

## **UPDATE: Vivione Biosciences to Take Over Lab Space at Pine Bluff Arsenal**

**By Mark Carter - 5/8/2012 11:38:00 AM**

WHITE HALL -- What Jefferson County officials believe will be the first of many high-tech companies to set up shop locally was formally introduced Tuesday at the Pine Bluff Arsenal.

Vivione Biosciences made official its move from Little Rock to the arsenal, where it is leasing about 2,000-SF of space to continue its commercialization of rapid-B technology, developed in partnership with the adjacent National Center for Toxicological Research.

NCTR is the U.S. Food & Drug Administration's primary research center, and in collaboration with Vivione its scientists have developed a diagnostic technology that can detect E. coli and other bacteria in food in a matter of minutes and hours as opposed to days or longer.

Officials think the technology has the potential to be life-changing. Vivione expects to grow quickly and eventually become the first physical client in Jefferson County's Bioplex technology park, which borders both the arsenal and NCTR. The firm employs six, with plans to hire five more high-tech positions soon and then begin hiring in increments every year.

Brian Umberson, Vivione's director of business development, was instrumental in the firm's relocation to the arsenal. He estimated building on 10 acres at the Bioplex site within a year and a half when the firm is ready to begin manufacturing product test kits.

Umberson said Vivione worked a very "competitive rent" with the arsenal for what he called "world-class" lab space.

The arsenal, which completed the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile in 2010, was eager to partner with private industry in areas that potentially complement its various missions, in this case its chemical and biological testing.

It is able to do so through the Arsenal Support Program Initiative, which affords U.S. military arsenals the authority and flexibility to promote the "commercial use of underutilized capacity at arsenal facilities."

"This is a pioneering effort for us," said Larry Wright, civilian commander of the arsenal. "This is the first time we've ventured into applying that authority."

Col. Franz Amann, military commander of the post, cited the Vivione deal as a prime example that the arsenal is not going away just because its chemical stockpile did.

"This complements our capabilities in the chemical arena," he said of the Vivione move.

The deal between Vivione and the arsenal will allow the government to cover its operational costs at the lab plus potentially collaborate. The arsenal maintains multiple missions (those related to its former chemical stockpile accounted for about half of its function) including testing equipment against chemical and biological weapons for the U.S. Army.

Vivione has previously worked under a cooperative research and development agreement (CRADA) with FDA at NCTR. Company and arsenal officials believe Vivione represents the first private firm to work under both a CRADA and an ASPI with the government.

Jefferson County officials welcomed the announcement as a culmination of their work to pass a sales tax increase in 2011 to provide incentive funds to help attract a firm like Vivione. The county pitched in \$73,000 through its public Economic Development Corporation (EDC) while the Arkansas Economic Development Commission kicked in \$292,000.

Lou Ann Nisbitt, president and CEO of the nonprofit Economic Development Alliance (EDA) of Jefferson County, worked with Umberson for more than a year to make the move happen. She sees the Vivione move as the first drop that will eventually lead to a steady stream of companies relocating and being created in Jefferson County.

"NCTR can act like an incubator, this lab at the arsenal can act as an incubator," she said. "The sales tax was the last piece of the puzzle that gave us the tools to do this."

Nisbitt said the jobs Vivione creates -- directly and indirectly -- will be high-paying, high-tech positions.

Vivione, formerly known as Litmus Rapid-B, last year [began its collaboration with NCTR to commercialize research](#) conducted at the facility, which borders the arsenal.

Vivione CEO Kevin Kuykendall, [subject of this week's Arkansas Business Executive Q&A](#), credited the partnership of several entities that helped make the move possible, including AEDC, EDC, EDA and the Pine Bluff Regional Chamber of Commerce.

"I've worked with companies from all over the country, and this is the first state I've ever seen where multiple organizations came together in an economic development way," he said. "Pine Bluff Arsenal is a world-class facility that will allow us to take the next step."

That next step, Kuykendall believes, is a technology that could "revolutionize the world."

"Literally, this has a chance to save lives," he said.

State and local officials are confident the relocation of Vivione to the arsenal, its planned expansion to the Bioplex and its continued collaboration with NCTR has the chance to greatly improve lives in a region that now lives in the shadow of Little Rock and northwest Arkansas in terms of economic development.

After all, it wasn't that long ago when Pine Bluff arguably held status as Arkansas' second city, where the likes of Elvis Presley and Bob Hope played the Pine Bluff Convention Center.

The road back could begin with Vivione's move to the arsenal.

"Vivione is a great anchor to start a biotechnology trend in Jefferson County," said EDC chairman George Makris.

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