



Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute *of* Florida

## PRESS RELEASE

### For immediate release

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## VGTI FLORIDA SCIENTISTS STRIVE TO CURE AIDS, IMPROVE GLOBAL HEALTH BY FOCUSING ON IMMUNE SYSTEM

**PORT SAINT LUCIE, Fla.** – The Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute of Florida, one of the state’s internationally acclaimed research organizations that is a key part of the fast-growing hub of bioscience excellence, has attracted some of the world’s top scientists working to prevent and treat AIDS, cancer, infectious diseases and other ailments that afflict older populations. Among its many research projects, VGTI Florida scientists are working on discoveries that could lead to the elimination of the HIV virus in persons infected with it – an advancement that could save millions of lives across the world.

“The team we are building here brings with it years of making seminal scientific findings that have contributed to, and continue to contribute to the health and longevity of humans here and around the globe,” said Jay Nelson, Ph.D., VGTI Florida executive director and vice president. “Being part of the growing scientific community in Florida provides us an opportunity to collaborate with other world-class research organizations such as the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies, Scripps Florida, Max Planck Florida Institute and Martin Memorial Health Systems. Our goals are all similar – to do groundbreaking scientific research that impacts the quality of human health around the world.”

Dr. Nelson recruited Rafick-Pierre Sékaly, Ph.D., considered one of the leading human immunologists in the world, to be scientific director of VGTI Florida. Dr. Sékaly’s team has made scientific breakthroughs in HIV vaccine development, and pioneered a new generation of novel approaches for HIV and cancer vaccines. His work has resulted in more than 200 peer-reviewed science journal articles, and 20 patents. His lab also has received numerous prestigious research grants from the National Institutes of Health, the Canadian government and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“The immunotherapy work we’re doing in Port St. Lucie is destined to improve lives everywhere, but especially in the global hotspots where AIDS and other viral pandemics are thriving,” said Dr. Sékaly. “For that, we have recruited people from across Florida, the country and all over the world to work here, and to partner with international investigators from other institutes and universities in Florida to form the nucleus of what’s on track to become a region rich in research advancements.”



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VGTI Florida is temporarily housed in the Torrey Pines Florida headquarters while its own building is constructed. The institute's research focus is on rapidly developing vaccines and therapeutics to fight infectious diseases, cancer and to boost the immune response of aging populations, which are most vulnerable to disease. Currently, VGTI Florida has developed basic and clinical research collaborations with Martin Memorial, Moffitt Cancer Center, and the University of Miami. VGTI has also created programs for university and high school students.

Plans call for VGTI Florida's new 100,000-square-foot building to open in 2012 on eight acres adjacent to Torrey Pines. VGTI Florida became possible through a \$60 million investment in January 2008 by the State of Florida through its Innovation Incentive Fund. The City of Port St. Lucie also has committed \$53 million for infrastructure expenditures. Research at the facility is funded by NIH research grants, and by other funding organizations. The institute is a spinoff of the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute at Oregon Health & Science University in Beaverton, Ore., a renowned organization that has gained national attention for its innovative research. Dr. Nelson also serves as director of OHSU VGTI.

### ABOUT VGTI FLORIDA

VGTI Florida is a world-class research institute in Port St. Lucie, Fla. that focuses on studying the human immune system to prevent and treat chronic infectious diseases, cancer and ailments that disproportionately affect aging populations. The institute's researchers have contributed to significant advances in the development of vaccines and other therapeutics to fight diseases such as AIDS, melanoma, breast cancer, prostate cancer, yellow fever and dengue fever. VGTI Florida is an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization that is a spinoff of the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute at Oregon Health & Science University in Beaverton, Ore.