

Furniture for R&D

BIOTECH: Hanson Lab Solutions makes cabinetry and counters for life science research facilities.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

There's a life science boom in California and **Hanson Lab Solutions** has a strategy to capitalize on it.

The Camarillo manufacturer and installer of laboratory equipment is busy these days because the life sciences industry has received research and development money related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Mike Hanson, co-owner and chief marketing officer at the firm, said that its hotspots are in San Francisco and San Diego but there is pending growth in Ventura and Los Angeles counties.



Mike Hanson

"Ventura County and L.A. County are going to be the new growth areas for life sciences," Hanson told the Business Journal.

Hanson and Chief Executive **Joe Matta** bought the company from a family trust in

2000. At the time, annual sales were \$3 million. This year they are projected to be \$20 million, with substantial growth forecast for next year with a sizeable work backlog, Hanson said.

The company was started by Hanson's father, Ken, in 1977.

"Prior to that, he sold laboratory supplies and saw a need for lab casework planning and design," Hanson said, adding that his father died in 2007.

Any business that is doing anything technical needs a lab – an R&D lab, a quality control lab or a raw materials processing lab.

The company has done work putting in lab cabinets and features for companies that made golf clubs, taco seasoning, furniture and aerospace, Matta said.

"It was crazy how many places have a lab," he added.

Life science firms the company has done lab work for include **Amgen Inc.** in Thousand Oaks, **Johnson & Johnson**, **Gilead Sciences Inc.** and **Pfizer Inc.**

Design, then build

A lot of work goes into designing a life sciences lab.

"The cycle on this is that by the time somebody decides they want a lab there is four, five months of work that goes into it before us," Matta said.

The company is approached by construction managers, contractors, or architectural design firms about building a lab. They are then presented some options on the building and the basic layouts.

The Hanson team will consult with the construction team and help in finishing the design.

"We float out a cost of the job, we win the job, perform the job, supply the materials as well as the complete installation of the laboratory interiors, and complete the job," Matta said. "Basically, when we are done with it, it is a lab instead of an office."

A typical lab buildout can cost anywhere from \$2 million to \$4 million, he said.

Hanson Lab Solutions had been in Newbury Park for about 40 years and then moved to Camarillo a few years ago where it had room to set up a state-of-the-art manufacturing area. It has 50 full-time employees, with 10 temporary workers. About 20 employees work in the manufacturing area in such positions as metal fabrication equipment operators, welders, finishers, painters and assemblers.

In the manufacturing area, which at 100,000 square feet is one of the largest steel lab casework fabrication facilities in the country, workers will assemble one project at a time. Hanson, however, sources its materials from a



Mobility: For labs that need flexibility in case research changes, Hanson developed the Agility line with rollers so it's movable.

vendor network that allows it to have multiple sources for their projects. That is especially important during the pandemic when some other manufacturers have had suppliers run late in getting product to them.

"In our manufacturing operation we are the giant final assembly operation and the resource that pulls everything together to get the completed laboratory space shipped and finished and installed," Matta said. "That is huge all by itself. We bring something to the table that nobody can do."

Google collaboration

Another way that Hanson Lab differentiates itself is with its Agility line of products that came out of doing work for **Verily Life Sciences**, the former Google Life Sciences subsidiary of the company's parent **Alphabet Inc.**

In 2016, the company was brought in to design the lab space for the life sciences division of the tech company.

The Hanson team sat down with some folks from Google, who had some ideas on what they wanted with an adaptable furniture system. It consists of cabinets and counters which are designed to be movable throughout a building.



Joe Matta

was going to outlast them and the next couple of generations of researchers who were going to work in the buildings at the South San Francisco campus, he said.

"Being that research and development is so fast and changing in terms of the direction they want to go, they were really bent on having a robust flexible furniture system," Matta added.

"We said, 'Yeah, we can do that,'" Matta recalled.

It became clear that the Google executives were looking for a robust and permanent type of product that



High-Tech Biology: Hanson installation for Google Life Sciences.

The Hanson team came up with a few options and presented them to Google. After making some minor adjustments based on comments from the tech company, they began to make the lab furniture.

"So this is a \$2 million laboratory buildout of something we had never made before in this exact fashion and shape," Matta said. "We pulled it off with flying colors."

The collaboration with Google, which included several more \$2 million to \$3 million phases after the first one, led to the creation of the Agility line of adaptable furniture systems. Since then, Hanson has continued to improve the product with new options and capabilities.

"There were upgrades in 2019 and in 2020 and we have upgrades planned for 2021 already," Matta said. "We are constantly in the development of these products."

Ventura County corridor

In terms of marketing, the company concentrates on getting its products into labs in the western U.S., Matta said.

The life sciences market is enormous in San

Francisco and the Silicon Valley. And it is has grown immensely in San Diego as it fills up on available land, Matta said.

The newest venue is the Los Angeles market, where biotech firms are opening in Santa Monica, Culver City, El Segundo and elsewhere. And then there is the L.A. life sciences corridor, which Matta said will be in Ventura County and not Los Angeles County.

In Newbury Park, the company has worked on refurbishing some buildings for lab space and there is several hundred thousand square feet of new construction where it can build lab space as well.

"There are multiple other facilities there," Matta said. "It is close, which is nice, and it is still competitive on the open market. We are getting our fair share, which is fine."

For Matta and Hanson, the story on the company is simple – just being the best in the narrow niche of lab furniture.

"Right now in all of California, Seattle, San Diego all those markets we cover, people are saying if you want to get it done, if you want to sleep at night, you call Hanson," Matta said.