

St. Lucie County





Up, up, up and away

St. Lucie County is a hotspot for research, real estate, manufacturing and health care — all buoyed by workforce development efforts and partners in education. Cemented by unified collaboration across agencies, the county has created a welcome mat for businesses and economic growth. At the same time, its leaders recognize the importance of preserving what makes the area special in terms of natural resources: scenic beaches, unique history and diverse activities. Add to that scenario an airport property with acres of developable land and cargo port with a state-of-the-art mega-yacht facility. You've got a region ripe for success. You've got St. Lucie County.

By Susan Shalhoub

St. Lucie County

The county is governed by five elected county commissioners and managed by an appointed county administrator.

St. Lucie County is made up of the county seat, which is the city of Fort Pierce, the city of Port St. Lucie and St. Lucie Village.

St. Lucie County

Covers 572 square miles and has:

21

Miles of coastline

320,000

Population

5,560

St. Lucie Public School employees

Fort Pierce

Covers 29 square miles and has:

14

Miles of coastline

46,500

Population

379

City of Fort Pierce employees

Port St. Lucie

Covers 120 square miles and has:

200,000+

Population

1,164

City of Port St. Lucie employees



St. Lucie County

A TALE OF TWO CITIES (AND A VILLAGE)

St. Lucie County defines its pillars of progress

St. Lucie County is proving that it's possible to grow strategically and maintain the facets of the area that make it a great place to live, work and play. County officials continue to make moving and expanding here as easy a process as possible for companies and organizations.

"So much of what we are doing is focused in St. Lucie County because it's so welcoming," says Rob Lord, president of Cleveland Clinic Martin Health, which has facilities in Port St. Lucie.

Altogether, there are about 320,000 residents of St. Lucie County, 141,780 of whom are in the workforce, according to the St. Lucie Economic Development Council. The median household income of the region is \$52,320, according to the latest data.

Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce are the county's two cities, along with St. Lucie Village, a town of 600 residents.

PORT ST. LUCIE

Port St. Lucie is Florida's seventh largest city, with a population of 203,000.

Both in terms of business and lifestyle, the city has a vast array of attractions: The New York Mets enjoy Clover Park for spring training, for example. Port St. Lucie also has the nation's only all-inclusive resort on the St. Lucie River, Club Med Sandpiper Bay.

But Port St. Lucie is also evolving as a hub for strategic development, advances in innovation and research, with success stories of manufacturers locating, staying and growing here — with county and municipal leaders firmly rooted as systems of support.

"It's a very vibrant community with lots happening," says City Manager Russ Blackburn. "We've worked hard to streamline the building process to make it easier for folks to come here, and recently lowered commercial building permit fees as well."

Within this welcoming culture, for example, is the Southern Grove Master Plan for over 1,100 acres to the city's western end along I-95, where research, health care, commerce and industry have a place to thrive. With some anchor tenants already positioned, others — and the jobs they bring — are on the way.

In terms of the number of people migrating into the city, these efforts are seeing an impact, data shows.

Steadily climbing U-Haul's list of Top U.S. Growth Cities, Port St. Lucie was sixth in 2019, and No. 3 for 2020. The truck rental company calculates the net gain of one-way U-Haul trucks entering a city versus leaving within the same year.

PRIDE OF PLACE

The city is also always looking for ways to enrich its unique character. Naming its 32 neighborhoods, an initiative that began in 2019, is one such example.

Until then, Blackburn says, the city's core had consisted of just plotted lots. "There wasn't a strong sense of identity in the different areas of the community," he says. But now, its neighborhoods bear names such as Hidden Oaks, Tulip Park, Morningside, Canal Pointe and Woodland Trails to express their individuality and geographic features.

"Naming neighborhoods gave the residents a greater sense of pride, a greater sense of 'where you are,'" says Blackburn.

To choose neighborhood names, city officials solicited neighbors' input online and through in-person events. The fact that the process brought such robust participation was a pleasant surprise, Blackburn says — illustrating and strengthening city pride overall.

FORT PIERCE

City pride is strong in Port St. Lucie's neighbor to the north, as well.

Fort Pierce, known as "The Sunrise City," is one of the oldest communities on Florida's East Coast. It's named after the Fort Pierce Army post, built during the Second Seminole War and incorporated in 1901. The military post is named after Benjamin Kendrick Pierce, a U.S. Army officer and brother of President Franklin Pierce.

BRIDGING PAST AND PRESENT

The city of 46,500 has shown progress in spurring redevelopment based on its legacy, making investments in infrastructure. Fort Pierce is home to Indian River State College and the historic, renovated Sunrise Theatre downtown. It's the site of King's Landing, a mixed-use development now underway, as well as major manufacturers and the scenic Fort Pierce Inlet State Park.

"Our history and culture give us our strength," says City Manager Nick Mimms. "We became a neglected



Fort Pierce

section of the Treasure Coast, but over the last decade we've become a destination. We are trying to get away from the word 'potential.' We are now a central point of growth."

This growth is ushered in with a dedicated commitment across the board to seeing Fort Pierce succeed. As is true for the rest of the county, various entities work together to ensure a streamlined business environment, says John Tompeck, director of utilities, Fort Pierce Utilities Authority.

"There has been great collaboration with utilities to make the area more business friendly," he says. "We've been working hard to use capital money to expand our service area. Folks who come here want to see slab-ready sites and we are working hard to provide that."

Ideal transportation logistics are another asset in Fort Pierce.

Once companies decide to locate in the city, employees find diverse activities, enjoying time in nature, family-friendly spots, cultural activities and some of the best fishing around, says Mimms.

"We're vibrant," he says. "We have fun."

ST. LUCIE VILLAGE

With 600 residents, St. Lucie Village was settled in 1843. The town was incorporated in 1961 by citizens looking to establish local control over use of its land. Mainly a single-family residential village, the community has 33 structures in its National Register Historic District.

Alongside its larger, sister communities of Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce, St. Lucie Village is a historic gem in a county judiciously looking ahead to its future.



MAP TERESANNE RUSSELL

MAKING PRODUCTS AND CREATING JOBS

Manufacturing constitutes over 5% of jobs in the region, about 6,200 positions, according to the St. Lucie County Economic Development Council, with an average wage of \$50,000.

The Treasure Coast Manufacturers Association ensures that those involved in manufacturing — including the county's main employment categories of transportation, food, fabricated metal products, computer goods, electronic products and wood products — are well represented.

St. Lucie County has its own Economic Development Council promoting growth throughout the region. Everything from juice to pickles to boats to plastics are made locally.

Building boats and futures, Maverick Boat Group, which has over 400 employees, and Pursuit Boats, which has over 360 employees, are the county's largest manufacturing employers.

Maverick built a 100,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Fort Pierce in 2018. The next year, Pursuit built 250,000 square feet of manufacturing space, also in Fort Pierce.

DERECKTOR

Derecktor Shipyards, with a long-term lease, has set about revitalizing the Port of Fort Pierce.

On 12 acres, Derecktor has begun constructing a repair and refit facility for mega-yachts, featuring the world's largest ship hoist. Able to lift yachts of up to 1,500 tons, the \$6.5 million hoist was delivered from Italy in January. Once online this spring, it will stand 85 feet in the air and weigh 700 tons. It can haul vessels up to 250 feet long, says Justin Beard, Derecktor marketing manager.



Derecktor is revitalizing the Port of Fort Pierce

"Fort Pierce's proximity to South Florida and accessibility to the Atlantic Ocean make it the ideal location for America's next great shipyard," Beard says.

Calling Derecktor Fort Pierce a growth opportunity for younger workers, Beard says hauling is set to begin in 2021. By 2025, the site expects to have 170 employees with \$1.5 million in annual tax revenues.

THAT PSL APPEAL

In Port St. Lucie, Southern Grove's Tradition Center for Commerce is already home to Oculus Surgical and TAMCO Group, part of City Electric Supply. TAMCO opened a 411,000-square-foot fulfillment and manufacturing center in January of 2020. City Manager Russ Blackburn says the new, 38-acre site doesn't just keep 200 jobs in Port St. Lucie but adds about 50 more.

Additionally, Accel International Holdings plans a 150,000-square-foot facility on a 10-acre site at the Tradition Center for Commerce, adding 125 new jobs. The company, based in Connecticut, makes wire and cable products.

GREAT INCENTIVES

CEO of A-1 Roof Trusses, John Herring cites the region's incentives, workforce and inter-agency collaboration as reasons his company will stay here.

Manufacturing

Pursuit Boats added a 182,000-square-foot facility, its second in Fort Pierce, and employs 500.

-PursuitBoats.com

Expert Shutters of Port St. Lucie won the 2020 South Florida Manufacturers Association "Manufacturer of the Year" award for companies with 31-75 employees.

-FloridaMakes.com

Fort Pierce is home to Natalie's Orchid Island Juice Company, which provides over 170 jobs to the area.

-St. Lucie EDC

A-1 is at the halfway point in adding 72,000 square feet of manufacturing space to its 18-acre site at St. Lucie Boulevard in Fort Pierce, along with 4.5 acres. The incentive package offered included a Job Growth Investment Grant and impact-fee mitigation.

The company has 283 employees in Fort Pierce. "With the expansion, we'll be looking for 30 more," says Herring.

A-1 offers its own training program, which positions students for roles in its engineering and design department. Community partners such as Indian River State College have been helpful in this regard, Herring says.

"I have built the business on bringing people in and watching them grow."

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Lawnwood is a top regional employer, providing 1,600+ jobs



STRONG HEALTH CARE RESOURCES FIRMLY IN PLACE

CLEVELAND CLINIC TRADITION HOSPITAL

"When folks are trying to decide where to move to retire, what they check is health care," says Rob Lord, CEO of Cleveland Clinic Martin Health. The system operates Tradition Hospital, in Port St. Lucie.

U.S. News & World Report named Cleveland Clinic the nation's No. 2 hospital in its Best Hospitals rankings for 2020-2021, and its No. 1 hospital for heart care. It's the 26th year in a row the system earned the No. 1 ranking for cardiology and heart surgery.

Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital in Port St. Lucie embarked upon a 2017 expansion, doubling in size.

Nine stories high, it has 177 patient rooms with an 18-bed observation area; a labor-and-delivery unit; neonatal intensive care unit; pediatrics department; interventional lab for cardiac catheterization, interventional radiology and vascular procedures; as well as two attached medical office buildings and ancillary services. The system has 850 employees since its expansion, not counting other support or ancillary caregivers, which would bring that number to over 1,000, Lord says.

'ECONOMIC ENGINE'

"A hospital serves as an economic engine," says Lord, not only creating jobs but also spurring other businesses to pop up around it.

THAT GROWTH CONTINUES.

Cleveland Clinic is committed to expanding its neuroscience and stroke program, says Lord, potentially at the Tradition Center for Innovation at Southern Grove. The health care system purchased 44 acres north of Discovery Way, with access to I-95, at the end of 2020.

Meanwhile, the health care system is diversifying and enriching its service with research initiatives as well. (See Growing Biotech, Page 42.)

Health Care

Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute in Fort Pierce is a top regional employer, providing 1,600+ jobs.

-St. Lucie EDC

The David L. Smythe Wound Center, part of Cleveland Clinic, has hyperbaric chambers. Its concentrated oxygen promotes tissue growth.

-MartinHealth.org

Cleveland Clinic's Tradition Hospital added 90 patient beds in its 2017 expansion.

-MartinHealth.org



CLEVELAND CLINIC TRADITION HOSPITAL

TRADITION CENTER FOR COMMERCE

Located in the City of Port St. Lucie in St. Lucie County, Florida, the Tradition Center for Commerce provides an abundance of development options, with more than 10 million square feet of office / medical, industrial, warehouse, multi-family residential, and retail space on 1,200+ AC of developable land.

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LAWNWOOD REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER & HEART INSTITUTE

Fort Pierce's Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute is a 380-bed, acute-care facility.

Owned by HCA Healthcare of Nashville, Tenn., the hospital has the area's only Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Level II Trauma Center, pediatric ICU and comprehensive stroke center. Healthgrades has given it an America's 50 Best Hospitals for Vascular Surgery Award for 2021.

The system is setting about making improvements to meet the needs of the growing community, says hospital CEO Eric Goldman, such as its new 12-bed Adolescent Behavioral Health program.

Work is underway on Lawnwood's \$100-million, 92,500-square-foot, five-story tower, as well. The first phase of work will add 32 medical surgical beds, as well as operating rooms and pre-op and recovery space. Completion is set for spring of 2023, says Goldman. Later phases involve a new emergency department, space for more beds and a 550-space garage.

ST. LUCIE MEDICAL CENTER

HCA Healthcare's St. Lucie Medical Center is a 229-bed acute-care facility in Port St. Lucie, employing about 1,100.

It partners with Indian River State College and Florida State University College of Medicine at Fort Pierce, as well as other institutions to fill

clinical roles, says CEO Jay Finnegan. These partnerships — along with system investments in the latest technology and treatments — have become a winning combination.

Its Orthopedic & Spine Institute, designed like an upscale hotel, is a 35-bed unit with the latest equipment and surgical options, including robotic surgery.

Accredited by The Joint Commission and recipient of a 2018 Healthgrades Patient Safety Excellence Award, St. Lucie Medical Center also offers a birthing center, cardiac catheterization lab, cancer care, general and vascular surgery, wound care and hyperbarics, as well as a new, child-friendly ER with private rooms.

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ST. LUCIE WORKS

St. Lucie County has been a leader in developing *"speed to market"* initiatives to help existing businesses expand and new businesses get up and running as quickly as possible.

Waivers, Deferrals and Alternatives Program, which allows staff to make more decisions regarding deviating from the strict language of the county code to allow business to open faster

A Defined Targeted Industries List expedites priority industries and job creation projects through the plans review and permitting processes.

A full-time Business Navigator, who helps walk businesses through the process.

Strong collaboration within the Economic Development Council, city partners, and local utilities.

Economic Incentives such as the Growth Incentive grants and Tax Abatement programs

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St Lucie Board of County Commissioners approved a 100,000-square-foot boat manufacturing plant in 2018 in just 8 weeks after submitting its plans.




PURSUIT®

St Lucie Board of County Commissioners approved a 250,000-square-foot expansion in 2020 with plans being approved 6 weeks after submittal. This project also required a federally protected species "take" permit – something that normally requires a 12- to 18-month approval process was completed within 6 months.

**ST. LUCIE
COUNTY**
FLORIDA 

For more
information,
contact

Leslie Olson, AICP

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FAU Professor Paul Wills leads the way in advancing aquaculture in Florida, the U.S. and around the world.



GROWING BIOTECH AT-A-GLANCE

- *Torrey Pines is a hub for research efforts for memory disorders such as Alzheimer's*
- *The Cleveland Clinic is partnering with FIU and launching the Florida Research and Innovation Center*
- *Scientists at the Florida Research and Innovation Center will study emerging pathogens such as COVID-19 and tick-borne viruses*

Port St. Lucie's growing biotech cluster got a boost with the 2020 merger of Florida International University and the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies. Within the Tradition Center for Innovation — standing at four stories and encompassing over 102,000 square feet — Torrey Pines has been a hub for research efforts for memory disorders such as Alzheimer's, says Rob Lord, CEO of Cleveland Clinic.

At the same time Cleveland Clinic hopes to be a part of that synergy, it is creating momentum of its own. Cleveland Clinic is leasing the former Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute of Florida, now called the Florida

Research and Innovation Center, to partner with FIU on research.

"We have seven scientists practicing now, with 11 support staff. We expect to double that this year. Being able to associate with Cleveland Clinic and live in South Florida is very attractive," says Lord. Scientists will study emerging pathogens such as COVID-19 and tick-borne viruses, he says.

Not only would the effort create jobs, but potential disease cures, then more jobs.

"You can see from those two major investments in our community in research that there is potential to spin off manufacturing, pharmacy or health care advances," says City Manager Russ Blackburn, allowing for streamlined collaboration with medical-device companies, biotech companies, medical IT firms and the like.

BY LAND AND BY SEA

In Fort Pierce, Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute and the



FAU PROFESSOR ADITYA NAYAK IS DEVELOPING AN IN-WATER HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGING SYSTEM

Smithsonian Marine Station specialize in marine ecosystem research. At the Smithsonian location, studies focus on the Indian River Lagoon, working with schools, outreach programs and fueling data for over 800 scientific journals.

Fort Pierce is also home to the USDA Agricultural & Horticultural Research Lab, which conducts studies on plant disease and pests, among other topics. The county had 406 farms in 2012, according to a USDA census.



IRSC
prepares
students for
careers in fields
like nursing

The largest donation in the college's history, \$45 million, by philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, will aid in area workforce collaborations as well, says Moore. Announced in December of 2020, the donation will allow IRSC to serve more low-income, underrepresented populations, encourage entrepreneurship and pursue more capital projects, like IRSC's Advanced Workforce Training Complex, now under construction in Fort Pierce.

PREPARING STUDENTS 'FOR JOBS COMING AT THEM'

ST. LUCIE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

It's never too early to start imagining what you want to do for a career. St. Lucie Public Schools believes that, too, and gives its 37,600 students inspiration and tools to get there.

The district has 17 elementary schools, nine schools Grades K-8, four middle schools and five high schools — plus Lincoln Park Academy, for Grades 6-12. The district has magnet and non-traditional institutions of learning as well.

St. Lucie public high schools earned a graduation rate of 98% in 2019-2020. But the district doesn't wait until graduation to get students started on career considerations.

Its Career and Technical Education programs offer 40 industry certifications and credentials — in-demand, high-salaried careers such as applied robotics, industrial biotechnology, building construction technology and pharmacy technician — says school district Superintendent Wayne Gent.

"We work closely with the Economic Development Council and industry

leaders to ensure our programs align with job-market needs," he says. "Students benefit from internships, field experiences and pre-apprenticeships in their chosen career pathways, which help to create a pipeline directly to work or further education."

INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE

IRSC, with campuses in Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie, is nationally recognized for its affordability. Offering baccalaureate and associate degrees as well as career and technical certificates in person and online, 91% of its students "get out with zero debt," according to IRSC President Tim Moore, serving 30,000 students a year.

The school's commitment to boosting the area workforce has grown even stronger with Moore's hiring in July of 2020. He has decades of experience in not just higher education, but also various start-up sectors. "His vision for connecting transformative education to employment and regional growth was particularly noted," reads the announcement of his selection as president.

"Just 80 miles north of us are companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin. These are high-paying jobs," says Moore. "Education is promptly changing. We can get too academic. We have to think like a business and prepare our students for jobs coming at them."

IRSC has created a vice president of strategic initiatives position to help prepare for future workforce needs. Rounding out the college experience are IRSC's 70 different clubs and organizations, which students can explore at RiverLife, the school's online database. There are over 1,600 student activities to choose from altogether. Additionally, a global perspective is offered through IRSC's study abroad program. Scholarships are available, and students can earn credit while exploring other parts of the world.

KEISER UNIVERSITY

Keiser, with a campus in Port St. Lucie, offers over 100 degrees at doctoral, specialist, master's, bachelor's and associate's levels. It serves 20,000 students, with 21 Florida campuses, two global locations and online programs. Data-analysis firm Niche ranked Keiser No. 13 overall in Florida among institutions of higher learning in its 2021 Best College in America rankings.

Education

St. Lucie Public Schools' 2019 graduation rate, 93%, is the 10th highest in Florida.

-St. Lucie Public School District

Indian River State College won the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.

-AspenInstitute.org

Keiser University, with 20,000 students and 3,800 employees, has become the state's largest private, non-profit university.

-KeiserUniversity.edu

FAU has semester-at-sea programs, internships, and research positions.

Campus President Leslie Kristof says the university works with an advisory board of local leaders in different sectors to grow its offerings.

As most Keiser students are health care majors, the university has strong bonds with Lawnwood Medical Center & Heart Institute, St. Lucie Medical Center and Cleveland Clinic, Kristof says. Offering bachelor's programs in medical laboratory science and imaging sciences in Port St. Lucie were the result of that feedback.

Keiser's corporate community partners, many who help with mock interviews, "always want to know who's graduating next," Kristof says, its bonds with the public schools' Career Technical Education programs bringing the connections full circle.

The goal, says Kristof, is employment within 90 days of graduation, "And we do a really good job at it."

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY'S HARBOR BRANCH OCEANOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE

Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, on 144 acres in Fort Pierce, hosts research and academic programs focused on the science and technology of the sea. With 200 faculty, staff and students, it has semester-at-sea programs, internships, research positions and more. Research areas include fisheries and conservation, aquaculture and stock enhancement, and marine biomedicine.

FAU has semester-at-sea programs, internships, and research positions.

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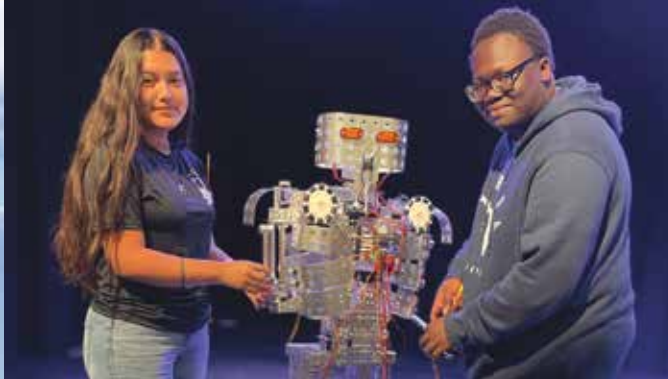
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ST. LUCIE PUBLIC SCHOOLS TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



DISTRICT ACCOLADES

- Ranked [1st in state](#) for academic growth
- 93% graduation rate, ranked [10th in state](#)
- 98% graduation rate for traditional high schools
- One of the top producers of industry certifications state-wide
- Recognized as a Cambridge District of the Year

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

- 34 academies and 56 programs such as:
 - Aerospace Technologies
 - Allied Health Assisting
 - Applied Cybersecurity
 - Industrial Biotechnology
 - Marine Oceanographic Studies
 - Manufacturing Technologies
 - Veterinary Technology
 - Emerging Technology in Business
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 - Biomedical Sciences
 - Robotics

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- Economic Development Council, St. Lucie County

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SKILLED WORKFORCE STRATEGY

"While economic growth and commercial activity are amazing here in St. Lucie, the 'special sauce' or secret to our success is the willingness of our people to work together," says Pete Tesch — president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County.

One example of this is #SMARTBIZ St. Lucie County, a business resource hub that brings together experts from organizations such as Enterprise Florida, Florida Virtual Entrepreneurial Center, SCORE and the Small Business Administration.

Recruitment, hiring and training are just part of the myriad workforce assistance services offered.

WAGE ASPIRATIONS

The EDC's Workforce Task Force has prioritized manufacturing, health care and construction/skilled trades.

Tesch is one of the community economic leaders on the board of CareerSource Research Coast. Along with community partners, the group — part of CareerSource Florida — leverages resources and finds strategies to address skills gaps and build talent pipelines.

Brian Bauer, president and CEO of CareerSource Research Coast, says its Industrial Manufacturing Technician



Students
at the 2019
State of Jobs
Conference

apprenticeship program was created through one such community collaboration, with Treasure Coast Manufacturers Association.

"Twenty-four apprentices have successfully graduated. The 18-month program has a 91% retention rate after completion, which means the apprentices continue to progress on their occupational paths

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

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- Cost competitive location to locate or expand a business
- Superb quality of life attracts innovative businesses and talented professionals
- Founding member of the Greater Treasure Coast Partnership



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with participating manufacturers like Paradigm Precision, Advanced Machine & Tool, Lenco Marine and EB Airfoils," says Bauer.

CareerSource hosts the City of Fort Pierce Job Fair each year, with over 100 local employers taking part, with priority service for veterans. It's a challenge to educate not only students about vocational and technical career pipelines but their parents as well, Bauer notes. There's also a challenge in the lucrative field of health care. "We can't get them trained fast enough," he says.

ACTIVE CHANGEMAKERS

Rich Kolleda owns Port St. Lucie staffing firm Spherion. He is a member of the EDC board and the CareerSource Research Coast Workforce Readiness Task Force. With its growing

population, the county is open to new perspectives to benefit its residents, he says.

"For those making \$10 an hour, if they can improve their skills so that they are making \$15 or \$20 an hour, that's a life-changing event," he says. "So how do we transition restaurant folks into health care or manufacturing, where we have immediate need?"

With training grants, apprenticeships and high-school career pathways programs, the county is attacking the issue from many levels.

Construction of a dedicated training space is now underway.

WORKFORCE TRAINING COMPLEX

Indian River State College has just broken ground on the Advanced

Workforce Training Complex, at its main campus in Fort Pierce, a \$24-million, 55,000-square-foot building.

With the 2017 Treasure Coast Skills Gap Study showing 94% of employers in the trades and 62% in the manufacturing industry reporting difficulty filling jobs, the complex is a beacon to the region's future.

The state-of-the-art structure will house technology and tools to teach high-wage, high-demand professions in advanced welding; heating and air conditioning; automotive technology; diesel engine repair; and additive manufacturing.

The college, along with Keiser University and St. Lucie Public Schools, all align programs with workforce needs, says Kolleda.

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TRANSPORTATION: INFRASTRUCTURE LAYS GROUND FOR OPPORTUNITY

The county, 120 miles south of Orlando and 60 miles north of West Palm Beach, is geographically well positioned to get people and goods from Point A to Point B.

St. Lucie's airport with U.S. Customs port of entry, rail service, deep-water port and interstate road accessibility — with I-95 and Florida's Turnpike bisecting in St. Lucie — makes the area ripe for business.

BY AIR

Treasure Coast International Airport sits on over 3,800 acres, which includes a manned FAA tower with firefighting capabilities and a 6,492-foot main runway. The property also includes a business park with over 50 companies. The airport is located within a foreign trade zone with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol on site. The resulting tariff and tax relief helps companies compete and maximize investments.

PlusOneAir is the first private investment at the airport since 2006, according to the EDC. The air charter

service acquired two hangars at the airport in 2019 and is constructing two more.

Meanwhile, a state-of-the-art hangar, at 28,500 square feet with an attached office, was just built to commercial aviation standards. It's seen as a catalyst for the development of the airport, says Stan Payne.

Payne is executive director at Treasure Coast International Airport and Port of Fort Pierce. "In terms of acreage, it's larger than Miami International Airport," says Payne. "We have property with the desire to convert it to jobs and revenue and need private partners."

The last couple of years have been spent getting land ready to lease, he says. With airfield access on the west side, it could be used for corporate aviation. With a fixed-base operator on site, Payne says there is talk of adding another, as well as plans to acquire federal certifications for commercial service for larger aircraft.

BY RAIL

Florida East Coast Railway, which runs from Jacksonville to Miami, is a Class-II regional railroad that hauls freight and has a maintenance, switch yard and service facility in Fort Pierce.

It also has land that could be used for passenger service, as does the city, says City Manager Nick Mimms. "We have collaborated with the city of Port Saint Lucie, Indian River State College and Saint Lucie County to support this initiative," to add high-speed rail, he says.

Groundwork's been laid for a Brightline passenger train station at King's Landing in Fort Pierce, says Mimms.

"We left a spot for the train stop and we would love for [Brightline] to do that. It's the perfect location: The interstate and tollway both converge at Fort Pierce," says Dale Matteson, president and CEO of King's Landing's Audubon Development.

BY SEA

Fort Pierce is in Phase 2 of a master plan to revitalize its deep-sea port. This work has included reconstruction of North 2nd Street, relocating and upgrading utilities and adding a new stormwater management system, according to the county. This collaborative project included the city, Fort Pierce Utility Authority, the Florida Department of Transportation and the Florida Seaport Transportation and Economic Development Council.

But the larger ongoing effort to broaden the region's economic base took a major step forward with the county's acquisition of the Indian River Terminal from private ownership in 2018, according to the Florida Ports Council.

Derecktor Shipyards assumed control of terminal operations in November of 2019 and will provide mega-yacht

maintenance, refit and overhaul, transitioning the cargo port to the next level.

From a transportation standpoint, Derecktor's Justin Beard calls Fort Pierce ideal. "Its close proximity from Fort Pierce Inlet, deep-water access to the Port of Fort Pierce ... and generous turning basin all provide ample clearance and maneuverability for the global fleet of mega-yachts and large sailing yachts," he says.

Goals for the port, once a Navy base during World War II, also include redevelopment of port properties and establishing job training and apprenticeship programs, according to Florida Ports Council.

BY ROAD

"All roads lead to Fort Pierce," Mimms is fond of saying, with U.S. Highway 1, Florida's Turnpike and I-95 all easily

accessible, as well as State Road A1A and State Road 70. St. Lucie County's location helps businesses get their goods where they need to be.

Legacy Park at Tradition, in Southern Grove, is the site of a future FedEx Ground facility, Port St. Lucie officials announced in December of 2020.

It will be sited on 22 acres along I-95, in a newly constructed 245,000-square-foot facility. The city approved economic incentives for the project, which included partners St. Lucie County Economic Development Council, developers the Sansone Group, and the St. Lucie County Commission.

The new facility is expected to spur 40 full-time jobs and 450 part-time positions as well.

Transportation

Free public transit system **St. Lucie County Connector** exceeded 660,000 rides in 2019. Since 2015, ridership is up 253%.

-St. Lucie County



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Real Estate Development

Port St. Lucie is #10 among U.S. cities where millennials are buying homes, according to a 2019 report.

Fort Pierce's King's Landing, over 207,000 square feet, connects Edgartown, the City Marina and historic downtown, and will include a hotel, condos and retail.

-City of Fort Pierce

WITH OPPORTUNITY ABOUND, IT'S HOT PROPERTY FOR MILES

RESIDENTIAL MARKET

With Port St. Lucie on the U.S. News & World Report list of Best Places to Live in Florida (#11), Fastest-Growing Places in the U.S. (#8) and Best Places to Retire in the U.S. (#3) for 2020, it's got real estate that's in demand.

Fort Pierce, especially its main promenade, has been attracting attention as well. It earned a top spot on a 2015 list of Best Small-Town Main Streets in America by Top Value Reviews as well as a "Most Idyllic and Historic Main Streets in America" title from USA Today.

John Slivon, a realtor with Port St. Lucie's Bowen Realty and past president of the Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale, says, "We are getting people from the south moving up, and from the north moving down" — right into St. Lucie.

Southern Grove, the Port St. Lucie master-planned community east of I-95 which includes the Tradition Center for Commerce, includes quarter-acre lots where people can now build their own homes. Port St. Lucie has a large population, but isn't large

enough to be a city center, producing a small-town feel with a full array of offerings.

"It's also one of the safest cities around," Slivon says.

BUILDING FUTURES

Ryan Courson, vice president of the St. Lucie division of construction firm GL Homes, says remote work is making more people willing to live farther from their jobs.

GL Homes began building in Port St. Lucie in 2018, with the quickly-sold-out 55+ community Valencia Cay at Riverland. Valencia Grove at Riverland, another 55+ community, opened at the beginning of 2020.

Johnny Lynch, South Florida regional president at GreenPointe Communities, agrees. Cleveland Clinic is a valuable resource to retirees moving to Port St. Lucie. Beyond providing jobs, he says, "It gives retirees a sense of comfort to have such a quality medical facility."

GreenPointe is the developer for Veranda in southeast Port St. Lucie, a 920-acre master planned community.

In the fall of 2020, Greenpointe purchased over 2,000 acres in western Port St. Lucie for a mixed-use community that will include a park, office space, a public high school and single- and multi-family home sites.

"Port St. Lucie is an attractive area, just 45 minutes to West Palm Beach," says Lynch. His company tailors its projects to land areas around it, so the Veranda project and new mixed-use development, set to begin this spring, will have different looks.

Fort Pierce is also adding new residential units as part of its mixed-use King's Landing project, connecting its Edgartown historic district, the City Marina and downtown. The Audubon Development project includes 12 single-family homes and townhomes and 60 condos, in addition to retail and a hotel.

Maddie Williams, executive director of the Treasure Coast Builders Association, says things have been busy in St. Lucie County, according to members of her association, consisting of general and residential contractors and their subcontractors in plumbing, electrical, HVAC, masonry, roofing, painting, suppliers and other trades, as well as lenders, real estate professionals, architects and engineers.

It's all about location.

USA Today ranked Downtown Fort Pierce among the "**Nation's Most Idyllic and Historic Main Streets**" and was named "**Most Beautiful Main Streets**" in America by Reader's Digest. Situated on the Treasure Coast, Fort Pierce is at the heart of it all, offering a plethora of transportation linkages which include highways, rail, a custom-serviced international airport, and a deep-water port. With recent redevelopment projects, historic preservation initiatives, and a focus on cultural and recreational amenities, Fort Pierce has become an exceptional place to live, work, learn, and play, and has the cultural excitement to rival any "**big city**" atmosphere.

Fort Pierce



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COMMERCIAL MARKET

Development-ready land with I-95 access awaits at The Southern Grove Development of Regional Impact (DRI) in Port St. Lucie.

The DRI's 3,605 acres — within the 8,200-acre area known as Tradition — is designed for large-scale manufacturing, logistics and retail.

In a deal with the city of Port St. Lucie, the Sansone Group of St. Louis, Mo., acquired 65 acres with options on another 300 in 2020 along I-95 and the corner of Becker Road and Village Parkway. It created Legacy Park at Tradition, future home of a 245,000-square-foot FedEx facility. Forty full-time and 450 part-time jobs are planned, according to the city.

Blackburn, the city manager, refers

to the Sansone Group purchase as “defining the South Florida real estate market.”

Within Southern Grove is the Tradition Center for Commerce. Its 1,175 acres offer plenty of space for manufacturing, distribution, offices, residential, educational or hospital-ity uses, according to city officials. Tenants include Cleveland Clinic Martin Health, Florida Research and Innovation Center, Keiser University, TAMCO Group and Oculus Surgical. Plans include housing, as well, such as 3,400 residences by Mattamy Homes in the Becker Road area and about 900 apartments in the Tradition Boulevard vicinity, according to Tambone Companies.

GOOD IDEAS FLOURISH

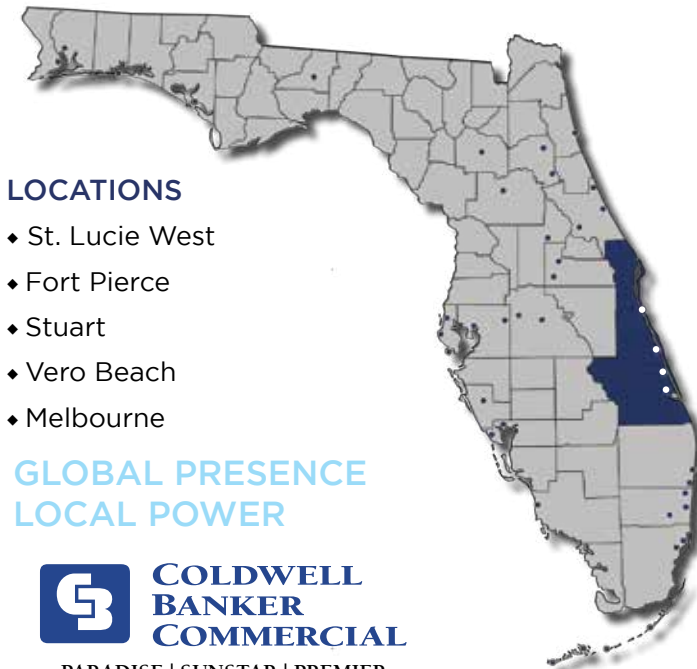
The city of Port St. Lucie contracted

with Tambone Companies to market 84 acres within the Tradition Center for Commerce, says founder Richard Tambone.

Tambone calls the master plan a proactive approach for a well-planned community with all the attributes to make it a success. “We’ve worked in all four counties south of here, and there is no city more open to creating jobs,” he says.

“Realtors and residents in St. Lucie County are excited for the Tradition Center for Commerce. Port St. Lucie has been named one of the top relocation destinations in Florida, and the new center will play a vital role in the continued economic and housing growth,” says Dionna Hall, CEO of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie Realtors.

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Fort Pierce

A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery contains the largest collection of artwork from renowned Florida landscape painter A.E. Backus.

Port St. Lucie

The Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens opened in 2010, on about 20 acres acquired by the city, county and Florida Communities Trust Land Conservation Program.

SO MUCH TO DO, WHO CAN CHOOSE?

Over 20 miles of coastline and 20,000 acres of parks and nature preserves beckon.

Whether you love the outdoors, history, museums, art, sports, dining out, live music, theater, shopping or any other recreational venture — St. Lucie County has you covered.

Those who enjoy fresh air, fauna and wildlife will appreciate the county's many parks, recreation areas and natural preserves. With a focus on protecting environmental assets of the region, spots of interest include the Savannas Recreation Area, Ancient Oaks Preserve, Bear Point

Sanctuary and Citrus Hammock Preserve, among many others. Walkers and hikers can leash up their dog or just head out with a friend and explore all that these areas have to offer.

Indian River Lagoon is another natural area which is treasured and preserved here on the Treasure Coast. Boasting a diverse ecosystem, it's home to over 4,000 species of plants and animals.

With over 20 golf courses accommodating a variety of budgets, the area hosts the PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie. With 54 holes of championship golf, Golf Digest ranks it one of the 75 Best Golf Resorts. Port St. Lucie is home to New



A: Fort Pierce Jetty
B: Fort Pierce Inlet State Park
C: North Fork, St. Lucie River Aquatic Preserve
D: National Navy UDT-Seal Museum

York Mets Spring Training. And with its world-class fishing, Fort Pierce is home to the largest saltwater fishing tournament in the U.S., the Southern Kingfish Association National Championship. "It's a huge draw for Fort Pierce. Our marina is full," says City Manager Nick Mimms.

The water also lures swimmers, paddleboarders, canoers and kayakers all over the county, with the St. Lucie River, Indian River Lagoon and Atlantic Ocean through the Fort Pierce Inlet.

Examples of these water opportunities include St. Lucie River's self-guided kayak tours or wildlife boat tours. Both are great ways to get in some fresh air and view turtles, alligators, birds and manatees in their Florida habitat.

Those who prefer jumping head-first into a shopping adventure are likely to enjoy The Landing at Tradition in Port St. Lucie, a walkable shopping district complete with coffee shops and frozen treats.

Club Med - Sandpiper Bay

History lovers can see the 114-year-old St. Lucie Club in St. Lucie Village, on the Indian River Lagoon. It was originally a retreat for Pennsylvania Republicans known as the Southern White House.



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CULTURE CLUB

History abounds in Fort Pierce. It is home to the National Navy SEAL Museum — the only one of its kind — on the training grounds of the original Navy combat divers, on the outskirts of the city. The historic Sunrise Theatre is here, as well as the Zora Neale Hurston Tracks Heritage Trail, commemorating the life of the Harlem Renaissance author.

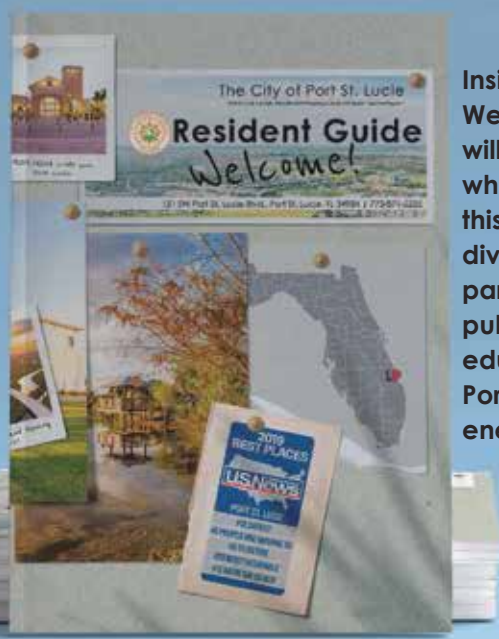
For garden enthusiasts, Fort Pierce is also home to Heathcote Botanical Gardens. Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens opened in 2010 on 20 acres acquired by the city, county and Florida Communities Trust Land Conservation Program, showing that inter-agency collaboration toward a common goal that makes the region shine.

Art fans enjoy the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery in Fort Pierce, the landscape painter was a great supporter of the Florida Highwaymen group of artists. The Orange Avenue Corridor, the subject of revitalization since 2016, is now the Peacock Arts District, a hub for art appreciation. "It's a branding of the area. With peacocks that roam around, it makes the area so unique," says Mimms.

Simulated surf park WaveGarden is planned for Fort Pierce with construction to begin in 2021, part of a 200-acre, \$595-million development, Willow Lakes, said Mimms. Slated for Midway Road, it's set to include 800 homes, retail, office space and bring thousands of jobs.

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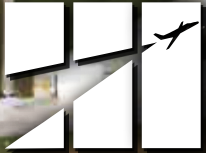
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