

# Mass. ruling causes solar industry flare-up

Requiring licensed electricians to install solar panels will drive costs, critics say

BY JACKIE NOBLETT  
JOURNAL STAFF

A state licensing board's interpretation of the electrical licensing law has some solar companies scrambling to hire more licensed electricians to install panels on rooftops, and recent graduates of local solar job training programs looking at a long road to reach

their goal.

Any and all aspects of solar photovoltaic system installation must be done by licensed electricians because the systems generate electric current, according to a **Board of State Examiners of Electricians** ruling announced in January. The clarification of Massachusetts licensing law means that electricians must handle all parts of the solar panel integration process, from making the wiring connection to bolting the panels on rooftops.

As state leaders promote the blossoming of the solar industry —

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| EXECUTIVE PROFILE |

# Getting drug discovery done

Lab founder goes to bat for biotech services industry

BY JULIE M. DONNELLY  
JOURNAL STAFF

**O**n a snowy afternoon this past winter, there was an event sponsored by the **Massachusetts Biotechnology Council** to talk about the state of the industry, and the challenges it faces during the downturn. As everyone chewed on their chicken, a panel spoke about the benefits of Gov. **Deval Patrick's** \$1 billion life sciences

bill. **Janet Wolfe**, the CEO of **Wolfe Laboratories** in Watertown, stood up and said, "This is great, but what is being done for the biotech services industry? What is being done to keep those jobs in the state?"

No one had a good answer.

But everyone, including **Susan Windham-Bannister**, the head of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center who was appointed to

dole out the money associated with the bill, was listening.

Less than six months later, Wolfe Laboratories was one of just seven companies to win what is called an Accelerator grant from the Life Sciences Center, to the tune of \$500,000. A total of 88 companies applied.

Contract research organizations like Wolfe Laboratories represent the less sexy side of



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## WOLFE: While other companies get glamor, hers does the science

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drug development.

They may formulate a biotech's drugs, to make sure there are the right concentrations of each ingredient. They may perform preliminary research to determine the safety and efficacy of a drug target. Or they may even run the animal trials that precede human studies.

They rarely receive attention from the public because they aren't the ones announcing the positive results, the possible treatment for cancer, or HIV or cystic fibrosis.

But CROs are receiving an increasing amount of attention from biotech and pharmaceutical company executives who realize experts like Wolfe and her team may be able to run these tests more quickly and cheaply than biotechs and pharma firms can run them in-house.

And for Wolfe, the work is fascinating.

Science grabbed hold of Wolfe in high school, after she read a biography of Marie Curie, the 1911 Nobel Prize-winning chemist.

Wolfe never wavered, getting both an undergrad degree and a Ph.D. in chemistry. She did a post-doctoral fellowship at the **National Institutes of Health**, and then her first real job was as an academic in the Department of Pharmacological Science at the **University of Tennessee**. But then fate stepped in. Her husband got the job of a lifetime, teaching at **Harvard Medical School**.

She decided she didn't want to stay in academia. The mother of three young children, Wolfe wanted to launch a business. Starting out, it was tough.

"I remember I sent out 150 letters to people in

**'We were at a meeting and she said she'd like to donate the registration fees. People thought that was a nice idea for next year. But Janet said, "not next year — now."'**



**Michael Durkin**

President and CEO, United Way of Massachusetts Bay

my Rolodex who were in the pharma or biotech industries, just trying to get the word out. I got two responses," she said. The company grew largely by word of mouth in the early years, and Wolfe said half of her business is repeat business.

Currently she has 25 to 30 clients of varying sizes, from virtually run biotech startups with just a few employees, to some household names she can't mention due to confidentiality agreements.

Wolfe said 50 percent to 60 percent of the clients are headquartered in New England, but others are all over the country and a few are abroad.

The economy has challenged Wolfe Labs in several different ways. She said the company has to do a larger number of smaller jobs to try to keep pace. She does not expect any growth in 2009.

She says not only are the jobs smaller, but they

often take longer to complete because small companies are receiving money in dribs and drabs, due to the capital crunch and more cautious venture capitalists

"We have to be flexible when a venture-backed company says, 'we can only get \$2 million until we reach our next scientific milestone. Can you help us get there?'"

Wolfe acknowledges that the company has been lowering prices in some cases, and lately spends more time negotiating deals.

But Wolfe says the downturn has had an unexpected benefit.

"Everyone is just really open now about finances. Everyone lays their cards on the table and then we figure out how we can help each other," she said.

Open and straightforward is how Wolfe likes it, at work, and in the rest of her life.

**Michael Durkin**, president and CEO of **United Way of Massachusetts Bay**, said that kind of just-get-to-it attitude is a breath of fresh air in the nonprofit sphere. Durkin said Wolfe has been "stoking the fires of corporate responsibility."

When Wolfe Labs held its 10-year anniversary celebration in April at the swanky Mandarin Oriental Hotel, she offered a panel on corporate philanthropy and contributed the registration fees to United Way.

"We were at a meeting and she said she'd like to donate the registration fees. People thought that was a nice idea for next year. But Janet said, 'not next year — now'," Durkin said.

**JULIE M. DONNELLY** can be reached at [juliedonnelly@bizjournals.com](mailto:juliedonnelly@bizjournals.com).



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