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Workforce Florida launches first Employ Florida Banner Center

Aerospace Resource Center to focus on training needs of aviation and aerospace companies

JACKSONVILLE — With a \$1.2 million grant from Workforce Florida, Inc., the Aerospace Resource Center, launched today at the Cecil Commerce Center, is the first in a series of new statewide initiatives to ensure Florida's workforce is trained to meet the current and future needs of industries vital to the state's economy.

The Aerospace Resource Center is a program of Florida Community College at Jacksonville and Brevard Community College in Cocoa. It targets the continuing demand for skilled workers by Florida's aviation and aerospace companies. The grant is the largest single award by Workforce Florida, Inc. for the establishment of statewide Employ Florida Banner Centers focused on workforce development in the aviation and aerospace, biotechnology, manufacturing and financial services industries.

"Florida's competitive edge for economic growth depends on the state's ability to deliver a highly skilled workforce," said Governor Jeb Bush. "The industry focus of Employ Florida Banner Centers reflects our commitment to diversifying the state's economic base. These centers also serve as a catalyst for improving the quality of jobs in Florida."

Banner Centers are a strategic goal of Workforce Florida to provide relevant skills training for workers in growth industries, which is a major component of the state's economic development plan. The Aerospace Resource Center also fulfills a recommendation this year by the Governor's Commission on the Future of Space and Aeronautics in Florida that called for integrating space and aeronautics companies' needs into state workforce development programs.

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In 2004, the space, aeronautics and aviation industries accounted for nearly 148,000 jobs and more than \$7 billion in wages in Florida.

The Aerospace Resource Center's mission is to craft rigorous and timely curricula to address technological advances and the changing workforce skills needs of aerospace and aviation businesses; to provide training; to promote economic development in both sectors; and to serve as a clearinghouse for companies seeking to identify training providers throughout Florida. The center will develop curricula for up to 10 entry-level and advanced courses in subjects identified as high-need areas by industry advisers and train at least 200 workers by January. But that's not all.

"Another component of these centers involves working with regional workforce boards as well as secondary and postsecondary educational institutions so the pipeline for educating and training new talent remains strong," said Katherine E. Wilson, Chairman of Workforce Florida. "With highly skilled jobs come higher wages and a better quality of life. The Aerospace Resource Center, like other Employ Florida Banner Centers, will ensure our state meets not only the current demands of key industries, but also their future workforce needs."

Florida aviation and aerospace companies routinely cite "lack of a qualified workforce" as a principal barrier to growth in industry surveys, according to Marshall Heard, Chairman of the Florida Aviation Aerospace Alliance, a nonprofit statewide association.

"A successful future for the state's aerospace sector is directly linked to meeting the demand for a qualified workforce," said Heard. "This first Banner Center provides us with a means to satisfy this demand."

The Aerospace Resource Center offers Florida Community College at Jacksonville and Brevard Community College an opportunity to build on their existing highly regarded offerings in aviation and aerospace respectively. Brevard Community College's Spaceport Center provides degree and continuing professional education programs. Florida Community College at Jacksonville offers degree and certificate programs through its Aviation Center of Excellence, which houses the Aerospace Resource Center.

"We're proud to be the home of the first Employ Florida Banner Center," said Dr. Steven Wallace, President of Florida Community College at Jacksonville. "We want the approximately 1,700 Florida companies involved in aviation and aerospace to know the Aerospace Resource Center is open for business to assist them with their workforce development needs. We also want students, people searching for new careers or professionals seeking a career change to consider the possibilities available in aerospace."

Dr. Thomas Gamble, President of Brevard Community College, said the Aerospace Resource Center's timing is ideal given the challenges and opportunities presented by recent developments in aviation and aerospace.

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“There are significant changes under way in both industries ranging from advances in personal aviation such as very light jets to the imminent end of the shuttle era,” said Gamble. “Florida’s ability to fully capitalize on such opportunities depends greatly on the quality of its workforce. We are delighted to work with Florida Community College at Jacksonville to develop the Aerospace Resource Center as a nexus for the aviation and aerospace industries in Florida.”

In addition to Workforce Florida’s \$1.2 million, one-year award to create the Aerospace Resource Center, the Florida Legislature approved an additional \$4 million in the 2006 legislative session to create up to seven additional centers. Of the \$4 million, Workforce Florida recently awarded \$1.5 million in individual \$500,000 grants to:

- Hillsborough Community College (manufacturing)
- Miami Dade College (financial services)
- University of Florida (biotechnology)

All Employ Florida Banner Center grants are renewable. Workforce Florida and the Agency for Workforce Innovation are currently reviewing proposals for additional new Employ Florida Banner Centers to address workforce development needs in areas including information technology, homeland security and defense and health care.

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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