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Startup Blue Sky Analytical Labs calls U of L home

The University of Lethbridge is a vital part of the southern Alberta economy and the success of its partnership with [Blue Sky Analytical Labs](#), which recently captured the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce’s New Business of the Year award, is a perfect example of the synergy that results from such collaborations.

Blue Sky, a unique startup venture providing specialized analytical testing, uses U of L space and scientific laboratory equipment, including nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and other spectroscopy instruments and an X-ray diffractometer, to analyze samples of everything from water to cannabis for its industry clients.

“Our partnership with Blue Sky demonstrates how the University contributes to the economy and can serve the needs of industries here in southern Alberta, in the province and beyond,” says Dr. Dena McMartin, vice-president research. “We are pleased with Blue Sky’s early success and foresee a partnership that will thrive long into the future. Ventures like this one benefit everyone involved and the U of L is always open to establishing partnerships with local entrepreneurs.”



Blue Sky had its beginnings when Ross Tisdale, the company’s president, spotted a niche opportunity. In his conversations with other entrepreneurs on campus, he learned many local industries send their samples to larger cities for the analyses they require. They wondered if such testing couldn’t be done locally with all the scientific equipment at the University and Tisdale, along with Luc Roberts (BSc ’12) and two others, began collaborating on the potential opportunity.

They developed a proposal and presented it to U of L senior administration, where it was given the green light. Blue Sky set up its offices in Science Commons in April and has been hard at work setting up protocols for its tests.

“We were initially focused on water, but understood there was also a large opportunity in the cannabis industry,” says Tisdale. “The majority of cannabis producers in Alberta, and there are quite a few of them, send their samples to Ontario to be analyzed because there are not many providers of services in Alberta and those who do provide the services can’t offer the whole package that Health Canada requires. As soon as we got our licence, we focused on cannabis and learned everything we could about it. We soon realized we have all the equipment to be the only place in Alberta that can do the entire Health Canada suite of tests. We want to service everyone from home growers looking for potency tests to commercial growers.”

Blue Sky is also collaborating with other local companies and clients, such as Down to Earth Labs, a Lethbridge company that specializes in soil testing.

“We believe that Lethbridge and the extended southern Alberta area has more than enough demand to house analytical laboratory work, but it’s all been going up to Calgary, aside from the soil work that Down to Earth does,” says Tisdale. “We’re trying to divert that revenue back into southern Alberta and the University of Lethbridge because it just makes sense.”

Operating an analytical lab requires technical expertise in several areas. Blue Sky has brought on Jackson Knott (BSc ’16, MSc ’20) as their lab manager and master chemist and Roberts, a PhD candidate, serves as the company’s microbiologist and vice-president. Tisdale brings a background in business and is currently completing an MBA at the University of Edinburgh. They’ve also received grant funding to hire Sara Dutton, a biology student. Ag-tech student, Kurtis Cridland, has joined the group on a volunteer basis and they hope to obtain additional grant funding for him and a computer science student to do database programming.

For Tisdale and the other staff at Blue Sky, winning the New Business of the Year award was a chance to celebrate their hard work and how far they’ve come in a few, short months.

“It’s important for us, being a startup here on campus, to make sure we strategically align our goals with those of the University,” Tisdale says. “Of course, it will only work if everybody is benefiting from this arrangement. We are also highlighting the Science Commons building, the beautiful facility that it is and the amazing equipment and infrastructure we have on campus.”

This news release can be found online at [Blue Sky Analytical](#).

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