

# PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

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## **Biotech embarks on lucrative federal project**

**Kristen Sawada** Pacific Business News

A biotechnology company that relocated to Hawaii is embarking on a multimillion dollar research project for the U.S. Department of Defense.

Tissue Genesis Inc., which uses elastin to grow replacement parts for the human body, opened its corporate offices March 1 at the Hawaii Health Care Business Incubator.

Tissue Genesis expects to procure a federal grant in April to research new tissue-repair methods for the military. The company wouldn't divulge the value of the contract.

The company is seeking angel investors and anticipates it will be capitalized at \$14 million by year's end, said CEO Anton Krucky, former general manager of IBM's Hawaii operations.

"We're trying to create better tools for surgeons in areas where they're trying to save lives and trying to prevent the loss of limbs and tissues," Vice President Tom Cannon said. "There's laser technology for binding elastin that allows you to put it in place quickly."

The company, incorporated in Hawaii in 2000, initially plans to hire 15 to 25 employees, Krucky said.

Tissue Genesis purchased a license to continue research and development of elastin to grow cells and repair blood vessels from Dr. Kenton Gregory, who invented the technology at Oregon Laser Medical Center, Cannon said. The company will primarily focus on growing blood vessels for use in cardiovascular surgery and for vessel repair for diabetics. Approximately 900,000 cardiovascular bypass surgery procedures are done nationally each year, Cannon said.

"What we're focusing on initially is vascular conduits, or vessels, that would be used in cardiovascular bypass surgery," Cannon said. "Our effort is to tissue engineer using the patient's own cells and the elastin material to engineer vessels as good if not better than the native vessel."

Elastin is composed of a natural protein that creates elasticity of blood vessels, skin and lungs. It is not rejected by the body when used to repair organ and skin wounds, Cannon said. It can be used with a laser to affix elastin to a wound instead of using stitches to close wounds.



The company is working with the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine and hopes to eventually be part of the university's new biotechnology campus in Kakaako, Cannon said. Tissue Genesis is collaborating with Tripler Army Medical Center to develop the technology.

"My vision is to create synergy with ourselves and other biomedical companies in the state to continue to build momentum," Krucky said.

"In the bigger picture, this is a huge plus for Hawaii to have something like this here," said Bill Tobin, manager of Hawaii Health Care Business Incubator. "Health care and biotechnology will be merging in the future. If the UH medical complex in Kakaako is built, I think the company would be a natural fit."

Tissue Genesis also develops automated systems for growing cells and tissues. The company partnered with Becton Dickinson, a \$4 billion biotechnology company, to market the systems.

Tissue Genesis has received \$1 million to date from Becton Dickinson and expects more money when the final agreement is complete, Cannon said.

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