

Columbia County IDA Column  
November 2009

It is with great pleasure that I write my first article on behalf of the Columbia County Industrial Development Authority (IDA). Future articles about activities of the IDA will alternately be written by IDA Board Members, Jim Poole, and me. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. My name is Gina Reynolds and I currently serve as the Deputy Director for the IDA. I have worked for the IDA for almost five years and until October 1<sup>st</sup> also served as the Deputy Director for the Lake City-Columbia County Chamber of Commerce.

The transition to the new IDA office was smooth and the first full month of operation has been busy. A special thanks to Mike Nelson at Intella for installing our phone system. The IDA continues to receive requests for information from companies wanting to locate to Columbia County. As mentioned in previous columns, the IDA continues to work on developing the 500-acre Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Catalyst site located on Hwy 90, just east of the airport. We are also working with a private company to develop 2500 acres to attract industry wanting to take advantage of the various transportation modes. Easy access to I-75 and I-10, availability of the railroad, the airport and the close proximity to the Jacksonville Port make this location a natural fit for logistics and distribution. We are working on a few additional projects and hope to provide information on those in the future.

Over the past few months the IDA Rudder Team, which is comprised of community leaders, has been engaged in developing the Economic Development Marketing Plan for Columbia County. In the most recent session, the team reviewed information on competitive communities within the southeastern United States. Knowing the competition's strengths and weaknesses is of value to the team. To name a few areas the Rudder team focused on, we reviewed the competition's geographic location and the access to multi-modal transportation infrastructure, and strengths of their state, regional and local partners. The way a community views its competitors usually depends on the size of the community. Typically, large counties with a population over 250,000 perceive out-of-state counties as their competitors. Medium populated counties with a population of 50,000 – 250,000 perceive non-contiguous but in-state counties as their strongest competitors. Small counties with a population of less than 50,000 perceive contiguous counties as their strongest competitors. Even though Columbia County's population is approximately 70,000, our service area is approximately 240,000, which makes us the economic hub within the region. Although Columbia County fits the criteria for a medium sized county, the Rudder team is being proactive and is looking at our competitors as communities in other states and even globally. As the team develops the plan we are being mindful that decisions made by this team effect not just Columbia County, but the entire region. It is exciting to see the possibilities Columbia County has in its future. I invite you to attend one of the Rudder Team meetings; they are open to the public and the next one will be held at Lake City Community College. The date for the next meeting has not been scheduled yet, but it will be held the first week of December. You can contact the IDA office at 758-1033 or you can review our session notes by visiting the

Columbia County website and selecting the Industrial Development Authority link. When complete, the results will provide a shared community vision resulting in a sustainable plan for Columbia County.

Columbia County is not the only one planning for the future. The Florida Chamber is also organizing their plan. The Florida Chamber Foundation is coordinating The 2030 Project, an initiative that will design and mobilize the state around a twenty year strategic vision for Florida's future. The project is organized around six key drivers for the future of Florida's economy: talent, innovation; infrastructure; quality of life, governance and business climate. The goal is to move Florida toward prosperity and high wage jobs, vibrant and sustainable communications and global competitiveness in all the markets Florida serves. There are two significant educational components of The 2030 Project: The Future of Florida Forum, which was held in October, and Regional Economic Forums. The regional forums are already underway and are being held in Jacksonville, Bay County, Indian River County, Clearwater, Naples, Orlando, St. Petersburg, Miami and *Lake City*. I am proud to say the IDA is hosting the regional forum in Lake City. It will be held on December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00 a.m. at the Lake City Community College Conference Center.

The talent supply chain is one of the areas the IDA's Rudder Team and the Florida Chamber is concentrating on to strengthen. Recently, Mr. Poole participated in a Workforce Florida live web stream to discuss the talent and training needs for rural Florida. The discussion also included examples of how a state program called Quick Response Training is utilized. Quick Response is a state training grant provided to new or existing companies to provide the required training to enable the business to either open or to expand. The QRT has been used by companies like New Millennium, Target, and TIMCO in the past. Mr. Poole along with Bill Stanton of the Jackson County Economic Development Authority, Lynn Topel, representing the RACEC area in South Central Florida, known as FHREDI, along with Bridget Merrill, the Enterprise Florida Vice President of Development participated on the webinar with Debbie McMullian of Workforce Florida and David Armstrong, Chair of the Workforce Florida Strategic Plan. The session may be heard by going to the Workforce Florida website at <http://www.workforceflorida.com/strategy/SessionToolkits.htm>.

A freight analysis has been initiated by the Florida Chamber Foundation to analyze the origination of freight coming into, through, within and from Florida. International shipments entering other states and routing into Florida will also be analyzed. A competitive analysis of transportation will be provided and will be a great tool for us to use as we continue to attract industry. The IDA is involved in this analysis, ensuring Columbia County and the rural areas in Florida are represented.

The community has grown tremendously over the past two decades. The growth we have seen does not happen by accident. It takes a leader with vision, perseverance and integrity. The community has been fortunate to have such a leader in Mr. Poole. For the past 17 years, he has

provided transitional progress through the Columbia County Industrial Development Authority and the Lake City-Columbia County Chamber of Commerce. Although the Chamber Board of Directors decided to end the partnership between the Chamber and IDA, Mr. Poole will continue to provide his leadership through the IDA. First Federal has taken the lead and will be honoring Mr. Poole on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 at the First Federal Operations Center. Chamber members are invited to attend. Please RSVP to the Chamber at 752-3690.

The IDA looks forward to providing future updates on the progress we are making to benefit the community.

*Gina Reynolds*  
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