

ing the company, which included the Springfield plant and a plant in New Brunswick, Canada, to Ralston.

billion dog-food market, while Nestle accounts for roughly 12 percent, the Journal reported. Ralston is also

companies could be required to trim their pet food businesses in order to gain regulatory approval.

road to a cure



John D. Rodwell stands in the laboratory of AxCell Biosciences in Newton, Pa. The company has mapped all of the ways that proteins with the same type of binding structure connect to one another. Scientists hope mapping the protein domain families will help figure out how proteins cause disease when they are not working together properly. If they can figure that out, they hope that could lead to ways of fixing the proteins, thus curing a particular disease.

horses, carrying out biological processes from cell division and regulating metabolism and digestion to making enzymes and other hormones. They do so by sending biochemical signals along a pathway created as segments on one protein, called peptide chains, bind to corresponding domains, or receptors, on another protein. When something goes awry in the

process, disease often results. Others are less certain about the applicability of AxCell's work. "This approach is very useful for certain diseases, for certain pathways, but not necessarily for all," said Gillian Woollett, associate vice president of biotechnology at the drug industry trade group, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

to stay optimistic

In 1999, holiday sales, fueled by millennium spending and a booming economy, rose 7.3 percent over the previous year.

A handful of major retailers say they're devoting more time and resources to making better hiring decisions. Both John Eyler, president and CEO of Toys 'R' Us, and Gordon Segal, CEO of Crate & Barrel, agree that hiring the best in-store clerks available has become even more critical in 2001.

Michael Gould, chairman of Bloomingdale's, foresees a difficult season ahead. Sales this winter for apparel targeted at vacationers

headed to warm climates were weak, Gould said.

Looking forward, Gould said he does not believe springtime fashions include enough clothing for the more practical shopper.

"There's nothing really wearable," he said.

Mullin said retailers need to begin taking chances on new products in order to differentiate themselves from competitors.

"There's this risk averse mentality out there," Mullin said, adding that merchants who continue down that road will continue to see their bottom lines suffer.

acing for cut in OPEC production

ay enues flowing — even if the U.S. slows down its oil imports — the



an investment bank in London. "The surprise would be if this doesn't happen," added Peter Gignoux, head of the petroleum desk at

hold the bulk of its crude from market. Iraq is embroiled in a pricing dispute with the United Nations, which regulates all Iraqi exports.

Branson amenities expanding as city does

By Kathryn Buckstaff
News-Leader

BRANSON — By the end of March, groups wanting to hold meetings in Branson will have the option of a new conference center.

Springfield businessman Bob Wehr, owner of Branson USA, said Monday that he is building a 16,000-square-foot addition to the amusement park's existing 760-seat theater. It will provide banquet facilities to seat 1,000 with closed-circuit television connected to the theater.

Wehr said he also will remodel for meeting space the existing 5,000-square-foot building that formerly housed the Shepherd of the Hills Museum at the park.



Wehr

The building has a 110-seat theater. The projects are expected to open March 30, just before the opening of the park in April. Effective April 1, the 112-acre amusement park will be annexed into the city of Branson under an agreement Wehr reached with the city.

Wehr said his development will not compete with the proposed civic convention center now in the early stages of planning.

"One of the first things that I did when I bought the park was to try to get a convention center down here," Wehr said. "I'm highly in favor of a major convention center. But I've got to run my business. They're a little too slow for me."

Wehr said he plans to attract church groups and company picnics.

The largest conference center in Branson is the Chateau on the Lake with 43,000 square feet of meeting space and seating for 2,000. Chateau general manager Stephen Marshall is also a member of the Convention Center Commission.

"The (civic) convention center will attract much larger groups, ones that can't be housed right now in Branson," Marshall said. "What Bob Wehr is doing is not in competition with that."

There are about 20 hotels that offer meeting space. Lodge of the Ozarks handles groups up to about 500 people in its banquet and meeting rooms. Last year, it was host to more than 50 veterans reunions, said owner Jim Thomas.

Those reunion-goers also spent money elsewhere in town, Thomas said. Their itineraries arranged by the hotel included theater shows and meals at other restaurants.

"Instead of having a scarcity of resources," Marshall said, "we should have an abundance of resources available to us. The more groups and larger groups that consider Branson as a destination, the better it will be for all merchants."