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## UI Research Park's EnterpriseWorks named to website's top-10 list

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CHAMPAIGN — EnterpriseWorks — the business incubator in the University of Illinois Research Park — has been selected as one of "10 Startup Incubators You Need to Watch" by Inc.com.

The selection is all the more remarkable because EnterpriseWorks is the only pure university incubator — and the only incubator in the Midwest — to make the list.

Ben Franklin TechVentures, also on the list, is housed on Lehigh University's campus in Bethlehem, Pa., but started in a former Bethlehem Steel research facility.

Many of the incubators on the list are unconventional programs that popped up in recent years.

"There are a lot of emerging 'accelerator' programs," said Laura Frerichs, director of EnterpriseWorks and the UI Research Park.

"That generally means companies are formed on a shorter timeline and are receiving some kind of mentoring from a successful entrepreneur, like a 10- to 12-week boot camp," she said.

Examples include TechStars, a highly competitive incubator with four locations, and Y-Combinator, founded by technology entrepreneur Paul Graham.

That quick-turnaround model works well for certain companies developing software or Web applications for mobile devices, Frerichs said.

But EnterpriseWorks works with a broad range of startups including firms in biotechnology, chemical sciences and material sciences.

The length of stay at EnterpriseWorks is determined on a case-by-case basis, since some companies, such as biotech startups, may need as much as five years to get off the ground, she said.

Another unconventional incubator on the list is Flashpoint, which works with nonprofit arts organizations in the Washington, D.C., area.

Frerichs said the UI Research Park is toying with the idea of a separate incubator where people in fine arts, dance and other creative areas could co-locate, sharing studio space or a retail or gallery location.

Several incubators on Inc.'s list — Summer@Highland, DreamIt Ventures and LaunchBox Digital, among them — have expanded to additional locations.

The UI Research Park isn't planning to follow that lead. But Frerichs said EnterpriseWorks is trying to do "a better job bridging" with the UI Chicago's incubator facility — perhaps through extension of the entrepreneur-in-residence program.

There are also grant opportunities that could allow the research park to support entrepreneurship at the

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Rantoul Business Center, she said. Rantoul has resources for manufacturing and larger-scale build-out that the park itself doesn't have.

Although EnterpriseWorks doesn't have a wealthy, well-known entrepreneur powering it, as Y-Combinator does, EnterpriseWorks does have four entrepreneurs-in-residence who advise young companies.

Those advisers include: Tim Hoerr and Dennis Beard, both of Serra Ventures; Jed Taylor of Pattern Insight and Harlee Sorkin of Mentor Management. All four have part-time consulting contracts with the university.

"We wanted to find a mix of skilled experts familiar with doing business in Champaign," Frerichs said.

Several incubators on Inc.'s list have a competitive application process. Some offer seed money — and take an equity interest in the companies they accept.

Though EnterpriseWorks doesn't make investments, it does work with IllinoisVentures, a UI-affiliated group that makes early-stage investments in small firms and advises them.

That formula works well for some companies, Frerichs said, but other companies prefer different revenue sources, including "angel" investors and Small Business Innovation Research grants.

Plus, the park is getting ready to launch an "iSmart" initiative that would provide more assistance to companies when they are initially formed.

It would involve a combination of providers that could offer legal, accounting and plan development services to start-ups.

Since the UI Research Park was established in 2001, about 120 companies have been tenants of the park's incubator facilities, Frerichs said.

"We're thrilled that we received the recognition from Inc.," she said.

Frerichs said the UI didn't apply for inclusion. Instead, it was contacted by a reporter for Inc. about a week before the list was released.

Although the list of 10 incubators appears on Inc.'s website — <http://www.inc.com/ss/10-start-up-incubators-to-watch> — Frerichs said she is not sure whether it will appear in Inc. magazine.