

Lee County hopes research lures fed money

By Brian Liberatore • bliberatore@news-press.com • May 8, 2010

The state and federal governments are offering more than \$300 million grants for renewable energy research and development.

Lee County wants a piece.

Hoping to make the region more competitive and spur grants, new businesses and entrepreneurs, Lee officials have designated about 30 square miles the Lee County Renewable Energy and Research Diamond. Commissioners may be looking to spend millions more upgrading the infrastructure and offering incentives within the region, now anchored by a handful of new high-tech firms and Florida Gulf Coast University.

"It's about any one thing that can help us be a little more competitive and differentiate ourselves with all of the other entities that are applying for these grants," said Holly Schwartz, assistant county manager.

The foundation is there, commissioners say, with the diamond's four points already attracting business and development:

- The research loop at Skyplex just north of the Southwest Florida International Airport has 275,000 square feet of commercial space.

- Algenol, a company converting algae into biofuel, is building its headquarters on property off of Alico Road west of Interstate 75. The county offered Algenol \$10 million in incentives for the project. Company CEO Paul Woods said he expects the offices to open by July and the biofuel production equipment installed later this summer.

- Next door to Algenol, Green Gallon Solutions is building a plant that will turn vegetable oil waste from restaurants into biofuel. Company partner Mico Vanderwey said he expects to open the facility by August.

The concept is similar to a FL Biofuels, LLC, which plans to open a plant off Edison Avenue in the next

month with help from a \$500,000 federal grant.

- FGCU has a \$1 million endowment, which university officials will use to fund a renewable energy scholar.

- FGCU broke ground last month on a 50,000 square-foot energy



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Luke Wunder of Crowther Facility Services prepares to install ductwork Friday at Algenol in south Fort Myers. (Amanda Inscore/news-press.com)