

[back to article](#)

Printed on page C6

annual meeting

LEDC Touts Top Biz Projects

USF Polytechnic was big draw to bring WellDyne to Lakeland.

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THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | The University of South Florida Polytechnic has yet to break ground, but it helped reel in one of the biggest additions to Lakeland business in recent years.

So says Damien Lamendola, chief executive of Colorado-based WellDyne RX, which expanded to Lakeland this year and intends to employ nearly 700 workers by the end of 2010.

"I always get asked the question, 'Why Lakeland?'" Lamendola said Wednesday during the Lakeland Economic Development Council's annual meeting.

"It came down to those three Ps: place, people, Polytechnic," he said. "We're looking at a lot of high-skill jobs and we need a good talent pool to hire from, so we're very excited about USF Polytechnic."

WellDyne, based in Englewood, Colo., provides mail-order pharmacy services for private and government health plans. Wednesday's meeting was held in its 66,000-square-foot facility near County Line and Swindell roads.

Officials say it is the most technologically advanced facility of its kind, using robots, electronic tagging and lasers to count and sort prescriptions.

As for USF Poly, LEDC Director Steve Scruggs projected that infrastructure for the new campus could be in place next year, with construction starting in 2011 and classes beginning the year after.

Wednesday's meeting also included the LEDC's annual roundup of top business projects. In addition to WellDyne, those that made the list for 2008-09 included:

GTech Printing Corp., a high-tech producer of scratch-off lottery tickets, has expanded to Lakeland with a \$45 million, 100,000-square-foot facility on Frontage Road. The site will employ about 300 workers within the next three to five years.

A Geico official recently told the LEDC that the company will hire 450 associates for new positions in Lakeland this year.

Auburndale-based Colorado Boxed Beef is hiring 80 new workers this year, with 44 in Lakeland and the rest in Auburndale.

Swiss flavor and fragrance company Firmenich is expanding its Lakeland operations this year and adding 66 new jobs as part of a \$20 million expansion.

Ring Power Corp. of St. Augustine, one of the largest Caterpillar dealers in the Southeast, is building a 90,000-square-foot dealership near the Polk Parkway and U.S. 98.



Damien Lamendola

It should open in August with a staff of 40.

Rich LeFrois with Central Florida Development began the program by previewing future developments his company has in the Lakeland/Plant City area.

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This story appeared in print on page C6
