A boost for science
College announces $187,084 science grant award

By SARA KENNEDY

skennedy@bradenton.com

MANATEE — State College of Florida announced Friday the award of a coveted National Science Foundation grant worth $187,084 that it plans to use for cutting-edge science education.

SCF faculty members will devote part of the money to train high school science teachers from Manatee and Sarasota counties in the use of sophisticated lab instruments.

Once teachers master use of the equipment, SCF plans to send portable “loaner” boxes full of new, high-tech tools and supplies back with them for the students’ use, SCF officials said at the college’s Bradenton campus.

Each “Lab in a Box” carries $14,000 worth of items, officials said.

Among the items a box might carry are an ultraviolet transilluminator, which visually illuminates DNA; a forensic DNA fingerprinting kit; and a mini centrifuge.

“It cements our position as leaders in science education,” explained SCF President Lars A. Hafner, in announcing the grant and the two-year pilot project it will finance. He called the project “extremely exciting news that sprang from true collaboration” with school districts, university faculty and area science professionals, and regional biotechnology companies.

With a tongue-twister for a name — the Biotechnology Alliance for Suncoast Biology Educators — the project is slated to start in May and continue through April 2013.

It was developed by SCF life sciences faculty members Jane Pfeilsticker, Matthew Kerle and Andrew Swanson, aided by Susan Puchalla, of the Sarasota County School District, and Judith Griffin, of the Manatee County School District.

Designed to help to make science more accessible, project developers hope it will better prepare about 200 high school students in biotechnology studies, they said.

It is also meant to encourage continued study through college, and careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

As an outgrowth of the project, SCF will offer a new Associate in Science Degree in Biotechnology this fall, SCF officials said.

“This is great for our students, and great for our community,” said Manatee Schools Superintendent Tim McGonegal.

Sara Kennedy, Herald reporter, can be reached at (941) 745-7031.
From left, State College of Florida lab staffers Malia Niswander, Nancy Stults, Katie DeBerry and Diane McGraff look on during a press conference Friday announcing a grant award from the National Science Foundation. The grant will help fund an educational partnership between local high schools and SCF.