

Technology

# Incubator backed by Ravens owner opens in South Baltimore



Image: By Matt Hooke/Baltimore Business Journal



Blackbird Laboratories CEO Matt Tremblay speaks to a crowd at the nonprofit's new Blackbird BioHub incubator in City Garage.

BY MATT HOOKE/BALTIMORE BUSINESS JOURNAL



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Mar 18, 2026

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### Story Highlights

- Blackbird Laboratories opened a \$12 million incubator at City Garage.

- The 35,000-square-foot BioHub provides office space for 120 people.
- Aletira Therapeutics and EPOCH Epigenetics moved into the new facility.

A startup fund established by [Baltimore Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti](#) has settled down to roost in South Baltimore.

Blackbird Laboratories recently completed the main buildout of its Blackbird BioHub incubator at the [City Garage building](#) near Baltimore Peninsula. CEO Matt Tremblay showcased the office cubicles and laboratories spread out across the 35,000-square-foot space during an open house on Tuesday. As singer Paul Anka's [swing cover of "Black Hole Sun"](#) played in the background, Tremblay described how the space had resembled an airplane hangar before Blackbird [started construction last year](#). That blank canvas has been transformed into an incubator with office space for up to 120 people and lab spaces for entrepreneurs who hope to create new ways to diagnose cancer and other diseases.

Companies began moving into the BioHub last month, though some minor construction is still being completed, he added. Blackbird spent \$12 million on the incubator space, including \$2 million of state aid.

The opening of lab and office space for startups is the latest expansion for Blackbird, which has grown into one of the largest startup funders in Baltimore since its founding in 2023 with a \$100 million gift from Bisciotti. The nonprofit has given out around \$35 million in grants to companies so far, with 95% of that money going to companies in Maryland. The opening of the BioHub gives Blackbird a way to become more hands-on with its portfolio companies and offer them lab space to help fuel their growth, Tremblay said.

The layout of City Garage gave Tremblay and contractor Riparius Construction the freedom to design the space with the startups in mind. The office has several specialized research labs that go beyond the generic bench spaces common at other incubators. A vivarium allows researchers to conduct animal testing with mice on-site. There is also an on-site lab certified for human specimen testing, something essential for companies working to treat diseases.

These unique facilities have helped the BioHub attract several companies, like gene therapy firm Aletira Therapeutics and diagnostic firm EPOCH Epigenetics, which spun out of the federal Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

"Having the vivarium here is an excellent resource for a small company like ourselves, which is just starting up and needs easy ways to do low-cost animal work," said Hugh Welles, Aletira's chief scientific officer.

A small handful of companies are planning to start labs inside the BioHub within the next couple of months, including Cambridge, Massachusetts-based [Aevum Therapeutics](#), Tremblay said. A company from a traditional medical hub adding a lab in Maryland exemplifies Blackbird's goal of giving Baltimore a national reputation as a hub for medical research. To that end, Blackbird has also partnered with some of the biggest names in tech, ranging from educational institutions like [Stanford University](#) and Harvard Medical School to venture capital firms like Catalio Capital Management and PTX Capital.

"We really focused on building out relationships with early-stage venture capital investors," Tremblay said. "I'd like to think that we're getting more of them to come to Baltimore in the last couple years."