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Gainesville Area Receives National Recognition As Region Of Excellence

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for a Competitive Workforce has awarded the greater Gainesville area, including Alachua & Bradford Counties, the 2009 Region of Excellence Award.

The partnerships between the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, Council for Economic Outreach, North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce and FloridaWorks were recognized for taking an innovative industry approach to integrating multiple organizations that are committed to the economic well-being of Alachua and Bradford Counties.

Recent successes from this collaborative TEAM (Targeted Economic Achievement Machine) have led to one of the lowest job loss rates of any area in the state of Florida during this recession, more than 200 new jobs generated in the height of the recession, one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state and a community at the forefront of Green Technology, Biotechnology and Health Sciences training.

“Businesses looking to grow or expand in our community can find all the resources to meet their needs under one roof at the Chamber. We have an advanced relationship with economic development and workforce that has allowed us to put special emphasis on business recruitment and training needs in order to keep our economy thriving,” said Brent Christensen, Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce president.

Criteria for the Region of Excellence award includes, but is not limited to:

- A program dedicated to improving the delivery of education and training at the Pre-K, K-12, postsecondary or adult workforce levels.
- A partnership involving an education institution dedicated to improving the bridge from education to employment.
- An advocacy campaign which has positively influenced public policy
- An awareness campaign which has made a significant impact on the public perception of an industry, its opportunities, or the bridge from education to employment.

Future TEAM plans include a three-pronged approach to create a world class workforce. The elements of this strategy include: engaging the business community in a plan to reduce costs due to poverty, crime prevention and dropout rates, creating a new way of educating with industry leading program design (i.e. internships, apprenticeships and mentoring) in addition to traditional schooling and fostering entrepreneurship at the low end of the socio-economic spectrum to incubate prosperity for those in poverty just as new businesses are incubated to achieve venture capital funding.

The principals of the TEAM were supported by the visions of Angela Pate, executive director of FloridaWorks.

“It is the belief that opportunity is every individual’s right that unites our TEAM of economic and workforce developers, educators, government and our business community. Excellence must be envisioned before it can be attained. Our goal is to be a community with innovation as our primary product and export. The Region of Excellence award is recognition from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that we are succeeding,” said Pate.

The TEAM was activated in 2005 and its value became evident when FloridaWorks received \$580,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for a Summer Youth Program. Since that first award, they have received an additional \$1.5 million to train for Healthcare and Green Technology industries. During the summer of 2009 FloridaWorks partnered with Santa Fe College, The School Board of Alachua County, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the Community Weatherization Coalition and Alachua County to target and train area youth and develop curriculum to prepare them for future in-demand jobs.

Through this program, at-risk youth were trained in solar panel installation, digital media, green building practices and energy auditing. This curriculum could not have been developed so quickly without all TEAM partners in close collaboration.

“Our leadership has a level of trust that allows us to have frank discussions on the issues that our employers, job seekers and students face and develop the best strategic approach to address challenges and opportunities utilizing our respective strengths and resources,” said Jackson Sasser, Santa Fe College president.

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