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National Biotech Organization Chooses Philadelphia for Annual Meeting

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National Biotech Organization Chooses Philadelphia for Annual Meeting

Tourists come to Philadelphia for its many attractions: Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, and the biotechnology industry! BIO, the Biotechnology Industry Organization recently announced that it had selected Philadelphia as the site for its 10th annual International Biotechnology Meeting and Exhibition to be held June 8 - 13, 1996 at the Philadelphia Convention Center.

"It puts the Philadelphia biotech community on the map," said Mark Kramer, executive director of the Technology Council of Greater Philadelphia. "The fact that BIO is coming here says volumes about what they think about the region and the depth of biotech companies here."

Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce president Charles Pizzi said: "The number one product of the Philadelphia area right now is the region's unequalled medical research industry and medical education. Having the national biotechnology convention in Philadelphia is an opportunity for us to show the world that we are second to none in these fields."

BIO president, Carl Feldbaum, explained the selection, saying, "The BIO board of directors selected Philadelphia because it is one of America's foremost incubators for innovation in biotechnology. There are 180 biotech and pharmaceutical companies and 42,000 employees in the Philadelphia area, including a number of pioneering firms that are setting the pace for the development of biotech products in agriculture; environmental clean-up; and breakthrough treatments for aging diseases, AIDS, and other conditions."

The Philadelphia area has been the perfect environment for the biotech and pharmaceutical industry with its leading medical centers and medical research institutes. The close proximity of industry and academia has led to many technology licensing agreements and research collaborations.

In recent years, Philadelphia's biotech industry has been receiving national attention. The Route 202 area has been called "The Medical Mile" with its many pharmaceutical and biotech firms. The large established pharmaceutical companies, such as SmithKline Beecham, with its U.S. headquarters in downtown Philadelphia, have led to many biotech spin-offs. Jeff Davidson, executive director of the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Association, says there are at least five to 10 new biotech start-ups each year.

The biotech companies themselves have led to the creation of new service industry. One such company is Puresyn, Inc., started in 1993. Founded by former Rorer Pharmaceuticals executive Mickey Flynn, Puresyn purifies biotech and pharmaceutical products for other companies. While the biotech industry continues to grow, the availability of investment capital has slowed over the past couple of years. The tightening capital market came partly as a result of several biotech products failing to gain FDA approval. "Wall Street is taking a long-term view of biotechnology," said Jennifer Masse, director of the Technology Council's Healthcare Group.

"Thankfully a certain realism has crept into the equation," said BIO's Feldbaum. "People now realize the difficulty in getting a drug to market."

The tougher financial environment has been leading to an increase in partnering. Centocor is partnering with Indianapolis based Eli Lilly to market its anti-clotting drug, ReoPro. Cephalon and SmithKline Beecham are collaborating on stroke research. Cephalon is also partnering with the California-based biotech firm, Chiron, to develop nerve growth hormones and with North Jersey based Schering-Plough to research Alzheimer's disease. Rhone-Poulenc Rorer announced last year it was forming a biotech network with a group of biotech

This collaborative spirit is expected to lead to major breakthroughs over the next few years. Jeff Davidson, of the Pennsylvania Biotech Association, is optimistic. "I believe we're heading towards an exciting future, and I think that the Philadelphia area is well-positioned to thrive in the biotechnology sector."

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While the 1996 BIO convention is more than a year away, planning is already underway. For more information, call Mickey Flynn at 610-640-0800.