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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 23, 2006

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Workforce Florida launches first of four new Employ Florida Banner Centers

Initiatives aim to meet workforce development demands of targeted Florida industries

JACKSONVILLE — Workforce Florida, Inc. today launched 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.

Workforce Florida is awarding grants totaling up to \$5.2 million to establish Employ Florida Banner Centers focused on workforce development in aviation and aerospace, life sciences, financial services, information technology and manufacturing. Today's kickoff was for the Aerospace Resource Center, a program of Florida Community College at Jacksonville and Brevard Community College, which received a \$1.2 million grant. Also receiving grants of \$500,000 each are: Hillsborough Community College, Miami Dade College and the University of Florida.

The 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.

"Florida's competitive edge for economic growth depends on the state's ability to deliver a highly skilled workforce," Governor Jeb Bush said prior to today's launch event. "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."

Each center is charged with crafting rigorous curricula to address technological advances and changing workforce skills needs; providing industry training; promoting economic development; and serving as a clearinghouse for companies seeking to identify training providers throughout Florida. 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. Employ Florida Banner Centers will ensure our state meets not only the current demands of key industries, but also their future workforce needs.”

Hillsborough Community College's grant will be used to create a Banner Center focused on the workforce development needs of Florida manufacturing companies. Miami Dade College will concentrate on financial services. The University of Florida's initiative will address the anticipated increase in demand for workers skilled in biotechnology.

At today's launch, Workforce Florida and community college officials were joined by business leaders from the aviation and aerospace industries at Cecil Commerce Center to outline plans for the Aerospace Resource Center. It is housed within Florida Community College at Jacksonville's Aviation Center of Excellence. In 2004, the space, aeronautics and aviation industries accounted for nearly 148,000 jobs and more than \$7 billion in wages in Florida.

“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,” Dr. Thomas Gamble, President of Brevard Community College in Cocoa, said prior to the Aerospace Resource Center kickoff. “Florida's ability to fully capitalize on such opportunities depends greatly on the quality of its workforce.”

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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