

## FROM: NIAGARA THIS WEEK

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### Innovations centre at old Atlas office

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Welland

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Stefanos Horianopoulos is on the verge of an invention that could have as much impact as the light bulb or the internal-combustion engine.

The Welland man, who worked at John Deere Welland Works for about 12 years before being laid off along with the rest of the 800 employees at the plant, is the founder of Kinery Power. His idea is simple: use a hydraulic device in the road to create energy, powered completely by vehicles driving overhead.

Like any business idea, the first thing he needs is a customer. In comes the city of Welland, which is going to endorse Horianopoulos by allowing a small pilot project in the market area. At the same time, the city is going to help him develop his idea, with the new Intensive Innovation Support Initiative, a public project located at the old Atlas Steel office building on Center Street.

"We believe we can turn this building into a centre of innovation for advanced manufacturing," Welland Mayor Damian Goulbourne said at a media conference last Thursday announcing the project, made possible by \$600,000 in funding from the new Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

The initiative will be operated by Vista Science and Technology, a local innovation consulting company and a spinoff of Niagara College and Brock University. The project team will handle research and development for small- and medium-sized local businesses, linking them to government funding programs and making use of the technology department at the college for product testing and development.

The news was music to the ears for Horianopoulos, who heard about the support for his idea a day before the conference. He said manufacturing of the device for Kinery Power could take place right in Welland, using the steel made by local manufacturers.

"This community will be the ideal community to start manufacturing, bringing in jobs," Horianopoulos said.

The old Atlas Steels office building, in the middle of what is now the Atlas Advanced Manufacturing Industrial Park, will be the home for the new project. It was purchased and refurbished by developer Steve Curic, who is also working on the old People's building downtown.

"Steve's got more confidence in our community than many people in our community currently have," said Welland's economic development manager Dan Degazio.

Many local businesses that have weathered the economic storm are smaller and medium sized businesses, operations that have managers spending a lot of time worrying about the bottom line, rather than adapting to market conditions through innovation and invention.

The Intensive Innovation Support Initiative will work in that regard for the companies, said Amy Lemay, Vista president. "In essence, we will almost become their research and development departments for them," Lemay said.

Funding for the initiative is guaranteed for six months, but Lemay and Degazio are confident budgeting for the program will be extended. To run the project, Vista is hiring a staffer, coordinator, assistant and co-op student.