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Buck Institute's stem cell facility under way

Sonoma County firms involved in \$41 million construction project

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Bringing 200 construction jobs and a future venue for stem cell research, a new \$41 million research facility is about to take shape at the Buck Institute for Age Research in Novato.

The 65,000-square-foot building will feature heating and cooling assisted by a geothermal system, as well as plenty of open lab areas for collaborative research.



PD FILE, 1999
Buck Institute

"It's really about creating great space for the science," said David Bendet, the project manager for building designer Perkins + Will of San Francisco.

The Buck Institute, an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to extending the human lifespan, received half of the facility's funding from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, the state's stem cell agency created by Proposition 71.

In 2008, that organization agreed to pay \$20.5 million toward the facility's completion. Construction was delayed when the nation's credit crisis arose later that year.

Now the project is on track to be completed by March 31, 2012, said Ralph O'Rear, the Buck Institute's vice president of facilities and planning.

When completed, O'Rear said, the building will allow the institute to house about 150 new employees in about a dozen research programs, each with a principal investigator and eight to 10 team members. The other new positions will include support and administrative staff.

The facility will include a basement and three stories above ground, and will feature "an open lab plan that allows for much greater flexibility," O'Rear said. Such spaces can better encourage the collaboration of multiple teams from different scientific disciplines.

Energy savings features include a system that pulls groundwater at 61 degrees Fahrenheit to provide a geothermal exchange with the interior air spaces.

"In the winter it provides some heating, and in the summer it provides some cooling," Bendet said.

This summer Ghilotti Construction of Santa Rosa has been doing earthwork for the future facility. The next phase, the building's construction, will soon begin under a \$17 million contract with a joint venture of Cahill Contractors of San Francisco and Otto Construction of Sacramento. A future phase will complete the building's interior.

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Local participating companies include Miller Pacific Engineering Group of Petaluma, Peterson Mechanical of Sonoma, and Northern Electric and Alcal-Arcade Roofing and Insulation, both of Santa Rosa.

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