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FSU intends to partner with digital production studio locating in Tradition

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PORT ST. LUCIE — One of the nation's top film schools may be headed to the Treasure Coast to work with a Hollywood digital production spin-off and a cast of local college students.

Florida State University's award-winning film school released a letter of intent Tuesday to partner with the Hobe Sound-based Wyndcrest Holdings LLC., which continues to work out a \$30 million state and city incentives package for a 150,000-square-foot digital production studio that would be within the Tradition development.

"The direction they plan to take with the new studio in the development of innovative technologies and storytelling techniques is directly in line with the educational goals of The Film School," said Frank Patterson, dean of the Florida State University College of Motion Picture, Television and Recording Arts. "It's a perfect match."

The new Wyndcrest company would create its own animated feature films and related video games, as well as create combat simulations for the military.

Terms of the FSU-Wyndcrest partnership are still being worked out.

The Tallahassee-based state university's letter of intent also includes a potential partnership with Fort Pierce-based Indian River State College, which has been building its own Digital Media Institute.

Ed Massey, president of Indian River State College, said the Wyndcrest project fits in with both the digital program that has been established in the high-tech Kight Center for Emerging Technologies, as well as the college's new Treasure Coast Public Safety Training Complex, which ties in with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

"I think this is a really good thing for the Research Coast and what we're trying to put together here," Massey said. "The students are very excited because they're taking this type of training and now there will be jobs in their own community and that's great."

John Textor, a co-chairman of the California-based Digital Domain and a principal with Wyndcrest Holdings, said the agreement would allow students at both FSU and IRSC to work alongside professional digital artists on commercial projects.

“This is as much of an agreement as you might have with the university at this stage,” Textor said. “But we thought it important to get a message to the St. Lucie community that this is real, it’s not just rumored, that there is a connection with FSU.”

Textor said he and his colleagues set their sights on FSU because “Their Film School graduates are excellent storytellers, and story is the key to our business.”

The college program, better known as The Film School, was created in 1989. In the past five years, Film School students have won five student Oscars and six student Emmys.

Wyndcrest is working with the city and Florida to open a studio in Florida.

Textor said he hoped a deal could be reached that goes before the Port St. Lucie City Council within a couple of weeks.

The local and state incentive package includes Core Communities donating 15 acres west of Interstate-95 for the studio. Under the terms of the contract, the studio must employ 500, paying an average of \$65,000, within four years.

Shawn Reilly, vice president of sales and marketing for Tradition, called it exciting news for digital animators to join the region’s growing biotech industry.

“This is further proof that Tradition and Port St. Lucie has quickly emerged as one of the country’s hottest locations for economic development,” Reilly said.

Residents have questioned how the city could spend money on private enterprises during the current economic downturn.

City officials said their share of the money for Wyndcrest is to come from several South Florida home builders, who agreed to put up \$50 million in 2004 for road improvements.

The studio will be separate from Digital Domain because of California tax reasons. However, Digital Domain employees will be involved in the recruiting and training of those in Florida.

In recent years, Digital Domain has been behind the visual effects for movies including “Flags of Our Fathers,” “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” and “Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen.”

The digital production endeavor wouldn’t be the first for the Tallahassee-based state university on the Treasure Coast.

FSU opened its Fort Pierce College of Medicine in 2007, which teams third- and fourth-year medical students with IRSC’s medical program and physicians on the Treasure Coast to gain clinical experience.

Also, FSU has a link in Tradition, having opened its High Performance Computing Center for collaboration with scientists at Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies.



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