

# Pioneering bio hacker group finds home

October 18 2011, by Nancy Owano



(PhysOrg.com) -- A garage lab for research in biotechnology seeking bigger digs for an open science lab has opened its doors in Sunnyvale, California. Instead of sponsorship from big corporations and government, the garage-spirited fundraisers turned to [Kickstarter](#), where 239 supporters donated \$35,319 to get Eri Gentry and her team out of the garage and into a well-equipped lab space of 2,400 square feet. The

lab is called BioCurious and its creed is to celebrate the hacker ethic, the desire to tinker, deconstruct, and rebuild, applied to biotechnology.

After meeting for a year in a garage, the new space opened with an all-volunteer staff. Membership is \$150 a month for people of all levels of experience, which gives them access to equipment, [workspace](#), to follow biotech pursuits.

Their governing principle is that “We believe that innovations in biology should be accessible, affordable, and open to everyone.” BioCurious is reaching out to entrepreneurs, engineers, aspiring biochemists, and just about anyone wanting to do hands-on scientific experiments. Some of the equipment in the new lab facility was donated to the collective, and they also bought some equipment at auctions. The lab has gel electrophoresis equipment, incubators, microscopes, fridge, freezer, pipettes and other equipment. BioCurious offers classes on such topics as personal genomics, hardware hacking, and a “Business of Biotech” lecture series. BioCurious speaks in plain, friendly language, inviting the public to “make genetically engineered bacteria, sequence DNA, find the tools to get your bio-project growing, or make friends with amateurs and experts in the community.”

Executive director Eri Gentry said she was inspired by her own experiences at HackerDojo, a San Francisco community of engineers, artists and other creatives who use the working and social facility in Mountain View, California. “You could tell right away that you could ask anyone for help. You could ask stupid questions. I realized there that this culture could be created. And it could be done for science.”

A hacker after all is anyone that is skilled at what he or she does, As useful as the machines and tools are for those who cannot afford more expensive laboratory space, “the cool hangout space” at BioCurious is

the component that most captures what BioCurious is all about. “Our hangout space is the same sort of place for computer hackers,” she said. At BioCurious, you feel the same kind of “awesomeness” from sharing ideas and enthusiasm, she added. “Brainstorming turns into something when you put a lab next to it.”

Gentry is nonetheless prepared for doubters who think a citizen-science construct is crazy. “You’re letting people off the street do science? You’re kidding me?” And will come up with ridiculous ideas of people cloning other humans or infecting people with Ebola virus,” she said, in an [interview](#).

Over the past year, however, plans were put in place. The BioCurious volunteers established a non-profit business entity, held meet-ups, acquired donated [equipment](#), evaluated lab spaces, and established safety and waste disposal procedures.

**More information:** [biocurious.posterous.com/biocu...he-next-big-thing-to](http://biocurious.posterous.com/biocu...he-next-big-thing-to)

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