

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

Sunshine state's 2nd safest city

Punta Gorda earns high marks for public safety

By CHUCK LaROSE Staff Writer

PUNTA GORDA - Punta Gorda has been recognized as one of the safest places in the Sunshine State, and some Southwest Florida cities aren't far behind.

BackgroundChecks.org, a website specializing in public records, has ranked Punta Gorda second on its 2016 list of safest cities in Florida, second only to Key Biscayne.

Venice came in 24th and North Port ranked 31st on the list, which compiled the rankings based on the number of crimes - both violent and involving property - committed relative to the population.

"The Punta Gorda Police Department is proud of the partnership we have with our community," Interim Punta Gorda Police Chief Thomas Lewis said. "A recognition such as this is a reflection of our city departments, the city manager, city council, law enforcement and residents partnering together for a common goal - a safe community in which to live and prosper."

The department credits an ongoing effort to be active in the community as the main reason for Punta Gorda's generally safe environment.

Attendance at neighborhood watch meetings, participation in local events and meetings with senior citizens to alert them to possible scams are a few of the ways the department interacts with residents.

"We're also using social media now to keep people up-to-date about things they should be aware of," said Lt. Katie Heck, the Punta Gorda Police Department's Community Services coordinator.

Punta Gorda, with a population of about 17,000, was deemed a "very safe place to live" by the website and had a low occurrence of violent crime. The chances of a resident being affected by crime involving property, the more prevalent type of crime in the community, was listed at just 1.6 percent.

"Most of the property crime in the area tends to come in bursts," Heck said. "We usually find that a sudden rash of burglaries is related to one individual or a crew that has come to the area. But our detectives do a great job of making sure the problem doesn't last long." City Mayor Rachel Keesling noted that the ranking is a win for the community overall.

"Punta Gorda is a safe place to live, work and visit because our public safety departments are dedicated and customer focused," she said. "Both our fire and police departments offer many unique, citizen-focused services that cover prevention, education and participation. As a city, our goal is to deliver the highest levels of service in multiple areas and our public safety professionals are achieving and exceeding that goal."

The accolade comes just months after the Nov. 1 homicide of 7-Eleven clerk Kyle Farishian in Punta Gorda Isles. The 18-year-old's death, which remains unsolved, was the first homicide in the PGI neighborhood since 1994.

Other Southwest Florida communities cracking the top 20 were Cape Coral (14th) and Naples (19th).

Though slightly higher than Punta Gorda, Venice earned a favorable rating in relation to violent crime and there is a 1.9 percent chance that a resident in the city of about 21,000 could be affected by a property crime.

With the study citing a population of 57,300, more than double the size of half the cities in the top 50, North Port had more instances of violent crime compared to Venice, but mirrored the community's 1.9 percent rate of property crime.

February 2016 Passenger Traffic up 37% at Punta Gorda

Punta Gorda, FL - The Charlotte County Airport Authority announces the Punta Gorda Airport passenger count for February, 2016 was 91,130. This is a 37.5 % increase in passenger traffic for February 2016 compared with February 2015 (66,254 passengers).

In February, there were 44,128 boarding passengers and 47,002 arriving passengers. This is the 28th month in a row that the Airport has seen an increase in passenger traffic in year over year monthly traffic. This is also a new record for February and the second highest month ever.

Kathleen Coppola, Commissioner of the Charlotte County Airport Authority, stated "The increase in passengers is associated with the increase in cities that Allegiant now serves. It is also a testament that more and more people are visiting our area along with those who live here are using the Punta Gorda Airport."

Allegiant Air has non-stop service to Thirty cities including Akron Canton Airport, OH; Allentown, PA; Asheville, NC; Belleville, IL; Cedar Rapids, IA; Cincinnati, OH; Columbus, OH; Des Moines, IA; Ft. Wayne, IN; Grand Rapids, MI; Greenville/ Spartanburg, SC; Harrisburg, Pa.; Huntington, WV; Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, MO.; Knoxville, TN; Lexington, KY; Moline, IL; Niagara Falls, NY; Peoria, IL; Pittsburgh, PA; Plattsburgh, NY; Portsmouth, NH; Raleigh, N.C.; Rockford, IL; South Bend, IN; Springfield, IL; Springfield/Branson, MO; Toledo, OH; and Youngstown, OH. Allegiant Air can be reached at www.allegiantair.com or call 702-505-8888. Please check their schedule as some of the cities are seasonal.

The Charlotte County Airport Authority owns and operates the Punta Gorda Airport located at 28000 Airport Road in Punta Gorda, Florida.

For more information contact Mr. Gary Quill at 941-639-1101 ext. 101.

RSW ranks 6th busiest spring break airport

By DAVE BREITENSTEIN NEWS-PRESS

If you're finding less elbow room these days in Charlotte and Sarasota restaurants, beaches and roads, that may be due to the spring breakers who have now joined the snowbirds and year-round residents in the area.

A lot of them are flying to the region.

According to the Transportation Security Administration, Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) will be the nation's sixth-busiest spring break destination this month.

TSA predictions based on daily checkpoint volume increases show RSW will see an 8.5 percent increase in passengers over March 2015. That means spring breakers, as well as families and business travelers, might expect longer lines at the ticket counter and security checkpoint.

"Our dedicated officers do their absolute best to screen passengers both effectively and efficiently, with a primary focus on traveler security," said Peter V. Neffenger, TSA administrator. "We want to ensure that everyone arrives at their destination safely, while at all times providing the highest standards of security screening possible.

"By following a few basic common-sense tips, the security screening process can be both effective and quick.

And while we never will compromise security, we will work to reduce checkpoint wait times wherever possible."

The No. 1 spring break airport, according to the TSA, is Orlando, followed by Phoenix, Fort Lauderdale, Minneapolis and Tampa.

Some college students on spring break are hitting the beach; others are playing in the current Snowbird Baseball Classic (snowbirdbaseball.info) in Charlotte County, which is also drawing their families and friends.

Here is the list of colleges where students have come or are coming from and the dates of arrival to the Charlotte and Sarasota counties, according to News-Press research: University of Michigan: Feb. 27 - March 6, John Carroll University: Feb. 27 - March 6, University of Kentucky: March 14 - March 19, Florida Gulf Coast University: March 7 - March 12, Stetson University: March 7 - March 13, Georgia State University: March 14 - March 20, Ball State University: March 6 - March 13, Indiana State: March 14 - March 18, Indiana University: March 13 - March 20, Miami University of Ohio: March 21 - March 22, Michigan State University: March 7 - March 11, Ohio State: March 14 - March 18, Penn State University: March 6 - March 12, Purdue University: March 14 - March 19, Queens University: March 6 - March 13, University of Georgia: March 7 - March 11, University of Minnesota: March 14 - March 18, University of Notre Dame: March 5 - March 13, University of North Carolina: March 6 - March 11, University of South Carolina: March 6 - March 13, Iowa State: March 14 - March 18, University of Chicago: March 19 - March 27, University of Iowa: March 13 - March 20, University of Wisconsin: March 19 - March 27, Valdosta: March 14 - March 18, University of Florida: Feb. 27 - March 6, University of Dayton: Feb. 24 - Feb. 28.

Veterans Florida grant

Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) recently facilitated the first Veterans Florida grant awarded in the state to DreamWare, Inc., a Naples-based technology company. Dreamware, Inc. will use the grant to hire and train 40 new veterans.

Veterans Florida grants were created in response to Governor Rick Scott's drive to increase jobs in Florida. Newly launched by the state on Jan. 1, 2016, Veterans Florida grants will assist companies in hiring and providing training to veterans. Companies can receive up to \$8000 per veteran to cover the training costs of new hires, with a maximum of \$200,000 total.

For more information about Veterans Florida grants, contact Kerr at (239) 432-5233 or adrian.kerr@fsw.edu.

Atlanta Braves could bring money, jobs to area

Atlanta baseball team considers moving spring training camp to Sarasota County
By CLINTON BURTON Sarasota County Editor Charlotte Sun

SARASOTA COUNTY - Orlando's loss could be Sarasota County's gain.

The Atlanta Braves plan to leave their spring training home at Disney's ESPN Wide World of Sports in Orlando when their 20-year lease expires after 2017. And, if all goes well, the team's next spring training home could be the West Villages in South Sarasota County.

If a deal is struck, the economic impact could be far-reaching.

"We don't have the numbers yet, but look at the benefit spring training has had for any community in the state of Florida," said Jeff Maultsby, the county's director of business and economic development. "We're fortunate to have the Baltimore Orioles here. If we are able to bring in another iconic brand like the Atlanta Braves, the potential exists to double that impact and spread it out across the county."

Florida's spring training has an annual economic impact of more than \$752 million statewide, according to Enterprise Florida, a public-private economic development

partnership.

The Braves are leaving Orlando because other Major League teams in the area are moving their spring training camp to Florida's east coast, leaving the Braves with no nearby teams to play.

Team management began looking for a new home and expressed an interest in Sarasota County months ago. Representatives of the West Villages Improvement District offered up a location just off U.S. 41 in the new commercial core of the master-planned community, just north of North Port.

"They made the offer of the location to the club and the club said that would be agreeable to them," Maultsby said. "We didn't have anything to do with selecting, suggesting or proposing any of that."

The Villages has offered to provide the primary funding for the project. The county is being asked to chip in with revenue from the Tourism Development Tax. The TDT is a charge on short-term lodging in Sarasota County.

Commissioner Charles Hines said he's pleased with the way the county is being asked to contribute financially.

"In regard to the taxpayers of Sarasota County, this isn't going to affect them. It's going to be from tourism tax dollars. I've always been an advocate of using those funds to build things here that create jobs, create opportunities," he said.

When completed, the ownership of the facility would be transferred to the county. The county and the team would both contribute to its upkeep.

"The team has indicated, if we came to an agreement, they would sign a long-term lease of 30 years plus two, five-year renewals for a total of 40 years," County Administrator Tom Harmer said Tuesday.

The team would pay an annual lease, the terms of which would have to be negotiated, he said.

County commissioners gave Harmer and his staff the authorization to continue the talks with the Braves and the district.

What's next?

"Now that the board has authorized us to move forward with those conversations with the club, we will in concert with our partners at the West Villages have additional meetings with the club and see where they lead us," Maultsby said.

The prospect has Visit Sarasota County President Virginia J. Haley seeing dollar signs.

"I know everyone keeps reminding us this is just the beginning, but it's hard not to be excited, particularly if we're able to negotiate a really good media packet with the team for promoting this area a lot of people have not heard of before," she said.

Haley said the Braves' popularity throughout the South gives the VSC a chance to reach a previously elusive group.

"That's an area that traditionally vacations in the panhandle of Florida, not on Florida's southwest coast, so it's like opening us up to this whole new market we don't have," she said. "It's similar to what Baltimore did. We didn't have an 'in' in the D.C./Baltimore market and now, five years later, they're in our top 10."

But tourism revenue wouldn't be the only economic impact.

"On a broad level, it's a jobs driver, everything from construction, to people that are going to work there at the stadium," said Sondra Guffey, marketing coordinator for the West Villages.

There's also the ancillary businesses that would be created.

"Look at what's happening in Sarasota near the (Orioles' stadium) and the Pirates spring training (in Manatee County), how that rejuvenated that area and brought in new businesses and just created a much nicer vibe," she said.

Guffey said the Braves, the West Villages Improvement District and Sarasota County have been discussing the proposal for about six months, but are now looking to ramp things up and have the facility open in 2018.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson said she's approaching the prospect with "cautionary excitement."

"It's an exciting moment, but there's a long road, a tough road ahead of us," she said.

That the Braves are even considering the move to the West Villages - the property is adjacent to the State College of Florida, Venice campus and a future Sarasota Memorial Hospital 28-acre medical and wellness complex - is indicative of the growth in the area.

"It was just a matter of time ... the population filled in and now South County is being considered for something like this," she said.

[Braves' arrival could boost tourism in south Sarasota County](#)

[Braves may be bound for Sarasota County](#)

[Bubil: Braves' arrival would boost South County real estate](#)

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Nationwide to hire hundreds in Gainesville ([Gainesville Sun](#))
- Energy Efficiency Funding Comes to Alachua County ([Gainesville Business Report](#))
- JetBlue seeks novices to train in Orlando and become airline pilots ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Gallup ranks Orlando No. 1 for 2015 job creation ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Florida hiring strong in February ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- White House taps Miami-Dade for program to create tech jobs ([South Florida Business Journal](#))
- New company says it's Florida's first licensed solely to sell flood insurance ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- New College gets \$4.2 million for Heiser complex expansion ([HT Politics](#))
- Collier County pursues sports tourism ([Naples Daily News](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

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- Can millennials save the U.S. economy? ([Market Watch](#))
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