

## *Today's News*

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### **Florida Atlantic U. Acquires Oceanographic Research Institution**

By ELIZABETH QUILL

Florida Atlantic University has begun acquiring Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, a renowned but financially strained research and exploration center, under a tentative deal brokered by the university's president and a key state senator.

The state budget, which Florida's governor, Charles J. Crist, signed into law last month, allocates \$44-million for repairs at the institution and an additional \$8.5-million a year for operations.

The institution, which owns more than 500 acres of undeveloped coastal land near Fort Pierce, Fla., about 90 miles north of Florida Atlantic's campus in Boca Raton, is one of three organizations in the country that operates manned deep-sea submersible research vehicles along the ocean floor. In addition, Harbor Branch owns a fully operational research vessel and a collection of biological specimens that includes 47,000 sponges and micro-organisms.

"It seems natural for the two institutions to grow together and evolve," the university's president, Frank T. Brogan, said in an interview on Monday. "This is truly a magical win-win-win relationship for everyone."

Mr. Brogan said Harbor Branch will not have to worry about its survival, Florida Atlantic can expand its research, and the state will acquire untouched land.

The oceanographic institution was formed in 1971 by J. Seward Johnson, an heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune, and Edwin A. Link, the inventor of the flight simulator. After running into financial trouble in recent years, the institution considered selling some of its waterfront property for commercial development.

When Mr. Brogan and the State Senate's president, Ken P. Pruitt, heard of those plans, around last June, they proposed a different solution to the institution's dwindling resources. Under the agreement, which is not yet finalized, the university will acquire 125 acres of property and financial responsibility for the institution.

Harbor Branch's current board will continue to lead the institution but will ultimately answer to Florida Atlantic. The university will also retain Harbor Branch's roughly 200 employees for at least one year.

"Their employees will be our employees, and their scientists our scientists," Mr. Brogan said.

State and local governments also plan to purchase some of the remaining undeveloped and environmentally sensitive land from the oceanographic institution, to help it pay off its debt and restore its endowment.

Mr. Brogan said Florida Atlantic's new relationship with Harbor Branch does not represent the first time it has worked with the institution. The university has a research facility and scientists at Harbor Branch and has offered educational programs through the institution in the past.

Florida Atlantic also has a research and ocean-engineering facility, SeaTech, in Dania Beach, about 30 miles south of Boca Raton. Mr. Brogan said Harbor Branch will continue to do the work it has been doing, but he would also like to expand its work in biosciences and bioengineering.

Senator Pruitt said he was glad the state had found a solution that did not involve selling the land to developers.

"This is one of those marriages made in heaven," Mr. Pruitt said. "We are creating the fourth leg of Florida's economy, which is going to be based on research and education."

The university has already begun the merger, completing paperwork and absorbing Harbor Branch employees as state employees. Mr. Brogan hopes this work will be done by the beginning of next year. Still, officials at Harbor Branch insist the merger is not a done deal. Both the university and the institution still need to work out and approve the final terms of agreement.

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