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FLREDC Announces Official Launch of MAGIC Spell Studios at Rochester Institute of Technology

New center opening in fall 2018 will converge RIT's internationally ranked academic programs in digital media

Project Complements "Finger Lakes Forward" – Region's Award-Winning Revitalization Plan to Grow the Economy and Create Jobs

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) today announced the official launch for the building that will house the new MAGIC Spell Studios on the campus of Rochester Institute of Technology. MAGIC is the university's creative approach to the convergence of digital media disciplines, including film and animation and game design and development, and a first-of-its kind effort in higher education. The facility, a FLREDC priority project, will allow RIT to bring together the academic programs and high-tech experimental facilities needed for technology development and commercially viable start-up activity. Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul joined state representatives, corporate partners and RIT leaders today for the announcement.

"RIT continues to be a center of hi-tech innovation for the Finger Lakes and all of New York," said **Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul**. "MAGIC Spell Studios will be the launching pad for the next generation of digital gaming entrepreneurs, and it is another example of Governor Cuomo's vision in which academia, business and government are partners in the rebirth of the Upstate economy."

"It really is very gratifying to see how the idea for MAGIC Spell Studios is being realized," said **RIT President Bill Destler**. "I do believe that this initiative will contribute to the continuing transformation of our regional economy thanks to a culture of innovation and technological expertise that has enabled this community to continually reinvent itself. And throughout its 187-year history, university-industry collaboration has been in RIT's DNA. MAGIC Spell Studios leverages those historical roots, as well as the current national rankings of several of our academic programs and our growing stature as a research institute."

The \$34 million project is supported by \$13.5 million in state incentives, including a \$12 million capital grant from Empire State Development and \$1.5 million from the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council. The new building will also be made possible through the support of \$12 million from Cisco Systems Inc., \$3 million from Dell and \$1.5 million from The Wegman Family Charitable Foundation. The balance is coming from RIT.

Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council Co-Chairs, Monroe Community College President Anne Kress and Wegmans Food Markets CEO Danny Wegman, said, “Strengthening academic and industry partnerships has always been a priority of the FLREDC. That’s why we strongly support the MAGIC Spell Studios—the collaboration between academics and industry will drive activity from RIT’s academic programs to commercial viability in the digital media fields.”

Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner Howard Zemsky said, “As one of the only higher education studios of its kind, MAGIC Spell Studios will link RIT’s academic expertise with the high-tech facilities needed to commercialize computer gaming, film and animation, and new media projects. This public-private partnership will boost the region as a leader in the rapidly growing digital media industry and contribute to the transformation of the Greater Rochester economy.”

The new MAGIC Spell Studios will feature a state-of-the-art sound stage, tiered theater with a projection booth and a cinema-quality audiovisual system, sound mixing and color correction rooms, numerous labs and production facilities that will help support RIT’s recent designation as a digital gaming hub, and an innovation zone that mixes faculty, staff, students, technology and infrastructure across programs from the School of Film and Animation, the School of Interactive Games and Media, and the RIT Center for Media, Arts, Games, Interaction and Creativity (MAGIC Center). The related programming in the facility will nurture entrepreneurial activity to generate new start-up companies, retain graduates, and create an industry hub with tremendous growth potential to generate new jobs in the region.

The emergence of MAGIC Spell Studios is expected to create 35 to 50 jobs in the first five years, with a goal of 100 jobs over the next 10 years. More importantly, it will help create local job opportunities that will give students and new graduates a reason to stay in the upstate New York region, helping to reverse what has been called the “brain drain” of local college graduates.

RIT has been developing and publishing digital media, such as games, apps, films, art installations and interactives since 2013, creating a collaborative, university-wide endeavor that ties together entrepreneurship, academics, content creation, production and distribution. Most recently, RIT was the first university to publish a video game on the Xbox One gaming Platform.

“MAGIC Spell Studios is about being fluid and truly multidisciplinary, and it is revolutionary,” said **MAGIC Spell Studios Director Andrew Phelps**. “Through the use of academic programs as a springboard to launch into very different experiences, MAGIC Spell Studios will help students grow their ideas into products and companies and engage students and faculty across disciplines to build these things together from proof-of-concept to refined prototypes that demonstrate commercial viability. This is something that the university has never done before.”

“This new facility is about exploring new horizons. Consider a new medium like virtual reality,” said **RIT’s School of Film and Animation Chair Malcolm Spaul**. “Our faculty is excited by it—it blurs the line between games and film, and everyone is talking about it. But no one is quite sure how this will ultimately inform how we reach audiences and tell stories. That’s what the cutting edge looks like, and this effort is about exploring those frontiers together.”

“The ways people engage with games and interactive content are changing more rapidly than ever before and the industry is more multi-faceted than ever as it continues to redefine itself,” said **RIT’s School of Interactive Games and Media Director David Schwartz**. “We have to challenge what our students build for these new horizons, which stretches beyond their own early experiences. The research and collaboration focus of MAGIC Spell Studios will be invaluable to their education.”

RIT was also recently named one of three Digital Gaming Hubs in New York State by ESD to increase the economic impact to New York State by fostering collaborative activities that spur new games or companies, as well as providing resources and mentoring to encourage students and entrepreneurs to enter the growing gaming industry. In addition, the digital gaming hubs will assist existing companies with gaming concepts, technologies and trends and host events focused on assisting the gaming community.

Accelerating Finger Lakes Forward

Today’s announcement complements “Finger Lakes Forward,” the region’s comprehensive blueprint to generate robust economic growth and community development. The State has already invested more than \$3.4 billion in the region since 2012 to lay the groundwork for the plan – investing in key industries including photonics, agriculture and food production, and advanced manufacturing. Today, unemployment is down to the lowest levels since before the Great Recession; personal and corporate income taxes are down; and businesses are choosing places like Rochester, Batavia and Canandaigua as a destination to grow and invest in. Now, the region is accelerating Finger Lakes Forward with a \$500 million State investment through the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, announced by Governor Cuomo in December 2015. The State’s \$500 million investment will incentivize private business to invest well over \$2.5 billion – and the region’s plan, as submitted, projects up to 8,200 new jobs. More information is available [here](#).

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