



Sequenom brings biotech jobs; others to expand

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GRAND RAPIDS -- A California biotech company is expanding in Grand Rapids, bringing more than 500 jobs in the next five years.

Sequenom Inc., based in San Diego, is choosing West Michigan for a \$20.3 million expansion for its prenatal diagnostic testing technology.

The company is developing noninvasive tests using the mother's blood to reliably detect genetic disorders in the fetus as early as the first trimester of pregnancy.

The company is buying laboratory space for now, with plans to construct its own labs here.

The prenatal testing technology can isolate and analyze fetal genetic material from a maternal blood sample. Eventually, the technology could provide tests for chromosome or gene abnormalities in a fetus, such as Down syndrome and gender-linked disorders.

Today the company was expected to win \$20 million in state tax incentives, granted over a 15-year period.

Grand Rapids is expected to grant Sequenom a tax abatement this fall.

The biotech company fits the goals of The Right Place economic development group, bringing hundreds of high-paying jobs with wages averaging \$1,700 a week.

News of jobs, expansions, and high-tech companies coming to town is sweet music to a region suffering 6.4 percent unemployment.

But Sequenom is not the only good news winning the state's stamp of approval.

Office-furniture suppliers and Bissell Home Products Inc. also are on the agenda of the Michigan Economic Growth Authority in Lansing.

Such diversity is crucial for the region's economic health, said Right Place President Birgit Klohs. Industrial design and life sciences are two hot targets.

"These projects demonstrate that West Michigan is moving from potential to reality in those areas," she said.

A 17,100-square-foot Innovation Center leads off an expansion at Bissell Inc.'s Walker headquarters, 2345 Walker Ave. NW.

Bissell will expand its research and development, and marketing capacity at the site, including adding a second floor to its building.

The \$9 million project will renovate the ground floor and build a second floor, adding 10,000 square feet of office space to the building that has 16,000 square feet on one level.

Bissell said it will retain 79 jobs, paying an average of \$1,260, while creating 106 new positions with weekly pay at \$1,209. State and local tax incentives total \$2.42 million.

An expansion for Genesis Seating will recycle the former Yamaha music instrument plant at 3445 East Paris Ave. SE in Kentwood.

The \$3.1 million investment is expected to add 131 jobs to the 90 already on the company's payroll.

Genesis is one of three area furniture suppliers now subsidiaries of Leggett & Platt Inc., based in Carthage, Mo.

Other expansions planned by the parent company include:

- Davidson Plyform Inc., 5505 33rd St. SE in Cascade Township, for a \$5.6 million plant expansion. It will add 45 jobs to the 162 employed now. Davidson and Genesis have been sharing the Cascade Township plant.
- Grand River Polishing is the latest acquisition by Leggett & Platt. Its plant is in Spring Lake Township, and upgrades to the factory will cost \$620,000. The project creates 57 jobs, nearly tripling the 30 currently employed.

Combined, the expansions at the three Leggett & Platt subsidiaries will add 233 jobs paying \$465 a week and bring \$9.1 million in investment. They qualify for \$2 million in state and local tax incentives, with Kentwood, Cascade Township and Spring Lake Township still to act on tax abatement requests.

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