



From the Director's Desk

By Nathan Sparks, CEcD



The political season is upon us once more. It should be noted that the EDC remains steadfastly apolitical when it comes to individual local, state and federal races. Not that we don't have our personal views mind you. We just feel very strongly that "economic development" is not a red, blue, green, purple or polka-dotted issue. Simply put, good jobs benefit everyone. While that basic philosophy causes us to remain above the fray with individual races, it does not apply to issues that stand to impact our local economy. As such, the EDC is supporting and helping advocate for two measures with major economic implications that will be on the November 6 ballot.

The first of these is the half cent sales tax that, if successful, will be used to fund public safety, road construction and storm water improvements. To me, this one is simple. With a population of now more than 200,000, Okaloosa County has outgrown its infrastructure - and that doesn't even take into consideration the tens of thousands of visitors who might be using our systems on any given weekend. While no one truly wants to pay more taxes, the good thing about the half cent sales tax proposal is that a) our low property tax rate remains untouched, and b) tourists from outside the area will help contribute to Okaloosa's many infrastructure and public safety needs every time they spend a dollar on a beach towel, a boat rental or a burger. Our neighboring counties have realized this and many have passed multiple local option sales tax measures to help ensure the future of their communities. It is time we do the same, and a **"Yes" vote on the countywide half cent sales tax** referendum will do just that.

The other issue the EDC is supporting is Amendment 9, which is a proposed Amendment to the Florida Constitution that would ban offshore oil drilling in state waters, or nine nautical miles from shore. While curiously paired with a measure that would also ban the use of e-cigarettes in public places, the oil ban alone is significant enough to get our support. With tourism and the military being the primary drivers of Okaloosa's economy, we cannot afford to allow oil activities in any portion of the Eastern Gulf of Mexico - an area deemed to be of utmost training and testing importance to our Nation's military, not to mention being coveted by those same tourists who will soon be contributing to our infrastructure and public safety needs through their half pennies. Bottom line, a **"Yes" vote on Amendment 9** is the first step to protecting the Gulf.

Defense Support Initiatives, DSI

By Kay Rasmussen, CEcD, Manager

The Defense Support Initiatives Committee had the pleasure and honor of hosting the Florida Defense Support Task Force earlier this month. The Task Force is legislatively chartered to

monitor activities as they relate to military communities and installations, and to provide and support recommendations on behalf of those entities. Having toured Eglin AFB the last time they were in Okaloosa County, the Task Force requested an introductory tour of Hurlburt Field in order to gain an increased understanding of the installation. Hurlburt leadership hosted the Task Force members for an afternoon briefing and tour, and provided invaluable information and insight into what is Hurlburt Field and Special Operations Forces.

By Florida Statute, the Florida Defense Support Task Force is comprised of the Governor or his or her designee, and 12 members appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The DSI is pleased to share that Jim Heald, Colonel USAF Retired and InDyne, Inc. has been newly appointed to serve as a Task Force member. Jim has been a long-time supporter of the Economic Development Council and the DSI—having served as chairman for both. We look forward to working with Jim and the rest of the Task Force as we continue to advocate for our military installations and missions.

Once such advocacy effort continues to be ensuring the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and the military test and training range residing in the Gulf remains unencumbered by the increased political efforts to open the eastern Gulf up to oil drilling. Oil drilling structures and associated exploratory activities are not compatible with military activities. As Nathan mentions above, prohibiting drilling in state waters is the first step to prohibiting drilling in Federal waters.

With Fiscal Year 2018 coming to a close, much appreciation is extended to Dr. John "Beach" Wilcox for his leadership of the DSI in his capacity as chairman. His subject matter expertise strengthened the DSI's advocacy efforts. Please join us in welcoming Bob Marinar as the DSI's new chairman! Activity efforts continue as the DSI moves forward with its advocacy support to our local military bases and we look forward to Bob's leadership.



Technology Coast Manufacturing and Engineering Network; TeCMEN

By Timothy McDonald, Chairman

The kids are back in school, football is in full swing, and a very successful second edition Industry Day is now complete; these are just a few highlights for this month's TeCMEN update. All of our FY18 efforts are genuinely bearing fruit, promoting sustainment, growth, and advancement in science, technology, engineering and math businesses, and educational institutions. We are all blessed to be a part of such a great community, great organization, and great country!

For those who did not attend Industry Day, you truly missed out on an exceptional event! Our guest speakers were top notch, the panels were informational, and the workshops were transformational. We had a record turnout, both in attendees, and exhibitors. We also had a tremendous group of sponsors, which without their aide, the event would not have been as successful. Thank you to Certified Manufacturing, Vertex Aerospace Crestview, CHELCO / PowerSouth Energy, Gulf Power, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide, American Elite Molding, and The Hsu Educational Foundation for their generous contributions!

The August TeCMEN meeting was by far one of our best meetings. District 4 Florida House Representative Mel Ponder updated our members on his current activities. Representative Ponder's current committee assignments include:

- Higher Education Appropriations
- Local, Federal, & Veteran Affairs
- Post-Secondary Education
- PreK-12 Innovation

Representative Ponder also fielded questions from our members to include school safety, considering this year's tragic mass shooting in our state at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. Mr. Ponder expressed a great empathy towards the subject, and has a laser focus on what we need to do in Northwest Florida to protect our students, and ensure they receive the education they deserve in a safe and secure environment.

Our September meeting held a similar theme with Okaloosa County Sheriff Larry Ashley as



our special presenter. Sheriff Ashley was elected to office in 2010 after rising through the ranks from road patrol to Chief Deputy. Mr. Ashley updated our members on his current activities for local public safety concerns. More importantly, and similarly to Representative Ponder, he expressed great concern for safety in our school systems, and was recently appointed by Governor Rick Scott to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission. I speak for all TeCMEN members when I say we thank you, Sheriff Ashley, for all the work you do to keep our communities safe.

As we close down FY18, I want to express my gratitude to the EDC and all TeCMEN members for your support in my efforts to carry the flag of the Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network. As a second generation Chairman, my Father being Chair during FY03, these past 12 months have been an incredible experience, and I am very proud now to turn the torch over to two great members. Please help me congratulate Paul Jernigan (The Boeing Company) as Chair and David Haines (Precision Measurement Inc.) as Vice-Chair. These two gentlemen are outstanding leaders in their respective organizations, and their leadership will help propel TeCMEN to new and greater heights!

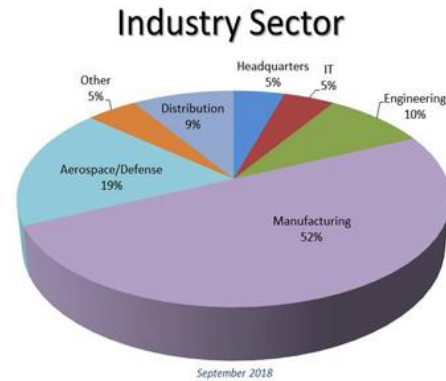
Business Assistance

By Caroline McCoy, CEcD

The EDC currently has 25 active projects with manufacturing taking the lead on the types of projects that we have in our pipeline. We continue to see a trend in requests for large, cleared greenfield sites and existing buildings larger than 50,000 SF with an open concept feel. Northwest Florida partners have been attending trade show mission trips in the US and internationally, and has identified many excellent leads for the area. The number of quality leads that the

EDC has received in the last 60 days have been tremendous. The best types of leads come from our local partners so if you are working with a company that is expanding, be sure to reach out to the EDC to see what type of assistance we can provide!

We had the honor to formally announce Project Benjo, aka Beast Code LLC, with the Office of Governor Rick Scott earlier this week. This Information Technology company plans on hiring 40+ employees with an average wage of \$70,148 which is 174% of the average wage in Okaloosa County. We were impressed with the Silicon Valley environment, the diverse workforce of this company and the number of University of West Florida graduates employed by this company. The success of this project would not have been possible without the public sector support of the Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners and the City of Fort Walton Beach. Be sure to check out the press release in this newsletter!



EDC Announcement

In case you didn't notice, there is now a 'CEcD' designation behind Caroline McCoy's name in the article above. We are pleased to share that Caroline has received her designation of Certified Economic Developer from the International Economic Development Council. The designation of Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) is a national recognition that denotes a mastery of principal skills in economic development. The CEcD designation recognizes qualified and dedicated practitioners in the economic development field and sets the standard of excellence within the profession. Candidates must pass a rigorous and comprehensive three-part, two-day examination, which tests a practitioner's knowledge, proficiency and judgment in the key areas of economic development, including business retention and expansion, marketing, finance, workforce development, community development, real estate, strategic planning, and management.

All three full-time employees of the EDC are now all board certified economic developers; an unheard of accomplishment in the profession. As highly competent economic development practitioners, Certified Economic Developers work with public officials, business leaders and community partners to provide opportunities to build upon and maximize the communities' industry sectors. Excellence in the economic development profession improves the well-being, quality of life and opportunities for individuals, businesses and communities.

Please join us in congratulating Caroline!

Member Announcements

Beast Code to Expand and Create 40 New Jobs in Okaloosa County

Beast Code LLC, an employee owned and operated software engineering company announced today that it has chosen to expand in Fort Walton Beach and will add 40 jobs by 2021. The expansion includes purchasing new equipment, a dedicated quality assurance area and collaborative work spaces.

The company was founded in 2014 by seven computer scientists who used successful Silicon Valley based companies as a standard and adopted an agile workflow enabling them to rapidly produce cost effective solutions tailored to the user's needs. In 2016, Beast Code purchased its current facility in Fort Walton Beach, projected to support the company's growth for five years. However, since then, Beast Code has been awarded several DoD contracts and operations have quickly scaled to 37 full time employees. Read the full press release [here](#).

Gulf Power's Rick Byars named top 50 in economic development

Gulf Power's Rick Byars, Economic Development & Major Accounts general manager, has been named as one of Consultant Connect's North America's Top 50 Economic Developers for 2018. The annual list is designed to acknowledge the hard work of the top leaders in this field and elevate the conversation around economic development and job creation, according to Ron Kitchens, managing partner of Consultant Connect. Read more [here](#).

Two Okaloosa County Companies Among The 50 Florida Companies to Watch

The EDC of Okaloosa County and GrowFL are pleased to announce that **Beast Code LLC** and **G.S. Gelato & Desserts, Inc.** are among 50 statewide honorees selected for the 2018 Florida Companies to Watch. These companies were selected from more than 500 nominees for the award, hosted by GrowFL, a statewide economic development organization, in association with the Edward Lowe Foundation. The winning company's management team, competitive market position and strong community involvement were among several factors that put them in contention for the award. *Congratulations!*

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