



# Improving on No. 1

## New Roche Leader Cites Passion, Innovation

By Tom Schuman

**W**hen a new leader emerges in an organization, sometimes it is because the company is struggling and there is nowhere to go but up. In such instances, it may be easier to become acclimated to the new position as expectations are low. Nothing could be farther from the case for one of Indiana's largest companies. Roche Diagnostics Corporation is part of Switzerland-based Roche Group, a world leader in innovation-drive health care. Indianapolis is the U.S. headquarters for the diagnostics division, which is the leading supplier of diagnostics in the world's five biggest markets. The global market share is 21%, well ahead of its competitors.

Tiffany P. Olson assumed the roles of president and CEO of Roche Diagnostics in June. Most of her eight years with the company have been in Indianapolis, although she comes back to the city after more than a year as global head of market development at the company's world headquarters in Basel, Switzerland.

"We've been a market leader, and we certainly want to maintain that, but we also want to distance ourselves a little," Olson relates after just more than six weeks on the job. "Everything we do is to keep us at that leadership position. Another goal is excellence in market execution, sometimes having to develop markets years before products are ready to come (to market)."

Globally, Roche has more than 65,000 employees in 150 countries. Its U.S. operations include 15,000 employees in a dozen states. The diagnostics operations in Indianapolis are broken down into five areas:

- **Diabetes care** – a world leader in blood glucose monitoring systems. The ACCU-CHEK® line of blood glucose meters, lancets, test strips and data management tools are a leading consumer product line. Disetronic Medical Systems, located in Fishers and acquired by Roche in 2003, is the world's second largest manufacturer of insulin pumps

### Then and Now

- **1964:** Bio-Dynamics formed by Willard "Bill" Eason, a chemical engineer with Ford Motor Company in Indianapolis. Started in his own garage, Eason developed a series of Unimeters that provided a fast, low-cost means for physicians to perform accurate analyses of certain routine lab work in their own offices.
- **1974:** BioDynamics acquired by Boehringer Mannheim Corporation of New York in 1974. Sales had reached \$25 million annually with profits exceeding \$1.5 million. Eason remained with the company until his retirement in 1979.
- **1998:** The Roche Group acquired Corange Ltd., the umbrella company for Boehringer Mannheim. In 2001, Roche Diagnostics becomes the top diagnostics company in the United States.
- **2005:** The 150-acre campus includes 18 buildings and more than 1.3 million square feet of space in Marion and Hamilton counties. Sales for Roche Diagnostics in 2004 approached \$1.9 billion.

- **Molecular diagnostics** – focuses on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology, which has provided the basis for advances in the diagnosis and monitoring of life-threatening diseases such as AIDS, hepatitis and West Nile Virus
- **Centralized diagnostics** – provides solutions for diagnostics laboratories, including high-performance analytical systems
- **Applied science** – produces reagents (chemicals) for life science research in the areas of genomics and proteomics
- **Near patient testing (or point of care)** – delivers diagnostics methods for use by medical professionals in the doctor's office, hospital, pharmacy, etc.

## Varied background

Olson started her Roche career in corporate accounts and group purchasing. She also served as vice president for molecular diagnostics, with responsibility for sales, marketing and support of those products in the United States. Overall, the 46-year-old Olson has 23 years of experience in health care.

“There’s been very strong growth in the molecular area, and we expect it to continue,” Olson states. New products in oncology, as well as the areas of leukemia and sepsis are on the way. “In centralized diagnostics, there will be growth in osteoporosis and cardiovascular drugs. For diabetes, Aviva is the newest consumer product in the blood glucose meter line.”

The competition for Roche varies by the division. Although some fields are more crowded than others, Olson says there are two givens: “Never underestimate the competition, and use the competition to make us better – see what we can learn from them.”

The complexity of Roche’s work leads to some misunderstandings, Olson says, about the functions of the diagnostics division. Sales, marketing, support, inventory warehouse and providing input back to research and development teams are among the main functions. In addition to the five divisions, Indianapolis is also home to centers of excellence – supporting other Roche operations worldwide – in information technology and manufacturing.

## International edge

While Olson was familiar with the diagnostics division, her corporate work over the past year (in the areas of clinical and market development, as well as quality and regulatory matters) has helped prepare her for the new assignment.

“That gave me a good overview of the areas of the company I was not familiar with,” she confesses. “It was a totally different perspective on the culture of how people think, how they problem solve, how health care is administered and managed, and how each employee brings unique strengths to the team.”

Olson describes a part of her leadership philosophy as the three L’s: listen, learn and lead. “One of the things I’ve tried to do is come in and listen to people and learn what the challenges and barriers are in their area. Once that understanding is there, we bring the senior management team together” and formulate plans of action.

Asked what she heard from employees during that first six weeks, she summarizes, “We have a group passionate to take care of customers and meet their needs. Our people come up with new ideas and ways to look at things. I continually hear this passion



**Tiffany Olson addresses Roche employees in Indianapolis and around the country during the company’s celebration of its 100th anniversary in the United States.**

to make sure we continue to help people in need of help.”

## History, longevity

Changing the way people are diagnosed and receive care is a focus of the entire Roche organization, Olson shares. The company was founded in 1896. Its U.S. presence dates back to July 25, 1905. The 100th anniversary gave Olson the opportunity to address all 3,500 (approximately 2,500 in Indiana) Roche Diagnostics team members.

“Our two main drivers are our people and the innovation we’ve brought to market,” she relayed two days before the anniversary celebration. “We want to make sure we’re set up to continue that in the future.”

Olson expressed some surprise at the numbers being honored when the Indianapolis campus conducted a silver and golden award luncheon for employees with at least 10 years of service. There were about 1,000 honorees, with a significant number in the 30-year plus category. (The company was honored earlier this year by *Fortune* magazine as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For in America).

The company’s history and stability are contributing factors, according to Olson. “We’ve weathered through some storms. One hundred years shows we’ve continually reinvented ourselves when we’ve had to.”

Olson says Roche Diagnostics will maintain and enhance its role in working to improve the life sciences business climate in Indiana. It will also combine with others in the industry on an education effort.

“We need to make sure the value of diagnostics is understood. The health care system needs to understand where the savings are in the system,” she declares. “Earlier and more accurate diagnoses can not only improve patient outcomes, but realize tremendous amounts of health care savings.”

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** Tiffany Olson, Roche Diagnostics, at (317) 521-2321 or [www.roche-diagnostics.us](http://www.roche-diagnostics.us)