

Tech-oriented New York grad school launched by contest opens

September 13 2017, by Karen Matthews



In this Wednesday Aug. 16, 2017, photo, former mayor Michael Bloomberg, third from left, visits the Bloomberg Center at Cornell Tech, a new technology-oriented graduate school on Roosevelt Island in New York. The new graduate school that backers hope will cement New York's status as a center of high-tech innovation officially opens Wednesday, Sept. 13. Cornell Tech is the product of a competition former Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced in 2011. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

The city's quest to make itself a legitimate rival to Silicon Valley as a high-tech hub has long bumped up against some harsh realities, among

them the fact it hasn't had a top-tier technology school pumping out the next generation of entrepreneurs and engineers.

A potential answer to that problem, a new technology-oriented graduate school called Cornell Tech, was dedicated Wednesday at a ceremony at its new campus on an island in the East River.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, called the school's opening "an important milestone in New York state's long-term economic strategy and a powerful symbol of possibility."

Cuomo said New York has been losing ground in the tech race "not because others were winning but because we were not competing."

The collaboration between Cornell University and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, built with the help of hundreds of millions of dollars from philanthropies and from the city, has just 250 master's degree students and 50 doctoral students taking classes this fall. But officials hope to ramp up to 2,000 students by the time the campus is fully developed.

Part of the concept is to promote close ties between academia and the startup economy, officials said.

"Cornell Tech presented an opportunity that is almost unheard of today, to build a new type of academic program and a new type of campus from scratch," Martha Pollack, the computer scientist who was named the 14th president of Cornell University this year, said in a speech to a business group.



This Wednesday Aug. 16, 2017, photo shows a southern view of Cornell Tech's campus from a 26-story residence hall on Roosevelt Island in New York. The new graduate school that backers hope will cement New York's status as a center of high-tech innovation officially opens Wednesday, Sept. 13. Cornell Tech is the product of a competition former Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced in 2011. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

She called the school "the first of its kind campus, built for the digital age."

The first three buildings of a 12-acre campus on Roosevelt Island are now open after a fledgling Cornell Tech program spent the past four years as a rent-free tenant at a Google office building in Manhattan.

The campus was born from a competition held by New York City in 2011, backed by independent then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire who made his fortune selling innovative data terminals to Wall Street.

"The best inheritance that I can leave my daughters and my grandchildren is a better city and a better world," Bloomberg said at the ceremony.



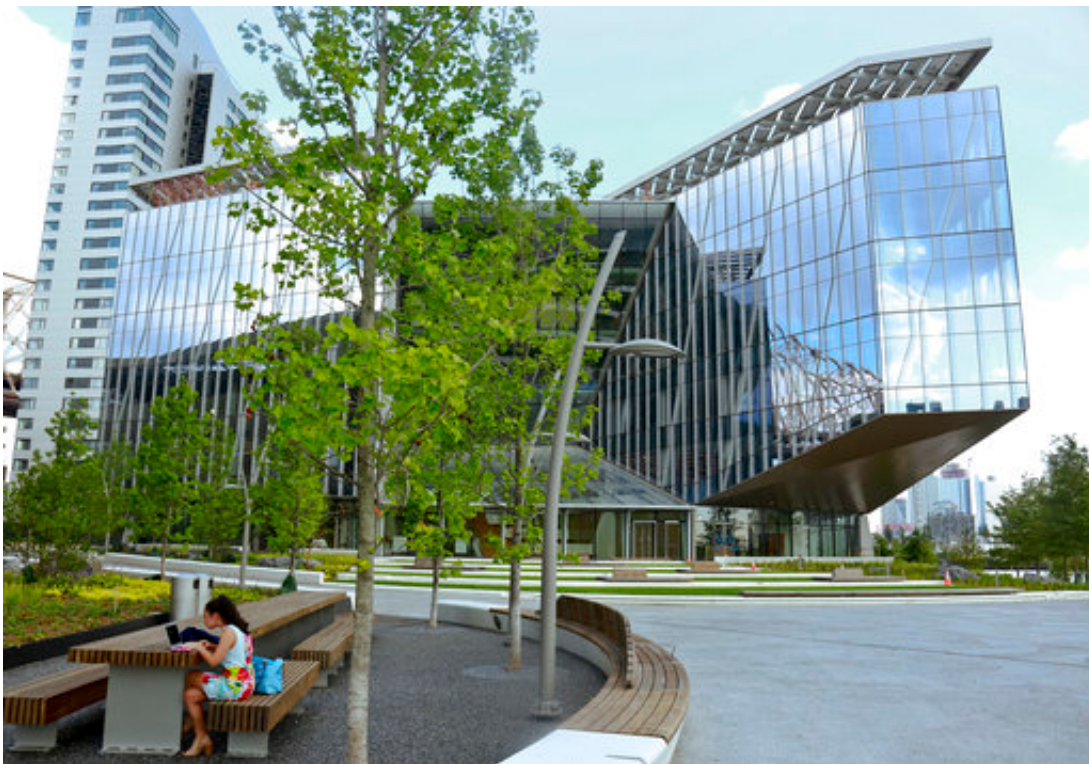
This Wednesday Aug. 16, 2017, photo shows the main buildings of Cornell Tech - the main academic building called the Bloomberg Center, left, a 26-story residence hall, center, and a programs building called the Bridge, right, on Roosevelt Island in New York. The first three buildings of a 12-acre campus on Roosevelt Island are officially opening Wednesday, Sept. 13, after a fledgling Cornell Tech program spent the past four years as a rent-free tenant at a Google office building in Manhattan. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

Donations to build the new campus have included \$100 million from the former mayor's charity, Bloomberg Philanthropies, \$350 million from philanthropist and duty-free magnate Chuck Feeney and \$133 million from Qualcomm founder Irwin Jacobs. The city provided \$100 million in seed money plus development rights on city land.

Students in fields including engineering, computer science, business and health tech are living this fall in a newly opened 26-story residence hall with sweeping views of Manhattan on one side and Queens on the other.

Cornell Tech's main academic building, called the Bloomberg Center, looks far more like a tech company than a university. Professors and researchers type away at laptops in the open-plan office. If they want privacy for a meeting they can repair to a huddle room.

There are no book-lined faculty offices, nor, it appeared during a recent visit, any books at all.



This Wednesday Aug. 16, 2017, photo shows Cornell Tech's 26-story residence hall, left, and a special programs building called the Bridge, right, on the campus of a new graduate school collaboration between Cornell University and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology on Roosevelt Island in New York. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

"It's a real shock to the system for those of us who come from academia," Pollack said. "You can't imagine going to a faculty member and saying, 'No, you're not going to have an office. You're going to be in an open floor plan.'"

The third Cornell Tech building, called the Bridge, is owned by developer Forest City Ratner and will be shared by the school and commercial tenants including, so far, Citigroup and Italian chocolate maker Ferrero, the maker of Nutella.

Pollack said the arrangement means that "our students and researchers will interact with startups, entrepreneurs, investors and established companies all in the pursuit of commercial innovation."

The Technion, Israel's oldest university, is responsible for two of the seven master's programs Cornell Tech offers. The programs in health tech and connective media are part of the Jacobs Technion-Cornell Institute, which also hosts a post-doctoral startup program for graduates to transform their research into new companies.



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The Technion's president, Peretz Lavie, said he was flattered when Bloomberg invited him to enter the competition for a New York campus but he knew that the Technion would need an American partner. The Cornell-Technion marriage works because the two universities share similar educational missions, Lavie said.

"It's a match made in heaven for many reasons," he said in a telephone interview.

Bloomberg acknowledged when he announced the competition back in 2011 that it would take time for New York to become the high-[tech](#) leader he envisioned.

"We understand that we will not catch up to Silicon Valley overnight," he said. "Building a state-of-the-art campus will take years—and attracting a critical mass of technology entrepreneurs may take even longer."



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But Bloomberg said he believed that in its first three decades the school could help launch 400 new companies.

Cornell Tech officials say that more than 30 startups have been formed out of the program, raising \$20 million and employing 105 people.

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