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Tucson, Arizona | Published: 05.08.2003

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Hot date for physicians, physicists

BIO FILE

By David Wichner ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Aiming to forge links between local researchers in two hot technology areas - biotechnology and optics - Tucson's leading optics firm



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will host a bio-optics roundtable June 3.

Kathleen Perkins, CEO of optics firm

Breault Research Organization and a board member of the Arizona Optics Industry Association, said the idea behind the invitation-only event is to give medical researchers and optical scientists a chance to compare notes.

"What I'm trying to do is get the physicians and the physicists in the same room," she said. "They share some of the same interests, though they're going at it from different disciplines."

Michael Stevenson, author of the Breault-produced journal Optics Report, noted that optical technology is increasingly used in molecular biology, from observation and analysis to manipulation.

Lasers make it possible to interact with and manipulate DNA, and without optics, the human genome would not have been sequenced and genomics would not exist, said Stevenson, who will soon earn dual degrees in molecular biology and optical engineering from the University of Arizona.

Stevenson said bio-optic research areas include the noninvasive observation of glucose levels in diabetics by measuring concentrations in the infrared light naturally emitted from the forearm; and development of artificial retinas, flexible lens implants for cataract sufferers and new, eyesight-correcting surgeries.

New PCC degree

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Pima Community College has finalized plans to offer a two-year associate's degree program and a one-year certificate program in histologic technology, or the study of biology through microscopes.

The program, which will be launched in August and will serve 30 students a year, is getting financial and in-kind support from Tucson-based Ventana Medical Systems and Tucson-area hospitals, said said Ann Christensen, PCC West Campus interim dean of math and science technology.

Ventana, a leading supplier of automated medical diagnostic equipment, has donated more than \$100,000 worth of equipment and will help teach lab techniques, Christensen said.

In addition, Pima County's Community Services Department will offer scholarships to students pursuing a fast-track certificate program for direct employment, as part of its grant under the H1-B visa program for foreign workers, she said.

The program, the only one if its kind in the state, addresses a critical shortage of trained lab technicians, Christensen said.

Contact reporter David Wichner at 573-4181 or wichner@azstarnet.com.

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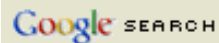


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