

Recent bizJOBS

- [Junior Underwriter](#)
- [Waste Diversion Specialist](#)
- [Assistant Executive Housekeeper](#)
- [Corporate Controller](#)
- [Connect 2 Dot Program Manager](#)
- [Estimator](#)
- [Account Executive](#)
- [Inbound Demand Generation Manager](#)
- [Programmer / Software Engineer at Unleaded Group](#)

More By This Author

- [Tourism: Touting Telluride Ads emphasize digital media and 'micro-targeting' potential guests](#)
- [Colorado cool stuff: Air Pear, Geopalz, Steele](#)
- [Tech startup: Dizzion Inc.](#)
- [Tech startup: iGivefirst Inc.](#)
- [Radio in the internet age: Pandora's audience is soaring](#)
- [More articles by this author](#)



Current Issue

- [In This Issue](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

Posted: May 01, 2012

Tec startup: SuviCa Inc.

By [Eric Peterson](#)



INITIAL LIGHT BULB Tin Tin Su of the University of Colorado at Boulder developed a technology to screen pharmaceuticals with mutant *Drosophila*, a.k.a. fruit flies.

"What started as an interesting scientific observation over time transformed into a way to screen molecules for certain activities" – namely, anti-cancer mechanisms, says SuviCa CEO Judy Hemberger.

Hemberger, co-founder of Pharmion (also a Boulder-based, cancer-focused biotech), joined SuviCa in 2011, a year after the company's technology was licensed from CU's Technology Transfer Office in 2010. Su is chief scientific officer.

IN A NUTSHELL "Cancer is such a complicated disease," says Hemberger. "Companies are looking at it from all different directions. When you find somebody finding a unique pathway to treat it, that's very exciting."

The *Drosophila*-based screening process is likewise unique, Hemberger says. "The beauty of SuviCa is that we can screen hundreds of molecules and do it very inexpensively," she says of the benefit of using mutant fruit flies. "A fruit fly is an interesting little organism. It gives you a first look at how effective a drug might be."

Hemberger says the fruit flies are "a means to an end." While the company continues to screen molecules for potential pharmaceutical compounds, it is also pushing a pair of products down the clinical pipeline. Both treat cancer by inhibiting the synthesis of proteins that sustain tumor growth in brain and head and neck (H&N) cancers. "If you can block the cells that produce protein, you can theoretically slow down the progression of the cancer," Hemberger says.

The company is currently in preclinical mode, but Hemberger says, "if the data is good," the company could start trials on human patients by early 2013.

Vern Norviel, a partner at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, a law firm headquartered in Palo Alto, Calif., is bullish on SuviCa's prospects. "I represent over 200 startups, and this is a very good one," he says. "They have an unbelievable team – it's almost ridiculous."

"The most important thing: They might just put a dent in the disease," Norviel adds. "For cancer, it's good to have a menu of ways to attack these cells. Having a new hammer to pound on them is a big deal."

THE MARKET Both of SuviCa's targets – brain and H&N cancers – are "orphan" diseases in that there are too few patients (fewer than 200,000) to motivate businesses to pursue costly clinical trials, so by law the process is expedited, and the exclusive marketing period extended to seven years.

FINANCING The company has been entirely funded by state and federal grants. This summer, Hemberger anticipates going after \$6 million to \$9 million in outside financing and is bullish on SuviCa's prospects. Investors "will look at the model, they'll look at the fact we have a unique mechanism, and they will look at the pedigree of the senior team," she says.



ColoradoBiz TV



Featured Video

- Colorado Companies to Watch spotlight: Beacon Communications LLC
- Colorado Companies to Watch alum: Bhakti Chai
- ViaWest's Nancy Phillips at C-Level

Denver-based writer Eric Peterson is the author of Frommer's Colorado, Frommer's Montana & Wyoming, Frommer's Yellowstone & Grand Teton National Parks and the Ramble series of guidebooks, featuring first-person travelogues covering everything from atomic landmarks in New Mexico to celebrity gone wrong in Hollywood. Peterson has also recently written about backpacking in Yosemite, cross-country skiing in Yellowstone and downhill skiing in Colorado for such publications as Denver's Westword and The New York Daily News.

Enjoy this article? [Sign up](#) to get ColoradoBiz Exclusives. The opinions expressed in this article are solely that of the author and do not represent ColoradoBiz magazine. Comments on articles will be removed if they include personal attacks.

Readers Respond

Commenting is not available in this channel entry.
