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OCRI bids high-tech heartland farewell

Research centre finds new office on Queensview Drive

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The Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation, the voice of the city's high-tech community, is leaving March Road, the heart of Silicon Valley North.

The city-funded economic development agency, whose membership includes hundreds of high-tech firms, will relocate to 17,000 square feet of office space at 2625 Queensview Dr. later this year.

The new lease extends to the end of 2009 and is worth roughly \$1,725,000. By all accounts, OCRI, through its broker Royal LePage Commercial Inc., has achieved better value compared to the lease at 36 Steacie Dr.

"It's less than our current costs on a square-foot basis," said OCRI president Jeffrey Dale. Mr. Dale expects to sign the lease by the end of the week. The new office space will provide OCRI with more convenient space for its staff and its partner agencies, Mr. Dale said. (Partner agencies include Industrial Research Assistance Program, the Communications and Information Technology Ontario, Materials and Manufacturing Ontario, Photonics Research Ontario and the Canadian Photonics Consortium.)

"The space provides us with more optimal location and phenomenal parking. We are really excited," said Mr. Dale.

Last week, OCRI was facing a 53-per-cent cut in its funding from the city. However, a surprise motion from Councillor Rick Chiarelli saw the agency take only a 17-per-cent hit. The result is that OCRI will receive \$1.5 million from the city this year. In 2003, OCRI received \$1.8 million.

OCRI's budget has now been worked into the city's base operating budget indefinitely.

OCRI will share its new office space with high-tech company Nexinnovations. The agency is headquartered in a Kanata building OCRI subleased from Semiconductor Insights in 1997. That lease expires at the end of September, but Mr. Dale said OCRI will not be "double-paying" for rent for the new and old locations.

However, OCRI could move into the new space as early as July, depending on when the fit-up is completed by Sakto Corporation, the new landlord. OCRI was originally interested in moving into Ben Franklin Place in a former Nortel Networks building that has been leased by the City of Ottawa.

"The new location has very central access for all of our partners," Mr. Dale said.

OCRI is an economic development agency that uses the city's funding to leverage incremental financial support from the province and the federal government. The remainder of its \$9.4 million budget is generated through memberships from the private sector. It has 640 members.

Last week, OCRI held its annual general meeting and announced its new board members, who include Gary Cameron, a VP at Bell Canada; Simon Gwatkin, VP of marketing at Mitel Networks, Norm Lo, a VP at Research in Motion and Jim Roche, president and CEO of Tundra Semiconductor Corp.

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