

EDITORIALS

Innovation Hub key to Lee's future

FGCU's Innovation Hub — the I-Hub — is an idea that deserves our community's strong support.

The community can benefit through jobs and greater investment in local businesses and people.

The land for the I-Hub — dedicated to renewable energy research and development — is on Alico Road just south of Southwest Florida International Airport.

Construction may start this year. The I-Hub is expected to have a 50,000-square-foot research building for FGCU, two 60,000-square-foot incubator buildings for developing business and research ideas, a photovoltaic solar lake, the Thomas Edison Renewable Energy Learning and Exhibition Center and an independent utility.

The I-Hub will be a research park to attract grants and give Lee County a major advantage in the critical area of renewable energy, such as solar power.

We first editorialized about this project Oct. 19 expressing support because it diversifies our economy from traditional areas of tourism and construction.

Rich Galvano of Galvano Development and John Backe, former president of CBS Publishing, are investing \$25 million in the property and looking to sell the real estate and grow the research park. Backe endowed a \$1 million professorship for FGCU to hire a renewable energy specialist this year. They'll be looking for government and private funding.

If county funding is requested, Lee commissioners might consider creating a fund separate from business incentive money to reward projects that focus on high-tech, renewable and alternative energy.

The I-Hub and businesses such as Algenol and FL BioFuels LLC are key to Lee's future.
