

Biotech entrepreneur discusses his vision for \$425 million, 1,600-job pharma center in High Point

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There's nothing comparable in the state.

That is how biotech entrepreneur Adnan Mjalli describes the \$425 million research park his Oasis Investment Group is developing on 80-plus acres of newly annexed land in High Point.

"It is a new model. I don't think there is an employment center like it in North Carolina. It's the first one," Mjalli said.

Oasis Pharma Center will provide 1.2 million in square feet of office and research and development space; 14,000 square feet of shops; an on-site day care; an 18-unit triplex of executive suites; and a 140-unit apartment building inside the park.

Byron Development LLC of Greensboro is the developer. The hard cost for construction is estimated at more than \$243 million.

The R&D park is expected to create more than 1,600 jobs — Mjalli calls this a conservative estimate — with an average salary of \$80,000 per year. The salary range for research and support jobs will span from \$40,000 to \$500,000 for executives. All told, the payroll will exceed \$1 billion over a seven-year period, he said.

The campus will cater to biotech and pharmaceutical engineers, as well as doctors, scientists, professors and support personnel working in drug and medical research and development.

"So I can imagine our companies here will relocate. Other companies will come and start," he said.

Mjalli first came to the Triad in 1999, with what was then TransTech Pharma. He selected 10,000 square feet in Mendenhall Business Park, which 20 years later is largely occupied by companies he either owns or helped found and sold.

Among those companies are vTv Therapeutics (NASDAQ: VTVT) and the former PharmaCore, now owned by Cambrex Corp. (NYSE: CBM), which is right next door.

Mjalli's main companies include High Point Clinical Trials and the recently acquired European firm Bien Etre, which mainly focuses on microbe benefits for human health.

He considered Research Triangle Park 20 years ago but found it too congested.



Adnan Mjalli

Back then, he and his investors envisioned what exists in High Point and across the Triad – what he called a "corridor of medical research" through his companies and others that have come here.

“We need to now take it one step further, transform it into a much bigger homemade, exquisite mini-village or city,” Mjalli said.



This image from the Oasis Pharma Center prospectus shows the site plan for the projected \$425 million, 80-acre clinical and medical research and development park in High Point.

Moving the needle

Hal Johnson of High Point's largest commercial and residential real estate brokerage, Craven Johnson Pollock Inc., said the OPC and other new developments in the area are already having a significant impact on the market.

That started a while back and is likely to continue, he said.

"The needle has been moved. When we came out of the recession I think High Point kind of took off," Johnson said.

OPC is likely to create a northern hub and will also benefit development downtown, he said.

That said, given that the OPC and other projects – including development around the High Point Rucker’s new ballpark – will be complete within the next decade, now's a smart time to invest, he said.

"As these projects come to fruition, the only thing that is going to happen is theoretically the prices around here are going to go up," Johnson said.

Recruiting talent

Between the talent pool that exists in the Triad, and the proximity of the Piedmont Triad International Airport, OPC could not be better positioned, Mjalli said.

“This area is special. The location of the state is really nice, convenient,” he said.

He noted that New York City and Washington, D.C., are roughly an hour's flight from PTI. Additionally, the Triad is home to numerous universities and biotech companies and with a low cost of living is a good draw to those located in the New York-New England area.

“There is a lot of talent in this area and in the Northeast that doesn’t want to relocate to San Diego or San Francisco,” Mjalli said. “They want to stick around.”

Sticking around, as Mjalli put it, might be refreshing to city and county government officials. who Mjalli says have been "very supportive" of his R&D project.

It also might help repair some of the economic impact incurred in recent years from the corporate headquarters and manufacturing exodus the Triad has experienced.

With construction expected to be complete in the next five to seven years, time will tell. Mjalli, for one, remains confident.

"It's a proven area. Again, I have been here for 19, 20 years."