Keiser University building $14 million campus in Tradition's struggling research cluster

Nicole Rodriguez
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PORT ST. LUCIE — Keiser University is solidifying plans to construct a campus in the city’s struggling Tradition Center for Innovation.

The college’s developer, Fort Lauderdale-based Keenan Development, put down a deposit for eight acres for sale for $2 million in the research cluster that houses Tradition Medical Center and financially floundering biotechs, Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies and the Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute of Florida, Keiser spokeswoman Kelli Lane said Thursday. The sale is expected to close this fall, she said.

Keiser will build a $14 million 74,000-square-foot campus in the corridor, according to a site plan submitted to the city.

The two-story state-of-the-art campus will have an anticipated enrollment of 1,200 — up 400 from the current number, said founder Arthur Keiser.

“It will be a very modern, very dynamic facility,” Keiser said. “We’ll have auditoriums so the community can use them as they have in the past.”

The college — which has had a presence in the city for the past 16 years — will vacate its location in a plaza in Port St. Lucie along U.S. 1 in a year, when construction on the Tradition campus is complete, Keiser said.
Keiser University already partners with Tradition Medical Center and hasn’t ruled out collaborating with Torrey Pines and VGTI — if they stand the test of time, Keiser said.

“We’ll be able to provide support to those big ventures and I think it will be a really natural and nice symbiotic relationships with those organizations that are out there with our institution being much closer to them,” he said.

VGTI asked the city in April for a $21 million bailout, then rescinded days later in hopes of striking a more realistic — and amicable — deal with the city.

The city has since sued VGTI for damages and a missed mortgage payment, and also is asking a judge to force the research center to stay put. The litigation still is pending.

Torrey Pines — which also is strapped for cash — reportedly is trying to secure financing to bail itself out of debt.

The addition of Keiser University and the recently announced expansion of Tradition Medical Center from 90 beds to 180 will help the faltering corridor thrive, Mayor Greg Oravec said Thursday.

“The addition of Keiser University is a positive for the Center for Innovation, taken in conjunction with the recent announcement of Tradition Hospital,” Oravec said. “We can see significant progress in development of this area we expect to be an economic engine for Tradition, Port St. Lucie and St. Lucie County.”