

Columbia County, FL Industrial Development Authority
June 2010 Column

Columbia County history was made when the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, County Manager, City of Lake City Council and Mayor, City Manager, Columbia County School Board, Superintendent of Schools along with the Columbia County IDA Board and Lake City-Columbia County Chamber of Commerce Board met to discuss the future of Columbia County and the City of Lake City's economic future. Each group has an important part to play in achieving success and coming together in a united effort will insure that the goal is achieved.

With the support of the County Commissioners, the IDA Rudder Team has worked to identify the areas in Columbia County that are best positioned to help bring about good economic growth in the years to come. The Rudder Team has divided the county into 7 different areas for consideration and then identified the strengths and gaps for each location to determine the top three areas to concentrate on for immediate growth. The Team recommended that the Plum Creek site east of Lake City Airport be the priority area to complete the rural area of critical economic concern catalyst site and to develop the intermodal logistics center which will serve as an inland port concept for receiving and transferring goods to Florida and the southeastern U. S.

Terry Huddleston, Principal at Columbia High School, with support of the School Board and Superintendent is moving forward with establishing a logistics and distribution academy at CHS this fall. There are 40 students already signed up to be part of this new program and to learn skills that would prepare them for a career in this field. Lake City Community College and the Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution have developed a curriculum for continuing the training at the college. The University of North Florida in Jacksonville presently has a degree program in logistics and distribution providing a seamless pathway toward the necessary education to achieve personal goals in this career field.

The present economy places even greater emphasis on having a diverse economy to help our community ride out down times like today. Diversification provides insurance to provide for a stronger economy that does not depend on one or two industries to keep it moving. Florida as a whole has been very successful with three areas for years. Those are construction, agriculture and tourism. These three industries provide an important base that needs additional support added on. The American economy has changed also from a self supportive system, manufacturing and producing our own food and products to one that depends on goods produced overseas that are received through our ports and then requires distribution to the end users. Lake City and Columbia County is well located to be part of this industry as well.

The bright spot of all this is the coming together of our community to look at the future needs together. This is just the first step of the efforts required to accomplish a brighter tomorrow with a stronger community. The vision needs to be shared and allowed to grow to become a true vision for Columbia County. All of us talk about providing a better opportunity for tomorrow for not only our young people but for all residents of our county. The talk can stop and action can start to reach our goals for the future. Taking the first step forward is the start to success.

Jim Poole
Executive Director