UAlbany RNA Institute pioneers technology for biomedical and pharmaceutical companies

RNA Institute at the University at Albany is settling into its niche as a technology development center, one year after opening its $9.4 million facility.

The research center applied for six patents this year, more than the rest of the university combined. The institute also has about eight research projects underway to develop the technology, methods and software for analyzing RNA.

The projects are driven by research in the biomedical and pharmaceutical fields to use RNA, or ribonucleic acid, as a tool in therapeutics and diagnostics. Two local research collaborators include drug developer Albany Molecular Research Inc. and the state Department of Health.

"We have formed a niche in the research world that nobody else is occupying and that's with the technology and equipment," said Paul Agris, director of the RNA Institute.

One of the institute's six patents is standardizations for tools used in RNA-research, developed after the institute brought in $2 million in equipment and realized there were no industry standards for calibrating many of the tools.

The RNA Institute began as part of the university's College of Arts and Sciences in 2010. Now, it's reach is expanding beyond the physical location at the University at Albany.

The institute receives an inquiry a week from researchers or pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies looking to partner on projects, Agris said. The center has room for more researchers and companies. A visitors laboratory is awaiting a young company to settle in under the state's Start-Up New York tax incentive program. Four companies, including
one from oversees and one from outside New York, are talking with the university about moving into the site.

Agris said the institute will announce a separate research partnership with a widely-recognized instrumentation company in the summer. Agris also is working to create a partnership with Peking University in Beijing, China to send students and post-doctoral researchers to Albany.

He also plans to add to the 30 faculty members at UAlbany who work with the institute. The research center is searching for a faculty member that would have a joint appointment with the School of Business and would focus on promoting entrepreneurship and overseeing the commercialization of the technology developed at the institute.