Northeast Loses ‘Playground,’ Gains Major Health Facility

Standing on the hills that once served as a childhood playground, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa joined executives from a global healthcare company and local leaders to dedicate the company’s new 92,000-square-foot biomedical technology production facility in Northeast Los Angeles on Tuesday. Grifols, Inc’s new biomedical facility is the first phase of a long-range investment in its U.S. headquarters in El Sereno.

Officials said the $135 million facility will bring up to 300 new jobs to the area. Grifols is a major producer of plasma-based biologic therapies to treat a variety of rare, incurable and often life threatening diseases and conditions.

Greg Rich, president and CEO of Grifols, Inc. told Villaraigosa that the project would not run into the problems that have stalled infrastructure projects throughout the City.

"Mr. Mayor, unlike other projects, this is fully funded and it is going forward."

While the hills surrounding the new facility were once a place where a younger Villaraigosa and other local children used cardboard boxes for a makeshift sleigh ride down the grassy slopes for springtime enjoyment, it is now the site of a massive investment in the northeast community.

"This is a very significant moment during this economic crisis," Villariagos said, "Nothing thrills me more than the sight of hardhats and shovels."

Construction on the facility began in October 2008 and is scheduled for completion by 2013. In October 2008, the company’s board of directors approved a $600 million long-range investment in production and plasma collection facilities.

With the new production facility, Grifols, Inc, the U.S. subsidiary of Grifols, SA, based in Spain, will increase its ability to manufacture intravenous immune globulin (IVIG), a key therapy for people who suffer from primary immune deficiency disorders. According to the Immune Deficiency Foundation (IDF) Web site, www.primaryimmune.org, these disorders occur in persons born with an immune system that is either absent or hampered in its ability to function.

Marcia Bolye, president and founder of the Immune Deficiency Foundation (IDF) attended the ceremony and told the audience that it was a "special day" because "these products give life."

Boyle began her advocacy work for patients with primary immune deficiency after doctors diagnosed her son John with a primary immunodeficiency disease in 1978. She said IVIG therapy has allowed her son to live a normal life.

Officials said the benefits of an advanced biomedical facility in El Sereno would benefit more than just patients who utilize the therapies that will be produced at the site, James Rosser, president of Cal State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) said the partnership between the Grifols and the University will motivate students to prepare for careers in the biotechnology field. There are currently 15 CSULA graduates employed by Grifols.

Los Angeles Councilman Jose Huizar, (CD14) told EGP that he hopes the kids in El Sereno learn about the new biomedical facility in their backyard and see it as a sign of what they can achieve. He noted that the jobs created will help the community and others. He said, "Their work literally saves the lives of countless people."