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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Landmark Agreement to Boost Northwest Florida Job Creation  
and Economic Development**

PANAMA CITY — Workforce Florida Inc. today signed an agreement with Gulf Coast Community College, The St. Joe Company and Gulf Power Company creating a model for collaboration to address emerging training needs for new businesses and jobs in Northwest Florida's West Bay area, the largest mixed-use planned community in the state.

The Memorandum of Understanding marks the first time Workforce Florida, the Governor's statewide workforce investment board, has joined with education partners and companies to develop and implement a plan for responding to emerging workforce needs spurred by a planned community and a major infrastructure project. The 75,000-acre West Bay area is home to the new Panama City-Bay County International Airport, which is scheduled to open in 2010 and serves as a catalyst for economic development and job creation for the region and state.

"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."

Gulf Coast Community College will serve as the lead partner in coordinating workforce development efforts for West Bay and its planned state-of-the-art Advanced Technology Center will be a critical resource for meeting training needs.

"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

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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."

Under the agreement, the principal partners, working with other pertinent educational institutions and economic development and workforce organizations, will create a plan to respond to the specialized training needs of companies locating in West Bay. Workforce Florida, for example, will make available training developed by Employ Florida Banner Centers, which work directly with industry to create cutting-edge curriculum for entry-level and advanced workers in high-value sectors such as biotechnology, aviation and aerospace and homeland security and defense, among others.

The partners will focus on maximizing existing resources and identifying new ones to develop a talent pipeline spanning from highly trained entry-level workers with industry-relevant skills to training throughout a worker's career, allowing them and the companies they work for to remain globally competitive.

The St. Joe Company, which donated 4,000 acres for the new airport and owns the surrounding land, anticipates the potential for 37 million square feet in West Bay planned for business and commercial activity. The community also includes a conservation area as well as recreational and residential areas.

“In an effort to spur economic development, we continue to talk to companies all over the world, and one consistent priority always rises to the top – a trained workforce,” said Britt Greene, President and CEO, The St. Joe Company. “The historic workforce alliance announced today will prime the job creation machine for Northwest Florida.”

Leaders representing all four memorandum principal partners were on hand for the signing ceremony on Gulf Coast Community College's campus. Gulf Power Company continues to be an economic development leader not just in Northwest Florida, but statewide.

“Today we are continuing support for this plan and we are adding a major area of focus on workforce development,” said Susan Story, President and CEO, Gulf Power Company. “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.”

To view the full text of the Memorandum of Understanding, go to:

[http://www.workforceflorida.com/news/mou/MOU\\_West\\_Bay\\_Sector\\_Plan\\_St\\_Joe\\_Gulf\\_Power\\_Co\\_GCCC\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.workforceflorida.com/news/mou/MOU_West_Bay_Sector_Plan_St_Joe_Gulf_Power_Co_GCCC_2_.pdf)

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A catalyst for creating and nurturing world-class talent, **Workforce Florida** is the Governor's statewide board of public and private-sector leaders charged with overseeing Florida's workforce system, which includes 24 regional workforce boards, and developing strategies that help Floridians advance in the workforce while supporting economic development priorities and strengthening the state's business climate. Learn more about Florida's workforce resources and solutions at [www.EmployFlorida.com](http://www.EmployFlorida.com).