Lecture Series Opens With Talk On Global Trade

By Carol Porter
Town-Crier Staff Report

The 2005 Florida International University Provost Lecture Series in Wellington was launched Wednesday with the topic “Adjusting to Globalization.” The series is sponsored by FIU, the Village of Wellington and the Quantum Group, a health care consulting firm.

Moderator Noel Guillama of the Quantum Group led the evening. After some brief opening remarks, Guillama introduced keynote speaker Dr. Jose de la Torre, dean of FIU’s Alva H. Chapman Graduate School of Business.

De la Torre said a much more globally aligned economy has emerged in the years since World War II. While global trade accounted for about 5.4 percent of world production in 1950, it now claims 20 percent, and generates $1.4 trillion in exchange annually.

A specialist in economics and business strategy in Latin America, de la Torre said Brazil and other Latin American nations are seeing a definite increase in foreign investment. For example, de la Torre pointed to three similar companies: the U.S. retailer Wal-Mart, the Dutch supermarket operator Royal Ahold and the French supermarket operator Carrefour. These three retail giants increased the number of their stores operating in Latin America from a mere three in the 1990s to almost 2,000 by the end of the year 2001.

De la Torre also pointed to several case studies where businesses in Latin America refused to consider a more regional approach and listen to the needs and responses of the local people. Businesses who do not listen to those needs are often bought out by other firms who would. De la Torre said it is important for businesses that want to make a global impact to adjust to the needs of other countries and think like the locals. Coffee made in one country, for example, is not made the same in another country.

De la Torre said one company, Fibers International, has its headquarters in Europe and offices in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. The company contracted with him to help the business correct its dwindling finances and resources, but did not listen to his findings when he told them they needed a more regional approach. Eventually, the European overseer company got out of the business in Latin America, and each of the smaller businesses was either bought out by a third party or shut down. De la Torre said it is important for a company interested in making inroads into another country to create a holding in that country and transfer the ownership of it to the people living in that region.

Concluding his presentation, de la Torre said one of the key components of any corporation anywhere is its people, and businesses need to take people into account, no matter what kind of business operation or where. If people are rewarded narrowly, they will think narrowly and not on a large scale. De la Torre also encouraged people to get as much exposure to different countries as possible.

Comments from a panel of experts in the field of trade and the economy followed de la Torre’s presentation, which included Kevin Johns, director of Economic Development for Palm Beach County; Richard Lehman, President of Richard S. Lehman & Associates; and Al Zucaro, chairman of the World Trade Center Palm Beach.

The next lecture in the series, “Challenges and Responses to an Aging Society” with Max Rothman, executive director of FIU’s Stempel School of Public Health Center on Aging, will take place at the Royal Palm Beach Cultural Center on Thursday, June 23 from 6 to 8 p.m.

For more information about the lecture series, call (800) 850-8523.