

Rutgers Bridgeton food innovation center has ribbon cutting

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Staff photo by Bryan LittelRutgers

President Richard McCormick, left, and Assemblyman Doug Fisher tour one of the food preparation areas at the Rutgers Food Innovation Center in Bridgeton during its opening Friday.

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BRIDGETON -- The ribbon was cut Friday on Rutgers Food Innovation Center's new 23,000-square-foot Food Business Incubator facility.

At a grand opening attended by a mixture of more than 200 local and state officials and Rutgers University representatives, visitors were given a grand tour of the \$8 million building.

"We've provided assistance to more than 1,000 clients since 2001," Louis Cooperhouse, director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center said Friday.

Cooperhouse said, with the addition of this new facility, the Food Innovation Center will be able to help many more clients.

The Rutgers Food Innovation Center previously operated out of a 2,700-square-foot office on East Commerce Street.

The new facility, located on Route 49, is not an incubator in the traditional sense. You won't find any fluffy yellow chicks there.

It's a place for agricultural entrepreneurs to take -- or incubate -- their ideas and make them marketable.

With help from the Food Innovation Center, Sheppard Farms in Cedarville developed a line of specialized asparagus, distributed in a microwavable package that extends the vegetable's shelf life to 21 days, from the usual 10-12 days.

A luncheon served at Friday's event consisted of foods developed by the center.

Cooperhouse said the assistance the center can provide businesses can help them compete in the food market.

The new facility is USDA and FDA inspected, and enables the production of foods with four processing and packaging areas where products can be manufactured directly by a client or on a contracted basis.

The building also has “blast chilling and freezing capabilities,” and refrigerated storage.

In addition, the facility has a library, conference room and various client meeting areas.

Cooperhouse said the center already has an education program for Woodstown High School students and will soon provide educational opportunities for Bridgeton High School seniors.

Bridgeton Mayor Jim Begley said it's his hope that the expansion to the Rutgers Food Innovation Center will attract businesses to the city that want to take advantage of what the center has to offer.

“Now that this is a reality, the real work will begin,” he said.

Former Bridgeton Mayor Mike Pirolli, who had a large hand in bringing the center to the city, was in attendance at Friday's grand opening. Also in attendance were U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez and U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo.

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