

Workforce Florida, Inc.

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**Workforce Florida president receives inaugural Toni Jennings
Award from the Florida Economic Development Council**

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida Economic Development Council (FEDC), in cooperation with Florida's workforce system, has presented its first Toni Jennings Workforce Development Professional of the Year Award to Curtis C. Austin, president of Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI).

Austin was hired by Enterprise Florida, Inc. to direct the state's workforce development efforts in 1998. Two years later, when Gov. Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature combined the state's workforce development system and welfare transition efforts to create Workforce Florida, Austin was chosen as its inaugural president.

"Through the efforts of many outstanding workforce professionals and our economic development and education partnerships, Florida's workforce system is nationally recognized for its innovation," Austin said. "It has been an honor to be part of the vision set forth by Florida leaders to align the state's workforce development efforts with economic development priorities to strengthen Florida's business climate and economy and provide better training and employment opportunities for workers.

"I'm also humbled to receive an honor named for former Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings one the workforce's system's true champions."

As president of the Florida Senate, Jennings was a key leader in efforts to create the state's modern workforce system resulting from the Florida Workforce Innovation Act of 2000. She went on to be appointed by then Gov. Bush as Workforce Florida's first volunteer chairman. Later, she was selected by Gov. Bush to serve as lieutenant governor. The FEDC award, recognizing Jennings' exceptional leadership in revamping Florida's workforce system to respond to critical workforce needs and advance local, regional and state economic development, will be presented annually.

Also receiving an award from the FEDC was Workforce Florida Board member Sharon Watley, president of General Scientific Manufacturing Inc. in Panama City. Watley is one of nine regional recipients of the Richard McLaughlin Economic Development Volunteer of the Year Award. She was recognized for her outstanding volunteer achievements in advancing economic development in her community and statewide.

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Awards were presented at the Florida Economic Development Conference held June 24-26 in Tampa. Ray Gilley, president and CEO of the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission and a former Workforce Florida Board chairman, and Susan Pareigis, president of the Florida Council of 100 and a former director of the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, presented Austin with the Jennings Award.

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Workforce Florida, Inc., (WFI) is the state's chief workforce policy organization and principal architect in the efforts to meet the current and future workforce needs and challenges of Florida's businesses and citizens. WFI is a state partner, along with the **Agency for Workforce Innovation**, in the Employ Florida affiliate network of 24 business-led regional workforce boards and nearly 100 One-Stop Career Centers that provide employment solutions throughout Florida. Learn more about Florida's workforce resources and solutions at www.EmployFlorida.com.