

**“STUDENTS FIRST” column for the *Immokalee Bulletin* – for 2/22/07 edition**

There are great plans in place for the future of your community, including plans in the all-important career education arena. Announcement of these plans was made at the School Board Meeting held in Immokalee a couple of weeks ago. Immokalee Career Center Principal Dorin Oxender spoke to Board Members about the plans. Here, in his own words, are the comments made by Mr. Oxender. “The career center is a passion of mine. I’ve been here for 12 years working towards this goal and in the last six months since I came on board, I’ve been charged with trying to develop programs and solicit feedback from agencies and associations on what programs we need to have in Southwest Florida specifically for training, and so we’ve done a bunch of consensus building that’s been a big part of my work in the six months. My charge was not to decide what was going to go in there, but the community and the needs of the community should decide what’s going to go in the career center. And with all of those agencies on board, we now have the programs identified. There will have to be a big focus on construction trade and the health sciences as the needs in Southwest Florida are dictating. Cosmetology, computer and technology, business education, culinary arts, early childhood education & teacher assisting, automotive technology, and of course a strong emphasis on GED preparation and family literacy programs should also be housed at the career center. One of the unique facets of the center is that it will include site-based businesses set up with open-to-the-public store fronts. The store fronts we are hoping to offer include a proposed bakery and cyber café, bank, school store, practicing medical office, an auto service center, a childcare center and a cosmetology center. The exciting thing is that this career center is just across the street from Immokalee High School and kittycornered to Immokalee Middle School. It’s going to serve as a beacon of hope and opportunity to the community. Hopefully through bringing middle school students over in wheels and explorations, and having the elementary students over for career days, and having the high school students know that they can get certificated training while attending high school is going to help people stay in school. They’ll know what the rainbow at the end of the tunnel is, and we’re extremely excited about it and can’t wait to see it break ground.” Mr. Oxender, we know the community, and those of us with the school district, are excited as well.