

Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center opens in Bucks

Joe Ferry

Promising that significant medical breakthroughs will come from within its laboratories, officials from Delaware Valley College and the Hepatitis B Foundation last week christened their new Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center of Bucks County.

More than 200 local and state dignitaries attended the official opening of the 62,000 square foot facility in the former D.A. Lewis warehouse on Old Easton Road in Buckingham Township. The center features 20 state-of-the-art laboratories and millions of dollars worth of sophisticated equipment that scientists will use to find cures for serious diseases, including cancer.

The Hepatitis B Foundation will have its headquarters at the \$12 million center, which will also serve as an incubator for start-up biotechnology companies. Students from DelVal and Drexel University will have access to its resources as part of their studies.

"When you say Bucks County, you're going to think of biotechnology," said



RICK GOULD

Cutting the ribbon for the opening of the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center are, from left, state Rep. Chuck McIlhinney, state Sen. Joe Conti, state Rep. Scott Petri (hidden), Delaware Valley College President Thomas Leamer, state Rep. Bernie O'Neill, RoseAnn Rosenthal, president and CEO of the Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Dr. Timothy Block, president of the center and the Hepatitis B Foundation, and Buckingham Township Supervisor Maggie Rash.

county commissioners Chairman James Cawley.

DelVal and the Hepatitis B Foundation have been affiliated since the mid-1990s. The foundation and its research arm, the Institute for Hepatitis and Virus Research, has operated out of the Jefferson Center for Biomedical Research, a partnership that includes Thomas Jefferson University and the Ben Franklin Technology Center of Pennsylvania, on the DelVal campus in Doylestown Township.

During its time there, the center has helped several biotechnology companies get started, including Immunotope, which has developed a promising cancer vaccine technology, and Nucleonics, a Horsham company that has developed gene-based vaccines and therapies based on gene-silencing technology.

Dr. Timothy Block, the driving force behind the center, hopes to aid more companies in getting on their feet. He said the center will be a "world class resource for education and research" that will produce great scientific and

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Biotechnology Center



Lorraine Keller of Pipersville, vice president of corporate development at Immunotope, explains her company's mission while Dr. Andy Coconati, a project leader, listens.

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medical discoveries.

Block predicted scientists working in Buckingham will accelerate the discovery of a cure for Hepatitis B, liver cancer and more. More than 50 scientists and public health officials will work at the center, which should create about 130 jobs in the region, he said.

In 2001, then-Gov. Mark Schweiker, in his last official act, approved a \$7.9 million grant for the center. The remainder of the cost of construction

was shared by the foundation and the college. Operational expenses will be met by charging rent to businesses and organizations that lease space.

As part of last week's ceremony, the state announced the center will get a \$250,000 grant as the state's 19th designated Keystone Innovation Zone, an area state-approved for tax breaks, loans and grants to encourage business development and collaboration between universities, entrepreneurs and communities.