



SUSAN HERTZBERG President and CEO, Boston Heart Lab, Framingham

A Heartfelt Dedication To Biotech

BY TARYN PLUMB

Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, resulting in more than one-third of all the nation's fatalities.

It is Boston Heart Lab's mission to change that.

Unlike many other illnesses and cancers, heart disease is not only preventable, but reversible, says Susan Hertzberg, president and CEO of the fast-growing Framingham-based biotech company.

"There's really no such thing as a sudden heart attack," Hertzberg said. "It takes years of preparation."

Which is where Boston Heart Lab, founded by Drs. Ernst Schaefer and Bela Asztalos, comes in.

No Slowing Down

The two-year-old biotech startup specializes in comprehensive and individualized cardiovascular disease testing. Because 50 percent of people who die from heart attacks every year have normal cholesterol, according to Hertzberg, the company's tests address various risk factors — beyond just the "good" and the "bad" cholesterol — and in the end, provide patient-specific risk profiles, advice and treatment plans for doctors, cardiologists and physician groups.

Contrary to popular belief, "lowering your bad cholesterol, your LDL, isn't really the whole story," said Hertzberg, who holds an MBA from Columbia University and has served a myriad of duties in the health care field over the years.

So ultimately the company is creating an entire lifestyle management plan that blends drug treatment with an emphasis on diet and exercise.

In the end, it's a fresh perspective on an insidious disease and one that has allowed for

Boston Heart Lab's rapid growth.

In just nine months, since Hertzberg came on last July, the company has boosted its employees from 38 to 53, and Hertzberg expects to be close to 70 workers by the end of the year.

Boston-based Bain Capital Ventures invested \$10 million in Boston Heart Lab last summer, and the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center also provided the company a \$440,000 tax incentive.

The ultimate goal: To be a \$100-million company in the next five years, Hertzberg said.

In striving for that, the CEO brings a unique and varied perspective to her post, having held a multitude of positions in the health care industry.

Initially, her path was going to be blazed in a white coat and stethoscope — she was accepted to medical school, but opted not to go — a decision that still pains her parents, she quipped.

As she explained, it just didn't feel right. "I knew I wanted to be in health care," Hertzberg said, "but being the clinician wasn't the right path for me."

Instead, in 1985, she answered an ad in the New York Times for a sales rep for MetPath, now Quest Diagnostics, Inc., and then moved to laboratory sales. Later, she navigated her way through managed care, in-vitro diagnostics, marketing, purchasing and finally management.

Just prior to taking the helm at Boston Heart Lab, she was president and CEO of the U.S. division of Ipsogen, a

For Susan Hertzberg and Boston Heart Lab, business is about saving lives.

French-based molecular diagnostics company.

Ultimately, "I've been on all sides of the table," she said.

That, she said, in the end has provided her with a unique vantage point.

"It's about trying to help make health care work more efficiently, and to the benefit of patients," said Hertzberg, who is married to a physician and has two grown children.

The impact Boston Heart Lab has on those patients, she says, is what drives her. And it's driving the growth of the company as well. ■



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