

New Arrival Aims to Grow on OC Lifesciences Sectors

SERVICES: Sets engineering, construction base in Irvine
JANE YU

Monday, April 14, 2014

IPS-Integrated Project Services Inc., a multinational engineering and construction firm, is betting on Orange County's host of medical device and drug makers to stir business opportunities and provide a base for its West Coast expansion.

Blue Bell, Penn.-based IPS provides a range of services from design and engineering to technical consulting and compliance testing, among others.

It caters primarily to the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, and also has clients in the education, food manufacturing and government sectors.

IPS has about \$250 million in annual revenue and has about 800 workers.

The 25-year-old company recently set up shop in a 5,000-square-foot facility in Irvine as its first location in the western U.S. and as part of a companywide growth push, according to Patrick Bucklen, a principal and partner in ownership of the company.

Bucklen recently moved to Irvine to head the local office, which he said brings the company close to current and prospective clients.

"I was an East Coast lifer, having worked in the New Jersey and Pennsylvania marketplace for 24 years," he said. "The transition to the West Coast was an easy one for me—I always wanted to move out here anyway."

The Irvine office is stocked for business.

"We have everything in-house that's associated with making a pharmaceutical product," he said. "We also have a lot of sister [offices] that afford us a lot of flexibility regarding high-level consulting, trouble shooting, drug formulation, and analysis of the work flows associated with the facility to try to make it efficient."

Bucklen said he's been busy interviewing and hiring for the Irvine office, where three people currently work.

"It will be about 25 to 30 people before we need to move to a new location," he said. "The challenge has been trying to penetrate the local marketplace for qualified people. We are going to grow this office. We would like to get to be 50-plus people here in OC in order to be able to support the growth and operations here."

The plan for the next few years is to grow the Irvine facility to account for between 15% and 25% of IPS' total revenue, Bucklen added.

"There is enough out here to make this one of the top branch offices within our organization," he said.

OC Hub

Orange County is an established center for the life sciences industries.

The field of local drug makers is topped by Irvine-based Allergan Inc., with more than \$6 billion in annual sales, and ranges from midsize companies to startups.

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Medical device makers here cover a similar range, with Irvine-based Edwards Lifesciences Corp., which had revenue of about \$2 billion last year, heading the field.

OC's status as a hub for drug and device makers was noted in a study published in December by Biocom, a San Diego-based research firm, which examined the life sciences industry in Southern California.

The report said total economic activity in OC related to the industry—which encompasses biopharmaceuticals, research and other fields—comes to more than \$27 billion.

Orange County has nearly 41,000 workers in the industry, up about 7% from 2012, according to the study.

It also has education facilities and investment professionals who focus on healthcare and biotechnology, such as Versant Ventures in Newport Beach, which specializes in early-stage firms across the biotechnology and medical device sectors.

History

IPS, founded in 1989, has largely been an East Coast company, with locations in New Jersey, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Indiana. Bucklen, with seven other partners, purchased the company from its original owners in 2009.

“When we bought the company, we wanted to grow globally,” he said. “We put in a concerted effort on the international marketplace ... and we invested heavily in the marketplace outside the U.S.”

The company has since expanded to four offices in India, two in China and one in Brazil.

“We went from 150 people to 800 in a matter of about five years,” Bucklen said. “We wanted to continue to grow. And that’s when I landed work with some customers in Orange County who were looking for aseptic-processing capabilities. We got to know the OC marketplace and realized there’s a ton of biopharmaceutical companies out here. We thought, ‘If we were going to continue to be industry leaders, we’ve got to penetrate the West Coast.’ ”

And Orange County was a “perfect” starting point of that initiative, according to Bucklen, who called the marketplace “very communal, in terms of wanting to utilize its local services and local presence.”

Future plans for IPS include looking north to set up an office in the San Francisco area.

“I see there is a strong demand for local subject matter expertise to the West Coast,” Bucklen said. “Our plan is to get this working here and then expand further up.”

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