

Company Offers Public Use Of 3D Printers

Amy Hamilton, The Daily Sentinel

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. (AP) -- In a workshop at Grand Junction's Business Incubator Center, employees with Apex CAD Products use three-dimensional printers to make an array of items for customers, from models of dental implants and vertebrae for medical professionals to working parts for machines.

It won't be long before members of the public, local businesses and engineering students can try their hands at making prototypes and working parts of their own at the center.

By January, the Business Incubator Center hopes to have a working lab that will launch ideas and inspire collaboration among community members to create solutions for problems, and potentially jump-start businesses, said Jon Maraschin, executive director of the center.

"We're hoping to open a pipeline for them," Maraschin said. "It's an experiment. We know the concept works, we're just trying to get the work down here."

The idea, temporarily called Makers Space, will be a room dedicated for several 3D printers and a staff member.

Using 3D to print plastic prototypes or actual parts requires knowledge of computer-aided design. However, some drawings to create items are available as downloads.

Teresa Coons, executive director of the John McConnell Math and Science Center, said she knows an educator whose daughters use their home 3D printer to create dollhouse furniture.

"I see it as an extension," she said. "I think what's exciting is you get people starting to do things and it spreads and it grows."

Tim Brower, director of the mechanical engineering partnership program between the University of Colorado and Colorado Mesa University, said the Makers Space idea would be a welcome place to refer community members. The CMU-based program has a high-end 3D printer, and community members often inquire if they can use it.

That gets tricky because it requires a staff member to help operate the machine and the equipment is meant for students.

"We don't really have a good way to bill for time and materials," Brower said. "Having a Makers Space concept going would be a great next step."

The Math and Science Center recently obtained its own 3D printer. When the center

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starts showing children and guests how its printer works, some students may want to try for themselves.

"I love the idea," Coons said. "It's something that's taking off. I know why the Incubator is doing it. That's where the innovative ideas come out of."

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