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## Company produces virus detector

**University-based company could diagnose viruses faster**

*By Tom Howell Jr.  
Staff writer*

It takes about two days to detect the West Nile Virus, E. coli and other harmful pathogens using current technology, but a new company affiliated with the university says it can detect these dangers in five minutes.

Innovative Biosensors Inc. joined the university's Technology Advancement Program to develop portable, fast and easy-to-use systems to locate harmful pathogens, IBI founder and CEO Joe Hernandez said.

The newest company in TAP, IBI hopes to have a commercial product for the food processing industry within a year. It will also explore "human diagnostics," or medical applications.

The fast response of IBI's test has the potential to save lives by detecting anthrax, smallpox, SARS and other dangers, Hernandez said.

"There is no other technology that can give you the same level of sensitivity in the same time frame," Hernandez said. "In that sense, we're in a very good position."

IBI's research process, named Cellular Analysis and Notification of Antigen Risks and Yields was created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Lincoln Laboratories in the late 1990s.

MIT's research was sponsored by \$20 million from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, which wanted to give soldiers the capability to detect biological weapons, Hernandez said. After MIT's findings were published in the journal Science in July 2003, IBI received exclusive rights to develop a commercial product that could be used by anyone.

The company joined TAP for its existing infrastructure, mentoring and university resources such as student workers, Hernandez said. TAP is a technology business incubator on the campus that accelerates the growth of start-up companies.

IBI has tapped the student labor pool on the campus. Hollie Kephart, a recent graduate of this university's MBA program, is the company's product manager. Her duties include working with scientists to relay the company's technology to the press and marketing activities, Kephart said. The company has also hired an undergraduate to assist with lab and business tasks, Hernandez said.

The company's goal is to expand and to have 12 employees by the end of 2005, Hernandez said. IBI's research is funded by private investors, state money from the

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Maryland Venture Fund and \$160,000 in grants from the Maryland Technology Development Corporation and Maryland Industrial Partnerships. With so many potential applications, IBI is optimistic.

"We expect revenues in the near term and profitability in a very short period of time," Kephart said. ¨



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