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# U of L gets \$9.8 million to expand biosafety lab

## Facility set to open this summer at ShelbyHurst

**Premium content from Business First - by John R. Karman III, Staff Writer**

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The [University of Louisville](#) has plans to expand its new, \$34.6 million biosafety lab, even though the recently constructed building on the former Shelby Campus has yet to open.

U of L has received nearly \$9.8 million in federal stimulus funding to build an addition to the facility, which is called the Center for Predictive Medicine.

The addition will expand the center to 50,000 square feet from its current 37,000 square feet, according to William Pierce, U of L's interim executive vice president for research.

No timetable has been set for the expansion project, he said. A decision on a construction time frame is expected to be made in the next six weeks.

An exact date when the lab will open also has not been determined, Pierce said, adding that he expects it to be this summer. The center will open before the addition is built.

### **Construction delays, weather slowed project**

U of L broke ground on the Center for Predictive Medicine three years ago, but its completion has been slowed by construction delays and weather problems, according to Pierce.

Construction now is complete, and internal systems are operational, he said. An independent testing and certification company will ensure that all systems are working properly before any research occurs at the center.

The biosafety lab will develop vaccines and other countermeasures to fight bioterrorism and emerging infectious diseases.

Influenza, tuberculosis, SARS and West Nile virus are among the organic agents that might be studied at the center.

Pierce was disappointed that the center wasn't open last fall because it could have studied the H1N1 virus.

"That's the kind of thing that we'll be able to do — quickly evaluate new drug treatments and vaccines" for the flu and other illnesses, he said.

### **Expansion will allow for more projects**

The expansion will not alter the type of research that will be done at the lab, Pierce said. It will give the center added capacity to host more researchers and take on a greater number of projects.

"We started with actually a bigger project in mind ... but it was scaled back along the way," Pierce explained. "When the stimulus money came along, we saw the opportunity to sort of go back to our original plan and increase the size. It's obviously quite welcome."

U of L's application for the stimulus money said that the center will use rodents, rabbits and ferrets in product-evaluation studies.

The expansion will facilitate translational studies with hematology, clinical and whole-animal imaging services, the application said.

It also will provide receiving, quarantine and vaccination space for animals used in studies.


### **Elected officials impressed with facility**

When U of L first announced plans for the biosafety lab, it created controversy and concern among neighbors of the former Shelby Campus, a 240-acre property at Shelbyville Road and Hurstbourne Parkway.

U of L has renamed the campus ShelbyHurst Research and Office Park and is redeveloping a portion of the property into a business complex.

Larry Odom-Groh, mayor of Bellemeade, which is located just west of ShelbyHurst, said he believes U of L officials have done a good job alleviating community fears.

"They've answered all the questions," he said. "I've toured the place several times. We're pretty much impressed with it."

Prior to work beginning on the U of L lab, the [National Institutes of Health](#)  performed an environmental assessment of the project and said the center should pose no serious danger to residents.

The building has alarms, cameras and security personnel, and it is surrounded by a 250-foot buffer. The university has said infectious materials would be stored in special cabinets.

"I don't think there are any new concerns," said Jon Ackerson, Louisville Metro Councilman for the 18th District. "There are some lingering concerns."

Still, Ackerson said he believes U of L is taking "every precaution possible" to ensure the safety of neighbors.

He added that he believes the center will attract "top-notch" researchers and develop "cutting-edge" technologies and treatments that will be "hugely beneficial" to people all over the world.

### **Scientific director hired last fall**

The biosafety lab is being built by [Messer Construction Co.](#), which is based in Cincinnati and has an office here.

Its original \$34.6 million price tag was partially funded through a \$22 million grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. U of L provided the other \$12.6 million.

The lab is one of 14 that the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has funded since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

It shares the park-like ShelbyHurst campus with two classroom buildings.

The University of Louisville Foundation, which leases the campus from the university, has hired Louisville-based NTS Corp. to build an office building with 80,000 to 120,000 square feet on part of the property.

In September, U of L hired Colleen Jonsson, a biochemist who had studied highly pathogenic viruses for 18 years, to be the scientific director of its Center for Predictive Medicine.

She had been part of the Southern Research Institute, a nonprofit research consortium in Birmingham, Ala.

A "relatively small number" of researchers and other staff will work full time at the ShelbyHurst biosafety facility, Pierce said.

Most of the scientists working at the site will be there on a project-by-project basis.

Send comments to [jkarman@bizjournals.com](mailto:jkarman@bizjournals.com)