



## Economic Development Council's 'incubator' program shows early success

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FORT WALTON BEACH — Sometimes everyone needs a little help getting started, even businesses.

The Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County started the Innovation Center, a business incubator at the University of West Florida's W.E. Combs Campus on Lovejoy Road, last year. The Innovation Center is designed to target technology-based businesses and help them through their first three years by providing planning assistance from other EDC members, financial counseling and lower operational costs through reduced leases.

The Innovation Center's first tenant, Government Support Jobs, has seen consistent growth since it was started in early 2009.

Government Support Jobs is a Web-based search program for prospective employers and job seekers similar to monster.com, but focuses only on government jobs. The company's Web site, [www.governmentssupportjobs.com](http://www.governmentssupportjobs.com), now has 10,000 qualified candidates, postings for 3,000 jobs and more than 650 clients.

"It's helped us reduce our cost and develop some contacts in business," said Jerry Pfeiffer, the firm's chief executive officer.

The Innovation Center has space for nine offices at the W.E. Combs Campus. Government Support Jobs has leased four of the spaces.

EDC President Larry Sassano said his agency is negotiating with a new defense contractor that would take up three of the remaining spaces if the company is awarded a contract. If the contractor does lease the spaces, the EDC will negotiate its agreement with UWF for another building at the campus.

"For years I've wanted to have an incubator in Okaloosa County," Sassano said. "To me, it's an integral part of an EDC."

It is hoped that after three years in the incubator program, if not less, companies will be established enough to stand on their own without the EDC's help, Sassano said.

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