Tech Garden celebrates 10 years of making Syracuse better (Editorial)

The Tech Garden in downtown Syracuse is celebrating its 10th anniversary. *(2014 file photo / Rick Moriarty)*

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By **Editorial Board**
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Ten years ago, **The Tech Garden** took over an abandoned and collapsed parking garage at Harrison and Warren streets. It turned a 1990s symbol of failure into a hub of innovation, invention and entrepreneurship.

Today, it is home to 70 companies with more than 175 employees. Companies like**SwipeToSpin**, **Lake Effect Applications**, **Rounded**, **Sage My**

Life and **Proz.com** are solid employers working from The Tech Garden. A similar number of companies have moved out on their own, mostly in our community.

There was another time when Syracuse was a hotbed for ideas and advancement, particularly in manufacturing. Going all the way back to the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 through the post-World War II era, we invented technologies and products in Syracuse and prospered.

In 1880, for example, 29-year-old inventor Charles Lipe opened a machine shop that the Onondaga Historical Association says became known as the "**Cradle of Industries**." Lipe rented space to dozens of young entrepreneurs, establishing an incubator near Geddes and Fayette streets. It became a "haven for inventors," much the way the Tech Garden is today.

By the 1980s, local manufacturing felt the impact of global changes. Assembly-line factories moved to a resurgent South and then left the U.S. entirely. By the time the MONY garage partially collapsed in 1994, Syracuse had lost mojo, population and confidence. Perhaps decades of prosperity – the region's very success – had made us uncertain about dealing with the whirlwind of change that was buffeting us. We lamented empty factories, our shrinking downtown and a stagnant economy.

Things are changing in Syracuse. With efforts like those taking place at the Tech Garden, the city is heading in the right direction.

Like Lipe's renters, this new problem-solving generation is eager to create new wealth. These innovators believe there is a future different than today. The Tech Garden not only nurtures that belief but teaches the skills to do it.

Beyond creating companies and jobs, The Tech Garden has created an entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports startups and accelerates growth.

The Tech Garden's experts fan out to support and encourage entrepreneurs throughout the community. You see them in university classrooms. You spot them at the **SALT Makerspace**. You see them at hackathons, at Startup Weekends, at Meetups, at Startup Grind, at the many events that draw together people yearning to succeed. They give support to the **WISE Women's Business Center**, the **Student Sandbox**, and **Syracuse CoWorks**.

The Tech Garden spurs the mixing and mingling that lead to invention, the relationships and insights that spark innovation. It hangs art near whiteboards, recognizing the role that art and culture play in this new order. It matches youthful exuberance, energy and excitement with mentors' experience and wisdom.

Here's what the MONY parking garage looked like when the second floor collapsed. Eventually, most of it was torn down to make way for The Tech Garden. *1994 file photo / Tom Fedor*

The new companies, the events, the opportunities -- the chance to succeed -- give young and ambitious college graduates a reason to stay in our community, to make new fortunes here.

Demand is a measure of success. Last year there was a 24-month wait to enter The Tech Garden. That demand triggered this year's **expansion into AXA Towers** adding another 18,000 square feet for a total space of more than 52,000 square feet. It is rare for incubators to expand. We are happy our civic

leaders started this project, sustained it during hard times and grew this success story.

Our community's future is passing to a new generation, adept in a digital age, eager for change, and unwilling to abide by a status quo. They see opportunity in Syracuse. As The Tech Garden celebrates its first 10 years, we wish it continued success.