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SECTION C

## MariCal signs deal with firm in Tokyo

The agreement gives the Hakuju Institute exclusive rights to the Portland company's biological technologies in Japan.

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*Staff Writer*

MariCal Inc. of Portland has signed a licensing deal worth more than \$1 million with the Hakuju Institute for Health Science, a Tokyo-based health care equipment and health food company.

The agreement gives Hakuju exclusive rights to MariCal biological technologies for use in Japan, and calls for the two companies to do some collaborative research in the future.

According to David E. Hughes, president and chief operating officer of MariCal, the agreement gives the Portland company a new view of the

technology it has developed. Hakuju's focus is on human health, said Hughes, particularly in using electrical fields in the treatment of ills. The company was founded in Tokyo in 1925, and its medical products and related health foods are used widely throughout Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Philippines and China.

Privately held MariCal was founded in 1996. Its breakthrough discoveries have concerned a class of extracellular ion receptor proteins, called calcium receptors. MariCal has isolated the biological "thermostat," or "master switch" that enables fish and other aquatic organisms to sense and respond to salinity and nutrients in their aquatic environment.

MariCal's calcium receptor protein technology is sensitive to ions, which are positively charged atoms and groups of atoms. While MariCal has been focusing on the technology as it relates to certain ionic processes in marine animals, the two companies

believe it can also be used to track electrical fields in the human body.

"It's another way of looking at exactly the same set of data," said Hughes. "These biological units that we work with are also reading electrical fields."

"This is very exciting because it will help us to better understand the actual biological pathways through which our products produce the excellent therapeutic results people in Japan have enjoyed for years, and will also allow us to develop new and better therapies in the future," said Hakuju President and Chief Executive Officer Akikuni Hara, in a written statement.

The initial connection between Hakuju and MariCal came about through the Portland company's participation in a biotechnology conference sponsored by the University of Southern Maine in 2002. H. William Harris, MariCal co-founder and chief executive officer, spoke about the calcium receptor protein and the company's experiences with patents and licensing of

technologies based on its proprietary expertise in the working of these proteins.

A consultant working for Hakuju was attending the conference, heard Harris' talk and saw how the two companies could work together to develop their technologies.

"This is exactly the sort of result we hope for when conducting such conferences," said Rita S. Heimes, director of the Technology Law Center at USM, in a written release. "Here, important international connections have been made, and the result is a large inflow of money into Maine and validation for the excellent work being done in marine research in the state."

MariCal has 21 employees in Portland, Norway, Scotland, Chile, Alaska and Canada. ■

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