

Biotech Firm to Help Raise Startups' Profile in DC

Anvyl Already Considered Standout Among Peers

Irvine-based biotechnology company **Anvyl LLC** will be among 35 startups to participate in the first University Startups Demo Day on Sept. 20 in Washington, D.C. The event is hosted by Washington, D.C.-based **National Council of Entrepreneurial Tech Transfer**, an association of university startups officers.

"Anvyl is both proud and flattered to have been chosen as one of the 35 best ..." Chief Operating Officer **David Putman** said via email.



STARTUPS

Deirdre Newman

The event is an opportunity for university-spawned startups to get exposure with venture capitalists and angel investors in the hopes of partnerships and funding, according to the council's website. It also raises awareness among members of Congress of the "pivotal role that universities play in the formation of high potential startups, the creation of high value jobs across the country, and overall national competitiveness," according to its website.

Anvyl is among the many startup companies working with **Applied Innovation**, UCI's innovation institute, to spin off technologies with market potential. Its technology was discovered at UCI, and Applied Innovation handled the licensing. Anvyl specializes in development of drugs for serious neurologic and psychiatric disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia and



Winning team: Concordia University Irvine Dean Stephen Christensen; student Vicki Kipilu; Lisa Deloney, Citi Market President, Southern California; student Cheryl Schmitz

autism. It's advancing the research of **Kelvin Gee**, a UCI professor of pharmacology. For more than 30 years, he's worked to understand how signaling through certain brain channels can affect a variety of medical disorders.

He and his group have designed and synthesized new molecules that can restore normal brain signaling that affects a variety of central nervous system disorders, with fewer side effects and greater effect than traditional medicines, according to the company. The discoveries have led to more than a dozen patented technologies. Gee serves as a scientific adviser to Anvyl.

More than 200 companies were screened for the demo day. Representatives from finalist companies will give six-minute pitches to members of Congress, investors and startup officers—executives at corporations who act as a liaisons with startups—at the **National Press Club** in Washington, D.C.

Student Leader Empowerment

A group of students from **California State University-Fullerton** recently launched a startup that developed software for student-body leaders at universities. They soon found that the software also was applicable for corporations.

Huntington Beach based-**Taskcot** is a collaborative effort among former CSUF students **Rohullah Latif**, chief executive and a former student-body president; **Nick Ajluni**, vice president of operations; **Nicholas Guillen**, vice president of marketing; and **Danny O'Donovan**, chief technology officer, who attended Cork Institute of Technology in Ireland.

He met the others while studying abroad in Southern California.

The four realized that student-body leaders all over the world faced the same challenges in managing large organizations and staying accountable, and wanted to develop a tool to empower student leaders. They came up with the idea for software that various groups and committee members can use to assign, discuss and track tasks, with the ability to share files and folders.

A development team in Ireland created and tested the software, and the company launched in June.

"It was a great opportunity and great location to be able to start something," Latif said. "Ireland has a small, highly-globalized economy, with a large exporting sector and a significant number of multinational corporations. It's a great place to do business."

Taskcot now has more than 10 universities

and companies around the world as clients, the majority in Ireland, one in Los Angeles and one in Silicon Valley, Guillen said.

They've received an investment in the six figures from an angel investor that chose to remain anonymous.

"We kind of see at the student leadership level, as motivated and inspired student leaders are to make change, they don't necessarily have the tools or technology to leverage that big impact," he said. "So having a collaborative management tool such as this will really help empower all those motivated and inspired student leaders to make a change and leave a lasting legacy when they leave their term at the university."

Bits & Pieces

Newport Beach-based **OC Web Kings** recently launched a new website that reflects a shift in focus from offering just development services to providing a comprehensive process to startups, including design, marketing and an expanded development team. The company launched in early 2013. It took in \$500,000 in revenue last year and is on track for \$1 million this year, said **Ian McLean**, director of business development. ... **Concordia University Irvine's** Teen Entrepreneurship Academy recently culminated with a business plan competition. Two high school students from Luxembourg won first place for "Smart Bins," a solar-powered trash sorting and recycling bin designed for parks, cities, colleges and other outdoor public spaces. They will share a \$1,000 prize.

Sign up for breaking startup news updates at ocbj.com

Allergan

from page 1

ican Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Association, Los Angeles/Orange County Chapter, which promotes the life-sciences industry between the U.S. and China.

Ni said open science refers to a project or product originating either in-house or outside of the company. Phase II trials typically are performed on groups of up to 300 people and designed to assess how well a particular drug works (see related story on page 21 in Special Report.)

"If successful in the clinical trials, these new startups would team up with Allergan to get drug approval to the market."

One of the first out of the gate was **Fred Ouyang**, a scientist at Allergan for about nine years. He co-founded **Alan Laboratories Inc.** in March 2014 with business partners **Yong Qiu** and **Min Xia**.

Ouyang left right before the acquisition because he thought his personality was better suited for a small company than a "well-established multi-national," he said.

He's now chief operating officer of Alan Labs, which focuses on research and development of generic drugs, particularly in tablet and capsule forms.

Ouyang said that working at Allergan helped him in the company's founding because he learned about the process of drug development and obtained technical knowledge.

"A good drug has to have a set of desirable characteristics," he said. "Our job is to select the drug candidate with the best combination of the characteristics. At Allergan, we learned the art of the selection process and criteria, which helps to advance the drug candidate along the development process."

He said he also was able to build a professional network from connections made at Al-

lergan.

Alan Labs has received \$9 million from private sources, Ouyang said.

Market Opening

Irvine-based **WBR Laboratories Inc.** was co-founded by **Alex Lu**, who worked as a scientist at Allergan for 12 years.

He's president of the company, which provides biological research products, such as antibodies, to universities, research institutes and others. Co-founder **Zhen Zhu** was a scientist at Allergan for more than 13 years.

They decided to start the company in late 2014 based on seeing a market for research support of companies focused on medical devices and pharmaceuticals, many of which are based in Southern California, he said. Allergan already is one of its customers.

The startup is so far self-funded; Lu has put in approximately \$75,000, he said, adding that the company is in the black.

Botox-Like

Fauad Hasan, former Allergan director of biologics manufacturing and development, co-founded drug company **Bonti** in Newport Beach. It's developing a drug that works similarly to Allergan's Irvine-centered Botox and is in the midst of raising Series B financing in an effort to get \$20 million for its second phase of clinical studies.

Hasan is the chief executive and president. He left Allergan in May of last year, following the acquisition.

"I had the entrepreneur bug in me for quite some time," he said in an email. "Allergan provided me with a great development and growth opportunity."



Hasan: co-founded drug developer



Whitcup: started two companies

Bonti's lead product is a neuro-toxin, as is Botox, but is a different molecule. Hasan said it works much faster and is more conducive to treating certain ailments, such as muscle spasms, musculoskeletal pain, and the recovery of muscles and joints due to injury or surgery.

Bonti closed a Series A round in August 2015 that netted \$9 million. The funds are being used for drug development and to start the first human clinical studies. It just finished manufacturing its drug for the studies, which Hasan said it plans to start by year-end. They will be spread over multiple sites, one of them in Orange County.

Double the Effort

Scott Whitcup was so inspired that he started two new companies last December: **Akrivista** and **Whitecap Biosciences**, both based in Mission Viejo.

He was head of Allergan's Ophthalmology Therapeutic Area for four years, followed by an 11-year stint as executive vice president of research and development.

Whitcup co-founded Akrivista with a focus on ophthalmology and dermatology. The other co-founders are **Michael Garst**, a former senior vice president at Allergan in chemical sciences, and **Orest Olejnik**, former senior vice president of Allergan's Global Pharmaceutical Sciences division.

"We spent months thinking through how patients are currently treated for a number of illnesses and conditions to identify areas where there was an opportunity for a radical change in the treatment paradigm," he said. "Some of the products we are working on are new mole-

cules, but others are existing compounds used in a unique way."

Akrivista is working on three different treatments, formulating the science, patenting them, and making compounds to get them into the clinics, he added.

Whitecap licenses technology others have started to create, working on further developing and commercializing it. He said he may merge the two companies at some point.

Akrivista has been self-funded by people in the company, including Garst, Whitcup said. It has enough money to fund projects for the first two years, so there's no pressing need to knock on the doors of venture capital firms right now, he added.

One of the biggest contrasts between starting his own companies and working at Allergan is that he and his team spend more time thinking about ideas and less time spending money on "unnecessary activities," he said.

"Thinking is cheap but important," he said. "I think it's a good model to live by. ... We're very cautious. Most of the money, our big spends, are for (when we get to clinical studies)."

One of the best features of working at Allergan, he said, was the company's approach to fostering interdisciplinary knowledge. For example, his research and development team would spend time with the commercialization, manufacturing and finance departments, he said.

"You gained insight into more than just your specified area," he said. "In today's economy, you have to ensure your drugs are cost-effective and understand the commercial opportunities, pricing and reimbursement. For all of my [future] projects, before they get into the clinic, I already think about who will pay for them, how will they be reimbursed, and what are the challenges five to 10 years from now? A lot of that critical thinking you get from spending 16 years or so at Allergan with good training." ■