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Governor presents \$6.1 million grant for Hernando's Citizen Success Center

Vincent F. Safuto, Hernando Today
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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks about the \$6.1 million grant to the Hernando County Citizen Success Center on Monday, 18. Behind DeSantis, from left, are county commissioners Jeff Holcomb, John Allocco, Beth Narverud, Steve Champion and Wayne Dukes.

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BROOKSVILLE — Jimmy Lodato couldn't stop smiling.

The Hernando School Board member who has sought for years to have a Citizen Success Center built on land at the Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport simply said on Monday, “This is victory day for us.”

“We’re going to start construction in the school district in April of 2022,” Lodato said. “And our first classes? Here? August of ’23.”

Dr. Timothy Beard, president of Pasco-Hernando State College, called the day “monumental” and “momentous” after Gov. Ron DeSantis announced a \$6.1 million grant to pay for the infrastructure needs of the new Citizen Success Center in Hernando County.

DeSantis said he had been focusing on infrastructure that could help the state’s economic growth in the past few weeks.

“We’re excited to be here to make, what I really believe, will be a really big difference for workforce engagement,” he said. “So today, what we’ll be doing is officially awarding \$6.1 million to Hernando County to construct a new education center for workforce training programs.”

In addition to the new county government center, there will be a Pasco-Hernando State College campus and a Suncoast Technical Education Center for programs that can prepare them for high-demand, high-paying careers in areas like manufacturing, aviation and health care, DeSantis said.

As more and more people see that the state is committed to education, training and business, it will attract more businesses to the state because they know they will have the workforce to sustain their businesses.

“Today’s announcement means that over the last couple of weeks, we’ve invested nearly \$15 million from the governor’s job growth grant fund for workforce education, and that’s in addition to a lot of the programs that we have had, and have been doing,” DeSantis said.

He said the big goal has been to make Florida No. 1 in workforce education by 2030.

State Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran said the new center will attract students who want to gain the credentials that will lead to not only jobs, but careers, in the area.

“It changes people’s entire vision of what can happen,” he said. “We know when they get that credential, they want the second one, and then the third one.”

He said people seeking “freedom” — implying that they will be escaping “vaccine mandates” — will be moving from California, New York, New Jersey and Illinois because of DeSantis’ leadership and that “Florida is a beacon of freedom for the rest of the country.”

The event drew members of the Hernando County Commission; Hernando County School Board; school district staff members including School Superintendent John Stratton and Sophia Watson, director of adult and technical education; state Sen. Wilton Simpson and state Rep. Blaise Ingolia.



Dr. Timothy Beard, president of Pasco-Hernando State College, thanks Gov. Ron DeSantis for the assistance needed to get started on the new Hernando County Citizen Success Center on Monday, Oct. 18.

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County Commission Chairman John Allocco said he was excited about having the memorandum of understanding signed recently, and said he'll be glad when the project starts to provide jobs that are relevant to the high school and college students.

"We have the seed money, we have the properties, and now we have to make sure that all parties involved fulfill their responsibility to the community to provide job-ready skills," he said.

It isn't just about providing jobs around the airport, though, Allocco emphasized. There are plenty of jobs in areas like plumbing, electrical work and construction. "I hope they're not left out of the equation," he said. "Those jobs are ready right now, if we can get the people with the skills."

Watson, of the school district, said it was a great hurdle that had to be crossed, getting this project going.

“I understand that there have been seeds planted for this project, and the seed has come to fruition with the governor, the Senate president, the commissioner of education, Pasco-Hernando State College, the school system, and the County Commission,” said Beard, of PHSC. “It’s just so transformational. It’s going to lay a foundation that forever will change the workforce landscape of Hernando County.”