



WHAT WOULD GALILEO DO?

The Pittsburghification of Sicily continues apace. UPMC, with Pitt faculty members and the Italian government, brought solid-organ transplantation to Palermo in 1999. The project got a permanent home in 2004, when the 70-bed ISMETT (Istituto Mediterraneo per i Trapianti e Terapie ad Alta Specializzazione) facility opened.

And now a similar public-private partnership will oversee the latest effort that will make Sicily a medical powerhouse: the pending construction of Ri.MED (Ricerca Mediterranea or Mediterranean Research) Biomedical Research and Biotechnology Center (BRBC) in Palermo-adjacent Carini. A jury of Italian scientists and architects has chosen HOK as the lead architectural firm for the facility after a worldwide design competition among 14 contenders. The winner was announced at a news conference in November, at which Italy's then prime minister, Mario Monti, spoke via teleconference. The president of Sicily and officials from Pitt, UPMC, and Italy's National Research Council also participated (these entities founded Ri.MED in 2006 with the Italian government).

The 334,000-square-foot research facility is expected to open in 2016. BRBC

will include a corporate incubator to shepherd its discoveries to market.

Ri.MED's investigators will ply the fields of structural biology, computational biology, drug discovery, vaccine development, biomedical device development, regenerative medicine, tissue engineering, molecular imaging, and neuroscience. If the spectacular views of the Tyrrhenian Sea and mountains are not enough to inspire, researchers can get creative juices flowing by strolling over to the lavender gardens or (we imagine) the campus espresso bar.

Arthur S. Levine, dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Pitt's senior vice chancellor for the health sciences—who also holds the title scientific director of the BRBC—says, “We want to make a substantial contribution to biomedical research globally. The goal is not only to do world-class science, but also to do the kind of science that will lead to the emergence of a biotechnology industry in Southern Italy.”

Expansion plans for the Carini site include the prospect of a hospital and the creation of a new medical school. —Joe Miksch

—Photo courtesy HOK