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Why Ireland-based Almac is investing \$65M to expand in Montgomery County



Image: Philadelphia Business Journal

A crew continuing foundation work for Almac's \$65 million, 115,000-square-foot expansion in Souderton.

JOHN GEORGE / PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL



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The loud explosions emanating from a Montgomery County industrial site early this year were not a cause for alarm.

They were part of the excavation work Almac recently completed before beginning a \$65 million expansion at its Souderton campus, which serves as the North American headquarters for the Northern Ireland contract pharmaceutical manufacturing and clinical services company.

"We had to finish the excavation work, which did include some blasting because there's a lot of shale in Pennsylvania," said Mark Rohlfing, the company's vice president of U.S. operations.



Almac executives Mark Rohlfing, left, and Richard Segiel.

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Almac is in the process of pouring the concrete for its 115,000-square-foot addition that will allow the company to increase clinical supply capacity by 60% at the 246,000-square-foot Souderton complex it opened in 2010. The project is part of the more than \$500 million Almac is investing in a multiyear global expansion initiative that also

includes projects at its Craigavon headquarters in North Ireland and its site in Durham, North Carolina.

Almac has committed to investing \$93.5 million in Pennsylvania, where the company also has operations in Audubon and Kulpsville, and **expects to add more than 350 employees** by the end of 2026. Along with the Souderton expansion project, the company plans to spend more than \$28 million on enhancing its technologies and capabilities at its other Montgomery County sites.



A rendering of Almac Group's proposed expansion in Souderton. The area in bright white on the left is the addition, which will be developed to connect seamlessly to its existing facility.

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Founded in 2001, Almac provides formulation development, clinical trial supply, commercial-scale manufacturing and distribution and logistics services to pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. The company is making such a large investment locally and internationally to keep up with the technological advancements transforming the drug-development industry.

"When we built this facility, we had small molecules because on our mind because that is where most of the drug development work was focused," Rohlfing said. "As the years have gone by, more of the activity in the biopharmaceutical space – from vaccines to monoclonal antibodies and cell and gene therapies – have resulted in advanced therapeutic products that need a different touch with how they are stored and how they are processed."

Richard Segiel, vice president of business development, North America, for Almac Clinical Services, said the makers of cancer and heart disease drugs continue to be the company's biggest customers. In recent years, he said, Almac has seen its clients be more active in developing drugs for aging populations, such as macular degeneration treatments. Other hot areas, Segiel said, are obesity drugs and treatments for orphan diseases, which are typically genetic conditions that afflict small patient populations.

Their clients' biggest need, Rohlring and Segiel agreed, is the need for refrigeration and storing products in low or sub-zero temperatures. Rohlring noted that the protein-based medicines the company is increasingly working with will degrade if taken out of refrigeration.

For the short term, the company has modified existing space to meet the needs of clients, including refrigerated storage and packaging for Covid-19 vaccines and other products.

"We've put in banks and banks of freezers where we could," Rohlring said. "With the expansion, we'll be able to collect all of those and put them in one spot. ... And we'll have extra capacity for growth over the next 10 to 12 years. That's largely what this project is about."



Ultra-low-temperature storage freezers are in demand at Almac.

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The expansion project in Souderton will produce increases of:

- 200% in 2- to 8-degree Celsius storage;

- 140% in 2- to 8-degree Celsius packaging;
- 100% in 20-degree Celsius packaging;
- 30% in 15- to 25-degree Celsius storage;
- 115% in ultra-low temperature storage.

Rohlfing said another growing trend in the life sciences industry is just-in-time manufacturing, a production model whereby products are created to meet demand – as opposed to being created in surplus or in advance of need. The Souderton expansion project will increase just-in-time manufacturing space by 100%.

Almac supplies products used in clinical trials. Historically, because new products can be tested anywhere in the world, any information being provided to patients needed to be printed in multiple languages. "With just-in-time manufacturing, if a company enrolls patients in say, Germany, we can put a German booklet in the kit and ship it out," Rohlfing said. "Just-in-time manufacturing gives companies a lot of flexibility and allows them to only use what they need."



A refrigerated warehouse at Almac in Souderton.

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Segiel said the expansion in Souderton, expected to be completed in 2026, can't come soon enough.

"If we had waited a few more years to do this we would have been in a real tight spot," he said. "With this project we're anticipating a growth trajectory based on these trends that we're seeing in the industry. This will enable us to meet the demands we see coming."

As Almac grows, the company will need to expand its staff.

The company – which has more than 7,000 employees in Europe, North America and Asia – currently has 1,640 workers in Montgomery County, most of them at its Souderton campus.

"We have a wide array of talent needs within the business," Rohlfing said. "We'll be hiring folks who will work on the production floor and warehouse and others all the way up to Ph.D. chemists."

Almac is establishing connections with local schools and colleges to attract potential future employees. Rohlfing said experience in the pharmaceutical industry is not required for all its positions.

"We hire a lot of people that were teachers or maybe they did supply chain management in the food industry or hardware or something like that," he said. "There are not many people who work in clinical supplies. We can teach people how to do what we do here. We need people with a good foundational education, and we'll take care of the rest. ... We're trying to provide good jobs with good salaries to the local workforce that we have here in Montgomery County and the surrounding counties."