

Orlando Sentinel

Sunday, June 6, 2004

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COURTING BIOTECH

BIO GROWTH

Florida is trying to lure biotechnology jobs at the industry's annual BIO 2004 trade show this week in San Francisco. Some key figures:

200,000

Total U.S. biotech jobs

15%

Growth rate in 2004

30,000

New jobs projected in U.S.

\$40 billion

U.S. biotech revenues

20,000

Attendance expected at BIO 2004 show

56

Number of countries attending

By **RICHARD BURNETT**
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Still riding the wave of last year's success, Gov. Jeb Bush and other state officials are once again hunting for treasure at the biotech industry's largest trade show, trying to lure more jobs to diversify the state's tourism-heavy economy.

Amid the moving, shaking and deal making of BIO 2004 in San Francisco, the governor and his economic development entourage hope to persuade biotech companies to make Florida their next expansion site. The international event takes place today through Wednesday at the Moscone Center.

Florida will find more of a receptive audience than ever, experts say, because of its \$500 million deal last year to land the East Coast expansion of San Diego-based Scripps Research Institute. The prestigious Scripps unit, which is being established in Palm Beach County, is expected to generate thousands of high-wage jobs in pharmaceutical and biomedical research.

"That deal puts Florida at the big table, in terms of recognition," said Walt Plosila, a vice president of the Battelle Memorial Institute, a major biotech research and consulting group based in Ohio. "Historically, Florida hasn't been mentioned in the same breath with the biotech leaders. But this deal shows the state's commitment to research as a vital part of the economy, and that will be viewed positively."

Even with the Scripps deal as a draw, however, Florida faces intense competition for the estimated 30,000 new jobs projected in the biotech industry this year. Most will probably go to the existing hubs such as Boston, San Diego and San Francisco, experts say.

Still, Florida stands a much better chance now to improve its ranking among biotech states, which varies widely depending on the source.

Even though it was runner-up to Palm Beach for the Scripps project, metro Orlando, known primarily for its Disney mystique, still faces an uphill battle.

"Perceptions take a very long time to overcome, even for executives who are supposed to be better informed," said Karim Khan, editor in chief of *Business Facilities*, the corporate relocation trade magazine. "If you get known for one thing, it can be very difficult to get past that and establish your identity in other areas."

Still, it was a major accomplishment for Central Florida to be a Scripps finalist, observers said.

"It was definitely to our advantage to have been in the ball game," said David Scott, an economist and finance professor at UCF. "I see it as a cup's half full type thing. Clearly, this region has a lot to offer in terms of open land, research facilities, quality of life issues and work force. And I do think the politicians now understand it's going to take more than a waterslide or some other new attraction to change the industrial mix and wage levels we have here."