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## Local scientists seek input on biotech incubator board

By [Lee Howard](#) Day Staff Writer

**New London** - Members of the Southeastern Connecticut Entrepreneur Network, meeting Tuesday to plan their next steps after helping secure a bioscience incubator in Groton, said they would be pushing their agenda forward on several fronts, including an effort to make sure the board overseeing the state's new \$200 million Bioscience Innovation Fund includes at least one representative from the region.

"It doesn't mean we mean to be parochial," said member Ethan Weiner of Latimer Brook Pharmaceutical Consultants. "But we do feel that there is a lot of talent in the region."

Jean Schaefer, founder of the network and head of Artemis Startup Consulting, said the group has been passing out biographies of local scientists with international reputations to key legislators in hopes of securing at least one seat at the table when an opening arises.

Mary Anne Rooke, executive in residence at Connecticut Innovations, pointed out that, while he is not on the board, Jeremy Crisp of Lyme oversees the bioscience fund as chief innovation officer at her agency. The bioscience fund was set up by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy to funnel grants over a 10-year period to educational organizations as well as offering loans to startup companies involved in scientific enterprises.

The 2-year-old entrepreneur network, now 150 strong, has given a voice to local scientists, including many laid off over the years by Pfizer Inc. in Groton, who want to develop biotech businesses in the region. The pinnacle of its success was the announcement last month by Malloy that the bioscience network Connecticut United for Research Excellence would be setting up an incubator on the Pfizer campus in an empty laboratory building.

"We definitely have the governor's attention and the legislature's attention," said Rhona Heyl, founder of Liftpoint Financial Services.

CURE Innovation Commons, as the incubator will be known, was funded initially by \$4.2 million in state bonding money. It is expected to be fully operational by the middle of next year, and Susan Froshauer, executive director of CURE who attended Tuesday's meeting at the temporary offices of the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region in the Mariner Square building, said so far most of the attention has been on carving out the 2-acre parcel as a separate piece of real estate dividable from the Pfizer campus.

"It's your building; it's the community's building," Froshauer told the group.

Schaefer, a former Pfizer scientist, said she has been working with Froshauer, another Pfizer alumnus, to make sure that the incubator is a success. Start-up and growth-oriented companies are eligible to join The Commons, including researchers in marine science, agriculture, chemistry, pharmacology, medical devices, information technology, biomedical engineering and clinical trials.

"The goal is to work with Susan," Schaefer said. "We talk. We're going to talk a lot more."

Froshauer said her hope is that the incubator will provide a space where a variety of companies can get together to develop new ideas. It also should be a place with a lot of activity similar to The Grove, a co-working space in New Haven where pancake breakfasts are not uncommon, she said.

The network members discussed briefly whether to limit membership to researchers in the life sciences but ultimately decided to maintain its open-door to entrepreneurs of all stripes. Though a large percentage of the network members have a background in pharmaceuticals because of their Pfizer lineage, it would be beneficial to the region to find ways to engage a variety of entrepreneurs, including those in the agricultural and marine sciences fields, said Barbara Sahagan, a former fellow at Pfizer.

"We would like to grow the other sectors of entrepreneurs," Sahagan said.

But one of the main goals is to nurture the pool of talent currently in the region and make sure they have a reason to stay in the area.

"We have to work together to be able to take the whole region and connect it to the rest of the state," said Robert Peitzch, founder of DKP Genomics. "We don't want people running off to Boston."

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