

Money helps region keep simulation edge: My Word

By Tom Baptiste

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UCF President John Hitt often says that America's leading partnership university does partnerships not because they are easy, but rather because they work. The Florida Legislature — in a challenging budget year — once again found a way to continue the state's investment in one of the greatest examples of partnership I have ever seen: the UCF Partnership Complex in the Central Florida Research Park that hosts representatives of the Navy, Army, Air Force and Marines as part of the nation's epicenter of modeling, simulation and training technology.

It is so named because not only are the military services partnering on this incredibly important aspect of keeping our troops prepared for duty, but also because it is a partnership with the University of Central Florida, home to the nation's leading educational programs in this field, and the cluster of hundreds of MS&T companies across Florida.

Kudos to the Florida Legislature and special thanks to House Speaker Steve Crisafulli for leading an effort to continue the state's investment in expanding that complex, where faculty and student researchers share space with their military counterparts for the study, research and development of next generation technologies. Thanks also to Senate President Andy Gardiner and others in leadership.

And thanks to dozens of community leaders who have stepped up to make sure the Legislature heard our story. At the top of that list is Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs and members of the MS&T Blue Ribbon Commission she appointed to champion this cause.

The Legislature's \$20 million appropriation will mean adequate shared space for this partnership that is directly responsible for the industry's \$5 billion annual impact on Florida's economy, including more than 60,000 jobs statewide.

Countless UCF students and graduates have gone on to work for the array of companies whose presence here has also led to Orlando becoming the home of The National Center for Simulation, the industry's trade association. That has also resulted in the world's largest modeling and simulation conference and trade show coming here every year, attracting thousands from around the world to see and explore the latest technologies and making an additional impact on our economy.

Most important is that American men and women in uniform are more prepared for their duties and safer in the face of danger. Not only are they trained for warfare, but for many other jobs in the services — not the least of which is the care that is given to our military personnel in the field and in veterans' medical facilities.

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