

CONTACT: Jennifer Wakefield, 407.617.0476 cell, Jennifer.Wakefield@OrlandoEDC.com

Orlando's Life Science Cluster – From Dreams to Reality

Imagine...a place where people come not only for the theme parks, but to be cured of deadly diseases; where medical miracles are performed everyday; where doctors from around the world are trained; and where scientists discover the secrets to longer, healthier lives. Imagine...a place known worldwide as a leader in medical excellence.

A few short years ago, this was all a dream for Orlando. Despite the region being home to two of the nation's largest hospital systems – Florida Hospital and Orlando Health – Orlando was not a real 'contender' for the life science and biotech industry. That changed in 2003, when Metro Orlando was 'short-listed' for the location of the Scripps Research Institute. While Scripps ultimately decided to locate in West Palm Beach instead, the region learned an important lesson: Metro Orlando had a great deal to offer but we needed a medical school to realistically compete for the development, expansion and relocation of life science companies.

Elected officials, community leaders and groups like the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission (EDC) immediately began working together with University of Central Florida (UCF) President Dr. John Hitt to make this happen. And in March 2006, within a remarkably short time frame, the UCF College of Medicine was approved.

With the approval of the College of Medicine, Orlando became a realistic locational choice for life science companies...and community leaders were working behind the scenes to prove this by luring the Burnham Institute for Medical Research to Orlando. When Burnham announced their east coast expansion was to be in Orlando, the eyes of the life science community and the world turned to our region.

Shortly thereafter, a "Medical City" was born when a University of Florida Research Center, Veterans Affairs Hospital, M.D. Anderson Orlando's Cancer Research Institute and a Nemours Children's Hospital...all announced plans to establish facilities at Lake Nona's new Science and Technology Park.

Within a short span of time, the dream of creating a world-class life science cluster was starting to take shape in Orlando. And this was not going unnoticed. The decision of the Burnham Institute to locate in Orlando generated unprecedented media coverage and overwhelming interest in Orlando as a life science destination. Prior to the UCF and Burnham announcements, the EDC received, at most, 5 inquiries per year from bio companies. Since the announcements, that number has increased tenfold.

With the growing promise of this sector, community leaders stepped forward to help the EDC recruit additional companies. Under the management of the Metro Orlando EDC, business and health industry leaders created *bioOrlando*, an organization dedicated to accelerating the growth of this industry in Central Florida. Since 2007, *bioOrlando* – a collaborative group of forward-thinking business leaders – has worked to position Central Florida as a premier life science and biotechnology business destination worldwide.

Since 2006, visitors flying into Orlando International Airport have gotten a unique perspective on the massive construction site at Lake Nona...a dream in the making. And, thanks to outstanding community support, bold business leadership and high hopes, the dream of becoming home to thriving life science companies has become a reality for Orlando.

For more information, visit www.bioOrlando.com.