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Grant Will Hatch State Technology Program

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BRANDON - Manufacturing has come a long way since Henry Ford pioneered the assembly line almost a century ago.

Today's widgets often require specially developed computer programs and tools. The people who make them must be highly skilled in math and science.

Brandon is about to become the state's training hub for that new breed of factory worker.

The Florida Advanced Technological Education Center will be headquartered here, courtesy of a \$2.6 million grant from the National Science Foundation to Hillsborough Community College, St. Petersburg College and the University of South Florida in Tampa.

The center, one of 30 programs established by the foundation nationwide, temporarily is located in HCC-Brandon's Pinebrooke facility just south of the school's Brandon campus. An opening celebration is planned for Nov. 3.

The center will have office and classroom space in HCC- Brandon's new student services building, which broke ground last week and is expected to open in about two years.

Experts from HCC, USF, St. Petersburg College and other community colleges in the state will collaborate to produce science and engineering curricula tailored to high-tech manufacturing needs, said the center's executive director, Marilyn Barger.

College students will benefit by development of new courses in quality control, electronics, automation and manufacturing processing, she said. They will be prepared to enter careers with two-year associate degrees or continue their education at four-year institutions, Barger said.

The four-year grant also is intended to start programs to recruit faculty and high school students to fill high-tech manufacturing needs. Students may be able to earn credits in a college program before graduating from high school, Barger said.

Carlos Soto, president of HCC's Brandon campus, said the center will focus largely on employer needs in a seven- county area. But he hopes it will bring new higher-paying jobs to Brandon, which is known mostly for residential development and service industries.

Kim Scheeler, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, said potential employers usually are impressed with the work force available in the Tampa area. He said he expects the new center at HCC-Brandon to help the region keep that edge.

`` It really puts us in a position of being more competitive on a national level," Scheeler said.

Among potential industries that might be lured to the area are companies that turn out sophisticated medical devices and equipment, he said.

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