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Welcome, Garvan

By Robyn Murray

THE Garvan Institute of Medical Research has officially opened its \$20 million Australian BioResources (ABR) medical research support centre at Moss Vale.

The "mouse house" will accommodate highly specialised mice on behalf of medical research organisations including St Vincent's Hospital, Universities of NSW, Newcastle and Western Sydney, the Children's Cancer Institute of Australia and the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute.

The state-of-the-art facility has the capacity to house 40,000 mice with more than 400 different genetic types in sterile "BioBubbles", the first of their kind in Australia.

Mice will be used in research into cancer, diabetes, brain disorders, autoimmune and inflammatory conditions, osteoporosis and heart disease.

Each BioBubble contains 1600 mouse boxes with individual air filtration, and controlled lighting and noise levels, to reduce stress on the mice.

Researchers working at partner institute will be able to control their mouse colonies through web-based software named Stuart (after the fictional mouse Stuart Little) and a high-speed data network.

Garvan chairman Bill Ferris said the centre would benefit the wider research community, which had until now relied on often antiquated and cramped premises with no room to expand.

"By offering this much-needed infrastructure to a range of institutes, hospitals and universities, our aim is to enhance performance in medical research - leading to faster progress in identifying diagnostics, prognostics and therapies and eventually cures," he said.

Garvan executive director Professor John Shine said the "mouse house" would meet increasing demand from the research community resulting from advances in medical research and technology.

"This facility will help to revolutionise the way we carry out medical research," he said.

Professor Shine said the building had been designed to take into account modern principles of environmental sustainability, animal ethics and occupational health and safety.

HOUSE OPEN: Australian BioResources project director Jeff Freeman, employee Paul McDade and Garvan chairman Bill Ferris outside the "mouse house" yesterday.



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LIFE IN A BUBBLE: Up to 40,000 mice will be housed in ultra-sterile conditions in the "BioBubbles" at the Australian BioResources centre.

Garvin opens \$20million centre

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The building has been designed to be as self-sufficient as possible, using solar power, rainwater and low-energy lighting.

The first of the mice, researchers and staff have already moved into the centre as part of start-up operations.

The centre will initially employ 20 staff, with core staff relocating from Sydney.

Mr Ferris thanked the Southern Highlands community and Wingecarribee Shire Council for its support and said he hoped the facility would encourage the development of more high-tech, "clean" industries in the region.

Garvan has approval to build a second, identical building at Moss Vale if required.

Facility director Jenny Kingham said the modular design of the centre allowed Garvan to adapt the existing centre to meet growing demand and there was strong interest in a second stage.

"The first question from partner institutions is always 'how quickly can you expand?'" she said.

Electrician starts new job at 'mouse house'

THE opening of the Australian BioResources (ABR) centre at Moss Vale has given local electrician Paul McDade a once in a lifetime opportunity.

As the facilities maintenance co-ordinator at ABR, Mr McDade oversees the complex plant and engineering systems essential to ensure that the "BioBubbles" and the rest of the centre remain secure and sterile.

Mr McDade formerly worked for an irrigation company, but saw the opportunity to further his skills on state-of-the-art technology when the ABR position was advertised.

"A lot of training has been provided and there will be ongoing training," said Mr McDade, who has been working with project director Jeff Freeman for seven weeks to prepare for the opening.

Mr McDade is adjusting to new working conditions which include sterilising tools and "gowning up" to enter the BioBubbles.

"It's definitely a challenge, but I'll get used to it," he said.

Mr McDade, who is also a qualified fitter and turner, said his new job offered "endless opportunities" including the chance to add electrical engineering to his qualifications.

Mr McDade is one of three local residents already employed at ABR.

Additional local staff will be employed and trained as the facility grows.

"This is great for the Southern Highlands and for Moss Vale," he said.

"It's a great opportunity for young people leaving school to become an animal technician."

Mr McDade is also enjoying another fringe benefit from his new job that's down the road.

In contrast to a 2.5 hours commute to a previous job in Blacktown, his new job is just a three and half minute bike ride from home.