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Mayor Foster Hosts STING RAY participants at City Hall

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— Sting Ray 2012

ST. PETERSBURG, FL (May 21, 2012) – Mayor Bill Foster last week played host at City Hall for nine members of the USF St. Petersburg STING RAY program, which helps students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities gain independence, find employment and establish positive social and work relationships.

Five of the nine students, all of whom are 18 to 22 years old, are new to the program. The mayor showed them around City Hall and posed for a photo in City Council chambers (From left to right:

Mayor Foster, David Tran, Trent Tucker, Isabel McKinney, Pinellas curriculum coordinator Annie Johnson, Chrystal Mendoza, Michael Farnum, Evan Lyle, Laresa Battee, Kailey Castine, and community coordinator Rob Knabel).

The new students were involved in a two-week, extended orientation program to prepare them for the fall semester. The program is part Project 10: Transition Education Network, the statewide project at USFSP that addresses transition needs of students with disabilities.

STING RAY (Students Transitioning into the Next Generation, Recognizing Alternatives for Youth) is collaboration among USF St. Petersburg, the Florida Department of Education and Pinellas County Schools. The program encourages the students to develop their own schedule of working, volunteering, studying and extracurricular activities. They audit courses at USF St. Petersburg, participate in activities with degree-seeking students and travel independently to the jobs they will seek based on their interests.

“Our ultimate goal is to enhance communication, independent living and employment readiness skills in order to find competitive, gainful employment,” said Christian Haas, mentor coordinator for Project 10. “In order to achieve this, we surround the students with degree seeking, age similar mentors, place them in on and off campus internships, allow them to audit a college course, and engage in community based instruction.”

Last semester, the program had over 25 mentors for six students, and six students had part-time employment.

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