

BIO WORLD® TODAY

MONDAY
JUNE 20, 2005

THE DAILY BIOTECHNOLOGY NEWSPAPER

VOLUME 16, No. 117
PAGE 1 OF 9

How BIO Prepares, Pays For Industry's Biggest Meeting

By Brady Huggett
Managing Editor

The Biotechnology Industry Organization annual conference takes over the host city like a virus, attaching at the convention center and spreading to hotels and restaurants, receptions and landmarks, along bus routes and via taxicabs, until the city is teeming with biotechnology.

The difference is that a virus brings sickness and sometimes death, while the BIO conference brings recognition to a locale, a chance to display biotech prowess and an economic windfall in the form of tens of thousands of attendees armed with travel accounts.

BIO 2005 is Philadelphia's turn, and the theme this year is Imagine, Collaborate, Innovate. The event is expected to draw about 18,000 registrants from as many as 60 countries. The growth of the conference since 1993 in Raleigh,

See Conference, Page 7

Conference

Continued from Page 1

N.C., has been explosive – it's gotten so big that registrants have to wonder how much time and effort go into preparing for the gala event.

The planning never stops, actually. The moment the last attendee filed out of the closing reception at SBC Park in San Francisco last year, BIO turned its attention to Philadelphia, said Ray Briscuso, executive director at BIO.

BIO is "focused 90 percent of the time on the event that's within the next year," he said, but the work begins years ahead of the actual conference. The locations are picked "about four or five years" in advance, which means the conference agenda is set through the 2009 meeting in Atlanta, and as soon as Philadelphia is over, BIO will "decide where we'll be in 2010."

Once a destination is three years away, "we start looking at accepting more speaking opportunities and start cultivating relationships," Briscuso said, adding he's already been to Chicago "half a dozen times" to plan for '06.

Cost, Benefit Of BIO Conference

Registrants strolling the outfield of SBC Park, home of the San Francisco Giants, during 2004's closing reception, or staring up at the suspended airplanes in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington the year before, might have wondered at the price tag of the conference.

Briscuso said the event costs "in the neighborhood of \$15 million" to put on. To help pay for it, BIO looks for partners, and this year, the Greater Philadelphia Venture Group

played a big part.

"When we made a bid, and this goes back five years, we made certain commitments to BIO as far as fund raising," said Sherrill Neff, chairman of the Greater Philadelphia Venture Group and a founding partner of Quaker BioVentures. "Our commitments have been exceeded substantially."

For all the hard work, GPVG gets in return about four days to display the biopharmaceutical skills of the "tri-state area" – Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware.

"Philadelphia is the heartland of biotech/pharma interaction," Neff told *BioWorld Today*, and changes in the industry have made the region an even more valuable place for the science.

"An underlying theme for us here is that historically, there was a dramatic division between what we thought was the biotech industry on the one hand and the pharma industry on the other," Neff said. "That distinction has not only begun to blur, but has blurred substantially."

Biotech has moved into the small-molecule space and has begun to earn its stripes in product and business development. Pharma has "become more comfortable" with large molecules and in-licensing to fill pipelines. That blurring of the lines "plays into our regional hand," Neff said.

Considering the number of attendees, and the fact that "6,000 to 7,000" of them are expected to be ex-U.S., Neff said Philadelphia was excited, "from a regional point of view, that we have the chance to showcase that to the community."

Local Economy Profits, Too

Although BIO has help raising funds, the conference is still "BIO's meeting," Briscuso said. "There's not a penny that is spent without our approval."

Help comes from attendees, too. It costs to attend BIO, of course, and some registrants also are willing to pay for added exposure. Briscuso mentioned Amgen Inc., which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. The company had budgeted to promote that milestone, and BIO was able to take some of that money in return for marketing.

"So, we get into their pocket, but we give them something that they want," he said, although that sort of "horse trading" is done by BIO itself, not volunteers or splinter groups on board to raise funds.

There's also an economic boon for Philadelphia. Although the conference costs \$15 million, the real money is spent by the attendees. BIO estimates another \$35 million will be expended by registrants on food and beverages, airfare, hotels and transportation. Another \$5 million goes to staging private events, such as throwing receptions or hosting cocktail parties. That's all part of doing global business, but with such a hefty cash injection, BIO leaving town might have the locals – including Neff and GPVG – pining for its return.

"We're thrilled with the prospects for the next week and I think there will be quite a legacy put in place behind it," Neff said. ■