

Digital Detroit wants Michigan in spotlight

By **JEFF BENNETT**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Digital Detroit is aggressively trying to change Michigan's high-tech image.

Although new to the business scene, the organization threw a launch party last month that attracted more than 800 people.

Jeff Sloan, chairman of Birmingham-based Digital Detroit, said he's trying to build a community where anyone with an interest in technology can network and learn from and socialize with others who have similar interests.

"We see our demographic as those with a broader interest in things that go beyond finding venture capital," Sloan said. "We also want to address the lifestyle in southeastern Michigan. Michigan is a good place that has good, quality talent."

The organization's Web site, www.digitaldetroit.org, brags that the group is "dedicated to catalyzing Michigan's emergence to national and international prominence as a definitive center for technology, entrepreneurship and the New Economy culture."

For a yearly fee, Digital Detroit offers an online portal that allows members to share ideas, attend monthly Digital Mixers for socializing, receive an e-newsletter and attend educational events such as conferences for free or at a reduced rate.

Annual membership fees are \$75 for individuals and \$25 for

students. Business memberships are based on the size of the workforce. A company with fewer than 25 employees would pay \$750 while an employer with more than 250 workers would pay \$7,500.

Digital Detroit's next big event is a conference, "Driving Michigan's Economy," set for Nov 29-30, at the Atheneum hotel in downtown Detroit. The event is to feature speakers from IBM Corp., Red Herring magazine and eBay. The cost is \$200 for both days for members and \$225 for nonmembers.

Sloan, who is also cofounder and comanager of the venture capital firm **Sloan Ventures** bought the assets of the Detroit-New-Media Association to form Digital Detroit. Sloan purchased the company in July but did not disclose the purchase price.

The purchase gave Digital Detroit 500 members. It has since added 150 people.

Among the newest members is Ann Arbor-based **Web Elite**, which designs Web pages for clients.

"What first caught my eye is that they had their act together," said Amy Kennedy, Web Elite's director of marketing. "They had good materials that were well thought out."

Kennedy said she hopes the membership will yield client contacts in the automotive industry.

"Right now the automotive companies are embracing the



Digital Detroit

For a yearly fee, Digital Detroit offers an online portal that will allow members to share ideas and attend monthly Digital Mixers for socializing.

Please see **TECH**, Page 8F

TECH | New community

From Page 7F

Web and the more contacts we can make, the better off we are going to be," Kennedy said.

Digital Detroit is operated by Sloan's subsidiary, **StartupNation**.

Similar to First Tuesday, StartupNation wants to establish chapters throughout the world.

Membership in one chapter will give access to other chapters.

To learn more about Digital Detroit, write Digital Detroit, 430 N. Old Woodward, Birmingham, MI 48009, call 248-644-4183 or visit www.digitaldetroit.org.

Contact **JEFF BENNETT** at 313-222-8769 or jbennett@freepress.com