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County Helps Revive Aging Industrial Office Buildings

Program encourages redevelopment to spur business growth in four targeted areas

Florida Research Group needed room to expand. The company that develops food, health, and pharmaceutical products for animals had outgrown its leased, 8,000-square-foot manufacturing building north of Tampa International Airport.

A search for new quarters led to an aging warehouse on East Diana Street, in the 56th Street Redevelopment Area. It's one of four Pilot Project Areas that Hillsborough County Economic Development has earmarked and loaded with incentives for qualified businesses.

The idea is to encourage reuse of existing properties, rather than develop businesses on land that might not have infrastructure such as roads, water lines, sewers, or electricity.

Here are the Pilot Project Areas targeted by Economic Development:

- 56th Street Redevelopment Area
- North Airport Redevelopment Area
- University Redevelopment Area
- Palm River Redevelopment Area

Florida Research Group, which makes “soft chews” of varying sizes, colors, and shapes to deliver food and health products to pets and livestock, bought the East Diana Street warehouse in August 2017. “Basically, it was an empty shell,” says Dr. Purna Bikkasani, the company’s director.



Florida Research Group is in a former warehouse in the 56th Street Redevelopment Area (above, shaded), one of four designated Pilot Project Areas in Hillsborough County.

With the County’s help, Florida Research Group retrofitted the warehouse inside

and out, and opened an expanded 57,000-square-foot building in about 12 weeks.

“They said, ‘What kind of help do you need?’” Bikkasani recalls of the County’s involvement. “We couldn’t believe the way they really, really helped us.”

The County provided financial assistance to upgrade the building’s air-conditioning system, electric power, and wiring and lighting. It also helped pay for improvements to the facility’s roof, walls, front entrance, grounds, and parking lot.

Fifteen full-time employees now work at Florida Research Group. Bikkasani and company CEO Dr. Kotha Sekharam hope to double that workforce within a few months.

The arrangement with Florida Research Group, and other businesses, benefits County residents by:

- Revitalizing underutilized areas
- Encouraging private capital investment
- Increasing the tax base
- Creating higher-wage job opportunities
- Supporting growth and expansion of businesses

When assessing private businesses’ requests for financial and other types of support, such as expediting the permitting process, Economic Development looks at an applicant’s product or service, its future plans, and its ability to create good jobs, among other attributes.

In many cases, existing businesses with an eye toward expansion prefer to remain in Hillsborough County, if feasible. This program can help make that decision easy.

Bikkasani and Sekharam are thrilled with their new facility, and confident when potential customers examine the operation. “They want to know, ‘Can these guys do what we want, or not?’” Bikkasani says.

Thanks largely to the County's "awesome" help, they see no barriers to the continued success and rapid expansion they envision.

Photo information: Employees manufacture "soft chews" at Florida Research Group, which is in a former warehouse in the 56th Street Redevelopment Area.

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