

Light years beyond!

Move over high-speed Internet, photonics pholks are gazing at the future

By SEAN MCKIBBON

PHOTONICS ISN'T just about telecom anymore. Visitors to Photonics North — an international photonics industry conference being held in town — were treated yesterday to a glimpse of the new avenues the industry is taking and Ottawa, like much of the world, is branching out.

"It's well beyond telecom. Ottawa's blossoming into a much stronger photonics community," said Ray Novokowsky, chairman of the Ottawa Photonics Cluster.

In the last five years, the local industry has gone from a focus on phone lines and high-speed Internet to developing technology that applies photonics — technology that targets the properties and transmission of photons, such as in fibre optics — to other industries.

'Next generation'

"The next generation is the biosciences and the biotechnologies and nanotechnologies," he said.

"We're no longer just looking at a bit for the sake of a bit, and bringing an image or a databyte to you. We're looking at what's the quality of that food (you're eating)? Are you comfortable with that food going into your child's mouth?"

His own firm CTD Photonics is developing a scanner that uses light to assess water quality almost instantaneously — a technology that could allow food manufacturers to monitor contaminants in water used as an ingredient, potentially preventing



Sean Kilpatrick SUN

OTTAWA PHOTONICS CLUSTER chairman Ray Novokowsky says Ottawa's photonics community is "blossoming" as local tech companies are looking beyond high-speed Internet access and phone lines.

costly product recalls.

Many of the spinoffs from Nortel and JDS Uniphase are taking the technology pioneered in the telecom stream and applying it to other sectors, he said.

Dalsa Corp. a Kitchener-based company spun out of the University of Waterloo,

made a name for itself in optical sensors.

Mini-technology

But Dalsa CEO Savvas Chamberlain, a speaker at the event, said one of Dalsa's biggest growth areas in the next 10 years will be in Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems

(MEMS) — a type of mini-sensor technology Dalsa purchased from Zarlink Corp.

It's not technically photonics, but Chamberlain says his firm is using the sensor know-how it developed in making video components to bring MEMS products to market.

Photonics is "in a renaissance," said Siemens Canada CEO Albert Maringer, chairman of the conference.

"It has been seen as an independent sphere, but I see it as an application of electronics."

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