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Tech out sector's growth

Firms, jobs on rise in capital: Survey

By ANNE HOWLAND, Ottawa Sun

OTTAWA'S HI-TECH sector is built on a foundation as "solid as the Canadian Shield," says the president and CEO of the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation.

Jeffrey Dale expressed optimism about the city's tech sector yesterday as OCRI released its semi-annual survey showing the number of companies and employees in the region is on the rise.

The capital is now home to a record-high 1,740 hi-tech companies, up from 1,688 six months ago, the study showed.

The 52 new firms represent an increase of about 3% over six months ago, and 10% than the 1,585 companies reported a year ago, OCRI said.

Hi-tech employment figures are also on the rise. The study showed 3,200 net new hires since January, for a total of 71,000 employees.

'VIBRANT' SECTOR

That's a 4.7% increase in the last six months and a 10.6% increase over the 64,200 employees reported at this time last year, the study reported.

"Ottawa's hi-tech community is vibrant," said Dale.

"The record number of new companies and the sustained growth in employment are sure signs that this city's hi-tech sector is on the move again."

Ottawa Talent Initiative executive director Gary Davis said the hi-tech situation has been improving since January, with more people receiving interviews and finding employment.

"It's like the ice breaking up in the spring," he said.

'CONFIDENT' EMPLOYERS

While Davis is also optimistic, he added there are still a lot of people looking for work in the tech sector.

Dale reiterated his prediction made earlier in the year -- and scoffed at by some -- that, three years from now, the tech sector will top 100,000 employees.

"Employers are once again opening their doors to new talent," he said.

"They're confident. And that's reflected in the increased number of employment opportunities."

More companies outside Canada, mainly in the U.S., have expressed interest in doing business in Ottawa within the past six months than within the previous two years, Dale said.

"We have a highly educated, experienced workforce; industry clusters with a worldwide reputation for excellence; and a research capacity that's second to none."

More than 87% of the city's technology companies responded to the latest survey.

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