Sarasota County lands academic and industry connection with UF

By John Hielscher
Published: Thursday, March 17, 2016 at 7:10 a.m.

In a major coup for Southwest Florida’s academic and economic development reputation, the University of Florida’s College of Engineering will set up an outreach center here to steer more local students into its program.

The “University of Florida Innovation Station” will support and direct students into the right classes and internships to graduate with a valuable UF engineering degree — and hopefully bring their skills back home to the region.

Funded by public and private dollars, UF’s initial physical presence here will not be large, but school officials and regional business leaders believe it will have a big impact.

“It’s not a magic wand, but it gives us a very different asset to compete for and grow innovation-based businesses,” said Mark Huey, president of the Economic Development Corp. of Sarasota County. “We are trying to spread our footprint and bring innovation out to the local business communities and accelerate growth.”

The Sarasota County Commission is scheduled on Friday to vote on approving $1 million in funding over five years for the program. The university has earmarked more than $1 million as well.

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation is donating $980,000 over five years to help launch the program, focusing on the educational component in local schools, said president/CEO Teri Hansen.

One program involves outreach in kindergarten through 12th-grade schools to help students prepare for college through science, technology, engineering and math — the STEM topics.

Those students can then attend State College of Florida for up to their first two years of course work and, if successful, automatically enroll in the UF engineering school.

“It helps in particular the disadvantaged students, those who might be first-time college ready in their family,” Hansen said. “Many times they turn away from UF because of student limits and costs. By staying the first two years at SCF, expenses are greatly reduced and they are able to intern at local companies, and then go off and get their degrees and then return to this market.”

Some SCF students will be able to transfer to UF in less than two years. The local program will start with 10 students who will take calculus, physics, chemistry and other classes at SCF’s Venice campus starting in fall 2017, according to president Carol Probstfeld.
In addition, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation has committed $63,000 to help those students earn a minor in engineering entrepreneurship degree at UF to develop skills to lead or launch their own companies.

The Innovation Station has been quietly in the works for more than a year.

The Sarasota EDC gathered the various stakeholders to collaborate on what Huey calls a “multi-faceted economic development initiative” to bring the global innovation economy to the region.

“The goal is to have these engineering students launching their entrepreneurial ventures here,” Huey said. “It’s ambitious, but it is working for some local early-stage companies.”

For the University of Florida, the Sarasota venture will bring more students into its 9,000-student engineering program to meet the state’s growing demand.

“Technology today is all about the talent pipeline,” said Cammy Abernathy, deal of the UF College of Engineering. “Everyone is trying to compete for the top engineers and scientists.”

College graduates with engineering degrees are starting jobs at an average salary of $64,901, the top for any college-degree field, according to a new study.

The Innovation Station will show local students how to get there, Hansen says.

“If you don’t know what classes to take, you don’t have anybody helping you see what the opportunities are, you are not likely to choose college, let alone choose engineering school,” she said. “This will really help those students to have someone show them that path and help them walk through it.”

**Interested?**

The Sarasota County Commission is scheduled to consider the agreement with the University of Florida at a 9 a.m. meeting Friday at the County Administration Building, 1660 Ringling Blvd.

**Coming Sunday**

UF is seeking to expand its academic and research reach and has chosen Sarasota County for the first leg of that effort. It will benefit Southwest Florida engineering students who will be able to get a fast-track into UF’s respected College of Engineering and local companies who will be able to tap UF’s research and possibly more students and graduates. The Herald-Tribune brings you students who have benefited from a similar partnership in Gainesville and explains what the model might be for this eventually huge expansion of the university into the lives of residents around the state.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sarasota County OKs $1 million for UF 'Innovation Station'

Commissioners unanimously approve outreach program with College of Engineering

By John Hielscher
Published: Friday, March 18, 2016 at 1:11 p.m.

Backing a potential “game changer” for economic development, the Sarasota County Commission approved $1 million in seed money Friday to start an outreach program with the University of Florida’s College of Engineering.

The “Innovation Station Sarasota County” will be an engineering tech center designed to encourage local students into UF’s engineering program, provide internships and support start-up businesses.

The county will draw money from its economic development incentive fund to finance the program over five years, as long as performance goals are achieved.

Others also are funding the Innovation Station. UF will provide $1 million, the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation of Sarasota has pledged $980,000, and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation has earmarked $63,000.

“We believe this will be a game changer in terms of the economic impact that the University of Florida and this partnership with Sarasota County and many others will have on our community,” said Jeff Maultsby, the county's director of business and economic development.

The commissioners voted unanimously for the funding at a brief special meeting, with several embracing the first-of-its kind program.

Chairman Alan Maio, a former owner of an engineering business, said he often recruited employees from the UF school.

“My old firm is packed solid with UF engineering graduates and master's graduates,” he said.

Commissioner Charles Hines said the program will further Sarasota County's efforts to diversify its economy beyond tourism.

“This is an incredible piece of that puzzle that we are always trying to work on,” he said.

The project, code named “Big Bang,” has been quietly in the works for about 18 months under the Economic Development Corp. of Sarasota County. Commissioner Christine Robinson, who with other commissioners was informed of progress along the way, said the university took its time deciding where to locate the program.
“They put us through a lot of vetting, and we passed the test,” Robinson said.

Trey Lauderdale, a UF engineering graduate and CEO of Sarasota-based Voalte, was credited for his work to attract the program here.

“We always make bold statements how we want to be the next Silicon Valley or Boulder, today was a huge step in that direction,” he said after the meeting.

EDC president Mark Huey said the initiative will impact economic development in the region for years to come.

“The station's plans anticipate support for tech start-up, high growth and established companies,” Huey said. “It will serve as a ‘concierge’ service for our existing tech businesses to access the college's innovation assets of students, faculty, research, intellectual property and other resources. The station will also better position the county to attract innovation economy businesses.”

The Innovation Station staff will include a director, a programs coordinator and a workforce programs coordinator, according to the county's grant agreement. It will work out of up to 1,500 square feet of office space at a location that the university will select.

One program will involve outreach in kindergarten through 12th grade schools to help students prepare for college through science, technology, engineering and math — the STEM topics.

Those students can then attend State College of Florida for up to their first two years of course work and, if successful, automatically enroll in the UF engineering school.

Some SCF students will be able to transfer to UF in less than two years. The local program will start with 10 students who will take calculus, physics, chemistry and other classes at SCF's Venice campus starting in fall 2017, according to president Carol Probstfeld.

**Coming Sunday:**

UF is seeking to expand its academic and research reach and has chosen Sarasota County for the first leg of that effort. It will benefit Southwest Florida engineering students who will be able to get a fast-track into UF's respected College of Engineering, and local companies that will be able to tap UF's research and, possibly, more students and graduates. The Herald-Tribune brings you students who have benefited from a similar partnership in Gainesville, and explains what the model might be for this expansion of the university into the lives of residents around the state.

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The scene at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport was proof that we're a multicultural America.

Oh, sure, despite our advanced degrees and advanced sense of self-worth, we can't distinguish premium boarding from the global whack-a-mole line.

But on St. Patrick's Day at ATL (where green sadly described the turkey sandwich to go), travelers showed their true colors without any of the violence of a presidential primary.

There was the young lady in stylish heels and an orange Virginia T-shirt.

The muscular guy toting a 300 lb. backpack looked all business with an Oklahoma hat tucked squarely on his boulder of a head.

And the younger dude with the scruffy beard showed that a too-snug Colorado T-shirt is the new black in hipster wear.

March Madness is like low humidity. We embrace it readily, knowing this too shall disappear much like traffic on South Tamiami Trail in August.

The Super Bowl and NCAA college basketball tournament are the two events that connect ardent sports fans with those who think ESPN is a misspelled acronym. Anyone call fill out a bracket, and your chances of picking a winner are better than buying lottery tickets.

There is a rhythm to the tournament.

The opening two rounds are for idealists and dreamers, where eggheads prove that they're jocks at heart. No matter if you're mighty Kansas or Central Northern Teachers Tech, if you have a T-shirt with a logo, you're part of the tribe.

Most brackets are busted by the second week of tournament play, which is when the favorites prevail. But the tournament's appeal remains pure American in that we pull for the home team and also root for the underdogs.

You can use the bracket approach to figure the odds on local issues with hometown followings:

**University of Florida 'Innovation Station':** What an exciting project. The University of Florida's College of Engineering will establish a physical presence in Sarasota in an effort to connect more local students with their program. This project will start small but has all the right connections to strengthen Sarasota-Manatee as a tech and learning hub. Commitments from the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, the Economic Development Corp. of Sarasota County, the county and other key leaders shows the strategic thinking that went into this ambitious plan. This is a … Final Four contender.
**Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport:** Don't fret because a JetBlue flight from SRQ to JFK is going seasonal. Have you been to the airport lately? Flights are packed, and improvements are ongoing. Most of my recent flights have gone through SRQ because of convenience and good fares. You also have to appreciate the experience that travelers have when they land in Sarasota. The banners welcoming Orioles fans show SRQ is paying attention to visitors. Tampa always will offer more flight options because size matters, but the hassle of dealing with traffic congestion and TPA construction make SRQ worth a look. It’s our airport, it's well-managed and it's a ... Sweet Sixteen pick.

**Venice roundabout:** What a celebration for I-told-you-so fans. The roundabout has been the epicenter of accident claims and local derision. Let's see what changes are made to make it fender friendly. But with more roundabouts planned, we know the local sentiment ... First Round flop.

Treat my picks much like that alleged turkey sandwich. Trash cans exist to be filled.

Now, which line am I in, and why is that guy wearing a T-shirt with no logo?

— Bill Church can be contacted at bill.church@heraldtribune.com or 941-361-4991. Follow him on Twitter @BillChurchMedia.

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With 'Innovation Station,' UF tapping talent

By Michael Pollick
GateHouse Media Services
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A partnership between the University of Florida, Sarasota County government, economic developers and two of Southwest Florida’s foundations is aimed at slowing down the region’s brain drain — in which local students, particularly those who have learned valuable skills in college, such as computer programming or engineering, are recruited out of the state — and providing a UF-driven shot in the arm to up-and-coming companies in desirable industries.

UF’s College of Engineering, well-endowed and feeling its muscles, is establishing a first-of-its-kind outreach center in Sarasota, called the “University of Florida Innovation Station.”

While the physical presence in Sarasota will be small — three or four staffers in an office — university officials and regional leaders are expecting the impact to be large.

The program means the establishment of a “concierge service” for startup, growing and established companies to tap the UF College of Engineering’s students, faculty, intellectual property and other resources, says Mark Huey, president of the Economic Development Corp. of Sarasota County, who spearheaded the effort to land the station for more than a year.

It also means local students will get a better chance to graduate with a valuable UF engineering degree. By tying together the region’s employers with students, the program will seek to beef up engineering internships closer to home, leading to stronger local job offers.

The Innovation Station also will work with educators in Sarasota and Manatee counties to help them enhance their kindergarten through high school offerings in science, technology, engineering and math — the so-called STEM topics.

For Southwest Florida’s college-bound students, the payoff for lucky participants is that they will be able to use State College of Florida to become card-carrying University of Florida engineering students after as little as one semester at the local college. For starters, there will only be 10 of them, and they will begin taking calculus, physics, chemistry and differential equations at the Venice campus of SCF in fall 2017, president Carol Probstfeld said.

At Santa Fe College in Gainesville, where the UF College of Engineering pioneered this part of the program, about 75 Gator engineers-to-be will start next fall.

If the UF Innovation Station follows the path of UF@SantaFe, those involved agreed, the program could also be expanded to include other colleges. Starting in the fall, two years after the engineering option began, Santa Fe began taking in UF applicants.
whose preference was the College of Design, Construction and Planning. So on top of the many kinds of engineers that could graduate this way, that one additional option opens the door for future architects, interior designers, planners and construction managers.

The Southwest Florida version “is going to take off and ramp up quickly,” said Allen Carlson, CEO of Sun Hydraulics Corp., the Sarasota-based maker of screw-in hydraulic cartridge valves and manifolds and one of the region’s premier industrial players.

The Sarasota County Commission has approved $1 million in funding over five years for the program. The university has earmarked more than $1 million as well.

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation is donating $980,000 over five years to help launch the program, focusing on the educational component in local schools, said president/CEO Teri Hansen.

“If you don’t know what classes to take, you don’t have anybody helping you see what the opportunities are, you are not likely to choose college, let alone choose engineering school,” Hansen said. “This will really help those students to have someone show them that path and help them walk through it.”

In addition, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation has committed $63,000 to help those students earn a minor in the engineering entrepreneurship degree at UF to develop skills to lead or launch their own companies, ideally here in Southwest Florida.

The genesis

The Innovation Station has been in the works for more than a year.

People like Carlson, whose company is one of the largest industrial employers on the west coast of Florida, along with the region’s educators and economic development teams, have been on the inside track.

Carlson, an industrial engineer as well as an executive, is an active participant in the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce push for more STEM in public schools. He sees the new path to becoming a Gator engineer as a valuable way of gaining new recruits.

“We hire 20 to 25 kids every summer, but there are very few who are actually home grown,” Carlson said. “Say they are from Chicago or Cleveland. They go back home.”

“So I would like to have these local kids going through STEM training here, go to some good engineering school and come back here and work for Sun Hydraulics, PGT, Tervis.”

“Part of the challenge is, we’ve got a whole bunch of kids rolling out of a STEM curriculum. Where do they go if they are interested in college?” Carlson asked rhetorically. “UF is one of the best schools, but it is tough to get in, and it is expensive. I think this will grow even faster than Santa Fe. There is a huge demand for college-level technical education in Sarasota.”

For UF, the primary goal is to allow more students to get through the engineering gate to meet the state’s growing needs.

“Technology today is all about the talent pipeline,” said Cammy Abernathy, dean of the UF College of Engineering, with its 9,000-plus student enrollment. “Everyone is trying to compete for the top engineers and scientists.”
Abernathy sees the SCF connection as a useful side road around what has become a bottleneck — the need for all UF engineering students to make it through a series of required core courses: calculus 1, 2 and 3; physics 1 and 2; chemistry 1; and differential equations.

The benefits

The EDC, under Huey, brought together the stakeholders to collaborate on what he calls a “multifaceted economic development initiative” to bring the global innovation economy to the region.

“The goal is to have these engineering students launching their entrepreneurial ventures here,” Huey said. “It's ambitious, but it is working for some local early-stage companies.”

Besides UF, the stakeholders included large employers like Sun and PGT Inc., the Venice-based hurricane-resistant window and door maker, and the region's existing educational institutions, from Ringling College of Art & Design to New College.

The UF College of Engineering is leading the way in what the university administrators say is likely to be a statewide chain of outreach centers such as the one in Sarasota, geared toward helping industrial employers cultivate and hire the talent they need to grow, while helping more students get into tough-to-crack UF, with its promise of fulfilling and well-paid work.

“This isn't going to be the last of our extension offices,” Abernathy told the Herald-Tribune. “This is going to be the first.”

From the point of view of aiding the state’s industry and creating prosperous workers, the UF College of Engineering is a logical place to start.

Fresh college grads with engineering degrees will command an average starting salary of $64,901 this spring, the highest for any college-degree career field, according to a recently released annual survey of more than 200 employer members of the national Association of Colleges and Employers.

The second-best starting salary — $61,321 — fell to students graduating with degrees in computer science.

The UF College of Engineering gets a piece of that action, too, through two of its nine departments: Computer & Information Science & Engineering and Electrical and Computer Engineering.

The college covers a wide range of other disciplines as well: biological engineering, biomedical engineering, chemical engineering, industrial and systems engineering, material science and mechanical and aerospace engineering.

Land-grant status

University of Florida administrators, starting with the engineer who became president of the university one year ago, Kent Fuchs (pronounced “fox”), is invoking the university's land-grant status as a rationale for expanding across the state.

Fuchs, one year into his tenure at UF, made it clear during a speech in December that he and his trustees would extend that concept of land-grant university to include a lot more than agriculture.

“We often think of the land-grant mission as the sole domain of our beloved IFAS,” Fuchs said in his inaugural address, referring to the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. “It’s time, I believe, for UF to be known as a leader in
embracing a comprehensive land-grant mission across all its colleges."

“We will continue to invest in and enhance our impact on Florida’s incredible agriculture industry, from farming to forestry. But just as our 13 research and education centers and extension facilities in all 67 counties are supporting robust agriculture and healthy and resilient cities, so our 16 colleges share in the land-grant mission, both rural and urban. From engineering to medicine to the arts and humanities, we will expand our reach and impact on society throughout an urbanizing state and world.”

Also setting the stage for the UF College Engineering to take a leading role in this agenda for expansion is a recent donation that is one of the largest in UF’s 105-year history.

Dr. Herbert Wertheim, a Miami optometrist and UF engineering grad, invented the eyeglass tints that block ultraviolet rays. Now in his late 70s, Wertheim and his family in September pledged $50 million to the College of Engineering.

The college already has changed its name to the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering, and plans to add an 80,000-square-foot Engineering Innovation building, which will also be named in Wertheim’s honor.

The intro

Trey Lauderdale, chief executive of Voalte, a fast-growing Sarasota hospital-communications provider, gets credit for putting Sarasota on Dean Abernathy’s mental map.

“One of our alums had started a company down there, Trey Lauderdale, and he had been telling me, ‘You guys really need to come down here and check this out,’” Abernathy said.

With expansion already on her mind, the engineering dean toured the region and spoke with decision makers.

Sarasota’s attractiveness to knowledge workers like those at Voalte was part of the draw, as was the fact that the region has strong economic development aspirations and good airport access, she said.

“The one thing they were missing was the one thing we could help deliver, and that is the tech-talent pipeline,” Abernathy said.

Lauderdale got his bachelor’s in industrial engineering on the UF campus, and then added a master’s degree, also from UF, in business entrepreneurship.

““This really signifies that a nationally recognized engineering program, top ranked in the state, is going to have a presence here,” Lauderdale said. “That is a really big deal.”

Voalte, which now provides its smartphone based communications system to 80-plus hospitals, brings in three or four University of Florida interns each summer and frequently hires them afterwards, Lauderdale said.

Being able to recruit UF engineering grads who have an affinity for the region, he said, “is going to help Sarasota. It is going to help the companies.”

But he is equally excited about technology transfer possibilities.

The tech center is to serve as “a door for us to reach into Gainesville,” he said.

To Lauderdale, that means having a better pathway into a related bureaucracy
within the university, the UF Office of Technology Licensing.

“Say someone wants to start a company here in Sarasota, based on some of that intellectual property. There is now a better pipeline, a pathway to get access to those engineers,” Lauderdale said.

Sarasota already has good access to capital and a great knowledge base because of the seasoned entrepreneurs who move here, he said.

“The missing element is there is no research and development. There is no engineering,” Lauderdale said. “So while there are programs that are going to be helping out from an education standpoint, the way I view it, it is a good opportunity for us to reach into Gainesville and access those individuals.”

**The prototype**

While some aspects of the tech center are novel, the College of Engineering has been fine-tuning the idea of giving some community college students a hall pass into engineering degrees for three years at Santa Fe College in Gainesville.

At the College of Engineering, the freshman and sophomore classes are packed.

But not everybody can handle the heavy load of the engineering school's required courses in calculus, differential equations, physics and chemistry. So there is room for more students in the junior and senior ranks.

This program got its start in 2013. Some of the students who applied for the UF College of Engineering but did not make the cut received special letters inviting them to take courses at Santa Fe.

Students already can enroll at State College of Florida with a goal of graduating from UF, a step-up system that has been in place for decades.

That path still exists and the College of Engineering encourages students to take it, particularly into high-demand majors like computer science and electrical engineering, Abernathy said.

But the two-plus-two path carries its own uncertainty. UF is not required to accept a student because they have completed two years at a state college. What the rule says is that if they do accept that student, they must give full credit for those courses the student already has passed.

Students must make a second college application.

Under the new plan, the student would know in advance that as soon as they get a 2.5 grade point average or better in a critical path course, they get their UF card and are essentially pre-admitted to the College of Engineering.

“I hear often about the need for engineers in this area,” said Probstfeld, the SCF president. “So we are just thrilled to have the opportunity to do this, particularly with the University of Florida.”

— *Staff writer John Hielscher contributed to this report*

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North Trail Artspace Group Announces Fundraisers

Artspace SRQ—an organization made up of representatives from businesses, neighborhood associations and local artists—has announced a new series of events intended to raise money for further research on the possibility of installing affordable housing for artists along Sarasota’s North Trail as a step toward redevelopment. The first program will begin at 7 p.m. Monday, March 21, with doors opening at 6. The event will be moderated by Lorrie Muldowney, a preservation consultant and the former manager of the Sarasota County History Center. Martin Treu, an architect and urban designer, will
speak about the North Trail as the “historic gateway to Sarasota,” and Megan McLaughlin will speak about similar efforts in Miami. The event will be held at the Crocker Church, 1260 12th St., Sarasota, with a reception afterward at the adjacent Bidwell-Wood House. A minimum donation of $10 is requested.

Want to know about biz in the 941?

Visit our brand-new website, 941CEO.com, for profiles on top executives, advice from CEOs, and the trends and news you need to know.

County Commission Approves $1 Million for UF Collaboration

The Sarasota County Commission voted Friday to approve a $1 million, five-year grant to establish an engineering and technology center with the University of Florida. Innovation Station Sarasota County, as the project will be called, will provide local workforce development and research and help establish the area as a talent pipeline for the university.

Sarasota Magazine Best of Sarasota 2016 Tickets On Sale

Tickets to the premier party of the season, Sarasota Magazine’s Best of Sarasota Garden of Wonder 2016, are on sale now. Featuring the best in local dining, shopping, arts, entertainment and more, the Garden of Wonder themed party will be held Tuesday, April 19, at the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Go here for details and to purchase your tickets.

County Holds Open House for ‘Disadvantaged’ Businesses

Sarasota County will hold a free open house for small businesses that have been designated, or may be eligible to become designated, as “disadvantaged business
University of Florida to bring engineering-based Innovation Station to Sarasota County

BY MEGHIN DELANEY
mdelaney@bradenton.com

BRADENTON -- Local students interested in pursuing a career in engineering will have another option open to them soon, as the University of Florida is moving forward with plans to bring an engineering-based Innovation Station to Venice, which will include a new partnership with State College of Florida.

The Innovation Station is the first extension of the engineering program in the area, and is being supported locally by the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. Sarasota County commissioners recently signed off on a $1 million five-year grant to support the program, in addition to the money provided by UF.

The program is also aiming to boost industry relations.

The UF Innovation Station is expected to open within six months in 1,000 to 1,500 square feet of leased office space in Sarasota County, according to Sarasota County.

The school's College of Engineering intends to "provide a cooperative engineering internship program at its main campus in Gainesville to serve Sarasota County through community outreach services," according to the funding request from the University of Florida.

The UF Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering has more than 9,300 students and $72 million in annual research awards in virtually every discipline, according to UF.

The program will also create the Gator Engineering @ State College of Florida program, an engineering degree program similar to Gator Engineering @ Santa Fe that allows a students to begin their coursework at State College of Florida, gain admission to UF as early as after
the first semester, continue coursework at State College of Florida until completion of critical tracking courses, and matriculate to UF to continue their engineering study in their chosen major, according to UF.

The program will extend beyond the two colleges. It also will make available online engineering entrepreneurship and innovation offerings, insight to university technology, and an introduction to potential student interns and targeted workshops, according information provided to the commission. Educational offerings will be available to K-12 students and institutions.

Meghin Delaney, education reporter, can be reached at 941-745-7081. Follow her on Twitter @MeghinDelaney.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Leaders formally announce UF 'Innovation Station'

By Shelby Webb
shelby.webb@heraldtribune.com
Published: Monday, March 21, 2016 at 8:01 p.m.

As the University of Florida seeks to broaden its footprint across the state, school officials were in Sarasota Monday to celebrate the first of what will likely be several new extension campuses for its College of Engineering.

UF President Kent Fuchs and UF College of Engineering Dean Cammy Abernathy spoke alongside local nonprofit, community and business leaders about Sarasota's new "Innovation Station," which will begin in the fall of 2017.

Fuchs said the new Sarasota extension campus reflects UF's mission as a land-grant university and its goal to make Florida a global leader when it comes to innovation.

“The Innovation Station will put UF engineering’s research, talent, innovation and experience behind Sarasota's rise as one of Florida's most exciting and dynamic creative communities,” Fuchs told reporters and elected officials Monday in formally announcing the project at the HuB, a collaborative workspace and business incubator in downtown Sarasota. “Our decision to establish a physical presence in this community embodies UF's larger effort in taking a leadership role in growing and diversifying our state's economy.”

Perhaps the biggest beneficiaries will be Southwest Florida’s college-bound students, some of whom will be able to use the State College of Florida to gain acceptance into UF’s highly touted College of Engineering after as little as one semester in local classes.

That agreement would be similar to one already established with Santa Fe Community College, located a few miles from the University of Florida in Gainesville. There, students who meet the qualifications of the College of Engineering but were not admitted because of limited space take staple engineering courses such as calculus, physics, chemistry and differential equations. If they earn a 2.5 GPA during a semester or two at the community college, they are automatically admitted into UF.

About 10 students will pilot the program at SCF’s Venice campus in the fall of 2017.

The college will also establish a “concierge service” that will allow companies to tap the UF College of Engineering’s resources, including students, faculty and intellectual property.

Trey Lauderdale, founder and CEO of the Sarasota-based healthcare
communications software company Voalte, said Sarasota could be the next tech
boom town, such as Austin, Texas, or Asheville, North Carolina, or Denver. But one
thing has stood in its way: the lack of a local engineering school that pumps out
startup ventures, new ideas and new employees.

“Here in Sarasota, there has been a lack of engineering resources and engineering
talent, and that has been a missing building block of our community,” Lauderdale
said. “Or, maybe I should correct myself and say that was a missing building block of
our community.”

Community and UF leaders also hope the new extension will allow the school to
funnel students into local engineering internships closer to home, which could lead
to stronger local job offers.

The Sarasota County Commission has approved $1 million in funding in $200,000
increments over five years for the program. UF will spend more than $1 million
during the same time period as well.

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation is donating $980,000 over five years,
while the Gulf Coast Community foundation also committed $63,000 to the
program.

Abernathy, the engineering college dean, said she would like to see between six and
eight similar satellite campuses across the state, but did not have a timeline for when
they could open.

She said the college selected Sarasota for its pilot program because of its history of
public-private partnerships, among other reasons.

“We wanted to start in a place where the chance of success was very high,”
Abernathy said. “There are so many pieces in the community — like the cultural
aspects, the other colleges — that make Sarasota a unique and great place to start
this initiative.”

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UF to launch 'innovation station' in Sarasota County

Mar 22, 2016, 7:24am EDT

University of Florida is turning up the heat on innovation in Sarasota County.

UF’s Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering is launching its first “Innovation Station” in the county. The initiative is designed to give businesses and entrepreneurs access to tech workforce talent, applied research, faculty, and intellectual property, according to a press release.

The project is the first physical extension of UF’s Florida Engineering Experiment Station, or FLEXStation, established last year to help Florida become a national leader in the high tech industry, the university said.

The UF Innovation Station is expected to open within six months in 1,000 to 1,500 square feet of leased office space in Sarasota County. It will be staffed by three to four people from UF: a director and program coordinators focused on industry, workforce development and educational collaboration programs, the press release said.
Even before the office opens, UF representatives will be in Sarasota County working to strengthen existing industry connections and foster new ones.

University of Florida is providing $1 million for the initiative, the release said. The Sarasota County Commission approved a performance-based grant for it as well; that grant will provide $1 million in $200,000 increments over five years, according to the Sarasota Herald-Tribune.

The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation is the lead philanthropic partner and awarded a five-year, $980,000 grant. Gulf Coast Community Foundation made a one-year grant of $63,000.

In addition to working directly with local businesses, collaborate with local academic institutions and the Sarasota County School District. State College of Florida’s Venice campus will also be home to Gator Engineering@SCF, where students can begin their course study and become full UF students before physically matriculating to UF, the press release said.

Margie Manning
Finance Editor
Tampa Bay Business Journal
UF to open engineering program in Sarasota

Katelyn Newberg, Alligator Staff Writer  14 hrs ago

Future UF engineering students can intern in Sarasota, Florida, through the expansion of an engineering program.

UF President Kent Fuchs announced at a press conference Monday morning that UF’s College of Engineering’s Florida Engineering Experiment Station will open its first physical extension, called the Innovation Station, in Sarasota County. Through the extension, students will work with professionals and companies in Sarasota, as they do in Gainesville.

The station will provide scholarships for UF students to intern in Sarasota, said Erik Sander, the executive director of the Florida Engineering Experiment Station. While the station launched Monday, an office space and a permanent director haven’t been chosen.

The station will be held in a 1,000- to 1,500-square-foot office space, and Sander will serve as the interim director. The project costs about $3 million, he said.
A 5-year, $980,000 grant is being provided from the Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation, a philanthropic organization in Sarasota, and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation is providing a one year, $63,000 grant. Both UF and the Sarasota County government are providing $1 million each.

Sander said the station will partner with academic institutions, including colleges and K-12 schools, to teach students about engineering.

“The concept and the idea is to introduce students to engineering and get them excited about careers in engineering,” he said.

He said the station is currently partnering with the State College of Florida and Sarasota County Public Schools. The station is planning to partner with the Ringling College of Art and Design and the New College of Florida to inspire more engineers in the state.

UF has been working with Sarasota County for about 18 months to open the station. He said Sarasota County was chosen to host the station because of its diverse community and large number of business leaders.

“At the end of the day, this project and this initiative is about positively impacting the innovation economy in this region,” he said.

Jason Cochran, a UF computer science sophomore, said programs like the Innovation Station are needed for computer science and engineering students.
He said the station will help entrepreneurs focus on solving complex problems. He hopes the station allows for new ideas and inventions, instead of more apps.

“People mistake creation for innovation,” the 20-year-old said. “I don’t think that the problem is that we don’t necessarily have enough STEM majors; it’s that they’re not solving the right problems.”
Editorial: UF initiative promises multiple benefits

Innovation Station can help students, SCF and the economy

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The University of Florida wants to re-engineer the ivory tower.

UF’s College of Engineering will create an Innovation Station in Sarasota County, extending education beyond the halls of academia and the walls of the university’s Gainesville campus.

The program will provide multiple entry points for local students interested in the wide field of engineering. UF will work with businesses and institutions in our region, which could help help recruit valuable companies.

There is a lot to like about this initiative, announced last week. For example:

Partnerships

■ The first five years of funding will be provided through almost-equal investments that spread the costs of personnel, office space and outreach. The diversified income stream underscores the value of — and need for — collaboration.

The Sarasota County Commission voted Friday to allocate up to $200,000, for each of five years, in support of its economic-development efforts. The university has committed the same total, $1 million. The Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation — which has funded upgrades in Sarasota County’s public-school programs in science, technology, engineering and math — will contribute $980,000. The Gulf Coast Community Foundation has pledged $63,000.

The use of county tax dollars as "seed money" for this start-up venture has some risk, but it is a slight. The University of Florida is a public institution; the engineering college is respected; savvy private donors saw fit to invest their money, and successful local business leaders have identified both needs and opportunities in engineering. (The leader of a local tech company, a UF engineering graduate, is credited with drawing the college's attention to Sarasota County.) What’s more, the county funding will be provided in phases and reporting requirements are in place; county officials said they made clear that funding for recurring costs, such as salaries, will end after five years.

■ The concept calls for a substantive partnership between the program and the State College of Florida. For example, students who take, and pass, specified early-level courses at SCF will be ensured entrance into the UF engineering school — an enormous opportunity for students that will also help protect, if not enhance, SCF’s reputation.

We particularly like the idea that students who might not be accepted into the highly competitive College of Engineering as incoming freshman could have an alternative path and, in essence, a second chance. This could be particularly beneficial to first-generation college students or those whose families are unfamiliar with the
requirements of an engineering school.

As one UF official said, part of the challenge is creating enough on-campus capacity for qualified applicants. If the partnership with SCF works as hoped, perhaps it could be a model for expanding access in other parts of the state.

**Scope of benefits**

Obviously, the program should be a boon to would-be engineering students in terms of classroom learning and the potential for internships with local companies. Offering those internships also helps businesses, enabling them to develop recruiting pipelines and, we hope, retain local talent.

One goal of the station is to "support creation and growth of new start-up companies" and offer research and applied-science opportunities for existing companies. Unlike some other economic-development initiatives, this one is not specific to a single company. And since engineers are needed in a vast array of applications — construction, computers, medicine, the environment and more — the program need not be sector-specific.

We look forward to the creation of the station, and hope the manifold potential benefits come to fruition.

*Editor's note: Herald-Tribune Publisher Patrick Dorsey is chairman of the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County, which helped attract the Innovation Station.*

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