

UA gets \$44 million to study environmental effects on children

Phoenix Business Journal
December 19, 2008

According to Arizona's Bioscience Roadmap, commissioned and coordinated by the Flinn Foundation, the state needs to focus on four strategies to develop a strong bioscience hub. Here are those strategies and how Arizona fared in the fourth quarter.

Build Research Infrastructure

- The University of Arizona was awarded a \$44 million, six-year contract from the National Institutes of Health to join the National Children's Study, an investigation of environmental influences on the health of 100,000 children throughout the United States.
- Science Foundation Arizona made its largest investment to date, \$9 million, in the Tucson-based Critical Path Institute. SFAz noted that C-Path's leadership in improving the drug- and device-approval process is drawing the attention of global pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to Arizona.
- Arizona State University and the Translational Genomics Research Institute announced two advances in high-performance computing that will accelerate joint research projects. Saguaro 2, one of the world's 10 fastest academic supercomputers, came online at ASU; meanwhile, ASU and the Canadian firm Obsidian Strategics Inc. announced an agreement to establish an ultra-fast data link between TGen and ASU's Tempe campus.
- The Arizona Cancer Center at the University of Arizona and two other institutions received a grant from the NIH to accelerate the translation of laboratory research on lymphoma into improved care for patients. The prestigious grant, part of the NCI's Specialized Program of Research Excellence program, is only the fifth for lymphoma research to be awarded nationwide.
- Four university scientists were awarded grants for groundbreaking research with the potential to revolutionize their fields. John Chaput and Rudy Diaz of ASU, and Laurence Hurley of UA were awarded four-year EUREKA (Exceptional, Unconventional Research Enabling Knowledge Acceleration) grants by the NIH. Stephen Johnston of ASU was awarded a Gates Foundation Grand Challenges Explorations grant.

Build Critical Mass of Firms

- Banner Health completed a \$316 million purchase of Sun Health Corp., appointing new management at several hospitals and at Sun Health Research Institute in Sun City.
- The CEO of Roche Holding AG, which purchased Oro Valley's Ventana Medical Systems Inc. earlier this year, announced that Ventana would increase its southern-Arizona workforce from 750 to 1,000 by the end of 2009, and would make additional investments in property and facilities to expand the firm's local presence.
- UA and Canon USA Inc. agreed to establish a collaborative research-and-development operation in digital photography and medical imaging, initially funded by a \$3 million research grant from Canon at UA's Science and Technology Park.
- Histogen Inc., a San Diego biotechnology firm, expanded to Tempe, establishing its Histogen Aesthetics division to market "anti-aging" skin-care products. Histogen said

that its Tempe staff would concentrate on sales and marketing, and described the initiation of clinical trials in Arizona as a potential future expansion.

- The owners of SynCardia Systems Inc., a Tucson manufacturer of bridge-to-transplant artificial hearts, purchased publicly held MicroMed Cardiovascular Inc., of Houston, a manufacturer of ventricular assist devices. SynCardia said that the purchase will significantly broaden its capacity to serve patients with heart disease.

Enhance Business Environment

- The Northern Arizona Center for Emerging Technologies, a Flagstaff-based high-technology business incubator, celebrated its grand opening and reached agreement with Northern Arizona University to assume leadership of NAU's technology-transfer activities.
- Mesa-based Beaker Inc., established in March, grew to 10 employees and launched beaker.com, a website supporting networking opportunities for bioscience professionals. The site, along with a companion site, beakerboardroom.com, offers social-networking, job-listing, recruiting, and career-development services tailored to the bioscience community.
- IR BioSciences Holdings Inc., the parent company of ImmuneRegen BioSciences Inc., a Scottsdale developer of a drug to speed wound healing and strengthen the immune system, completed a \$5 million round of financing, anticipated as a first step toward a total of \$15 million.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services selected Arizona and Utah for a pilot program that will encourage Medicare recipients to use Google Health or one of three other electronic health-records services. HHS chose Arizona in part because of the state's Health-e Connection initiative, which is encouraging all health-care providers in the state to adopt electronic medical records by 2010.

Prepare Workers, Educate Citizens

- Science Foundation Arizona awarded \$8.8 million to Arizona's three public universities to support the second cohort of Graduate Research Fellows. With 100 new fellows joining 80 second-year fellows, the program is now the largest of its kind in the United States. Approximately 40 percent of the new fellows are conducting bioscience-related research.
- Chandler-Gilbert Community College and South Mountain Community College took steps toward more robust bioscience education programs. CGCC launched a biomedical research technology program, becoming the third of the Maricopa County Community Colleges with a formalized biosciences occupational program. SMCC strengthened its bioscience program by earning a \$290,000 Expanding Undergraduate Bioscience Engagement Track grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to support student research and links with area high schools.
- Two new training programs for health professionals began operation. DeVry University launched a bachelor's degree program in clinical laboratory science on its Phoenix campus. Fortis College, based in Baltimore, began offering classes on the campus of St. Luke's Medical Center in Phoenix; initially, courses will include medical assisting, dental assisting, and medical billing and coding, with nursing and emergency medical programs to be added in the future.
- Bioscience High School in Phoenix achieved the top passing rate in Maricopa County on the AIMS mathematics test. Statewide, Bioscience High had the second-highest passing rate among all high schools, trailing only University High School in Tucson.