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Dec. 10, 2020

NTx set to Launch Major Expansion in New Mexico

STEM employer will add 116 jobs with LEDA assistance

RIO RANCHO, N.M. - A home-grown biosciences company that can make New Mexico a leader in the development and manufacturing of life-saving medicines will receive state economic assistance as it expands into a new research and production center, Economic Development Cabinet Secretary Alicia J. Keyes announced today.

Nature's Toolbox (NTx) is working to commercialize its cell-free technology that will expedite the development and manufacturing of vaccines and pharmaceuticals using mRNA and protein technology, now being studied and utilized in the fight against COVID-19.

The company is set to bring \$30 million in private investment to its new Rio Rancho project and hire 116 employees with an average salary of \$74,000 a year. The total additional payroll associated with the expansion will be approximately \$74.5 million over the next 10 years. The direct economic impact over the decade is estimated at \$190 million.

Biosciences is one of the target industry sectors identified by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to diversify the economy and bring higher-paying jobs to New Mexico. NTx has also committed to work with New Mexico universities to develop the state as a Center of Excellence in the bioscience sector by assisting with paid internships and mentorship programs. The company is already working with the STEM Boomerang program to bring New Mexico college graduates back for careers in science and technology.

"NTx is just the latest example of how our focus on STEM is paying off for New Mexico," said Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. "It is not just creating much needed good-paying jobs now but paving the way for a stronger and more sustainable economy for decades to come."

The New Mexico Economic Development Department has pledged \$1.75 million to NTx when the company occupies and builds out a 25,000-square-foot office and manufacturing center at the Enchanted Hills Commerce Center in Rio Rancho. Another \$3.25 million would be awarded to support future job growth and expansion of the facility's footprint to handle high-volume manufacturing and emergency response.

The startup has outgrown its current space in Santa Fe and is on track to relocate and expand its workforce in early 2021.

“NTx is a company that launched in New Mexico and is now expanding in the state and adding high-paying jobs with assistance from LEDA,” Secretary Keyes said. “New Mexico has proven to be a recognized location for excellence in biosciences. The state investment in NTx will help build new partnerships in this industry and advance these innovative technologies.”

NTx is setting a new benchmark in drug development with its bioinformatics and bio-manufacturing platforms. Because the process does not rely on cellular fermentation, it allows for rapid screenings of genetic data to identify and produce encoded targets, which expedites the characterization of novel materials and accelerates preclinical drug discovery efforts.

NTx co-founder and president Alex Koglin studied structural biology at the University of Frankfurt. After completing a Human Frontier Science Fellowship in the laboratories of Christopher T. Walsh at Harvard Medical School, he came to New Mexico to work at Los Alamos National Laboratory in 2009 as the J. Robert Oppenheimer Fellow where he specialized in antibacterial drug resistance as part of the biosecurity and defense program.

As part of that work, Koglin realized how out of date most anti-bacterial drug research had become as even small scale manufacturing for early drug testing requires large cultures or extensive organic synthesis efforts with single-use equipment that needs sophisticated maintenance and produces massive amounts of waste.

Koglin knew the work could be completed faster and more efficiently to accelerate drug discovery and streamline production, scaling from the benchtop to the pharmacy shelf to make drugs more accessible.

“We’ve known for a long time that manufacturing of pharmaceuticals, primarily of biologicals, needs to be modernized - vaccines, antibodies, insulin, and hormone and enzyme replacement therapies - it’s a massive effort and a long timeline,” Koglin said. “We truly believe we can provide the technology to replace their manufacturing.”

Koglin left LANL in 2015 to start NTx and set up research offices at the Santa Fe Community College’s (SFCC) Trades and Advanced Technology Center. He said the company is growing quickly and it was not possible to remain at SFCC. The technology and investment needed to expand is expensive and without the state and local investments, NTx might very well have left New Mexico.

The city of Rio Rancho is the fiscal agent for the project at 7701 Innovation Way, 87144, and is also supporting the expansion with up to \$500,000 in local LEDA.

“I am very excited at the prospect of welcoming NTx, a cutting-edge, innovation-leading bioscience company, to Rio Rancho,” Mayor Gregg Hull said. “The Enchanted Hills Commerce Center has long been an economic engine for our community. As NTx looked to accelerate its growth potential and stay in New Mexico, it landed right here in Rio Rancho where we have strived to build robust infrastructure, a pro-business environment, and to cultivate economic diversity and growth. I thank the Governor, the Secretary, and the State, and I look forward to seeking our governing body’s support on this tremendous opportunity.”

“We have a lot of high-tech jobs and a lot of bioscience activity here in Rio Rancho,” said Matthew Geisel, the City of Rio Rancho Economic Development Director. “Alex [Koglin] is already in touch with a lot of the graduates from STEM Boomerang who want to come back to New Mexico. These are the high-tech jobs of the future. The jobs that will keep our kids here and bring our kids home.”

"NTx has developed revolutionary technology that will speed up the production, manufacturing and distribution of high quality vaccines and increase access to critical medicine across the globe," added Fred Shepherd, president and CEO of the Sandoval Economic Alliance. "They are a great example of the type of company that can grow and prosper in our community as we strive to become a leader in the bioscience industry. We look forward to continuing to work with them as they grow and expand in our community."

Charles McMillan, a former director at Los Alamos National Laboratory who serves on the NTx board of directors, said there is more awareness now of the potential of NTx. "Both Moderna and Pfizer are using mRNA science in their COVID-19 vaccines, and there is more broad awareness about its safety and efficiency," McMillan said.

"Historically many vaccines have been produced through fermentation processes. The flu vaccine, for example, through egg cultures. That technology is slow and expensive, and it's very difficult to produce high-quality materials. It appears with this mRNA technology, you can produce high-quality materials at a controlled cost very quickly. That's why this is so important," McMillan said. "The new technology has a small footprint and once established can be deployed in rural and developing areas of the globe."

McMillan said that NTx is working closely with both Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. "Both LANL and Sandia are strong in fundamental bioscience research and being able to add leading-edge manufacturing in close proximity is going to make for strong partnerships in the state."

The LEDA award will be paid out in phases as NTx reaches economic development benchmarks as specified in the Project Participation Agreement. The project is also subject to approval by the city of Rio Rancho at an upcoming public meeting of the Governing Body.

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