

Business is bubbling up in UR's test tubes

Infusion of capital, entrepreneurial skills would stoke the fire



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As the region's historic pillars of employment continue to erode, university-based research is being increasingly viewed as a vehicle for future economic growth, particularly in the area of biotechnology.

But does Rochester have the "right stuff" to become a biotech hub?

For its part, the University of Rochester has the potential to serve as a catalyst for regional biotech business development.

UR is in the process of investing more than \$500 million in biomedical

research, which has already resulted in more than 400,000 square feet of new state-of-the-art research facilities and the hiring of more than 500 new faculty and support staff.

Over the past 10 years, UR has seen its biomedical research funding grow to more than \$220 million annually.

And we are not standing still. A \$37.5 million bioengineering and optics building is nearing completion, and early this year, we broke ground on a new \$63.5 million James P. Wilmot Cancer Center.

The expansion in both our scientific and clinical enterprises has enabled us to recruit new faculty who, in the process of conducting their research and treating patients, develop new technologies and approaches to patient care.

These discoveries can, in turn, serve as a pool of innovation upon which existing biotech companies can draw and even form the basis of new ventures.

Furthermore, UR's biomedical research skills and facilities are a resource for local businesses to help

advance their research and product development goals.

A prominent example is the ongoing research partnership between UR's Eye Institute and Bausch & Lomb, a collaboration that has already resulted in revolutionary advances in eye surgery.

The UR Medical Center also is working with Eastman Kodak Co. to help develop its next generation of digital medical imaging and health care information technology.

In most instances, the new technologies created by UR's medical research are licensed to outside companies and result in royalty payments — more than \$30 million to the center last year — a substantial portion of which is then reinvested into our research activities.

However, these technologies can also form the basis of new startup companies. Rochester-based biotech companies VirtualScopics, Vaccinex, OyaGen and Koning, to name a few, all have their origins in UR research.

Providing a local business climate in which these and other biotech compa-

nies can grow and prosper is critical if this sector is to thrive.

UR has been involved in the creation of several entities designed to support biotech and other high-tech business development, such as Excell Partners, Infotonics, the University Technology Seed Fund and High Tech Rochester. We are also in the process of developing a biotech incubator facility.

But the region must continue to address some of the fundamental obstacles to biotech business development if it is to fully harness the medical innovation emerging from local industry and academia.

These include a general shortage of risk capital and entrepreneurial management.

A more robust and comprehensive system of support and strategic investments by the community will allow this sector to grow and become one of the new pillars of Rochester's economic future. □

Robinson is the chief operating officer of the University of Rochester Medical Center.