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UCF, EA Sports team up on digital lab

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By Walter Pacheco, Orlando Sentinel

A new partnership between EA [Sports](#) and the [University of Central Florida](#) will seek to boost the high-tech game industry in [Central](#) Florida.

Officials on Friday announced the opening of the EA [Sports](#) Innovation Lab at the UCF Center for Emerging Media in downtown [Orlando](#).

The 3,000-square-foot lab, with 14 computer stations, a [conference](#) room with two massive flat-screen televisions and an [Ikea](#) sense of style, will serve as an extension of EA Sports' [Maitland](#) headquarters.

"EA talent will work side by side with students and focus on what's next in the digital interactive media industry," said EA Sports vice president Daryl Holt, who participated in the grand opening alongside Gov. [Rick Scott](#), Orlando City Commissioner [Daisy Lynum](#) and UCF President [John Hitt](#), among other local and state officials.

EA Sports built the lab in space donated by UCF for students of the school's Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy. Orlando officials in 2004 donated the building at 500 W. Livingston St. so UCF students could learn about video-game design.

The lab will house a mix of students from UCF's FIEA curriculum and EA Sports employees.

On Friday, dry erase boards with paintings of scenes from several video games adorned the lab's walls. Teams will use the flat-screen televisions to test and play games developed by the lab.

Hitt said 250 students have graduated from that program since its inception.

The governor said the partnership between the gaming giant and the state university will "foster Florida's home-grown talent."

"The Innovation Lab will prepare Florida students for high-tech jobs," Scott said. "It will ensure that high-tech businesses like EA open their doors in our state."

Steve Precourt, R-Orlando, praised the work among city officials, UCF, EA Sports and Central Florida's high-tech industry, calling it a "success story."

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"Tech companies have helped provide the incentive for this cluster to develop," he said.

wpacheco@tribune.com or 407-420-6262. Read his blog at orlandosentinel.com/techblog.

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