Monday Chat: Keiser University chief gives snapshot of Florida's education landscape

By Joe Crankshaw

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PORT ST. LUCIE — Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., Peter F. Crocetto Jr., has lived in Florida since childhood. He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Fort Lauderdale College and a master's degree in business administration from the New York Institute of Technology. He is executive vce chancellor and chief operating officer of Keiser University, a private, not-for-profit educational institution with 15 campuses in Florida. He is also a senior member of the Florida Commission for Independent Education. First appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush, he has since been reappointed by Gov. Charlie Crist and Gov. Rick Scott. A resident of Palm City, he is married to the former Louise Pate. They have one son.

Q. What type of education is offered by Keiser University?

A. We started in the '70s offering vocational certificates. Now we offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in a wide range of subjects.

Q. What is the Commission on Independent Education? What does it do?

A. The commission was combined from two other boards dealing with private education. It is a consumer protection agency which promotes accountability at the post-secondary level, encourages adherence to standards to make sure of the quality of education offered Florida students.

Q. Does the commission supervise academics at those schools?

A. Academics are governed by accreditation agencies, but when new schools open, for the first two years they are not accredited and the commission ensures they provide what they say they offer.

Q. How many schools are created each year in Florida?

A. The commission licenses more than 900 schools on an annual basis. In the year 2009-2010, we had 84 provisional licenses, 66 first licenses, 376 annual renewals, 84 licenses by means of accreditation and 203 licensed by means of accreditation. We also license their programs, close to 700 programs a year.
Q. How many schools are there under the commission's jurisdiction?

A. 921.

Q. How does enrollment in independent schools compare to enrollment in the state educational system?

A. Last year there were 379,752 students enrolled in independent schools or about half the total upper-level student body in the state.

Q. What contribution do private schools make to education in Florida?

A. A very large contribution. Go in any doctor's office and see where their nursing assistants and other staff graduated. The average age of students in career colleges is 27. They are not your typical high school graduates.

Q. Public post-secondary schools are having problems with funding. What is happening to the private schools?

A. Not-for-profit schools still have their benefactors, but they have problems. But for-profit schools are having a harder time because people will not donate to a for-profit institution. Students in those colleges are having to pay out more as a result.

Q. What is in the future for private schools in Florida?

A. Education in Florida is a dynamite place to be, there is no boundary to what can be accomplished.