

UF INNOVATION STATION

Former Sun Hydraulics CEO to lead UF station

Staff report

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A very familiar face in the Southwest Florida manufacturing scene has been hired as the regional director of the new UF Innovation Station Sarasota County.

Allen "Al" Carlson, who retired March 31 as CEO of Sun Hydraulics Corp., will work with the University of Florida's Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering to strengthen economic and workforce development opportunities in Southwest Florida.



Allen "Al" Carlson, who just retired as CEO of Sun Hydraulics Corp., has been hired as the regional director of the new UF Innovation Station Sarasota County in Sarasota. HERALD-TRIBUNE ARCHIVE

The UF station mirrors somewhat the agricultural extension offices that the major land-grant and research university has around Florida, only in this case it's an engineering extension office.

"Mr. Carlson has extensive experience in running a successful engineering and manufacturing company," Sarasota County administrator Tom Harmer said. "His background in workforce development, combined with his knowledge of our local community, will allow him to hit the ground running."

The UF Innovation Station is the first physical extension office of the Florida Engineering Experiment Station, or FLEXStation — an arm of the Wertheim College dedicated to strengthening Florida's role in the global innovation economy.

Carlson will be based in Sarasota and will work closely with the leadership team at UF, the university said.

For 16 years, Carlson served as president and CEO of Sun, one of the largest Nasdaq-listed companies in Southwest Florida. Sun was founded in Sarasota County.

Carlson has more than 40 years experience in the fluid-power industry and is active on the boards of Sun, Tervis Tumbler and Mayville Engineering Co. Inc. He also is a regent at the Milwaukee School of Engineering and serves on local and regional boards for Junior Achievement. Carlson is a graduate of the Milwaukee School of Engineering and the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School.

"The University of Florida's engineering college is a highly acclaimed academic institution that focuses on leadership and innovation," Carlson said. "I am pleased to become a part of UF's Innovation Station and to help increase and improve the Sarasota region's technical talent pipeline and future economic development. This initiative is important for both established companies, like Sun Hydraulics, and also for startups that need interns, technicians and degreed engineers."

Carlson said he plans to expand the UF Innovation Station Sarasota County staff to

include program coordinators focused on industry, workforce development and educational collaboration programs.

In addition to building student talent pipelines with companies in the region and through the State College of Florida, “Carlson will lead efforts to engage the entrepreneurial community with UF technology, link local companies to student design projects and prototype development programs, and build collaborations with the region's existing academic institutions. His primary responsibility is to drive economic impact,” UF administrators said.

“Al Carlson has played a key role in creating the Sarasota region's innovation ecosystem for the past 20 years,” said Cammy Abernathy, dean of the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering. “He also has a passion for providing opportunities for the next generation. We couldn't ask for a better person to lead this initiative.”

The station was launched with public and private funding, including philanthropic support from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation.

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