

The Grand Canyon State - Biotech Full Speed Ahead

By Heidi Banning, Branch Manager, KSR Phoenix

Arizona, which was once only a winter haven for 'snowbirds', is becoming the newest urban biocluster and emerging market for biotechnology. Over the past few years, the focus for Arizona has been BIOTECH.

The state has experienced positive job growth for the last 50 years. The growth is a function of an ever-diversifying economic base with the blend of high-tech, manufacturing, agriculture, trade, and service industries.¹

Arizona's Governor, Janet Napolitano, along with leaders from the state's universities, is committed to continued improvement of the in-state technology climate by pushing along bills for incoming biotech funding.² Additionally, Arizona is investing in its future by adding resources to its educational system. The foundation for a bioscience education is being laid in academic institutions across the state: high schools are building state-of-the-art laboratories, community colleges are working with state universities to make it easier to transfer credit hours, and local colleges and universities are working closely with industry leaders to retain graduating students in Arizona by creating job opportunities.

Along with strides being made in the educational system, in 2002, a public-private partnership raised more than \$100 million to launch the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen). This created a catalyst for revitalizing a 28-acre site of downtown Phoenix known as the Phoenix Biomedical Campus (PBC) at Copper Square.³ TGen, the perfect research anchor, was established in Central Arizona to build research excellence, encourage collaboration, and secure outside research funds.⁴ In addition, the University of Arizona College of Medicine and the Arizona Biomedical Collaborative (ABC) – a joint research endeavor of Arizona's three state universities – will join TGen and the other research-driven tenants at PBC, as will Phoenix Union Bioscience High School. The new state-of-the-art \$9.5 million facility is hosting its first freshman class in fall 2006.

Fortunately, in June 2006, the federal government approved a plan to give \$35 million toward the Arizona 21st Century Competitive Initiative Fund, aimed at helping attract biotech to the state.⁵ One of the primary goals of this plan is to promote research to create science-related jobs. This will afford many opportunities for scientists at all experience and educational levels.

Arizona's existing and emerging strengths in electronics, information, optics, and materials can be a potential advantage for its efforts in the biotech arena. These industries are increasingly converging with the biosciences, resulting in new technologies that provide the state with niche market opportunities. This trend creates a potential competitive advantage for the state; when these industries converge, there will be a generation of technological products that embody elements of all the respective fields.

Even though the state's focus has been on the biotech sector in recent years, there are many other industries where the scientific mind can thrive. These include: environmental, agriculture, mining, personal care, cosmetics, food/beverage, clinical research, aerospace, and semiconductor.

According to Dale Howell, a scientific recruiter for KSR in Arizona, companies are searching for a broad range of talent. The need can be anywhere from a recent graduate to a Ph.D. that can fill senior- or director-level positions. Experience in at least one of the following areas is beneficial: research and development, quality control, quality assurance, wastewater, industrial hygiene, medical devices, FDA regulations, and analytical instrumentation such as HPLC, GCMS, ICP, and/or AA.

Arizona is internationally renowned for its unsurpassed natural beauty, pleasant desert winters, varied recreational activities and diverse cultural opportunities. Greater Phoenix has been one of the nation's fastest-growing regions with 3.4 million of the state's total population of over six million. The Tucson metro area, which houses the same industries as Greater Phoenix, has a smaller population of just under one million.⁶ To the north, Flagstaff and Prescott are other beautiful areas in the state that offer various scientific positions. Perhaps your career path will lead you to Arizona for its diverse opportunities in science?

¹ Arizona Department of Commerce, www.azcommerce.com

² Council on Innovation and Technology, www.gcit.az.gov

³ City of Phoenix Downtown Development Office, www.phoenix.gov/downtown

⁴ AZTechBizDev.com, www.aztechbizdev.com

⁵ Translational Genomics Research Institute, <http://www.tgen.org/>

⁶ Arizona Workforce Connection, www.workforce.az.gov