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MICHIGAN BUSINESS

CAROL CAIN: Detroit bids for federal tissue bank

July 24, 2006

BY CAROL CAIN
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

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A Detroit entrepreneur is leading the charge to move the nation's human tissue bank -- the largest in the world -- to Michigan. If successful, the bank would help invigorate our economy and bolster the state's reputation as a life sciences leader.

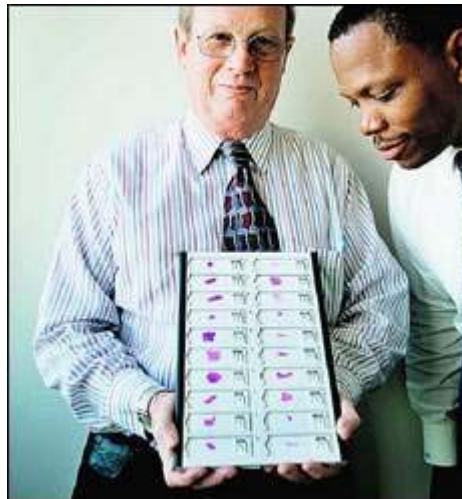
The tissue bank, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), is run by the Department of Defense. It is housed at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. But now, the bank is being forced to find a new location after a recommendation in 2005 by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission to close the hospital.

Randal Charlton, founder and CEO of **Asterand Ltd.**, said the initial economic impact for Michigan would be worth more than \$80 million in construction, tax revenues and new payrolls.

"And that is just the beginning," says Charlton, the 66-year-old Briton who started Asterand, a human tissue firm at TechTown, Detroit's research and technology park, six years ago.

"It could be worth literally billions of dollars to the research community," he added, saying tissue samples would be used in drug development and medical research by pharmaceutical companies, hospitals and universities. Charlton would not say specifically how many Michigan jobs might be created by the tissue bank's relocation, but he did speculate it could be in the thousands when factoring in small-business spin-offs.

Other states in the hunt for the facility include Massachusetts, North Carolina and Maryland. The Department of Defense has not set a date for naming the tissue bank's new home.



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Randal Charlton, founder and CEO of Asterand, holds slides of human tissues. Howard Bell is executive director of TechTown, the 12-block technology and research park near Wayne State University. They would like to see the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology move to Detroit. (ROMAIN BLANQUART/Detroit Free Press)

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Civil War roots

The tissue bank was started in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln to help doctors learn more about wounds and diseases affecting soldiers on the battlefield. It has since grown to include 80 million samples.

Last year, after hearing about the bank's impending relocation, Charlton formed the **Michigan Pathology Archives Consortium** to develop a plan to bring the bank to Michigan. He realized the bank would foster new small business in the medical field and drive high-tech education, which is why Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and the Van Andel Institute are members of the consortium.

Charlton also has been working with Howard Bell, CEO of TechTown, the 12-block technology and research park near Wayne State University, to marshal Michigan's forces to go after the bank.

"This is another Google-type opportunity," Bell says, referring to the recent blockbuster announcement that the high-tech search firm plans to expand its operations to Ann Arbor, creating at least 1,000 jobs in five years.

Charlton has made several presentations to the Department of Defense and will meet again with its officials in coming weeks.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm said, "The consortium is a perfect example of how Michigan's strengths in life sciences, technology and defense can come together to grow jobs and our economy."

"This project is precisely what our 21st Century Jobs Fund and economic plan will foster in the years ahead."

Sen. Carl Levin is among those working on behalf of the bid.

"I have supported and will continue to support the consortium's efforts to create a partnership with the Department of Defense, and I'm hopeful that the DOD will recognize the value of bringing these important organizations together in a mutually beneficial way."

Ed Pagani, senior director of strategic alliances at Ann Arbor-based **Pfizer Inc.**, a drug manufacturer, thinks the tissue bank would be a great benefit to the state's life sciences efforts.

He adds that human tissue samples are a vital part of any new drug development as "animal studies can only provide certain data."

Federal presence in Detroit

If Michigan's bid is successful, the details of how the tissue bank would be moved, who would pay for it and who would manage it have yet to be worked out, Charlton and Bell say.

But this much is known:

- The bank would be housed somewhere within TechTown's 12 blocks.
- One of the buildings there would have to be dubbed a federal building.
- The federal government would still own the bank, but the samples would be shared with consortium.

Asterand has 91 employees including doctors, lab technicians and more who would work with pathologists at the federal facility if the national tissue

bank came here.

Meanwhile, in a development that could strengthen Michigan's bid, another federal tissue bank -- the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Perinatology Research Branch that was dispersed among Detroit Medical Center sites -- recently signed a lease to locate at TechTown by year's end.

"What we are offering the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology is expertise in analyzing the usefulness of tissue samples that have been collected over many generations and preparing those samples and data connected with them so that they may have the highest possible research value," Charlton says.

CAROL CAIN hosts "Michigan Matters" on WWJ-TV (Channel 62) at 11 a.m. Sundays and WKBD-TV (Channel 50) at 9:30 a.m. Sundays. If you have information about your business, mail it to Small Business, Detroit Free Press, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit 48226, or e-mail clcain@freepress.com.

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