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NEWS RELEASE

Press Conference Contact at GCCC: Chris Thomes, office (850) 747-3250; cell (850) 832-8395

Landmark Agreement Provides Framework for Alliance to Stimulate Job Creation and Workforce Training

In tough economic times such as these, organizations within Northwest Florida are coming together to create innovative ideas to help stimulate job creation and economic development. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a new workforce initiative was signed Tuesday, December 16, at Gulf Coast Community College. Executives from Workforce Florida, Inc., Gulf Power Company, The St. Joe Company, and Gulf Coast Community College agree that the MOU is unprecedented and is a model of collaboration.

“Partnerships like the one cemented today are key to building the world-class workforce that will strengthen Florida’s economy for generations to come,” said Governor Charlie Crist. “This landmark agreement is a wonderful example of state government and the private sector coming together to create new jobs and exciting new opportunities for the Sunshine State.”

The Memorandum formally establishes an alliance that will identify and coordinate key workforce development strategies to bolster economic development in the West Bay area. This area will be anchored by the new international airport which will provide an opportunity to transform the region’s economy.

“I am enthusiastic about the partnership embodied in this groundbreaking MOU,” said Bill Cramer, Chair, GCCC District Board of Trustees. “Gulf Coast Community College enjoys an enviable record of leadership and collaboration on workforce initiatives. This unprecedented agreement lays the foundation for innovative high-tech education and training programs that are essential to attract and sustain industries at our new airport.”

The initiative emphasizes responsiveness to specialized workforce needs, coordination with secondary and post-secondary education, and creative leveraging of resources and assets to support workforce development.

Workforce Florida is the state’s principal workforce policy organization charged with designing and implementing strategies for a highly skilled workforce in support of Florida’s economic development priorities. The organization will coordinate the development of a West Bay Area Sector Workforce Initiative along with other state and

business and workforce. The initiative focuses on creating a workforce development program that can be replicated statewide using innovative new programs as well as existing programs and resources.

“Governor Crist recognizes the power of partnerships and has made building a world-class workforce for our state a top priority,” said Chris Hart IV, President and CEO, Workforce Florida. “This landmark agreement is exciting because we have come together for a common purpose – jobs – to seize upon new opportunities and fully align workforce resources.”

Gulf Coast Community College, with the assistance of its partners, will identify priority training and education needs and design programs to meet those needs. The College will ensure that workforce development efforts are aligned with business needs and meet industry-approved standards or competencies.

“This agreement relates to the heart of Gulf Coast Community College’s Strategic Plan,” said Dr. Jim Kerley, President of GCCC. “We must be flexible, agile, creative and innovative as we respond to the needs of the community. Our vision and mission state that we will deliver life-changing learning opportunities, join as a full partner in dynamic cultural and economic development of the region, and collaborate with the community to help create or improve economic well-being and to enhance the quality of life.”

Gulf Power Company and The St. Joe Company are leaders in economic development in Northwest Florida and have significant interest in the successful economic development of the West Bay area. They also have critical leadership roles in state economic development through organizations such as Enterprise Florida, Inc., and the Florida Council of 100. Both companies will be instrumental in leveraging resources and assets to support workforce development.

Susan Story, Gulf Power Company President and CEO, said the entities involved are enthusiastic about the opportunities this collaborative effort will bring to our region.

“Today we are continuing support for this plan and we are adding a major area of focus on workforce development,” Story said. “We all understand how critical having the right talent is to economic development. That’s why we are excited to have Workforce Florida as a key player in this partnership – they bring experience and leadership as the number one workforce system in the country to this effort.”

As the largest master-planned region in Florida, the West Bay area features a multimodal infrastructure network that joins land, sea and air, and includes opportunities for businesses to build adjacent to and directly access a 10,000 foot runway.

“The historic Workforce Alliance announced today will prime the job creation machine for Northwest Florida,” said Britt Greene, President and CEO, The St. Joe Company.