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THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO STC.UNM

The recent announcement of the [sale of local high-tech company IntelliCyt to international pharma company Sartorius AG for \\$90 million](#) represents the largest acquisition to date of a local start-up company spun out of University of New Mexico technology. The sale of IntelliCyt is, of course, great news for New Mexico's start-up economy because it confirms that high quality technology is being developed in New Mexico and high quality management teams can be created here to bring technology to market.



STC.UNM, the technology transfer and economic development arm of UNM started in 1995. In 1998, Dr. Larry Sklar, Professor of Pathology, and Dr. Bruce Edwards, Research Professor of Pathology at the UNM's Health Sciences Center, began working together on improvements to flow cytometry technology. In 2006, the HyperCyt® System was ready for commercialization. STC presented the Sklar-Edwards invention to an experienced biotechnology entrepreneur who wanted to relocate from Pittsburgh to New Mexico. Terry Dunlay, an electrical engineer and entrepreneur with over 25 years of experience, had founded and led companies developing similar cellular analysis instrumentation. He was so impressed with the technology that he and the two inventors formed a [start-up company called IntelliCyt Corporation](#). In the early days, Sklar and Edwards played key roles in helping the company get off the ground. The inventors could see that not only would pharma companies and life science research benefit from their innovation but the local economy would as well.

During the company's first year, IntelliCyt (originally known as Sage Sciences) was headquartered in STC's incubator, [the Cecchi VentureLab](#), and developed beta versions of the HyperCyt® to produce a user friendly product that it started selling as a compatible add-on sampler and software to flow cytometers and high throughput flow cytometers. IntelliCyt has now incorporated the HyperCyt® technology, the brains of the system, into its iQue® Screener series, instruments that integrate the software, hardware and cytometer into one unit. More than 300 systems have been sold worldwide to blue chip customers such as MD Anderson Cancer Center, GlaxoSmithKline, and Pfizer.

Meanwhile the inventors were also using their invention in their drug discovery research lab, the Center for Molecular Discovery (CMD), at UNM's Health Sciences Center, involving an impressive group of collaborative UNM inventors from other departments, and growing an IP portfolio that has made the CMD one of the University's busiest research and development centers.

The Center for Molecular Discovery (CMD), located in the Innovation, Discovery, and Training Complex on UNM's Health Sciences campus, is a drug discovery research lab operating since 2005 that has been funded by the National Institutes of Health for 15 years. Under Dr. Sklar's leadership, the CMD was selected by the National Institutes of Health in 2008 as one of only nine national molecular discovery centers in the U.S. with a six-year, \$15.5 million grant. The NIH provided another \$9.5 million in 2010 to help develop the Innovation, Discovery and Training Complex for CMD. Like the drugs being repurposed for new uses, the former OMI building on north campus was also being "repurposed" as the CMD's new home. Overall since 1998, the team

of researchers at the CMD has generated over \$50 million in funding to develop technologies for small molecule discoveries.



STC CEO Lisa Kuuttila observed: “The Center for Molecular Discovery is a perfect example of an innovation ecosystem right here at the University of New Mexico, an example of collaborative academic innovation and commercialization at its best. It’s really a Rainforest model for innovation. The CMD is physically close to the other 7 research labs and programs collaborating with it. This synergy has created an innovation network as they are focused on developing new and repurposed drugs from small molecule discoveries which, in turn, has created a solid and growing pipeline of technologies. Its researchers, who come from many departments at UNM’s Health Sciences Center, are highly collaborative and innovative and bring considerable expertise in numerous research areas to bear on the challenge of developing better treatments for cancer and other diseases. These technologies have high commercial impact.”

In 2016, the company was sold to international pharmaceutical and laboratory equipment company Sartorius AG for \$90 million. IntelliCyt, which employs more than 55 people, will continue to operate independently at its Albuquerque-based facility as IntelliCyt, a Sartorius company. Sales for the company’s new product have skyrocketed. The affiliation with Sartorius will open up new markets and provide the financial backing to help the local company grow to the next level.

STC CEO Lisa Kuuttila, a 30+ year veteran of the university tech-transfer and commercialization world, counsels patience when it comes to nurturing new technologies and the companies that bring them to market. “It took 10 years to develop the technology and 10 years to create a successful company. It takes a long time to achieve the many, many basic research steps to discoveries and the many carefully planned and executive business development steps necessary to mature a start-up. It’s a beautiful thing to see such fruition come to pass from such dedication and hard work. All involved are to be commended but, in particular, I want to praise the vision and persistence of Dr. Sklar and Dr. Edwards who were there every step of the way and who continue to expand the vision of drug discovery to save lives”

[STC has spun off 103 start-up companies from UNM technologies.](#) Twelve new businesses formed with UNM technology in the fiscal year that ended in June 2016. That’s up from nine startups that formed in each of the past three years and is the largest number of businesses to launch in a single year since the technology transfer program began in 1996. STC provided services to 22 companies in FY2016 through the Venture Lab program. Through the Innovate ABQ initiative described in the introduction, UNM and STC plan to further grow these numbers and provide support to create further success stories like IntelliCyt.