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Press release : 2007 : 04 : 13 : International Ocean Institute Opens First US Center at USF St. Petersburg

Erika Llenza

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International Ocean Institute Opens First US Center at USF St. Petersburg

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USF St. Petersburg has been designated as the first Operational Center of the International Ocean Institute in the United States.

Known worldwide for its policy and research efforts to promote sustainable ocean space and resources, IOI challenges the university to be an international steward that actively promotes awareness, education, and research to protect the world's waters for future generations.

Christopher F. D'Elia, PhD, regional associate vice chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies at USF St. Petersburg, who will lead IOI-USA, said that "this designation is an acknowledgment that the US needs an operational center to interact with IOI's 25 other partners in promoting and achieving sustainable uses of ocean space and coasts."

Noel J. Brown, PhD, Former Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for North America, and a member of IOI's Governing Board said the selection of Tampa Bay as the first US Operational Center is significant.

"IOI-USA is clearly a timely response to a growing sense of urgency regarding the sustainability of the ocean. It provides an opportunity for the US to exercise a new kind of leadership in education, training, and capacity building," Brown said.

Peter Betzer, professor and founding dean of USF's College of Marine Science said, "This is another star in the constellation of environmental programs and organizations in St. Petersburg that will help us reach out beyond the shores of Florida to the broader international community."

According to Florida environmental attorney and board member Marianne Cufone, who was instrumental in bringing IOI to Tampa Bay and will manage operations, "This is the perfect location for IOI-USA. We have a large marine and coastal sciences community, with many government and other organizations focused on environmental matters in this area. We are leaders on ocean issues; now through IOI, we have a means to cooperate globally."

Two early goals for IOI-USA will be to provide training in port and maritime security and to host an international conference. Planned for November 2008, A Coastal Cities Summit: Coastal Values and Coastal Vulnerabilities is expected to attract 700 international visitors to St. Petersburg, including mayors from major coastal cities around the world, according to David Randle, PhD, who is organizing the meeting.

"The IOI will be an important tool to promote U.S. leadership in maritime affairs in the international arena," said USF Professor Frank Muller-Karger, a member of the president's US Commission on Ocean Policy and an IOI-USA board member.

Regional Chancellor Karen A. White said, "IOI-USA will address many of the great challenges that face the oceans today, including the increasing urbanization of the earth's coastlines. As an urban institution specializing in coastal study and policy, USF St. Petersburg is proud to receive such distinctive recognition of our environmental leadership in coastal and marine science."

About IOI

Founded in 1972, as a knowledge-based non-governmental, non-profit international organization, its strength lies in its training programs for coastal communities. Through education, outreach, and research programs, IOI's network promotes the sustainable use of the ocean and coastal resources.

Headquartered in Valetta, Malta, the International Ocean Institute, is a 26-member network of Operational Centers from nations around the globe including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Fiji, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Malta, Nigeria, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, and the Ukraine. Many IOI operational centers partner with local universities.