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May 2024

From the Director's Desk

By Nathan Sparks, CEcD



Many of you reading this had the pleasure of knowing Dr. David Goetsch, Emeritus Vice President, Northwest Florida State College, noted author of more than 70 books and proud United States Marine Corps veteran. Among his many accomplishments (and I do mean many), Dr. Goetsch co-founded both One Okaloosa EDC and the Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network (TeCMEN) in the late 80s. He served as Chairman of the EDC twice and was selected as the State of Florida's "Economic Development Volunteer of the Year" three times (1992, 1997 & 2007), later receiving "Honorary Lifetime Member" status from the EDC.

Sadly, Dr. Goetsch passed away on May 2 following a long illness. "Remarkable" is a word that is often used when reflecting on the life and impact of a gifted leader. In Dr. Goetsch's case, the word remarkable almost doesn't do him justice. The holder of multiple degrees, Dr. Goetsch was a very well-educated man. But it was how he used his extensive knowledge and training that proved his true worth. From forever shaping the lives of countless students who were fortunate to have him as an instructor (a role that he relished, and one that routinely saw him recognized at the state and national levels), to the many local organizations that he supported and guided, his impact is nothing short of monumental.

I remember my first lunch meeting with Dr. Goetsch in July 2013. I had just joined the EDC and sought out Dr. Goetsch for his guidance. Having done my research, I knew that he was savvy and knowledgeable on the many facets of economic development - but within a few minutes of meeting him I could also tell how much he truly cared about our organization, Okaloosa County and its communities. From that day forward, I knew that whenever I needed some guidance or level-setting perspective (or an expert speaker or panel moderator) Dave was there for me. Like so many of you, I will miss him dearly.

Speaking of Dr. Goetsch, the 7th annual TeCMEN Industry Day that many of you attended on May 15 would have certainly made him proud. We appreciate all who supported the event, whether it be as one of our 14 planning committee members, 17 sponsors, 22 speakers, panelists, moderators and workshop leaders, 50 exhibitors or 370+ attendees. Most of all, I would like to thank my One Okaloosa teammates who once again rose to the occasion. This year's event would have been possible without dedicated individuals like Kay Rasmussen, Linda Sumblin, Cole Randall, Chrystal Moore-Lewis and Monica Earley.



Tri-County Community Partnership Initiative

By Kay Rasmussen, Associate Director



The Tri-County Community Partnership Initiative (TCPI) and its community based Advisory Board is sponsored by One Okaloosa EDC and managed by its leadership team which includes TCPI facilitator John Schuliger, Delonix Professional Consulting. Established as a public-private partnership, TCPI continues to facilitate collaborative and innovative discussions amongst community and military leadership. Quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for the TCPI AB to review recommendations brought forward by targeted workgroups. Focus areas are categorized within three lines of effort; 1) Education and Training, 2) Infrastructure, and 3) Quality of Life. An additional funding workgroup provides information on options for state and/or federal funding opportunities to support specific projects. Specific Work Groups / Task Forces are fluid and are established by the TCPI AB as necessary. The TCPI AB evaluates proposed opportunities and makes recommendations to the Eglin-Hurlburt CPP and its Executive Committee for execution.

Traffic congestion to the west of Hurlburt Field has been identified as a negative impact to Air Force Special Operations Command and is one partnership example within the Infrastructure Line of Effort. Childcare and housing are two examples being addressed within the Quality of Life Line of Effort.

The next TCPI AB meeting is scheduled for June 12 at the Northwest Florida State College campus in Niceville. Additional information is available on the [website](#).

Technology Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Network

By Andrew Rencich, Chairman

We start this TeCMEN update with heavy hearts learning the recent passing of one of the TeCMEN co-founders, Dr. David Goetsch. David was a true community leader in many avenues and will be greatly missed. Our condolences to Dr. Goetsch's family.



TeCMEN has been busy with our two annual signature projects. The first TeCMEN signature event held on April 5th was the Okaloosa County Educate the Educator Plus One. EtE+1 provides the opportunity for Okaloosa County educators plus students (middle and high school students invited by Okaloosa County Schools) to increase their knowledge of local labor market information and the job market, and to introduce attendees to local employers at their facilities. Also, during the program day, attendees were introduced and connected to career/education opportunities following their high school graduation. There were twenty attendees that participated the event highlighting North Okaloosa County. The morning session included information from: Nathan

Sparks, One Okaloosa EDC; Crestview City Councilman and TeCMEN Chair Andrew Rencich; Crestview City Manager Tim Bolduc; Crestview Mayor Whiten; OCSD Steve, Horton; and CareerSource Okaloosa Walton Michele Burns and Kelly Jordan. We visited three amazing employers (ConexSmart; North Okaloosa Medical Center; and Crestview Chamber of Commerce) who generously shared their time and provided tours. Each site tour provided valued employment related information.



The second event was our 7th annual Gulf Coast one-day Technology, Manufacturing, and Engineering Expo held on May 15th. The goal of the TeCMEN Industry Day is to combine robust and relevant content with meaningful networking opportunities. The day was remarkable thanks to the TID attendees (including Okaloosa County School Ambassadors representing OCSD, Rocky Bayou Christian School, Destin High School, and HSU Educational Foundation), the generous sponsors, speakers, exhibitors, planning committee, and the One Okaloosa EDC Team. We are proud to share that the 2024 TID broke previous attendee records (nearly 400) and exhibitor booths (56). The topics, speakers and panelists were extremely informative throughout the day. I was honored to begin the day with the host welcome and opening remarks. Following my remarks, Brigadier General Jeffrey Geraghty, Commander 96th Test Wing, Eglin AFB presented on "Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy in Preparation for the Great Power Competition." The balance of the event included SME panelists highlighting the following topics: Building the Future Defense Workforce; Federal Contracting; and Utilizing Artificial Intelligence for Business Optimization. The afternoon sessions included a Florida's Manufacturing Sector and a new opportunity, Speed Matching Session, which was well received. Additional TID updates will follow and photos from the event can be viewed/downloaded at www.tecmenindustryday.com.

Business Retention & Expansion

By Cole Randall, Project Manager

We are excited to share an update on the progress of our 2024 Business Expansion Support Team (BEST) committee. Launched on January 1st, the BEST committee was tasked with surveying a minimum of 20 local companies to gain in-depth insights into their business experiences and needs within Okaloosa County.

Focusing on the manufacturing, technology, defense, and aerospace industries, these surveys involved in-person confidential meetings with company leaders, including CEOs, executives, and HR managers. Each session, lasting between 30 minutes to over an hour, aimed to assess their satisfaction with operating in Okaloosa County while soliciting their input on how our community can better support their growth and success.

We are pleased to announce that we have successfully met our goal, having conducted detailed interviews with leaders from 20 companies, with a small number remaining. The invaluable feedback gathered from these discussions is currently being aggregated into a comprehensive report. This report, which will provide critical insights for community development, is scheduled to be submitted to our elected leaders in

approximately 45 days.

Although we are not finished aggregating all the data yet, I'd like to share the 5 most commonly referenced challenges in order so far:

1. Available Workforce Pipeline
2. Affordable Housing
3. Available Infrastructure for Expansion
4. Connections to Internship Programs
5. Transportation (work commutes)

This is great news because it provides our elected leaders and the community with clear priorities to collectively address and find solutions to these challenges.

All of this has been made possible thanks to the support and collaboration of our amazing partners: Okaloosa Schools CTE, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton, FloridaMakes, Northwest Florida State College, Okaloosa Technical College, CHELCO / PowerSouth, and FPL. Their contributions have been instrumental in reaching this milestone and driving the continuous improvement of our business environment.

Stay tuned for more updates as we continue to work towards enhancing the business environment in Okaloosa County!

Welcome New Members



Origin Bank.



Members in the News

HCA Florida Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and the **Okaloosa County School District** (OCSD) held a ribbon cutting ceremony to officially open the Health Academy of Northwest Florida, the first high school health academy to be housed on an HCA Healthcare hospital campus in the country.

The **Okaloosa County School District** announced that Fort Walton Beach High School has been named a 2023-24 Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Distinguished

School for its commitment to empowering students through its STEM curriculum and career readiness programs. PLTW high school programs focus on building students' STEM skills, as well as their collaboration, teamwork, and communication abilities, to prepare them for future careers and life beyond the classroom.

Executive Committee Members and Staff

Officers

Dr. Mike Mosley, Chairman; Neko Stubblefield, Vice-Chair; Nic Dezinski, Treasurer; Bonnie Barlow, Secretary; Jillian McQueen, Past Chairman

Ex Officios

CareerSource: Michele Burns

County Commissioner: Paul Mixon

Educational Partners: Dr. Devin Stephenson, Dr. Melinda Bowers, Mr. Marcus Chambers

Utility Partners: Steve Rhodes, Gordon King, Bernard Johnson

Employees / Contractors

Nathan Sparks CEcD, Executive Director

Kay Rasmussen CEcD, Associate Director / DSI Manager

Cole Randall, Project Manager

Chrystal Moore-Lewis, Administrative Assistant

Linda Sumblin, TeCMEN Manager

Penny Mercer/Alexis Allen, Accounting Department

Monica Earley, Event Coordinator

John Schuliger, TCPI Facilitator



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