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GRIFOLS' EXEC ZUNIGA GIVES BACK TO ALMA MATER,
NEIGHBORHOOD ON EASTSIDE

Locals Take Lead in Bioscience Growth

By Dana Bartholomew (/staff/dana-bartholomew/)

Friday, March 2, 2018

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Grifols Chief Executive Willie Zuniga. Photo by Ringo Chiu (/staff/ringo-chiu/).

Some leaders of the growing Los Angeles biosciences industry deserve ample credit for recruiting the next generation of biotech workers and entrepreneurs.

Take Willie Zuniga. The chief executive of Grifols Biologicals Inc. has his hands full producing plasma-derived medicines for rare chronic conditions such as hemophilia.

But he's also made it a mission to hire workers in and around his native east Los Angeles, home of the Spanish-owned Grifols S.A. plant in El Sereno.

"The most rewarding thing, for me personally," said the soft-spoken chief executive during a recent visit, "is creating more job opportunities for the folks in the local community and Los

Angeles.”

Grifols S.A. has poured \$350 million into the 36-acre campus since it took over Alpha Therapeutic Inc. more than a decade ago, tripling the size of its El Sereno work force to 1,200 employees, with more expected in coming months.

Many point to its chief executive as the local guru for bioscience work force development.

Zuniga was born and raised in working-class El Sereno and nearby Lincoln Heights, and attended two years of college with a dream of becoming a medical doctor. Then he got married young, had a daughter, and hit the bricks instead of the medical library stacks.

He landed a job in 1979 at Alpha Therapeutic, starting as an entry level manufacturing tech producing blood-derived proteins. He was 21. He’s now company president, having worked in just about every area of the plant.

He went to nearby Cal State Los Angeles to finish his bachelor’s degree. But he never forgot his roots – not in El Sereno, nor on the factory floor.

Zuniga and other Grifols execs have since fanned out across East Los Angeles to spur interest in science and biotech – from grade schools to community colleges to four-year universities.

They’ve lectured at-risk students, hosted seminars and conducted tours of the densely packed hilltop campus, where “Grifols” is now etched in Dodger blue. They’ve also sponsored after school programs, taught summer science academies and helped build 16 Habitat for Humanity homes for needy residents.


The recruiting efforts have helped spur the development of biotech programs at Citrus College, Los Angeles Trade Technical College and Los Angeles Valley College. The company met with Cerritos College and Los Angeles Mission College to discuss programs there.


And Zuniga has never ceased to support his Cal State alma mater – now an emerging leader in biotech – where he serves on a presidential advisory board.



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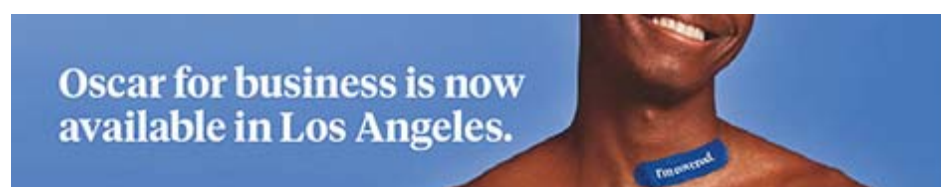
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