

## A lab with a view: New research space reflects company's open, research-driven philosophy

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Labs at the new Cell Signaling Technology space look out onto plants and a common area including the cafeteria, reminders of the building's former life as the Kings Grant Inn. (Staff photo by Alison Shuman)

**T**he landmark King's Grant Inn, which stood along Route 128 for decades, has now been transformed into a new home for Cell Signaling Technology - a biotech firm doing research into treatment for diseases such as cancer and diabetes.

Construction on the building to turn it from a hotel and conference center into office and laboratory space has been going on for more than a year.

A centerpiece of the hotel - the tropical garden room - largely remains and includes the front desk, a cafeteria and an informal meeting and relaxation area.

The building is more than just new office space - other new amenities include a conference room that holds 125 people and has a built in projector and screen. The phone system even meets the company's exact needs by directing customers directly to the person working on the product they are ordering, wherever they are in the building.

"You can't get better customer service than that - speaking to the actual person that makes the product, packages it and tests it," Scharf said.

A wing on the second floor is devoted to research, some of it funded by National Institutes of Health grants and also by the company.

"They're working on discoveries of new biomarkers," he said. "It's almost a university in a company."

Some of the findings will result in new products for the company. Others will result in articles published in medical journals. It's unlikely a public company would do so much research, he said.

Despite its transformation, the building still holds memories as the Kings Grant for many employees.

Scharf, like so many others, has his share of memories of the building as a hotel and conference center. He remembers calling home to his wife from what is now office space, to tell her about his interview with the company, when he was staying at the hotel and the two lived in the San Francisco area. Other employees said they remember having their high-school prom at the hotel. The marketing department is in space that was once the restaurant's seating area. Hotel rooms now serve as workspace for two or three people. The water hookups remain where the hotel room bathrooms were, too.

Cell Signaling Technology bought the building from brothers Steve and Walter Jones, who had owned and operated the King's Grant Inn for 40 years, for \$7 million in January 2004. The inn was not for sale, but Cell Signaling was looking for a new home and approached the Joneses with an offer they said at the time they couldn't refuse. Cell Signaling chose the location because of its size, location and opportunity for expansion.

The company's official address is Danvers, but the property is split almost evenly between Beverly and Danvers, with about 4 acres in each community.

The company's new home, at 110,000 square feet, is more than double the 50,000 square feet the company occupied at the Cummings Center in Beverly before it moved.

"We've been growing incredibly over the past five years," he said.

Each summer, the company takes in more than 40 high-school and college interns.

"We're run more like a university than a company," he said.

The company was founded in 1999 by Michael Comb, as a spinoff of New England Biolabs, which was founded by his father Don Comb. The company makes antibodies used mainly by scientists and universities conducting research on cancer, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and other diseases. Its largest customer is the U.S. government and other customers include the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University.

The company moved in to the building on Dec. 5, on schedule and timed with the end of the Cummings Center lease runs out.

From the beginning, each of the company's department heads were in on the renovation work, Scharf said. During construction, a "mock lab" was even set up in one of the old hotel rooms and so-called bench scientists tested it out and decided what they liked and what needed some changes.

"They set up the labs based on the feedback," he said.

In all, there are 66 labs.

According to a building permit issued in October 2004, the work cost \$12.9 million. The renovations were designed by architect Doug Trees of Hamilton and the work was done by Columbia Construction of North Reading.

The move to the new space was bittersweet for many employees, who lost Dr. Yi Tan, 42, a company co-founder who had worked at New England Biolabs, to lung cancer not long before the move.

"It was a real blow to the company," Scharf said.