

WEEKEND WAVE

3-6-15



Friday Economic Roundup

Dignam named new chair of North Port EDC

By LORRAINE SCHNEEBERGER NORTH PORT SUN EDITOR

NORTH PORT - The North Port Economic Development Corp. has named new officers on its board of directors, with longtime Englewood resident David Dignam, president of Key Agency Inc., as its chairman.

Dignam's insurance firm has offices in Englewood, North Port and Boca Grande.

Other officers are vice chairman Ricky Satcher with Bayfront Health Port Charlotte; secretary Kaley Miller with The Mosaic Company; treasurer Jim Kelley of BB&T Bank; and immediate past chairman Peter Bartolotta with Acuity Group Management, the NPEDC's co-founder.

The North Port EDC is a private organization that hopes to further the city as a viable regional player for growth in business, education and medicine. The group unveiled a five-part "vision plan" in January 2013. Although it would cost potentially hundreds of millions to complete, the plan could create roughly 1,700 jobs and transform the city, NPEDC members say.

Bartolotta clarified Saturday that the organization's only paid members, Administrative

Manager Jean Fox and Executive Director Jean Harris, were let go in September. He would not comment on their individual salaries.

"The NPEDC is actively pursuing development initiatives, programs and strategies that drive the economy of North Port," Bartolotta said in a statement. "As the organization operates with the best interests of the community and its advancement in mind, we must periodically assess our means to effectively sustain our efforts.

"We will re-evaluate our funding resources and modify our budgets to continue accomplishing our goals on behalf of the people of our community."

"The mission hasn't changed," Bartolotta added in a phone interview Saturday. "We are now volunteer-driven."

The group's plan includes the following:

- * Establishing the Warm Mineral Springs Day Spa as an economic driver for the city with a conference center.

- * Developing an ecotourism initiative that identifies locations for "eco-lodges" that give access to public parkland and waterways.

- * Building a Main Street concept along U.S. 41 from Lowe's to Ortiz Boulevard that would include expanding the University of South Florida's campus.

- * Developing the Toledo Blade corridor to focus on health and wellness, with a women's medical center and children's and teaching hospitals, as well as an eventual entertainment district.

- * Developing the city's "west side" with an education and retirement center that builds around lifelong learning, culture, tourism and the arts, including a hospitality school and a culinary institute near the West Villages.

Bartolotta said he's excited about the new North Port campus of Suncoast Technical College and joint library project off Toledo Blade, planned to open in 2017. He said the NPEDC has created a side committee as a workforce-development initiative, identifying what jobs could come to the city with the collaboration of USF, State College of Florida and STC.

Nearly 50 dues-paying members are listed on the NPEDC's website, as well as "supporters/ investors" - Acuity; Bayfront Health Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda and Venice Regional Bayfront Health; BB&T; CareerSource Suncoast; CORE Construction; Fawcett Memorial Hospital; Gilbane Building Co.; Key Agency, King Plastic Corp.; Mosaic; TaxSavers; and Willis Smith Construction.

"We didn't announce investors because it's an internal funding mechanism," Bartolotta said.

The group's co-founder said last week the organization is taking a wait-and-see stance, "pretty much staying where we are right now. We're trying to see where the city wants to go and where the city wants us."

He added on Saturday, "The private sector and the public sector have to work together. We're here, available to assist in any way we can. If the government sees us as valuable, we would hope they would call us in for assistance. If not, we'll continue doing what we're doing."

Accepting Applications for RESTORE Funding

The Charlotte County RESTORE (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies) Act Advisory Board is accepting applications for project funding requests. RESTORE funds apply to programs, projects, and activities that restore and protect the environment and economy of the Gulf Coast. Applications are available online - visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click "[RESTORE Act Funding Application](#)" in the Hot Topics list. Paper copies are available in Administration at 18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte. Application deadline: 5:00 p.m. Friday, April 17, 2015. For more information, call 941.743.1944.

High-tech leader to speak Wednesday

A former Microsoft and Apple executive turned tech company entrepreneur will speak at an "Eggs and Exchange" event Wednesday presented by GrowFL, the Economic Development Corp. of Sarasota County and CEO Nexus.

Rob Campbell, chief strategy officer of Datum Corp., has more than 35 years' experience with fast-growth technology startups. He founded several software companies, including Forethought Inc. -- the developer of the PowerPoint and Filemaker applications -- and Sarasota-based Voalté Inc., where he was CEO.

GrowFL's CEO Roundtables are designed specifically for second-stage CEOs, presidents and business owners.

Space is limited at the event to be held at Laurel Oaks Country Club, 2700 Gary Player Blvd. Registration and networking will be 7:30-8:15 a.m., with the keynote to be from 8:15-9:30 a.m.

Register by contacting Elouisa Hewkin at (407) 823-1442 or ehewkin@growfl.com.

11-week course in business

An 11-week, free course in Introduction to Business Development will start Tuesday, held by the Community Entrepreneur Opportunity Council, CareerSource Suncoast, city of Sarasota and Manasota SCORE.

The course focuses on the basics for new and aspiring small business owners. Certified business counselors from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of South Florida and local business experts will teach classes about business planning, including market strategies, competitive analysis, financials and operations and management plans. The classes will include classroom training and mentoring.

Attendance at the first two classes is required to complete the course. While the course is free, attendance and participation are mandatory. Applications may be completed at Tuesday's first class.

The course will be held 6-9 p.m. at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, 1845 34th St., in Sarasota.

For more information, call 365-2200, Ext. 3220

FSW chooses Wright Construction for \$4.5M renovation

(Fort Myers News-Press)

Florida SouthWestern State College has chosen Fort Myers-based Wright Construction for its renovation of Leonhardt Hall.

The work will cost about \$4.5 million, according to a statement from Wright released Thursday, and will begin in May.

Almost 50 years old, Leonhardt Hall has not had significant work done on it since 1968, according to Wright. The building's roof, fire sprinkler system, heating and air-conditioning systems, plumbing and windows will be worked on.

"The project will be completed in two phases," said John Purnell, project manager for Wright. Splitting the project in two will allow classes and labs to remain open while new facilities are completed on the second floor, according to the statement.

New partnership to offer warehouse and distribution certifications

By Michael Pollick Sarasota Herald-Tribune

CareerEdge Funders Collaborative of Bradenton and St. Petersburg College have formed a new joint venture aimed at getting 300 workers certified to work in supply-chain jobs in the next two years.

The new deal for would-be workers is called "TDL Tampa Bay," or "transportation, distribution and logistics."

While this specific partnership is with a Pinellas County institution, CareerEdge Funders executive director Mireya Eavey emphasized that State College of Florida and other schools also will be involved, and that the job seekers to be helped are to be from Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties as well as from Hillsborough and Pinellas counties.

St. Petersburg College, as part of a consortium of a dozen colleges nationwide, has been working on eight new career certification courses since 2013, with funding from the Department of Labor. The college has 10 campuses throughout Hillsborough and Pinellas counties.

Meanwhile, CareerEdge, which has its offices at State College of Florida's Lakewood Ranch campus, has lined up a \$220,000 starter grant for the new partnership from a national non-profit group called Jobs for the Future.

"These are brand-new industry certifications that will assist the unemployed and underemployed in getting entry or mid-level positions in the supply chain," said Marta Przyborowski, who runs the St. Petersburg College program from the school's main office in Clearwater.

Of the eight new certifications, two have been rolled out: "supply chain management principles" and "warehousing operations."

Studying online

Much of the coursework will be done online through WebEx, a live interactive video

meeting system developed by Cisco Systems Inc..

"Say some people at PGT are going to take this class," Eavey said, referring to the Venice-based hurricane-resistant window and door maker. "Their employees will go to a classroom and the live WebEx will be in the classroom. We are bringing the classroom here by WebEx and technology."

The supply chain course is being taught entirely online. Warehousing operations will be taught through a combination of classroom and online instruction.

Other courses will help workers earn industry-recognized credentials such as a Commercial Drivers License, or CDL, or to become a Global Logistics Associate. Some of the courses will allow students to earn college credit leading to an associate's degree in transportation, distribution and logistics.

The funding is money that could go to pay tuition starting today, Eavey said.

Other sources of money are lining up to support the TDL partnership, she said.

Ready to hire

At Sarasota County's Gold Coast Eagle Distributing, human resources director Leslie Heller said her company already is in line for the partnership's newly certified workers.

She says she could hire five Class A CDL-licensed truck drivers who have customer service experience if they walked into the office today.

"You can have a good driver, but you have to be able to communicate with the customers," Heller said. "They are representing Gold Coast Eagle at that moment."

Eavey said she is also in communication with Bealls Inc., the Bradenton-based department store operator, and with PGT regarding their training needs.

Meanwhile, CareerEdge expects to continue to enhance its working relationship with State College of Florida, which has been a partner since 2010.

That school's Corporate and Community Development division now offers related certifications, such as "Certified in Production and Inventory Management."

"We're pleased to continue in our partnership with CareerEdge and educational partners to understand employers' perspectives and needs and provide the best training to meet the workforce demands in our area," SCF President Carol F. Probstfeld said.

Manatee incentive program creating jobs

MANATEE COUNTY - An incentives program that Manatee County launched in 2009 to create more private sector jobs has resulted in 1,220-plus positions so far.

Based on the 60 economic development agreements already in place with employers, the county expects that number to exceed 3,700 by 2021. As more new and expanding companies agree to accept incentives - such as state tax refunds, reduced impact fees, low-interest loans and a voter-approved property tax break - for creating more jobs in Manatee, those numbers should go up.

On Tuesday, the Manatee County Commission received an update about the program and discussed ideas for enhancing it, such as getting more employers to not just locate in Manatee but to redevelop the "urban core."

Karen Stewart, economic development manager, said participating employers sign agreements with the county to receive various incentives as they meet "performance measures," specifically creating a specified number of jobs at an agreed-upon average wage.

Participants have included prominent employers such as Feld Entertainment (producers of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and Disney on Ice), manufacturer Sun Hydraulics and supplements seller It Works! Global.

So far, the 60 employers are paying an average annual salary of \$47,778, which is 32 percent more than the countywide average. About 36 percent of them are in manufacturing, 34 percent are corporate headquarters, 19 percent are in information technology - followed by hospitality, sports performance and other industries.

Of the \$7.1 million in promised incentives, about \$2.4 million has been awarded so far. Stewart said the return on investment is expected to include \$393.8 million in capital projects and, over a five-to-10 year period, \$304 million in new property taxes and \$1.9 billion in wages.

Commissioner Charles Smith, whose district includes east Palmetto and central and east Palmetto, said he wants the program to provide additional incentives that motivate new employers to locate in the "urban core," where Stewart says there are still too many vacant buildings.

"You'll never eliminate slum and blight in the urban core with the same incentives" offered to employers locating in the suburbs, Smith said.

County Administrator Ed Hunzeker suggesting waiving the impact fee imposed on new construction to pay for road construction for employers who locate in the urban area. "Why pay an impact fee for roads in the urban core when the roads are already there?" Hunzeker

said.

Hunzeker also suggested working more closely with the cities of Bradenton and Palmetto to attract redevelopment.

Financial giant moves into downtown Punta Gorda

By BRENDA BARBOSA STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

PUNTA GORDA - After more than three years of negotiations, financial powerhouse Morgan Stanley finally inked a deal with the city to rent office space downtown.

"This has been a long process," Mayor Carolyn Freeland said. "We are delighted that Morgan Stanley is moving in downtown."

Under the terms of the lease, Morgan Stanley has agreed to rent roughly 2,800 square feet of retail space at \$16 per square foot on the ground level of Herald Court Centre's Building 1. The lease goes into effect March 15, and runs through April 30, 2021.

Officials said Morgan Stanley plans to build out and move into the space by Aug. 1.

"We are now awaiting their final subcontractor and contractor details to get the work started," said City Manager Howard Kunik, who also noted that the space first will have to undergo remodeling before Morgan Stanley can move in.

A representative from Morgan Stanley couldn't be reached for comment.

After years of trying to rent out vacant space in the publicly owned building to little avail, the city finally is beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. The recession, coupled with the real estate bust, left the building mostly vacant for years. Currently, a sandwich shop, an athletic retail store and a high-end tattoo shop occupy the ground level of the building. Morgan Stanley would bring occupancy up to just shy of 70 percent.

"Maybe this will spur some more activity," Kunik said.

For months, officials for the city's Community Redevelopment Agency had tossed around the idea of selling the roughly 13,000 square feet of ground-level retail space in Building 1, located next to Florida Gulf Coast University's Herald Court Centre campus in downtown Punta Gorda. Building 1, which houses The Foot Landing, Otherside Ink and a Subway restaurant, sits along U.S. 41 North between West Olympia Avenue and Herald Court.

City officials also have agreed to renew the YMCA's lease of the Bayfront Center for an additional year. City Council members said they wanted regular updates from Y officials regarding the center's sailing activities and programs.

Charlotte inches toward solar farm incentive

By ADAM KREGER STAFF WRITER CHARLOTTE SUN

CHARLOTTE - County officials have indicated they'll soon sign off on an economic development incentive for Florida Power & Light, as the company could begin construction later this year on a massive solar farm in the Babcock Ranch area.

The incentive essentially would give FPL a tax break for using the county's land for the \$100 million project, but the solar farm would "provide significant return on investment to the county," according to the county's website. Agreeing to the incentive would be the next step toward making the possibility of a huge local solar farm a reality.

"It would efficiently generate electricity to put into the grid," said Lucienne Pears, with the Charlotte County Economic Development Office.

The County Commission briefly discussed the incentive for FPL at a pre-agenda meeting Thursday, and plans to approve it at Tuesday's meeting. The proposed incentive for FPL is 30 percent of the county portion of annual ad valorem taxes paid by the project, but the amount is not to exceed \$250,000 per year, or a total of \$1.5 million over 10 years.

"It's pretty straightforward," commissioner Ken Doherty said. "If they show they're paying their taxes, they'll get a check."

In mid-December, the Florida Public Service Commission approved a deal allowing FPL to be the sole power utility to serve the sprawling Babcock Ranch community, where 19,000 homes are planned to be developed on roughly 18,000 acres next to the Babcock Ranch Preserve.

FPL spokeswoman Alys Daly said Thursday, "Until everything is approved, (the Charlotte farm) is not a done deal," but, should FPL and the county clear a few more legal hurdles, construction on the local project would begin after the spring and finish sometime next year. On Jan. 26, FPL released details about plans to install at least 1 million solar panels between three new solar power plants in an effort to advance the use of affordable, clean energy in Florida. The three anticipated sites are the one in Charlotte, another in DeSoto

County near the state's first large-scale solar plant, and the third in Manatee County on the site of an existing FPL natural gas power plant.

According to an FPL media release, solar power - even the most economical large-scale installation - generally is not yet cost effective in FPL's service area, due in part to its higher costs compared to the company's highly efficient system and low electric rates. But, the sites in Charlotte, DeSoto and Manatee are advantageous because of "built-in advantages, such as the existence of sufficient transmission and substation infrastructure, which reduce the overall cost of building new solar plants."

Each of the new plants is being designed for roughly 74 megawatts of capacity.

FPL president and CEO Eric Silagy said in the press release, "These exciting large-scale solar projects - equivalent to roughly 45,000 typical residential rooftop systems - will bring new tax revenue and several hundred new jobs to rural communities we serve and deliver emissions-free power when the sun is shining to our customers across the state."

The commission meets at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the County Administration Building, 18500 Murdock Circle.

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- Florida's economy ranks near top in the nation ([Orlando Business Journal](#))
- Siesta Beach wins another award ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Small-business jobs on the rebound ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Massive retail theme park proposed for Northwest Miami-Dade ([Miami Herald](#))
- Tampa International wants to be a world class destination for art ([Tampa Bay Times](#))
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- Florida leading the way in self-driving cars ([International Business Times](#))

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- Employment jumps in February ([Tampa Bay Times](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

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- Will Apple Pay revolutionize small business? ([The Week](#))
- Tapping instead of clicking for commerce ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- YouVisit expands from virtual college tours into hospitality, real estate ([Miami Herald](#))
- Bartering helps small businesses conserve cash ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Free Wi-Fi On Buses Offers A Link To Future Of 'Smart Cities' ([NPR](#))
- Good employers work 'fun' into workplace ([Fort Myers News-Press](#))
- Buying up a Florida neighborhood to bring in entrepreneurs ([Fast Company](#))

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