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New Center Focuses on Improving Skills of Florida's Biotech Workforce

ALACHUA — Efforts to ensure Florida's booming biotechnology industry has the highly skilled workforce it needs to continue to grow has received a major boost thanks to a \$500,000 grant from Workforce Florida, Inc. to establish the Employ Florida Banner Center for Biotechnology at the University of Florida.

A key statewide focus of the center will be to build on existing curricula and create new courses to train workers currently employed in the industry who need to upgrade their skills and prepare people interested in careers in biotechnology for new, in-demand jobs. The University of Florida's major partners in this initiative are: Florida Community College at Jacksonville, Santa Fe Community College, Indian River Community College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and the International Society for Pharmaceutical Engineering.

The recent arrival and anticipated opening of branches of several prominent bioscience institutes including the Scripps Research Institute, Burnham Institute for Medical Research, Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies and SRI International has heightened the need for qualified technical workers who can support the research and development of new medical discoveries and their transition to the marketplace.

"Florida must be prepared to meet the challenges of our steadily growing high tech job market," said Gov. Jeb Bush. "To that end, we are broadening Florida's economic base by strategically investing in the expansion of high-skill, high-wage industries such as biotechnology. The work of the Employ Florida Banner Center for Biotechnology will greatly assist our goal of diversifying Florida's economy."

The Employ Florida Banner Center for Biotechnology marks the latest investment by Workforce Florida in this sector. Among the training and educational materials to be used by this center will be Web-based biotech curricula created in 2005 by a statewide

consortium that focuses on laboratory technology, biomanufacturing and regulatory affairs. The curricula were developed through a \$1.2 million grant from Workforce Florida. Additionally, in recent years Workforce Florida has awarded Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) and Quick Response Training (QRT) grants to life sciences firms such as Cordis Corp., Noven Pharmaceuticals and Regeneration Technologies, Inc. to train their employees.

“Our workforce system’s continuing investment in the biotechnology industry advances our goal of serving as a catalyst for economic development in Florida,” said Katherine Wilson, Chairman of Workforce Florida.

Wilson, along with other workforce, education, economic development and business leaders, gathered today at the University of Florida’s Center of Excellence for Regenerative Health Biotechnology, directed by Richard O. Snyder, to outline plans for the new Employ Florida Banner Center. It is housed within the university’s Center of Excellence, which includes a new \$10 million drug manufacturing facility, Florida Biologix™.

The Employ Florida Banner Center is a fitting complement to the Center of Excellence’s research, education, biopharmaceutical manufacturing and biotech career-outreach programs.

“UF and our partners in the Employ Florida Banner Center for Biotechnology are committed to doing our part to ensure our state has a strong pipeline of highly qualified people to meet current and future staffing demands,” said Win Phillips, the University of Florida’s Vice President for Research.

Florida’s biotechnology industry is expected to grow considerably once anticipated spin-offs and other businesses cluster around the new, big bioscience research institutes. The state, however, has long been home to a thriving biotechnology industry. In 2005, there were 85 biotech companies in Florida, according to Enterprise Florida, Inc. There were more than 300 companies in the related field of medical device manufacturing and design. The statewide average annual salary in 2005 for biotechnology was \$50,891 and \$49,973 for medical device manufacturing.

Bioscience businesses are seeking a range of personnel from laboratory technicians, who can help conduct experiments and manufacture drugs and devices, to professional, administrative, regulatory and other support staff.

“This is an exciting time for Florida’s bioscience industry,” said Russell Allen, President of BioFlorida, the statewide industry organization. “As this sector expands and transforms from a research and development industry to a high-growth manufacturing sector, we want to raise the level of training available so that Floridians are prepared to seize on the new career opportunities.”

The Employ Florida Banner Center for Biotechnology is part of a \$5.2 million strategic initiative to develop the state's workforce in key Florida industries. Banner Centers that focus on training in aviation and aerospace, manufacturing and financial services also were launched this year. Additional centers are being planned for industries including construction, energy, health care, homeland security and defense, information technology and logistics and distribution. The centers are part of the Employ Florida network of state and local workforce partners and services.

For more information on Employ Florida Banner Centers, please go to www.EmployFlorida.com.

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Workforce Florida, Inc., (WFI) is the state's chief workforce policy organization and principal architect in the efforts to meet the current and future workforce needs and challenges of Florida's businesses and citizens. WFI is a state partner, along with the Agency for Workforce Innovation, in the Employ Florida affiliate network of 24 business-led regional workforce boards and nearly 100 one-stop centers that provide employment solutions throughout Florida. Learn more about Florida's workforce resources and solutions at www.EmployFlorida.com.

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