

# Chattanooga Times Free Press

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## Biotechs blip on local radar Study says city should promote itself to gain new companies

**By Mike Pare Staff Writer**

Jayesh Doshi believes his Chattanooga nanofibers business could tap into what is a half-trillion-dollar biotechnology industry — if more such firms would move to the area.

"We're looking for customers who would use our materials. It could become a very good opportunity," said the owner of eSpin Technologies.

Chattanooga's economic development officials believe so, too. They're in the early stages of crafting an initiative that leverages the area's assets to woo new firms and investment in the biotechnology and life sciences arenas.

"Time spent now could produce a great return on investment in the future," said J.Ed. Marston, the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce's vice president for marketing.

The effort builds off a Tennessee Valley Authority study last year that cites the Chattanooga region's education centers, health care network, transportation infrastructure and amenities to grow and attract such companies.

Although the TVA study identified Nashville, Oak Ridge and Memphis as leading biotech centers in the region, Chattanooga's medical facilities and health-related service and manufacturing sectors are also growing.

"By identifying assets and strengths of the Chattanooga area, the study helps the region increase its visibility and ability to attract new investments and quality jobs," said TVA Senior Vice President of Economic Development John Bradley in a statement.

It cites such assets as the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, UT College of Medicine Unit in Chattanooga and Chattanooga State Technical Community College. Erlanger and T. C. Thompson Children's Hospital also were mentioned as part of the city's health care network.

Jim Frierson, a Chattanooga Technology Council board member, said developments going on in medical devices, surgical procedures and new drug treatments play to growing the life sciences segment.

Some people and business in the area are "quietly blazing a new trail" and it makes sense to have an economic development strategy that capitalizes on their strengths, he said.

Nancy Watts, who directs Chattanooga State's pharmacy technician program, said Chamber officials have talked to her as they seek pharmaceutical companies for the region.

"Students could go in that direction," Dr. Watts said about the opportunity for biotechnology jobs. "We give them a foundation to take that step."

Laurie Crook, chief executive of a Franklin, Tenn., staffing company that specializes in the life sciences sector, said some people in that industry are looking at the South where costs are lower. They're also interested in places where quality of life is better than in California or Massachusetts, she said.

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"They're looking for places such as Chattanooga and other Southeastern cities," said Ms. Crook, CEO of Accord Scientific LLC.

The area seems promising, she said.

Mr. Marston said the Chamber is networking with existing schools and companies to identify firms from that sector which might be interested in locating to the Chattanooga area.

"We have a strong distribution advantage for some companies," he said.

In addition, Mr. Marston said, some entrepreneurs may have an interest in Chattanooga for quality of life reasons.

While the TVA life sciences study said the region has many hidden strengths and is positioned to compete and support future growth in targeted segments of the life sciences industry, there are also perceived weaknesses.

It said the Chattanooga area has a lack of life science facilities in the sector, and there are no major efforts to provide incentives to the industry.

E-mail Mike Pare at [mpare@timesfreepress.com](mailto:mpare@timesfreepress.com) **LIFE SCIENCE PROSPECTS Opportunities for Chattanooga:** Facilitate organic growth Market regional attributes Utilize local banks with life sciences experience **Threats for Chattanooga:** Competition for funding within UT system Perception and reality of Tennessee's historical lack of support Rapidly changing industry Source:



TVA

Staff Photo by Mark Gilliland Chattanooga State faculty lab technician Beverly Hawkins, right, demonstrates to students Billie Jean Smart, left, and Kendra Johnson how to prepare an intravenous admixture.