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# Rosalind Franklin's Helix 51 incubator attracts handful of new businesses; 'This keeps everything growing here, from the startups to the big guys'

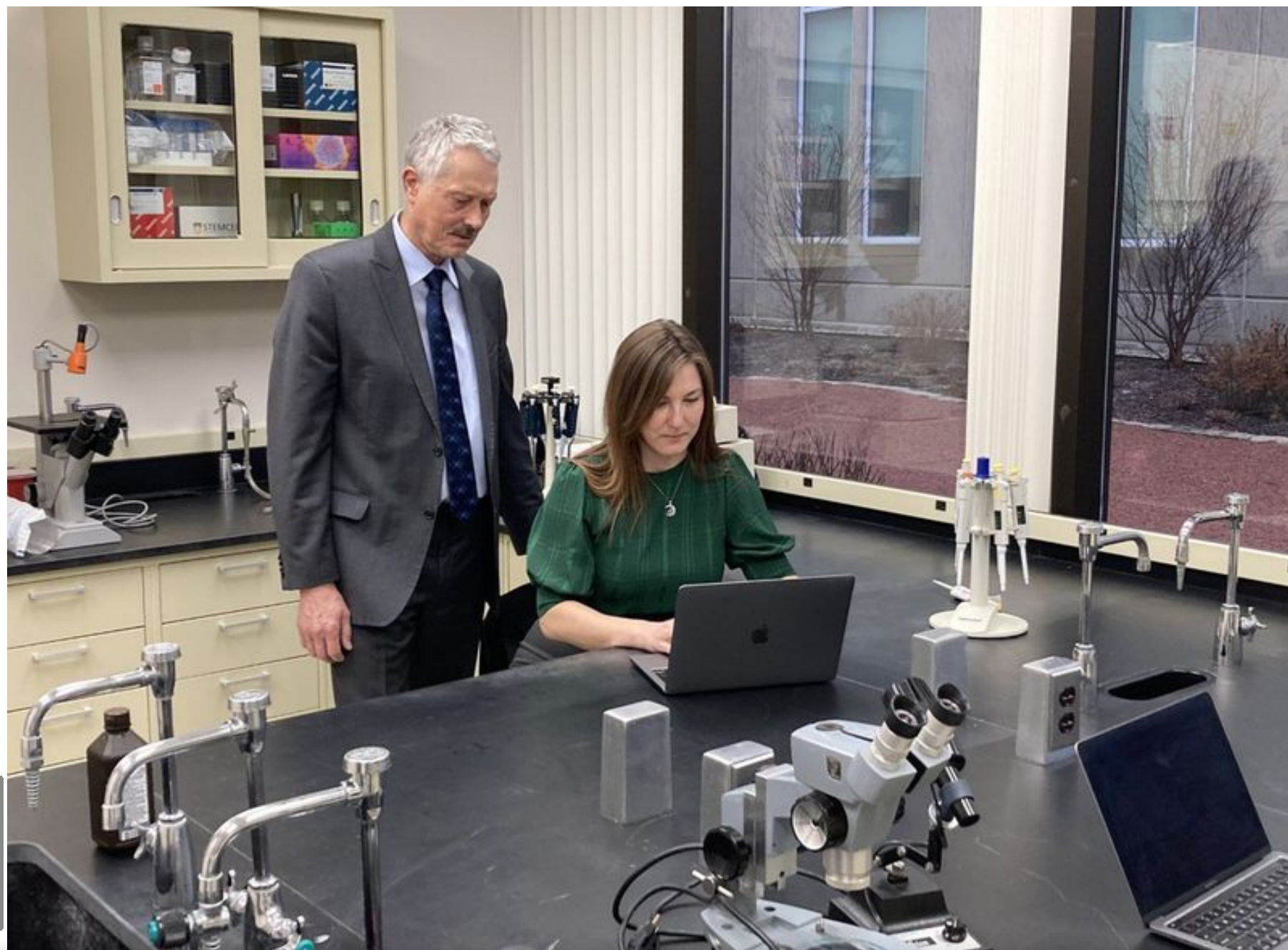
FEEDBACK

By **STEVE SADIN**  
LAKE COUNTY NEWS-SUN | FEB 24, 2022



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Scientists and entrepreneurs using stem cell research to repair damaged hearts and kill cancer cells, as well as other health science technology, are part of the rapid growth of Rosalind Franklin University's Helix 51 business incubator.

"We're repairing hearts," said Catherine Phillips, the CEO of TargaCell, a Helix tenant since August. "Once a heart is damaged from a heart attack, it's a slippery slope. We're developing a way to use stem cells to repair the heart."

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"We're making and using stem cells to kill cancer cells," added Yekaterina Galat, the COO and co-founder of Artec

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cells.”

Artec and TargaCell are among five of the eight tenants of the Helix 51 incubator on Rosalind Franklin’s North Chicago campus who arrived in the past six months benefiting from the available resources within 15 minutes of some of the world’s major life science companies.

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Michael Rosen, the managing director of the incubator and Rosalind Franklin’s adjoining Innovation and Research Park, said Lake County is home to 122 life science businesses, including some of the world’s largest employing more than 33,000 people.

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Rosen said life science entrepreneurs needed to go to downtown Chicago for incubator space to nurture their ideas before Helix opened. Now they can work near Abbott, and AbbVie, Inc. in North Chicago; Baxter and

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“They’re all a 15-minute drive,” Rosen said. “Our hope is they will move into the Innovation and Research Park, like Inspirotec, (Inc.),” he added, referring to the incubator’s first tenant which is now headquartered in the park.

Kevin Considine, the president and CEO of Lake County Partners which developed the economic impact study for the incubator, said helping budding entrepreneurs helps feed the large companies in the county like Abbott, Baxter, AbbVie, Horizon and Pfizer.

Considine said 80% of all health science jobs in Illinois are located in Lake County. The startups in the incubator are part of the “ecosystem” which keeps the industry thriving locally.

“This keeps everything growing here, from the startups to the big guys,” Considine said.

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Prasanth Bijjam, the chief technology officer of Everyplace Labs, works on tests from the portable test station the company is creating. (Steve Sadin / Lake County News-Sun)

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U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Hoffman Estates, who recently visited the Innovation and Research Park with U.S. Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Deerfield, said when she met with Rosalind Franklin officials four years ago, she saw the potential for the park and incubator.

“It’s no surprise we’ve seen this incubator begin to grow and thrive,” Duckworth said in an email. “I think it’s

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“The incubator contributes to Lake County being the home of the nation’s life sciences corridor,” added Schneider in an email.

None of these cures being developed in the incubator will be available for several years. That is one of the reasons Targacell, Artec and the others are working in the incubator to get approval from the Food and Drug Administration so they can market their innovations.

Peter Farmakis, the CEO of Covira Surgical, which is developing a medicine to reduce post-surgical infections, said he is in the process of raising approximately \$6 million to grow the business to the point human trials can start by the end of next year. It may take until 2026 or 2027 before there is final FDA approval.

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Farmakis said he came to the incubator because of the resources it offers scientists and researchers. They can use a boost from people with business savvy, which Helix 51 provides as part of the rent tenants pay.

“I get collaboration with a group of people to help grow the business,” Farmakis said. “There are a lot of supportive resources at Helix 51.

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Rosen said the incubator provides “entrepreneurs in residence” offering mentoring in the FDA regulatory process, patents, finance, legal formation of a business and product development assistance to move the product “from the lab to a factory.” There is also a Rosalind Franklin intern program which can provide marketing help.

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People entering the incubator have two options. Rosen said one program provides a laboratory and office space, which is important to scientists developing treatment for which they must prove there is creditability. The other plan offers office space with the collaboration and mentoring available.

“We’re the only wet lab in Lake County and northern Cook County,” Rosen said.

Iyad Ayoub, the COO of Resuscitation Therapeutics, Inc., which is another incubator member, is developing a drug which will improve recovery chances of a person who suffers cardiac arrest. He said it will be used by paramedics who try to restart a heart.

Ayoub said the vast majority of people who go into cardiac arrest outside of a hospital do not survive but a 1% improvement will save approximately 3,500 lives a year. It is administered by paramedics before they apply CPR.

“Just improving by 1% is worth it,” he said.

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Talking about the Helix 51 business incubator at Rosalind Franklin University are, clockwise from left, Catherine Phillips, the CEO of TargaCell; Robin McWherter, TargaCell's president; Claire Zhou, the COO of Everyplace Labs (partially hidden); Iyad Ayoub, the COO of Resuscitation Therapeutics, Inc.; Michael Rosen, the incubator's managing director; Peter Farmakis, the CEO of Covira Surgical; Yekaterina Galat, the COO and co-founder of Artec Biotech, Inc., Vasil Galat, the CEO and the other co-founder of Artec. (Steve Sadin / Lake County News-Sun)

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Claire Zhou, the COO of Everyplace Labs, said the coronavirus pandemic gave the company's portable testing station, which looks similar to a cash station machine, a boost testing for COVID-19 at a workplace. As the pandemic wanes, the company is seeking other applications.

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Rosen said there are plans to grow the incubator further. With two more slots left for budding entrepreneurs, he said Rosalind Franklin will use a grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to renovate the second floor and double the size.

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