

OLEDWorks gets tax credits to expand



Co-founder of OLEDWorks John Hamer of Greece, right, meets with, from left, RG&E executive Joseph Rizzo, Karen Altman of Rochester and Rochester Commissioner Carlos Carballada. / KATE MELTON

The ceiling over the offices and lab of OLEDWorks LLC is filled with standard fluorescent light fixtures that cost maybe \$100 each.

Swapping those out with organic light-emitting diode light fixtures today would be a fool's errand, with each costing hundreds of times more.

But within a handful of years, OLEDWorks co-founder and managing partner Michael Boroson said, the Rochester startup lighting [technology](#) company's goal is to be turning out OLED lighting panels that cost not much more than fluorescents, but that are vastly more efficient and open up all sorts of design and cost-saving avenues.

OLEDWorks today employs eight — all former Eastman Kodak Co. OLED scientists and technicians let go last year after Kodak sold its OLED operations to South Korean television and mobile phone giant LG Electronics. OLEDWorks plans to hire a dozen people over the next 12 months and 50 over the next two to three years as the company starts churning out lighting units, Boroson said.

Those expansion plans are coming with some public assistance as Empire State Development Corp. announced Friday that it had tied as much as \$537,000 worth of tax credits to OLEDWorks meeting those hiring goals.

The company started in July 2010 providing OLED technology consulting services, though the goal was always to move into manufacturing, Boroson said. It moved into the Canal Side location — stocked largely with equipment bought from Kodak last year — in April.

According to Empire State, OLEDWorks also has received some venture capital early stage [funding](#) from private investors to help pay for the expansion. Boroson declined to discuss details of the investment.

OLED technology is becoming a growing high-tech manufacturing niche in the Rochester region. Moser Baer Technologies Inc. — the U.S. division of an Indian company — in 2012 expects to open an OLED manufacturing line at Canandaigua's Smart System Technology and Commercialization Center. That drove Finger Lakes [Community](#) College to put together a clean-room technician program that starts in January, training clean-room technicians and equipment operators.

Boroson said OLEDWorks' focus on getting the costs of OLED lighting down will be through the equipment and processes used. While OLED lighting is available commercially today, it's available at luxury [automobile](#) prices, he said. "We need to come up with a machine and process that makes Volkswagens."

OLED-based light sources not only would give off less heat and be [more efficient](#) than more traditional forms of lighting, but they open the door to a dizzying number of configurations.

Possibilities include walls, ceilings or even furniture covered with a thin sheet of LEDs so the whole surface gives off light, the elimination of drop ceilings just to accommodate lighting fixtures, even windows that let in natural light during the day and give off their own light at night, said co-founder and managing partner John W. Hamer, as the small firm on Friday hosted a cocktail party for its investors, suppliers and other partners at its Canal Side [Business](#) Center setup on Rochester's west side.

"Creativity is the limit here," Hamer said.

MDANEMAN@DemocratandChronicle.com