

Workforce Florida, Inc.

Curtis Austin
President

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 23, 2007

CONTACTS:

Adriane Glenn Grant, Workforce Florida, Inc., 850.921.1122
Terrie Glover Ard, Moore Consulting Group, Inc., 850.224.0174
Carol Traynor, Valencia Community College, 407.582.1017

New Center Focuses on Expanding Training for Florida Health Care Professionals

ORLANDO — Florida now has another tool in its ongoing efforts to meet state demand for allied health and nursing professionals: the Employ Florida Banner Center for Health Sciences.

Workforce Florida, Inc. has awarded Valencia Community College \$500,000 to fund the new statewide initiative aimed at expanding training opportunities for entry-level and experienced health care workers. The Employ Florida Banner Center for Health Sciences is a joint program of Valencia and its major partners: Lake-Sumter Community College, Seminole Community College, University of Central Florida, Workforce Central Florida and the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission.

Today, state and local workforce and economic development leaders, education partners and health care industry leaders gathered at Valencia Community College to outline plans for the Employ Florida Banner Center for Health Sciences.

“Every day our state gains an additional 900 new residents. Along with these new Floridians come increased demands for quality health care services,” said Katherine E. Wilson, Chairman of Workforce Florida, prior to today’s kickoff event. “It is through joint partnerships such as this one with Workforce Florida, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, Workforce Central Florida and our education and business partners that we must seek innovative solutions to ensure these demands are met.

“Our health care workforce is one of the best in the nation. Increasing opportunities to attain the highest quality training for Florida health care professionals helps us maintain our state’s overall quality of life.”

- more -

The Employ Florida Banner Center for Health Sciences is part of a broader \$6.2 million initiative focused on developing the state's workforce in several key Florida industries. It is one of 10 new Employ Florida Banner Centers charged with cultivating partnerships among regional and statewide workforce, education, economic development and industry leaders to expand entry-level and advanced worker training in high-growth sectors including aviation and aerospace, biotechnology, construction, energy, financial services, homeland security and defense, logistics and distribution, and manufacturing.

The mission of these centers is consistent with Governor Charlie Crist's focus on economic development and particularly the growth of high-skill, high-wage jobs in Florida.

"Governor Crist has emphasized the importance of a highly skilled workforce to ensure Florida's continued economic prosperity," said Monesia T. Brown, Director of the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI). "We realize that in order to do this we must prepare our workforce. With our partners, Workforce Florida and Valencia Community College, this Banner Center will help us accomplish the Governor's goal and address the critical need for registered nurses and allied health professionals within Florida's health services industry."

Valencia Community College and its partners are off to fast start with the Employ Florida Banner Center for Health Sciences. By this summer, the center will develop curricula for three new advanced certifications preparing participants who have an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree in a health care field for advanced certification in Magnetic Resonance Imaging/Radiography, Computed Tomography/Radiography or Polysomnography/Respiratory Therapy. These programs will be offered at Valencia, but all new curricula will be portable, allowing it to be duplicated at other educational institutions throughout the state. The Employ Florida Banner Center also is transforming a paramedic course at Valencia Community College to an online format to meet increasing demand for Web-based training.

Also in its first year, the program will support training and recruitment to help address Florida's critical nursing shortage. Among its initial offerings in nursing, the Employ Florida Banner Center will provide training in simulation labs at Valencia Community College and Lake-Sumter Community College for about 40 incumbent workers, enroll about 250 people in the Orlando-area in entry-level nursing programs and offer a "boot camp" for about three dozen nursing faculty members. The Employ Florida Banner Center also is a major participant in the May Florida Nursing Summit organized by Valencia Community College.

"Valencia has a long tradition of engaging regional health care providers in an effort to grow and strengthen the pool of skilled workers," said Valencia President Dr. Sanford Shugart. "The Banner Center will allow us to extend resources and educational opportunities across the state, and to better serve our students right here at home with advanced training and professional development."

Florida's health care industry will play a major role in shaping training developed by this center through focus groups and a statewide panel of advisers. Among the industry representatives serving on the Advisory Council are executives from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, HCA Healthcare, Health Central, Florida Association for Homes and Services for the Aging, Florida Hospital, Florida Hospital Association, Florida Health Care Association, Orlando Regional Healthcare and Osceola Regional Medical Center.

“By boosting opportunities for training in the nursing and allied health fields, this Banner Center will aid the recruitment and retention of skilled health care professionals throughout Florida,” said Martha DeCastro, Vice President of Nursing for the Florida Hospital Association. “We applaud this investment in Florida’s future and are proud to be part of this initiative.”

All of the Employ Florida Banner Centers are part of the Employ Florida network of state and local workforce partners and workforce development services and programs. For more information on Employ Florida Banner Centers, please go to www.EmployFlorida.com.

###

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.

Workforce Florida is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. All voice telephone numbers on this document may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment via the Florida Relay Service at 711.