

# News Release



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## Tri-County Biological Science Center New Director



Charleston County's Public Safety Directorate has hired Tom Van Koughnett as the director for the new Tri-County Biological Science Center. Van Koughnett will be an integral part of the design/build process for the lab as well as creating standard operating procedures, hiring staff, and getting policies in place before the building is built. Prior to joining the County, Van Koughnett was instrumental in the implementation and accreditation of a new biology unit at the Oakland County Sheriff's Office in Michigan. He also served as the lead administrator for the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) program at the local level. Van Koughnett worked as a forensic scientist for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, and Michigan State Police, and was key in the accreditation process of a new biology unit in Florida.

"We are excited to announce Tom as our new director of our regional DNA lab. Tom's background as a forensic scientist and knowledge in the accreditation process of new labs will be critical to opening and running this lab," said Deputy County Administrator of Public Safety Eric Watson.

"I am eager to start building this DNA lab from the ground up and look forward to working with our regional partners to create a more efficient DNA processing system locally," said Van Koughnett.

Dorchester County Sheriff L.C. Knight has expressed his agency's excitement for the much-needed Tri-County Biological Science Center. "Now with the naming of the new director, Lowcountry agencies can look forward to the groundbreaking of the new facility." Sheriff Knight said, "We hope and expect the Biological Science Center to be very successful. It will assist all agencies in the Lowcountry by speeding the results of testing. The State Law Enforcement Division currently processes our DNA evidence collected from homicides, assaults, burglaries, sexual assaults, and other crimes. In addition, they process evidence for most other agencies in the state. The new lab will not only reduce the time agencies in the Lowcountry are waiting on results but will also ease some of the burden on the SLED lab. In addition to speeding up the process, this will also allow us to build a personal working relationship with the lab techs here in our backyard."

"Berkeley County's investment in the regional DNA lab is important for several reasons. When initiating a case, our officers will be able to process evidence faster with a quicker turnaround on results. This helps directly with the judicial process and the speed that we can adjudicate cases. Jail overcrowding and the expense for housing inmates are real concerns in our County. Nonviolent offenders staying weeks and months longer than they should is a significant cost to the taxpayer; and overcrowding leads to tough working conditions for our staff. We'd like to thank Charleston County for taking the lead on this project and to leadership in the Tri-County region for working together on behalf of all taxpayers to provide a solution in this critical area." -Berkeley County Supervisor Johnny Cribb

The Tri-County Biological Services Center will process criminal DNA. It is the result of a partnership with Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties, and will be located at 3765 Leeds Avenue, North Charleston. The nearly \$10 million project will include the construction of a 10,000 square foot building, purchase of equipment, and onboarding of staff. The design/build process is expected to begin in late 2022 and construction in early 2024. The lab is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2025. At that time, Van Koughnett will begin the nearly two-year accreditation process. The lab must receive accreditation before DNA can be processed.

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