

Chamber Connections



ST. JOHNS COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Ponte Vedra Beach Division



SJC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CREATES HYBRID EVENT TO CONNECT MEMBERS

Pictured above: Garry Redig, Matt Price, Dr. Hamer and Jared Rice
More inside on 1.27.21 Chamber event at TPC Clubhouse.

March 2021



ST. JOHNS COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Ponte Vedra Recorder





Isabelle Renault
President/CEO,
St. Johns County
Chamber of Commerce

Dear Members:

I wanted to share the contents of the letter I submitted to St. Johns County Government in January. It was attached to the Chamber's Economic Development Council Annual Economic Development Report for Fiscal Year 2019-2020. I invite you to review the annual report on our website at Economic Development Council – St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce (sjcchamber.com).

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This year brought a unique set of challenges with lasting effects on our community. I wanted to share several highlights, I believe, we should keep in mind as we continue to grow the economy of St. Johns County.

Overall, the SJC data trend shows that our local market continues to remain strong and growing. Employment by industry sector is reported as of 2019 with 15.1% of the jobs in accommodation and food service and 3.4% representing the arts, entertainment and recreation. However, we expect these data points to decrease in 2020 due to the number of

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

COVID-19-generated temporary business closures the St. Johns County tourism industry endured. This pandemic and the many named storms and hurricanes in recent years are just another reminder that diversification of our local economic base must be prioritized to enhance our economic resiliency.

The county's commercial taxable value continues to grow even during the pandemic. The state government mandated closures forced many businesses to implement remote work for their employees. While fearful at first, small and large businesses alike were pleasantly surprised to realize that their remote workers' performance increased. What employers may have seen as a hinderance and a liability turned out to be, in many cases, financial savings and an increase in productivity. With the validation of the benefits of remote work continuing to roll in, we can expect lasting changes in the way we work.

For many years, we have discussed our changing work habits, and this pandemic simply accelerated the process. A clear indicator of the coming change was the nationwide growth of co-working spaces in recent years — one signpost for the coming change. The rate of commercial real estate acquisitions by businesses is changing and earlier decisions for expanded brick and mortar facilities are being re-examined. These decisions will have potentially large implications for communities that are relying on ever-increasing commercial property taxes for government services.

Another potentially huge lasting change is the almost overnight consumer switch from brick-and-mortar retail to online shopping. In many ways, our social and consumer lives have changed to a Zoom square and shopping apps on our devices. Some love online shopping and grocery deliveries while others cannot wait to drive to shops and enjoy in-person

retail therapy we were used to prior to COVID-19. One thing is certain: The convenience of getting what we wish at our doorstep within 24 hours or less will make us question our habits and may have lasting effects on consumers. What will happen to our small retail shops and even larger ones? Will more of them close? Will some shift permanently to e-commerce vs. brick and mortar?

To my first point: How will this affect commercial real estate and the collection of sales taxes the state of Florida heavily relies on to provide services to Floridians? Due to the pandemic-induced state budget crisis, this spring, the Florida legislature will consider legislation closing the online sales tax loophole in an effort to recapture some \$700 million in lost revenue. While historically seen by many as a tax increase, this loophole is now being positioned as a tax fairness issue, thus greatly increasing its chances for passage.

The newly proposed Biden Administration stimulus package and more robust vaccine-distribution system will certainly ignite a hope for a more stable and "normal" lifestyle. I strongly believe that the entrepreneurship spirit this nation was built upon will always prevail. You can beat it up, slam it with you name it — hurricanes, pandemics, cyber-attacks — it will still find a way to sprout, pollinate and grow at a faster rate in places where government removes barriers and encourages it to prosper. This year will be a critical time to support business start-ups and first-time entrepreneurs and lead them to success. Entrepreneurs will need to make financial resilience a priority as they are developing their products or services. Places and online platforms fostering and accelerating the connection between entrepreneurs, connecting minds, ideas, skills and resources will be more critical than ever before. Let us remember that products and services created are the

life form of the minds of our dreamers and innovators, and that people are the ultimate difference makers.

Developing our current workforce and replacing the employees lost during the pandemic will give us some growing pains. Businesses will need to be ready to ramp up their operations and will need more able workers to make that happen. Employers will have to adapt to the new expectation of work-life balance for workers, while employees will need to learn new technology that may have come to the market to help businesses pivot during the crisis. Many workers and professionals — still mostly women — put their careers on hold to support their family at home. Will they be ready to go back to the workforce at the same level of participation prior to the pandemic? New non-traditional tools to generate job and job seekers' connections will be necessary to speed up the recruitment process and ensure a good fit for both employees and employers. An agile worker will be more valued for his/her resilience.

Our world is changing. While it is unsettling, it also opens the door to new potential we did not know we could reach, because we were never faced with it. A positive trend for our community is the appeal of Florida and St. Johns County to business owners who are fleeing other parts of the country for a state that remains open for business, with no state income tax and a welcoming weather. We have reached the tipping point in our local economy when we can trigger transformational changes through stronger focus and investment in a concerted public-private approach for economic development.

We, at the Chamber, are excited about the prospect of what our community can achieve through our partnership with St. Johns County government.

Upward and onward!

Chamber's Public Policy Committee connects members with governmental decision-makers

Committee members guide the Chamber's business advocacy efforts

The slate of members comprising the Public Policy Committee for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce for 2020-2021, led by Chair Beth Sweeny, Flagler College, director of Community and Government Relations, is comprised of: Mark Nighbor, Advanced Disposal; Dirk Schroeder, Century 21; Mike Koppenhafer, Fisher Koppenhafer Architects; Mike Davis, A.D. Davis Construction; Kevin Craig, AT&T; John Dickinson, Constangy Brooks; Janette Wagner, Capital City Bank; Cary Paige, Aqua Grill; Mark Pinto, The



Beth Sweeny

The Public Policy Committee (PPC) oversees the Chamber's business advocacy efforts at the state,

Fiorentino Group; Carol Burns, Vista Hospitality; Victor Raymos, St. Augustine and SJC Board of Realtors; Viv Helwig, Vested Metals; Keith Johnson, Keith Johnson, CPA; Ed Dwyer, Vigeo Alliance; Michael Scine, Scine Advisors, CPA; and Isabelle Renault, St. Johns County Chamber President and Chief Executive Officer.

"When members ask what differentiates a business organization like ours from others, it is easy to point to public policy expertise and influence as a valuable benefit that membership can buy you for an affordable investment."

Robert Porter, Chamber's VP of public policy

COMMITTEE continues on Page 17

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Karen B. Everett
 Director PVB Division,
 St. Johns County
 Chamber of Commerce

Hope and spring are in the air! And just like that, it's March!!! What a year, but we can look forward with a high degree of hope.

We truly are living in interesting times. While this trite and overused phrase is an English expression that is claimed to be a translation of a traditional Chinese curse, the words give us all pause. While some may prefer to live in "uninteresting times," we can all look back and count silver linings and lessons learned.

We have been challenged to continue to provide excellent Chamber member services and have hosted many outdoor events within CDC guidelines with creativity. For example, we attracted

Chamber members from throughout the county on March 4 for our first Glow Golf at Palencia Golf Club.

We are hosting our first indoors event tomorrow at Sawgrass Marriott in Ponte Vedra Beach—the March 26 Economic Development Council Quarterly Breakfast. It will feature outdoors venue for networking and indoor space for the presentation.

Chamber staff and volunteer leaders have been closely monitoring the COVID-19 numbers for St. Johns County and, due to improving numbers, we are planning a robust array of events, both in person and virtual. Check your newsletters and the Chamber calendar on

our website for more information.

We began recording many informative presentations and members have easy access to them at the Resources tab at your member portal. For example, the Chamber's North Business Council hosted Jay Owen for a three-part series on Growing Your Business. The series will be added to the Resources tab soon.

The Chamber's Economic Development Council is co-hosting a morning panel on financing on Wednesday, April 14 with the Ponte Vedra Beach Division at the TPC Clubhouse. Mark your calendars!

Thanks for your continued support and come visit us.

ANNOUNCEMENT: PONTE VEDRA BEACH VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER ENTRANCE HAS MOVED

The entrance to the Ponte Vedra Beach Visitor Information Center has moved to the other side of the building at 200 Solana Road, Suite B. It faces the drive-through window of Woody's BBQ.

All residents and visitors invited to visit to obtain maps, brochures and information at the Ponte Vedra Beach Visitor Information Center. The office also serves as an office for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

A Chamber member, The Wedding Authority, now has a presence in the former Visitor Information Center. It currently has offices in St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra Beach.

Committee

Continued from 16

county and municipal levels of government. The PPC monitors, reviews and makes recommendations to the Chamber leadership on legislative and regulatory issues that impact St. Johns County businesses.

The PPC is comprised of senior Chamber leaders, former Chamber and EDC Chairs and representatives from various geographical, industry and professions to insure the intellectual depth of knowledge in the areas of land use, taxation, public safety, tourism and environment. The Chamber chair, along with the Chamber CEO/president, make the final appointments for the upcoming fiscal year.

If you have an interest in serving a future Public Policy Committee, or would like to suggest an issue, please email Robert Porter, the Chamber's vice president of Public Policy at bob.porter@sjcchamber.com. Additional information about Policy and Politics in St. Johns can be found on the Chamber's website at Public Policy - St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, FL (sjcchamber.com).

"The members of the Chamber's Public Policy Committee have an important role in shaping policy recommendations for the Chamber and advocating for our business members on issues affecting them," said Isabelle Renault, president

and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

Porter added, "When members ask what differentiates a business organization like ours from others, it is easy to point to public policy expertise and influence as a valuable benefit that membership can buy you for an affordable investment."

In recent years, the Chamber has taken public positions on issues as diverse as a panhandling ordinance in St. Augustine; beach replenishment from Vilano to Ponte Vedra Beach; restoration of the affordable Housing Trust Funds at the state level; and a single-use plastic bag ordinance in St. Augustine Beach. Recently, after polling the membership twice, the Chamber came out in public opposition to the proposed Florida Constitutional Amendment #2, which would raise the mandatory minimum wage to \$15/hour. The Chamber will continue to canvas the Chamber members for input on significant issues.

The Chamber solicits opinions from Chamber members on legislative issues. For example, the 2021 St. Johns County Legislative Delegation meeting was held Dec. 18 at the St. Johns County Administration Building. The state delegation heard from the Chamber of Commerce on statewide issues of concern. The Chamber's Public Policy Committee represented the members of the Chamber at this meeting. The regular 2021 Legislative Session convened March 2.

UPCOMING PONTE VEDRA BEACH DIVISION EVENTS

RIBBON CUTTINGS

Body 20 Ponte Vedra Beach

Date: Monday, March 29

Time: 5 p.m.

Location: 240 A1A N, Suite 1, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082

Painting With a Twist (PVB)

Date: Thursday, April 8

Time: 5 p.m.

Location: 268 Solana Road Ponte Vedra Beach FL 32082

MARCH EVENTS

In-Person: PVB Division Chamber After Hours

Date: Thursday, March 25,

Time: 5:30-7 p.m.

Location: Olea at Nocatee 50 Pine Shadow Parkway Ponte Vedra FL 32081

Sponsor: Olea at Nocatee

In-Person and virtual: Economic Development Council Quarterly Breakfast

Date: Friday, March 26

Time: 7:30-9:30 a.m.

Location: Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa 1000 Tournament Players Club Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082

Topic: The Role of Transportation in Local and Regional Economic Development.

Sponsors: St. Augustine and St. Johns County Board of Realtors MLS, Fiorentino Group, North Avenue Capital, Jackson Law Group, PuroClean Emergency Restoration Services, Pivot CPAs, Nissan of St. Augustine

In-Person: Business on the Move

Date: Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Time: 8:30-9:30 a.m. (Register)

Location: The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche at Mission Nombre de Dios 101 San Marco Ave., St. Augustine, FL 32084

Info: Make your move and take your shot! Business on the Move is a special networking opportunity offered to highlight local chamber businesses and bring members together.

APRIL EVENTS

In-Person: Business Financing Workshop

Co-hosted with PVB Division and EDC

Date: Wednesday, April 14

Time: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Location: TPC Clubhouse

Topic: Business Financing Workshop
 Info: The panelists will discuss alternative financing methods to help your business grow

■ Joseph Rowell CEO, North Avenue Capital

■ Matt Price, VP Commercial Banking, Relationship Manager, Regions Bank

■ Marius Dobren, President, Sawgrass Finance, LLC.

Sponsor: Fields Auto Group

MAY EVENTS

PVB Division Chamber at Noon

Date: Wednesday, May 12

Time: Noon-1 p.m.

Speaker: David Rey, CEO and President - Goodwill

Topic: Workforce Development and how Goodwill Industries of North Florida can benefit Chamber members.

Sponsor: Fields Auto Group

PVB Division Chamber After Hours

Date: Wednesday, May 19

Time: 5-7 p.m.

Location: Ponte Vedra Wellness Center – Nocatee

205 Marketside Avenue Suite 220, Ponte Vedra, FL 32081

Sponsor: Ponte Vedra Wellness Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER, GO TO WWW.SJCCHAMBER.COM OR CALL (904) 285-2004

Chamber EDC meeting to present transportation panel discussion March 26



Shannan Schuessler
Event moderator

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce will host its next quarterly economic development breakfast from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. March 26 at the Sawgrass Marriott in Ponte Vedra Beach. This event will be the Chamber's first indoor event since the pandemic started one year ago.

Featuring a panel of transportation experts, the event will be moderated by Shannan Schuessler, a former Florida Department of Transportation chief of staff, currently with The Fiorentino Group.

It will feature discussions by Greg Evans, FDOT District 2 secretary; Nat Ford, Jacksonville Transportation Authority CEO; and Phong Ngyuen, transportation development manager, county Growth Management Department.

They will address the role of transportation in local and regional economic development.

The event will take place outdoors for networking and breakfast and indoors for the panel discussion. Following best practices and CDC guidelines

regarding social distancing, no more than five guests will be seated at each indoor table with each table spaced at the appropriate social distance. Pursuant to Marriott policy, all guests will be asked to wear a mask or facial covering while not actively eating or drinking on the property.

To register, go to www.sjcchamber.com and click on Events. The registration fee is \$50 for Chamber members at the Economic Development Council level, \$70 for other Chamber members and \$85 for guests. For guests who prefer to attend the event virtually in webinar format, registration will open for virtual attendance when in-person capacity has been reached. Virtual registration is \$20. Future chamber members are invited to contact Sam Ruiz at Samuel.Ruiz@sjcchamber.com to register.

EDC continues on Page 19

Chamber to host business financing workshop April 14

Mark your calendars for a special in-person Chamber panel from 8:30-9:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 14 at the TPC Clubhouse. Co-hosted by the Chamber's Economic Development Council and the Ponte Vedra Beach Division, the panel will be moderated by Ed Dwyer, president, Vigeo Alliance and business consultant with the Small Business Development Center.

The panel members will discuss alternative financing methods to help your business grow and will provide information for small and mid-sized businesses and new start-ups in need of obtaining financing to start, operate or grow their business. The speakers include: Joseph Rowell, CEO, North Avenue Capital; Matt Price, VP, Commercial Banking Relationship manager, Regions Bank; and Marius Dobren, Sawgrass Finance, LLC.

Both the chairman of the Chamber's Economic Development Council, Andy Jackson, Jackson Law Firm and chairman of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division board, Matt Price, Regions Bank, agree that this collaboration is timely and relevant.

WORKSHOP continues on Page 19

Cultural Center cuts ribbon on new facility

By Shaun Ryan

The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach opened its new facility Jan. 4 in Jacksonville Beach, marking the first step in expanding its services to reach more artists, art students and art lovers throughout the area.

The new studio is located at 3972 Third St. South in the Trader Joe's shopping complex. Classes in visual arts and music, workshops, camps for children and the Market, where local artists sell their work, will be available at this location.

The hours at the new studio are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, with after-hour appointments available.

Because COVID-19 continues to pose challenges at public venues, no exhibitions have been scheduled at this time.

Though not all classes and workshops have been canceled, most are being offered online. At this time, some events are still being planned, including the Bark For Art Family Event in March, the Beaches Celebration of the Arts in May and Holiday Shoppes in November.

CULTURAL CENTER continues on Page 19



ABOVE: Representatives of the Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach and guests prepare to cut the ribbon celebrating the opening of the Cultural Center's new location at 3972 Third St. South in Jacksonville Beach.

LEFT: Donna Guzzo, president and executive director of the Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach, discusses some of the programs offered by the Cultural Center with attendees of the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Photos by Susan Griffin

EDC

Continued from 18

“We are so fortunate that our speakers have agreed to convene to discuss how transportation affects our economic development,” said Isabelle Renault, Chamber president and CEO.

Sponsors for the event are St. Augustine and St. Johns County Board of Realtors MLS, North Avenue Capital, Jackson Law Group, PuroClean Emergency Restoration Services, The Fiorentino Group, Pivot CPAs and Nissan St. Augustine.

To learn more about the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce or to become a member, go to www.sjc-chamber.com, call (904) 829-5681, or connect on Facebook at www.facebook.com/sjchamber.

Workshop

Continued from 18

“Our members need this information,” Price said. “And this format will allow the panelists to describe how their firms can assist small businesses.”

Registration information is open for Chamber members. Go to www.sjchamber.com and click on events.



PET PARADISE OPENS NEW FACILITY AT WORLD GOLF VILLAGE

Staff and ambassadors with St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce celebrate with Pet Paradise staff at the Jan. 12 ribbon cutting of its newest facility in World Golf Village at 291 Center Place Way. Pet Paradise also has a Bartram facility at 14976 Walden Springs Way, as well as three other Jacksonville locations.

Photo provided by St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Cultural Center

Continued from 18

For information on exhibits, classes, workshops and events, go to ccpvb.org.

The center has sold its former headquarters at 50 Executive Way in Ponte Vedra Beach to Roanoke Vinton Radio Inc. The sale dovetailed with a plan to eventually

sell the building with an eye toward a future move into an arts complex to be built near the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall.

The center is also looking to expand into additional facilities in Nocatee.

The center continues to offer the Sound Connections Music Therapy program for children with special needs, which has expanded to six schools in St. Johns County. The expansion was supported by the

Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund and The Community Foundation of Northeast Florida.

The Kick StART after-school visual arts program continues at Palm Valley Academy and Osceola Elementary. This is supported by the Dr. JoAnn Crisp-Ellert Fund at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida and The Lazzara Family Foundation.

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ABOVE: Executive Director of THE PLAYERS Championship Jared Rice speaks to attendees at a St. Johns County Chamber luncheon Wednesday, Jan. 27, at TPC Sawgrass.



RIGHT: Attendees network and enjoy lunch at the Chamber event.

Photos by Susan Griffin

PLAYERS Championship attendance to be reduced to 20% of max capacity

Tournament adapted in response to COVID-19

By Shaun Ryan

THE PLAYERS Championship will return this year with a \$15 million purse, despite the ongoing pandemic that shut down play on day one of the 2020 tournament.

This year, to safeguard the health of spectators and others, that will mean making special accommodations.

PLAYERS Championship Executive Director Jared Rice addressed those changes during a Chamber at Noon presentation Wednesday at the TPC Sawgrass clubhouse.

He said that, after the challenges of last year, “we immediately got focused on how we’d come back.”

“We’ve announced recently that the tournament will have about 20% of our expected max capacity,” he told the audience.

In addition, attendees will be required to wear masks, watch their distance from oth-

ers and wash their hands – the “three W’s,” as Rice put it.

There will also be a reduction in the hospitality venues. Those that will be open will be modified to have more open air, and seating will be adapted.

Corporate chalets will have modified layouts with a focus on social distancing and limited access.

However, the PGA Tour fan shop will still be open Friday through Sunday of advance week and during the tournament week.

According to Rice, social digital channels and telecasts will be important for those who are unable to attend in person. He said some restaurants may be planning watch parties.

“What won’t change is that we’ll have this tournament telecast to over 200 countries, 2 billion households,” he said. “And those cutaways of that telecast show our community and how great of a place it is to live, work and play.”

PLAYERS continues on Page 21



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From left: Garry Redig, vice president of operations for Fields Auto Group, Matt Price, vice president of commercial banking, Regions Bank, Dr. Erika Hamer, owner of Ponte Vedra Wellness Center and chairperson of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and Jared Rice, executive director of THE PLAYERS Championship.

PLAYERS

Continued from 20

He said the players are excited about returning and that Rory McIlroy, who won the tournament in 2019, is technically the longest defending champion of THE PLAYERS.

Tickets for those who have attended in the past will be available on Monday, Feb. 1. On Feb. 16, tickets will be offered to the general public.

The tournament, to be held

at the TPC Sawgrass Stadium Course, is scheduled for March 9-14 this year with play commencing after two practice days. Further information is available at theplayers.com.

Rice expressed his hope that the tournament will be able to return to pre-COVID conditions in 2022.

The Chamber at Noon event was conducted by the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.



Photos by Susan Griffin

Troy Smith, tournament chairman, of the 2021 PLAYERS, speaks to attendees at the Chamber luncheon Jan. 27.

NEW BARBERSHOP FEATURES MASCULINE ATMOSPHERE



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Representative from Diesel Barbershop and members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Monday, Feb. 1. Diesel Barbershop, a modern-day reimagining of the vintage corner barbershop, is expanding with its newest location in Saint Johns. Located at 155 Bartram Market Drive, Suite 114, this marks Diesel Barbershop's 30th location across 10 states. Diesel Barbershop Bartram Market will feature 10 stations, vintage arcade games that are free to play, complimentary beverages and signature services like the Diesel Plus and the Full Service. For more information, go to www.dieselbarbershop.com.

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Driftwood Realty Group opens in Nocatee Town Center

By Shaun Ryan

After more than five years of running a successful residential real estate team based in St. Johns County, Kristin and Quinton Doakes — known as the Doakes Team — have launched their own independent brokerage, Driftwood Realty Group.

“The real estate industry has changed, and your traditional real estate agent is becoming less valuable to sellers and buyers,” said broker Kristin Doakes. “This is due to having multiple online resources at their fingertips. Our advisors guide buyers and sellers through the process, offering resources that extend far beyond the transaction.”

The internet has had a big impact on the real estate landscape. Buyers often go to Zillow or Realtor.com to learn about a property before inquiring about it. They can even see what the current owners paid for a house when they bought it.

“They come in with so much information, and we have to really bring market knowledge that only an agent could provide,” said Doakes.

That the brokerage calls its agents advisers is suggestive of a different approach, one that Doakes said has worked for the Doakes Team. These advisers go beyond

writing up contracts and showing properties.

“We’re advising them through the entire real estate process,” said Doakes.

The brokerage works with title companies, lenders and others all the way through.

“We’ll be there at the inspection, pointing things out and making sure they see everything,” Doakes said.

The role of the advisers doesn’t end with the transaction.

“It’s a relationship,” Doakes said. “We’re always there.”

This means following up with customers on a regular basis.

As part of this approach to real estate in the 21st century, the brokerage makes use of the latest technology, combining automated systems, a fully developed marketing library and an in-house marketing team.

Driftwood Realty Group announced the new brokerage’s opening in January and the team has received a lot of positive feedback.

“The agents that we’ve spoken to are really excited about what we have to offer, because Quinton and I have built an excellent brand over the last six years in real estate,” Doakes said.

More information is available at www.DriftwoodRealtyGroup.com.



Kristin and Quinton Doakes (center) cut the ribbon for their independent brokerage, Driftwood Realty Group.



LEFT: Crystal and Tommy Horton, owners Seaside Slingshots, bring a couple of their slingshot vehicles to the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Driftwood Realty Group.

Photos by Susan Griffin

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Source: Real Value of Joining a Local Chamber of Commerce
Shapiro Group, 2012.

Buc-ee's opens 1st Florida travel center near World Golf Village



Photos by Susan Griffin

Co-founder and CEO of Buc-ee's Arch "Beaver" Aplin III (front row, second from right), cuts the ribbon as representatives from Buc-ee's, members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and government officials celebrate the grand opening of the travel center's first Florida location on Feb. 22.

Buc-ee's officially opened its first travel center in Florida at 6 a.m. Monday, Feb. 22 near World Golf Village. A ribbon-cutting ceremony conducted by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce was held at 11 a.m.

The center at 200 World Commerce Parkway occupies 52,600 square feet and has 104 fueling stations. The gas station and convenience store are open 24 hours, and the latter features thousands of snack, meal and drink options. Signature favorites include Texas barbecue, homemade fudge, kolaches, Beaver nuggets, jerky and fresh pastries.

The opening drew a large crowd of Buc-ee's fans Monday.

"Picking St. Augustine for our first Florida location made sense for many reasons, but its proximity to our other locations across the South was our initial motivator," said Stan Beard, Buc-ee's director of real estate. "Location aside, our owners fell in love with the rich history and warm hospitality of St. Augustine. With their crystal-clear beaches and walkable atmosphere, St. Augustine is among the most beautiful cities in Florida. We are excited to offer visitors and residents the experience and convenience of Buc-ee's and can't wait to become a part of the local community."

Construction is underway for a second Florida location in Daytona Beach, which is expected to open next month.

The two Florida "outposts" continue Buc-ee's multi-state expansion across the South, joining stores in Georgia and Alabama. Buc-ee's first travel center in South Carolina is also currently under construction and is slated for opening in 2022.

Buc-ee's continues to operate 38 locations in Texas, where it was founded by Arch "Beaver" Aplin III in 1982. In fact, the world's largest gas station is the Buc-ee's in New Braunfels, Texas, which has 120 gas pumps, 1,000 parking spots and a 67,000-square-foot store.

The St. Johns County center will bring approximately 200 new, permanent, full-time jobs to the area.



Buc-ee's, located at 200 World Commerce Parkway, boasts a large retail center, as well as numerous snack, meal and drink options.



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County update subject of Ponte Vedra Chamber meeting

By Shaun Ryan

In an update on the state of the county Wednesday, Feb. 24, St. Johns County Deputy Administrator Joy Andrews gave members of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the Chamber of Commerce a rundown on several issues of interest to local residents.

Many of the items she discussed related to growth.

“People are moving from all over the country to St. Johns County,” she said.

Since 2010, the population has increased 40% to 265,000 people, making St. Johns the 10th fastest growing county in the nation.

At the same time, businesses are inquiring about relocation here. Andrews called that “great news for our residents.”



Joy Andrews

“As long as you want to work, there’s pretty much a job for you,” she said, citing the county’s unemployment rate of 3.6% in December.

In fact, she said the county seemed to be at a “crossroads of growth” where it can be selective in what kinds of business it wants. She emphasized the need for a strong job market for the next generation.

“What kind of jobs do we want to create right here at home for them?” she asked rhetorically.

She listed several projects underway that will create or help retain jobs. Among these was the link, a 22,000-square-foot coworking space and innovation incubator being

built in Nocatee; the newly complete PGA TOUR global headquarters, which has the capacity for 1,100 employees; the Ascension St. Vincent’s hospital, which recently broke ground and will create about 450 new jobs; the Baptist HealthPlace at Nocatee; and Flagler Health+ villages at Durbin Park, Murabella and Nocatee.

The medical facilities are expected to promote the creation of related businesses in their vicinity.

Also on the horizon are five new hotels in St. Augustine and a proposed Baptist Medical Center hospital at State Road 207 and Interstate 95.

Andrews offered some reasons so many people want to live here.

For the ninth consecutive year, St. Johns has been named the healthiest county in the state. The school district has been named

the one in Florida where students are most likely to succeed. Nocatee was recently ranked among the top-selling master-planned communities in the nation. St. Augustine was named one of the 11 Best Small Towns in America. And St. Augustine Beach was ranked number 8 on the list of the 25 Best Beaches in America.

Andrews also listed a number of projects in the works for the Ponte Vedra area.

These include installation of a new water main along Ponte Vedra Boulevard, installation of protective sand on berms along the coast, sidewalk improvements at L’Atrium Circle and sidewalk construction along Palm Valley Road, and intersection improvements at Solana Road and State Road A1A, Roscoe Boulevard and Palm Valley Bridge, Mickler Road and S.R. A1A, and several other places.

St. Johns County Chamber holds inaugural Glow Golf Outing & Soirée

Gathering outdoors on the lovely Palencia Golf Clubhouse Patio, members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce socialized and networked on March 4 while many golfers tried their luck with “Glow Golf.”

“This was a first for the Chamber — I applaud our staff and volunteer leaders for their creativity in organizing fun outdoor events for our members during this trying time,” said Isabelle Renault, president and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. “A glowing good time was had by all.”

The event was sponsored by Florida Power and Light FPL (Illumination Presenting); T-Mobile (Radiance) and Glow Sponsors: OxiFresh, WaveFly, Yellowstone Landscape, ASAP Towing, St. Augustine Lighthouse, Koehn Outdoor, Jackson Law Group, CGC Kinetico and Southern Vibes Tasting Room and Wine Cellar.

The Chamber will be hosting a Classic Golf Tournament in June. Watch for more details.



Sharon Friedes and Alan Lowe attend the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce’s Glow Golf Outing & Soiree on March 4 at The Palencia Club in St. Augustine.



Carol Saviak and Reba Ludlow



Dr. Erika Hamer, Trudy Toche and Lisa Petges



Representatives from Radiance presenting partner T-Mobile participate in the event.

Photos by Susan Griffin

MOSH CEO speaks about expansion project

By Shaun Ryan

Jacksonville’s Museum of Science & History is about to undergo a major transformation that will shift its focus to better fit the role of a museum in the 21st century and better accommodate increasing numbers of visitors.



Bruce J. Fafard

Bruce J. Fafard, chief executive officer at MOSH, presented the museum’s plans Wednesday, March 17, at a virtual meeting of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

The project would entail construction of a 130,000-square-foot facility on four acres of Lot X, which is located on East Bay Street and borders Hogan Creek. This would essentially move the museum from its current site on the south bank of the St. Johns River to the north bank.

If all goes well, construction on the \$85 million project could begin before the end of the year. Currently, it has committed funds of \$30 million. Construction would take an anticipated three to four years.

One of the factors driving the expansion is capacity. On normal years when the pandemic is not a factor, the museum sees as many as 190,000 visitors, with the number growing year over year. The most visitors MOSH has seen in a single year was 226,000.

“We’ve really outgrown our service model,” said Fafard, “both in terms of capacity and in terms of the visitor experience that we can offer.”

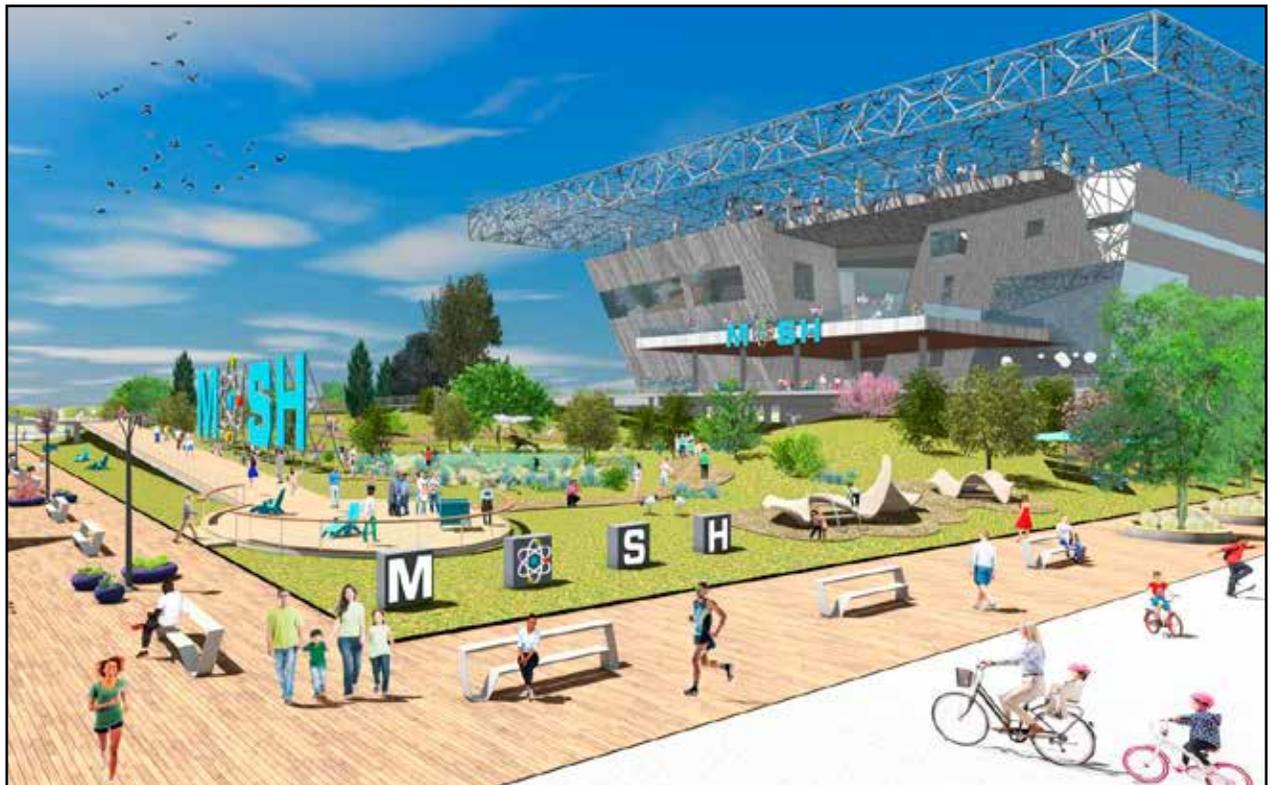
The new museum could accommodate up to 500,000 visitors annually.

The facility will allow MOSH to be transformed from a one-size-fits-all experience to what Fafard called “the museum of tomorrow” — something that’s more nimble, customized and open to new ideas.

It will focus on three “ecosystems,” which will overlap in some areas, weaving together science, culture and innovation.

The innovation ecosystem will focus on capturing Northeast Florida’s “entrepreneurial spirit,” according to Fafard. Experiences will look at new technology, creative problem solving and inventing.

The cultural ecosystem will explore Northeast Florida, its roots and its future identity. Art, music, dance and



Rendering provided by Wingard

A preliminary rendering (for illustration purposes only) shows an example of what the new MOSH facility could possibly look like.

more will take center stage. There will be live demonstrations for cooking, music, performance and story-telling, to name a few.

The natural ecosystem will examine ecology and the natural environment, with live animals and natural history collections.

Throughout, there will be maker spaces, so that visitors can have hands-on experiences.

MOSH is already a major destination for area residents with its core, long-term exhibits regarding science and history, its smaller-scale signature exhibits that frequently focus on the humanities and larger traveling exhibits that cover a variety of topics.

It also has art exhibits, outreach exhibits and online exhibits.

Annually, it serves more than 50,000 students and allows them to participate in STEAM-based programs, which cover more than 31 Sunshine State Educational Standards in the areas of physical, applied, natural and

earth-and-space sciences.

The museum was chartered in 1941 as the Jacksonville Children’s Museum and moved to its current location in 1969. In 1976, it changed its name to the Jacksonville Museum of Science and History and was rebranded in 1988 as MOSH.

In 1989, the facility was expanded to its current 74,000 square feet. Then, last November, the museum launched its Genesis project to build the new facility on the north bank.

The larger museum is expected to have a \$33 million net impact in Duval County, with \$13.6 million of that representing wages and salaries supporting 351 jobs. It is expected to generate about \$185,000 in direct and indirect taxes for the county.

Currently, the museum is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. Hours may be increased later in the year.

For more information, go to themosh.org.

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