

Spiral of success

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Fairfield company specializes in biological-related testing

Parenthood has turned out to be a growth industry for one local company.

Fairfield's DNA Diagnostics Center is the world's largest private DNA paternity testing laboratory, performing 75 percent of all private DNA paternity tests nationwide, company officials said.

"We help people find a daddy," said company spokeswoman Lisa McDaniel. "Who knew that we'd be in Fairfield, Ohio?"

Dr. Richard Lee, the founder and former director of DNA research and testing at Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati, started the business in February 1995. when he and a small team of employees worked from a single office suite. Today, DNA Diagnostics Center boasts nearly 200 employees, occupying two full office buildings and half of a third.

The company specializes in biological-related testing—paternity tests, maternity tests, sibling tests, grandparent tests, and reconstructive testing, where an alleged father's DNA can be reconstructed through samples taken by various known relatives.

In the past two years, DNA Diagnostics Center has expanded its services to meet growing demands for forensic and veterinary DNA testing services. Plans are currently in the works to do human genetics testing here, a move that is expected to create another 200 jobs over the next five years, McDaniel said.

"We wanted to successfully launch the forensics and veterinary testing first," McDaniel said. "But Dr. Lee hopes to eventually have a genetics research institute in Fairfield."

Calling human genetics testing "the Holy Grail" of DNA testing, McDaniel explained that such testing is likely to change peoples' lives.

"Everything is encoded in your cells," McDaniel said. Just as biological testing can determine a person's parental status, human genetics testing can detect abnormalities in a fetus or whether two people test positive for a genetic disease that could be positively transferred to their child, she said.

Since there is no longer a need to draw blood to collect a DNA sample, the testing process has become painless and quick, said Dr. Michael Baird, laboratory director for DNA Diagnostics Center and a national expert on DNA testing.

A buccal swab, a long Q-tip-like instrument, is used to collect invisible cells from the inside of the mouth or cheek, he said. A patient can receive results from a typical paternity test in five days at DNA Diagnostics Center. And while forensics on a single piece of evidence can take several months, it has come a long way from its beginning in the early 1980s.

“The trend that I’ve seen over the years is the increasing number of people using DNA to determine parenthood,” said Dr. Baird, noting that testing-technique advancements have accelerated its popularity and increased the accuracy of results.

Citing statistics from the American Association of Blood Banks, Dr. Baird noted about 350,000 paternity tests were conducted last year. He guessed about half of all DNA paternity tests in the US are conducted in the state of Ohio.

At DNA Diagnostics Center, lab technicians routinely achieve results with 99.999 percent or higher inclusions on DNA paternity tests, meaning results almost surely prove that a man is the father of a child. At the same time, the center is 100 percent accurate on showing paternal exclusions, meaning a man is absolutely not the father.

While the center’s primary service will likely continue to be private paternity testing, future growth opportunities will come from its ability to capture county and state contracts for child support and legal custody casework, said Dr. Baird.

“Forensic business also has potential in terms of increasing what we’ve got, as well as demand for human genetic testing,” he said of the business’s expansion efforts.

In fact, high-tech, health care businesses like DNA Diagnostics Center are precisely the type of companies that local economic officials aim to attract to their communities, said Andy Kuchta, Butler County Economic Development Director.

“The health care industry is projecting to growth over the next decade, and it has so many types of different companies within it that determining how to focus on one branch of the industry is challenging,” Kuchta said. “We’ve known for a while that this type of company is exactly what we want to be targeting. We’re talking with area hospital CEOs to bring in area experts to help define who we should be going after and how we can better prepare Butler County to make it more attractive to them.”

Dr. Baird added, “We don’t pollute and it is a high-tech business which requires a high-skill level employee. It’s the type of employer cities want to get in.”