

WEEKEND WAVE

10-23-15



Friday Economic Roundup

'Honored and humbled' Cheney Bros. opens new distribution center

By BRENDA BARBOSA Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

CHARLOTTE COUNTY - After more than five years of negotiating, planning, permitting and construction, food distribution giant Cheney Brothers opened the doors to its new \$40 million, state-of-the-art distribution center in Charlotte County Thursday.

"We are both honored and humbled to be part of that wonderful community," Cheney chairman and CEO Byron Russell said at the new facility off Piper Road. "We want to become Charlotte County's and the surrounding counties' favorite sons and daughters."

Gov. Rick Scott, who campaigned on a platform of job creation in 2014 and has been an avid supporter of Cheney's expansion, joined hundreds of company representatives, local government officials and community leaders in celebrating the opening of the new distribution center.

"What's most exciting is that ... more people will get to live the dream of America, which is to have a great job," Scott said.

So far, Cheney Brothers has created more than 350 new jobs at its Charlotte facility and is

expected to hire a total of 900 new people in the next five years, officials said.

"A Cheney Brothers job is a great job because it's a great company," Scott said.

Construction of the 345,000-square-foot facility began last year on a 35-acre parcel just behind the county's Public Safety Complex, near the Punta Gorda Airport. Thursday's opening marked yet another milestone in the 90-year history of Cheney, which started in 1925 as a mom-and-pop operation with one truck delivering eggs and milk.

Today, Cheney has several locations totaling more than a million square feet of space, and more than \$1 billion in sales, making it one of the state's largest privately owned companies. The new distribution center in Charlotte County is Cheney's fifth in Florida.

A veritable technological feat, the two-story facility operates almost entirely with automated technology, and state-of-the-art cooling and heating; more than 26,000 cubic yards of concrete and a half-million yards of fill went into creating the building.

"This is a definite plus for the county," said Charlotte County Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch.

Prior to construction, months of work went into building Cheney Way, the new road leading to the facility that was made possible with a \$721,677 state Economic Development Transportation Fund grant, and bringing in dirt to raise the site.

Scott congratulated local officials and the construction team on bringing the building to life.

"It's nice to see all the economic development efforts across the county come to fruition," said Punta Gorda City Councilwoman Rachel Keesling. "This will definitely bring other companies to the area."

In 2009, Cheney Brothers began scouting Southwest Florida for a place to build a new distribution center that would service Florida's west coast, with easy access to a main thoroughfare. The 35-acre parcel of land just off Interstate 75 near the airport, once known as FEMA Village, caught Russell's attention. In 2012, Cheney purchased the land from Charlotte County.

Originally, company officials planned the facility to be about 250,000 square feet, similar to the Cheney Brothers headquarters in Riviera Beach, Fla. But those projections proved to be too small. Thanks to the new building, the company is already one of the largest private employers in the county. Applicants can go to cheneybrothers.com for job openings.

Governor Scott Announces 380 New Jobs at Opening of Cheney Brothers Distribution Center

Capital Soup

PUNTA GORDA, Fla. - Today, Governor Rick Scott attended the ribbon cutting of Cheney Brothers Inc.'s fifth Florida facility, a new food distribution center in Punta Gorda. The new facility will create 380 new jobs for families in Charlotte County. Cheney Brothers Inc. currently employs more than 2,000 Floridians statewide.

Governor Scott said, "Last year, I attended the ground breaking for this new distribution center, and I am proud to join the Cheney Brothers team today to officially open their newest facility. Cheney Brothers Inc. has already created more than 2,000 jobs for Floridians, and the creation of 380 new jobs in Punta Gorda is great news. We will keep working to support Florida companies like Cheney Brothers Inc. so our state can be first in the nation for job creation."

Cheney Brothers is a privately-owned Florida company and broadline food distributor carrying over 15,000 individual products. Cheney Brothers currently has locations in Riviera Beach, Ocala, Orlando, Miami, and now Punta Gorda. The opening of the Charlotte County facility will provide a closer distribution center to its customers in the Tampa Bay region and southwest Florida.

Byron Russell, CEO and Chairman of Cheney Brothers, Inc., said, "This project has been years in the making, and we are proud to cut the ribbon and officially open the doors of Cheney's Brothers newest facility in Charlotte County. On behalf of the whole Cheney Brothers team, I would like to thank Governor Scott and our local partners at the Charlotte County EDC for their support during this exciting process."

Shane Simmons, Cheney Brothers, Inc. Southwest Florida President, said, "This new facility will help Cheney Brothers continue to meet the needs of our customers across the state and provide new job opportunities for hundreds of Floridians. We look forward to officially beginning a great relationship with the local families and businesses in the Punta Gorda community."

The broader wholesale trade, transportation and logistics industry employs more than half a million Floridians. As the Western Hemisphere's commercial gateway, Florida's logistics &

distribution industry is poised to grow further with the Panama Canal expansion in 2016 and the numerous infrastructure developments and upgrades underway around the state.

Bill Johnson, President & CEO of Enterprise Florida, said "Today's ribbon cutting for Cheney Brothers' new facility in Punta Gorda is exciting news for Southwest Florida. With over 2,000 employees statewide, Cheney Brothers is taking advantage of Florida's incredible business climate and commitment to economic development. I look forward to their continued success in helping us diversify our economy and creating more opportunities for Floridians."

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity Executive Director Jesse Panuccio said, "Today's ribbon cutting at Cheney Brothers is another milestone for one of Florida's significant job creators. Great businesses like Cheney Brothers continue to expand in Florida because of our pro-growth, low-tax environment."

French tech start-ups explore Florida

By CASEY LOGAN News-Press

French technology met Southwest Florida sunshine Monday, as CEOs and others from several start-ups began their three-day visit to the region.

The contingent started at the Naples Accelerator's new space in the Kraft building off Pine Ridge Road in Naples. The visit will take the group to such places as the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, FGCU, and Babcock Ranch in Charlotte County. They will hear from such folks as Joe Martinez of Enterprise Florida, David Diamond with Venture X and Tim Cartwright of the Tamiami Angel Fund, among others.

Cristele Couget of Retis, a nonprofit French innovation network that focuses on information technology, digital, biotechnology, health and clean technology, helped to organize the trip.

"The program is totally geared toward start-ups and helping them understand the opportunities here in Florida and Southwest Florida," said Couget, who has visited the region a handful of times. "We are really excited to be here, and we are really looking forward to doing more."

Why come to Southwest Florida?

"People here are really committed to help the French companies," Couget said, compared to bigger cities such as New York, where start-ups are not as big a priority and can get lost in the business landscape.

For some of the French entrepreneurs, such as Adina Grigoriu of Active Asset Allocation, it was their first time in the state.

The financial services company, which employs 15 and works out of an incubator in Nice, advises a couple of pension funds in the United States. Grigoriu is looking to connect with people in the U.S. and to generate good leads she can follow up on.

"I think it's a great opportunity to access the market," she said. "We are seriously considering coming here for a few months to start with."

Grigoriu foresees the possibility that she and perhaps two or three others might come: "The idea would be to hire people here," she said, adding she would seek IT talent.

Michel Cance and Alain Iozzino of E-prospects are on the tour "to explore what Southwest Florida has to offer," Cance said, adding they had also visited New York and Boston. "If it's around digital information technologies, that's what we're looking for."

"And quality of life," said a smiling Iozzino.

"We provide Internet solutions, so we can set up anywhere in the world," Cance explained.

Eric Benrey, CEO of My Blue Ship, said the mobile-communications start-up is looking for a place to set up in the U.S.: "Florida could be a nice place for such deployment."

Olivier Steward and Cedric Sperat are with Matchable, which uses data analysis to examine player behaviors to make recommendations to video game companies.

"It's a good opportunity to see the culture here," Sperat said.

"We can tackle the market here rather than California, where it's more expensive," Steward added.

Francis Beckers, CEO of Revora Concept, invented a product for divers that combines multiple functions into one device that can be worn on the wrist.

"There's a great market for this in Southwest Florida," he said.

"His strategy is to expand to the United States quickly," said Couget, helping with translation. "The biggest market for this device is here."

Jule Alan, of data protection start-up Envoro Technologie, wanted to visit to learn about the opportunities.

"I thought it was a very good idea to see what is happening here," he said. "I was told it is

very dynamic in Florida."

Enterprise Zone

To encourage economic development in economically distressed areas of the state, in 1982 Florida launched an Enterprise Zone program by providing incentives to induce private investment. At the 2015 legislative session, extension of the Enterprise Zone program was not authorized, and the program will sunset on Dec. 31, 2015.

Incentives include business machinery and equipment sales tax refund, building materials sales tax refund, job tax credit, and property tax credit for Florida corporations. To qualify for the incentives, a business or home must be within the Enterprise Zone, and further specific eligibility criteria must be met. The Charlotte County Enterprise Zone was approved by the state in 2013. The zone includes portions of the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park, Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), Parkside CRA, and Punta Gorda, totaling approximately 16 square miles.

Visit http://FloridasInnovationCoast.com/index.php/site_selection/enterprise_zone for more information.

Applications must be approved by the Florida Department of Revenue before the sunset date.

For more information contact Debrah Forester, Redevelopment Manager with the Charlotte County Economic Development Department, at 941-764-4943 or Debrah.Forester@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

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