

Attracting biotech talent

How South Florida will benefit from an emerging biotechnology center in Palm Beach County

The announcement that Scripps Research Institute (Florida) will locate on the campus of Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and adjacent land is another important step in the development of a biotechnology research and business center in Palm Beach County. *Smart Business* spoke with Mitchell Berger, widely regarded as an astute observer and contributor to the development of the community, about how this latest development impacts the business community.

What is the impact of the site location?

The site being centered around FAU resolves an important issue in creating a real biotech center for South Florida. But it is just one of a host of issues needed to be resolved to create an environment that attracts the very best talent to Scripps, to FAU and to the other universities that will be collaborating.

We all must remember that biotech centers in other locations in this country and throughout the world compete for top talent. If we attract top talent, then all good things will flow from that.

What is the potential upside for the business community?

Biotech is a great industry. It is a clean business that provides high value for our society. Employment is centered in professionals being paid decent wages. It has the potential to attract financial companies and other support entities that can contribute to the balanced growth of our economy.

Perhaps most important, it has the potential to enhance the reputation and capabilities of our institutions of higher learning. Virtually every business, no matter what type or size, can benefit from this development.



What do you see as the greatest challenges to achieving this potential?

Great things are never easy. And the development of South Florida into a biotech powerhouse is not going to be easy or quick. But, with the right cooperative leadership from our educational institutions, from our elected government officials and from the business community, I am confident that we can compete for the very best talent.

In Florida, we are blessed with good weather, multi cultural vibrancy and unmatched recreational activities — elements that represent real competitive advantages. Our challenge is making the most of these advantages. Other geographic areas have a decades-long head start, but none are blessed with greater natural advantages.

What will determine whether these challenges are met?

Ultimately, it is all about leadership in all the sectors contributing to the development of a biotech powerhouse. As I experience the thoughtfulness of leaders like (FAU President) Frank Brogan, (University of Miami President) Donna Shalala, (Nova Southeastern President)

Ray Ferrero Jr. and a host of others, I am confident that all will be working collaboratively and intelligently to contribute to this development.

I am incredibly bullish on the fact that leaders — from Scripps, from the educational institutions, from the state and local government and from the business community — will work collaboratively, because the upside potential here is so, so bright for our community. I really believe that our leaders understand that cooperation is so critical to achieving the opportunity before us.

What is the time line for this development?

I expect to see demonstrable, continuous progress over the next five years. Ten years from now, I expect biotech to be a major contributor to our local economy. And I expect to see a quantum leap in worldwide reputation of our educational institutions.

Most important, I see our community making a significant contribution to the health of people throughout the world. And that is a great thing.

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