3-D print center opens in Paltz

MakerBot CEO says technology is revolutionary

BY JEREMIAH HORRIGAN
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NEW PALTZ - Bre Pettis has seen the future, and it looks a lot like a high-end toaster oven.

Pettis is CEO of a Brooklyn-based outfit called MakerBot. The company makes 3-D printers, sci-fi-looking devices that take two-dimensional diagrams to new heights - literally. The machines race around to a computer program, stacking layer upon layer of material to create realistic results.

Thirty of his desktop 3-D MakerBot printers were on display Tuesday at the formal opening of the MakerBot Innovation Center at SUNY New Paltz.

Large-scale printing hub

The center is intended to be a large-scale 3-D printing hub for students, faculty and local industry, a place where administrators say "collaboration and innovation will help train the next generation of engineers, industrial designers and artists."

Pettis breathlessly invoked the names of Guttenberg, who invented the printing press, and Neo, the hero of "The Matrix," in describing the future he says has already arrived, thanks to his printers and what they'll be providing students, businesspeople and entrepreneurs at the new center.

Referring to what it must have been like to be in a room when Johannes Guttenberg used movable type to create a Bible the known world could then read and own, Pettis predicted 3-D printing "will explode across the world."

"This is one moment when everything changes."

Examples of items that were fabricated by students using the new 3-D printing MakerBots were on display.

And while a gizmo that can fabricate everything from plastic key rings to parts for NASA rovers would be a perfect geek magnet, the printers have already caught the attention of SUNY arts students.

Cat Wilson is a jewelry maker and graduate student in SUNY's metal program who's already found ways to create plastic molds in pursuit of her art.

After a bevy of college officials, businesspeople and politicians helped snip a ceremonial ribbon with an oversize pair of MakerBot plastic shears, Pettis continued to look for ways to describe the excitement he feels about his printers.

He's a self-described tinkerer, a former teacher in the Seattle public school system who said he needed a 3-D printer, but couldn't afford the years-ago $100,000 price tag. "So I had to make one myself," he said.

His MakerBot 2 retails for $2,200.

"When you have a MakerBot you have a superpower," he said. "It turns out it's a useful and practical super power that unlocks so much innovation and so many possibilities - and SUNY New Paltz and their students will lead the charge into the future."

Denise VanBuren of Central Hudson watches Tuesday as SUNY New Paltz graduate student and assistant in the MakerBot Innovation Center, Katherine Wilson, explains how a student project did a fabrication of the bust of David using 3-D printing technology.