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Leveraging Learning – Department of Defense and Department of Education Look for Collaboration

The early August Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative's iFest (an Office of the Secretary of Defense event) featured Department of Defense training and learning technologies as an opportunity to team with the Department of Education in helping reclaim American education leadership. iFest provided a forum for discussing some of the challenges facing education throughout the nation. As a featured keynote, James "Jim" Shelton III, assistant secretary of education for innovation, discussed some of the education voids that might benefit from defense technologies.

During his presentation, Shelton referenced a few areas where DoD has harnessed learning technologies (such as serious gaming and its recent focus on intelligent tutoring) that may contribute to putting education back on track. According to Shelton, DoD funding is one of the leading areas for research investment from a national perspective, whereas education is one of the last areas to receive research funding. He noted that if we leverage the 'lessons' that DoD has already learned, we can add those tools to the education tool kit and help put education on a growth path.

Shelton's presentation not only challenged government, but also the DoD education and training industry members attending iFest. He left the audience with a "what are we waiting for" challenge indicating education as:

A huge adjacent market opportunity

- With large, long-lasting product segments
- And with significantly less complex and dynamic outcome requirements
- Prioritized by the government and the private sector
- Enabling the nation's economic, diplomatic and developmental aspirations

After Shelton departed iFest, he continued his visit with Team Orlando by attending a roundtable discussion organized by USAF Lieutenant General (Ret.) Tom Baptiste, president/executive director of the National Center for Simulation (NCS), headquartered in the Central Florida Research Park, and Hank Okraski, chairman of the NCS Education and Workforce Development Committee. The event brought together some of Central Florida's top education leaders and the simulation community to share the Central Florida education and simulation innovations story with Shelton.

Joining Shelton were Linda Harmon, Northrop Grumman/Central Florida STEM Council; Cecilia Lopez, FL Virtual School; Walt Augustin, U.S. Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division; Dr. Jeff Bindell, techPATH, Florida High Tech Corridor Council; Dr. Randy Shumaker, UCF, Institute for Simulation & Training; Dr. Donna Poniatowski, Seminole County Public Schools (Journeys High School); Walt Griffin, Seminole County Public Schools; Dr. Connie Collins, Seminole County Public Schools (Principal, Crooms AOIT); Dr. Bill Vogel, Superintendent, Seminole County Public Schools; Janet Addair, Orange County Public Schools; Admiral Al Harms-VP, UCF /PRISM; Paul Jesukiewicz, Principal, Booz Allen Hamilton; Mary Trier, MT3 and NCS Board Member; and Dr. Mark Riecken, SAIC.

After a short orientation of the simulation industry by Lieutenant General Baptiste, Okraski provided a historical perspective of the growth of the industry in Florida and the pipeline of an educated workforce possessing the skillsets required by the industry. "Team Orlando, with its large acquisition programs," said Okraski, "is the economic engine of that growth. However, the myriad of simulation applications emerging have added more 'cylinders' to that engine, requiring a larger and more educated workforce." The Outreach by the Education and Workforce Development Committee at NCS is designed to be the linchpin within the community to funnel the technology opportunities to educators and students within Central Florida.

Shelton described his vision for regional education clusters that serve concentrations of technology throughout the nation. He also discussed the budget for education and the difficulties in dealing with shortfalls.

The group participated in active discussion on several topics, specifically touching on the growing need for resources and Central Florida's innovative implementation of education (such as virtual education and customized learning for the 'at risk' group of students whose educational needs currently go unmet), the various simulation programs that have been adapted in some of the schools, the industry/education partnership, and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives. Shelton was impressed with the cluster and indicated the cluster's collaborative nature positions it as a potential center of excellence in education innovation. He encouraged the group to continue to move forward in its innovations and collaboration while pursuing existing funding and grant opportunities, specifically identifying the U.S. Department of Education for innovations and cluster development and the Investing in Innovation Fund.

After leaving the roundtable discussion, Shelton saw a firsthand representation of some of Central Florida's education innovations at the University of Central Florida Institute for Simulation and Training (IST). Dr. Randy Shumaker, executive director of the institute, led Shelton through two innovative programs under development at IST: National Science Foundation-sponsored "Water's Journey through the Everglades," an informal education project aimed at museums; and the virtual classroom that helps train student teachers, using virtual technologies, how to control and engage students to enhance learning. This project is currently in active use at 10 universities, with another three universities joining the program in the near future.

Team Orlando's Outreach by the Education and Workforce Development Committee at NCS provided exposure to some of the simulation community's leading innovators at iFest, and some of its world-class innovators in education at the community roundtable. Through partnership, Team Orlando continues to impact business development and creative learning solutions for issues surrounding defense and other government sectors. ♦

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