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## Forget Potatoes: Officials look to boost computer chip design in Spa City

### Program to boost Capital region's tech sector

By Paul Post, *The Saratogian*

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SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. >> A new \$10 million economic development initiative is expected to elevate the Capital Region's thriving technology sector to even higher levels, on par with places such as Silicon Valley, Austin, Texas and Portland, Ore.

GlobalFoundries, in Malta, is already a worldwide leader in semiconductor manufacturing and research, but another key industry component — computer chip design — doesn't occur locally.

A new Electronic Design and Innovation Initiative, called EDI2 or EDI Squared, will provide the space, tools and equipment leading design experts need for such work, before starting firms of their own that create well-paying jobs.

"This is the first initiative like this in the United States," said Richard Goldman, an East Greenbush native and industry expert who has worked for firms such as Texas Instruments and Silicon Valley-based Synopsys. "It's an unmatched opportunity for upstate New York and the Saratoga region."

Goldman and other officials unveiled the program Friday during a press conference hosted by Saratoga Economic Development Corp. at the Holiday Inn.

Quite often, top graduates from schools such as RPI go elsewhere because design opportunities aren't available in the region. The initiative will hopefully eliminate, or at least slow, this "brain drain," SEDC President Dennis Brobston said.

The program has three main elements.

First, the design work center, called an "accelerator," will be equipped with highly expensive electronic design automation tools. This software can cost up to \$3 million for a two-year license, making it cost-prohibitive for many small- and mid-sized firms.

EDI2 — using private, state and federal dollars — will buy licenses and then rent time on design tools to accommodate all size firms including start-ups, existing companies seeking design capabilities, and large companies seeking opportunities for product development and commercialization.

The program's next two elements are education related.

Clarkson University's Wallace H. Coulter School of Engineering, in Schenectady, "will continue to work to building engaging design curriculum," said Associate Dean Hugo Irizarry-Quinones.

Also, SUNY Adirondack's Wilton campus will offer workforce development classes, with a goal of helping currently-employed people become trained in the semiconductor design field.

Plans call for the new design work center to open next April 1, at SEDC offices on Clinton St. in Saratoga Springs.

However, SEDC is expected to occupy space at the proposed "SoBro" facility, planned for the old Saratoga Diner property on South Broadway when the site opens. A 2019 groundbreaking is planned for the \$30 million mixed-used complex of affordable housing, businesses, and an incubator for budding entrepreneurs.

The semiconductor design "accelerator" will move to that site with SEDC when the building is completed, Brobston said.

The EDI2 initiative is expected to create 100 jobs over the next five years, he said. But the more significant impact is expected to be long term, as young designers realize success and launch their own firms.

Cutting-edge design is critical because semiconductor technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated at an extremely rapid rate — a principle called "Moore's law."

In essence, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles about every two years.

"Design is what will keep us on track," Goldman said.

But once computer chips are designed, a manufacturer such as GlobalFoundries is needed to make them. This makes Saratoga Springs a good fit for the new EDI2 design center's location, he said.

In addition to state and federal funding, it's hoped that large semiconductor corporations will contribute to the project, too.

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