



# New lab could be key to building life science industry in Athens

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Athens Research and Technology's new laboratory on Olympic Drive represents a promising future for biotechnology business growth in Athens and Northeast Georgia, according to a local expert on the subject.

In operation in Athens since 1986, ART moved into its new state-of-the-art lab in March. The company supplies highly pure, highly active human proteins to researchers, pharmaceutical companies, laboratories, universities and other entities worldwide for the study of human conditions ranging from emphysema to coronary disease to cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

ART's new building comprises 11,000 square feet on the corner of Trans Tech and Olympic drives, but has about 2,000 square feet of space to rent out to another biotech business. Additionally, long-range plans for the property call for two more buildings encompassing a total of 45,000 square feet.

Young Athens companies can use that type of business space, said Margaret Wagner Dahl, University of Georgia associate provost for economic development and director of the Georgia BioBusiness Center, which



Top, James Blount, right, and Josh Macomson work in the new Athens Research and Technology wet lab facility recently in Athens. Above, Lynn Bryant, left, and Jinx Patel of Athens Research and Technology. Right, a research associate works with test tubes at the lab.

helps researchers launch and grow biotech businesses. The BioBusiness Center serves as a business incubator for biotech startups, and ART's new facility and additional facilities will offer space those young biotech firms might rent when they're ready to leave the incubator, Dahl said.

"We absolutely think the ART facility is the right direction for the community; it fills a need," Dahl said. "It won't fill the entire need, but it also puts that area of Olympic Drive on the map as a piece of dirt we have in the community that people can look at for these kinds of biotech opportunities."

The ART lab was built on part of 3 acres next to the Merial animal pharmaceutical complex on Olympic Drive and was developed under the auspices of ArtBio LLC, a real estate corporation owned by two of ART's key employees — business manager Lynn Bryant and research director Jinx Patel. They designed the new lab building with an eye to the future — not just ART's, but other small biotech firms as well.

ART, founded by a group of pathologists headed by Dr. Hillary Newland, hired Patel as the company's first employee. She had been working as a research associate at UGA. Bryant came on board shortly afterward as its second employee.

The two women had been running ART out of a Paradise Boulevard facility for the past 15 years, but more than a year ago began considering a move.



See **LAB** on F5

# LAB REPRESENTS FIRST PHASE OF BIOTECH CAMPUS from F1

Weather issues of the past several summers helped convince Patel and Bryant that it might be time to find a new home.

"We've had a steady growth rate, and in 2007 we found ourselves in a drought," Bryant said. "We use very little water in what we do, but we were being asked for a 16 percent cutback in water usage at the same time we were growing. We explored the idea of drilling a well."

The women looked into sharing a well, but then realized they would be making a significant investment in a building they did not own.

"We were moving into year 14 of our lease, so we asked our landlord about buying the building and the price they gave us indicated they weren't interested in selling, and that led us to look for other property," Bryant said.

The Olympic Drive site offered them exactly what they were looking for, Bryant said.

"It's a great location between Meriel and Noramco, two of the world's largest life-science companies in Athens," she said.

After establishing ArtBio LLC, the two women began designing the future research campus.

Between the land purchase and the initial construction, ArtBio has invested between \$5 million and \$6 million in the new facility. The company has been aided with a \$300,000 low-interest loan from the state's Life Science Facility Fund, and ArtBio also obtained \$100,000 from Athens-Clarke Growth Fund, made available to companies that create new jobs in the community.

"It's nice for us to have access to low-interest rate funds, but it's also nice to have the state recognize that there is a life-science business taking place in Clarke County," Bryant said. "Both of these loans stipulate that they're giving us these loans not only to encourage us to do this project, but also to encourage us to meet job-creation requirements."

Their priority in building a new facility was to provide room to grow for the existing operation, which occupied 7,500 square feet, but Bryant and Patel also examined the possibilities of providing lab and office space for other like-minded companies, with the vision of developing a bio-science campus just 12 minutes from UGA.

Bryant said the seeds for helping develop smaller biotech businesses in Athens were planted in 2006, when Novartis opted not to locate in the area, choosing North Carolina instead. The feelings were intensified when Athens lost out on Solvay and National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility.

"When headlines hit the paper that Novartis was not coming ... there were comments that there wasn't a (biotech) industry here," Bryant said. "I made a few calls to people and said 'Please come see us, we've done contract research for Novartis, they're a customer of ours, they buy our products. There are companies in this area — we're not the only ones — who have a genuine international presence and yet



Richard Hamm/Staff

Teresa Ross works with lab equipment recently at the new Athens Research and Technology wet lab facility off Olympic Drive.

because we don't sell to people in Clarke County or even maybe in Georgia, we're under the radar when it comes to discussions of the life sciences."

"With that, we decided we'd start flying in the radar. (Our facility) might be tiny, but we're certainly here working, and we hope some people may wish to join us," she added. We'll be attracting people from the region and we'll just see what happens."

Athens-Clarke County's inability to land the big biotech firms like Novartis and Solvay in the past or NBAF more recently, has convinced some observers that the bioscience industry doesn't have a viable future here.

And while the area's efforts to land a national biotech titan has yet to bear fruit, Bryant and Patel's vision for their new lab complex was to ensure that the door remains open to attract and develop smaller biotech concerns, which could be the first step in recruiting a research or manufacturing giant.

Kathleen Robichard, communications director for the Georgia Research Alliance, said the new ART facility is in position to offer exactly what some smaller life-science firms are seeking.

"Athens Research and Technology helps the biotech

companies in a couple of ways," Robichard said. "One is they provide services to companies that are testing and provide research services to the companies that are developing products and testing products. The second is, with their expanded space, they are a great location for a start-up company that has grown a little too big for an incubator on

a college campus and needs both office and laboratory space. Since they already have experience in managing laboratory space, it should prove to be a great location for a biotech company."

Robichard added that the expansion of the biotech industry represents a win-win situation in terms of local economic development.

"This kind of expansion has an absolute, direct economic impact," she said. "When a company grows, it's very healthy for the economy; when a biotech company grows, it's very healthy for creating a larger biotech cluster; when the biotech company grows with experience to manage space where other biotech companies can grow, that's a third ideal component of that environment."

And the biotech industry is clearly blossoming in Georgia. According to an Ernst & Young Biotechnology Report in 2006, Georgia is the seventh largest life-sciences communi-

ty in the country, and www.georgiabiosciences.com reports that the state is home to more than 250 biotech companies, with some 20,000 employees and about \$7 billion in sales in 2007.

Patel and Bryant want their concept to help fledging biotech firms take the next step in their development, thus helping spur biotech growth in Athens.

UGA's BioBusiness Center expects to send prospective tenants to ArtBio's building, Dahl said.

"We will be planning on referring companies that graduate from the BioBusiness Center to their space whenever they are a good fit, and I believe some of those discussions are happening now," Dahl said. "The Georgia BioBusiness center is very pleased that ART has gone forward and taken the risk to do this, and I think they are going to benefit from it. They already are benefiting from it. It's going to be very successful."

Patel and Bryant agreed, saying they have had to move up their plans for developing the second phase of the property. Their original plans for the ArtBio campus called for building the current lab, moving in and letting the business grow gradually before starting on the second structure. They had predicted construction of the second building might start in three years.

But in the past year and a half since they began constructing the first building, ART's own business has grown rapidly. They have added four employees in the past year and orders for purified proteins have increased as well.

Additionally, they have been getting serious inquiries from people interested in renting the extra space, Patel said.

"We're already talking to other companies, so we're really at this point thinking about development of the second building," Patel said. "We may do that sooner than later, possibly within a year."

"To our surprise, we are already working on No. 2 now," Bryant added.



# ART's lab design lightens the work

By Don Nelson

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The first thing a visitor to Athens Research and Technology's new laboratory facility off Olympic Drive notices is the expansive space and abundance of natural lighting filling the lab area.

The bright, spacious facility where biochemists and other lab technicians purify proteins for the international research market is unusual, said Lynn Bryant, business director for ART and partner in ArtBio, the company that developed the facility.

"In the industry, we are probably somewhat more of an open lab environment than most would have," Bryant said.

"The way the light comes in is extraordinary," Bryant said. "And the space, as compared to the space we have had in the past, has an open design with very wide passageways between the lab benches."

In addition, Bryant and research director and partner Jinx Patel, designed the facility in a modular format, allowing their team to work on many different kinds of projects at any given time.

"We can move work sta-

tions to the work benches," Bryant said. "We use carts and we can bring equipment to the people, or they can take their project from one work station to another; it's really been a productive work environment. It's allowed lots of different people to help solve problems."

Recently one of ART's young employees said she had never been happier at work, Bryant said.

In planning the laboratory, Bryant and Patel sought suggestions from all their employees.

"Every person who works here has had input into the lab layout and the choices we made," she said.

Teresa Ross, a University of Georgia graduate with a master's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology, began working with ART in November before the company moved to the Olympic Drive facility. Ross said she has enjoyed the change.

"I think it's pleasant because we have the exterior light and you can see what's going on; we're not confined to a dark lab where you don't know what's going on outside," Ross said. "It's clean and it's spacious. It's different from what it was in our last lab."