

Beauty & Brains

Lake Placid and Saranac Lake area lures and retains biotechnology experts



The Trudeau Institute has been a magnet for biotech growth.

The Lake Placid-Saranac Lake area of New York’s Tech Valley is home to a growing number of startup biotechnology enterprises, and it’s not by accident.

It started in 1876, when Dr. Edward L. Trudeau moved to Saranac Lake with its clear mountain air to treat his tuberculosis and later opened a sanitarium to treat TB patients and study the disease. Today, the Trudeau Institute, an offspring of his efforts, is a 25-acre campus where scientists work to discover medical breakthroughs.

“The Trudeau Institute is certainly a centerpiece of what has long branded the Saranac Lake area as a place for bioscience,” says Garry Douglas, president and chief executive officer of the Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce, which works with economic developers to market the area’s biotech qualifications.

Fast-forward a century to 1975, and the W. Alton Jones Cell Science Center was founded in Lake Placid as a research and education site for disciplines such as genetics, virology and immunology. “That really brought many of us here to the North Country, and we just fell in love with the Adirondacks,” says Daniel Lundin, president of Bionique Testing Laboratories in Saranac Lake.

Bionique has carved a niche with its pharmaceutical and biotechnology customers. The company is an expert at detecting mycoplasmal contamination of cell lines and products from cell cultures. Mycoplasma are bacteria without cell walls, which makes them difficult to isolate and detect. “That is our specialty,” Lundin says.

A Positive Move

Other thriving entrepreneurship in the region are the indirect outcome of the purchase of Upstate Biotechnology in Lake Placid by Atlanta-based Serologicals Corp. in 2004. A year later, the company consolidated operations and closed the Lake Placid facility, giving the 120 employees one choice – move.

“We all had relocation offers, but very few people took them,” recalls Dominic Eisinger, who instead founded Multiplex Biosciences along with Upstate Bio colleague Laurie Stephen. As the result of a 2006 merger, the company is now Rules Based Medicine, which Eisinger describes as “the premier protein biomarker testing company. By that I mean that we can test from a drop of blood upwards of 200 different proteins.”

Tom Jelinik, another Upstate Bio alum, founded Lake Placid Biologicals in 2006. “Any time we considered going somewhere else, dealing with congestion and urban problems just didn’t cut it,” Jelinik says, praising the area’s room to breathe. LP Bio provides biochemical tools like antibodies and purified proteins for experiments to study diseases or design drugs.

Carol Calabrese, co-executive director of the Essex County Industrial Development Agency, says of entrepreneurs like Eisinger and Jelinik, “They’re here for the quality of life. They could be doing business anywhere in the world.”

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