

Group solidifying efforts to champion bioscience industries

BY ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

Heads of economic development agencies and universities from across Florida are to meet for a third time Feb. 2 at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton to decide the structure and mission of a group that may champion the needs of the state's emerging bioscience industry.

Locally, top Florida International University officials, including Vice President for Engagement Divina Grossman and President Mark B. Rosenberg, along with Beacon Council President and CEO Frank Nero and Director of Business Expansion, Retention, Recruitment and Urban Initiatives Gisela Mohring, have been focused on creating the group's mission statement.

"FIU is doing all the coordination within all of the organizations and we're helping them



FIU Vice President for Engagement Divina Grossman and President Mark Rosenberg bring an academic perspective to bioscience team.

along," Ms. Mohring said. "We present it to the group in February for discussion, and hopefully we'll solidify it from there."

The group includes Enterprise Florida President John Adams, Florida Gulf Coast University Provost Ronald Toll and Indian River State College President

Ed Massey.

Others include the external strategy work group, which will focus on methods for achieving the group's missions, headed by Florida High Tech Corridor President Randy Berridge and Mr. Toll, and another to promote entrepreneurship to stu-

dents across the state.

The group first met at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables on Aug. 17 to see how it could leverage education and bioscience research across the state to bolster the life science industry.

At its most recent meeting in October at Broward College, State Sen. Jeremy Ring, a Margate Democrat and chair of Policy and Steering Committee on Commerce and Industry, discussed what the state needs to do to support the burgeoning industry, which business and civic leaders have pegged as the next great generator of wealth for the region.

While the group is looking to help the education system get on the same track as the industry to provide the workforce, the idea of a "long-term play" seems to indicate the group will push for even more public investment

in the life sciences.

Senator Ring "felt there was a lack of funding in the state for research commercialization and on the state level a lack of strong leadership in this area," said Mr. Nero said in a previous interview. He "felt that this was probably more of long-term play than a short-term play."

Sen. Ring "made a couple of recommendations. One is to expand the composition of the group to include individuals with a track record in venture capital with a record of investing in life sciences," Mr. Nero added.

Once the group reconvenes and sets its format and goals, it will present itself to lawmakers in Tallahassee.

"Any successful economic endeavor must have leadership from state," Mr. Nero said. "The State of Florida must become chief salesperson and advocate [for] the bioscience" industry.

Beacon Council, which targets jobs, labors equally to keep those we have

BY ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

Miami-Dade's economic development arm, the Beacon Council, prides itself on helping companies establish regional headquarters here and spearheading large-scale projects like a possible commercial air show in Homestead next year, but nearly half its time and resources are spent making sure companies already here are functioning smoothly.

Eleven of the council's 31 completed "projects" in 2010 focused on convincing businesses to stay in Miami-Dade or expand – and some did both.

Those include the expansion of Avaya Inc., a global communications company that consolidated its operation and chose Miami over locations in Argentina and Colorado to add 180 jobs and make a \$4.6 million capital investment.

Other big victories include Visa's opening of a call center that's to add 366 jobs and Ibiley Manufacturing Corp., which makes body armor textiles for the military and police, planning to add 120 jobs. Most of those jobs will be added over a number of years.

But large companies aren't the only focus. EspacioUSA, a Spanish construction and real estate company, added three employees, while Aquaculture Research/Environmental Associates Inc. expanded its operations in Homestead, adding seven jobs.

The local projects come from a combination of references from the Local Business, Local Jobs committee of the council's private-sector board, individual board members' referrals and staff members' 150 or so annual visits to local companies.

"Many times it's really inquiring to find out how they're doing and what obstacles they have," said Steve Beatus, council associate executive vice president, of the visits to local companies. "Many times it's just a



It's easier and less costly to keep a firm than lure one: Steve Beatus.

re-education of how their business is doing and what their future plans may be."

And "many times we uncover challenges they're having," he added.

Helping local companies seems to bring a more immediate return on the agency's work as well.

Many of the Beacon Council's international projects, in which it courts foreign companies to set up a North American or Latin American headquarters, have a timeline of more than a year. Although some local projects can be

extensive, "there's really no rule of thumb," Mr. Beatus said. "Some projects, from soup to nuts, are completed within a couple of months, others have taken years."

The council's budget, he added, is split about evenly between attracting foreign or domestic companies to move here and helping local companies stay and grow.

Prior to the recession one of the council's biggest challenges was finding qualified employees for new or expanding companies to hire. While finding highly trained and skilled workers for emerging knowledge-based industries remains a key concern for many, now companies are looking for ways to maximize return on every penny they spend.

"If anything, the questions we had were companies trying to streamline opportunities, looking for other sources of

revenue, new markets and looking at facilities that provide economic advantages," Mr. Beatus said.

The council, however, doesn't always succeed. Sometimes there's not much it can do to keep companies, especially large corporations, from leaving town.

This month Seabourn, the luxury brand of Carnival Cruises, announced it would be moving its headquarters to Seattle, laying off 66 but saving millions along the way.

Last year Boston Scientific, a medical device and procedures company that employed about 1,400 in Doral, announced it was closing the site and moving to Costa Rica.

The Beacon Council does its best to convince companies leaving and laying people off in swaths to stay, but "the challenge with many of these companies... [is] dictated not because of issues here in Miami-Dade County but fall under more of global corporate decisions," Mr. Beatus said.

Once the companies leave, he said, the work moves to trying to mitigate the impact on those laid off and getting large pieces of real estate reoccupied.

While the Beacon Council can't convince every company to stay, each one it does retain is a small victory at a cheaper price.

Though companies considering a move out of town aren't eligible for incentives, those thinking about expansion are.

"It's certainly much easier, in terms of effort and expense," Mr. Beatus continued, "keeping a company growing here than trying to attract another company to locate here."

Furthermore, the cost of relocation and disruption to daily business gives the council another chip to bargain with in efforts to keep adding jobs locally.

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