

SEDC launches program to support chip design work



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Dennis Brobston, president of the SEDC speaks at the announcement of the EDI Squared Initiative at a press conference held at the Saratoga Springs Holiday Inn Friday June 29, 2018 in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. ... [more](#)

Saratoga Springs

Over the past 20 years the Capital Region has become an epicenter for computer chip manufacturing and research and development.

The only part of the industry that the region hasn't been able to attract is computer chip design firms. These are the electrical engineering companies that map out the complex highways of transistors onto silicon that become the brains of electronics devices.

The Saratoga Economic Development Corp. wants to change that with a new program called the Electronic Design and Innovation Initiative, or EDI2 Saratoga.

The \$10 million program will create a chip design "accelerator" program that will offer access to electronic design automation software that normally costs millions of dollars to license. The idea is that by offering the software and other business support services, existing chip design companies and startups will want to cluster in Saratoga County.

"We worked for more than a year with some of the top technology minds in Tech Valley and Silicon Valley to develop EDI2 Saratoga and recruit a robust mix of founding partners, SEDC President Dennis Brobston said. "We are confident this model and our expanding partners will cement our region as a global leader in advanced electronics systems."

Although SEDC plans to apply to the state and federal government for funding, it already has several partners on the project. They are National Grid, NYSEG, Siemens, the Center for Economic Growth, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and a local energy

management firm called ReWire Energy that wants to participate in the program to design a smart grid monitoring system that



ReWire is applying for funding for the project through FuzeHub's Jeff Lawrence Innovation Fund. FuzeHub is an Albany-based manufacturing and commercialization assistance center.

Bringing chip design firms to Saratoga County is a perfect match with GlobalFoundries, which is a so-called foundry that makes chips for companies based on their design. GlobalFoundries works closely with designers at those companies in addition to third-party design firms that are utilized in the chip making process.

Chip design salaries average about \$120,000, which is higher than the average salary at GlobalFoundries' Fab 8 computer chip factory in the town of Malta, which is home to 3,400 workers.

Other cities like Austin, Texas and Boston as well as San Diego and San Francisco have strong chip design sectors, but the Albany area is not as mature as those when it comes to semiconductor manufacturing.

However, Brobston and others who appeared at a press conference on Friday said that the industry has never seen a chip design accelerator created.

Rich Goldman, a chip design industry veteran who grew up in East Greenbush and now works for a company called Lumerical in Vancouver, said the barriers to entry into chip design are so high because of the software costs. But EDI2 Saratoga would help provide a low-cost entry to startups and smaller companies.

With the industry reaching the limits of what's known as Moore's Law — the ability to shrink device structures and thereby costs significantly every two years — chip design is becoming more important than ever to keep innovating.

"Moore's Law is now facing unprecedented challenges," Goldman said. "Design is what will keep us on track."

And SUNY Polytechnic Institute and Fab 8 could potentially benefit as prototyping centers for chip design firms to test out their early chip architecture.

Clarkson University and SUNY Adirondack will be academic partners in the program, with Clarkson developing more focused curriculum and SUNY Adirondack focusing on workforce development and bridge programs that would help someone with a biology degree, for example, get trained in chip design.

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