

## The Birmingham News

### Innovation Depot signs 8 new clients to tech stable

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

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After his physiology and biophysics classes, UAB professor Erik M. Schwiebert treks daily to Innovation Depot to set up a drug discovery company using his research that he will license from the university.

His company, called DiscoveryBioMed LLC, is one of eight new clients to sign one-year leases at the \$17 million business incubator that opened at 1500 First Ave. North in April.

The start-ups are the first class of newcomers for the incubator that combined the Entrepreneurial Center and the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Office for the Advancement of Developing Industries under one roof.

The eight bring the number of residents at Innovation Depot to 46, leaving space for as many as 19 more.

With the newcomers, it now houses 16 information technology and software companies, 12 biotechnology and life sciences companies, seven engineering and technology companies, six business services firms and five resident agencies and organizations that provide services for the businesses.

"This last group is very impressive," said Innovation Depot CEO Susan Matlock, who added they "all have strong potential for acquisition."

Matlock said the companies are moving in now, with the last expected to complete the transition by Sept. 15. It's a diverse group: four are in the high-tech/IT/software category, two are biotechs, and there's one each in engineering and business services.

DiscoveryBioMed will conduct three business operations - Schwiebert calls them "interrelated arms" - from an office and two laboratories at the Depot. Using normal and diseased tissue, the company aims to acquire or engineer human cell models that will maintain properties they normally have in living organisms. The firm's second arm will use the models to speed up drug discovery efforts. The third will provide drug screening services for researchers.

"We are forming formal agreements with several academic clients at UAB, in greater Alabama and across the U.S. and Canada," said Schwiebert, who learned cell physiology at Dartmouth and Johns Hopkins. He and partner Thomas H. Barr, a UAB mathematics instructor and the company's chief operating officer, are licensing the process he developed during his 11 years at the school from the UAB Research Foundation.

DiscoveryBioMed got seed capital from the Birmingham Technology Fund and is in final

negotiations for more cash from the venture fund, Schwiebert said. He said support and mentoring also came from Dr. Larry Greer and Alan Dean at Greer Capital Advisors LLC, which manages the venture fund, and David Anthony, managing partner of New York-based 21Ventures LLC.

**`Wonderful wet labs':**

"Innovation Depot set aside some wonderful wet labs for us to perform our science that is spacious and flexible," Schwiebert said. He said the facility, which has break and conference rooms and gathering places, "feels like a home."

BioGX, a biological genetics company using detection technology founded and led by Michael Vickery, is another biotech newcomer. It aims to develop and market rapid and automated testing substances and research reagents for use in food and agricultural, environmental, recreational water and mold testing.

Two other newcomers - Gazoont Inc. and Point Clear Solutions - involve former participants in ComFrame Software Co., a one-time incubator tenant. Gazoont will provide health information for consumers, employers, payers and providers.

Point Clear is a professional IT services firm delivering software products targeted at solving core business problems, improving user and customer experience, and redefining business processes

Working with both companies are Blaine Anderson, president and CEO; Donnie Gooch, COO; Neal Evans, chief technology officer; and Lee Farabaugh, user experience director.

Also leasing Innovation Depot space is 2B Solutions Inc., an IT company that builds custom software for mobile devices. Jeff Cross is president and George Moreno is business development director.

Edmond V. Watters founded engineering and construction services firm Strada Professional Services LLC. Services include utility planning, design, and facility and construction management.

Turning Point Rehabilitation Inc., with Robin Hinkle as CEO, plans to design and build clinics providing drug and alcohol treatment to uninsured and underinsured adults and adolescents. Its first facility will be in Bosie, Idaho.

Software consulting firm Westglenn Software, a designer and builder of database systems applications, is led by founder Jeff Trotman.

Matlock said the companies were among 119 applicants seeking spots at Innovation Depot. "To get into here, the application is the business plan. That's what we look at: `Can you grow a business?'" she said. Also considered are the potential to obtain funding and create jobs, she said.

Matlock said other companies are in the pipeline to get Depot space and she hopes to announce their leases near the end of the year.

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