



Workforce Florida, Inc.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 17, 2006

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New Center Focuses on Improving Manufacturing Employees' Skills

With a \$500,000 grant from Workforce Florida, five community colleges launch the Employ Florida Banner Center for Manufacturing

TAMPA — Efforts to ensure the skills of Florida workers are as modern as the microchips, metals and medical devices they make every day just got a major boost thanks to a \$500,000 grant from Workforce Florida, Inc. and a partnership of five of the state's 28 community colleges.

Led by Hillsborough Community College, a consortium that includes Florida Community College at Jacksonville, Manatee Community College, Pasco-Hernando Community College and Polk Community College has launched the Employ Florida Banner Center for Manufacturing.

On Tuesday, the college partners and state workforce system and business leaders, among others, gathered at TAW Custom Equipment, a division of Tampa Armature Works, Inc., to outline plans for the statewide initiative aimed at improving the skills of entry-level and advanced manufacturing employees.

"Florida's manufacturing industry is a key driver of the state's robust economy," said Katherine E. Wilson, Chairman of Workforce Florida, Inc. "In order to remain globally competitive, Florida manufacturers must have a highly skilled workforce. This new Employ Florida Banner Center demonstrates the state's commitment to advance the industry's competitiveness by better positioning it to meet demand for the high-quality products made here."

Florida's manufacturing sector is very diverse. There are about 16,500 manufacturers that make everything from fertilizer, contact lenses and orange juice to aircraft parts, circuit boards, boats and more. Through primarily small businesses, the industry employs almost 400,000 people with an average annual salary of about \$43,400.

Based at Hillsborough Community College's Brandon campus, the Employ Florida Banner Center is poised to become one of the first programs in the U.S. to develop curricula to prepare students, workers and prospective employees for the new national certification in manufacturing. Like the certification, the new curricula will focus on knowledge and training in four areas: quality assurance, maintenance awareness, manufacturing processes and safety. All of the college partners will become certified test centers for the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council's Production Technician Certification. The Employ Florida Banner Center also will take the lead in creating, coordinating and providing skills upgrade training based on needs identified by Florida manufacturers.

“This is a total team effort,” said Hillsborough Community College President Dr. Gwendolyn Stephenson. “Everyone involved in the Employ Florida Banner Center recognizes the value of just-in-time training for current and future manufacturing employees to make sure Florida’s workers are the best in the nation.”

The Employ Florida Banner Center will complement Hillsborough Community College’s federally funded Florida-Advanced Technological Education (FL-ATE) Center for Manufacturing Education. That program focuses on updating community college curricula for degrees in manufacturing and related technologies, faculty development, and outreach to high school students that encourages them to consider pursuing higher education and careers in science, mathematics, engineering and manufacturing.

For manufacturers, such as Tropicana Products in Bradenton, this new resource for industry-specific worker training is welcome news. Like many companies, Tropicana is preparing for a challenge as employees approach retirement while also balancing its current need for qualified workers in the tight labor market. Tropicana has been a major supporter of the creation of a manufacturing Banner Center.

“The renewed interest in updated technical educational pathways will provide Florida manufacturers with a well-trained, skilled workforce for the future,” said Mike Haycock, Tropicana’s Vice President of Chilled Supply Chain. “That ultimately will mean better lives for Florida families.”

Also backing the Banner Center is TAW Custom Equipment, which hosted Tuesday’s event at its new facility. Among other things, the company makes high- and low-voltage switchgear for industrial clients and power distribution equipment used by the U.S. military.

The Employ Florida Banner Center for Manufacturing is part of a \$5.2 million strategic initiative of the state workforce system to meet the employee-training needs of industries that help diversify the state economy. A center focused on skills for aviation and aerospace workers has opened at Florida Community College at Jacksonville. Another focused on biotechnology workers’ skills is starting up at the University of Florida. A fourth Employ Florida Banner Center in financial services is planned for Miami Dade College. These 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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