

OPINION and COMMENTARY

Happy to be Here: Bridget Wingert Solid foundation built from a dream

The ribbon cutting at the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center last week was an impressive ceremony.

"Did you see all those guys? All those doctors?" a member of the audience asked after the presentation. He was in awe of the place and what was going on there – the cancer research, the scientific breakthroughs for treatment and diagnoses going on in his backyard.

All of the area's state officials were at the refurbished warehouse on Old Easton Road near the Doylestown Airport in Buckingham Township. They were joined by Thomas Leamer, president of Delaware Valley College, Joshua Feldstein, Del Val's former president, and James Linksz, president of Bucks County Community College. The center houses the Hepatitis B Foundation offices, the Drexel Institute for Biotechnology and Virology Research, an office for the Ben Franklin Technology Center of Southeastern Pennsylvania and startup companies like Nucleonics, a developer of gene-based vaccines.

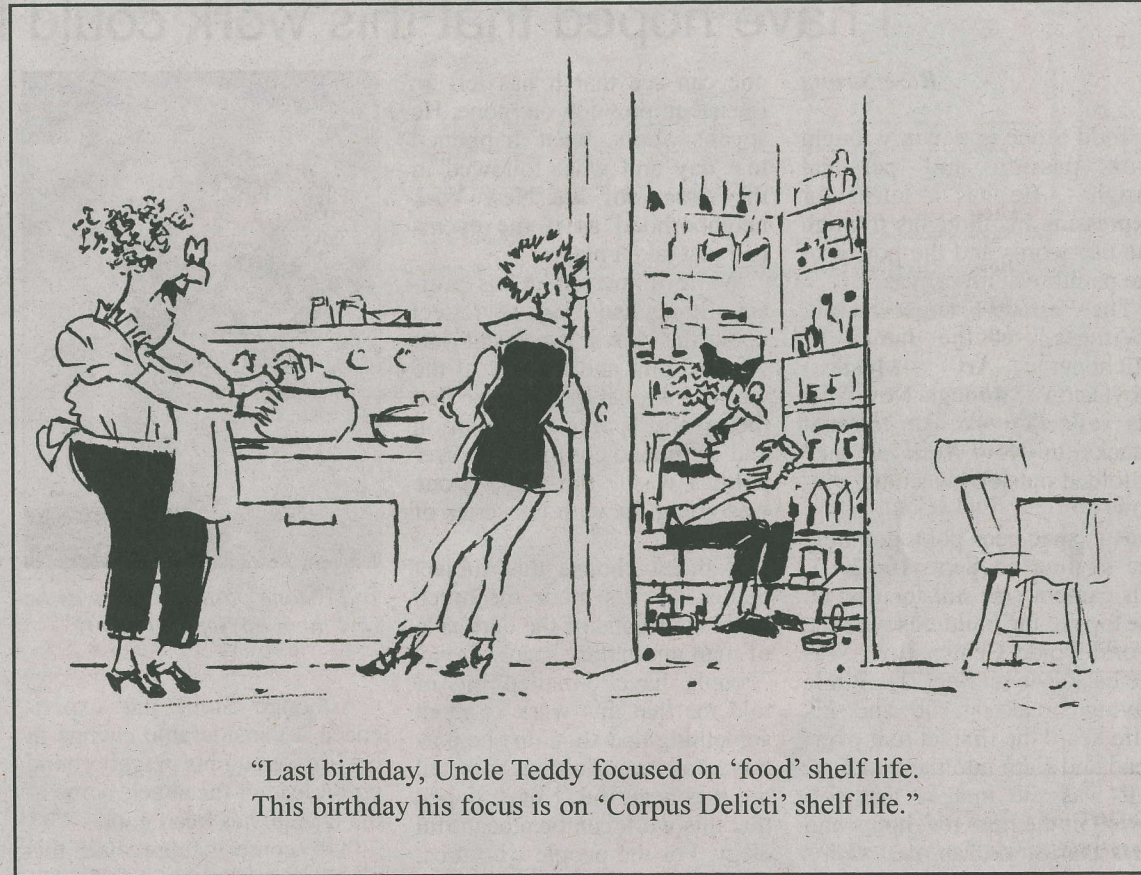
An impressive lineup of important scientific supporters has built the biotechnology center but like many worthy endeavors, this one had a humble beginning. It started after a chance meeting on the

the Jefferson Center joined Drexel University.

At the dedication when the official guests were introduced, Block interrupted the ceremony to introduce the Wittes, who played such an important role in the growth of his dream – one of their contributions has been the establishment of the Bruce Witte Research Fellowship, which supports young scientists who work for the Hepatitis B Foundation. Among the New Hope guests were supporters, artist Sharon Victor, woodworker Phill Powell, Curtis Thomsen and Karen Bush.

Tim Block, in his self-effacing way, gave credit to his local roots. He was raised in Buffalo, N.Y., one of six sons and daughters of Joyce and Carl Block, who moved to New Hope when their children were grown. He earned his undergraduate degree at the SUNY Buffalo – he enrolled at age 14 – and a graduate degree at Princeton. He attended Rutgers Medical School and later joined the faculty at Jefferson. He worked with Blumberg at Oxford University on hepatitis B research.

Members of the Block family, a remarkable group, have been among the Hepatitis B Foundation's most ardent supporters. All eventually found their way from Buffalo to



"Last birthday, Uncle Teddy focused on 'food' shelf life. This birthday his focus is on 'Corpus Delicti' shelf life."

Artist's Corner: Jan Lipes Loving deformity

On a Japanese scroll dating about 1200 A.D. is written, "To appreciate and find pleasure in curiously curved potted trees is to love deformity."

Whatever did the author mean? Who loves deformity? In America today, the cult of youth and beauty



Bonsai don't differ genetically from trees found in nature and stay small because they are kept in pots. Coniferous and deciduous trees are used, with pine, maple and juniper still considered classic bonsai.

A bonsai is the tree and the pot, varying

chance meeting on the Delaware Canal towpath, at a kitchen table in New Hope when young scientist Dr. Timothy Block and his wife, Joan, talked to neighbors, Jan and Paul Witte, about his vision for eradicating hepatitis B. The liver disease had affected a person close to him.

"I made a promise never to forget," Block says of the help that he had. With the Wittes, who are known for their selfless generosity, and the support of Dr. Baruch Blumberg, who won the Nobel Prize for his discovery of the hepatitis B virus, Block founded the Hepatitis B Foundation in 1991.

The foundation grew into the Jefferson Center for Biomedical Research, a partnership of Del Val, Thomas Jefferson University and the Ben Franklin Technology Center and Block became an assistant professor at Jefferson.

In 2001, Gov Mark Schweiker approved a \$7.9 million grant for the foundation and Del Val that helped to fund the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center. In 2004,

their way from Buffalo to Bucks County. Tim's brothers Tom and Teddy he calls the "ice cream magnates." Tom was the first to move to New Hope. He founded Thomas Sweet, the ice cream company in Princeton, when Tim was a student there.

Sisters Randy and Jamie had Sadye Rose, the hat shop in Doylestown, for many years. Today Jamie has an off-Broadway casting company. Kathy is a professional musician.

It was Tim's passion as much as his education that helped build the Hepatitis B Foundation. President of the foundation, he takes no salary from it or the institute for viral research. His salary comes from membership on the Drexel faculty.

Tim Block now has an office in the center of the sparkling 62,000-square-foot biotechnology center, the only biotech facility and graduate research site in Bucks County. And Doylestown has been named a U.S. Biotech Hotspot in a national list compiled by Nature Biotechnology.



Joan and Tim Block celebrate the official opening of the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center.