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Proxy Biomedical Ltd. of Ireland ready to set up shop in Cleveland

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A company specializing in materials for tissue repair could be first in a pipeline of Irish businesses looking to ply the region's biomedical cluster.

On Monday, state officials are scheduled to vote on job-creating tax breaks for Proxy Biomedical Ltd., based in Galway, Ireland.

The company would bring 26 jobs and \$1.8 million in payroll to Cleveland if it lands tax breaks from the Ohio Tax Credit Authority, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars in state grants and loans in the next two weeks.

Proxy Biomedical could be early fruit of a three-year relationship between the Cleveland Clinic and Enterprise Ireland, that government's business development group, said Chris Coburn, executive director of Cleveland Clinic Innovations.

The Clinic has a decades-long relationship with Ireland's top cardiologists. About 20 percent of that country's heart doctors and surgeons were trained at the Clinic, said Dr. Brian Griffin, a cardiologist who is in charge of the Clinic's cardiovascular training programs.

Most of the biggest U.S. pharmaceutical and medical device companies also have longstanding relationships in Ireland. Companies such as Boston Scientific and Medtronic, as well as information technology giants Google and Microsoft, have invested millions of dollars in research, development and manufacturing facilities there.

"We were capturing on average 25 percent of all U.S. technology investment into Europe," said Sean McEllin, senior vice president of medical technologies for Enterprise Ireland.

In September, a delegation that included Clinic doctors and representatives of the Clinic-led, state-supported Global Cardiovascular Innovation Center visited Proxy Biomedical and other Irish businesses, Coburn said.

"What they see is a critical mass here in terms of things they care about," said Coburn.

Since then, a handful of Irish medical technology companies have begun working with Coburn's group on opening locations in Cleveland, McEllin said.

But for Enterprise Ireland's relationship with the Clinic -- started during the Clinic's 2006 innovation summit in Cleveland -- those companies probably would have located in the biotechnology cluster around Boston, he said.

One of those companies, Creganna, wants to open a Cleveland location.

The company that designs and builds products and technologies for medical device and life science companies expanded its Marlborough, Mass., facility in January. It opened a support office in Mountain View, Calif., last month.

Cleveland Clinic Innovation's system to develop doctor innovations into devices and therapies that help patients is strikingly similar to Creganna's approach to managing the intellectual property of medical innovation, said Alan Crean, a business development officer for Creganna.

"We saw a huge fit with what Chris Coburn and his team were trying to achieve and what we are doing," Crean said.

Combining the business development resources of the Irish government and medical device industry association with the product development strengths of Creganna and Cleveland Clinic Innovations "looks like it has a powerful potential to commercialize," Crean said.

McEllin sees that relationship going in both directions. Ireland has invested in the research and development abilities of its universities and companies. "It's a very supportive startup environment," he said.

He envisions a kind of conveyor belt between Ireland and the United States. "It would be fantastic to see ideas and innovations come from Cleveland, start in Ireland, and then come back to the U.S. and Cleveland," he said.

Proxy Biomedical has a strong, local link. Chief Executive Peter Gingras is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University, said Carin Rockind, spokeswoman for TeamNEO, the region's business-attraction organization.

The Clinic worked with the state, the city, BioEnterprise, TeamNEO, CWRU and others to lure Proxy Biomedical, which was considering Boston, Rockind said.

The company does research, development and manufacturing of medical devices for surgery, tissue engineering and pharmacology.

Proxy Biomedical says it will invest \$1.8 million here, and is eyeing space in the redeveloped Baker Electric building, East 71st Street and Euclid Avenue, officials said.

That would put Proxy Biomedical near a stop on Euclid's new rapid-transit bus line, and close to the Clinic and University Circle, where skilled labor and biomedical expertise is growing, Rockind noted.

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