



life Sciences **Biotech** & Advanced Manufacturing

University and industry unite through the P.R.-STRT

BY JAMES FERRÉ

Through the project “Collegiate Innovation: From Laboratory to Market,” the Puerto Rico Science, Technology & Research Trust (P.R.-STRT) has invested \$50,000 to stimulate and promote entrepreneurship as well as the commercialization of research at the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez campus (RUM by its Spanish acronym).

“This two year program, and we plan to support it for years after as well, will help faculty and students develop products and get them into the real world,” said Thomas Farb, the trust executive director. This private organization was

created to define and implement Puerto Rico’s science, technology and research & development (R&D) public policy, while also serving to promote investment and financing of these activities for economic, social and educational development.

The project, which encompasses RUM’s Research & Development Center, as well as the Puerto Rico TechnoEconomic Corridor (PRTEC), will link academia and private institutions.

“This project bridges two of our main objectives: fostering research and fostering commercialization of research,” Farb said.

“Universities are where it all begins,” the P.R.-STRT director explained, referring to the trust

mission as “economic development through technology development.”

“When a university commercializes technology, it ends up helping the university in many ways, being good for both research and students,” Farb explained. The university can receive more federal funds, in addition to research grants from private organizations, and becomes more attractive and competitive for recruiting and retaining faculty.

“Faculty benefits from increased research, driven by the increased funding, as well as seeing how their breakthroughs turn into actual products or services,” he said. “And of great importance,

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VWR Advanced Instruments set to enter new markets

BY CARLA LEWIS

As a world-class provider of products and services to companies engaged in production and science, VWR Advanced Instruments LLC has conducted business in Puerto Rico for more than 25 years, providing such services as equipment calibration, microbiology and analytical lab services, metrology, validation, equipment repair & maintenance and good manufacturing practices (GMP) warehousing.

VWR, an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2008 and ISO 17025:2005 company, provides products and services to the Puerto Rico market with a local touch. It also can serve customers with global operations in a “copy exact” manner.

“The ISO 9001:2008 certification and ISO 17025:2005 accreditation will help us enter new markets,” said Dan Welch, VWR’s Puerto Rico vice president. “We always have been recognized for our strong technical expertise, and our accreditations now prove we are doing things right for our clients.”

“We provide the most complete array of services in the market, making us a ‘one-stop shop’ for services and products,” said Héctor Delgado, VWR services director.

Welch said VWR is adding new disciplines to its calibration services, which are provided in its state-of-the-art building in Manatí, and boasts an environmentally controlled multilaboratory facility that offers calibration for pipettes, air samplers, temperature & electrical equipment and a mass laboratory. “All our standards are traceable to the National Institute of Standards & Technology,” Welch noted.

Among some of the industry’s challenges, Welch



VWR Advanced Instruments team

said, is reducing costs while maintaining its level of quality.

“We stay competitive by providing our customers the confidence that we are capable of delivering products and services that will meet their requirements. Having a strong quality-standard system in place allows us to provide more value to our customers while improving their production processes and reducing their operating costs,” Welch assured.

VWR boasts a microbiology and analytical laboratory where companies can outsource laboratory analyses to achieve more productivity and reduce operating costs.

In addition, with its 35,000-square-foot GMP warehouse, VWR offers customers peace of mind, knowing that their high-value products are securely stored in an environmentally controlled warehouse. “Our technical-services team is factory-trained to repair and provide onsite maintenance

and calibrate laboratory instruments and equipment,” Welch added. “Our calibration asset-management program helps customers reduce costs and improves their performance, ensuring they are using, at all times, equipment that is properly maintained and calibrated,” he said. VWR’s team of 17 service engineers works with more than 100 brands of equipment.

“We are a highly respected company with a long history in Puerto Rico. Our employees understand we exist because of our customers, and we have a passion for hiring problem-solvers,” Welch assured.

VWR Advanced Instruments is part of VWR, a much larger organization that has supported customers through a combination of strength, vision and innovation for more than 50 years. Founded in 1852, VWR is a global leader in laboratory-product distribution and services. ■



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students can receive hands-on experience in making today's scientific breakthroughs and developing tomorrow's products. Furthermore, they can become involved in the formation of start-up companies around the products they develop.

"Even though Puerto Rico is a lot more entrepreneurial than many believe, we still are undergoing some cultural changes," Farb said, noting the change in perspective and values necessary to move from thinking about working for a big corporation, to thinking it is as good or better to start a company or even work for a start up.

"This program makes me feel like I'm back in Cambridge, Massachusetts" said Farb, who lived most of his life in Massachusetts' Boston/Cambridge area, which is well-known for its tight university bonds (Boston University, Boston College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard and University of Massachusetts) with private industry. It is through these links that Massachusetts has become the leading R&D state since the State New Economy Index was developed in 1999.

"While we don't want to copy them [Massachusetts], we can learn from them. We are unique and will have to have our own approach," Farb said, noting that one of Massachusetts' major principles for successful economic development through technology development is the active involvement of both private and public universities.

The State New Economy Index ranks states according to how well their structure matches the New Economy's ideal structure, one that is knowledge-based, globalized, entrepreneurial, information-technology driven and innovation-based.



Thomas Farb, Puerto Rico Science, Technology & Research Trust Executive Director

While Puerto Rico isn't ranked in the State New Economy Index, the Puerto Rico Statistics Institute measured the island's knowledge economy utilizing World Bank methodology. The results revealed the island's knowledge economy ranks

41 among 135, behind the U.S. (9), as well as our competitors Finland (3), Ireland (11) and Singapore (24).

"One of the project's main goals is to increase the number of patents filed from Puerto Rico, which currently averages 21 a year," Farb explained. Other program objectives include increasing trained intellectual-property researchers, companies coached on commercializing technology, faculty and students coached or who partake in seminars, business plans written and companies formed.

However, Farb was quick to note that these are just benchmarks. "Ultimately, the program's goals continue to be economic development through technology development."

"I think Mayagüez has tremendous potential to be a real entrepreneurial center for Puerto Rico," the trust's executive director said, noting that even though the program's offices are in San Juan, research and commercialization of research is an islandwide activity "We are going to duplicate this kind of program in other areas."

"We want to work with both public and private universities, as well as regional economic-development organizations, such as PRTEC. They know these companies and have the relationships," said Farb, who believes regional economic-development organizations have a strong grassroots basis, know their municipalities and understand the other organizations in the area. [For example, the PRTEC, which is a conglomerate of public and private entities in western Puerto Rico, whose goal is to enable the island's economic development.]

"In the future, we hope to have a lot more programs such as this one with regional economic-development organizations and with other campuses of the UPR and with private universities," Farb concluded. ■



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