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By KAREN BUCKELEW, Daily Record Business Writer — www.mddailyrecord.com — November 14, 2007

After 4 years, Innovative Biosensors launches its technology

Joe Hernandez founded Innovative Biosensors Inc. in late 2003, enticed by the potential to change the world of biodefense with a fast, portable technology to detect pathogens in the air.

This week, nearly four years later, Hernandez' company launched that technology, the BioFlash Biological Aerosol Collection, Detection and Identification System, onto the biodefense marketplace.

The product collects air samples, analyzes them using genetically engineered cells that react to various pathogens, and identifies any of 21 biological threat agents within minutes.

The company sees it as essential in spaces such as government or military buildings, airports and banks.

The launch is the latest victory for Innovative Biosensors, which now employs 21 and, in February, graduated from a business incubator into its very own headquarters in Rockville.

But Hernandez, the company's president and CEO, already has his eyes on the future, when his technology hits the clinic and changes the world of diagnosing hospital-acquired infections.

"This is the culmination of a lot of work and a lot of energy," Hernandez said of the product launch. "Now we hope to leverage the knowledge we've gained as we build a clinical instrument."

Hernandez has been essential to Innovative Biosensors' success, said Sarah Djamshidi, acting director of the Technology Advancement Program, or TAP, at the University of Maryland, College Park, the incubator that graduated the company.

The executive had worked in business development at Digene Corp., another TAP graduate, which merged with Qiagen this year in a $1.6 billion deal.

"Joe had tremendous vision," said Djamshidi of Hernandez, who moved Innovative Biosensors into TAP in April 2004. "He definitely was the kind of person to execute it."

Innovative Biosensors' technology, which originated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, combines three elements that are essential to biodefense, but have been absent from existing products, said Cole Van Nice, a board member at Innovative Biosensors.

Van Nice is partner at New York-based Chart Venture Partners, which last year contributed about $1 million to Innovative Biosensors' $6.25 million early financing round.

"From the biodefense perspective, what makes [BioFlash] so interesting is it really does have an unprecedented combination of speed, sensitivity and specificity for detecting biowarfare agents," said Van Nice, whose firm funds early-stage homeland security and biodefense firms.

BioFlash is portable, sensitive to small amounts of threat agents, and can deliver results in less than five minutes, according to the company. Existing tests can take anywhere from 15 minutes to 30 minutes, too long if the air in a building has been contaminated, Van Nice said.

The equipment comes ready to detect 21 biological agents, Hernandez said, but clients can mix and match up to 30 different agents that Innovative Biosensors' technology can identify.

Joe Hernandez,
Founder of Innovative Biosensors

The firm already signed a $1.6 million deal last month to provide its technology to an unnamed client for security at what Hernandez called a critical building within the national capital region.

It will announce two more major deals in the coming weeks, the CEO said.

The next step is Innovative Biosensors' clinical technology, now 10 months into development, a system that would take just minutes to identify bacteria or viruses just inside a patient's nose.

That product could hit the market by the end of next year, Hernandez said.

"I think both markets are critically important markets," said Van Nice of the clinical and biodefense arenas. "But the clinical diagnostic market is larger."

Hernadez just wants success for his technology.

"We're really excited about the opportunities," he said.

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