

RocketLounge ready for liftoff in Fort Myers



PATRICIA BORNS, pborns@news-press.com 12:10 p.m. EDT April 4, 2016



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(Photo: Kin fay Moroti/news-press.com)

A new tenant recently scotch-taped its name on the door of the Henderson Square building Spirits of Bacchus.



KINFAY MOROTI/THE NEWS-PRESS... Dieter Kondek is the CEO of The RocketLounge. (Photo: Kin fay Moroti/news-press.com)

[RocketLounge \(http://www.therocketlounge.com/\)](http://www.therocketlounge.com/), the discrete sign reads with a suggestive allure. [After-hours club?](#)

If its members occupy it 24/7 as the founders hope, it will be an all-hours club of sorts -- a hive of new ideas and start-up technology c

"We call it a Silicon Valley-style incubator. Other entrepreneurs are starting bakeries. We want tenants who are about technology," say CEO Dieter Kondek.

The downtown venture joins and partners with other Southwest Florida incubators in trying to bootstrap higher paying, sustainable ma an entrenched real estate and tourism economy. RocketLounge's difference is a laser tech focus, and a full concept of work space, ec to bring inventors and investors together, Kondek says.

He and co-founders Peter Ocsody and Joerg Sahlmann have the tech DNA and private funding for this work.

Kondek cut his tech teeth at IBM and Dell before morphing into computer startups. His most recent, based on a video algorithm, had the very spot where RocketLounge is hanging out its shingle.

"What I learned was the real innovations are at smaller startups," he says. "You either work for Google and make a lot of money in sto leave Google, start a company, and someone buys you in three years. This is what created the Valley."

Before starting RocketLounge, he ran pitch events and shark tanks with co-work spaces for two years in "the mecca," as some refer to San Francisco.

Oscody poured 20 years' management consulting experience into designing RocketLounge's mentorship program, which mentors new startups from their feasibility studies to capital raising; while Sahlmann is qualifying technology startups in Munich to send RocketLounge's way.

Why here?

No one blinked when [Naples Accelerator \(http://naplesaccelerator.com/\)](http://naplesaccelerator.com/) launched a couple of years ago with a regional who's who of investors on its board.

But Fort Myers? Kondek is quick to remind naysayers it worked for Edison, Firestone and Ford.

"Incubation is happening in smaller markets because they're more affordable to live in, as people see you can really develop the product here," Kondek says.

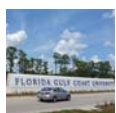
Like Naples, Fort Myers has no lack of money. "We have plenty of billionaires, but they make their money in traditional industries like insurance and pharma," Kondek explains. Tech is another mindset, as anyone who's watched Shark Tank or [Halt and Catch Fire](#) knows.

Halt & Catch Fire Season 1 Trailer



But Kondek believes [South Florida](#) industrialists are open and even eager to put some of their hard-earned capital into tech ventures. The state is staking its own money and expertise to help show them the way.

This is how Austin, his reference model, got started. "That city didn't have technology roots either, but it did have a university that began to attract talent," he says -- as FGCU's entrepreneurship major is doing now.



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[\\$25,000 will fund a FGCU student's entrepreneurial dream](#)

[\(http://www.news-press.com/story/news/education/2016/04/03/25000-fund-fgcu-students-entrepreneurial-dream/82407336/\)](http://www.news-press.com/story/news/education/2016/04/03/25000-fund-fgcu-students-entrepreneurial-dream/82407336/)

Downtown Fort Myers can have gravitas as a tech magnet for that talent, he believes. So does new FGCU grad Guillermo Fernandez the Lounge soon as a virtual member.

"The freelance market has taken over with my generation, but we don't have a home necessarily," says Fernandez, who won his Lour with nine teammates in a university competition. Their product: a lighter, simpler, faster camera tripod. "I think RocketLounge provides millennials like myself to run our own businesses. We need a place to generate ideas and work together."

Dominik Goertz, who owns the [Heritage Square](#) building and invited RocketLounge into the space, liked the idea of bringing technology downtown so much he became a Lounge investor. So did [Paragon Technologies](#) founder Kevin Schoensee, who also owns property c

Kondek envisions innovators rolling from their loft apartments to their Lounge spaces and continuing the brainstorm at a sidewalk café

"It's very good for downtown. That's why they all helped us," he says.

First look inside

A week before its soft opening, The News-Press toured the high-ceilinged, tall-windowed spaces and sat in on a dress rehearsal of the pitches that make incubators go.

The open RocketLounge work spaces feature Naples-made tables color-coded by membership level – yellow for virtual Loungers, who with free WiFi and locally brewed coffee for \$99 a year; and orange when they're ready to make the work space their own.

The office suites for early-stage companies can accommodate four or six staff and come with higher-level mentoring and operations s

Everyone's welcomed to use the full kitchen and gaming room to blow off steam, and, especially, to attend the pitch events around a long counter with video and digital screening systems. Small, weekly events will be rounded out with straight-ahead shark tank sessions for complete with open bar.



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[\(http://www.news-press.com/story/money/2015/10/19/french-tech-startups-explore-florida/73942936/\)](http://www.news-press.com/story/money/2015/10/19/french-tech-startups-explore-florida/73942936/)

Paul Shahiari is no stranger to the pitch. He's founded two other startups before his latest, [Ecomedes](#) (<http://www.ecomedes.com/>), a management tool that can tell someone – a builder or government procurer, say -- the cost and return on investment for an environmentally sustainable product or part. The tool automates decades of consulting experience his past clients have paid hundreds of thousands of

If the software takes off, that knowledge could become free.

But you could cut the tension in the air when Schoensee and Bud Stoddard of [Tamiami Angel Funds](#) (<http://www.tamiamiangels.com/>) looking for vulnerabilities.

"If it's so easy to sell, why haven't you made more money?" was one.

Reactions to a pitch may range from an immediate cash commitment to a deeper look – likely, in Ecomedes' case – to outright boos. In the Valley, rich friends may get together and give one startup \$50,000 each. Most people bet

about or know.

"I felt really happy we were the first ones to take it for a test drive," Shahiari said later. "The questions were good, perfect. The room, t
you hook up to – that's what will happen here week after week."

He and DeMond had only met Kondek the week before.

Two days later they were back at the Henderson Square building, looking at space to build their company.



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(<http://www.news-press.com/story/life/food/2016/03/16/bacchus-closed-moving-relocating-downtown-fort-myers-spirits-restaurant-bar/81820052/>)

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