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## Preventing a 'brain drain'

Working to keep Space Coast's skilled workforce

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With our economy becoming ever more global and competitive, retaining and attracting new industries to a community is more important than ever. Communities are viewed and their competitiveness is evaluated on a variety of factors, including physical and information infrastructure, educational systems and financial incentives. However, quality and availability of an area's workforce are always a chief concern. The 22nd annual corporate survey conducted by Area Development magazine ranked availability of skilled labor fourth out of 34 factors considered by site section executives. This is a significant change from the 2006 survey in which it was ranked eighth.

By any criteria, the workforce of the Space Coast is highly skilled. With approximately 15,000 people employed by NASA and related private sector contractors, our region boasts one of the highest concentrations of aerospace workers in the country, if not the world. We have some of the brightest minds in our country as our friends and neighbors. Unfortunately, with the scheduled termination of the space shuttle program in 2010 and the extended gap before our nation launches the Constellation program of new moon rockets and manned spacecraft, that workforce could be reduced by thousands.

While this significant loss of highly skilled jobs in and of itself is devastating to the local economy, it is made worse by the potential for a "brain drain." As one of NASA's most successful programs winds down after more than 25 years and before another begins, many senior engineers, managers, and executives could seek economic security and professional advancement in other



communities. Failure to retain one of the Space Coast's most important resources -- its skilled workforce -- is not an option. The effort to mitigate the impacts of this gap in NASA programs and to relocate aerospace workers to other parts of the county has already begun. Groups like the Aerospace Career Development Council have been meeting for well over a year to define the issues and development solutions to the transition at the Kennedy Space Center.

As a result a collaborative effort between the Technological Research and Development Authority (TRDA) and the Brevard Workforce Development Board (BWDB) is generating a strategic plan to mitigate the anticipated workforce and economic impacts to our area. The TRDA-BWDB plan, funded through a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and Workforce Florida, will include a workforce assessment, development of training and life-long learning programs, and business advocacy and entrepreneurial support.

At the TRDA and BWDB we know that our workforce is our future. Business owners and leaders recognize it as well. The Kennedy Space Center has been, and will continue to be, the United States' preeminent aerospace processing and launch facility. Regardless, we must effectively manage the transition in NASA programs to retain the workforce needed for a robust and successful Constellation program in the mid 2010's. In the interim, our workforce can become the bedrock for new and expanded industries, including aviation, communications, digital media and bio-science.

We believe we can help do this through encouraging entrepreneurialism in these technical areas and by providing the support and resources needed to assist these bright minds in their efforts. We can do this -- all of us working together.

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