



INNOVATIVE DIVERSITY THRIVING IN LONDON CANADA

Large multinationals, fast-growing mid-sized ventures, and exciting start-ups are finding success thanks to the rich and multilayered research and innovation ecosystem in London, Canada.

“There is so much momentum being built locally to support entrepreneurs and ventures from ideation to start-up and scaleup,” said Kapil Lakhota, CEO at London Economic Development Corporation.

“It’s such a vibrant innovation ecosystem that has the impact research institutes and agencies and all the resources needed to assist with organic growth and the kind of transformational growth that comes from innovation.”

London has developed into an innovation hub and a centre of product development in health care and medical devices, agri-food, digital media and technology, banking, finance and insurance, advanced manufacturing, transportation and aerospace and defence.

“The diversity of industries and talent makes for a depth of innovation that is unique,” said Lakhota. “There is a foundation of historic and leading brands,

such as 3M, McCormick Canada, Labatt and Nestle, and over the last several years the city has seen the emergence of a number of successes that have attracted international attention.”

Located in the heart of the southwestern region of Ontario, exactly halfway between Toronto and Detroit, London is one of Canada’s fastest-growing cities and the 11th-largest urban centre in the country at more than 530,000 people. It is a multinational hub, with 25 per cent of its population being born abroad and 140 languages spoken by its residents.

London offers a terrific balance of city amenities, natural beauty, and career opportunities, says Lakhota.

“It’s a safe, neighbourhood-focused urban centre with downtown amenities in art and culture, great post-secondary institutions, and world-class healthcare. There is everything you want in a city here. It has the convenience, charm and comfort of a small town but the quality of life and economic power of a big city.”

Innovation through partnership

London's enviable innovation strength is built upon foundational institutions, including: Western University, its three Western Research parks and the Western Morrisette Institute for Entrepreneurship (MIFE); Fanshawe College and its Leap Junction accelerator; leading healthcare institutions and the cutting-edge medical research of the Lawson Health Research Institute, Robarts Research Institute, and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry at Western University.

Those institutions have partnered in a number of ways to drive the results of research.

WORLDdiscoveries, the business development and commercialization arm of a partnership between Western University, Robarts Research Institute and Lawson Health Research Institute, seeks to reinforce London's place as a pre-eminent commercialization centre in North America.

It is at the heart of London's Research Row, a new concept used to describe a geographical band that is home to a large number of London's research-based institutions. The Row employs nearly 2,000 researchers and conducts over \$330 million in research annually.

In addition, Western, Fanshawe and the City of London have partnered on the Advanced Manufacturing Research Park where research, testing, prototype development and product commercialization is driving economic development for the city. A particular area of strength at the park is composite and lightweight materials in the transportation and agri-food sectors.

An exciting venture is a new agri-food incubator and accelerator called The Grove, a partnership between LEDC, Small Business centre, the Western Fair Association and RH Accelerator. Located at the Western Fair Entertainment District, it provides the access to equipment, facilities, capital and mentorship needed by food entrepreneurs and high potential agri-food companies to commercialize new products, create jobs, and grow market share.

FedDev Ontario recently invested \$7.2 million in The Grove, which will leverage the unique expertise of London's post-secondary institutions and build on the existing strength of region's agri-food sector, which includes more than 90 companies employing more than 7,000 people.

Deep ecosystem

London has a strong support system for innovators and investigators and it's only growing.

TechAlliance is Ontario's Regional Innovation Centre for London and surrounding areas. Focused on supercharging the community, TechAlliance provides advice, experiences, and access to capital to launch startups, accelerate scale-ups and inspire talent.

London is also home to RH Accelerator, a privately owned incubator located in the historic London Roundhouse, which works with high-growth companies.

"That's a really exciting initiative that has led to investment that is fuelling growth and product development. It's so great to have private investment complementing government efforts," said Lakhotia.

As well, Fanshawe is developing Innovation Village, a physical and virtual commercialization hub featuring one-stop supports, collaborative workspaces, virtual reality and multimedia labs, a maker space, project rooms, research support, a food processing lab and cutting-edge equipment. It attracted \$3 million in FedDev Ontario funding in late 2020.

And to build on London's power in the digital media and technology sector, which includes more than 300 companies employing 10,000 people, LEDC is launching a yet-to-be-named office to accelerate the creation of content in London across the spectrum of film, TV, streaming services, gaming, animation, sound and music production, and artificial and virtual reality.

Where innovation emerges

Among the established and emerging success stories in London are:



Alimentiv (formerly Robarts Clinical Trials) – is a specialized global gastrointestinal contract research organization headquartered in London that offers clinical research services to academic and industry clients around the world. It operates under the Alimentiv Health Trust, a social enterprise using the profits of commercial services to reinvest in research to transform human health on a global scale.



Aspire Food Group – produces nutrient-dense protein powder from crickets for food supplements and pet nutrition. Aspire was awarded \$16.8 million from Next Generation Manufacturing to construct the world's first fully automated cricket protein manufacturing facility in London's Innovation Park. The plant, expected to open in 2022, has also received more than \$10 million from Sustainable Development Technologies Canada.



Digital Extremes – a leader in the video game industry for more than 27 years. London is the heart of the company's creative operations in game and graphic design to sound and motion capture work. Digital Extremes has been recognized for 11 straight years as one of Canada's Top 100 employers.



Front Line Medical Technologies – a medical device start-up company founded in London by a vascular surgeon and a biomedical engineer that has developed a product called the COBRA-OS for temporary frontline bleeding control and resuscitation. It is the smallest such device on the market and received Health Canada approval in February.



Paystone – integrates engagement tools, including gift cards and loyalty programs, into payment processing platforms. The 12-year-old company serves more than 25,000 customers and processes \$10 billion in annual bank card volume. Named among Canada's fastest-growing companies in 2020, Paystone attracted \$69 million in strategic financing from Canadian Business Growth Fund (CBGF) and National Bank of Canada in January. The funds will be used to fuel growth in customer engagement services and electronic payment processing solutions.



Race Roster – a technology company that builds custom tools for registration, fundraising, race-day check-in, timing, and customer relationship management for race organizers. Since 2012, Race Roster has partnered with over 4,000 organizers to grow, manage and execute in-person and virtual events.



VidHug – the easy and automated video generation platform launched in 2018 and has seen explosive growth through the pandemic. It is geared to helping people make greeting videos for loved ones marking celebrations. The platform has been used to deliver more than 4 million "virtual hug videos" in more than 190 countries.