

Center for Applied Space Technology

A Message from CAST Executive Director, Maria Peterson

It is a fundamental researcher's dream to take an idea that has been espoused repeatedly by a number of disparate sources; develop a program that provides an opportunity to evaluate the expressed principles; and then design, run, and evaluate a proof-of-concept program that serves to prove or deny the hypothesis. When this program is established to evaluate and support highly qualified workers as they seek to transition from long-held occupations into exciting, but very new career fields, the anticipation of success becomes palpable. Such was the occasion recently experienced by CAST. It has long been held that the aerospace workforce that supports our national space program are among the most highly, trained, skilled, and safety conscious in the country, and possibly the world. This mantra has been used repeatedly by politicians and bureaucrats since the determination of the demise of the space shuttle program, often as a ready-made excuse for why more isn't being done under their purview to minimize the impact of the death of the program (as in, "these folks are so highly skilled that they will have no difficulty finding jobs in other careers"). Working with Brevard Workforce and with significant support from United Space Alliance (USA), CAST was able to objectively quantify this long-held myth.

Understanding that the State of Florida has made significant economic investment in the biotechnology industry, the Center endeavored to establish a pipeline between the older, fading industry and the vibrant, expanding new one. The "AerospaceTech to Biotech" program was crafted with the University of Florida Center of Excellence in Regenerative Health Biotechnology (UFCERHB), in order to evaluate skill transferability into biotechnology operations. The UFCERHB team developed and exported the program to the Space Life Sciences Laboratory (SLSL) where they were able to train and appraise the skill levels of the selected technicians. The result was predictable for those of us who have worked within the human spaceflight industry but still surprising to the UF team. The technicians were extremely well-schooled and experienced in the same qualifications that mark a good biotech technician, particularly workplace attitudes, skills, and competencies supported by strong systems technology expertise. In short, the aerospace workforce is, in fact, a very unique and valuable asset to our national interests and might be easily transitioned into other emerging career fields that require a high level of competency and professionalism. The CAST team was proud to facilitate several of these classes, usually peopled by technicians who had already received a 'pink slip'. Along with our partners in this effort, CAST stands ready to assist your industry in exploring ways in which this workforce might be transitioned to your advantage.