



CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Economic Development

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

Florida's Babcock Ranch: First Solar Powered City in U.S.

On April 22, Earth Day, the sun will begin to rise on a brand new world in Florida. Babcock Ranch, the country's first solar-powered city will celebrate the unveiling of its 18,000-acre mixed-use development in Southwest Florida's Charlotte county.

The development, which will be completed across 25 years, is the result of the largest conservation land agreement in Florida history.

Babcock Ranch is a place inspired by the past, but engineered for the present, it is a new approach to community-creation utilizing new technologies while engaging with nature. Located on an area larger than Manhattan - more than half of the town will be dedicated to natural greenways, parks, and lakes making it America's most walkable, hikeable, bikeable, town with neighborhoods and public resources linked together by an extensive greenway and trail system.

It will be a city powered by the sun, but fueled by a concept termed "civitas" - a basic hometown pride and a calling to participate and belong. Residents will be able to choose



Concept rendering of the Babcock Ranch development.

from close to 20,000 homes in all price ranges and enjoy 6 million square feet of retail, commercial, office and community areas.

In a video introducing the concept of Babcock Ranch, Kitson & Partners' CEO Syd Kitson, describes it as America's "city of tomorrow" with purpose.

"While a lot of communities talk about being environmentally responsible, Babcock Ranch is the real deal; an entitled sustainable city integrated with nature that will change the way people think about living and working in the 21st century."

Building on that declaration the very same year, Kitson & Partners joined with Florida Power & Light to announce plans to build the world's largest solar photovoltaic power plant making Babcock Ranch the first solar powered city in the United States.

"When you turn a light on during the day when the sun is shining," Kitson explains "it will be solar energy powering that light. At night when the sun goes down, it's going to be powered by natural gas which is also a very clean form of energy."

Work on the solar power plant began in October on 450 acres adjacent to the Babcock Development and is expected to be almost two times the size as the current largest array and connect to the main grid. This process will allow a consistent supply of energy on overcast days. With days of full sunshine, the solar power plant will infuse the excess power generated back into the electrical grid.

"You will literally have the cleanest source of energy possible going into Babcock Ranch. What we are really hoping to happen here is we want to be a living laboratory for companies to come in and try out their technology. You and I both know that the 'holy grail' for renewable energy is storage. So we are talking to companies who have the technology to accomplish those things."

Supporting Kitson's outreach to this industry is the study conducted by independent research firm Fishkind & Associates, where it found that Babcock Ranch would generate 20,000 permanent jobs encompassing a vast range of businesses and income levels ranging from retail to high tech, not to mention the additional temporary jobs created in construction and related fields during the next 25 years. These newly created jobs would sustain up to 50,000 residents in 19,000 households throughout the four villages and five hamlets within the City of Babcock Ranch.

Companies interested in relocating to the development would be only 20 miles north of Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers and close to Interstate 75.

Established in 1914, by Pittsburgh mayor and lumber baron, Edward Vose Babcock,



An on-property solar panel farm will be featured, delivering solar power to the community's homes and businesses.

Babcock Ranch is located near Fort Myers and Punta Gorda. The 91,000 acres was used primarily for Florida's agricultural and logging industries. With the death of Babcock's son in 1997, the Babcock heirs decided to sell the entire acreage to the state of Florida providing what conservationists called 'the missing piece' establishing an environmental corridor from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf Coast.

The state offered \$455 million in 2005, but negotiations fell through due in part to the arrangement of the transaction and tax liabilities.

Stepping into the fallout of the broken discussions with the state, Palm Beach-based real estate firm Kitson & Partners signed a contract for the purchase of the property in July 2005, and developed a plan to sell more than 74,000 acres to the state of Florida for preservation with the state retaining all ranching operations and employees under its ownership. The deal was finalized with the Babcock family, the state of Florida and Lee County on July 31, 2006.

A decade later, the sun will rise on Babcock Ranch to power a community and light a better way toward a more sustainable Florida.

Florida Has a Remarkable Story to Tell

Governor Rick Scott announced today that Florida's unemployment rate dropped to 4.9 percent in February, falling from 10.7 percent five years ago. This milestone marks the state's lowest unemployment rate in eight years.

Over the past five years, Florida businesses have created more than 1 million jobs. More than 200,000 of those were created in just the past year alone. Right now, there are more than 277,000 job openings all over the state, from registered nurses to truck drivers to computer technicians.

All of this means our efforts to improve Florida's economy and spark private-sector growth are working. Florida has a remarkable story to tell, and we will continue to share our story of putting people back to work and growing our economy for years to come.

[Florida's unemployment rate dips below 5 percent](#)

New events welcome tourism tax

By GARY ROBERTS Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

MURDOCK - In launching a program to help promote tourism, Charlotte officials are offering funding and expertise to help new community events achieve a successful start. At Tuesday's County Commission meeting, officials discussed defining the criteria for event applicants seeking financial assistance through the event development program, aimed at assisting qualified organizers with the start-up costs and event planning.

"We want to make sure they know what they're doing," said Lorah Steiner, county tourist development director.

The event development program is made possible by a 5 percent tourist development tax, which goes toward the marketing and promotion of Charlotte County as a tourist destination, as well as for the debt service on Charlotte Sports Park renovations.

Otherwise known as the bed tax because it is generated by overnight guests in area accommodations, one of its primary purposes is to create tourism that results in more hotel room nights. The goal of attracting overnight stays is key to the program in order to provide for a continual replenishment of the fund, she said.

Another basic goal of the program is to support events outside of season, when tourism typically slows down. Consequently, the program focuses on events planned from April 1 to mid-December.

Applicant criteria consists of a comprehensive application requesting information such as financial and business plans.

"Do they have a well thought-out marketing plan and process?" Steiner said.

The application asks such questions as who is organizing the event, the event's potential to draw visitors to the area and proof of event insurance, along with other details. Each answer receives a point value, with a minimum score of 70 required for funding, Steiner said.

There is a \$40,000 budget this year for the event development program. Last year, during a pilot program, two first-time events each received the maximum \$20,000 award from the tourism bureau: Blues, Brews & BBQ Fest in Punta Gorda and Englewood Beach Waterfest. Both sponsoring organizations are expected to apply for funding again this year, she said. "I think this is a great start," said Commissioner Chris Constance, who also chairs the Tourist Development Council, which is spearheading the program.

The Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau also will assist applicants with workshops that may include bringing in experienced event organizers to share their proven strategies for marketing and event management.

While this fund is intended for larger events, Steiner said a separate fund for smaller events could be helpful as well, especially during that critical first year.

"It's important to help small events that have the potential to grow," Steiner said.

County Commission Chairman Bill Truex suggested the program not automatically exclude events during season, but Steiner said encouraging more attractions during the summer is vital to making Charlotte County a year-round tourist destination.

"I would caution you, if you fund something during season, you set a precedent," she said.

In fiscal year 2015 - from Oct. 1, 2014, to Sept. 30, 2015 - the county's tourist development tax revenue exceeded \$3.5 million for the first time in history, registering a 19 percent increase over record 2015 revenues. In addition, the first few months of 2016 posted new highs, possibly leading to another unprecedented year in tourism, Steiner said.

For additional information, including application materials, visit charlotteharbortravel.com/tdc/adf/.

Innovation Station expected to create 'tech talent' pipeline

By CLINTON BURTON Sarasota County Editor Charlotte Sun

When the University of Florida opens Innovation Station Sarasota County next year, the engineering tech center will be the school's first engineering extension office and could bode well for the region.

"The university has a long tradition of agriculture extension and teaching and research education centers," UF President W. Kent Fuchs said Monday.

"Today we are expanding that tradition."

Speaking to a group of elected officials, invited guests and media on Monday, Fuchs said he expects there will one day be "several" innovation stations in Florida.

For now the focus is on Southwest Florida.

"Our decision to establish a physical presence in this community embodies UF's larger effort to play a leadership role in growing and diversifying our state's economy," he said.

Sarasota County commissioners have unanimously approved \$1 million in seed money to help fund the education and outreach initiative.

The grant will be paid in arrears - as opposed to in advance or ongoing - over a period of five years.

The contract outlines a timeframe with preliminary work beginning April 1. The county's final payment will be due March 30, 2021. The money isn't guaranteed.

The contract includes strict reporting requirements that must be provided and approved before the first, and all subsequent, payments are made.

UF is also contributing \$1 million. Sarasota's Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation is the lead philanthropic partner and awarded a five-year, \$980,000 grant.

The Gulf Coast Community Foundation, which provides grants throughout Southwest Florida, made a one-year grant of \$61,500.

Sarasota County's share will come from its economic development incentive fund that was established to help retain existing businesses in the county and encourage others to relocate to the area.

The rules for the program have been revised over the years and the county purchased equipment for a training program at Suncoast Technical College when a lack of precision machinists in the area was noted, said Jeff Maultsby, the county's director of business and economic development.

"Every one of the graduates in the last couple of years have found jobs," he said. "Employers are standing in line to get them as they come out of that program. That's just one example of the impact we're looking to make in our community."

Maultsby said the innovation station will keep the momentum going by creating a pipeline of "tech talent."

Fuchs is quick to point out UF isn't looking to draw students away from schools already operating in the region.

"UF is not here to compete with those colleges and universities, but to complement them," he said. "Our focus is rather on joining with community partners here in Sarasota and shared initiatives and public education, workforce development, technology commercialization and economic development."

The university is hoping to eventually open six to eight of the innovation stations, UF's dean of the college of engineering, Cammy Abernathy, said.

"Over what period of time remains to be determined," she said.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- With 'Innovation Station,' UF tapping talent ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Governor highlights recent job growth in ([Florida WFTV](#))
- Port Canaveral awards \$25M cruise terminal upgrade contract ([Florida Today](#))
- OIA sees double-digit passenger growth in January ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Sarasota-Manatee is No. 11 in U.S. for growth, census says ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Amtrak on track to return to Gulf Coast ([Sun Herald](#))
- Kissimmee officials want to attract Puerto Ricans to medical corridor ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Marketing company moving headquarters to St. Petersburg from New York ([Tampa Bay Times](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

- Sherwin-Williams buying rival Valspar for \$9 billion ([AP](#))
- US grew slightly more in 4th quarter than earlier estimated ([AP](#))
- Hertz Equipment names chairman ([Business Observer](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- 'Is the on-demand economy dying? ([CNET](#))
- Stop cutting prices and start creating value ([Ron Stein](#))
- A new perk geared for millennials: help paying off student loans ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Why it's important to measure profitability for each of your products ([Jerry Osteryoung](#))
- President Obama talks business with Cuban entrepreneurs ([Miami Herald](#))
- Family-owned businesses face unique challenges ([Plastics Today](#))

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