

Biotech firm picks Oro Valley



Robert Green, president and founder of Integrated Biomolecule Corp., looks over his site at the Rancho Vistoso Tech Center in Oro Valley.

Biomolecule is UA tech park 'success story' now in need of bigger facility

By Jonathan J. Higuera
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A Tucson biotech company nurtured at the University of Arizona Science and Technology Park is moving to Oro Valley as part of an expansion plan.

Integrated Biomolecule Corp., which specializes in organic chemistry, will join two other occupants of the Rancho Vistoso Tech Center on Innovation Park Drive by the end of next summer.

The company, started in 1992 by founder and President Robert Green, currently occupies about 5,300 square feet at the UA Science and Technology Park.

"We've outgrown our space and it makes sense for us to have our own building," Green said.

The company is engaged in research and development, manufacturing and sales of fine organic compounds typically used in the pharmaceutical and diagnostic industries. It also does lab testing of food and nutritional supplement samples.

"When we decided to build, we looked at every industrial-type site in the Tucson area," Green said. "We went to Oro Valley for a family affair and drove by Ventana Medical Systems. We pulled into Innovation Park Drive and said, 'This is the place.' "

Because the deal isn't completely done, he was hesitant to talk about the specifics. But he did say the company plans to build an 18,000-square-foot building with state-of-the-art laboratories on more than two acres. The architectural firm Acorn Associates will design the building.

"It needs to fit the beautiful environment but project that there is a high-tech organization within," Green said.

The building would be the park's second-largest, behind Ventana Medical Systems, which has 180,000 square feet in three buildings.

Green wouldn't speculate on how much the company would grow from its current 10 employees. "Our business requires very high skills but not necessarily a lot of people," he said. "It depends on if and how you grow the business."

In addition to Ventana Medical Systems, the industrial park's other occupant is Western National Parks Association, a nonprofit that operates visitor center bookstores at national parks. It moved there in April.

"We're looking forward to getting new neighbors out here," said Scott Aldridge, the nonprofit's chief operating officer.

Ventana Medical Systems, a biotech company that makes medical devices that detect cancer, relocated to the center in November 2001. It owns about 40 acres at the park and occupies about 15 acres.

"It's a very beautiful spot to have an office park," said Nick Malden, Ventana's chief financial officer. "We're very happy with our location. It's going to get bigger as businesses move here. As they do, the infrastructure will grow and evolve."

For its part, Oro Valley town administrators also are happy about landing another biotech company.

"We're really tickled to be getting this type of business in our community because it is the kind of business everybody would love to have," said Jeff Weir, Oro Valley's economic development administrator. "It benefits the entire region."

To help facilitate the move, Oro Valley will put together project teams to work with Integrated Biomolecule and other stakeholders in the project, he said.

"We don't have economic incentives like a lot of other states, but the one thing a community can do is put together a project team that brings all our disciplines together with owners, landowners, architects and all the decision-makers," Weir said. "We did it with Ventana and we'll do it with Robert's company."

The 325-acre tech center is part of a Vistoso Partners planned development.

"This is the main place where we want to see high-tech businesses," Weir said.

The park also will be getting a 250,000-square-foot hospital and 60,000-square-foot medical center. Construction on the hospital is expected to begin next March.

Integrated's move coincides with a spurt of building in Oro Valley, said Weir, citing three major retail projects along Oracle Road that will bring close to 2 million square feet of retail stores when completed.

"We've had more commercial development here in the last two years than all the other years combined," he said. "We're finally seeing a lot of the infill projects that had been sought after."

Marshall Worden, director of the UA Science and Technology Park, said Integrated Biomolecule has been one of that Southeast Side tech park's "great success stories." He isn't sad to see the company go because it is a mature, successful business that is staying in the area, he said.

"We were able to create an environment where they have grown and blossomed and become very successful, including a couple of spinoff companies," he said. "We can only wish them great success."

Integrated Biomolecule was one of the UA Science and Tech Park's original tenants. It moved there in 1995 in space provided by IBM and two years later moved to its own space. Worden said the park will eventually put Integrated Biomolecule's facilities back on the market for lease.

"There's a shortage of good-quality lab space," he said. "Hopefully, we'll find another success story."