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Food-testing company expanding in B.C.

Covance Inc. to build laboratory

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A world leader in food testing made official Tuesday its plans to build a nutritional chemistry and food safety laboratory in downtown Battle Creek.

Covance Inc., based in Princeton, N.J., will invest about \$14 million in purchasing and renovating the former SEMCO Energy building at 55 E. Hamblin Ave.

Its decision to expand in the 30,000-square-foot building will bring an estimated 43 new high-tech jobs by 2014.

Construction is expected to begin within the next few weeks and the laboratory could be open for business in the fourth quarter 2010.

The company selected Battle Creek in part because of Kellogg Co., which has called the Cereal City home since 1906.

The two companies have worked together for more than 30 years, a Kellogg spokeswoman, Adaire Putnam, wrote in an e-mail.

"We look forward to continuing our partnership with Covance and welcome their close proximity to the W.K. Kellogg Institute for Food and Nutrition Research, the epicenter for Kellogg's global product development, quality, research and innovation," Putnam wrote.

Covance said it signed a 7-year, \$42 million service agreement with the anchor client to consolidate much of the food company's analytical chemistry, microbiology and stability testing.

It plans to serve other area food companies as well, seeing as it will be the first laboratory in Michigan to offer some of these services, said Karl Dehn, Battle Creek Unlimited president and chief executive officer.

The company expects to receive about \$4.3 million in combined financial incentives from the state and Battle Creek. Some incentives have yet to be finalized at an upcoming city commission meeting, Dehn said.

Battle Creek Unlimited and the National Center for Food Protection have been working for more than a year to convince Covance to build a new facility here, Dehn said.

The testing company will partner with the recently-formed National Center for Food Protection. The collaborative network is working to develop food safety testing, research and education while positioning Battle Creek to be a global hub for food protection.

Covance will provide food testing facilities for the NCFP and invite all manufacturers access to the company's market-leading analytical chemistry, stability and food safety testing services.

"We're thrilled that they are going to be here," NCFP president and CEO Stephen Benoit said. "It's a great thing for the city and a great thing for the center."

Additionally, a Covance representative will serve on the Advisory Board for the NCFP's Emerging Technology Accelerator initiative unique to Battle Creek.

"I'm not aware of any efforts that are like this in the food protection space," Benoit said.

It will work with the group to get faster, more accurate food testing results, James Lovett, Covance's corporate senior vice president said.

"There's actually some clients in this area that we already serve in other locations," he said. "Now we'll be 100 miles away instead of several hundred miles away."

Distance is an important factor when testing food on production lines, he said. Often the closer the laboratory is to the manufacturer, the faster the results.

Covance considered an undisclosed number of alternative locations, but selected Battle Creek because of its ties to Kellogg and the NCFP, he said. This will be the company's third food-testing facility.

In Wisconsin, Covance has helped develop educational opportunities in science and technology, Lovett said.

Officials are working with Covance to extend similar opportunities to students at colleges and universities here as well.

"Battle Creek will be a new community for us and we are very much looking forward to being a good corporate partner there," Lovett said.

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