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Maryland delivers its global bio-pitch in D.C. this week

Biotech world gathers to network, forge connections and explore business opportunities

By Lindsey Robbins
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As more than 15,000 biotech executives converge from around the world on Washington, D.C., this week for the Biotechnology Industry Organization's annual international convention, Maryland public- and private-sector officials plan to use the global stage to showcase the state's bioscience promise.

"The convention presents a terrific opportunity for Maryland's successful and emerging life sciences businesses to showcase their prominence to a national and international audience," Renée Winsky, executive director of the Tech Council of Maryland and its MdBio division, wrote in an email to The Gazette.

The convention, which kicked off Monday and runs through Thursday at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, draws biotech representatives from around the nation and overseas to network and foster business and scientific development.

Maryland has played a significant role in the conference even when it has been held elsewhere, said Karen Glenn Hood, spokeswoman for the Department of Business and Economic Development. BIO, as the organization is called, named Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) its Governor of the Year for 2010.

"Having the conference in our own backyard gives us the unique opportunity to showcase," she said.

Maryland has more than 450 biotech companies, which generate \$2 billion in annual revenues and employ 20,000 people, Winsky said during a conference call Wednesday. The state has the nation's second highest per capita biocluster, with its businesses accounting for 8 percent of the national biotech industry, she said.

Thirty businesses are exhibiting products at the BioMaryland Pavillion this year, including Martek Biosciences of Columbia with its life'sDHA nutritional product in oil and powder forms; AstraZeneca's biologics division MedImmune of Gaithersburg with its FluMist flu vaccine and Synagis treatment for pediatric respiratory disease; and WellDoc of Baltimore, which has developed a mobile diabetes management system.

These product presentations would be difficult to pull off on a similar scale outside of the area, Hood said. The pavilion opens at 10 a.m. Tuesday.

"MedImmune is proud of our heritage of success here, and we look forward to the many partnership, collaboration, leadership and education platforms the meeting provides our team," spokeswoman Karen Lancaster wrote in an email to The Gazette. "Most importantly, we get a great chance to share and absorb ideas and foster alliances that advance our mission of bringing innovative medicines to the patients who can benefit from them."

County economic development agencies also are staffing booths at the convention, hoping to drum up business.

Maryland officials also prepared for the convention with a U.S. Food and Drug Administration workshop for 75 foreign representatives on Friday, Hood said.

O'Malley is to host a breakfast with biotech executives Tuesday at 8 a.m. and a panel on Maryland's pioneering women in biotech at 10:30 a.m.

The state also will hand out eight \$2,000 Translation Research and Biotechnology Commercialization grants to businesses on Wednesday. This is the second year for the program, Hood said.

Maryland has invested more than \$700 million in biotech infrastructure during the last 20 years and has promised the state's industry \$1.3 billion through its Bio 2020 initiative.