

# San Antonio fills research park by making offers that scientists cannot refuse

**San Antonio.** In the middle of nowhere on the outskirts of San Antonio, a new research park is in the making. The Institute of Biotechnology is first on the prairie.



**Ross Perot, left, with Jess Hay, former chairman of UT board of regents, and John Howe III, president of UT-Health Science Center in San Antonio. At right, Wen-Hwa Lee.**



was so committed to biotechnology that it built the laboratory before anyone had agreed to fill it. Acting in the belief that the city could prosper economically by capitalizing on its many medical research institutions (see story on page 638), the city had plunged boldly into a hoped-for but nonetheless uncertain future. An oil man named Tom Pawell donated 1,500 acres for a research park and the university pledged \$30 million for equipment and research to the new Texas Research and Technology Foundation. Perot wrote a cheque for \$15 million to pay for construction of the limestone and glass laboratory named after a local entrepreneur, Hayden Head.

Lee was also promised close ties with the medical centre's department of medicine, where chairman Jay Stein was eager to forge a collaboration with Lee's research group, which focuses on cancer genes and regulatory problems.

Lee was interested but not convinced. There was, he told Howe, one thing missing. Houses. Out on the prairie there was no place to

live. "We work 24 hours a day," Lee says. "This is a very competitive field. Post-docs and graduate students come and go at all hours. They cannot have a long commute. It is not efficient."

No problem. A two-storey complex with 30 apartments, enclosing a garden with swings for the children, has been built within walking distance of the laboratory, and more faculty housing is on the drawing boards.

In July 1991, Lee and his colleagues from San Diego moved into Hayden Head. The faculty now is up to ten, with researchers from Princeton, Johns Hopkins and Dartmouth universities among those who have been enticed by the newness of it all and the charm of watching 60 deer eat dinner at the institute's feeder.

Scientists who are there are excited by the opportunity to build a research laboratory from scratch. However, they miss the well-stocked libraries that are the hallmark of a major research institution and they feel that their relations with medical colleagues are constrained by the fact that the hospital is miles away in downtown San Antonio.

Will this new venture work? Although it is anybody's guess, those involved, whether Texas-born or newly adopted, have no doubts.

**Barbara J. Culliton**

"Young man," said Ross Perot to Wen-Hwa Lee, "I want you to come to Texas. You tell me what you want. Is that fair enough?" Lee, then head of a molecular biology laboratory at the University of California at San Diego, thought it was. Says Lee, "Mr Perot said that if I came to Texas and needed anything, I should just let him know. I found that very encouraging."

Perot, a Texas legend long before he launched a campaign for the US presidency, has played an active part in recruiting scientific talent to Texas, particularly in San Antonio and Dallas. But Perot's open-ended offer to Lee was only one of many elements that induced him to move his 23-person laboratory from San Diego to San Antonio.

Lee and his wife, Eva, grew up in Taiwan. Each migrated to California for a PhD at the University of California at Berkeley before moving to San Diego. Although his laboratory was successful, Lee saw more clearly the limits to where he was once the president of the University of Texas Health Science Center, John Howe III, began to recruit him in 1990 to San Antonio.

For instance, he says, "We had no room. We had 23 people in 2,000 square feet." Howe was offering him a brand-new research building just waiting to be occupied.

Lee was also impressed that San Antonio

## Texas' top ten turnarounds

Fields whose citation "impact" have gone from below to above the US average (= 1.00) in the last decade

Citations per Texas paper relative to US average

		1981-85	1987-91	Change
1	Biotechnology/Applied Microbiology	.63	1.07	+.44
2	Otolaryngology/Ophthalmology	.71	1.14	+.43
3	Physics	.86	1.23	+.37
4	Gastroenterology	.82	1.15	+.33
5	Environmental/Social Medicine	.81	1.09	+.28
6	Orthopaedics & Traumatology	.90	1.16	+.26
7	Cardiology & Respiratory Medicine	.83	1.05	+.22
8	Organic Chemistry	.88	1.05	+.17
9	Haematology	.92	1.08	+.16
10	Neurology	.91	1.02	+.11

Source: ISI's Science Indicators Database, 1981-91