

DEBBIE HART

The great biotech convener

Debbie Hart, founding president and CEO of BioNJ, is dedicated to the mission and work of BioNJ — “Because Patients Can’t Wait.” As the life-sciences association for New Jersey, BioNJ includes a network of almost 400 member companies representing research-based companies and stakeholders. Since 1994, Debbie has worked alongside New Jersey’s biopharmaceutical industry leaders to propel the rich innovation ecosystem in the region to stimulate and support innovation, improve and save lives, and lower the hurdles of healthcare advancements for society.

Debbie’s list of accolades represents the positive influence she has had across the industry. In addition to being named one of the world’s 100 Most Influential People in Biotechnology by Scientific American Worldview, Debbie was named by Governor Murphy to New Jersey’s Restart and Recovery Advisory Council and by Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin to the Economic Advisory Council to Restart the Economy. Additionally, she was named by Governor Murphy to the New Jersey Commission on Science, Innovation and Technology where she serves as vice chair; as co-chair of the New Jersey Higher Education Strategic Plan Research, Innovation and Talent Working Group; and the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education and Business Partnership. Debbie served as chair of the bipartisan, bicameral New Jersey Biotechnology Task Force, which was charged with making recommendations to the legislature for fostering the growth of the biotechnology industry in New Jersey. Many of those recommendations are now law. Debbie also serves on the boards of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and Choose New Jersey.

PV: What was the spark that led you to found BioNJ?

HART: The spark came from a friend — Brad Brewster — who at the time was one of the leading lobbyists in Trenton. He and his partner Dale Florio knocked on my door back in the early 1990s. They,

along with a group of New Jersey life-sciences executives, including our founding Chair Dr. Abe Abuchowski, asked me to help them establish the Biotechnology Council of New Jersey — now BioNJ. Founding members included biopharma companies such as Bristol Myers Squibb, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Immunomedics, Medarex,

and Schering Plough. And I cannot thank them enough. It’s been literally my labor of love since 1993; we incorporated officially in 1994.

Our founders set a direction and a tone for BioNJ that still drives us today. We set out to help the then emerging industry realize its full potential. And now, more than 27 years later, New Jersey’s life-sciences industry is an international powerhouse, with more than 300,000 direct and indirect jobs, more than 3,200 life-sciences establishments, and an annual economic impact of \$83.4 billion. Just last year, in 2020, more than 40% of all novel FDA approvals came from a company with a footprint in New Jersey — not to mention the first COVID-19 saliva test as well as the first COVID-19 vaccine coming from our great state.

As an organization, we strive to provide our members with the tools needed to grow our community with opportunities to partner and entrepreneurs and innovators with the policies and resources they need to flourish.

PV: As a leader of leaders across the NJ life-sciences ecosystem, what would you consider to be your greatest strengths?

HART: Ever since I was young, I enjoyed bringing people together. I have been very fortunate to have been able to do just that through my work at BioNJ. BioNJ acts as a convener — bringing together the full breadth of stakeholders within the ecosystem to ensure innovation is happening unencumbered in New Jersey and that patients have access to that innovation at the right time. For instance, we work closely with elected officials and policymakers to pursue bipartisan strategies that reduce patient costs at the pharmacy counter and encourage investment in tomorrow’s cures. BioNJ has brought our constituents together to advocate for practical market-based solutions, such as value-based contracting, capping out-of-pocket costs, and sharing negotiated savings with patients.

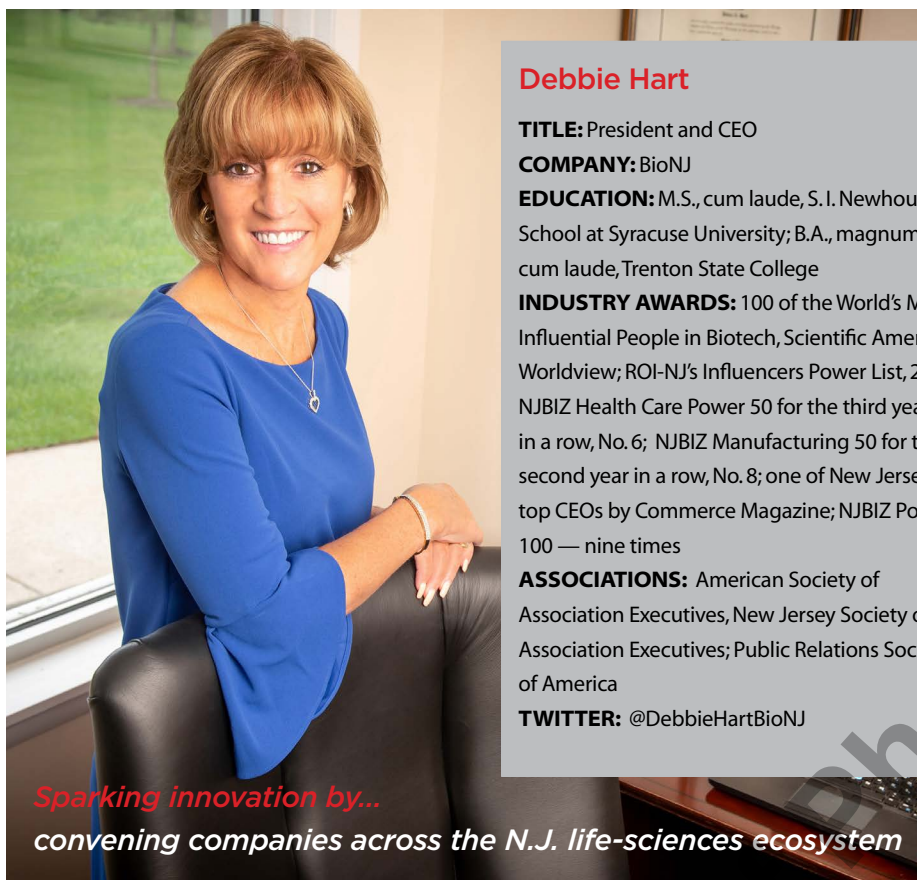
I would like to give credit to the many, many colleagues with whom I work who help BioNJ achieve its goals and our mission. I’m proud of my talented and passionate team, who always go the extra mile. I have a good eye for talent and have had the opportunity to mentor numerous extraordinary professionals through the years. At BioNJ, we are working every day to attract and retain companies and talent and to make sure that those in our ecosystem are connected and supported to ensure that New Jersey remains the medical chest of the world.

PV: Over the last 27-plus years, the association has been incredibly successful, what’s on the horizon in terms of future opportunities?

HART: By our very nature as an organization, we always want more and we always want better, and so we are always welcoming new members, devel-



PASSIONATE. CONVENER.



Debbie Hart

TITLE: President and CEO

COMPANY: BioNJ

EDUCATION: M.S., cum laude, S. I. Newhouse School at Syracuse University; B.A., magnum cum laude, Trenton State College

INDUSTRY AWARDS: 100 of the World's Most Influential People in Biotech, Scientific American Worldview; ROI-NJ's Influencers Power List, 2021; NJBIZ Health Care Power 50 for the third year in a row, No. 6; NJBIZ Manufacturing 50 for the second year in a row, No. 8; one of New Jersey's top CEOs by Commerce Magazine; NJBIZ Power 100 — nine times

ASSOCIATIONS: American Society of Association Executives, New Jersey Society of Association Executives; Public Relations Society of America

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*Sparking innovation by...
convening companies across the N.J. life-sciences ecosystem*

oping new programs and services, and advocating on behalf of the industry and patients.

Our agenda evolves and expands to mirror the growth and evolution of the industry and the environment. We are particularly proud of our commitment to patients and to making sure that their voices are heard. We are also using our voice to tell the industry's story and to talk about the medical innovation, which is allowing patients to live longer, more productive lives. We have taken a lead in educating the community on the challenges presented by the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER) and other value frameworks and to proposing better cost-effective solutions.

We are particularly concerned about some of the proposals coming from Washington, D.C. — proposals that will put the brakes on innovation, have a devastating impact on our state's biopharmaceutical economy, and also reduce patient access to lifesaving medicines. We are proactively working with policymakers and others to ensure that patients can access the therapies and cures they need and that innovation is enabled at every turn. BioNJ is committed to telling the industry story in New Jersey that includes the growth and expansion of cell and gene therapy, the state's manufacturing capabilities, as well new state incentives and emerging innovation hubs, such as New Brunswick and Jersey City.

PV: Can you share with me a couple accom-

plishments you've had with BioNJ that punctuate the success you have achieved?

HART: I want to start by saying it takes a village. We are so fortunate that we have an amazing one — across the ecosystem we have amazing people. Back when BioNJ was established there was a biotechnology task force — it was a bipartisan, bicameral legislative task force that brainstormed about the things that they could do to support the industry to foster its growth in New Jersey. And they developed a whole series of bills that all came to fruition, the most notable of which was the Technology Business Tax Certificate Transfer Program, also known as the NOL program — net operating loss — where unprofitable companies can sell their losses for cash. That program back in the early and to mid-1990s put New Jersey on the map in terms of a state that was going to support the industry and wanted it to grow.

Fast forward 20-plus years, and we identified the need to reestablish that task force. The second iteration of the biotechnology task force was established, and I was fortunate — very fortunate — to chair it and work with several legislators who were very committed to the work. In fact, Senator Bob Singer, who served on the original task force, served on the second one as did does Senator Sarlo and Assemblyman Zwicker.

Out of the reestablished task force came numerous recommendations that I'm thrilled to say

BIONJ IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING OUR MEMBERS HELP PATIENTS.

are now reality. For example, bringing back the New Jersey Commission on Science Innovation and Technology was one of the recommendations. We're thrilled that we are in year three of the commission, and the work has just been extraordinary in terms of issuing grants and bringing forward other programs that are helping the industry — and not just the biotech industry, but the technology industry as well.

BioNJ also advocated to increase of the Angel Investor Tax Credit; and that is a reality today. And there were recommendations in the Governor's Economic Recovery Act, which was signed into law in January of this year. Again, I want to give credit to the village starting with the Governor, legislators, industry members, and our BioNJ team members who helped to make all of this a reality. This will be part of BioNJ's legacy moving forward.

PV: What have been some of the most memorable moments for you?

HART: During our Annual Dinner Meeting: Innovation Celebration, there have been so many times that I've been brought to tears by patients and their stories. In fact, I get choked up when I think about one of our favorite patient advocates, the 2019 Heart of BioNJ Honoree and renowned industry artist, 12-year-old "Magic" Max Schill. Max, who has grown up before our very eyes, walked the halls of the Capitol on numerous occasions delivering hand-drawn pictures to Senators while advocating for the passage of the 21st Century Cures, which he played a key role in getting passed in 2019. He was there when President Obama signed the bill. The President even wrote him an excuse to get out of school that day.

PV: What would you like your legacy to be?

HART: I would say continued excellence. Our vision is that the industry continues to grow and expand here — that New Jersey companies continue to lead the country in drug approvals and innovation; that patients around the world will be able to access the therapies and cures that they need when they need them. That has been and continues to be my labor of love. **PV**