



Bénac, delivering health security in the La Rochelle area

La Rochelle, Thursday 29 June 2023 — Jean-Luc ALGAY, representing Jean-François FOUNTAINE, Mayor of La Rochelle and President of La Rochelle urban community council, and senior executives from Laboratoires Théa, Europe's leading eye-care company, laid the foundation stone to the future Bénac manufacturing facility at 6 rue Charles Tellier in Chef-de-Baie, in the Technocéan business park (17000 La Rochelle).

The new facility will be purpose-built to manufacture a product that is used with cataract surgery. Almost 1,000,000 cataract surgeries are performed every year in France, making it the most frequent surgical procedure in France—and in France's neighbouring countries. For almost 60% of these procedures, surgeons use an ocular insert made by French laboratory Théa to dilate the pupil (mydriasis) before going on to make a small incision in the eye and implant an artificial intraocular lens that helps to restore useful focus.

For years these sterile micro-capsules have been manufactured at premises leased from Carl Zeiss Méditec France in nearby Périgny, but soon they will be made in a brand-new facility purpose-built just down the road in the Technocéan business park (17000 La Rochelle).

In a move to anticipate the end of the lease with German manufacturer Zeiss and jump on the opportunity to consolidate its foothold in Charente-Maritime, Théa has decided to build its own production facility in La Rochelle. The Auvergne-based group liaised with La Rochelle urban community council to secure the acquisition of land in the Technocéan business park, a green business incubator and showcase venture for sustainable development in La Rochelle. Jean-François FOUNTAINE, Mayor of La Rochelle and President of the La Rochelle urban community council, signed off the land sale deal on 3 May 2023.

Delivery of the new factory is set for 2024 and facility go-live is scheduled for 2026. ANSM, the French medicines and healthcare products regulatory agency, will run all the requisite tests, checks and audits over the course of 2024 and 2025.

The brief guiding the new site premises and equipment design is to employ the best available technologies, notably in terms of spatial flow and energy performance, while complying with French 'RE2020' green building code to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Théa pioneered and continues to lead the worldwide preservative-free movement in eye care, and this project further illustrates Théa's ongoing commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility.

The Bénac teams will soon have around 1700m² in floorspace to work with, which is a step up from the ≈500m² available today. Furthermore, the architectural project for the site—as a flexible and scalable facility purpose-g geared to pharmaceutical manufacturing and packaging process activities—was designed to accommodate future expansion; in other words, to continue to grow to meet the rising demand for a product that is already surging, not only in France but also in neighbouring countries, as the facility is projected to serve as the manufacturing centre for the whole of Europe.

Jean-Frédéric CHIBRET, CEO of Théa, which is headquartered in Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de Dôme), is delighted to have sealed this collaboration with the La Rochelle urban community, noting that “despite

how hard it is for Made-in-France manufacturing to stay competitive in healthcare products, we at Théa have kept our headquarters and R&D here in France, and we continue to make 70% of our products in France (and 100% in Europe). That means we are contributing to our country's prosperity but also our domestic health security, as we provide greater self-sufficiency to our national healthcare system.

Jean-Luc ALGAY, VP of La Rochelle urban community council, said he was thrilled to support the Théa group on this exciting project, adding that the region's healthcare sector was fast gaining ground.

About Théa

Théa is Europe's leading independent eye-care group. Based in Clermont-Ferrand, France, Théa has 35 affiliates and offices in Europe, North and South America, North Africa, and the Middle East. Today, the Théa network counts more than 1,600 employees, and Théa products are available in 75 countries across the globe. In 2022, Théa posted consolidated global revenues of around €865M. The independent family-owned and family-run group, founded from an R&D start-up by Henri Chibret, has been chaired since 2008 by his nephew, Jean-Frédéric Chibret. Visit <https://www.laboratoires-thea.com> to find out more

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