

Columbia County, FL Industrial Development Authority
July 2010 Column

The recent meeting of the County Commissioners, School Board, City of Lake City along with the IDA and the Chamber focused on Our Future is Now. That is not new or different but a reminder that we must prepare for the future. It is important to grow our economic base to provide the job base to support our community for the coming years.

The Columbia County IDA working with its Rudder Team looked at Columbia County as a whole for economic development. The efforts concentrated on locations that provided the necessary infrastructure for transportation. Transporting goods and people will be the key to success in the future. Columbia County with its two interstates, two railroads, airport and proximity to the Jacksonville Port has the resources to be a leader in moving goods and people for years to come.

The Florida legislature and former Governor Bush established three Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern. Columbia County is part of the third region, comprised of 14 counties that are working together to improve the economic opportunity for the area. The region was awarded two catalyst sites to be developed as central industrial parks that will provide jobs to the region and offer strategic locations for companies doing business in Logistics and Distribution. One of these locations is in Columbia County and the second is in Suwannee County.

Columbia County is fortunate to be partnering with Plum Creek, the largest land owner in Florida, to develop the catalyst site in Columbia County. In addition, Plum Creek will also work with Columbia County on developing an Intermodal Logistic Center (Inland Port) to utilize the transportation infrastructure in Columbia County to receive and transport goods throughout the State of Florida and the southeast. Presently, over 50% of the goods used in Florida are transported from other states rather than from within the state.

Logistics and Distribution will add strength to our local economy. Florida and Columbia County have depended on three industries to provide our economic base for years. They are tourism, agriculture and construction. All three will continue to be the driving force industries, but they will be supplemented by other industries like logistics and distribution to provide stability to our economy. Columbia County is also fortunate to have a strong medical, government and financial base as well.

The Intermodal Logistics Center will also provide the opportunity for businesses to export products overseas. The IDA working with the U S Department of Commerce and Enterprise Florida can assist a business in obtaining help with exporting or importing. Companies interested in exporting will find they are able to gain assistance in learning how to conduct business with specific countries and insure that they are paid for their products.

The IDA and Plum Creek are planning a media day on August 6, 2010 at Florida Gateway College to officially kick off the catalyst site and Intermodal Logistics Center. There is a lot of work to be completed to have the site ready for business. Now is the time to be prepared for the future. There will be more details to follow on this event.

There is a lot of training and preparation taking place state wide to improve Florida's position economically. Enterprise Florida, Workforce Florida, Florida Chamber, Florida Chamber Foundation as well as our local organizations has been laying the groundwork for a stronger Florida. The Columbia

County IDA board and staff take an active role in the state plans. By taking an active role, we are able to insure that our local plans are included in the state plans. The committees include business representation as well as representatives from all of Florida's regulatory agencies.

The North Central Florida Regional Planning Council prepares an annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Plan (CEDS). This plan is used by the federal government to identify local economic plans and when funding is available to provide funding to the projects identified in the CEDS plan. The CEDS committee is made up of economic developers and tourism directors for the 11 county region comprising the NCFRPC.

The economic projection for the future is positive. We will not see a boom time like we experienced earlier this decade. The future growth will be steady but at a much slower pace than what we have seen. Florida is still predicted to grow to 30 million people by 2025. That is a 50% growth over the next 15 years.

I was asked recently about the economy. My reply is that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, a pen light but at least it is a light. That light will grow brighter. Now is the time to prepare.

Jim Poole
Executive Director