

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

## Biotech bustling, poised to grow

By [Anthony Clark](#)  
Business editor

Published: Thursday, May 13, 2010 at 5:12 p.m.

ALACHUA - Attendees pointed to the size of the 7th annual Celebration of Biotechnology on Thursday as evidence of how far the industry has come and its importance to the economies of Florida and the region.

When the first event was held in the lobby of the Sid Martin Biotechnology incubator, "we were floored and overjoyed that 40 people showed up," said Sue Washer, president of Applied Genetic Technologies Corp.

In recent years, more than 500 attendees and 60 vendors have filled tents on the grounds of Progress Corporate Park for BioFlorida's trade event, according to the organization's president and CEO Russell Allen.

That makes it larger than the association's annual trade show, he said, because "the largest concentration of members are here in this park."

That concentration draws vendors that supply items such as lab supplies from across the country.

SGS, a Belgium-based company with U.S. headquarters in Maryland, had a table at the event and hopes to provide clinical trial services to companies coming out of the incubator, said Rafael Semidei, business development manager.

Today, companies like RTI Biologics, Exactech and MRI Devices anchor about 40 other startup companies with about 2,000 high-wage jobs combined.

The jobs are not just for people with technical degrees, Washer said. As the companies mature, they provide manufacturing and office jobs.

Santa Fe College biotech students are finding jobs in hospitals and medical companies locally and statewide in what is projected to be one of the most in-demand fields, according to Kelly Gridley, director of biotechnology programs.

SFC has 120 biotech students - its highest ever - in its new 24,000-square-foot facility that opened across the street from Progress Corporate Park last August.

After three years in the incubator, Washer's own company - which is developing gene therapy for inherited emphysema and blindness - received venture capital funding, a rarity at the time.

"Now it's fairly routine," she said, with about 25 major venture capital firms invested in local companies.

The effect of that is to encourage local angel investors - which fund startups at earlier stages - so "that the next level of investors will come and fund the companies that they feed," Washer said.

Synogen is a private angel fund and incubator program for medical technology companies created by the founders of successful biotech companies, such as RTI Biologics, who are investing their wealth to grow more companies.

Three of its portfolio companies - Xhale, AxoGen and Optima Neuroscience - have grown and graduated from the incubator, and its newest company - Registerpatient.com - just launched its Web-based patient registration and insurance verification program, according to President Stephanie Warrington.

Warrington, who is also on the board of BioFlorida, said that as much as biotechnology has grown in Florida, it is still just in its infancy, with research and management talent in place and investment starting to grow.

"I think it's set to explode as the economy improves," she said.

Copyright © 2010 Gainesville.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.



*Erica Brough/ Staff photographer*

Steve Baker, left, a vendor with SMC USA, speaks with territory sales manager Tai Le from Thermo Scientific during BioFlorida's 7th Annual Celebration of Biotechnology at RTI Biologics in Alachua, Fla., Thursday.

Save energy and money.  
**Get a free Home Energy Check.**

CLICK HERE


