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## Photon Forum brings top technology executives to Tucson

By Kyle Schliesman  
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*Inside Tucson Business*

Drawing participants from around the world, the inaugural Photon Forum seems poised to breeze into town without any big road bumps.

This international optics forum originated last year with a partnership between Tucson's Breault Research Organization and the national optics publication Laser Focus World. This week, from April 5-7, the event will be held at the Loews Ventana Canyon Resort, with multiple activities and presentations prepared.

"Starting something like this from scratch is not an easy thing to do, but it is extremely worthwhile," said Kathleen Perkins, chief executive officer of Breault Research Organization and publisher of Optics Report. "We've got the right kind of people coming to the conference."

As of March 30, about 65 people were registered, including the presenters. However, people were still registering as late as that day.

A number of guests represent top optics firms from around the country, including the chief executive officer of New York's Advanced Photonics; the senior principal engineer for Illinois-based Baxter HealthCare; a director from Switzerland-based Roche Diagnostics; and the chief technologist of California-based JDS Uniphase. A representative from Cornesa Tokyo-based group that represents several large companies including Sony and Cannon also will attend the event.

"We've got two people coming in from Japan. We've got six Fortune 500 companies, and then we have a number of national optics companies and six Tucson start ups," Perkins said. "We have about half a dozen small businesses from Tucson that strategically made a decision to do this."

Local firms such as NP Photonics, Opto-Forensic Technologies and Engineering Synthesis Design also will attend, as will faculty from both the University of Arizona and Arizona State University. The event received sponsorship from both Raytheon Missile Systems and the University of Arizona Science and Technology Park.

"The conference is shaping up well both with the quality of the attendees and the quality of the speakers," said John Grabo, director of marketing for the tech park. "We'd like to see this develop into one of the more significant conferences in the photonics sector."

Perkins also credits Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup for his support. Walkup will deliver a lunchtime presentation on April 6. Other presentations will run all day on April 5 and from 8 a.m. to about noon on April 6. Presentation topics will include:

--Drug Discovery.

--Clinical Diagnostics.

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Many of these will deal with cutting-edge optics technologies, such as advancements in imaging spectroscopy. This centuries-old science uses the light spectrum to distinguish the difference between materials. Modern technology has taken this process to another level that could have significant economic and military benefits, said Mitch Ruda, owner of Tucson's Ruda and Associates, an event speaker.

"Now, with the advent of digital cameras, it is becoming easier to extract information," Ruda said. "You take an image and, pixel by pixel, you obtain detailed spectral information. Then, through computer processing, you can use the computer to find anything you want. I have a picture that will show you the difference between Bacon avocados and Hass avocados."

A venture capital roundtable will take place late afternoon on April 5, followed by a dinner presentation. The venture capital panel will feature representatives from Arizona's Valley Ventures, San Francisco's SkyMoon Ventures and San Diego's Inglewood Ventures.

"I wanted Arizona represented, but I didn't want it to be Larry Aldrich and the same guys that you hear from all the time. I wanted guys from Boston and the Bay area that manage half a billion dollars, for example, and that have a different perspective," Perkins said.

Perkins chose Loews Ventana Canyon as the forum's site to showcase Tucson's best face.

"This is where you want Chief Technology Officers to stay for two days, because they are going to fall in love with the canyon and with the beauty of Tucson, while they also see the businesses of Tucson," Perkins said.

Perkin's intends to bring another crowd to Tucson around the same time next year for the second annual Photon Forum. At this point, the partners plan to hold the event annually.

"It was a terrific partnership and hopefully it is a long partnership," Perkins said. "They've made a big commitment financially and resource-wise to Tucson and to Breault and to the Tucson optics community. They really could have said We will only do this if it is in Phoenix.' They didn't do that."

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