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Maryland in the biotechnology spotlight

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It has been a busy couple of weeks for Maryland's life sciences community. On Sept. 15, Gov. Martin O'Malley joined elected officials and other members of Maryland's life sciences community to officially open the Maryland Biotechnology Center.

Also, from Sept. 21 through Sept. 23, the Baltimore Convention Center hosted the World Stem Cell Summit. Both were high-profile events for the state.

Billed as Maryland's one-stop portal for the bioscience industry, the Maryland Biotechnology Center officially opened on Sept. 15. Opening ceremonies were held at each of the Maryland Biotechnology Center's two locations: the World Trade Center in Baltimore and the Shady Grove Innovation Center in Rockville.

The Maryland Biotechnology Center is O'Malley's first key deliverable from the BioMaryland 2020 Plan. With \$5 million in funding, the Maryland Biotechnology Center will act as the state's central location for the life sciences industry where companies and entrepreneurs can access all of Maryland's programs, resources and information.

The Maryland Biotechnology Center will also help Maryland brand itself against other top-tier life sciences hubs. Now that the Maryland Biotechnology Center has officially opened, the next question is how much progress can be made regarding the other priorities set forth in the BioMaryland 2020 Plan in the current economic climate. Since the next legislative session is only a few months away, we will not have to wait long to answer that question.

With the start of the 2009 World Stem Cell Summit, the focus switched from local to international. In its fifth year, the World Stem Cell Summit, presented by the Genetics Policy Institute, brought together more than 1,000 attendees representing over 25 countries and dozens of states. Co-hosted locally by Johns Hopkins University, University System of Maryland, University of Maryland -- Baltimore, Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, Maryland Technology Development Corp. and the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund, the World Stem Cell Summit is the pre-eminent international conference focused exclusively on regenerative medicine.

Offering a diverse agenda of speeches, educational forums, poster viewings and networking opportunities, the World Stem Cell Summit covered all major topics affecting the regenerative medicine industry.

Maryland seemed a natural fit for this year's World Stem Cell Summit because Maryland has been one of the few states to take the lead in funding stem cell research at the state level. To strengthen that commitment, on Sept. 21, Maryland and California entered into a first-of- its-kind collaboration agreement.

The Collaborative Funding Memorandum of Understanding, entered into by the Maryland Technology Development Corp. and the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, established a protocol in which the two states agreed to work together to pool resources and to help scientists in each state share their talents and discoveries. Although the details of the arrangement still need to be worked out, it was a smart move by the state to establish a formal collaboration with California, which is generally recognized as being on the forefront of funding for stem cell research.

O'Malley was on hand to witness the historic agreement between Maryland and California and delivered the keynote address at the opening session.

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O'Malley was also presented with a Stem Cell Action Award for his leadership in establishing and funding stem cell research in Maryland. That leadership will certainly be put to the test in the next legislative session, when extreme budget challenges are likely to affect all state programs, including then Stem Cell Research Fund.

It has been a busy and exciting couple of weeks for the life sciences industry in Maryland. However, with the change of seasons there is no rest for the weary. From now through the end of the year there are several important events for the local life sciences community, culminating with Mid-Atlantic Bio in early November. Then it will be time for the next legislative session, when the real fun is likely to begin.

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