

The Ion, Houston's Innovation Epicenter, Announces Opening Celebration Activation Festival

Hub builds community and accelerates Houston's transformation into an interconnected city for technological advancement

April 29, 2022 – [Rice Management Company](#) (RMC), the developer of the [Ion](#), a 266,000 square-foot innovation hub within the greater Ion District located in Midtown, today announced it will host **Activation Festival** the week of May 9 to commemorate the building's opening and in-person programming. The public is invited to partake in programming, explore the Ion's amenities and learn about the educational and upskilling opportunities it offers beginning May 9 at 1:00 p.m. The Ion's purpose is to strengthen Houston's economic resilience and build a community for those that have not had access to economic opportunities in innovation and tech-enabled industries.

About the Building

Linking educational institutions, incubators, accelerators, businesses, entrepreneurs, and investors together, the Ion is creating pathways for the future workforce. The building is centrally located less than a mile from Downtown Houston and 1.5 miles from the Texas Medical Center. It is also steps from the Wheeler MetroRail station and is oriented for easy pedestrian, bike, train, bus, and rideshare access.

The building accommodates multiple uses, including 50,000 square feet devoted to public and shared spaces for events and programming, event space, classrooms, and maker spaces, including the [Ion Prototyping Lab](#) and the Ion Investor Studio. Current Ion tenants include technology giants [Microsoft](#), [Chevron Technology Ventures](#), [Schlumberger](#), and [Dow Chemicals](#), as well as startups like [Liongard](#), one of Houston's fastest-growing startups, and early-stage companies like [Koda Health](#) and [Clutch](#). The Ion will also be home to four [chef-driven restaurants](#) by Houston-based restaurateurs including The Lymbar, Late August, Common Bond, and Second Draught, a concept by Baileson Brewing, which will open in summer 2022.

Dramatically Redesigned for Today's Workforce

Formerly an Art Deco, 1930s-era Sears, the Ion was collaboratively designed by [SHoP Architects](#), [James Carpenter Design Associates](#), and [Gensler](#). Today, it is now a dramatically reimagined and purpose-built innovation hub that is also the anchor of Midtown's upcoming, transformational 16-acre Ion District. [Gilbane](#) and [Walter P Moore](#) played integral roles in the building's construction and structural engineering. Hines served as the development manager. The building's design team repurposed the existing structure to generate a smooth flow, connectivity, and transparency to innovation activities within the building and the half-acre outdoor plaza, designed by [James Corner Field Operations](#).

The Ion's structure includes the existing four-story concrete Sears building with an additional two floors of new class-A office atop. Preserved to revive the building's architectural significance, the design and construction team meticulously preserved historical aspects of the original building, including the façade, historic concrete canopies, interior terrazzo flooring, mosaic surrounding the glass block windows, and the concrete structure.

Legacy and design elements of note:

- Display showcase windows (“vitrines”) on the façade, which were restored and are for small exhibitions. The first art exhibit titled “Eye On Art” is open for public enjoyment.
- An abundance of natural light, introduced through large window openings in the north, east, and west concrete exterior walls.
- A massive light well created through large openings in the center of each floor of the building with a 250-seat Forum Stair amphitheater at the ground level for public-facing events.

“To create a purposefully collaborative complex, RMC intentionally chose to bring in the world’s leading design and architecture teams to reimagine the Ion’s space to mirror its vision,” said Ryan LeVasseur, Managing Director, Direct Real Estate, RMC. “We are ecstatic that the public can celebrate SHoP, Gensler, James Carpenter, Field Operations, Gilbane, and Walter P Moore’s vision. Their ingenuity and collaboration created a dynamic hub and anchor to transform how Houstonians work, learn, and engage with its neighbors.”

Ion District Also Growing

The Ion anchors the forthcoming [Ion District](#), an intentionally accessible, walkable, and integrated urban community. The growth of the Ion District continues to pick up momentum as the home to the second location of North America's largest climate-tech incubator, [Greentown Labs Houston](#), and the recently announced education facility for the nationally renowned [Theatre Under The Stars](#). RMC is also continuing construction of the district's third building, the 1,585 space District garage, and is in discussions for the development of three more buildings over the next three years.

About Activation Week

Activation Week begins May 9 with 2-3 programs daily through Friday, May 13. The event is a week-long, in-person showcase of the Ion and its innovation ecosystem partners. It includes an array of thought-provoking experiences, programs, and speakers, including a [silent disco](#), demos with robotic dogs, keynotes and panels on [the future of innovation](#), and [a startup showcase](#), representative of the building’s diverse offerings and the breadth of audiences it serves. Activation Festival culminates in a community-wide [block party](#) to celebrate the heart of Houston’s new innovation district Friday evening. A complete list of public events can be found [here](#), where you can also RSVP.

Opportunities to get Involved

Ongoing programming includes Cup of Joey, a weekly Friday networking event; [Family Tech Day](#), an event for Houston’s youth and their families to learn more about how to build a big idea; [How to Start a Startup](#), where attendees can learn how to identify problems, needs, and trends with their startup idea; and [Houston Startup Showcase](#), a year-long series of monthly pitch competitions.

“The Ion offers a wide range of accessible programming,” said Jan E. Odegard, Executive Director of the Ion. “After more than a year adapting to the online and hybrid environment during 2020 and 2021, all of our events are now in-person, safety and health conditions permitting, and we’re thrilled to welcome the Houston community for this epic week.”

To follow the Ion’s journey and get involved, Houstonians and tech enthusiasts can sign-up for the newsletter [here](#).

About the Ion

The Ion anchors a 16-acre innovation district, the epicenter for Houston's innovation ecosystem, as an inclusive, dynamic, vibrant, and dense hub focusing on quality collaborations between entrepreneurs, incubators, accelerators, corporations, academics, and the Houston community. The 266,000-square-foot building accommodates multiple uses, including class-A office space, shared workspace, prototyping and maker resources, event space, classrooms, food and beverage offerings, as well as indoor/outdoor communal areas with shared amenities. For more information, please visit <https://ionhouston.com/>

About Rice Management Company

Rice Management Company (RMC) is responsible for the stewardship of Rice University's endowment. The endowment plays a vital role for Rice. The distributions generated provide approximately 40% of the University's operating revenues, which makes it the single largest revenue source to the operating budget. The RMC team brings decades of investment management expertise across diversified industries and financial specialties. Through disciplined research and due diligence, we assess and pursue investment strategies that are aligned with the long-term risk/reward profile of the endowment. For more information, please visit investments.rice.edu