

SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE

**THOMAS WIGGANS**

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Mark Jones

in

Menlo Park, California

on

27 April 2015

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)



*Courtesy of Thomas Wiggans*

Thomas Wiggans

SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE  
Center for Oral History  
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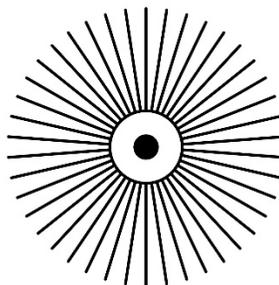
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## THOMAS WIGGANS

### Education

1975 BSBS, University of Kansas  
1976 MBA, Southern Methodist University

### Professional Experience

1975-1976 Skillern's Drug Store  
Pharmacist

1976-1978 Eli Lilly & Company  
Sales Representative  
1978-1980 Marketing Associate

1980-1983 Serono Laboratories Inc.  
Director of Marketing  
1983-1985 Vice President, Sales and Marketing  
1985-1986 Executive Vice President  
1986-1991 President and General Manager

1991-1992 Serono Laboratories Ltd.  
Managing Director

1992-1994 CytoTherapeutics  
Chief Operating Officer and Director

1994-2005 Connetics Corporation  
Chief Executive Officer and Director  
2005-2006 Chief Executive Officer and Chairman

2007-2009 Peplin, Inc.  
Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer

2010-2020 Dermira, Inc.  
Co-founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer

## ABSTRACT

**Thomas Wiggans** grew up in Fredonia, Kansas, a small town with just a few thousand residents. Both his grandfather and father ran a local drugstore, which Wiggans worked in during his adolescence. This led to Wiggans not only having an early interest in becoming a pharmacist but also allowed him to learn the ins-and-outs of the profession. He attended the University of Kansas for pharmacy, where he worked summer jobs to support himself. While studying, he was approached by the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly for a sales position. Wiggans expressed his interest in first pursuing a master's in business administration; after receiving his MBA from Southern Methodist University, he was hired at Eli Lilly for an entry-level marketing position. He was placed in Jacksonville, Florida, where he was a member of a small marketing team with just two other representatives. He was given a multi-month project based out of Indianapolis, Indiana, after which he was promoted to a marketing associate.

Uninterested in continuing at Eli Lilly, Wiggans began entertaining other job opportunities. He interviewed with Serono in Boston, Massachusetts, which focused on fertility technology. The company was new to the United States, and Wiggans was hired as the marketing manager to grow the company's American presence. Wiggans established the company's sales force at a pivotal time, when fertility technology was booming. The success of the sales force led to Wiggans being promoted to general manager. As the general manager, Wiggans worked with Integrated Genetics to develop recombinant gonadotropins and Celltech Group from recombinant growth hormones. After facing budgeting issues, Wiggans was sent to the United Kingdom, where he worked until he left Serono in 1990.

After leaving Serono, Wiggans was approached by CytoTherapeutics, a cell transplantation company, to join their company. Wiggans accepted the position and returned to Boston, commuting each day to Providence, Rhode Island. He was interested in bringing commercial products to the company, but the board disagreed. This coupled with the difficulty of performing clinical trials pushed Wiggans to seek out other companies. He later received a call from a recruiter with the company Connetics. He accepted the position, moving his family across the country to California. The main product of Connetics was Relaxin, which was a genetically engineered hormone designed to treat scleroderma. While Connetics never developed Relaxin as a treatment for scleroderma, they did shift their focus towards foam dermatology products, which Wiggans recognized as an underserved market. Before the company was sold in 2006, Wiggans helped grow Connetics to four hundred employees and two hundred million dollars in revenue.

Not ready to retire, Wiggans began looking for his next venture. He was invited to join the board of Peplin Operation Pty Ltd., where he was the chairman and then CEO for one year. He also pursued a political career in his home state of Kansas, inspired by his years working to lobby for biotechnology in Washington, DC. After an unsuccessful campaign for governor, Wiggans returned to California, where he was invited by Bay City Capital to look for new opportunities. There, he works as an operational company manager with Gene Bauer, focusing on serving dermatologists. Wiggans has also worked with the Biotechnology Institute and the BioGENEius program.

## INTERVIEWER

**Mark Jones** holds a PhD in history, philosophy, and social studies of science from the University of California, San Diego. He is the former director of research at the Life Sciences Foundation and executive editor of LSF Magazine. He has served in numerous academic posts, and is completing the definitive account of the origins of the biotechnology industry, entitled *Translating Life*, for Harvard University Press.

## ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

Staff of the Life Sciences Foundation conducted this interview, which became a part of our collections upon the merger of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the Life Sciences Foundation into the Science History Institute in 2018. The Center for Oral History at the Science History Institute edited and formatted this transcript to match our style guide, but as noted, Science History Institute staff members did not conduct the interview.

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Did not want to retire. Met wife at Soreno. Wife received nursing degree and MBA. Invited to join board at Peplin Operation Pty Ltd. Was chairman of board and then CEO for one year. Bought by LEO Pharma. Interest in moving back to Kansas for political career. Career lobbying for biotechnology in Washington, DC. Aspired for offices like governor or senator. Ran as Democrat. Dislike of political fundraising. Return to California. Invited to Bay City Capital to look for opportunities. Work with Gene Bauer. Focus on serving dermatology. Developing two acne products and one anti-inflammatory product. Working as operational company manager. Discussion of luck in career moves. Involvement with Biotechnonology Institute and BioGENEius program.