



## Montana BioScience Alliance Newsletter

March 2007

Spring is here, and we're already bustling with activity.

After a successful February legislative reception in Helena, we're gearing up for a panel at the April Economic Development Summit in Butte, and the annual meeting (which will be in July).

More information about the Summit - and some of Senator Baucus's recent accomplishments for Montana's bioscience industry - is below. Additional information about the annual meeting will be available soon.

Hope to see you at one of these upcoming events!

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### A Message from Senator Max Baucus

My top priority is to boost our state's economy and create more good-paying jobs here at home. And one great vehicle to help achieve this is the bioscience industry. I've long supported the bioscience industry, and I'm going to continue to use my post as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee to help bioscience flourish in Montana. In January, I introduced my Research Competitiveness Act. Among other things, this will facilitate applied and basic research with updated, streamlined, and permanent tax credits. It will also create a new tax credit to help small technology companies access the capital that they need to survive their start-up years. By giving companies the tools today, they will boost our economy tomorrow.

While economic factors like tax credits are vital to helping the bioscience industry flourish, sometimes there is just no substitute for good old fashioned, outside the box, brainstorming sessions. To help facilitate this, I've organized my fourth annual Economic Development Summit in Butte on April 30 and May 1. During this two day summit, there will be a specific break out session on bioscience, which will be an opportunity for leaders from all over Montana, the nation, and the world, to come together in one room to network and think of

creative new ways to boost the bioscience industry. My summit is free and open to the public, and I'd encourage everyone to come out. For more information visit [www.MontanaEconomicSummit07.org](http://www.MontanaEconomicSummit07.org)

## *New Executive Board Elected*

Robert Bargatze, Ph.D., of LigoCyte Pharmaceuticals, has been appointed President of the Montana BioScience Alliance. David Crum of McLaughlin Research Institute will serve as the secretary and Carol Beam of St. Vincent Healthcare will continue as treasurer.

A founder and the chief scientific officer for Bozeman-based LigoCyte, Dr. Bargatze manages research programs with a focus on product development. He has 30 years of experience in leading immunological research projects. Dr. Bargatze was a key member of the team at Stanford University that pioneered leukocyte recruitment research. Dr. Bargatze will succeed President, John O'Donnell of TechRanch. Both men were founding board members for the organization in 2004.

"Montana Bioscience has had a banner year with outreach in communities throughout Montana and I look forward to working with the board to plan events which will encourage dialogue between both companies and scientists in Montana and the northwest region," said Bargatze. "Montana has a vibrant biotech community fueled by our world-class university programs, our corporate partners and more than 50 active members."

Many thanks and much appreciation go to outgoing President John O'Donnell for his leadership over the past two years!

## *Member News*

**LigoCyte Pharmaceuticals**, in Bozeman, recently received approval from the FDA to begin phase one clinical trials for a Norwalk virus vaccine.

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**McLaughlin Research Institute** scientist Dr. John R. Bermingham, Jr., has identified a gene that plays a key role in the development of the peripheral nervous system. His work to determine the specific function of that gene will be funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the European Leukodystrophy Association. These grants are worth a total of \$2.3 million.

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**Rocky Mountain Labs** was recently ranked as #22 of the top 40 places in the U.S. for

postdoctoral fellows to gain experience by [The Scientist](#). RML was not ranked in 2006.

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**Montana State University** researchers and their collaborators have been published in three major scientific journals. "Nature" published a paper December 20, in its advanced online version. "Science" published a paper on December 15 and "PLoS Pathogens" on October 27.

The recently-published studies show that molecular interactions between the parasite and host directly regulate toxoplasmosis's severity. Genes from the parasite also disrupt signals in the host's immune system and control the establishment of life-long chronic disease.

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One of the most respected pharmacy research schools in the nation, **The Skaggs School of Pharmacy** in the College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences on The University of Montana Missoula campus will dedicate a new 59,000 square feet, four-story addition to the existing building on May 9, 2007. Exponential growth of research programs in the School, now ranked 6th in NIH-funded research amongst U.S. Schools of Pharmacy, and the fact that it is home to the NIH Center of Biomedical Research Excellence in Structural and Functional Neuroscience, created a critical need for this additional space.

Dr. Vernon Grund, Professor and Chair of the Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, who oversaw the building addition project from beginning to end, described some of the School's philosophy of growth, an approach that has led to continuing success of their programs. "The key word is momentum. Once this kind of growth starts, the momentum needs to be maintained and you can't allow things to stagnate. A new facility like this means you're going to be able to provide a stimulating environment not only for those already on board who may be working in overcrowded spaces, but also for new world class scientists with growing research programs who are enthused about this state-of-the-art biomedical research facility. The facility will also allow expansion of M.S. and Ph.D. programs in biomedical sciences, neuroscience, and toxicology, and help to attract the highest quality of applicants for these programs."

Buildings and programs like these are especially important to a rural state like Montana, since they allow students, technicians and postdoctoral students greater opportunity to stay in Montana once they have completed their training. The Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences alone currently employs over 130 people. Due to the quality of research being done there, and to the patents being filed by researchers, many spin-off companies are now being created that have even greater potential to feed the Montana economy.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) has been awarded a \$1.5 million federal grant to improve the efficiency and quality of its Medicaid program.

DPHHS will use the funding to expand the capacity of its web-based records system. The system will contain information about the overall health status of each Medicaid recipient, as monitored against published national disease guidelines. Patients will also be able to access their records online, resulting in the ability to actively and readily manage their health-care needs.

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Montana State University recently announced a new technology for license. The chemiluminescent assay is capable of automated high-throughput screening of antiviral compounds and can be used to screen the ability of natural compounds to enhance a cell's immunity against a broad range of viruses.

The assay enables screening of antiviral compounds and mechanisms of action including identification of:

- Distinct targets where antiviral compounds disrupt virus replication
- Compounds that stimulate innate cellular resistance to viral infection
- Adjuvants that will be effective against acute viral infections at mucosal surfaces
- Compounds that reduce viral infectivity against a broad range of viruses that infect epithelial cells

For licensing for further details, contact Nick Zelter at 406.994.7706.

## *What's Happening?*

Sharon Peterson and Rob Bargatze represented the Montana BioScience Alliance at the San Diego Biotechnology Association Forum sponsored by Pfizer and BIOCUM in La Jolla on February 5 & 6, 2007. They heard many interesting presentations, visited the Pfizer facility, and learned of opportunities for strategic alliances.

The Montana BioScience Alliance participated in the Montana Board of Research and Commercialization Technology poster session in the Capitol rotunda on February 13, 2007. Several of the Alliance partners displayed posters with some pretty amazing research. It was a great opportunity for networking and meeting with Legislators and state government folks. Governor Schweitzer stopped by to view the posters.

After the session, Montana Bio held a board meeting with election of officers, plans for the coming year including printing a new directory. It was noted that last year's directory has served as a great marketing tool and will be enlarged this year. For information on how to join the alliance and make sure your organization is included in the directory, contact information is on the website: [www.montanabio.org](http://www.montanabio.org).

Later that evening, a legislative reception was held at the Great Northern Hotel. Speakers Sheri Stickley from the State Science and Technology Institute and John Gibson from the Biotechnology Industry Organization informed the group regarding the return on investment for research in Montana.

## Events Calendar

**March 20 - 21, 2007** • Seattle, WA  
Invest Northwest® Conference

**April 17-18, 2007** • Washington, DC  
BIO Legislative Fly-In  
Information and registration [www.bio.org/fly-in](http://www.bio.org/fly-in)

**April 30-May 1, 2007** • Montana Tech - Butte, MT  
Montana Economic Development Summit  
For information – [www.montanaeconomicsummit07.org](http://www.montanaeconomicsummit07.org)

**May 6-9, 2007** • Boston, MA  
BIO International Convention  
Montana BioScience will have a booth at the Exhibition – please plan to provide materials and information about your organization and let Sharon Peterson know if you can attend and help with booth.

**May 9, 2007** • University of Montana – Missoula, MT  
Prescription for Discovery  
1:30 pm Dedication of the Skaggs Addition to the Skaggs Building

**June 8-10 2007** • Double Arrow Lodge – Seeley Lake, MT  
Annual Montana Neuroscience Retreat hosted by the Center for Structural and Functional Neuroscience, University of Montana. Includes neuroscientists from the U of Montana, MSU, McLaughlin Research Institute, and Rocky Mountain Labs.

**July 2-3, 2007** • McLaughlin Research Institute – Great Falls, MT  
McLaughlin Research Institute Scientific Advisory Committee  
**Montana BioScience Alliance Annual Meeting**

**July 26-27, 2007** • International Heart Institute – Missoula, MT  
The Rocky Mountain Valve Symposium  
For more information: [www.rockymountainvalvesymposium.org](http://www.rockymountainvalvesymposium.org)

**August 23-24, 2007** • Big Sky, MT  
Big Sky Venture Capital Conference

For more information: [www.bigskyventurecapital.com](http://www.bigskyventurecapital.com)

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BioScience  
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located  
on the  
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