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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VTCRC Announces First Companies Selected for JLABS Virtual Residency

Acomhal Research, Qentoros, and The Tiny Cargo Company are the first group of companies selected for collaboration from the region.

BLACKSBURG, Va. (March 28, 2023) – The Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC) announced today that three companies have been selected to join Johnson & Johnson Innovation – JLABS (JLABS). Under a collaboration between VTCRC and Johnson & Johnson Innovation, LLC, established to support innovators in the Blacksburg-Roanoke region with the aim to accelerate emerging biotech and life science startups, the selected companies will have full access to JLABS programming, resources, and mentorship from experts across The Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies virtually.

Acomhal Research, Qentoros, and The Tiny Cargo Company will benefit from the JLABS global life science network and industry connections, along with access privileges to the JLABS @ Washington, DC site, while keeping their businesses located in the region.

“These companies will have a much greater chance of getting their potentially life-saving innovations to patients because of the quality of global services and mentorship that JLABS brings to the table,” said Brett Malone, President and CEO of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. “We’re also excited to provide lab space in Blacksburg based on the companies’ needs.”

Acomhal Research is developing new proprietary drugs with the aim to treat primary cancer tumors more effectively, resulting in less recurrence and fewer metastases, thereby improving patient outcomes. Samy Lamouille is the CEO and co-founder.

The Tiny Cargo Company has innovated a novel, non-immunogenic injury-targeting drug delivery platform consisting of bovine milk derived exosomes, including a formulation for

protecting the heart after myocardial infarction. The potent injury-protective effects of this novel exosomal formulation were discovered by Dr. Robert Gourdie and Dr. Spencer Marsh, Chief Scientific Officer of Tiny Cargo.

The Tiny Cargo Company was formed and spun out of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute of Virginia Tech in 2019. Dr. Gourdie has spent his career developing and commercializing peptide therapeutics, co-founding First String Research (Now Xequel Bio), a $120M+ company in Phase III clinical trials.

“Access to the JLABS program has been instrumental in the overall development of The Tiny Cargo Company from a hypothetical startup originating in an academic lab into a funded startup with a deep IP portfolio,” Gourdie said. “We foresee a bright future for Tiny Cargo and Milk Exosome technologies with this continued relationship.”

Qentoros is focused on creating novel therapeutics derived from Platelet-Rich Plasma that combat chronic infection and/or inflammation and promote tissue healing. The technology is based on collecting and processing platelets from horses to produce the anti-inflammatory biotherapeutic, BIO-PLY™. It has been demonstrated to be effective across animal species, and even human tissue, creating large commercial potential.

The company is working with the FDA to demonstrate safety and efficacy of the Investigatory New Animal Drug (INAD) through collaboration with the Virginia Tech Middleburg Agricultural Research and Extension (MARE) Center. At the conclusion of clinical trials, it hopes to be the first FDA approved platelet based veterinary treatment for joint infections and osteoarthritis in horses.

“While our product was discovered from and is currently being perfected in the equine realm, there is a promising avenue to translating the product to the human market,” said Dr. Jessica Gilbertie, Founder and CSO of Qentoros. “We ultimately intend to use BIO-PLY™ to treat osteoarthritis and joint infections in humans, especially in post-surgical infections of artificial joints.”

The VTCRC-JLABS collaboration was launched as part of a GO Virginia Region 2 project. The program is strategic in bringing specialized biotech accelerator programs to the region along with much-needed affordable lab space to serve startups. New labs in Blacksburg (COgro Labs) are opening this month and in Roanoke in late 2024.

The regional collaboration working on building biotechnology infrastructure and programming includes the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, Montgomery County, the City of Roanoke, Carilion Clinic, Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, Verge, Virginia Bio, the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Town of Blacksburg, and the Virginia Tech Foundation.

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Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (VTCRC) has a mission to create a space with purpose where innovators have access to unparalleled resources, partnerships, and opportunities for growth. Born out of a need to translate Virginia Tech research to commercial potential, the VTCRC was established in Blacksburg in 1985. Since then, it has been home to over 750 premier organizations with a common goal to disrupt industries. Today, with operations across Virginia, the research park continues to be a destination for growth and a space with purpose. The VTCRC is a for-profit, wholly owned, private subsidiary of the Virginia Tech Foundation, and is, therefore, not a state entity. Learn more at vtcrc.com.