



JOHN GEORGE | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Dr. Timothy Block at the biotech center.

## Bio-incubator hatched to aid researchers, startups

**JOHN GEORGE**  
STAFF WRITER

More than five years after Dr. Timothy Block first conceived the idea for a building where researchers, students and entrepreneurs would work and learn side by side, the \$15 million Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center of Bucks County is set to open next week in Buckingham.

The 62,000-square-foot facility, which gets its official unveiling Sept. 7, was created through a partnership between the Hepatitis B Foundation and Delaware Valley College.

The center — structured as a nonprofit

organization — will serve as the foundation's new headquarters, a teaching site for college students from DelVal and Drexel University, and a place to nurture fledgling life sciences companies.

"We will be able to accomplish much more in partnership with biotechnology companies in this space that would not be possible alone," said Block, the foundation's co-founder and president. "This facility will help expand our efforts to assist both those affected by viral hepatitis worldwide, and to develop biotechnology businesses in our region."

Block said Bucks County has a wealth of pharmaceutical industry workers, but an

absence of places to help people with the idea for how a company gets started. He wants the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center to change that.

"People can come here with just an idea, and some credibility, and we'll let them in," he said. "I see this place as a dream machine."

Dr. Thomas Leamer, DelVal's president, said establishing the center will allow the school to strengthen its life sciences programs and better prepare students for careers in biotechnology.

"The center will play a crucial role in the education of tomorrow's researchers," Leamer said.

## BIO-INCUBATORS: Fledgling biotech companies finding more places to get started

The Buckingham center isn't the only biotech incubator on the way.

Burlington County College is planning to open a science incubator in Mount Laurel, N.J., in January. The \$4 million facility will encompass 12,800 square feet for 11 interconnected laboratory modules designed to house early-stage and startup scientific companies. The community college has secured more than \$2 million in state grants to help fund the project.

Ron Maxson, acting incubator manager for the college, said the new incubator has already attracted the interest of one potential tenant: Molecular Diagnostic Partners, a Mount Laurel company that creates DNA- and RNA-based diagnostic tests for infectious diseases.

This year, the Science Center added 16,500 square feet of laboratory and office space for up to 19 new life sciences companies at its West Philadelphia incubator.

The Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center project was funded in part by a \$7.9 million grant approved for DelVal and the Hepatitis B Foundation in 2001 by then-Gov. Mark Schweiker. The center also received \$220,000 in federal funding. Delaware Valley College and the Hepatitis B Foundation borrowed funds for the remaining costs and expect to repay the loan through rent charged to the businesses and organizations leasing space in the buildings.

Since the late 1990s, the foundation has operated out of the Jefferson Center for Biomedical Research, a research and training facility built through a partnership involving Thomas Jefferson University, DelVal and the Ben Franklin Technology Center of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Block was an assistant professor at Jefferson until the summer of 2004 when he

and his team joined Drexel.

The biomedical research center on the DelVal campus will revert to classroom space for the college. The center served as an incubator for about a half-dozen biotech startups, including Nucleonics, a Horsham

become part of his nonprofit institute."

Among the other companies already signed up for space in the building include Active Cell, a bioprocessing company; Shenandoah, which is involved in bioprotein production; BioSante, which is developing orally administered therapeutic proteins; and Calisto Pharmaceuticals, which is focused on cancer therapies.

In addition to serving as the home for the Hepatitis B Foundation and its affiliated Institute for Hepatitis and Virus Research, the center will house the Drexel Institute for Biotechnology and Virology Research and an office for Ben Franklin.

The Hepatitis B Foundation and DelVal initially planned

to build a facility on farmland on the college campus.

After discussing the idea with Bucks County lawmakers, state Rep. Joseph Conti and former U.S. Rep. James Greenwood [now president of the Biotechnology Industry Organization], they agreed to create the center in a vacated building rather than building on farmland.

The site they ended up with was a distribution warehouse on Old Easton Road that previously belonged to D.A. Lewis Associates, a marketing company that was closing its Buckingham warehouse and eliminating about 130 jobs in the county.

Block said the 17-year-old foundation and its institute will have 55 researchers, who are working on new treatment for hepatitis B and C and liver cancer. He expects at least 110 people will work at the site when all the space is leased.

"I love this building," he said, during a tour of the site. "This is my dream." ■



**Burlington County College President Ron Maxson leads a tour of the science incubator construction in Mount Laurel.**

developer of gene-based vaccines and therapies based on gene silencing technology, and Immunotope, which is moving to the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center.

Immunotope's experimental cancer vaccine technology is drawing attention and funding from a variety of sources. Most recently, the company landed a \$730,000 grant from the U.S. Army to fund the development of a diagnostic assay for prostate cancer and \$350,000 from Ben Franklin for clinical testing of its experimental immunotherapeutic vaccine in ovarian cancer patients. Immunotope earlier received \$400,000 in grants from the National Institutes of Health for its ovarian cancer therapy.

"[Block's] scientific interest in hepatitis and liver cancer was very compatible with our immunology focus," said Ramila Philip, president and chief scientific officer. "It has worked out very well, for a while we didn't have the financial resources [to establish an independent headquarters]. He has given us a place to call home, and I've