

## **Biomed firms find home in North Country**

By George Spohr

*Health Care Quarterly, August 8, 2003*

The biotechnology industry – specifically, the biomedical industry – is finding the Adirondacks to be a unique fit. And the Adirondacks, long a difficult place in which to do business, is embracing the industry, because it means high-paying jobs, little truck traffic, and environmental friendliness.

“We know that biotech industry can thrive in the North Country, because we have exciting industry here now that is doing very well,” says Carol Calabrese, co-executive director of the Essex County Industrial Development Association (IDA). “They’re growing, very prosperously, and they’re finding the resources they need. We believe our strengths are this type of industry as a cluster – and we do have a nice range of various levels of biotech industry across the Northern Tier of New York.”

Calabrese is targeting biomedical industries for Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, northern Herkimer, and St. Lawrence counties. The IDA is looking for relatively young – no more than five years old – companies that are portable, or companies that aren’t location-dependent.

The North Country is uniquely positioned to serve the biomedical industry because several two- and four-year colleges across the Adirondacks have work-force-training programs geared for biomedical companies.

Another reason the Adirondacks is a perfect fit, Calabrese says, is that biomedical companies are part of a “very clean industry that’s very compatible with the Adirondacks.” The Adirondack Park Agency (APA) has worked with the IDA to prepare sites that are available for biomed and biotech companies.

“They really are sites that are designated by the APA that are for industry,” Calabrese says. “We’re not talking about industry that’s going to create pollutants. You’re talking about, for the most part, a pretty clean industry. These are going to be, somewhat, suppliers of upstate New York and New England companies. They’re a different level of biotech company.”

Biomedical industries began coming to the North Country in the past few years. Noticing a trend, the IDA began work to further increase the number of biomed sites within its boundaries. It became a regional effort as more companies moved into neighboring counties.

The IDA, in concert with CITEC Manufacturing & Technologies Solutions, a nonprofit North Country-based economic development agency, is calling its initiative to gain biomedical companies the “Adirondack Biotech Initiative.” It’s receiving financial support from Empire State Development and the New York State Office for Science, Technology & Academic Research (NYSTAR).

“New York State [is becoming] a world biotechnology leader,” says Russell W. Bessette, NYSTAR’s executive director. “This new program will make the fast-growing biotechnology industry more aware of the tremendous assets offered by the Adirondacks and North Country regions, and it will help create new jobs for people in this part of the state.”

Calabrese says her office’s goal is to leverage the momentum that’s been building.

“There is a strong, established, pro-economic-development network that continues to initiate and develop opportunities for the growth of businesses,” she says. “There are a number of economic incentives, work-force-training programs, and strategic site locations that make the Adirondacks and North Country region a profitable place to do business.”

“Small business is the economic backbone, the fiber of the communities in the Adirondacks,” she adds. “The strong viability of biotech companies already located here is a testimonial for the inherent attraction of like industry.”

Existing companies include NuMED, which boasts employees from Franklin and St. Lawrence counties, Upstate Biotech in Essex County, and Wyeth, a global pharmaceutical-research company with a North Country office.

All the companies are helping the IDA in its efforts to attract its peers in the industry, and none has found the North Country’s two-lane highway system to be a problem.

“Most of these companies we’re talking about aren’t using major transportation as in trucking,” Calabrese explains. “They’re using the UPSes and the FedExes and working with existing companies that are here. They haven’t had a problem, and it hasn’t been an obstacle they face.”

And from here, Calabrese wants to learn from the companies so she can better market the region.

“Something that is key and that is very important in this process is that the development team have a clear understanding of what it takes for a biotech company to be successful,” she says. “What I mean by that is, what are their challenges? What are their obstacles? You have to have a clear understanding of what they want and need to be successful.”