

Local research can aid push to diversify space industry



PHOTOS BY MIKE EWEN/DEMOCRAT
TalTech Alliance held its monthly luncheon Wednesday at the Capital City Country Club. Guest speaker Chris Snow, senior director of government relations for Space Florida, spoke about aerospace developments in the state and Space Florida's agenda for the 2012 legislative session. Though the shuttle program, illustrated at left, has been retired, Snow says Florida still has a future for space launches and other related technologies.



FLORIDA TODAY

Space-X erected its Falcon 9 rocket at Launch Complex 40 as a test. The rocket was lowered Monday afternoon and will be disassembled and shipped across the country for testing.

61 aerospace-related companies in Leon County employ 1,029 workers

By Dave Hodges

Democrat business editor

Tallahassee can play a role in the state's ongoing effort to diversify its space business beyond the processing and preparation for launch activities, a senior Space Florida executive said Wednesday.

Chris Snow, senior director of government relations for Space Florida, characterized the state's aerospace business development effort as one that is growing to include more fields and types of businesses.

"One of the reasons why it's so important to Tallahassee and Leon County is because Space Florida is really focused on the diversification of Florida's space industry," he told a luncheon meeting of the Tallahassee Technology Alliance and the Aviation & Aerospace Industry Roundtable of the Economic Development Council of Tallahassee-Leon County.

"One of the things we are focused

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on — and we've had a working relationship with the EDC for quite a while — is really working on trying to diversify," Snow said. "One of the areas where we can do that is research and development. We have lost a lot of that and honestly, never had a lot of it. A lot of it went to other states, so trying to grow that is very important with facilities here in Tallahassee."

Research plays a role in many of the 10 market sectors that Space Florida has identified in its diversification initiative. Among them are agriculture and environmental

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monitoring, human life sciences, communications, robotics, clean energy and advanced materials.

"That's really how we are focused on targeting Florida's space industry," Snow said.

Along with that diversification is expanding the supply chain in Florida, specifically adding to the depth and breadth of the in-state providers of space-related services and hardware. Snow said that will keep more of the support functions located here.

Leon County has a thriving industry. According to data from the Florida State University Center for Economic Forecasting & Analysis, there are 61 aerospace-related companies that employ 1,029 workers here. In 2010, they had total industry sales or revenues of \$97.7 million.

For those who consider the aerospace industry confined to Brevard County, "we wanted to show them that the trickle-down effect of those launches that are happening at Cape Canaveral is so much bigger than contractors, subcontractors, and all those," Snow said. "It's so massive across the state that we wanted really to give that perspective."

Florida has a total of 3,891 aerospace-related companies and a workforce of 74,232. Industry revenues reported for 2010 in the state were \$9.16 billion.

The figures also show the wide distribution of aerospace activity. Miami-Dade County has the most aerospace-related companies with 551, but Orange County had the most revenues with \$1.34 bil-

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lion. Okaloosa County has the biggest workforce with 16,490 people due to the presence of Eglin Air Force Base and other defense facilities.

Brevard County, home of Kennedy Space Center, has 150 aerospace-related companies and a workforce of 3,058. The county's 2010 revenues were \$292 million.

With NASA's space shuttle program having ended, the industry is in transition. NASA's next vehicle is the Space Launch System, or SLS. It will not be ready for testing until 2017, but Florida's strategy in the meantime is to support the companies that are working to assist NASA with its next program, Snow said.

Boeing recently announced it will bring its commercial crew headquarters to Cape Canaveral and projects it will produce 550 jobs by 2015 in the design and development of the Orion multipurpose crew vehicle.

Boeing will be using the former shuttle hangar known as Orbiter Processing Facility No. 3 at KSC for building the new space vehicle.

"This is the kind of work that didn't necessarily happen in Florida in the past," Snow said. "A lot of what we used to see was 'ship it and shoot it.' What I

mean by that is you would have somebody build a rocket in Texas, Colorado, etc., then they'd ship it to Florida and then launch the rocket."

Consequently, a lot of jobs remained elsewhere. "To get this manufacturing and design here in Florida was really critical for us," he added.

Beth Kirkland, executive director for the EDC, said Tallahassee has research facilities that are involved in projects relevant to aerospace technology. The National High Magnetic Field Laboratory is working on advanced propulsion systems, for example.

The Florida Center for Advanced Aero Propulsion received \$3.2 million from the National Science Foundation for the development of a next-generation polysonic wind tunnel that will be housed in the center's new research building. Next door at the High Performance Materials Institute, scientists are perfecting the design and fabrication of advanced composite materials for use in aviation and other applications.

Space Florida was created as a special district to be the contact for all space-related functions in Florida. It serves the civilian, military and commercial sectors of the industry and is governed by an independent board of directors.

Space Florida reports directly to the governor and operates much like a seaport or airport authority, Snow said. "We are made up that way because we are the economic development agency for the state's aerospace industry. We also need to facilitate management of space ports, the space life sciences lab, and other buildings at Cape Canaveral and around the state."