



Former Pfizer workers form biotechnology firm

by Chris Gautz | Jackson Citizen Patriot
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From left, Mike Dority, Megan Osborn, Daniel Ross and Kristen Kenney will be a part of Transpharm Preclinical Solutions. The new lab will open in Napoleon.

Take a video tour of Transpharm's facility.

The back of Dan Ross' new business card contains a bit of hyperbole, but he hopes someday it will reflect reality.

Ross is president and CEO of Transpharm Preclinical Solutions, 7190 S. Brooklyn Road, and according to the card, his company is "Located in the Heart of Michigan's Biotechnology Corridor."

"I would like to have a lot of focus on this area in the future for life science companies," he said.

TransPharm vice president Michael Dority said he has been encouraging some of his former Pfizer

colleagues to open businesses in Jackson County. Dority and others found themselves out of work when the pharmaceutical giant closed its 2,100-employee facility in Ann Arbor last year.

Dority said those he has talked to who want to open a life science business are too “Ann Arbor-centric” in their thinking. Coming to Jackson didn’t occur to them, he said, which doesn’t make sense to him.

“There’s affordable space in a community that’s ready to support small business,” Dority said of Jackson.

Ross has received assistance from the state in the form of a \$400,000 loan and from his former employer, which has donated equipment and lab materials. He has invested \$611,000 in equipment that has enabled him to be ready to be open for business this month.

At TransPharm, Ross and his team of scientists will conduct efficacy testing on rodents for infectious-disease research. It will be a “one-stop shop” for pharmaceutical companies looking for translational pharmacology studies, he said.

They will also have the ability to produce reports the customer can use in dealing with federal regulators.

The work will be done in two sections of the 6,200-square-foot facility, a wet lab space large enough to have 16 workstations and a vivarium.

“This is what’s not available anywhere else,” Ross said standing in the vivarium, where the air is exchanged 10 times an hour.

Inside the vivarium are two bioBubble workstations, or self-contained plastic-walled rooms, each with two large hepafilters that exchange the air inside 100 times an hour.

“We’re all really ready to take on the challenges and hard work,” said scientist Megan Osborn, who will work inside the bioBubble. “We’re excited.”

Osborn and fellow scientist Kristen Kenney worked together in the discovery and antibacterial pharmacology department at Pfizer with Ross and Dority.

Osborn said Pfizer offered her a job at the company’s facility in Connecticut, but she decided to stay in the area after her former colleague made her an offer.

Both Osborn and Kenney said they are excited to begin work again in Michigan with someone they know and trust.

“I can see us doing really well here,” Kenney said.

Ross said he is working on securing contracts with two other post-Pfizer startups that want to use the vivarium for studies. That could lead to more work and a physical expansion of the Transpharm building shortly after it opens.

Scott Fleming, president and CEO of The Enterprise Group, the county’s economic-development agency, said he is impressed by Transpharm’s facility, its business plan and its potential for growth.

“They’re definitely going to grow,” he said. “These are the type of folks we need to concentrate on because they are going to bring in other colleagues.”
