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Biomed Notebook

Life sciences: positive signs in a down economy

By Stephen DeSantis

It seems that, despite a worrisome economy, investments in the life sciences industry's physical capabilities have not wavered. In fact, it has been difficult to keep up with the number of new research and biomedical manufacturing facilities launched in the region in September.

It very well may be that these projects were conceived in better market environments — the planning, design and construction of these facilities take years — but it still translates to positive news, and jobs, in otherwise tough times.

The past month was filled with ribbon cuttings, tours and plenty of local dignitaries handing out enough balloons to go around.

[Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics Inc.](#) started off the spree with a 115,000 square-foot expansion of its manufacturing space in Walpole. Sen. [John Kerry](#) (D-Mass.) was there to cut the ribbon on the \$100 million facility. The town will see 70 more jobs created, the company said.

Then, Swiss drug developer [Novartis AG](#) opened its much-anticipated 80,000 square-foot facility called the Novartis Research Center of Excellence in Virology at 45 Sidney St. in Cambridge. Once fully staffed, it is expected to house 150 new employees by late 2009. The center is designated a biosafety level 3 research facility.

Cambridge old-timer [Genzyme Inc.](#) celebrated the launch of a new early-stage research facility called simply, the Science Center, on its campus in Framingham. The Science Center was certified a Green Building, receiving a Gold rating by the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Council. According to Genzyme, it will add 350 new jobs to the region. The biotech is also building a massive 230,000 square-foot cell culture manufacturing facility in Framingham. The plant is being built at a cost of \$250 million and is expected to create another 300 new jobs in the town. More expansion is in the works in Allston, the company stated. Genzyme said it plans to beef up its R&D and manufacturing infrastructure around the world.

Last week, drug discovery tool maker [RainDance Technologies Inc.](#) dedicated its new 28,000-square-foot headquarters and manufacturing facilities in Lexington, completing its previously announced move from Guilford, Conn. Because the company's space is an expansion over its existing facility, it stated it will add 50 percent more staff within a year.

On the same day, medical device maker [Arteriocyte Medical Systems Inc.](#) held an “open house” to show off its new manufacturing and distribution center in Hopkinton.

This week, Lexington-based antibiotics biotech [Cubist Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#) unveiled its new 35,000 square feet of lab space. The company stated the space will be filled with 50 research scientists and administrative staff.

Gov. [Deval Patrick](#) attended both the Genzyme and Cubist grand opening ceremonies. Perhaps the governor wanted to see possible future recipients of his \$1 billion life sciences package up close and personal.

And the Ocean State had its day as well. Medical device maker [Concordia Medical](#) opened a 25,000 square-foot facility in Warwick. Rhode Island Gov. [Donald Carcieri](#) attended the festivities.

The one not to miss was most likely biotech firm [Synageva BioPharma Corp.](#)'s party celebrating the opening of its headquarters in Waltham with champagne and canapes. Synageva was founded in the Atlanta area as [Avigenics](#). It continues to use its Georgia office for research and production. Welcome to New England, Synageva. As I am sure you know, the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center — and its \$1 billion — is just a short drive away.

Of course all these ribbon cuttings pale in comparison to the proposed relocation of Cambridge-based [Vertex Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#) to a massive 500,000 square-foot building at Fan Pier in South Boston. If the deal is finalized, construction will no doubt take years. That's one grand opening this reporter won't be missing out on.