

## **fuse2005 comes into focus**

by Kevin Tampone, Journal Staff

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SYRACUSE — Organizers of an event designed to encourage new business development and economic growth in Syracuse have been refining their goals and means in recent months.

The event, fuse2005, is set for Oct. 17 and 18 at the Oncenter Complex. It will bring together representatives from local, regional, national, and international companies to network and learn what Syracuse has to offer.

Organizers are quick to point out that this is not just a trade show for tech companies. The focus will be on attracting participants who have something to gain from upstate New York's potential economic strengths.

"This is the launching of a long-term recruitment effort," says Nasir Ali, vice president of new-venture development at the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and an organizer of fuse. "Central New York has as many, if not more, opportunities than anywhere else. This event is about showing people that."

Organizers have set the conference up around several industries or specialties they believe are the region's economic hotbeds. They include health care, communications, security, and collaboration technologies.

The conference will include panel discussions in each of those areas as well as several private luncheons with different topics, such as business opportunities surrounding DestiNY USA and a "pitchfest" that aims to connect entrepreneurs with potential investors.

The event will also feature talks from U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-New York), U.S. Rep. James Walsh (R-Onondaga), and James Carrick, CEO of Strategic Computer Solutions, Inc. All together, about two dozen speakers and panelists are confirmed for the conference.

They hail from local companies, like Sensis Corporation, and firms outside the area, like Interregnum, a London-based company doing work with DestiNY. Additional speakers and panelists, including Sen. Charles Schumer (D-New York), are nearly confirmed, organizers say.

The original inspiration for the conference grew out of the region's broadband infrastructure, which organizers have said is among the best in the nation. The event has grown beyond focusing on that infrastructure.

"Broadband is a key enabler," Ali says. "But broadband is not the story anymore than the story is the road or the highway near your house. It's what you can do with it."

Sponsors are paying for the event, Ali says. They include companies and organizations like DestiNY, Verizon, Syracuse University, and USA Datanet. He declined to comment on the total cost.

The goal is to attract about 350 participants, says Errol Unikel, senior adviser for fuse and CEO of Unicorn Technologies, a consulting company hired to organize and run the event. Organizers are targeting mid-level to senior executives in both emerging and existing companies.

The area's broadband infrastructure alone will not change its fortunes, Unikel says. But partnerships among businesses, investors, and universities that leverage the region's technology capabilities and talent will, he adds.

"What's going to change things here is the confluence of all this activity on all these fronts," he says. "There is enough going on here that the area is changing. The Rust Belt persona need not exist anymore. All these things are happening in a way that's changing the reality."

To attract the kind of participants who will actually get something from the event, organizers are relying heavily on the event's sponsors, Unikel says. The idea is for them to reach out to their partners and companies with which they do business.

Bringing that web of interconnected entities here to showcase the region should generate new ideas and, eventually, economic growth, Unikel explains. "The more we reach out, the more we are building potential trade relationships," he says. "Relationships get formed. Things happen."

Naturally, the process of generating new business opportunities will take time, Ali says. But that's why he says he envisions fuse becoming an annual event. Next year's addition will build on what happens this year, he says. "The goal is to bring the players together," Ali says. "It can't just be two events one year apart."

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