

## **Springfield ranks high for biotech readiness**

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**By JIM KINNEY**

**Business writer**

SPRINGFIELD - Biotechnology companies looking to set up laboratories and factories will find everything they need right here in Springfield, according to a set of community ratings released Thursday by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council.

Springfield was one of 17 cities in the state placed in the most-ready, or "platinum," category in the Massachusetts BioReady Community Ratings released Thursday.

"We're at a stage now where we have pretty much provided that infrastructure," said Dr. Paul Friedmann, executive director of the Pioneer Valley Life Sciences Institute at 3601 Main St. "Five years ago we didn't have it. Three years ago we were working on it. A year ago we were almost there. Now we are there."

In all, the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council ranked 44 cities that applied for rankings, said Peter J. Abair, the council's director for economic development.

"It gives us another reason to contact companies in the biotechnology cluster and it gives us something to say when we do contact them," said Allan W. Blair, president and chief executive officer of the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council.

The Biotechnology Council is a not-for-profit organization that represents the state's biotechnology industry. The category includes researchers, makers of advanced pharmaceuticals and biofuels companies like Qteros.

Qteros developed a microbe that produces ethanol from non-food plant material. The company announced this week that it is building a pilot production plant on the Solutia Inc. property in the Springfield's Indian Orchard section.

Springfield was the only Pioneer Valley City rated platinum. Chicopee, Northampton and Westfield, were ranked one level lower as "gold." Easthampton, Greenfield and Sturbridge were among the communities listed as "bronze," a level signifying that the basics, such as natural gas, water and sewer, are in place.

Springfield achieved platinum in part because the Pioneer Valley Life Sciences Institute, has 12,500 square feet of available space for a business incubator in its building, Abair said.

Vacant sites in the Chicopee River Business Park and at the Smith & Wesson Industrial Park are already approved for biotechnology uses.

He said Springfield also has the health regulations, zoning and planning rules sought by biotechnology companies.

Abair said the rankings will go up on the council's Web site, [www.MassBio.com](http://www.MassBio.com) and on the Web site of MassEcon, a private economic-development group, at [www.massecon.com](http://www.massecon.com).

"We would be asked quite a bit by communities, how do we position ourselves for this industry," Abair said.

As of 2006, the most recent year for which numbers are available, 44,005 Massachusetts residents worked for 400 companies in the biotech industry, Abair said.

Friedmann said the Pioneer Valley Life Sciences Institute has about 40 employees now. It's a collaboration between Baystate Health and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where scientists research breast cancer, diabetes and obesity, and cell death.

The institute already has one tenant, Biomedical Research Models has a contract with the National Institutes of Health and eight to 10 employees, Friedmann said.

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