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BCBSF STATEMENT ON FACILITIES

January 20, 1993

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's current facility policy is to retain ownership of our Riverside Home Office Complex and lease additional space as needed.

As part of our strategic planning process, we are looking at a wide range of opportunities that will help us address our facilities requirements for the future. At this point, we are considering a number of options.

NOTE: Attribute statement to Patrick McCabe

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OPINION

Karen
Brune Mathis

Senior business writer

One name surfaces on big project

There's nothing like a good mystery company to get the city moving.

Rumors continued swirling yesterday about the latest unidentified organization considering Jacksonville for a large project.

A refresher: Yesterday, we reported that a major project of at least 1 million square feet was looking at Jacksonville — as well as other Florida cities — for a multi-use project, and that the University of Florida College of Architecture dean was working on the deal.

As for names, just one seemed to take prominence yesterday:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Inc., which now occupies about 1 million square feet of space around town.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield owns a 20-story, 548,000-square-foot office building along Riverside Avenue downtown and leases about 400,000 square feet of office space in three buildings at the Freedom Commerce Centre in Baymeadows and also leases an estimated 65,000 square feet in Deerwood Center.

It employs about 4,900 people in Jacksonville.

For its part, however, Blue Cross and Blue Shield spokesman Patrick McCabe issued only a brief statement yesterday that the organization is "considering a number of options" regarding its future facilities needs.

The statement said the organization's "current facility policy is to retain ownership of our Riverside Home Office Complex and lease additional space as needed."

"As part of our strategic planning process, we are looking at a wide range of opportunities that will help us address our facilities requirements for the future. At this point, we are considering a number of options," it concluded.

McCabe declined further comment.

Sources didn't share many more details yesterday other than that the project would start with 600,000 square feet — a little less than the space in Barnett's downtown tower.

However, some sources stress that Blue Cross's strategic planning is for the long term, and not to read too much into its statement or assume it's behind the mystery project.

UF Architecture Dean Wayne Drummond cautioned yesterday against much more publicity about the project.

When asked if Blue Cross was his client, he said no. When asked if perhaps Blue Cross was the client of someone else he was working with, he brought the questioning to a close.

"I really feel an obligation not to say any more," he said.

Stay tuned.

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BUSINESS

Details outline huge development project

By Karen Brune Mathis
Senior business writer

Jacksonville, once again awash with widespread rumors about a major new development project interested in the city, can take heart: The rumors are true.

A University of Florida dean working on a major development said yesterday he hopes to get the deal in place this year — and the place could be Jacksonville.

However, Wayne Drummond, dean of the UF College of Architecture, wasn't much more specific than that when asked yesterday about a huge new office project that sources said he was assisting.

"We are involved in a major development effort with the possibility of it being in the northeast region," Drummond said.

"There's a strong focus on Jacksonville," he said, but stressed the city wasn't necessarily the final site.

Other than that, he added just a few more details upon questioning:

- It's "possibly" more than 1 million square feet in size, meaning it could be the equivalent of 1½ times the space in the downtown Barnett Center.

- The client may or may not be headquartered in Florida. "Their ownership structure is very com-

plicated."

- The project wouldn't be strictly an office development. "It's going to have a number of functions."

- Several Florida cities are being considered; more than 20 sites were looked at in Jacksonville.

- The client isn't necessarily a corporation.

As for the time frame, "We're hopeful we can be of service and get a deal in place before the year is out," he said.

Declining to provide any more details, Drummond said: "I have an obligation ... to protect the confidentiality of my client."

Sources throughout the city have

been speculating about the project, which evokes images of the secrecy surrounding such Jacksonville developments as the AT&T Universal Card Services Corp. headquarters, Merrill Lynch & Co.'s operations center and, recently, Vistakon's new manufacturing plant.

Deputy Mayor Frank Nero, acknowledging his knowledge of the project, said "the city stands prepared to do whatever we can when it comes time to do business."

While Drummond and Nero declined to offer more details, sources in Jacksonville familiar with the deal have talked about it

— but refuse to be identified because they promised confidentiality or fear they'd lose any chance to work on the project.

Those sources say they understand that:

- The project would be more than 1 million square feet in size; some say it could be up to 1.8 million square feet — the size of almost three Barnett Centers.

- The project would be built in phases.

- Some say the project has been narrowed to three Florida cities, including Jacksonville; at least two sources say Northeast Florida appears to be the chosen area.

- It appears to be a suburban deal rather than a downtown prospect, although some say that downtown is a possible site.

- Because of its size, the project most likely would go into an existing Development of Regional Impact. Sites mentioned most often, but not exclusively, are Deerwood Park and Freedom Commerce Centre on the Southside and Jacksonville International Tradeport on the Northside.

Officials of those developments either couldn't be reached or declined comment yesterday.

No projected employment numbers were available.