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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PBCC to open a registered nursing program in Belle Glade

Nursing "boot camp" starts this fall

(Mar. 31, 2005 – Belle Glade) Health care workers on the coast think the nursing shortage is bad there, but it's much worse in the county's rural communities. That's why Palm Beach Community College is establishing a registered nursing program at its location in Belle Glade.

"We have a 25 percent vacancy rate for nurses," said Mary Weeks, chief nursing officer for Glades General Hospital in Belle Glade. "We've offered incentives like sign-on bonuses and recruited nurses from as far away as the Philippines, but the nurses often don't stay. We're trying to keep an experienced base, but there are too many temptations out there. It's hard to retain nurses other than those who grow up in the community."

Hendry Medical Center in Clewiston has provided nursing scholarships for residents for the past 15 years, said Sue Seeley, chief nursing officer, but they're still experiencing a shortage.

The Glades Initiative Partnership Council, the county Health Care District, the Everglades Area Health Education Centers from Nova Southeastern University, Glades General and Hendry hospitals, and an "access committee" of citizens from South Bay, Pahokee, Belle Glade and Clewiston first met three years ago, each pledging to do their part to establish the RN program at PBCC in Belle Glade. The program is scheduled to begin in January 2006.

The deadline for students to apply to the new RN program in Belle Glade is October 1, said Joanne Masella, registered nursing program

coordinator. “We’re all pulling together—business people, health care providers, politicians and educators—for our rural areas to have their own health care that ranks with that on the coast. It makes more sense that people who are committed to the community will be committed to its health care.”

PBCC has converted the RN program’s prerequisite courses to online classes to provide access to rural students and upgraded the laboratory from the practical nursing (PN) program that began in 2001 (and has graduated three classes of practical nurses so far) to a combination PN/RN lab. The College has installed videoconferencing equipment to make it possible for RN students to be connected to the nursing lecture classes at PBCC in Lake Worth. This fall, the College will offer a “boot camp” program in Belle Glade to prepare students for the rigors of the nursing program.

The Health Care District of Palm Beach County, which recently purchased Glades General Hospital, will provide funding for one nursing faculty position; Hendry Medical Center will do the same, and both hospitals will be used as clinical sites for the student nurses to have hands-on experiences.

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