



## UT-Southwestern Biotech Park to Support Tech Development, Industry-Academia Pacts

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By Ben Butkus

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Owners of a new biotechnology park currently under construction near the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas are betting it will spur technology commercialization and economic growth in the region by providing lab access and incubator space for startup and established companies, and by facilitating academic-industry collaboration and entrepreneurial training and resources, university officials said last week.

UT-Southwestern said it bought the 13-acre site on which the park will be developed primarily with profits it received over the past several years from its technology-licensing program. It will also use some of these profits to finance part of the facility's development over the next few years, a university official said this week.

The park, to be called BioCenter at Southwestern Medical District, next year plans to open the first of four buildings that will ultimately provide up to 500,000 square feet of laboratory and office space.

Though BioCenter is being designed particularly to help nurture technologies developed in UT-Southwestern's research labs, it will also provide commercial space for existing life-science startups from around the state and for established companies wishing to forge a collaborative bond with the school, Dennis Stone, vice president for technology development at UT-Southwestern, said in a statement.

First and foremost, however, BioCenter will help fledgling university biomedical companies gain a foothold by providing them with what the university calls "high-quality" laboratory space and other important business services.

"Dallas has lacked quality commercial space for companies in the biomedical industry, especially early-stage companies," Lawrence Allred, assistant vice president for venture development at UT-Southwestern, wrote in an e-mail to *BTW* this week.

"Previous start-up companies arising out of UT-Southwestern technologies have located elsewhere due to the lack of local biomedical commercial space," Allred added. "BioCenter at Southwestern Medical District will help satisfy that need."

Allred said that the BioCenter will be designed to provide support “across the spectrum of technology commercialization from concept, through R&D, and even small-scale manufacturing; [and] will provide the capability to advance commercial-quality technologies from the earliest stage as they emerge from academic laboratories through full commercial development in mature biomedical companies.”

Those “mature” companies may also end up being located at the BioCenter if UT-Southwestern has its druthers. According to Allred, the BioCenter is designed to be a fully capable industrial venue for biomedical companies of any size, and there is no requirement that the companies arise from UT-Southwestern technology or have pre-existing university ties.

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Besides having access to brand new office space and wet labs, tenants will be able to interact with resident UT-Southwestern bioengineering faculty; be co-located with the university’s IP-management offices; and associate with local venture-capital networks such as Richardson-based STARTech Early Ventures.

Furthermore, the research park’s location 10 minutes from Dallas’ Love Field airport and within the Southwestern Medical District, which is associated with Children’s Medical Center, Parkland Health Systems, and UT Southwestern University Hospital, could provide opportunities for tenant companies to form research collaborations and other relationships with academic and medical entities.

Perhaps most important, especially for young companies, will be that they will have preferred access to a number of research core facilities at UT-Southwestern, including but not limited to cores in protein chemistry and sequencing; mass spectrometry; peptide synthesis; microscopy; biochemical kinetics; DNA microarrays; mouse laboratories; flow cytometry; analytical ultracentrifugation; X-ray crystallography; synthetic chemistry and chemical synthesis; DNA sequencing; and concierge services and assistance for all aspects of clinical and translational research.

“Such services offer a great advantage because the capital expenses for these capabilities would kill a small company,” Stone said in a statement.

According to Allred, startup companies will be offered “price advantages” as compared with more established biotech entities, which will lease space at market rates. Allred added that negotiations are underway with several undisclosed biomedical companies about leasing space in the first BioCenter building.

Two companies that are already prominently involved in the formation of BioCenter, and which figure to remain closely tied to the center, are not the usual biotech or pharma giants: locally based Texas Instruments and AT&T.

Texas Instruments “has a major strategic program” on emerging medical applications for semiconductors, Allred said. “As part of this program TI has collaborative efforts with UT-Southwestern and will be involved in BioCenter.”

Doug Rasor, vice president of emerging medical technology and chair of biotech-based economic-development group BioDFW, said in a statement that TI “welcomes the establishment of this center. We expect semiconductor technology to play a key role in some projects ... with the goal of commercializing breakthrough research in the medical device and health care fields.”

Meantime, AT&T is providing BioCenter \$750,000 over five years to help tenants support training in entrepreneurship, UT-Southwestern said. The contribution will help establish an entrepreneurial center within the BioCenter devoted to providing researchers with business training.

It is unclear exactly why AT&T seeks involvement in what will largely be a biomedical-oriented project. Calls to the company were not returned. However, Allred suggested that the firm is eyeing opportunities in the area of intelligent medical systems.

“BioCenter will be a biomedical industrial venue,” Allred said. “Biotechnology will be a significant part of it ... but so too will medical devices [and] health-care technologies including remote monitoring and telehealth and telemedicine companies.”

He added that “intelligent medical systems, where smart medical devices operate in smart medical systems ... is one of the arenas of biomedical development that will be strongly represented in BioCenter.”

The site for BioCenter was purchased with profits the school has received over the past several years from technology transfer. Since 1984, more than 550 researchers from UT-Southwestern have been named inventors on more than 1,200 invention disclosures that together have yielded more than 360 issued US patents, the university said.

In addition, some 300 licensing agreements involving those patents have generated more than \$110 million for the school since 1984, with more than \$40 million generated in the last four years, according to UT-Southwestern.

“There are funds that have been received as a result of multiple successes with past licenses and start-up companies,” Allred said. “Some of this has been used to purchase the land and support early steps in the development.”

He added that building construction is being funded through standard commercial financing mechanisms. “The university as a borrower is highly rated and as a result has a relatively lower cost of capital,” Allred said.