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*The Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, which manages Research Triangle Park, is partnering with Dallas-based developer KDC to plan 1 million square feet of office space as part of a multiuse urban district called Hub RTP. The goal is to make the suburban office park appealing as a live-work-play center.*

COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: TRIANGLE NORTH CAROLINA

# FAST FORWARD: THE RESEARCH TRIANGLE AREA

The Raleigh-Durham area has tremendous momentum with a combination of top universities, highly skilled labor and advanced manufacturing.

For Research Triangle Park's 7,000 acres and surrounding 11-county territory of innovation, manufacturing and technology, new construction and incoming business keep the commerce hub ticking.

About 45 minutes southwest of Raleigh in Sanford, Audentes Therapeutics, a San Francisco-based life-sciences company, is investing \$110 million in a gene-therapy manufacturing facility in Lee County, joining New York City-based Pfizer at Central Carolina Enterprise Park.

In Raleigh, N.C. State University's Centennial Campus has plans for a 185,000-square-foot Plant Sciences Building, with construction expected to be complete by fall 2021. The addition will increase the area's dominance in agricultural technology, an industry that touches about 112 area companies.

Coworking spaces, favored by innovators and inventors, are popping up across the Triangle as a new generation of workforce — the disruptors, whose game-changing products redefine their industries — rent space on a fresh blueprint that reworks the concept of office building.

"People all over the world study the model of the Research Triangle Park," says Ryan Combs, executive

director of the Research Triangle Regional Partnership in Raleigh, an economic development connector for businesses and private-sector growth. "They may not know it's in North Carolina, but they know RTP."

Talent and education — the 11 counties are home to 10 colleges and universities and seven community colleges — pair nicely with the area's stellar quality of life. About 76 people move to the area daily, according to a 2019 partnership study. The regional median home value is \$175,000, and the median household income is \$76,000 with a labor force of 1 million.

"We do a lot of great things here," Combs says. "Look at the health care system, with gene therapy. It's a

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game changer, because it's going to drive down the cost of health care. Look at the universities and the \$3 billion we get a year in research dollars. You take technologies developed at the universities, incubate and have a company in the urban core, and then you expand to the rural counties and manufacture."

## **BUILDING THE TALENT PIPELINE**

Audentes Therapeutics, which develops genetic medicines as part of Tokyo-based Astellas Pharma, says its Lee County facility will create about 200 jobs. CEO Natalie Holles says Sanford's location "will support the next phase of our growth as we establish a robust, global supply chain and expand our therapeutic and geographic scope."

The business is partnering with Central Carolina Community College for workforce development and Sanford Area Growth Alliance, the local economic development group.

The college, which also works with Pfizer and KriGen Pharmaceuticals in Harnett County, will offer courses that prepare students for positions at the Audentes facility. "We intend to be the workforce partner that focuses on building and sustaining the biotech talent pipeline, specifically targeting the pharmaceutical-manufacturing industry sector," says Central Carolina President Lisa Chapman. Training will include two-year credentials for entry-level positions, Many students later earn four-year degrees through agreements with area universities.

"We are well-positioned to provide a comprehensive approach to meeting workforce needs," Chapman says. That includes "great opportunities for providing learning pathways for adults who may be ready to transition from other careers to the promising opportunities in biotech."

## **A HUB FOR AG-TECH**

A region once dominated by tobacco farming, the Triangle is now home to

# **TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS: RALEIGH**

*Raleigh's lucky number is two: It's North Carolina's second-largest city; placed second on Money magazine's "Best Big City to Live In" list in 2018 behind Austin, Texas; ranked No. 2 on Forbes' list of "Best Place for Business and Careers" and No. 2 for Forbes' "Best Educated City."*

*Using the slogan "Uniquely Raleigh," the city pushes a to-do calendar away from office walls with a revitalized downtown, craft breweries, multiple festivals, and cultural and athletic events.*

*With a comparatively low cost of living and a "strong sense of community," Money projected a 9.6% growth in the city's jobs from 2017 to 2022.*

*"With three research institutions, the community college system and women's colleges, we have a diverse talent pipeline that's well-educated, and that's the biggest draw right now," says Raleigh Economic Development Manager Veronica Creech. "Those students have an entire career ladder right in front of them here."*

*N.C. State University's Centennial Campus, a hub for STEM education, "is hugely important for land use, for driving jobs, for attracting talent and for fostering new ideas," she says. The campus, with more than 70 corporate, government and nonprofit partners, has helped foster more than 135 startup companies and ranks No. 4 nationally for industry-sponsored research.*

*In late March, Plant Health Care, a Raleigh-based Research Triangle AgTech Cluster company, raised \$2.3 million in equity, adding to \$3 million raised in November. The company develops products to protect crops from environmental factors and disease.*

*HQ Raleigh, a four-location coworking company with 600 members and more than 300 companies using its office space, has helped create more than 500 jobs.*

*La French Tech, an international initiative founded in 2013 that promotes French startups and entrepreneurship communities, may soon be coming to the Triangle area. An application for accreditation for "La French Tech Research Triangle" was submitted in February. Nearly 40 local companies and universities are listed as supporters.*

*"France is exploding with startup companies, and if you're a European company, you want access to the U.S. market," says Ryan Combs, executive director of the Research Triangle Regional Partnership. "So you have startup incubators popping up in France, and when they start growing, they want to expand to the U.S. and have access to our market, so that designation will help us in attracting companies to the region."*



*Raleigh's job market is expected to grow 9.6% from 2017 to 2022, according to Money magazine.*

## LITTLE BIG SHOT: DURHAM

*Talent is a big part of what sells Durham: Duke and North Carolina Central universities, world-renowned Duke University Hospital, a life-sciences and biotechnology center, and a vibrant startup culture make it the lifestyle choice for many, says Timothy Downs, vice president of economic development for the Durham Chamber of Commerce.*

*"Durham really is, for all intents and purposes in the Triangle, the center of life sciences and biotech work," he says. "We seem to be very much on the radar for companies that are in Palo Alto, [Calif.], San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia, places that have those centers, and they're looking at us for relocations. Because the one thing we do better than any of our competitors is talent."*

*Durham benefits from a "cool" quality stemming from its robust restaurant and entertainment scenes, hiking trails, the Durham Bulls minor league baseball team and a growing number of coworking spaces. "Raleigh and Durham complement each other so well, because Durham is smaller and sort of edgier with a more accessible kind of culture," Downs says.*

*The Frontier, American Underground and WeWork are three hot spots for coworking. "People want to be close to one another. Not the same company but around other companies," says Ryan Combs, executive director of the Research Triangle Regional Partnership in Raleigh. "It's this urban environment, where people can work, play and have a beer after work."*

*Inc. magazine's 2019 list of "surge cities," which ranks the best spots for starting a business, listed Durham as No. 3, behind Austin, Texas, and Salt Lake City. The magazine noted that tech companies flock to the Bull City because the average rent of less than \$27 per square foot is a fraction of that of New York City or San Francisco. The city has a wide range of software and science startups, such as therapeutics upstart Ribometrix, which recently raised \$20 million, and biotech firm Baebies, which has secured \$19 million.*

*Companies increasingly pick locations based on where employees want to live, Downs says. More than half of Durham's population is age 25 to 34, according to AccessNC. "The reason we win projects, and the reason we get people is [because of] our quality of life. We have all the things you want, [whether] you're single or if you're married with kids.*



*Since 2000, there's been more than \$1.8 billion of investment in Durham's center city, according to Downtown Durham Inc.*

*"I don't like to predict, but if I had to, I'd say 10 years from now, we are going to be the center of biotech in the country," Downs says. "Now, there's a lot of caveats to that. For us to continue to grow, transportation and other infrastructure has to grow with us. But assuming everything is in place for us to continue to grow, I think we'll be the center for biotech in the country. We may not be the largest, but we'll be the gravitational center."*

a 25-company cluster of agricultural technology companies that contribute \$1.2 billion to the gross regional product. "This area could explode as an ag-tech hub," Combs says. The work is critical to meeting the world's food needs as the population grows from 7.8 billion to an estimated 10 billion by 2050.

About 90 research faculty members at N.C. State will be immersed in the Plant Science Initiative to help farms develop new crop and plant varieties, improve marketability, collaborate on agricultural challenges and attract and train scientists for research and to create a pipeline to its partners in biotechnology.

"It's about bringing together [economists, engineers and scientists] by enveloping interdisciplinary research to solve those grand global challenges associated with plants," says Richard Linton, dean of N.C. State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He notes that 84% of future ag jobs will be connected to plant science. "I don't think that there's a more exciting place outside of Research Triangle Park for growth and opportunities in agriculture and life sciences."

North Carolina has about 48,000 farms, which contribute \$90 billion to the state economy, according to RTRP figures.

"The PSI building is a game changer for our state," Combs says. Moreover, the new Research Triangle AgTech Cluster will gather regional resources to attract more tech companies and talent.

With its renowned higher education institutes and proximity to Raleigh-Durham International Airport, mountains, beaches and state parks, the Research Triangle is hard to beat as a business hub. "People are figuring out that this is a great place to start a company," Combs says. "You do these things in New York or Boston, you get lost in the crowd. People can connect with people a lot easier here. It's the easiest place in the country to get a first meeting." ■

— Kathy Blake is a freelance writer from eastern North Carolina.