

# Biotech group gets partner

## Caltech joins area business startup effort

By Kimm Groshong Staff Writer  
Pasadena Star-News

PASADENA - Caltech and a unique Pasadena bioscience collaborative are joining forces to encourage startup life sciences companies to stick with their entrepreneurial goals and to foster the San Gabriel Valley's development in those fields.

The Pasadena Bioscience Collaborative rents out space in a fully equipped biology and chemistry lab to fledgling biotechnology companies that might not otherwise have the financial wherewithal to pursue their capitalist dreams.

Bruce Blomstrom, the collaborative's president, said while the life sciences are a rapidly growing industry and area universities are helping to fuel the research, the collaborative aims to fill a gap in the development chain.

"What was not here was a space where new companies with new ideas could develop to the point where they could secure funding," he said. "We are focused on filling the gap." Seven companies currently call the collaborative's 1,500- square-foot brick building on East Foothill Boulevard their scientific home.

Lena Basile, CEO of a company called Neumedicines, described the collaborative as "a godsend." Her company was founded by three USC researchers and joined the collaborative a year ago, working to develop a novel cancer therapy. "We have found it invaluable to helping our company start and develop," she said.

Although other organizations such as the Pasadena Angels and Pasadena Entretec help young technology companies with funding and support, the Pasadena Bioscience Collaborative is the only group in the area that provides young companies with a physical home complete with so-called "wet" chemical and biological lab space, Blomstrom said. Basile said her company would have needed at least \$50,000 or \$100,000 just to buy the scientific equipment to begin work. And her federal funding doesn't provide for equipment purchases. "The startup costs in terms of producing a laboratory are very high and can be a major deterrent from actually starting up," she said.

The collaborative grew out of initial funding secured by state Sen. Jack Scott, D-Pasadena, to determine whether there was a need for the incubator. The city of Pasadena, the trustees of California State University, Pasadena City College, Huntington Medical Research Institutes and BioCatalytics were also early supporters.

Pasadena City College's Wendie Johnston, director of the LA/Orange County Biotechnology Center, collaborates extensively with the incubator. She brings equipment largely donated by industry to the collaborative and strives to develop a workforce for the San Gabriel Valley's biotech industry by teaching courses that give students more lab experience. Many of her students have interned for the collaborative's companies.

PCC's Biological Technology Program trains students coming from a variety of educational backgrounds in lab work. Some come straight from high school while many already have bachelor's degrees. "It's hard to find a job when you just have a degree and you haven't done any lab work," Johnston said. "We offer the training that would make them very desirable in a lab."

By supporting the development of companies and training of technicians locally, the collaborative encourages students and researchers to continue to live and work in the San Gabriel Valley. "We want the brain to stay here," she said.

And that is of interest to Caltech as well.

Rich Wolf, the institute's assistant vice president of technology transfer, said Caltech entered the agreement with the collaborative because "we're just interested in supporting entrepreneurialism in the region and we think that what they're doing is interesting." He said universities today are playing a more important role in supporting the innovation economy than ever before. "Universities are really, really important to the development of the high-tech and biotech industries in this country," Wolf said. "Anything we can do to support that is important at the national level and obviously really important at the local level."

SCIENCE TEAM: Bruce Blomstrom, foreground, president of the Pasadena Bioscience Collaborative, visits the lab as technician Doug Simpson works on a project. The collaborative, an incubator for researchers in life science who are looking to translate their work into young companies, recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Caltech. (Walt Mancini/Staff)