Interview with Jason Halsey , Chairman, Life Technologies Corporation

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Tags: Life Technologies Corporation

In the past two years Life Technologies has been investing in Singapore— last year you opened a regional distribution center in Singapore's Tuas Biomedical Park and this June you established a Global Instrument Center of Excellence. What are the aims of both and how will they fit into the global operations of Life Technologies?

We have been present in Singapore since 1997, therefore establishing the center was more of reinforcement of our commitment to Singapore. We have designated this center of excellence for product development and manufacturing of Life Technologies instruments.

The center will concentrate on Life Technologies activities associated with instrument development and manufacturing. So when there is a new product idea, it may be developed in California, but the manufacturing across all our market segments will be done here in Singapore.

What have been the investments?

Given our strategy of bringing in at least four new products a year should provide an idea of the level of investment.

We have made substantial investments in different areas such as human resources, manufacturing equipment and processes. We have been growing; last year our head count was around 300 and today we are at 400. We have hired 100 people in a year and half. In terms of facilities, during the

last three years we have added 75,000 square feet in Tuas and 50,000 square feet here in our headquarters, which gives us a total of 200,000 square feet operations here in Singapore.

What are your expectations of the center?

We would like to be bringing in at least four new products a year into the Singapore manufacturing facility. They could be from new product introductions or as transfers from existing manufacturing, which is primarily from contract manufacturers that we use around the world. The idea is to consolidate our instruments operations here. We foresee continuing our product development activities in the PCR product line but also expanding it into other technologies.

Attracting or recruiting people is a major problem for the industry today. Which specific challenges have you found in working at Life Technologies?

It certainly can be a challenge. Singapore is an island nation with five million people, so there is an inherent constraint in the talent pool. But something that has been done to alleviate this is an industry consortium has been put together with the objective of expanding the awairness and interest of new university graduates in the life science industry based here in Singapore. So, we have come together as an industry and are working together to increase the talent pool, rather than hire from each other. We are trying to reach out to new college graduates of the universities here, to show them what the life sciences industry is about and why it is an exciting place to work. We have also been working with the local universities to tailor educational programs that should help produce future employees for the companies.

Historically it has been particularly tough hiring R&D personal. I could hire really great mechanical engineers and I could hire biologists and scientists, but I could not find anyone that has experience working across the two disciplines, since at Life Technologies we merge life science with traditional engineering.

It has been easier here in Singapore lately to find those people, because for one, the Universities of Singapore has done a great job in producing students with that cross-discipline knowledge that is perfect for our industry. In terms of attrition being an issue, I have found that it coincides with the fluctuating economy. Two years ago when unemployment was at 1.8 percent we had 20 percent turnover. Now the global economy is slowing down and as a result our attrition is much lower.

What would be your final message to our international readers?

Even though Singapore is becoming more expensive, the solution is notnecessarily to jump to some place cheaper, but instead to tap into Singapore’s talented work force and focus on efficiency.

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