

Columbia County IDA Column  
October 2009

The recent decision by the Lake City-Chamber of Commerce Board to end the 27 year partnership with the Columbia County IDA opens the door for Gina Reynolds and me to concentrate strictly on the economic development area for Columbia County. I wish to express our thanks to the businesses that make up the membership of the Chamber of Commerce for the privilege of serving as the Executive Director for the past 17 years and Gina as the Deputy Director for the past 4 and a half years. The contacts, friendships and relationships that have developed from that service will be treasured for years.

The Columbia County Industrial Development Authority was created by the Columbia County Board of County Commissioners by Resolution in 1977 for the purpose of economic development. State Statue authorized the counties to create IDAs with the main purpose of approving Industrial Bond Issues for the county. The State Statue also authorized the IDA Board to hire staff to perform the economic duties. Jim Ward, former Mayor of Lake City, was the first executive director of the IDA.

In 1982, the Chamber and the Board of County Commissioners entered into an agreement to share staff, offices and operational expenses. That is the partnership that ended effective September 30, 2009. The IDA remains a dependent taxing authority. The IDA may not tax but rather depends on the County Commission to establish its tax rate from ad valorem taxes.

The role of the IDA has evolved over time to being an economic development agency rather than just for industrial development. American industry has changed from true manufacturing to information, service and logistics and distribution. Manufacturing is still the primary focus but the end result is how to get the final product to the end user. For years, Florida has been dependent on three types of industry for the economy. Those are Tourism, Agriculture and Construction. Those are still the big three but Florida along with Columbia County has worked to diversify its economy. Diversity is the key to future success and the IDA must be at the forefront along with the county and the private sector to make this occur.

The Columbia County IDA Board is composed of the following residents of Columbia County: Donna Brown of James Moore & Company as Chair, Suzanne Norris, President of Mercantile Bank of North Central Florida as Vice Chair, Carlton Jones of Cochran Forest Products, Jeff Simmons of FPL, Gus Rentz of Rountree-Moore Toyota, Marc Vann of Brown Vann Carpet One and until September 30, 2009, Superintendant of Schools Mike Millikin. The Board of County Commissioners appoint the members of the IDA Board. Jim Poole has served as the Executive Director since January of 1993 and Gina Reynolds became the second Deputy Director of the IDA in 2005.

The Columbia County IDA is funded by a designated portion of the ad valorem tax. The tax rate is established and set by the Columbia County Board of County Commissioners. The tax shows on the tax payer's tax bill as CCIDA and the amount. The ad valorem tax generates about \$304,000 per year. Tax revenue does not start to come in until November each year and requires

an agency to carry forward revenue to operate until new revenue starts. The IDA carries forward approximately \$250,000, making a total budget available of \$550,000 for the year.

The Columbia County IDA Board and its Rudder Team are presently working on Go To Market Columbia County marketing plan. The Rudder Team has met to begin the direction for the plan. The IDA Board will now be taking a more active role in the plan, along with representatives of industry segments that have been identified for targeted marketing for the county. The present Rudder Team includes Commissioner Stephen Bailey, Councilman George Ward, IDA representative Jeff Simmons, Chamber representative Chris Dampier of People State Bank, Tyson Johnson of Parks Johnson Insurance, Connie Anderson of Columbia Bank, Dr. Charles Hall of Lake City Community College along with the IDA staff. Dale Williams, County Manager, Wendell Johnson, City Manager and Charles Carroll of the College serve as Ad Hoc members. The plan is to have the preliminary plan completed by the first of the year. You may view the progress of the Rudder Team by going to [www.columbiacountyfla.com](http://www.columbiacountyfla.com) and clicking on the IDA page. Next, we will be looking at competitive communities across the southeast with similar traits to Columbia County.

The IDA, Rudder Team and Columbia County, along with the City of Lake City, are looking at each of the interstate interchanges in Columbia County to determine the best uses for these locations. The committee will also look at which areas would be priority developments and the areas that would be developed later. The goal is to have ready industrial and commercial sites for Columbia County to market in the near future.

One of the exciting projects that the IDA is working on is the development of the 500 acre Catalyst Site for the North Florida Economic Development Partnership. The Partnership is composed of the 14 counties in North Central Florida that were designated as the Third Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern. The 14 counties have selected two catalyst sites for development. One is the 500 acre site east of the Lake City Airport that will be used to target a light manufacturer. The second site is located in western Suwannee County and will be used to target a distribution project. Both of these sites will be assisted by Enterprise Florida, the State's Public-Private Economic Development Partnership, in locating an end user for these sites.

In addition, the IDA has been working closely with Plum Creek, the property owner for the majority of the land east of the Lake City Airport, on an Inland Port concept. Plum Creek and the IDA have worked on completing an application for a rail right of way easement from the U S Forestry Service. This would give the site the rail service that is necessary to receive goods and products that enter the United States via the Jacksonville Port. These goods and products would complete a cross dock operation in Lake City that would break down these shipments to smaller lots for final delivery to the end users across the southeast. Plum Creek is working with Columbia County and the State of Florida to develop 2500 acres initially for this project. The Inland Port and the Catalyst Site projects will work simultaneously to bring about a positive industrial park area for the county and the region for years to come.

The glamorous part of economic development is the recruitment of new businesses to Columbia County. The pleasant part of economic development is watching existing companies prosper and grow. Columbia County is fortunate to have had both occur over the past years.

Although the economy is struggling, the interest in Columbia County is strong. The IDA is working on five projects in addition to the Inland Port, Catalyst Site and the Go To Market Columbia Plan. The IDA will give you a regular update on our progress.

To contact the IDA by phone: 386-758-1033. Physical Address: 164 NW Madison Street, Lake City, Fl. 32055.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our community and to work with so many individuals that are committed to giving Columbia County a brighter tomorrow.

*Jim Poole*  
*Executive Director, Columbia County IDA*