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**JANUARY 2017**

**Looking Back While Pressing Forward**

As we wish you a happy New Year, we reflect on the many things 2016 gave us that we can smile about. Unemployment continued its decline and remained the lowest in the region at year’s end, with a net jobs gain over the previous year.

We launched our new Nature Coast Business Alliance, with strong turnout the first few months since its September launch. Plans for this year include expanding topics and speakers, and build-up to an annual tech and innovation expo. Our Board developed task forces after our annual goal setting session to work toward implementing the respective goals they were tasked with.

The top priority – countywide high speed Internet – nears reality with cities working toward agreements with a fiber optic provider to establish the network and connect our business community. As part of that process, efforts are underway to explore the possibility of a business incubator in the county.

We completed a total overhaul of our web site to include more content site selectors and consultants need to consider locating a business here. We vetted rail-served sites in Williston to potential industry for consideration, with the objective of increasing rail traffic for the Florida Northern Railroad.

Lastly, this newsletter got some tweaks to kick off 2017 with a purpose and renewed vision. Happy reading!

**NEWS AND NOTES**

- **Skilled labor No. 1 site selection factor:** The skill level and availability of talent for employers is the top criteria in site selection determination, according to the latest corporate executives survey from Area Development.com. The annual survey from the online publication serves as a barometer for what top level execs consider when choosing a prospective site to locate their business. Access to “high level, highly skilled” workers is the top driver, followed by highway proximity and quality of life. Click [here](#) to read the story.
- **Latest labor force data:** Levy County’s labor force saw a slight decline in November, decreasing 152 to 16,714. The number of employed decreased by 145 to 15,830 with a decrease of eight for unemployed, which stands at 884. The unemployment rate of 5.3 percent remains the lowest in the region.
- **Madison EDC head Tapped for FEDC role:** Allen Cherry has been elected to the position of North Central Regional Director for the Florida Economic Development Council. Cherry, Executive Director of the Madison County Economic Development Council, retired as County Coordinator in July after 10 years.
- **On the agenda:** The FEDC, Florida Rural Economic Development Association and others are focusing on key areas for the upcoming Legislative session: continued support of Enterprise Florida – the state’s official economic development organization – as well as an increase in appropriations for the Rural Infrastructure Fund and elimination of a match requirement for the Rural Regional Development Grant. The regular session for the Legislature convenes March 7, 2017.



**Board of Directors**

- Chris Cowart  
Levy County School Board
- Denny George  
Duke Energy
- Dick Streeter,  
Withlacoochee-Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce; *vice chairman/treasurer to the Board*
- Greg Galpin  
Weyerhaeuser; *Chairman to the Board*
- Jeff Edison  
Superintendent of Schools
- Joyce Wilson,  
Unity Family Community Center
- Mark Meyer  
Florida Northern Railroad
- Phil Geist  
Small Business Development Center
- Rayanne Giddis  
College of Central Florida
- Ryan Watson  
Central Florida Electric Cooperative

**OUR VALUABLE PARTNERS**

- [CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion](#)
- [Department of Economic Opportunity](#)
- [Enterprise Florida](#)
- [Levy County](#)
- [North Florida Economic Development Partnership](#)
- [Virtual Entrepreneur Center](#)

**ADD IT TO YOUR CALENDARS**

12th	12th	17th	25 <sup>th</sup> and 31 <sup>st</sup>
<p><b>NCBDC regular board meeting</b> CareerSource, Chiefland 3 pm</p>	<p><b>MRMA tour: Institute of Human &amp; Machine Cognition</b> <a href="#">Email for more info</a> <a href="#">Or visit web site</a></p>	<p><b>RESTORE Act advisory team/NCBDC regular meeting</b> County Courthouse, Bronson 3 pm</p>	<p><b>NE FL Freight Movement Forums</b> FDOT district 2 offices, Lake City or Jacksonville. Click <a href="#">here</a> for more information</p>