



## PUERTO RICAN PHOTONICS STUDENTS GET LASER-TEC ASSIST

When Hurricane Maria desolated the island of Puerto Rico in September, the Puerto Rico Photonics Institute (PRPI) at the Universidad Metropolitana was no exception to the critical damage in infrastructure and communication lines. Despite the devastation, the PRPI Laser and Photonics Certificate program courses restarted merely a month later, in October. The Institute, however, struggled with placing students in the Industry Technical Internship program due to economic challenges currently present on the island.

LASER-TEC, with the support of the Nation-

al Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education program, has offered stipends for students in need, allowing them to pursue the eight-week internship requirement of the program and finish their certificate on time. The students will be working for local fiber optics companies to gain valuable hands-on experience and help restore the telecommunication systems of Puerto Rico. The stipends will cover students' wages, cost of living, and transportation during the length of the internship.

LASER-TEC is a National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education Center

of Excellence in Lasers and Fiber Optics and is headquartered at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce. It is an association of community and state colleges, universities, K-12 schools and technical centers, trade associations, and laser and fiber optic (LFO) companies. The center's mission is to develop a sustainable pipeline of qualified laser and fiber optic technicians to meet industry needs.

*For more information about LASER-TEC, please contact Dr. Chrys Panayiotou, executive director, at cpanayio@irsc.edu or 772-462-7621. ■*

—CONTRIBUTED

### SCHOOL ADMIN. BUILDING

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recently been using at Orange Blossom, and is expected to be at least two stories, if not three.

Marty Sanders, the School District's executive director of growth management, land acquisition, inter-governmental relations, and facilities and maintenance, said the new building will have a 50-year life expectancy and will be built with operational and capital costs in mind.

But where will the administration building be built? Bargeron said the district is under contract to purchase a 10-acre site near the Tutto Fresco restaurant along Commerce

Centre Drive on the northwest quadrant of Interstate 95 close to PGA Village.

Sanders lauded the location, noting that based on expected future growth in the county, the nexus of I-95 and St. Lucie West Boulevard is the best place to be.

He said it's convenient to the Florida Turnpike, the interstate and, of course, St. Lucie West Boulevard. It's also along a public transportation route and has a bus stop nearby.

Before settling on the property near Tutto Fresco, however, the School District's staff considered properties already in their possession – properties targeted for future schools. Staff ultimately decided that it would not do for them to take away a large parcel planned for a future high school,

Bargeron said. The \$1.8 million property is expected to close this coming spring. The delay in securing the property is not stopping the School District from pushing forward on getting the architect and a construction manager on board.

The board recently inked contracts with Donadio and Associates, of Vero Beach, to provide the architectural services and Jacquin & Sons, of Fort Pierce, to serve as the construction manager.

The School District is using insurance money to cover the cost of retrofitting and renting space at Indian River State College to consolidate some of its office space.

But construction of the new administration building will be funded through what cash the district has on hand and through

what it calls "revenue anticipation notes." Such notes are essentially short-term loans held by a single entity.

It's the same process the School District used to cover the \$13-or-so million heating, ventilation and air-conditioning renovation at Port St. Lucie High School about six years ago. Five years later, the note was paid off.

District staff said they are working as quickly as possible to bring about a new building so all the departments can again be housed under the same roof.

"It's really hard to operate under these conditions," Bargeron said of having the district's numerous departments scattered throughout the county – a by-product of vacating Orange Blossom. "We're very eager to get everyone back together." ■



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