

## Berkshire voices

# Teamwork allows the BIC to expand its brand



BERKSHIRE INNOVATION CENTER

Several dignitaries including, front row from left, Berkshire Innovation Center Director Ben Sosne; Mass MoCA Director Kristy Edmonds; state Rep. John Barrett III; and BIC board Chair Steven Boyd, attended the opening ceremony for BIC Works Mass MoCA in North Adams.

**PITTSFIELD** — Growing and expanding the Berkshire Innovation Center's presence and mission is something that is always worthwhile.

In late October, I had the privilege of joining friends and partners in the main courtyard of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, on an unseasonably warm and sunny day, to cut a ribbon marking the grand opening of BIC Works @ MoCA — the Berkshire Innovation Center's new North Adams site.

Stephen Boyd, the BIC's co-founder and board chair, opened the ceremony by recalling advice he received early on from key stakeholders at the Massachusetts Life Science Center, the BIC's primary investors. Those early partners noted that they had seen many incubators and innovation centers come and go, but the ones that succeeded all shared a similar trait: they all focused first on building a community. It didn't matter how big or fancy a building you built or how much advanced equipment you packed into it, the organizations that experienced the most success were those that were able to attract and engage a core set of partners and then grow that core group such that the collective wisdom of the stakeholders continued to expand.

This nugget of wisdom was embedded into the BIC's DNA from the get-go, and continues to drive every aspect of what we do. Hang out at the BIC long enough, and you will surely hear the phrase "collective wisdom always wins". It is a core tenant ingrained in our board, our staff, and our member community. When we examine our metrics, we count opportunities for "knowledge spillovers" and

look for "return on collisions." Our motto — "Do More Together" — is all over our website, marketing materials, and, of course, the freshly installed signs outside our new home on Mass MoCA's campus.

This fidelity to collaboration and motivation to build a community is at the very heart of our decision to expand into Northern Berkshire and to plant our flag in the center of Mass MoCA.

The BIC, which serves as a catalyst to spark innovation and sustainable growth of technology-focused companies in our region, serves 30 plus industry members and another 30 plus affiliate partners, and collaborates with over 15 regional educational institutions. Our industry members alone employ nearly 8,000 people in the Berkshires. As some of the region's largest and highest paying employers, they drive our local economy, and their engagement has made the BIC the hive of activity for the region's innovation economy.

Despite the bustle of activity in Pittsfield, we've recognized an opportunity to increase access to our network and expand our community. Our facility in Pittsfield is simply too far away for some county residents, which often precludes us from reaching as many students and young professionals as we could and should. This expansion into northern Berkshire County is the first step of a phased growth plan, a plan specifically designed to reach a broader and more diverse population. Access matters and must be created. Nobody should be left out because of geographic location.

BIC Works @ MoCA is designed to be an experiential learning center that will help develop the talent pipeline

through K-12 STEM programming, promote collaborative learning opportunities and provide professional development opportunities. The new facility is a dynamic platform for the exploration of innovation through hands-on-learning. Like everything we do, it will be a collaborative partnership with our member firms, our local and regional academic institutions, and our economic development partners across the Commonwealth. It will also leverage the energy of the MASS MoCA community by finding new learning experiences at the intersection of creativity and innovation.

Even the process of securing a new location and designing and fitting out the new space was a study of collaboration in action. With deep admiration for the community Mass MoCA had built and the vision its director, Kristy Edmonds, is infusing throughout the campus, we knew a BIC presence at MoCA would elevate the work of both organizations. For several months, however, we struggled to find a space on campus that was appropriate. That all changed when the whole BIC team traveled north for a tour.

As Team BIC gathered to look at a potential space on the third floor of Building One, and considered how we might renovate the space, we looked out the window and saw a pair of moving trucks parked right in the courtyard. A private art gallery with a storefront space in the middle of the campus had just given notice and was vacating. Learning that the space would be available, we jumped. We proposed a technology learning and experience center, and both the BIC board and the Mass MoCA management team were quick to support and enhance the vision.

State Sen. Paul Mark, D-Beck-

et, and state Rep. John Barrett III, D-North Adams, were at the table early and offered immediate and meaningful support. The North Adams Partnership helped raise funds for renovations. Local developers David Moresi and David Carver donated labor and furniture. MassDevelopment, a long-time supporter of the BIC, matched these contributions with a grant from its collaborative workspace program.

This collaborative undertaking, along with a touch of magic from the BIC's own Shaun O'Neill allowed us to unveil at our ribbon cutting a dynamic platform for adventures in innovation through "Technology-on-Display" learning stations.

Initial stations include: "Robots as Teammates," designed with researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, that allows students to teach a robot a task and then watch as the robot shows what it has learned; "Agroll by Growgenics," a display that allows students to test variable spectrum lighting for indoor vertical farming; and "Berkshire CubeSat Project," driven by a Williams College sophomore, which envisions a hands-on experience where students can develop space missions from design, to launch and operations.

There's also the BIC "Story Vault," which invites guests into a re-imagined true vault for a Story Like You Mean It podcasting experience; and a floating 3D Printer Wall, which showcases the connection of additive manufacturing to the clean energy simulation experience offered through the BIC's Manufacturing Academy.

Reflecting upon the energizing images of the more than 100 guests who gathered at the opening ceremony, I am con-

vinced of the power of people, how place matters and our capacity to do more together. However, as I look at and learn about the technologies that are emerging, whether in national news, through our BIC member organizations or via our academic partners, I, who am not a futurist by career, would like to share a prediction.

Because the arts and innovation are both driven by creativity and because Mass MoCA visitors activate openness and exploration to experience art, BIC Works @ MoCA will not only benefit from this ethos and vibe, but the exploration and receptivity experienced by visitors will spill over and have a positive impact on our space.

Too frequently, we consider arts as humanistic and technology as anti-human. That's not really the case in reality. Today, the integration of technology happens all the time to enhance the arts and there are, of course, still more ways technology can evolve to serve humanity.

But consider this: Although he's most famous for his paintings like the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci was also known for his acumen in civil engineering, hydrodynamics, geology, geometry, mechanical engineering, physics and optics. You see, we are, by design, exploring and creating souls, and this adventure in innovation at BIC Works @ MoCA is designed to be a catalyst for all visitors and community members to experience that "Innovation Happens Right Here, in the Berkshires."

It starts with each person's capacity to explore more, then create.

Ben Sosne is the Executive Director of the Berkshire Innovation Center in Pittsfield.