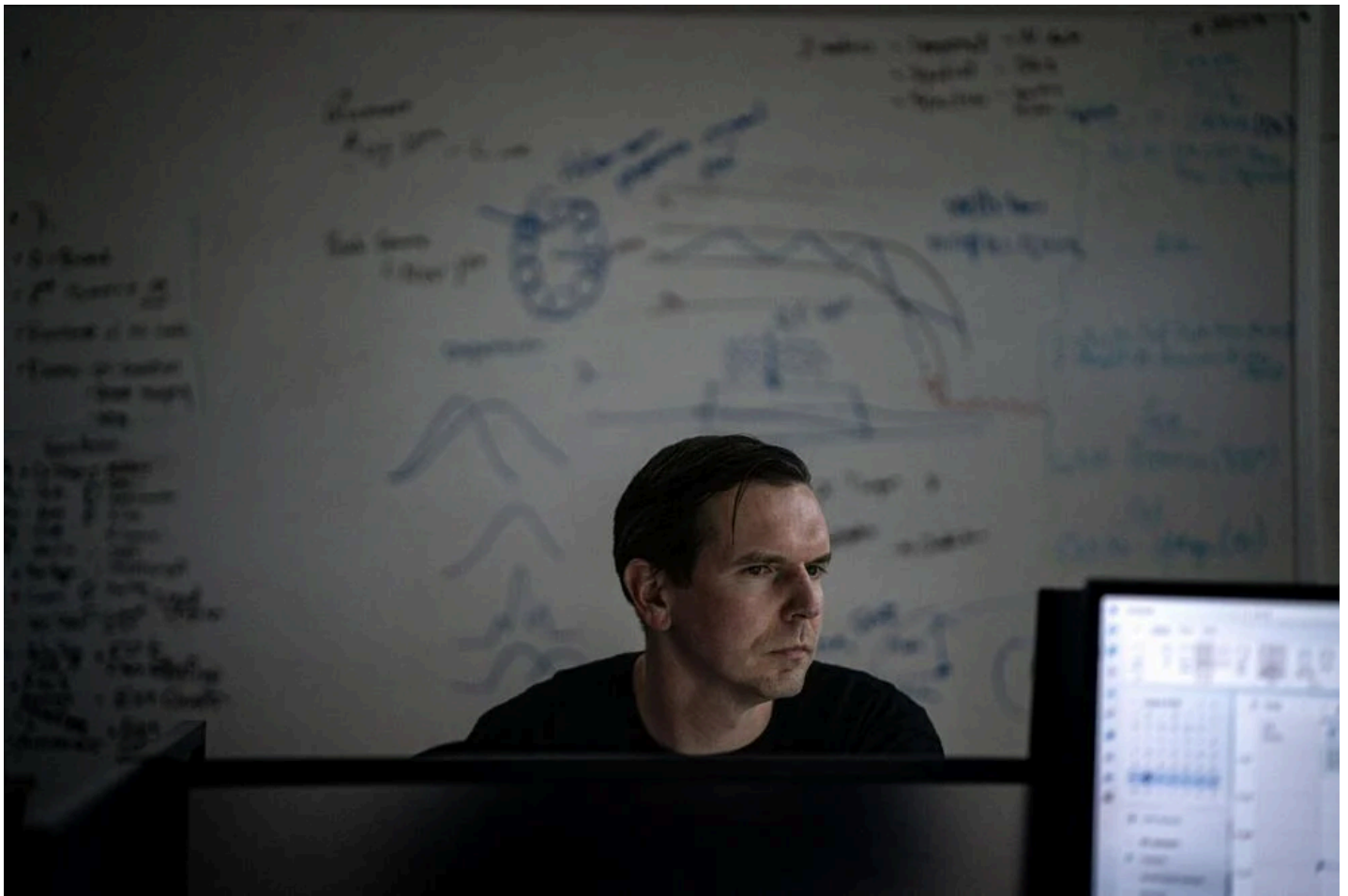
Perez recalled how empty the building felt when he took it over last year. It didn't have Wi-Fi, he said, noting he used to sit on a metal folding chair in the lobby, waiting to lead tours for prospective tenants.

"It had no energy," Perez said. "We've come a long way."

Gesue did not respond to *The New Mexican's* request for comment on the hub's impact on the neighborhood.

Mayor Michael Garcia said in a statement the hub's success is an encouraging sign.

"To see the Hub fully leased and operating at capacity less than a year after opening demonstrates that there is strong demand for the kind of innovation, entrepreneurship and economic opportunity we are working to cultivate here in Santa Fe," he said.



Stephen Buchanan, CEO of Bandelier Technologies, on Monday at his new office in the midtown campus. Bandelier is one of several tenants in the now filled New Mexico Innovation Hub.

Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

Garcia described that achievement as "an important milestone," but he said much work remains at midtown.

Carly Venditti, director of the Santa Fe Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency, which is shepherding the work at midtown, described the hub as "a strong catalyst," noting it is helping to strengthen the regional economy.

"Its success demonstrates the demand for a place where innovation, education and entrepreneurship can come together," she said in a statement.

A literal open door

Stephen Buchanan, founder and CEO of Bandelier Technologies, said he doesn't mind when people curious about his business drop in to have a look at its new office.

“We leave our door open all the time,” he said, chuckling. “If you’re here, you’re welcome in our office.”

Bandelier Technologies is a quantum sensing and imaging startup company that develops applications for projects with national security implications, such as the power grid and fiber optic systems. Buchanan, a military veteran who recently earned his master’s degree in business administration from Harvard, launched the company after deciding he wanted to move to Santa Fe from the East Coast.

It didn’t take long for him to realize the Innovation Hub was where he wanted to be.

“What really drove me to it is the vision David had,” Buchanan said.

It was clear to him Perez understands what tech startups are looking for, he said, adding he also was impressed by Perez’s long-term plans and the roster of other tenants he has attracted.

While Bandelier Technologies is the only hub tenant focusing on quantum sensing and imaging, Buchanan said other tenants are working on parallel subjects, creating a synergetic atmosphere.

“That kind of stuff is contagious,” he said.

Like Bandelier, some other tenants also work with Los Alamos National Laboratory. Buchanan said he has received good insights from his neighbors into how the lab operates and what the high-tech climate is like in New Mexico.

The decision to locate his startup in the state is paying dividends, Buchanan said. He soon will add three new employees to his seven-member staff through the New Mexico Economic Development Department’s Job Training Incentive Program, which reimburses relocating or expanding businesses for 50% to 90% of employee training and wages for up to six months.



Electrical technician Sergio Arvizu works on a drone Monday at Bandelier Technologies in the New Mexico Innovation Hub. Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

The only problem, he said, is Bandelier is already close to filling the 1,400 square feet it leases at the hub.

Buchanan described his company's quarters, which includes laboratory, fabrication and office space, as cozy.

SFCC tech training

Santa Fe Community College officials said they are working with the hub to extend the college's workforce development and training offerings through Mosaica, the college's research park entity.

Mosaica will occupy nearly 4,800 square feet at the hub, with two-full-time employees and two adjunct faculty members. The space will house an advanced machining lab and related programs where about 25 students will be enrolled in courses. Officials said that number could double as the program develops.

“We envision connecting our students with startup activities and immersive learning opportunities while creating additional career pathways to employers at the Hub,” SFCC President Becky Rowley said in a statement.

Mosaica was created to advance workforce and economic development for the benefit of students and the community, Rowley said, with an emphasis on technological innovation and entrepreneurship.

“By working together, SFCC, Mosaica and the Innovation Hub can connect degree-seeking education, workforce skill-building and entrepreneurship, creating pathways toward multigenerational economic and social prosperity,” she said.

Bigger plans

Now that the Innovation Hub is operating at capacity, Perez said, he can focus on plans to expand the consortium.

“We are planning 140,000 square feet of new development on the campus,” he said.

That includes 90,000 square feet of laboratory, flex and industrial space, with work beginning early in 2027 and finishing in 2028, he said.



The team of Bandelier Technologies at their new office space at midtown on Monday.

Gabriela Campos/The New Mexican

“We’re actually taking pre-leases now, and companies are working with us to build it out to serve their needs,” Perez said.

The project includes a new restaurant. Perez has begun speaking to restaurateurs who might be interested in operating the eatery.

A second phase of new construction will follow in the form of a 50,000-square-foot office building with a residential component. Perez said 15% of housing in the project will be designated as affordable.

He estimated it would take at least four years to complete the project.

Casting a wider net

Even with his leasing success in the initial phase of the Innovation Hub, Perez said he doesn’t feel like the market is close to being tapped out.

“I believe there is more demand to be at the Innovation Hub — not just among companies based in Santa Fe but throughout New Mexico,” he said. “And we want to create something that attracts companies from outside the state.”

Perez cited conversations with fusion energy companies based in the United Kingdom that are attracted to the Innovation Hub because of other tenants who work in the same field.

Those companies don’t necessarily consider each other competitors, he said. In many cases, they are working on different sides of fusion energy development, and their work can be cooperative rather than competitive.

In fact, Perez sees a belief in a shared mission emerging among the hub’s tenants.

“What we’re seeing is the Innovation Hub is creating a sense of belonging for the broader ecosystem,” he said. “Everyone is welcome. Everyone feels like they belong here.”

Perez also sees a sense of stewardship in building an economic driver — not just for Santa Fe but for New Mexico.

“We want to make sure it reflects our values, and we’re focused on creating opportunities for young people here,” Perez said. “We want to build careers for young people here so they don’t have to leave New Mexico.”

During a recent lunch at a Tesuque restaurant, a diner at an adjoining table overheard Perez speaking with a friend about the hub and approached him, he said.

“Are you involved with midtown?” the man asked.

When he said he was, the man came over and shook his hand, Perez said, telling him, “ ‘Thank you for what you’re doing for Santa Fe.’ ”

The experience was gratifying and confirmed for him the important role the New Mexico Innovation Hub is playing in improving the city’s future, he said, adding, “That tells me I’m doing the right thing.”

Several new high-tech tenants have joined the New Mexico Innovation Hub in recent months, bringing the first phase of the midtown campus project to capacity.

Founder David Perez said he now can concentrate on developing other phases of the hub, a process he estimated will take four years.

Perez has plans to add new laboratory and office space to the hub, along with housing and a restaurant.

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