

Area business incubator Launchpad to move to William and Mary's Tribe Square this fall



Launchpad and a second student entrepreneurship center will fill the vacancies on the first floor of William and Mary's Tribe Square. (Rodrigo Arriaza / Virginia Gazette)

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Local startups and student entrepreneurs will be closer than ever when the Launchpad regional business incubator and a second student entrepreneurship center open in the College of William and Mary's Tribe Square this fall.

The Alan B. Miller Entrepreneurship Center, a branch of the college's Raymond A. Mason School of Business, will support this second campus entrepreneurship hub and will offer co-working space, networking opportunities and more when it opens in fall 2019.

Launchpad will leave its current offices in New Town and is expected to re-open this fall in a renovated space just a few steps from the entrepreneurial hub, director Tim Ryan said.

Tribe Square on Richmond Road is a mixed-use retail and residential student housing complex with four

retail spaces on its first floor and 14 apartments on its second and third floors. One storefront was filled by Chick-fil-A this past fall, and the remaining retail vacancies will be filled by these two additions, Miller Center executive director Graham Henshaw said.

“Prominently located in Tribe Square, the new hub will cultivate a culture of disciplined creativity across the university and with our regional partners,” William and Mary President Katherine Rowe said in a college news release.

Funding for the renovation work being done on the empty retail spaces will come primarily from the President's Strategic Investment Fund, which was created last summer with a \$1.5 million donation from an anonymous alumna, the release states.

Henshaw said the project will meet growing demand for space from students at the existing Miller Center, and allow others to use its facilities for the first time.

“We made a conscious decision three years ago to open up all of our programming to all students, and that has provided access to tools and resources that are not available anywhere else on campus,” he said. “Now, three years into that, we frequently find ourselves maxed out in that space.”

Henshaw and Ryan agreed that the Miller Center and Launchpad are working toward common goals in terms of the programming and support services they offer, but that their users previously found it difficult to collaborate effectively because of the distance between the two.

By being separated by just a walkway, they said entrepreneurial-minded students and business startups will easily be able to work together and learn from each other.

“From the Launchpad point of view, we really wanted more engagement with the students and the businesses wanted to be able to connect with them more, and I think the same holds true with the entrepreneurship center as well,” Ryan said. “The opportunities that present themselves by being in such a close proximity to each other are awesome.”

The retail spaces in Tribe Square that formerly housed The Crust and Subway will be converted into a large co-working space with conference rooms, team break-out rooms, office space and semi-permanent co-working areas, Henshaw said. Launchpad will move to the former Mooyah space and will have room for all of its incubated businesses. Launchpad businesses will be able to use the entrepreneurship center facilities and vice versa, Henshaw said.

“We really want it to be this mix of entrepreneurial thinkers, so you might be in the copy room or waiting to use the 3-D printer that an entrepreneur from Launchpad is working on, and you're next to them working on a student venture,” he said. “We really want to see some cross-pollination there, so all of the resources are available to the Launchpad.”

For more information about the two centers, visit millercenter.mason.wm.edu and gwlaunchpad.com.

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