

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Seeking biomedical safe havens

Triangle Business Journal - by [Frank Vinluan](#)

Friday, October 23, 2009

DURHAM – When Tropical Storm Allison brought flooding to Houston in 2001, the [W](#) **Baylor University College of Medicine** lost decades worth of biological samples that were in freezers at university facilities.

“All it takes is one time, and you can lose 20 years worth of work,” says Steve Oglesbee, director of the Tissue Culture Facility at the [W](#) **Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center** at the [W](#) **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**.

Much akin to the need to back up data at off-site computer farms, the need for redundancy in valuable biological samples is increasingly dawning on researchers in both the private and public sectors.

That’s why Oglesbee is working with a group that’s developing a request for proposals for off-site storage of samples from the cancer center that also could include samples from other university departments. Samples could be divided so that researchers could keep a working batch at the university and backup samples off site.

The RFP should be ready by mid-November, and Durham company Kryosphere is expected to be among companies submitting a response.

Kryosphere, a young, venture-backed company, sees opportunity in providing temperature-controlled storage facilities in areas that have research universities as well as biotechnology and pharmaceutical operations. The idea is to have facilities near such organizations so that researchers can gain easy access to backup samples if need be.

Funded so far with \$1.5 million in venture capital in two rounds from angel investors and hoping to hit the \$1 million revenue plateau in 2010, Kryosphere is mapping out plans to grow beyond its Durham base and add locations throughout the Southeast.

The Triad, Richmond, Va., Atlanta, north Florida and south Florida are locations being evaluated. The next branch should open in mid-2010, says Kryosphere President Eric Hallman.

“To be successful and to provide the services we provide, we need to be part of the research community,” Hallman says.

It’s a slightly different business model than what’s offered by a handful of other temperature-controlled storage companies. Waltham, Mass.-based Thermo Fisher Scientific and Indianapolis-based [W](#) **BioStorage Technologies** each offer biospecimen storage with samples shipped to a central location.

Kryosphere opened its 10,000-square-foot Durham facility in mid-2008. The facility now stores about 2 million samples that include blood, DNA and cell lines. The Durham site has a capacity of more than 15 million samples.

UNC’s [W](#) **Lineberger Center** keeps several freezers at Kryosphere to back up samples, and Oglesbee’s group is working on expanding that capacity, be it with Kryosphere or another company.

Kryosphere’s clients include drug development companies, clinical research organizations and research labs at universities.