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Lee gambles a bundle on search for new jobs



Recruiters' record spotty, need urgent

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
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Lee County is wagering up to \$25 million, and the region's vitality, on an Economic Development Office that's struggled to recruit and retain businesses.

The agency's efforts to generate jobs have sputtered at the same time the county is suffering a 9.8 percent unemployment rate and the undesirable label as America's foreclosure capital.

In the past 10 years, the taxpayer-supported Economic Development Office hasn't knocked the socks off many CEOs looking for greener pastures. According to its own data, the agency provided extensive logistical help in establishing 36 companies in target areas. Combined, they pledged to create 1,903 jobs, which amounts to less than 1 percent of Lee's labor force of 284,036 people.

Agency projections turned out to be optimistic. The News-Press spent two months tracking down those 36 companies, finding that:

- Eleven have ceased their operations here.
- Ten remaining companies employ fewer workers than anticipated; two are about to call it quits.
- Thirteen companies met or exceeded employment projections by a combined 242 jobs.
- Two companies did not return multiple calls.

All told, those 36 companies dwindled to 25, and those 1,903 jobs were cut to 1,005 positions, not counting the two non-responsive businesses.

Those numbers have not deterred Lee commissioners from believing the economic development office can revolutionize our economy.

"They've done an extremely exemplary job, from Sony to Source Interlink to Lynx Services," said Commission Chairman Ray Judah, referring to three companies the agency has assisted. "There are a number of organizations

See **ECONOMY** A12

ALSO INSIDE: Lee County hopes to recruit smaller industries, **A13**; The News-Press panelists discuss how to use \$25 million reserved for economic development, **A13**; Read about The News-Press' special report on the economy, **B10**.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL DONLAN/THE NEWS-PRESS

news-press.com/economy: We have special coverage on our Web site

MULTIMEDIA: Watch a special presentation on the state of the Southwest Florida economy. **DATABASES:** Search foreclosures, housing permits and industry information and more. **YOUR VIEWS:** Read the numerous e-mails and letters that have come to us from readers about fixing our economy and click on the link to send in your ideas. **VIDEO:** Watch excerpts from the conversations from our panelists. **COMMUNITY CONVERSATION:** Read editorials, letters to the editor, guest opinion columns. **BLOG:** Read posts of local business leaders' ideas for improving the economic outlook. **PANELISTS:** See the faces and read quotes from the experts who visited The News-Press and participated in panels to brainstorm and propose solutions.

Drywall blamed for A.C. failures

Repairers find likely culprit for number of breakdowns

BY RYAN LINGERICH
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Air conditioning manufacturers nationwide are taking an economic hit as they repeatedly replace copper coils destroyed by the recently exposed "Chinese drywall" phenomenon, local air condition company owners said.

"I have never seen this many air conditioners fail at this age," said Fred Kobie, owner of Kobie Kooling in Fort Myers and a 25-year industry veteran. "It's almost an epidemic down here."

For about two years, scientists, engineers and vendors nationwide struggled to learn why evaporating coils in new machines in new developments have gone sour often in under a year, Kobie said.

The machines should have lifespans beyond 10 years.

See **DRYWALL** A2

As with all, Bush will wait for his final grade

BY BOB RATHGEBER
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It will take years, perhaps decades, for historians to slot George W. Bush's ranking in presidential history.

Even then, it won't be chiseled into stone. Time, as well as world events have a dramatic way of changing the presidential pecking order.

Nevertheless, as the nation's 43rd president prepares to hand the White House keys to Barack Obama a week from Tuesday, the debating, politicking and lobbying has begun: What will be Bush's legacy and how will he compare with his predecessors?

In the top tier alongside George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

In the middle, where most are lumped?

Or at the bottom, alongside James Buchanan, Jimmy Carter, Andrew Johnson and Herbert Hoover?

"The rating of a president is a snapshot of a lot of things," said Peter Bergerson, a professor of

See **BUSH** A13

Also see Bush on Israel, Iran A3
Also see Bush attends aircraft carrier ceremony A4

news-press.com/forums

Have your say: How would you rate George W. Bush and other past presidents?

Gas went up; deaths went down

With fewer people on the roads, 30 percent fewer died in 2008

BY GABRIELLA SOUZA
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The number of fatal crashes on Lee County roads dropped more than 30 percent in 2008, and officials say high gas prices played a role in that decrease.

According to the Florida Highway Patrol, 70 people were killed in Lee in

2008, down from 106 in 2007. The number of motorists on Lee County roads was about 8 percent lower in 2008, according to Lee County's Metropolitan Planning Organization.

That decrease can be attributed to the jump in gas prices, said Sgt. David Petracca of the Lee County Sheriff's Office traffic unit. Prices at the pump spiked up to \$4 a gallon during the summer and stayed about level for

See **FATALITIES** A2

Also see fatal crashes A2

"Anytime you put more traffic on the roads you're obviously going to see more crashes."

— Sgt. David Petracca,
Lee County Sheriff's
Office traffic unit

News Digest

Festival draws pair back to Sanibel

Sanibel artists Polly and Ikki Matsumoto to return to the island for BIG ARTS event. **INSIDE TROPICALIA**



Ravens move on to AFC title game

Baltimore upends Tennessee, 13-10, to advance in the NFL playoffs. **SPORTS, C1**

Struggling Americans try to hit the jackpot

States report rising lottery sales over the last six months, and researchers say it's because of the economy. **BUSINESS, D1**





VALERIE ROCHE/THE NEWS-PRESS

CallTech, a global call center that closed in 2007, sits abandoned on Colonial Blvd. near U.S. 41, in Fort Myers.

ECONOMY

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they attracted to Lee County that are expanding and hiring more employees.”

Commissioners authorized a \$25 million incentive program to lure companies and help existing businesses expand operations. It’s quick cash is meant to relieve the economic bedlam that’s been plaguing our community.

But if the agency hasn’t succeeded in building a solid, diversified economy, why entrust it with an amount that’s 14 times its annual budget?

Ron Inge, former chairman of a community leadership group called the Horizon Council, initially suggested the incentives. He said Lee County has been at a disadvantage for the past decade as other regions wave cash at prospective businesses.

“It’s a huge competitive environment,” Inge said. “In that 10-year period, we were competing against communities that had incentives already.”

Jim Moore, the agency’s executive director since August, admits money won’t fix a broader problem that Lee’s economy is too reliant on construction, real estate and tourism. Today’s business climate isn’t exactly suitable for companies looking to expand or relocate.

“The businessman would be foolish to go ahead with plans, given the economy,” Moore said.

Times are tough, but they’re also tough in Brevard County, which managed to land the Brazilian jet manufacturer Embraer last May. Embraer inquired about building its \$50 million, 150,000-square-foot aircraft assembly facility in Lee, but chose Melbourne, the beneficiary of 200 new jobs paying an average salary of \$50,000. Embraer officials wouldn’t say what qualities Lee was lacking, but Melbourne-area and state agencies ponied up \$12 million in incentives.

Brent Barkway, business development officer for Lee’s economic development agency, suspects this region was missing one key ingredient.

“The amount of aerospace engineers on that side of the state was too much for us to overcome,” Barkway said. “It’s not that there is anything wrong with us.”

To woo prospects, Lee recruiters boast of our high quality of life, pro-business climate and growing work force. Sounds good, but corporate executives hear the same, if not better, sales pitches elsewhere.

In 2003, the Scripps Research Institute also

checked into Lee, which emerged as one of four finalists. After evaluating contenders, the biomedical research group instead chose Jupiter for its 364,000-square-foot center. Keith McKeown, Scripps’ vice president of communications and public relations, would not specify what Lee County lacked, but said Palm Beach County had six distinct advantages:

- The county donated 100 acres and \$157 million in construction costs, in addition to \$310 million in startup costs from state government.
- Palm Beach’s housing inventory was ample for scientists and researchers.
- Southeast Florida had easy national and international flight connections.
- The Palm Beach area had variety in its cultural and physical amenities.
- Scripps staff felt Palm Beach closely resembled the institute’s headquarters near San Diego.
- Palm Beach residents had money and influence.

“Palm Beach is one of the philanthropic capitals of the country,” McKeown said.

Scripps’ contract with Florida requires the institute to employ at least 545 people by 2013.

Lee wants to land a few “Tiffany targets,” as Moore calls them, but the lack of a clincher is not just a Lee County problem. In December, the Economic Development Foundation in Naples released its 2008 Florida Economic Scorecard, comparing the state’s eight geographic regions in 26 categories. Southwest Florida as a whole — Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties — ranked dead last. Northwest Florida was first.

There’s no sense dwelling on the past, Lee officials say. Barkway believes Lee has 25 realistic, active prospects looking to relocate their businesses. Another bright spot is a 37 percent increase in recruitment and business assistance contacts logged by economic development staff in 2008 vs. 2007.

The Economic Development Office is a small operation with 15 employees and a \$1.7 million annual budget. Moore, who earns \$124,615 a year, took the helm this summer after Regina Smith, agency head for five years, accepted a county buyout.

The agency does not recruit restaurants, retail stores or hotels. It pursues companies in six target industries: aviation, shared services, corporate headquarters, information technology, life sciences and manufacturing. Staffers provide market research to anyone, but focus on target companies planning to create a minimum of 10 jobs, generate at least 51 percent of rev-

Then and now

Lee County’s Economic Development Office has helped 36 target companies open here since 1999. However, 11 of those companies no longer are in business, and another 10 employ fewer workers than initially projected.

1999	JOBS PROJECTED	JOBS NOW	CHANGE
AG&I Cutting Tools	13	28	115%
S4J Manufacturing Services	12	14	17%
CallTech	150	0	-100%
2000			
FindWhat.com/MIVA	25	N/A	N/A
Flexi International	15	0	-100%
International Aviation Services	171	0	-100%
Regal Discount Securities	32	16	-50%
PrivateSky Aviation	30	70	133%
West Coast Roofing & Waterproofing	100	130	30%
2001			
G. Neil	54	0	-100%
Source Interlink	240	320	33%
Future Aviation	45	40	-11%
ACS Business	25	30	20%
Goodwin Custom Stairs Inc.	12	4	-67%
2002			
MCCI	25	0	-100%
Ac-Folien of America	40	0	-100%
Gulf Coast Stamping	10	15	50%
Local Tel	58	0	-100%
Water One	14	7	-50%
2003			
SmartDisk	45	3	-93%
Cape Plastics & Fabrication	11	0	-100%
2004			
Harvest Pak Foods Corp.	30	0	-100%
Shamrock Boats	20	0	-100%
BeSafe International Inc.	15	0	-100%
Creative Door & Millwork	15	40	167%
Prestige Packaging	24	52	117%
Dawning Technologies	23	15	-35%
Digital Telecom Access Control	15	1	-93%
2005			
Greystone Pharmaceuticals	15	15	0%
2006			
Alorica Inc.	400	N/A	N/A
Survival Armor Inc.	25	17	-32%
Tigris Pharmaceuticals	5	6	20%
FreshPoint Inc.	45	35	-22%
Florida Family Insurance	50	61	22%
2008			
Shaw Development	80	80	0%
Somero Enterprises Inc.	14	6	-57%
Total	1903	944	-50%

THE NEWS-PRESS

enue outside Florida and offer salaries at 125 percent of Lee’s average wage.

The 36 companies

Digital Telecom Access Control looked promising, a custom computer programming business projected to employ 15 workers earning \$75,000 a year. It opened five years ago in Cape Coral. Today, callers are greeted by a recording: Press one for sales, press two for technical support, press three for the business office. Sounds like a big operation, but in actuality, all calls lead to owner and president Michael Fischer — the last man standing.

“We had a couple of good contracts, but the economy started to go in a different

direction,” Fischer said. “The telecom sector has come to a screeching halt.”

D-TAC’s decline isn’t a rarity.

CallTech, a global call center, opened its Fort Myers facility in 1999, quickly outlining a series of expansions to bump the employee count to 500. CallTech’s work force disintegrated just as fast. Director of recruiting Jim Phillips said the center closed in 2007 because of a client reduction that coincided with a lease expiration. Its 25,000-square-foot facility remains vacant.

BeSafe International, which manufactured protective vests for police officers, spent the past month moving its operation from Fort Myers to Miami after four

years here. Flexi International, a software company that brought its regional office to Lee in 2000, moved to Naples five years later.

BeSafe and Flexi are the types of business Lee County wants: manufacturing and high-tech industries that sell products outside the region and pay above-average wages. They also are the types of business Lee County has trouble attracting and trouble keeping.

In December, the county hired Denver-based Atlas Advertising to create a campaign promoting Lee on a national level. Ben Wright, Atlas’ CEO and founder, said losing businesses is not uncommon as company executives evaluate their options.

Wright discerned that two Floridas have emerged in economic development, and Lee isn’t necessarily vying for an Embraer or Scripps with Brevard or Palm Beach, counties that feature bigger, better-trained work forces.

“Prospects and companies differentiate between the west coast of Florida and the east coast,” Wright said. “We’re not so sure we’re competing with the rest of the state.”

The Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast helped bring 12 companies to Brevard County in the past five years, when it began tracking the data. Lee, by comparison, landed 14 companies in that timeframe. Brevard’s companies generated 977 new jobs to Lee’s 776.

The true difference between Brevard and Lee are the types of new businesses opening shop. Brevard’s include a glut of manufacturers: aircraft, airplane parts, medical supplies, electronics, guided missile and rubber. Lee’s newcomers manufactured bulletproof vests, doors, metal products and pharmaceuticals, along with food packaging and headquarters for manufacturing and insurance firms.

County incentive

Four months after commissioners approved the \$25 million incentive, the economic development office is revealing its first recommendation, the expansion of a marketing research and public opinion polling firm. The undisclosed company plans to build a 70,000-square-foot facility and create 200 jobs over five years, each averaging \$60,000-a-year salaries. Commissioners will vote Tuesday on whether the project merits \$350,000 in incentives.

Jennifer Berg, marketing and communications manager for the economic office,

said an 80-employee consumer finance company soon will announce it is relocating here.

Moore repeatedly has stated he’d rather not spend a penny of the \$25 million, calling the incentives a marketing tool.

“The only way I’m going to use the \$25 million is to close the deal,” Moore said. “I’m not going to put it out there on the table and say ‘please come have as much as you want.’”

New vs. existing

In the past decade, the economic development office helped 77 businesses expand their local presence, creating 3,403 new jobs. Just like new companies, some existing businesses also closed their doors. Paragon Marketing added 40 employees in 1999, but closed the office three years later. Neo-media Technologies was going strong when the software design company added 35 employees in 2000. The company restructured in 2007, uprooting its world headquarters to Atlanta so it could “offer close contact to potential customers and easier access to international markets,” according to a news release.

As the economy worsens, Lee’s economic development office will monitor local businesses.

“Who is more loyal to this community than the people who are already here, have their roots here, have their families here and would like to keep them here?” Moore said.

That’s fine, but Carlene Maurer, co-owner of Beach Bowl near Fort Myers Beach, admits she is struggling to keep the business afloat, but still wants to open a snack shop and arcade there. Beach Bowl, like a majority of local businesses, does not qualify for incentives because it’s not a target industry looking to create 75 new jobs. Maurer relayed her idea after The News-Press solicited comments from the public.

She suggested \$100,000 grants for 250 existing businesses. That \$25 million, she said, would inject cash flow into companies with desire to stay in business here.

“What about us existing businesses?” Maurer said later in an interview. “We might have to shut down.”

Horizon Council chairman John Wiest said a future discussion can, and should, include existing businesses that need financial help, but the \$25 million has a one purpose.

“That is clearly to diversify the economy and mitigate against future economic problems,” he said.

WHO QUALIFIES

The county has set aside \$25 million for economic development grants. Companies qualifying for Financial Incentives for Recruiting Strategic Targets, or FIRST money, must meet three criteria:

- Operate within a target industry or high-impact

sector.

- Create 75 full-time jobs within three years, paying at least \$47,840 a year, or 125 percent of the county’s average salary.
- Make a cumulative capital investment equal to or greater than the award amount.

TARGET INDUSTRIES

The Lee County Economic Development Office targets its recruitment in six categories:

- Aviation
- Shared services
- Corporate headquarters
- Information technology
- Life sciences
- Manufacturing

OTHER RECRUITING TOOLS

Incentives are aplenty. The Lee County Job Opportunity Program provides up to \$2,000 per employee for companies creating jobs that pay at least 15 percent above the county average, and another \$1,000 if those jobs fall within a designated enterprise zone in central and eastern Fort Myers. Man-

ufacturers can apply for low-rate financing with industrial development revenue bonds. State programs include tax refunds of \$3,000 per full-time job created in targeted markets, grants for new and existing businesses to train employees and low-rate financing through enterprise bonds.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- Site selection assistance
- Demographic and statistical information
- Business meetings
- Employee training and recruiting
- Community tours
- Financial assistance
- Enterprise bonds
- Industrial development revenue bonds



A small-business county discovers need to diversify

Quarter of Lee firms in building and realty

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
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There are big fish in the sea, like shark, tarpon and sturgeon.

There also are big fish in the world of economic development: A-list companies moving their corporate headquarters or opening new research parks.

But Lee County officials don't fish in that ocean.

Instead, the county casts its line in the bay, content catching a mix of smaller fish — preferring to angle for grouper and snapper over tuna.

"You need to fish for fish you're more likely to catch," said Jim Moore, executive director of Lee's Economic Development Office. "I'd much rather have 100 50-employee businesses than one 5,000-employee company. That way you have diversity."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Lee County had 16,945 businesses in 2006, the latest year statistics were available. Only 22 of those companies employed more than 500. Nearly 77 percent of all Lee businesses employ fewer than 10 workers.

Lee has a mom-and-pop economy, an asset in good times because small businesses here and there can go belly-up with minimal effect on the community. In Lee, that theory works against the county. Too many of its small businesses do the same thing.

In 1998, 18.8 percent of 11,616 businesses were construction, real estate and rental companies, according to the census. In 2006, that proportion jumped to 25.7 percent of Lee's 16,945 businesses.

The region's business growth was so intertwined with construction that when the industry crumbled, so did the economy. Unemployment in Lee hit 9.8 percent in November as 27,958 residents were jobless. By comparison,

SMALL-BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Lee County had 16,945 businesses in 2006, more than half of which employed fewer than five workers:

- 1-4 employees: 10,161
- 5-9 employees: 2,854
- 10-19 employees: 1,844
- 20-49 employees: 1,290
- 50-99 employees: 479
- 100-249 employees: 261
- 250-499 employees: 34
- 500-999 employees: 17
- 1,000-plus employees: 5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

the rate was 2.3 percent in December 2005, when Lee recorded its all-time highest median single-family home price of \$322,300. That figure dropped to \$106,100 this November.

"The core of our business is not diversified," Moore said. "The core of our business is not high-profit, good-wage jobs."

Moore's office does not pursue most mom-and-pop shops, instead focusing on medium-size companies that make and sell products or provide technical services, and pay salaries above the county's average wage of \$38,272 per year.

In 2006, Dave Medinas opened Cool-View, a Fort Myers company that produces overhead lights for operating rooms and headlights for surgeons. His business employs five and involves light manufacturing, or assembly, of a high-tech medical product, the type of industry wanted by Lee. Although the business is going strong, Medinas is forced to import a majority of his parts, and finds it sad innovation and manufacturing are absent in Thomas Edison and Henry Ford's stomping grounds.

"It's frustrating not to be able to buy anything here," Medinas said. "We need 150 parts, but we only have one vendor from the three-county area. It would be nice to go down the street and find something."

Only 404 Lee businesses were categorized as manufacturers in the census' 2006 report, just 16 of which employed more than 100 people. The largest is The News-Press, listed at 600 employees by the Economic Development Office. After a series of layoffs, buyouts and resignations last year, that count dropped to 500.

Small businesses always will be the heart of Lee County, firms like Benson's Grocery in Bonita Springs. The store has been in the DeBono family for 31 years, and five of its seven employees are related.

What distinguishes small businesses from larger ones, according to Benson's co-owner Allen DeBono, is a personal touch and ability to change course at drop of a hat. For example, when the economy started going south, Benson's began offering smaller packages of meat, knowing customers with limited resources were buying a day or two's worth of food instead of a week or two.

"You have to be quick on your feet," DeBono said. "You have to adjust based on the economy and your clientele. If you're stubborn and say, 'This is how we're going to do it,' you're going to fail."

Benson's stays aloft with a time-tested business practice.

"Businesses have to get back to treating people like people," DeBono said.

Meanwhile, Goodwin Custom Stairs owner Jesse Goodwin, who opened his business in 2001, said he's behind on bills and not sure how he'll make payroll if the economy doesn't turn around quickly. He's down to four employees, and the company is too small to qualify for incentives. But he, like all small business owners, has hope.

"They always say that in the first 100 days a new president is in office, there is a boom," Goodwin said. "I just hope to last until then."

Barack Obama's inauguration ceremony is Jan. 20.

BUSH

Continued from A1

public affairs at Florida Gulf Coast University. "It is a reflection of the current time."

Bergerson said Bush will be ranked in the bottom third among contemporary presidents — from FDR on.

Bush is saddled with an unpopular war and the worst economic times since the Great Depression.

"It takes time, decades," Bergerson said.

One former president he cites is Dwight Eisenhower, considered for many years as simply the eight-year caretaker of a country basking in calm, post-war and post-depression years.

"You are going to be seeing Eisenhower rise," Bergerson said. "He is going to be elevated."

In 2000, a group of 86 historians commissioned by the Wall Street Journal to rank the presidents placed Ike 10th, and he continues to receive high marks.

He is now viewed as a leader with a strong, guiding hand, not a man resting on his World War II laurels.

Then there's his successor, John F. Kennedy. After his assassination in 1963, his greatness was unquestioned. Camelot reigned. Four decades later, much of the shine is gone. Bringing the world to the brink of an atomic war over Cuba has tarnished his image.

Bergerson said political scientists evaluate presidential legacies in a variety of ways:

- Leadership in national security and national defense.
- Leadership in foreign policy.
- Leadership in economics.
- Leadership of Congress.
- Public opinion.
- Leadership of the bureaucracy and other agencies.

"Handling of Katrina is one of the top areas here," Bergerson said, referring to the Bush administration's slow handling of aid to New Orleans hurricane victims.

- Political leadership of the Republican Party.
- World leader.

"Some of these rise higher than others," Bergerson said. "It's like a chain. It all depends on the strength of the weakest one."

Historians and political scientists aside, a president's legacy can be clouded by biased leanings.

Democrats will tout the positive accomplishments, for example, for Bill Clinton as being responsible for a booming economy — yet casting aside the fact he was impeached.

Republicans hail Ronald Reagan for bringing down the Berlin Wall and helping break up the Soviet Union. They fail to mention Iran-Contra — the controversy of allowing illegal arms to rebels — or his ignoring of



BUSH Leaves office with low approval rating

the AIDS crisis.

"It really takes years, decades to determine this, doesn't it?" said Will Prather, head of the Lee County Democratic Party.

As far as Bush, "One of the things ... it certainly sets the stage for a unique opportunity that we haven't seen in generations."

Prather said Bush's handling of post-9/11 was right on.

"His strength in leadership. ... He made the commitment in ridding us of terrorism."

But, said Prather, there's the Iraq war and economic challenges.

Prather likes the way Bush is leaving office.

"He has been quite humble in the past few months and has accepted some of the responsibilities," he said. "President Bush is standing on the threshold of history with his gracious way he is transitioning out of power. I find that quite admirable."

Gary Lee, Prather's counterpart with the Lee Republican Party, concedes when Bush leaves office the opinion of him will not be very high.

"Harry Truman is one of my favorite comparisons," Lee said. "When he left office he had a terrible approval rating. Now look at him, he's viewed very favorably."

Most historians now put Truman among the 10 best presidents.

Lee said Bush will be remembered as a significant friend of Africa.

"His commitment to defeating AIDS and malaria in Africa was outstanding. He is viewed very favorably in Africa with poll numbers in the 80s there."

FGCU's Bergerson puts presidents into two camps — those before Roosevelt and the dozen since 1932.

"Since FDR the change in the presidency has been dramatic," Bergerson said. "The whole idea of the presidency was transformed by FDR. Before him, there is a limited amount of information available about the president."

Roosevelt opened up the world to the White House with his "fireside chats" on the radio, then came television, debates, the Internet, Blackberries and Twitter.

Compare that to the era before Lincoln, when it might have taken weeks before anyone even knew who was elected president.

In the waning hours of his two terms in office, Bush can do little to change how he will be perceived unless Osama Bin Laden is captured, peace arrives in the Mideast and the economy suddenly becomes robust.

While we wait for those pieces of history to sort themselves over time, George W. Bush becomes just like his 42 predecessors — an ex-president.

Borders prep for spread of Mexico drug violence

The Associated Press

EL PASO, TEXAS — If Mexican drug violence spills across the U.S. border, Homeland Security officials say they have a contingency plan to assist border areas that includes bringing in the military.

"It's a common-sense extension of our continued work with our state, local, and tribal partners in securing the southwest border," DHS spokeswoman Amy Kudwa said Friday.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who described the contingency plan in an interview with The New York Times this week, said he ordered specific plans to be drawn up this summer as violence in Mexico continued to mount.

The plan includes federal homeland security agents helping local authorities and maybe even military assistance from the Department of Defense, possibly including aircraft, armored vehicles and special teams to go to areas overwhelmed with violence, authorities said.

Kudwa would not give specifics on the so-called "surge" plan, but said it does not create any new authorities.

In the last year, more than 5,000 people have been killed and police and military officials have become common targets for violent drug cartels who are fighting with each other and the government for control of lucrative drug and human smuggling routes across Mexico.

More than one-fifth of the deaths have occurred in Ciudad Juarez, the hardscrabble border city just across the Rio Grande from El Paso.

Officials in Mexico reported about 1,600 homicides in Juarez in 2007 and at least 20 people have been killed in the first nine days of this year.

To date, there has been no significant violent spillover from the drug war in Mexico, but U.S. authorities have spent a tense year watching and waiting.

In October, Hidalgo County officials issued fully automatic weapons to deputies patrolling the river in the Rio Grande Valley. Sheriff Lupe Treviño also authorized his deputies to return fire across the border if smugglers or other criminals took aim at them.

In El Paso, the country's largest

border community and one of the safest metropolitan areas in the nation, Sheriff Richard Wiles said that while he doesn't anticipate the city or county being overwhelmed by border violence he applauded the DHS plan to quickly respond if the worst should happen.

"I think it's appropriate for the federal government to have a contingency plan all the way up to the worst case scenario," Wiles said.

The contingency plan was news to most border states.

"At this point, DHS has not contacted the California National Guard to bring any forces ... to support first responders, i.e. (U.S.) Border Patrol, at the border in California," California National Guard spokesman Jonathan Guibord said Friday.

He said National Guard officials in California know only "what's been publicized" about the plan, but added that state military officials routinely train and prepare to respond to any order from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger or the president.

Katherine Cesinger, a spokeswoman for Texas Gov. Rick Perry, said Texas officials were briefed on the plan but were not consulted beforehand about a plan to fight Mexican drug cartels on the 2,000-mile U.S. border, more than half of which is in Texas.

Cesinger said the state has its own specific security plans for each area of the Texas border should violence from Mexico become an issue. She declined to give specifics of those plans.

Officials with New Mexico's Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management said they are in constant contact with federal Homeland Security officials but weren't aware of any specific security plan that could include Department of Defense assets.

"We haven't seen a specific operational plan for a specific region or specific threat. The use of Defense Department resources ... would have to be an extreme situation," said Tim Manning, the New Mexico Homeland Security director.

Homeland Security officials did not respond to questions about which local or state agencies were notified about the surge plan.

"They always say that in the first 100 days a new president is in office, there is a boom. I just hope to last until then."

— Jesse Goodwin, owner of Goodwin Custom Stairs

Lee's leaders debate money's fate

No consensus target found for \$25 million

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
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The money — \$25 million reserved for economic development — is there.

So, who should get it?

That's up for debate.

The News-Press convened five economy meetings November, asking 38 business, education and community leaders how to get the best bang for our buck. They couldn't agree.

"Market the destination," suggested Will Prather, owner of Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre.

"We ought to use the \$25 million as bait for public-

private partnerships," said Steve Scott, president of LEAD Foundation, a leadership group.

Lee County stipulated that it should be spent on high-impact businesses, existing or new, that pledge to generate at least 75 high-paying jobs and invest a significant amount of money in the community.

Panelists, again, disagreed on whether the cash should be spread among a variety of businesses, or just one whopper of a deal.

"I'd like to keep it whole," said Janet Watermeier, president of Watermeier Property Services. "I don't want to see it piecemealed out, so that it can make a bigger impact."

Bob Jones, president of Edison State College's Fort

Myers campus, said the simple fact that Lee designated so much money for economic development shows CEOs we're serious about diversifying the economy. But what about existing businesses crumbling under the recession?

"Yes, we need the incentives to prove to these other companies to get them down here, but I'd also like to really put a push on how can we take the local companies that are having problems and help them out," Bo Turbeville, vice president of Accent Business Products.

Bill Valenti, president of Florida Gulf Bank, agrees.

"That is our engine that's made the economy grow," he said, "and that's the engine that will bring it back."

- of Lee County public schools
- Lalai Hamric, president and CEO of Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida
- Gail Markham, president of Markham Norton Mosteller Wright & Co.
- Jim Moore, executive director of the Lee County Economic Development Office
- Jim Nathan, president and CEO of Lee Memorial Health System
- Will Prather, owner of Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre
- Michael Reitmann, executive vice president of the Lee Building Industry Association
- Bill Valenti, president of Florida Gulf Bank

PANEL 4

- Anita Cereceda, owner of The Pier Peddler and Local Color
- Eddie Felton, executive director of Home Ownership Resource Center
- Brian Fulton, office manager with Tomasso Mortgage
- Ron Hamel, executive director of Gulf Citrus Growers Association
- Ron Inge, president of Development Solutions, Land Solutions, Inc.

- Marietta Mudgett, executive director of the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce
- Dennis Pearlman, president of The Case Companies
- Steve Scott, president of LEAD Foundation
- Steve Shimp, chairman of Owen-Ames-Kimball

PANEL 5

- John Albion, president of the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce
- Wilson Bradshaw, president of Florida Gulf Coast University
- Scot Congress, president of Congress Jewelers
- Pam Cronin, vice president of fun stuff at the Shell Factory & Nature Park
- Leonardo Garcia, former CEO of the Southwest Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Kitty Green, president and CEO of The Bonita Bay Group
- David Hall, president of First Community Bank of Southwest Florida
- Syd Kitson, chairman of Kitson & Partners
- Tony Lapi, president of Rochester Resorts (Tween Waters Inn)
- Janet Watermeier, president of Watermeier Property Services



» **news-press.com** View photo galleries, including St. Andrew Festival, Jazz on the Green.

MUSEUMS | TROPICALIA

Sites serve as Southwest Florida history warehouses.

THE BUCS START HERE | C1

Raheem Morris, 32, will be in charge as Tampa Bay regroup.



THE NEWS-PRESS

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2009 | PUBLISHED SINCE 1884

FINAL \$1.50



News-Press | *The Inauguration of Barack Obama*

news-press.com

Our coverage of the inauguration starting Monday will include:

Blogs: Reporter Janine Zeitlin and Southwest Florida's Will Prather will be on the ground in Washington.

Photo galleries: Click on hundreds of photos — from preparations, the inauguration, the balls and live entertainment.

Video stories: We will provide reports on Southwest Florida residents who are riding a bus to the inauguration.

Live video: We will have live streaming video feeds throughout the inauguration.

Live chats: Monday (9:30 a.m.) with Paul Reynolds of the Lee County Republican Executive Committee on George Bush's legacy; (noon) Professor Marsa Detscher of Edison State College with pre-inauguration analysis; Tuesday (2 p.m.) Professor Marsa Detscher of Edison State College on post-inauguration analysis.

Games: Play Obama trivia or match his Cabinet picks with their offices.

news-press.com/inauguration

Click on our special inauguration page with more photo galleries, video, interactive graphics and the latest headlines.

COMING TUESDAY

The News-Press will publish a commemorative EXTRA edition after Barack Obama is sworn in as the president. You will be able to purchase the EXTRA throughout Southwest Florida.



REPORTING

Janine Zeitlin and Kinfa Moroti will travel with Southwest Floridians for Barack Obama's inauguration. A photojournalist, Moroti covered Obama's nomination at the Democratic National Convention. Staff writer Zeitlin has reported on what the election has meant to Southwest Floridians.

FULFILLMENT OF A DREAM



KINFAY MOROTI/THE NEWS-PRESS

Susan C. Tull and her sons Kyle Myvett, left, and Rick Flowers followed Barack Obama's presidential bid. Tull and Flowers will attend the inauguration with Tull's granddaughter, Kyrah Myvett, 3.

SW Floridians to brave chill, witness history

BY JANINE ZEITLIN

jzeitlin@news-press.com

About a thousand miles from Fort Myers, millions will jam the nation's Capitol to see Barack Obama become the nation's 44th — and first African-American — president Tuesday.

Among the mass will be many Southwest Florida residents, likely shivering, as they brave a predicted temperature that will hover in the low 20s.

Some will fly there and sleep soundly at the Ritz. Others will drive the 16-hour trek and crash on a church floor or in a cheap motel.

Most don't have tickets to see Obama sworn in after 11:30 a.m. They may catch glimpses on the 20-plus Jumbotrons on the National Mall.

Still, they're going to feel part of history. They're going to see a barrier overcome. A dream fulfilled. A promise of change rise.

See **CEREMONY** A14

The rails deliver president-elect to dawn of an era

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Invoking hope and history, President-elect Barack Obama rolled into the capital city Saturday night pledging to help bring the nation "a new Declaration of Independence" and promising to rise to the stern challenges of the times. He kicked off a four-day inaugural celebration with a daylong rail trip, retracing the path Abraham Lincoln took in 1861.

Obama began his day in Philadelphia, where he said the young nation had faced its "first true test" as a fragile democracy. He ended it in Washington, where his own tests await after his inauguration Tuesday.

The president-in-waiting drew on a grand heritage of American giants as he appealed "not to our easy instincts but to our better angels," an echo of Lincoln's first inaugural address. He took note of the enormous challenges that lie ahead and promised to act

See **OBAMA** A14

MORE INSIDE ON THE HISTORIC INAUGURATION OF BARACK OBAMA

• Obama and Lincoln: 148 years apart, the two presidents' paths are similar, **A13** • From Hawaii to Harvard: The making of the 44th president of the United States, **A13** • Young and old alike, Southwest Floridians will be on hand in Washington for this historic moment, **A15** • Fort Myers businessman Will Prather blogs from Washington, **A15**

The boom, the bust ... and now?

The top 10 issues Lee must address to turn it around



BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

No community is perfect.

Like everybody else, Lee County has its share of problems: an economy too dependent on real estate and tourism, a work force with below-average education levels and land that's suited for homes, not industry.

Left unchecked during the boom, those problems festered. And when that boom fizzled, the economy crashed hard.

"Everything got so good," said David Jones, board chairman of Investors' Security Trust Co. and executive professor at Florida Gulf Coast University. "The region was playing the cards it dealt you, and you kept having, demographically, people retiring and come down here."

"There was never a moment of real urgency. We have finally reached that moment."

A rash of foreclosures put Lee No. 1 in the nation as 76 homes were foreclosed upon every day last year — that's a whole neighborhood, gone, every day. By November, the unemployment rate hit 9.8 percent as thousands searched for jobs that no longer exist. Construction came to an abrupt halt as builders pulled just 482 permits for new single-family homes in Lee for all of 2008.

The News-Press panelists identify problems and offer solutions on Page A18.

news-press.com/economy

MULTIMEDIA:

Watch a special presentation on the state of the Southwest Florida economy.

DATABASES: Search foreclosures, housing permits and industry information and more.

VIDEO: Watch excerpts from the conversations from our panelists.

YOUR VIEWS:

Read the numerous e-mails and letters that have come to us from readers about fixing our economy and click on the link to send in your ideas.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION: Read editorials, letters to the editor, guest opinion columns.

BLOG: Read posts of local business leaders' ideas for improving the economic outlook.

PANELISTS: See the faces and read quotes from the experts who visited The News-Press and participated in panels to brainstorm and propose solutions.

THE SERIES

As Lee County's economy continues to tumble, The News-Press is exploring the community's economic failures, achievements and assets through a series of news stories, panel discussions and video presentations. The project will identify possible solutions as Lee looks toward recovery in the coming months and years.

Here is a series rundown:

JAN. 11 — Millions: Lee's economic development office was given \$25 million for business recruitment and expansion, but the agency has struggled to attract new industries.

TODAY — Problems: A string of challenges looms as the community regroups, problems that must be addressed before resurrecting the local economy.

JAN. 25 — Ideas: The community is down, but not out, thanks to a few key assets that position Lee County well for a return to prosperity.

JAN. 26 — Solutions: The News-Press will feature a daily solution each day this week, using ideas generated by residents and community leaders.

E-MAIL US

Why is Lee County's economy in such bad shape? How and when will it get better?

Send your comments to economy@news-press.com.

His path to freedom was forged, state says

Fort Myers inmate almost beat the rap

BY PAT GILLESPIE

pgillespie@news-press.com

A convicted armed robber is being investigated for forgery after authentic-looking documents ordering his release from prison were found to be fake.

Raynaldo Ray Quiroga, 24, of Fort Myers, has been

news-press.com/crime

Online only: Read official documents on this case filed by Lee County Clerk of Court Criminal Division.



QUIROGA

Court received an authentic-looking signed order to release Quiroga from prison dated Dec. 4, an accompanying document that records a phony Dec.

al agencies across the state now that the scheme was foiled.

On Jan. 9, the Lee County Clerk of

4 court hearing when the order was supposedly signed and fake documents from the Florida Department of Corrections asking for the clerk to resubmit the order so Quiroga could be released.

"Right now, we believe everything was forged," said corrections department spokeswoman Gretl Plessinger.

Several Lee deputy clerks

See **FORGERY** A2

The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel implemented a unilateral cease-fire early Sunday in its 22-day offensive that turned Gaza neighborhoods into battlegrounds and dealt a stinging blow to the Islamic militants of Hamas. But Israeli troops will stay in the Palestinian territory for now and Hamas threatened to keep fighting until they leave.

In announcing the cease-fire late Saturday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel had

achieved its goals and more.

"Hamas was hit hard, in its military arms and in its government institutions. Its leaders are in hiding and many of its men have been killed," Olmert said.

Israel launched the offensive Dec. 27 to stop years of rocket fire from Gaza at southern Israeli towns. But the rockets did not stop coming throughout the assault. Militants fired about 30 rockets into

See **CEASE-FIRE** A2
See U.S. reaction A4



The News-Press consulted with 38 business and community leaders to identify the community's biggest problems, and the panels were anxious to discuss possible solutions. Ten issues stood out:



1. Diversification

The key to solid investing is creating a diversified portfolio. A healthy mix of stocks, bonds, mutual funds and cash is the best strategy to protect investors.

The same holds true for a community. Lee County's portfolio, however, is a two-headed monster. Real estate/construction and tourism drive the local economy. That was a good strategy during boom years, but when the real estate bubble popped, Lee's economy tumbled.

"The one-man band doesn't do so well when the one-man band gets cold," said Jim Moore, executive director for Lee's economic development office.

Jim Nathan, president of Lee Memorial Health System, equates the rapid collapse to a factory closure.

"If you use construction and real estate as our General Motors plant, our Procter & Gamble, when our General Motors plant shut down, it shut the whole community down," Nathan said. "That's the lack of diversity. We were around a single industry."

The real estate collapse had a trickle-down effect. With fewer homes under construction, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and roofers were jobless. Mortgage and title companies downsized because they had less work. In turn, those laid off workers stopped eating out and buying clothing, so restaurants and stores laid off employees. Those out-of-work residents could not afford a new TV or vehicle, so electronics stores and car dealerships cut costs by trimming the work force.

"In a downturn, it's usually the lower-level positions because people who have less education and less experience are the first to be laid off," said Barbara Hartman, communications representative for the Career and Service Centers of Southwest Florida. "It's affecting everybody now."

"No one is immune."

Tourism also is down, but not out. The Lee County Convention and Visitors Bureau reports tourists are spending less on visits, and nearly six in 10 are staying with friends and family instead of paid accommodations.

John Delaney, former Jacksonville mayor and soon-to-be chancellor of Florida's university system, said the state must abandon a mindset that tourism can sustain a community. Tourism dollars should be a bonus, not the base, for a community's economic engine.

"That's free money," Delaney said during a December visit to Naples. "They typically don't get arrested, they don't send kids to school, they're spending money in our restaurants and things like that."

"It's the icing on the cake."



2. Overbuilding

Southwest Florida's housing frenzy of the early 2000s drove up prices, and construction workers couldn't build homes and strip malls fast enough. But families and investors bought above their means, and now are paying the price. Last year, 27,886 Lee County homes entered the foreclosure process, 11 times as many as in 2006.

As of Friday, there were 10,707 single-family homes, 5,012 condominiums or villas, 684 multifamily homes and 278 mobile homes for sale in Lee County. Some foreclosures are included in that data.

Homes are selling again, 600 of them in November, but the median sales price dipped to \$106,100 for a single-family home, according to the Florida Association of Realtors. It's the lowest mark since March 2000.

Denny Grimes, a real estate agent who writes a column for The News-Press, said a six-month inventory of homes on the market is ideal. Presently, it's a 14-month supply, a stash that could snowball once a backlog of foreclosures emerges from the court system.

The solution is simple: Clear out that inventory and get back to a six-month supply. That takes time, said Steve Koffman, a real estate agent with Century 21 Sunbelt. The region can speed up that process by creating new jobs so people have a reason to move down here, Koffman said, and marketing the low prices to baby boomers up north who are nearing retirement.

Simply selling homes isn't the answer. It's critical to put people inside those houses, Koffman says, people who hold down jobs and spend money at local businesses.

"Unless we occupy them, put a body in them, whether they are renting it or buying it, we still have vacant inventory sitting there," Koffman said. "That's not going to help the neighbors. That's not going to help the economy."



3. Clusters

Every shopping mall has anchor stores, like Macy's or J.C. Penney, that draw hordes of customers. Those shoppers then pop into smaller stores while they're at the mall.

Communities have anchors, too. Walt Disney World, for example, ignited the Orlando area, now home to multiple theme parks, water parks, tourist attractions and entertainment venues. Banks, restaurants, hotels and retailers then clustered in Central Florida, thriving off millions of tourists and the residents serving them.

Melbourne's anchor is the space program. Pensacola has its vast military presence.

Lee County has ... Tough to answer. It has tourism, but there isn't that year-round, stable anchor that keeps the community running through thick and thin.

Solutions vary, from being a leader in green energies or pharmaceuticals to creating a hub for geriatric research, playing off the region's demographics. One business often leads to two, which double to four, and so on.

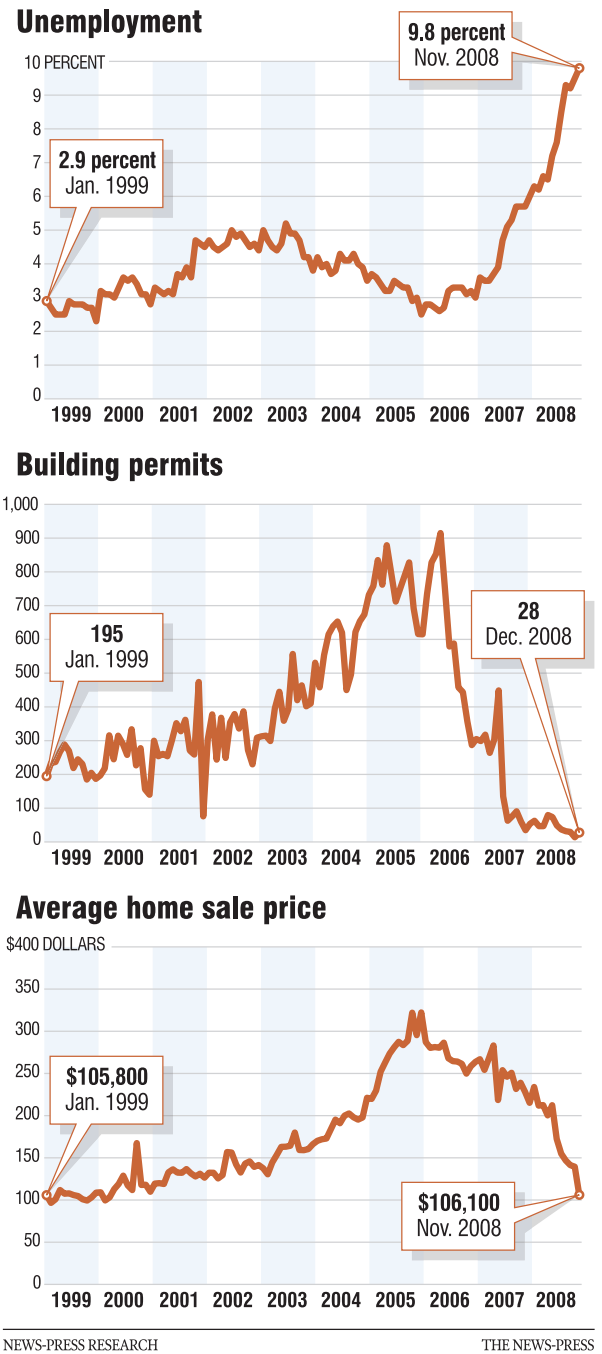
"They tend to cluster together, such as Silicon Valley," said Gail Markham, president of the local accounting firm Markham Norton Mosteller Wright & Co. "We can do that here."

Getting started, Moore says, is the difficult part. Without a reputation for excelling in a particular industry, Lee County isn't on the national radar. It just takes one or two successful businesses to start a cluster.

"To walk 1,000 miles, you've got to take that first step," Moore said.

Ups and downs of our economy

Lee County's economy is either really good, or really bad. We're enduring the negative now, but fixing a few key problems can help create a better tomorrow.



4. Regulations

Lee County has zoning regulations, permitting agencies and oversight boards that monitor growth. It assesses impact fees and employs numerous building codes and design specifications. Rules and codes help ensure uniformity and safety, but they're also a turnoff.

"Our ability to have a company come in and turn a shovel is impaired," said Ron Inge, president of Development Solutions, Land Solutions Inc. "We haven't gotten a second look from some companies because they know it will take too long."

The solution, Inge says, is reducing paperwork and creating hard-and-fast timelines to approve projects, and eliminating some regulations that border on ridiculous.

Lee is not alone in regulation standards. Harlan Parrish, president and CEO for retail banking with Colonial Bank's Florida West Coast Region, hit a roadblock in Collier.

"They wanted a certain amount of windows in a bank building, which means I had to put a faux window in a vault," Parrish said. "It's ridiculous. I own land down there, but we will not build another facility in Collier County until it eases."

"Most of our growth will be in Lee, Charlotte, Sarasota, Bradenton and on up."

Inge hopes Lee County uses the economic slowdown to revise its regulations and streamline permitting.



5. Leadership

Lee County voters elect a county commission. Voters in each municipality elect city council members. There's also a county economic development office, Smart Growth agency, regional planning council, state university and the Horizon Council, a who's who of area leaders.

Each agency has leadership qualities, but which is leading? None serve as the economy point-man, a person or group that is in charge of the whole mission.

The News-Press' panelists did not agree on who should lead our economic revolution.

"I think the Horizon Council is a natural because you have a public-private partnership there," Markham said, referring to the group that consists of local government, education and business executives.

Michael Reitmann, executive vice president of the Lee Building Industry Association, believes the Horizon Council does not represent the average Lee resident.

"It's not encompassing the broad-based community and it's not encompassing the people who go out to vote," said Reitmann, who suggested FGCU could coordinate economic recovery.

FGCU President Wilson Bradshaw touts the university's fiscal impact on the region, estimated at \$389 million annually, but did not commit to taking a leadership role.

The Horizon Council proposed a \$25 million incentive for business recruitment and expansion. Commissioners approved the program, then delegated the legwork to their economic development office.

Kitty Green, president and CEO of The Bonita Bay Group, said elected officials are part of the answer, but not the answer.

"It's not just the guys sitting in those chairs," Green said. "It's us. We could get together and figure out what our vision is for this area."

6. Regionalism

Southwest Florida consists of Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties, according to Enterprise Florida, the state's equivalent of an economic development office.



FGCU also includes Hendry and Glades counties because of their proximity. Sarasota, DeSoto and Manatee counties were included in forums sponsored by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council.

There is no clear-cut definition of Southwest Florida. The region is a potpourri, encompassing poverty-stricken farming communities in Hendry, where its 11.9 percent unemployment rate tops the state. It includes multimillion dollar beachfront mansions in Collier, the second home for many of America's rich and famous. It stretches north, south, east and west.

"It is not defined by political boundaries," said Ken Heatherington, executive director of the regional planning council. "Southwest Florida can extend to Tampa Bay and Bartow, depending on what the issue is."

Tourism, for example, is a coastal issue, while agriculture mostly is an inland concern.

Some companies have fled Lee for greener pastures in Collier, and vice versa. Sarasota city and county recently tried to lure the Boston Red Sox from its spring training home in Fort Myers. Sarasota also made a pitch for the Baltimore Orioles, a team Lee actively is recruiting.

What's good for one city or county is good for the region. Richard Pegnetter, dean of FGCU's Lutgert College of Business, said one county cannot stand alone in its quest to recruit new industries, not when regions like Southeast Florida and Central Florida are consolidating their efforts. That larger pull increases their bargaining power.

"Within that circle, we can recruit a work force," Pegnetter said. "(Businesses) don't care if it cuts across county lines. They just want to know if we can do it."



7. Educated work force

Seemingly every business in town displayed "help wanted" signs in December 2005, when unemployment dipped to 2.5 percent. That's what many economists deem full employment — everybody who wanted a job had a job. Now, they're out of work again.

"If you really started to take a look at the root, these were not long-term, sustainable, benefits-oriented, business-oriented, community-building type jobs," Nathan said. "They were short-term, temporary, service economy, part-time positions."

The types of careers county leaders want here — high-paying, high-skill jobs — require college degrees. That's where Lee falls short. About 32.1 percent of Lee adults have earned degrees; the national average is 34.9 percent.

Lee County has eight colleges, none of which can switch on and off academic programs at the drop of a hat. Cathy Duff, acting associate provost at FGCU, said staff first analyzes student and market demand. Then, the university must identify funding sources, develop a curriculum and gain state approval, later hiring new faculty. It's a process that takes two to three years, meaning the timeline from inception to graduation can be six to seven years. That doesn't mean the curriculum is outdated, though.

"All programs go through a constant phase of assessment and regeneration as technology changes," Duff said.

Career preparatory programs in high schools also cannot respond quick enough.

"The longer I'm in the business, the more I realize we are reactionary," said Lee County Superintendent James Browder. "Today, I can tell you this: 50 percent of the jobs that will be available in five years, we don't even know about."

Browder gives an example.

"Four years ago, we started three comprehensive high schools," he said. "One of our biggest programs was construction and trade. Today, kids are still taking those programs, but there are no jobs for them."

Browder said he frequently reviews lists of high-demand careers, striving to create programs based on those forecasts.



8. Land

There's plenty of vacant land in Lee County to build a single-family home. It's not so easy for businesses. A property search through Lee's economic development office revealed just 68 properties larger than 10 acres are for sale. About half are near I-75 between Alico Road and Daniels Parkway.

Many large parcels east of the interstate contain protected wetlands. Lehigh Acres was platted in quarter-acre and half-acre residential lots, making it difficult for prospective companies needing large parcels.

"We don't have flexibility in those urban areas because of those plots," said Wayne Daltry, Lee's Smart Growth director.

For years, there's been talk of consolidating vacant lots into large commercial properties, but Daltry said Florida statutes prevent government agencies from using eminent domain for economic development. One unwilling seller on an otherwise barren street takes that entire neighborhood out of consideration.

Without consolidation, Lehigh will remain a bedroom community, absent the industry and jobs to build its own economy. Cape Coral is the same way. "People don't know, Cape Coral used to have a ton of trees on it, but they bulldozed them down and made canals, and made it a dream land," said Steve Personette, a Cape resident and Embarq spokesman. "It was all about land. We made it a tourist destination, and then we made it a snowbird heaven for the second home."

In addition to those 68 commercial properties for sale, Moore said companies looking to relocate can have their pick of vacant facilities or leased land scattered across Lee County.

See **ECONOMY** A19



Oh Baby, What a Sale!



3 Day Specials!

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**Plus, more great savings today
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DKNY, Apple Bottoms, Baby Phat,
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ECONOMY

Continued from A18



9. Taxes

Florida is great for the working class, which pays no state income tax and no sales tax on prepackaged food. But somebody has to pay the bills, a burden that falls on property owners and businesses. Florida's tax structure has been the subject of debates for decades but the budget crisis is renewing that discussion. "We need to come together to find ways to grow and diversify our

region's economy," said U.S. Rep. Connie Mack, R-Fort Myers. "We can do this by tapping into the varied resources we have available right here in our region, keeping taxes and impact fees low as a way to bring companies into Southwest Florida, and working with local colleges and universities to tap into our students' full potential."

Tom Fliss, president of AGI/VR Wesson Inc. in Cape Coral, said his company pays \$60,000 per year in tangible personal property taxes on heavy machinery needed to produce cutting tools for aluminum and steel. That's added up to \$600,000 since his company moved from Wisconsin. Fliss said it's not surprising Lee County, or Florida for that matter, has difficulty

attracting manufacturers. "I don't see how anybody with a lot of equipment can come to Florida and justify it," he said.

Weather brought Fliss' company here, a similar draw for Prestige Packaging in Fort Myers. Director of manufacturing Kent Lewis said the company paid nearly \$1 million in relocation costs and government fees to move from Detroit to Fort Myers.

"Some of the codes down here are excessive, and I think at times are cost-prohibitive," he said. "It doesn't seem business-friendly in some cases."



10. Destination

With picture-perfect weather and sparkling beaches, Lee is a fantastic destination for tourists.

That has not translated into a major destination for business travelers. At 42,000 square feet, Harborside Event Center in Fort Myers pales in comparison to the Orange County Convention Center, which boasts 2.1 million square feet of convention space and 500,000 square feet of meeting space.

Orlando's complex is hosting two events this week: a surf expo drawing

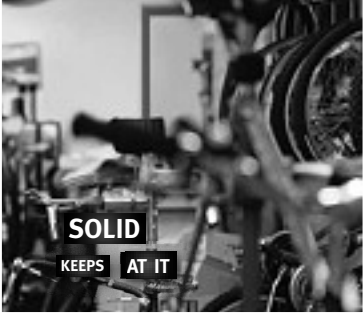
16,200 people and a gun show drawing 43,000. Last year, the center hosted 1 million convention participants who spent an average of \$1,400 while in town, according to deputy general manager Kathy Canning.

This week's events at Harborside include a private celebration for local Comcast staff, and a public bridal show, senior expo and woodcarving exposition. Several area hotels, including the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point and Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, also have facilities capable of hosting small- to medium-sized groups.

Orange County didn't just construct a giant center off the cuff, Canning said. It gradually built bigger facilities as conventions drew larger crowds, expansions made possible as Orlando International Airport added flights and more business-class hotels and attractions opened southwest of downtown.

Jack Wilda, 78, of North Fort Myers believes Lee cannot compete with Orlando, Tampa and Miami without a larger convention center. Wilda belongs to the Caloosa Clowns Alley, which tried to host the Southeast Clown Association convention locally, but found no suitable space at a reasonable price.

"There is a difference between a convention center and a hotel that can handle a convention," Wilda said.



SOLID TAKES ACTION

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SPORTS | C1

Firecat defensive tackle hopeful battles hearing impairment.

TROPICALIA

Butterfly Estates in Fort Myers houses thousands of butterflies.



THE NEWS-PRESS

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FINAL \$1.50

Baltimore's Birds aren't here just yet

Other bidders, upgrades are still to be dealt with

BY GLENN MILLER
gmiller@news-press.com

Convincing the Baltimore Orioles to relocate spring training headquarters to Lee County will have a cost.

No estimates have been made public as to how much it will take to ready City of

Palms Park for the team. County Commissioner Ray Judah may have a ballpark estimate, but is not sharing it.

"Not at liberty to tell you at this time," Judah said.

The cost will hinge on what improvements the Orioles will ask the county to make.

What do the Orioles want? "I'm not at liberty to tell you that," Judah said.

The Orioles train in Fort

Lauderdale on a year-to-year lease. Lee County officials are talking to Orioles officials about moving the team here, perhaps by 2012.

That's when the Boston Red Sox are scheduled to move into a new spring training home in south Lee, leaving City of Palms Park vacant during spring training.

The Orioles, who also have had talks in recent

months with Sarasota and Vero Beach, aren't committing themselves publicly to long-term leases with any community.

"Our options remain open," Orioles spokesman Greg Bader said. "There's a dialogue between the club and Fort Lauderdale that will continue."

See **ORIOLES** A10
Also see spring training A10

"Our options remain open. There's a dialogue between the club and Fort Lauderdale that will continue."

— Greg Bader, Orioles spokesman

Miss Florida places fifth

Indiana beauty wins Miss America crown

BY DAYNA HARPSTER
dharpster@news-press.com

No matter the fact she finished fifth, Miss Florida

Sierra Minott was a winner to parishioners at the First Christian Church of Fort Myers, who gathered to watch the Miss America pageant live in the church sanctuary Saturday night.

In fact, they'd been cheering her on every Sunday for a month.

"We've been putting her picture up on the screens during our worship service and praying for her," said Pastor Gary Cox, to a crowd



MINOTT Friends cheer Fort Myers resident

See **MISS AMERICA** A3

REINVENTING OUR ECONOMY: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Lee has hidden strengths

Existing assets may pave the way

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

The economy is grim, but Lee County won't disintegrate into a ghost town.

The community has an arsenal of assets that can be used to rebuild Lee, including nice weather, a strong airport and the state's fastest-growing university, say local business leaders. Even the real estate meltdown has a plus side: Thousands of houses and condos are available at discounts.

Those strengths can help propel the county into new industries that mean job growth and a more balanced economy.

Already, Lee is delving into technologies such as solar power, biomedicine and green research.

But any transformation will take a strong vision and hard work.

"You can't just want it in your heart," said Doug Gyure, owner of S4J Manufacturing Services in Cape Coral. "You have to do something about it."

Starting Monday, The News-Press will explore five tactics that can diversify — and thus enhance — Lee's stagnant economy. Ideas include green technology, international tourism and trade, medical research,

See **ECONOMY** A11
Also see tourism **A11**



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CLAY SISK/THE NEWS-PRESS

ABOUT THE SERIES

As Lee County's economy continues to tumble, The News-Press is exploring the community's economic failures, achievements and assets through a series of news stories, panel discussions and video presentations.

The project will identify possible solutions as Lee looks toward recovery in the coming months and years.

Here is a series rundown:

Jan. 11 — Millions: Lee's economic development office was given \$25 million for



business recruitment and expansion, but the agency has struggled to attract new industries.

Jan. 18 — Problems: A string of challenges looms as the community regroups, problems that must be addressed before resurrecting the local economy.

Today — Ideas: The community is down, but not out, thanks to some key assets and a willingness to develop new industries.

Jan. 26 — Solutions: The News-Press will feature a solution each day this week, using ideas generated by residents and community leaders.

news-press.com/economy: We have special coverage on our Web site.

YOUR VIEWS: Read the numerous e-mails and letters that have come to us from readers about fixing our economy and click on the link to send in your ideas. **VIDEO:** Watch excerpts from the conversations from our panelists. **PANELISTS:** See the faces and read quotes from the experts who visited The News-Press and participated in panels to brainstorm and propose solutions. **COMMUNITY CONVERSATION:** Read editorials, letters to the editor, guest opinion columns. **MULTIMEDIA:** Watch a special presentation about ideas that will help Lee County in the effort to improve the economic outlook. **DATABASES:** Search foreclosures, housing permits and industry information and more.

NOTICE TO OUR READERS

The New York Times crossword scheduled to appear in Saturday's newspaper appears today on Page B9. The News-Press apologizes for any inconvenience the delay may have caused.

A year later, gunshots at day care resound

Children, adults alike remain traumatized by the horrors

BY DENES HUSTY III
dhusty@news-press.com

A mother grieves every day for her daughter. Traumatized children were frightened of loud noises and the color red for months.

A year after an unthinkable tragedy at a Cape Coral child care



ROBERT DUNN

center, when a young mother was killed, the emotional scars remain.

On Jan. 25, 2008, at Bobbie Noonan's Child Care, teacher Christine Lozier-Dunn, 36, was

gunned down in front of teachers and kids, her blood covering some of the children.

Her husband, Robert H. Dunn, 45, broke into the day care, police said, and shot her. They were in the midst of a bitter divorce.

The killing shocked the community and caused Bobbie Noonan's and other day cares throughout Southwest Florida to review and improve security measures.

"We at Bobbie Noonan's are still in the healing process. What happened was a tragedy that we hope

See **ANNIVERSARY** A3



Louise Zoller and her daughter, Morgan Hunter, 12, were at Bobby Noonan's Day Care to pick up Zoller's youngest child the day Robert Dunn allegedly shot and killed his ex-wife, Christine Lozier-Dunn.

AMANDA INSCORE
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Classifieds ... F1-10
Horoscopes ... E30
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Obituaries ... B6

Opinion ... B10-11
TV ... E33-39
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High 77
Low 50

Fort Myers woman spent time working near many U.S. presidents. B1

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JACK HARDMAN/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Barbara Hartman meets with Judith Andrillon, an instructor with the School District of Lee County, to discuss a "ready-to-work" plan for students.

HARTMAN

Continued from A1

high-pitched, almost squeaky voice and a disarming manner of greeting first-time business contacts as though they had been, like Helms and Wilke, friends and business colleagues for years.

It is dealing with such human resources professionals that is the major part of Hartman's job.

Of late, though, she's become more known as the voice of the unemployed. She is the designated spokeswoman for her employer, the Career and Service Centers for Southwest Florida located on Ford Street Extension, between Winkler Avenue and Colonial Boulevard, in Fort Myers.

She made Page 1 of The News-Press again Friday when it was announced Southwest Florida's unemployment rate had hit 10 percent.

It distresses her.

"I have never seen a labor market this bad," she said. "Both sides are struggling. People get so discouraged. We have to remind them that they've worked before and they will work again. We have to keep encouraging them."

Hartman's official title is communications representative for the unique agency that combines the state's local employment efforts with the training and hiring program of the Area Agency on Workforce Development. The center handles everything from major training programs for companies new to the area to processing unemployment compensation benefits, though its culture is to emphasize employment. The word "unemployment" appears on no titles; it's hardly ever uttered. Hartman has been there for 30 years, doing just about every job there is.

Though the public spokeswoman, and, hence, how she is known, Hartman's chief job is to work with people like Wilke and Helms, finding people to fill what jobs there are in good times and bad.

Her voice, her size and her ease of manner are, to be sure, part of the real Hartman, but they leave a false impression that she might be less than the consummate professional. That is because those first impressions are only the beginning, according to Tim Nevarez, her former boss, now retired.

"The first thing you notice about Barbara is how nice the lady is," Nevarez said.

"Everything you see about her is real, whether she is on the clock or off," he said. "When you first talk to her, her warmth comes through. You can sense the caring, the compassion, the empathy ... all those human qualities come through."

"That doesn't mean she is naive or doesn't know what she is talking about."

Indeed, Hartman has long been a secret weapon in the critical world of employers who hire the workers who make this area's economy work — the resource the employers trust like nobody else to get them the right people, trained correctly for the right jobs at the right time.

She is an expert on the dry, lifeless charts with the numbers — total unemployed, total employed, percentages, etc. — that make up Labor Market Statistics, of which she interprets to the media and public, explaining which sectors of the economy are losing jobs and why.

Hartman loves those charts, calling them "Godiva chocolate to me." She finds the numbers "soothing ... because they make sense."

"They are a snapshot of what is going on," she said. "It is a very difficult time out there for people."

Her habit of using numbers to show empathy for

those hurt by this economic downturn is part of her unique ability to treat each person with whom she deals with an equal measure of professionalism and personal concern.

Which is why her fans run from professionals such as Helms and Wilke to Edgardo Vargas, 43, of Cape Coral, laid off almost four months ago as a truck driver for a kitchen cabinet company that closed.

Hartman first met Vargas several years ago when Hartman's daughter, Jeanie, needed to move from Fort Myers to Tallahassee on two weeks' notice.

Hartman didn't know how they would do it. Vargas was driving a truck for a moving company at the time. He detected her distress, told mother and daughter to sit down and he would handle everything, which he did.

"When we arrived in Tallahassee, he was already there. Like a mirage. He saved us," Hartman said.

So when he got laid off, Vargas, who never went beyond junior high school, was distressed by the paperwork for getting unemployment insurance.

It was Hartman's turn to take over. She carefully guided him through the process. "She is a beautiful lady. Just the most wonderful, patient lady I ever met in my life," said Vargas.

"Little woman ... big, big heart."

Hartman is forever involving her business contacts in her other endeavors, and they return the favor. For example, she, Helms and Wilke got one another into the Mayor's Alliance for People with Disabilities, where they work hard to find jobs for the blind and those who live in wheelchairs. This came after she found both men their first jobs.

"I keep in touch with my people," Hartman said simply. "We just pull each other into each other's lives."

"She has more knowledge about this labor market than anybody in Southwest Florida," said Helms. "She is the single best resource I know of for employers."

"We have never regretted working with one of her referrals."

Wilke talks about how Hartman helped Home Depot find employees during the boom times of 2004 to 2006.

"We couldn't find enough help. She was right there for us," he said, a condition that was repeated recently when he needed nine professionals in a specialized field.

"She does what she says she'll do," Wilke said. "I don't know of a time she has ever disappointed me."

Wilke carries Hartman's phone number on his speed dial.

"If she calls at 7 p.m., I'll always answer for her," he said. "One time we were in a movie and my phone vibrated. I looked, saw it was Barbara and told my wife and kids I'd be right back," he recalled.

Helms has a similar take on Hartman's value to him.

"Once you have a friendship with her and a business friendship with her you sleep better at night," he said.

"If something is going on in the labor market or you know someone has a hardship, knowing Barbara is a phone call away is very comforting."

But what Helms calls "the warm argument" between himself and Wilke continues. Or does it?

Helms recalls that Hartman interviewed him for a human resources job at Sony and recommended that he be hired.

"She hired me. That proves she likes me best," he said.

"Don't tell Jim — but I know she likes him best," confessed Wilke.

TOURISM

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

Every community has its bread and butter.

Nashville is about country music. Las Vegas is the world's gambling capital. Each city has other stuff going on but sticks with what put them on the map.

For Lee County, that's tourism. Last year, the county rolled out a welcome mat for 4.8 million tourists, equivalent to the population of Colorado visiting the Fort Myers area. Tourists had an economic impact of \$3 billion. As community leaders eye strategies to diversify Southwest Florida's weak economy, tourism won't be cast into a secondary role.

"We talk about diversification, but let's keep in mind those base entities — tourism and construction," said John Albion, president of the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce. "We can't be too quick to abandon too much of that because it is our strength, it is our passion, our machine and it is our calling card when we talk about tourism."

Picture a young athlete, one who can throw the baseball hard but cannot hit a lick. He has two options: Quit the team, or spend long hours in the

LEE COUNTY VISITORS

January: 325,101
February: 471,758
March: 497,385
April: 434,671
May: 411,777
June: 457,954
July: 443,166
August: 342,933
September: 262,439
October: 350,381
November: 317,701
December (2007): 496,848

Total visitors for 12 prior months: 4,812,114 (December 2008 data is not yet available)

Source: Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau

batting cages to improve.

Some of Lee's competitors have upgraded skills.

While many areas of Florida, including Lee, have cashed in on pleasure tourism, Jacksonville is pursuing business tourism. It launched a branding campaign in November 2007 that dubs Northeast Florida as "America's Health Center." The campaign targets out-of-area patients seeking treatment, medical companies conducting research and medical conventions, according to Nancy Skaran, international administrator for Jacksonville's Mayo Clinic. In

ECONOMY

Continued from A1

geriatric research and CEO recruitment.

In developing those solutions, the newspaper convened panels of local experts and interviewed business owners, unemployed workers, retirees and Lee's movers and shakers. In all, ideas from more than 100 helped the reporting. Consensus was Lee still has a bright future, but the county must reinvent itself to avoid another crash.

"Florida is not a failed, Third World economy," said Michael McMullan, president and CEO of Bank of Florida Corp. "If you get down to ZIP code level, you've got vitality, you've got great business folks that are entrepreneurial and are looking for loans."

The bright side

For three years, doom and gloom has hovered over Lee County as its housing market and economy tumbled. The big question has been "How low will it go?"

Whenever Lee's economy picks up, be it months or years, the community will not be starting from scratch. Residents have access to one of America's newest airport terminals, postcard-perfect weather, low home prices and Florida's newest public university. Businesses have relocation or expansion options with made-to-order commercial buildings and vacant land at bargain-basement prices.

It's these assets that will ease Lee County's transition back to boom:

Transportation

Southwest Florida International Airport opened in May 1983, but the region outgrew its 17-gate airport.

A \$438 million terminal opened in September 2005 with 28 gates, but the 798,000-square-foot facility can expand to 65. It has a 12,000-foot runway; plans call for a second 9,100-foot runway in six years.

Even though some airlines cut flights or stopped flying altogether last year, the Fort Myers airport was among the nation's 50 busiest with 7.6 million passengers. It has 21 airlines with non-stop flights to 36 airports.

New industries, manufacturers and hotels have popped up near the airport, and a bioscience and technology research park is under development on airport property.

"As an airport, we have direct and secondary impacts on the community of almost \$3.6 billion a year, which supports about 64,000 jobs," said Bob Ball, executive director for the

Lee County Port Authority. "You'll hear often we are the economic engine of the community. While we are the engine, our oil and gas come from the businesses of the region."

On the ground, Interstate 75 is undergoing a \$431 million widening project through Lee and Collier counties. Cape Coral, Bonita Springs and Lee County governments have worked on easing the north-south and east-west commutes with new thoroughfares and wider roads.

With easier commutes, both on the ground and in the air, the Port Authority finds itself in a position where it can pursue additional domestic and international connections, or even additional cargo. The airport has capacity, the region has demand and the passengers have money to make expansion possible despite economic crisis.

"We are doing very aggressive communications with all of the airline schedule planners, with all of the airlines, letting them know about Southwest Florida, our statistics, our demographics of the region," Ball said. "We're in a pretty good situation because they're having a bad winter up North."

Weather

Look at today's weather forecast for Boston, Chicago and Minneapolis.

The sub-tropical climate in Southwest Florida brought Thomas Edison here. It brings 5 million tourists here annually. It brings golf tournaments, spring training teams, sandsculpting competitions and art events.

Companies involved in bioscience or pharmaceutical research, for example, can locate laboratories anywhere. Why not here?

The average high temperature in January is 75 degrees. In Boston, it's 36. In Chicago, it's 32.

In Minneapolis, it's 22 — that's the average high. Never in recorded history have our thermometers ever dipped as low.

Those numbers alone are why Southwest Florida is congested right now, in spite of the economy. Many seasonal residents are current or former corporate executives with disposable income.

"When it gets zero up there and the snow starts flying, they're going to come down here," said Cape Coral resident and Embark spokesman Steve Personette.

Housing

During the height of Southwest Florida's real estate boom, Lee County school officials considered building dormitories or apartments to house

2007, Mayo treated 96,000 patients, of which 30 percent came from outside the region.

"They stay at hotels, eat in restaurants, go to ocean-side resorts, play golf if they are able, go to the spa and make a vacation out of it," Skaran said.

Visit Jacksonville, the agency coordinating Northeast Florida's medical tourism push, booked 13 conventions in 2008 with 6,700 room nights, according to director of corporate communications Lyndsay Rossman. By comparison, medical conventions in the previous five years accounted for 10,261 room nights in Jacksonville.

In May, that city's tourism agency is flying in health care meeting planners, free of charge, to give executives a look at why Jacksonville is suited to handle their convention needs.

The Visitor & Convention Bureau in Lee County also rolls out the welcome mat for VIPs.

"We host meeting planners, travel agents, travel journalists from all over the world and tour operators," said agency communications director Nancy Hamilton. "We invite them here to experience the area and help them understand the area."

employees. In December 2005, the median single-family home price hit \$322,300, out of reach for thousands of teachers, firefighters, police officers and health care workers.

Prices have spiraled down since then, putting people like 26-year-old Janiris Caraballo right back into the market. In June, the Oasis Middle School teacher purchased a 3-bedroom, 2-bath Cape Coral home in foreclosure for \$104,000. The previous owners held an open house, selling everything from appliances and doors to the garage door opener and even toilet paper dispenser. Caraballo was OK with buying a fixer-upper.

"If it wasn't for this, the economy the way it is, I wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise," she said. "It opened the door for me to buy a home."

In November, the median home price in Lee dipped to \$106,100. December figures will be released Monday.

Not only are buyers getting good deals, but they're having their pick of the litter as more than 16,000 Lee homes are for sale. Mike Quaintance, president of the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce, believes the third or fourth quarter of 2009 will mark a new day.

"I feel that's when we'll be able to say we've turned the corner," he said.

Real estate

Homebuyers aren't the only ones making out good in the economic downturn. Stan Stouder, founding partner with CB Richard Ellis Fort Myers/Naples, said business owners are finding more empty facilities and vacant land in central areas, and at lower prices. During Southwest Florida's boom, he said, new commercial interests were forced to the outskirts. As companies went out of business, or landowners wanted to dump their holdings, the core of Lee County is back in play.

Those wanting land for future development still face lengthy zoning, permitting and construction processes. Still, Stouder said prices are so low developers can buy now and hold for future use, and make money once they do turn a shovel.

"Great profits aren't found by looking six months ahead," he said. "It's found by looking several years down the road."

State university

Florida Gulf Coast University opened in 1997 with 2,584 students, growing to 10,198 in the fall of 2008. It boasts 51 bachelor's degrees, 30 master's programs and one doctorate.

Last week, Lee's agency sent 10,000 mailings to meeting planners across the country. In March, it will host meeting planners for corporations and associations based in target markets of Boston and New York City.

Targeting business travelers is one solution to diversifying Lee's tourism industry, which employs one in every five workers locally. But Lee's biggest asset remain the beach, a destination 94 percent of tourists visited in November.

Before Lee can start any sort of specific business tourism, like Jacksonville does with medicine, Fort Myers resident Donald Nicholson said Southwest Florida leaders needs to agree on a major draw, then promote it nationally. It could be eco-tourism at Babcock Ranch, golf vacations, boating, state parks or a niche within medicine. Nicholson said he's grown tired of talk in his 42 years here.

"We don't seem to be able to find the right star to jump on, to get started," Nicholson said. "The county and cities need to come together to promote the area, and not just the beaches."

"It's a wonderful town to live in, but there's a lot of work to do."

FGCU's five-year plan, contingent upon funding, includes new bachelor's degrees in marine science, economics, journalism, graphic design, software engineering and real estate. The university also wants to add master's programs in environmental studies, engineering, mathematics and music education, as well as a doctorate in education.

Faculty are keeping with FGCU's environmentally friendly theme, researching green technologies and solar energy production through a solar farm being installed on campus.

Edison State College, Ave Maria University, Hodges University and Southwest Florida College reported record enrollments in the fall, adding programs in response to demand.

FGCU released a study in November estimating the university had a \$389 million economic impact on Southwest Florida last year, a figure that will remain high despite the shaken economy.

"We can provide a buffer for this region," President Wilson Bradshaw said. "We have not had layoffs, and we're still building. We spent \$31 million on construction last year, and \$17 million this year."

Reinventing Lee

Lee County isn't the first community that's been forced into a Plan B. Downtrodden regions elsewhere have reinvented themselves out of necessity.

Pensacola, which has a Naval air station, routinely was a target when the military was closing bases. After losing several hundred military jobs five years ago, the community not only fought to keep its military presence, but landed a \$150 million Air Force training center and hangar. That's why the loss of 1,000 non-military jobs in November and December hasn't created panic.

"They know almost all of the job cuts are listed as temporary," said Charles Wood, senior vice president for economic development with the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce. "There is a comfort factor in the diversity of our local economy."

America of yesteryear thrived on the backs of entrepreneurs, great inventors like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone, a trio that spent their winters in Fort Myers. McMullan, of Bank of Florida Corp., is confident the same types of individuals are living in Lee County and will help turn the tide.

"Our economy was built from resilience, tenacity and an entrepreneurial mindset," he said. "Those folks are going to be the ones who start pulling us out of this."



news-press.com Check out photo galleries from featured weekend events.

BUSINESS MONDAY | B10

The residents are now in charge at Gulf Harbour Country Club.

PLAYING FOR A TEAMMATE | C1

East Lee High soccer team giving all for player in semi-coma.



BONITA NEWS-PRESS

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2009 | PUBLISHED SINCE 1884

BONITA 50¢

Retail centers still sinking

Lee County stores wondering when we'll hit bottom

BY DICK HOGAN
dhogan@news-press.com

Anchored by a SuperTarget, the shopping center at Pine Island and Pondella roads in Cape Coral has been a bustling hub of retailers and restaurants since it opened in 2007.

Across the street, it's a differ-

ent story. The newer center, opened in 2008, saw its Linens n' Things go out of business last year and now the Circuit City's windows are plastered with going-out-of-business signs.

What a difference a year makes.

Lee County's once-thriving retail sector is finally seeing the

effects of over-building, plus a wobbly local economy, a slower pace of population increase and national financial woes.

"I don't want to be gloom and doom, but I don't think we're at the bottom yet," Colliers Arnold Southwest Florida commercial real estate agent Karen Johnson-Crowther said. "I think we'll see

more store closings through 2009."

National retail analyst Britt Beemer of Charleston, S.C.-based America's Research Group said that will be happening around the country.

"You'll be seeing many," he said, with Sears/Kmart one of the most vulnerable. "We're

watching the single biggest retail contraction and pullback in our lifetimes."

People don't have money to spend shopping and that trend won't turn around for a year and a half, Beemer said. "We won't see any pickup in retail spending until the summer of 2010."

With that happening, plus the oversupply of retail space available

See **RETAIL** A4

Bone marrow connects two lives

Fort Myers man saved by L.A. woman

BY DAYNA HARPSTER
dharpster@news-press.com

Jaciel Valdivias of Fort Myers and Victoria Namkung of Los Angeles were both 29 in late 2005. But Valdivias, a line cook for Carrabba's and a native of Mexico, and Namkung, a fashion journalist and daughter of a Jewish Irish mother and a Korean father, were otherwise worlds apart.

They were about to realize you don't choose your family. Once in a while, the National Bone Marrow Donor Program makes surprising choices for you.

It's one of the rare explanations for why a 31-year-old Mexican man now has a 31-year-old Korean, Irish and Jewish "sister" in Los Angeles.

Two years ago today, Namkung saved Valdivias' life by donating peripheral blood stem cells that treated his acute myelogenous leukemia.

Registry rules didn't allow contact between donor and recipient for a year. So life went on, and Valdivias assumed his donor was Latin American; Namkung assumed her recipient was Asian.

See **DONOR** A4

news-press.com/
galleries

Photo gallery: Fort Myers man receives gift of life

Lenders fight rule changes

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most congressional Democrats say the quickest way to save homeowners such as Troy Butler of Saginaw, Mich., is to let them declare bankruptcy and allow judges to dictate new mortgage terms.

Easy, except the lenders that would absorb the pain — and lose control of any deals to ease the terms — do not want to get dragged into Bankruptcy Court by millions of overextended borrowers. In Lee County alone, an estimated 30,000 properties already are in foreclosure.

Butler, 40, is a laid-off General Motors worker who

See **BANKRUPTCY** A4

RESEARCH ROCKETS: SCIENTISTS NAB BIRDS WITH NET



PHOTOS BY VALERIE ROCHE/THE NEWS-PRESS

Surrounded by inquisitive scientists, a tagged wood stork sits in a cage to recover from capture myopathy, a condition of increased body temperature and lactic acid buildup. After being released, the wood stork flew off.

Wood storks captured in Corkscrew Swamp

Endangered bird tagging takes patience — and ordnance

BY KEVIN LOLLAR
klollar@news-press.com

Slowly and cautiously, the wood stork flared its black and white wings and settled into a shallow pond Thursday at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Collier County.

Before the bird could start feeding, an explosion like the boom of a Civil War cannon shattered the sanctuary's stillness.

Four cast-iron rockets dragged a 40-by-60-foot net across the pond to capture the stork. Half a dozen researchers swarmed from camouflaged hunting blinds and sprinted through muck and water to begin doing science that might some day influence how the endangered species is managed. Specifically, the wet and muddy researchers put a satellite transmitter on the bird with which they can track its movements to learn more about the species' habits.

"This work is 15 minutes of excitement surrounded by endless hours of boredom," said research coordinator Larry Bryan of the University of Georgia.

See **WOOD STORKS** A2
Also see bird watchers help Florida **B7**



Rena Borkataria, a University of Florida doctoral candidate, takes a captured wood stork to be tagged and fitted with a satellite transmitter at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Collier County.

MORE ABOUT WOOD STORKS

Internet wood stork tracking

To see movements of satellite-tagged wood storks and other species, go to seaturtle.org and click on "Satellite tracking."

Wood stork facts

Scientific name: Mycteria americana
Other common names: Flinthead, ironhead, wood ibis
Status: Endangered

news-press.com/galleries

More photos: Get a closer look at the wood stork.



Green projects a growth industry

Initiatives like FGCU's solar field have potential

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

Green was the buzzword of 2008.

Everybody talked about going green: buying hybrid vehicles, installing solar panels and using cloth shopping bags instead of paper or plastic.

Although the bad economy derailed many green initiatives, last year showed that many people and companies are willing to go green when the price is right.

"There are so many ways to be green in our area," said Dave Russ, executive vice president for BioGreen, an organic, environmentally safe fertilizer with its Florida headquarters in Fort Myers. "Our county should be a leader in solar and wind, and we have the perfect breeze here. Put out some windmills and the cattle could graze around them."

This week, The News-Press is exploring five strategies to aid Lee County's future economy. Solution No. 1 is tapping into the growing interest of green energy and green technologies.

Green is the biotech of a decade ago. It's all the rage.

It's also just getting started. Case in point: Florida Gulf Coast University will need thousands of solar panels for its 2 megawatt solar farm on campus. The Sunshine State, however, does not have any companies that manufacture solar cells, according to Sherry Shields, assistant director of communications for the Florida Solar Energy

See **ECONOMY** A4
Also see Have an idea? **A4**

ABOUT THE SERIES

This week, The News-Press is exploring five solutions that can diversify Lee County and create a more stable economy. Here is the schedule of stories:

Today: Green technology
Tuesday: International trade and travel
Wednesday: Medical research
Thursday: Geriatric research
Friday: CEO recruitment

News Digest

Laughter to live

107-year-old resident at Bonita's Hope Hospice House says laughing has kept her going. **Page D1.**



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RETAIL

Continued from A1

in Lee County, it can be tough going for local owners.

“The retail market is soft,” acknowledged Dale Hafele, the Fort Myers-based president of the Florida division of North American Properties, which developed the SuperTarget and Circuit City-anchored shopping centers on Pine Island Road.

But he’s encouraged by the recent explosion in the number of people buying houses here, particularly in Cape Coral.

“We’re closer to having an end user living in those homes rather than someone just speculating,” Hafele said. “It’s one step closer to having someone living there who’s going to shop at one of our centers and it gets Lee County

back to affordability again.”

In the meantime, he said, there’s little to do but wait.

“I don’t think anything’s going to get developed in the near future (on Pine Island Road) just because there’s no lenders out there,” he said, noting that although many banks have received federal bailout money they’re not financing construction. “As we all know, they’re not doing that. There’s no money out there.”

For owners, said Johnson-Crowther, that means that “the smart tenants are the ones who are saying, ‘Wait a minute, maybe I can relocate to a new facility that’s better for less money.’”

But not all retail is equal, with locations in central, well traveled spots better able to compete.

In the North American center where Linens n’ Things used to

operate, for example, “We’re in the process of replacing Linens with Bed Bath & Beyond, a bigger, stronger retailer,” Hafele said.

Other areas are more problematic, experts say.

Estero, for example, in the area near the Coconut Point Mall, there are centers sitting empty because the building of retail “got way ahead of the market” as developers failed to anticipate the collapse of the housing boom in late 2005, said Gary Tasman, executive director of Cushman & Wakefield of Florida.

Occasionally, however, even now, a small retailer will catch a break.

Matt Ponzio, for example, said it will be “very welcome” to have a Publix grocery store open next month in the shopping center at San Carlos Boulevard and Summerlin Road in south Fort Myers

where he’s owned the UPS store for five years.

The 53,000-square-foot Publix will open Feb. 5 with a pharmacy and a Publix liquor store, Publix spokeswoman Shannon Patten said. The store is one of 49 purchased in June by Publix from Albertsons.

Publix isn’t coming a moment too soon, Ponzio said. “Of course, having your major anchor leave is huge just for traffic — we didn’t have people coming past our store each day.”

Other retailers are less worried about short-term fluctuations in the economy and surrounding businesses.

Paul Campbell, for example, owns Campbell’s Ornamental Concrete just east of the SuperTarget on Pine Island Road. His father, Mason Campbell, started the business in 1972 on Coronado

Boulevard in Cape Coral and moved to the current location 19 years ago when Pine Island Road was a two-lane highway.

Since the area became a retail mecca, Paul Campbell said, “I get a lot more people coming by. The shopping center added a turn lane and now people actually have a way to slow down and turn.”

North American also takes the long view, Hafele said.

The dearth of financing for new construction isn’t, over the long term, a bad thing for owners of centers like the one with Circuit City, he said.

Commercial projects take years to execute, Hafele said, and “It’s going to be a long time before new centers are built. So our competition, especially new competition, will be nonexistent until the banks come around to lending again.”



VALERIE ROCHE/ THE NEWS-PRESS



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Jaciél Valdivias, a line cook at Carrabba’s, is alive today because of a bone marrow donation. Two years after his transplant he is back to work.

At left, Valdivias and Victoria Namkung of Los Angeles, recipient and donor, meet in Miami two years after the operation that saved Valdivias’ life.

DONOR

Continued from A1

They were reasonable conclusions. “They (the registry) give you this book as a thank you,” Namkung said earlier this month by phone. “It’s a story of all these matches, and in every story it’s the same ethnic group.”

So they knew each other only by assigned numbers — and erroneous assumptions. At the eight-month mark, Valdivias sent Namkung a card that said, “Thank you for saving my life.”

Then the year passed and Valdivias made a call.

“I was overwhelmed as I have waited for this call for a year,” Namkung wrote in an e-mail to family and friends. “It was emotional and amazing. He... says that we are now ‘blood for life.’”

Valdivias admitted being surprised when he saw a picture of Namkung. But not for long. “Everybody’s the same. A different face, maybe, but the same. She’s my sister.”

“I certainly consider him a relative,” Namkung said. “It’s a great thing we’ll have for the rest of our lives.”

GIFT OF LIFE

Namkung was Christmas shopping in December 2005 in Beverly Hills when she got a call from the registry that she was a tissue-type match for someone.

“I felt like I won the lottery,” Namkung said.

Meanwhile, Valdivias believed he was dying and felt like it. He knew he needed a peripheral stem cell transplant. No match could be found in his family, but the bone marrow registry was testing a couple of people who were preliminary matches.

One was Namkung, who had registered in 1995. She had heard about a little girl of Korean and Irish ancestry who had leukemia. But despite their unusual shared heritage, Namkung was not a match.

So she had moved on with her life, writing for Style and USA Today, covering events such as the Golden Globes.

Meanwhile in Fort Myers, the 25-pound baskets of chicken Valdivias carried at Carrabba’s felt heavier. He would often come home from work and fall asleep in his clothes, said his spouse, Maria Avila. He was out of breath; carrying a 24-pack of bottled water into their house in Pine Manor was exhausting.

Avila took Valdivias to the doctor she sees for her diabetes. Another doctor confirmed with tests Valdivias had acute myelogenous leukemia.

That was just two months after his supervisor convinced him to buy health insurance through Carrabba’s. Avila had been telling him it was time to go to a dentist for teeth cleaning, anyway.

“Everybody over there has insurance now,” Valdivias said. “They saw what happened to me.”

BONE MARROW AND STEM CELL DONATION

There are two ways to donate, said Pam Jeffers of the National Bone Marrow Program. Either bone marrow is harvested for transplant or peripheral stem cells are transfused. Both are used to treat leukemia. Bone marrow donation is done under anesthesia. Some liquid marrow inside the bone is removed with hollow needles, and the donor’s body makes more over the next few weeks. The donor may feel tired and sore in the lower back for a couple of days.

A peripheral blood stem cell donation is a nonsurgical, outpatient procedure in which blood is taken from one arm, passed through a centrifugal machine that collects the cells necessary for transplantation, then returns the blood to the donor through the other arm. Any nausea, bone or muscle pain or fatigue disappears shortly after donating.

Victoria Namkung, who recently donated stem cells to Fort Myers resident Jaciél Valdivias, said she could handle the pain after donation with extra-strength Tylenol.

Of those who register, only about 1 in 200 will go on to donate. Of them, 70 percent donate stem cells; 30 percent bone marrow.

Only 30 percent of donations come from family. The rest are found through unrelated donors.

To register — which normally involves a kit sent to your home with instructions for painlessly swabbing cells from inside your cheek — go to marrow.org.

Chemotherapy darkened his skin, blistered his mouth, swelled his lips and his face, and almost killed him.

That was rather the point.

All of the diseased bone marrow had to be destroyed so Valdivias could start anew. That’s what doctors at the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa did during Valdivias’ 30 days in the hospital. No matter how bad it got, he said, “I just remember that the next day it will be over. And I was praying all the time.”

FAMILY FORMED

On Jan. 23 and 24, 2006, at UCLA Medical Center, Namkung donated stem cells.

“Everyone asks, ‘Did it hurt?’” Namkung said. “No. But the real question is, ‘Did he live?’”

She got to see for herself the day before Thanksgiving last year, when donor and recipient met in Miami.

Valdivias and Avila gave Namkung a statue of an angel.

Namkung learned that Valdivias was a fan of Jackie Chan. A few weeks later, an autographed photo of Chan arrived addressed to Valdivias.

They are making plans for their extended families to meet.

This relationship is not unusual, said Pam Jeffers of the National Bone Marrow Donor Program. “It’s like a new definition of a blended family.”

Although everyone hopes and prays it’s unnecessary, Namkung remains the match who saved Valdivias once — and promises she would do it again.

ECONOMY

Continued from A1

Center in Cocoa.

Instead, about 14,000 solar panels will be trucked into Florida for FGCU’s project.

One company has noticed that business opportunity. Advanced Solar Photonics is building a factory in Lake Mary, north of Orlando, that will be operational next fall. The solar market is entirely theirs, at least until it has some competition.

“You can have a good business model that also helps the environment,” said Edgardo Rodriguez, vice president of sales and marketing. “It’s the best of both worlds.”

In addition to its solar project, FGCU hopes to be on the cutting edge with its new Green Technology Research Group. The university won a \$1.5 million Department of Defense grant to develop technology that combats biological weapons. Part of that research includes a chemical that destroys germs when activated by ultraviolet lights. It’s considered a green project because it has no negative effects on the environment. Faculty also are researching algae to see if it can be converted into biodiesel fuel.

“We’re not going to be the only people in the game,” said chemistry professor Jose Barreto, who leads the research group. “Everybody is trying to develop green technologies. If we don’t do it, someone else will, and we’ll be left behind.”

President Obama’s New Energy for America plan calls for a \$150 billion investment into green technologies, creating 5 million new jobs. Barreto said FGCU and Southwest Florida can be players in developing green technology, but he is realistic about the region’s chances of being the Silicon Valley of green research.

“It’s grandiose to say we’ll be the epicenter of green technology, but we have to at least be



MARC BEAUDIN/THE NEWS-PRESS

FGCU biotechnology student Jessica Strnad works on a new chemical process to make photocatalysts at a Green Technologies Research Group project in a lab at the university.

HAVE AN IDEA?

Do you have ideas for diversifying Lee County’s economy? What fields should the region target? Send your suggestions or ideas to economy@news-press.com.

news-press.com/economy

Photo gallery: Researching green technologies at FGCU

Multimedia: Watch a special presentation about ideas that will help Lee County in the effort to improve the economic outlook.

participants, or we’ll just be a backwater to everyone else,” Barreto said.

Just east of Southwest Florida’s populated coastline, the \$11 billion Everglades restoration project is under way. Janet Watermeier, Lee County’s former economic development director and president of Watermeier Property Services, said there’s no reason the area cannot capitalize on the thousands of workers who will carry out that project.

“They will be located on one coast or the other coast,” Watermeier said. “I don’t see why Southwest Florida couldn’t capture the environmental restoration people that come with that.”

“You can have a good business model that also helps the environment.”
— Edgardo Rodriguez, vice president of sales and marketing at Advanced Solar Photonics

BANKRUPTCY

Continued from A1

has filed for bankruptcy. But the Bankruptcy Court has no authority to change the terms of his \$90,000-plus mortgage that is more than double the value of his home.

A bill to give judges authority to alter loan terms for primary residences may be the quickest way to arrest the housing market’s collapse. Most Democrats in the House and Senate support that plan. President Obama told Democratic leaders Friday he also backs it.

But 10 groups representing the lending industry and other businesses are fighting back fiercely. Several have engaged portions of their lobbying machines to stop the legislation. The groups spent \$83 million in lobbying on multiple issues in 2008, a figure that shows the power of the banking and investing industry and their business supporters.

One Democratic backer of the bankruptcy proposal, Rep. Maxine Waters of California, said the banking industry “has owned this Congress far too long.”

Butler, the GM worker, and an industry lobbyist see things much differently.

“I’m living from day to day, hoping to make it through the day. I worry about my family, where we’re going to live, how we’ll survive,” said, Butler, who

has a disabled wife and two children, ages 15 and 11.

The chief lobbyist for the Mortgage Bankers Association, Steve O’Connor, said new homebuyers would end up paying higher interest and bigger down payments if lenders are saddled with the risk that a judge could change mortgage terms.

“We’re going to defend the industry (against) bad public policy,” O’Connor said.

The association’s 23-member government affairs team is trying to persuade lawmakers to kill the bankruptcy legislation. The team includes six lobbyists and nine policy experts who double as lobbyists, said O’Connor, senior vice president of government affairs.

The bankruptcy solution would not cost taxpayers money, as would mortgage modification programs that could become part of the government’s huge economic bailout package. But it certainly would harm the bottom line for lenders and investors holding mortgages.

The lending industry has voluntary programs in place to change mortgage terms. But Butler’s lawyer, Peter Bagley, said it was a nightmare trying to contact his client’s lender.

First, he was told the application for a loan modification would take at least 30 days to process. Bagley then called someone with authority to stop any sale of the home, but only received voice messages that

the mailbox was full. The application never arrived.

The key to passage of the bankruptcy bill is the Senate, where Democrats need 60 votes to stop a possible filibuster. Ten Democrats — all still in the Senate — would not back the plan in a vote a year ago.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the chief Senate sponsor of the bill, said Obama persuaded him in a White House meeting Friday to remove the bankruptcy proposal from an economic recovery package — to ensure it doesn’t jeopardize the stimulus bill. But Obama pledged his support for the bankruptcy solution, Durbin said.

Obama said he would work with Durbin to attach the proposal to other “must pass” legislation — with the hope that supporters of the overall bill would not vote against it because of the bankruptcy provisions.

Of the 10 organizations that asked the House Judiciary Committee to oppose the bill, the largest is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It spent \$57.9 million on lobbying in 2008, according to the Center For Responsive Politics, an organization that tracks lobbying expenditures and political donations.

The Mortgage Bankers Association, which represents 2,400 member companies in the real estate property industry, spent \$3.8 million and the American Bankers Association totaled \$6.8 million.

“I’m living from day to day, hoping to make it through the day. I worry about my family, where we’re going to live, how we’ll survive.”

— Troy Butler of Saginaw, Mich.



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SMALL-TOWN HEROES | C1

Key players go from tiny Fla. places to a big Tampa stage.

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Serving tomatoes and broccoli together packs a powerful punch.



BONITA NEWS-PRESS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2009 | PUBLISHED SINCE 1884

BONITA 50¢

Home sales rise dramatically

December numbers go up 146 percent from year ago

BY TIM ENGSTROM
tengstrom@news-press.com

Buyers from across the nation and around the world snapped up bargain-priced homes in Lee County in December, pushing sales up 146 percent from a year ago. Realtors assisted in the selling of 1,064 homes in Lee in December — up from 432 in December 2007 —

according to the Florida Association of Realtors. Last month, 600 existing homes were sold. The median sales price fell 50 percent to \$106,900, from \$215,200 in December 2007. The median price was essentially flat from November, up about \$800. For the year, 8,217 existing homes sold in Lee, up 43 percent from the 5,753 in 2007. The median price was \$158,200, down 38 percent from \$254,700 in 2007. “For the past six months, it seems like every month has been better

than the last,” said Valerie Busic, a Realtor with Busic, Chesser & Associates. Busic said her real estate team has helped buyers from across the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Germany and Finland. “Right now, prices are at their lowest and people are taking advantage of that,” Busic said. Buyer Mike Dascoli, 23, of East Amherst, N.Y., recently worked with Busic to buy a foreclosed home in northeast Cape Coral as an investment property. Dascoli paid \$83,000

for a home that sold for \$240,600 a little more than three years ago. “I’ve got it rented out and it’s doing well,” Dascoli said. “I will probably turn a little cash flow on it and when the market turns around, even if it is five years from now, I should be in good shape.” Busic said foreclosed homes continue to dominate the market and that’s why prices are staying low. See **HOMES A3** Also see prices, sales of existing homes down **A3**

1,064 Number of Lee County homes that were sold by Realtors in December. That’s up 146 percent from the 432 sold in December 2007.

\$106,900 Median sales price for homes sold in Lee County, down 50 percent from \$215,200 in December 2007.

Bonita Utilities considers solar field

But project may lead to development on land

BY MARK S. KRZOS
mkrzos@news-press.com

Bonita Springs Utilities is considering building a solar farm on land it owns in an environmentally sensitive area in east Bonita Springs. BSU has formed a committee to examine the feasibility of such a plan, said Fred Partin, BSU’s executive director. “It’s one of the things we’re looking at independently of the city,” Partin said. “We’re looking at costs and we’re looking to see if it would be worth the investment. ... We are talking to some manufacturers. It’s something that needs to be cost effective.” A solar farm produces energy with the help of solar panels. The 325 acres BSU owns is in the Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource Area, a 83,000-acre swath of land in southeastern Lee County that’s vital to the county’s future water supply. BSU officials have been lobbying the city of Bonita Springs to allow more houses in the area. “The reality is that to upgrade that area, you have to put in the infrastructure,” said Partin, noting that a piecemeal approach to development in portions of the DR/GR is not the way to go. “The only way it makes sense is to put in enough (housing) units to justify those improvements.”

See **SOLAR A2**

News Digest

Senate OKs delay for digital TV switch

The U.S. Senate voted to delay next month’s transition to digital television until June because too many viewers won’t be ready for the switch. **NATION & WORLD, A4**

Woman reportedly taught kids to steal

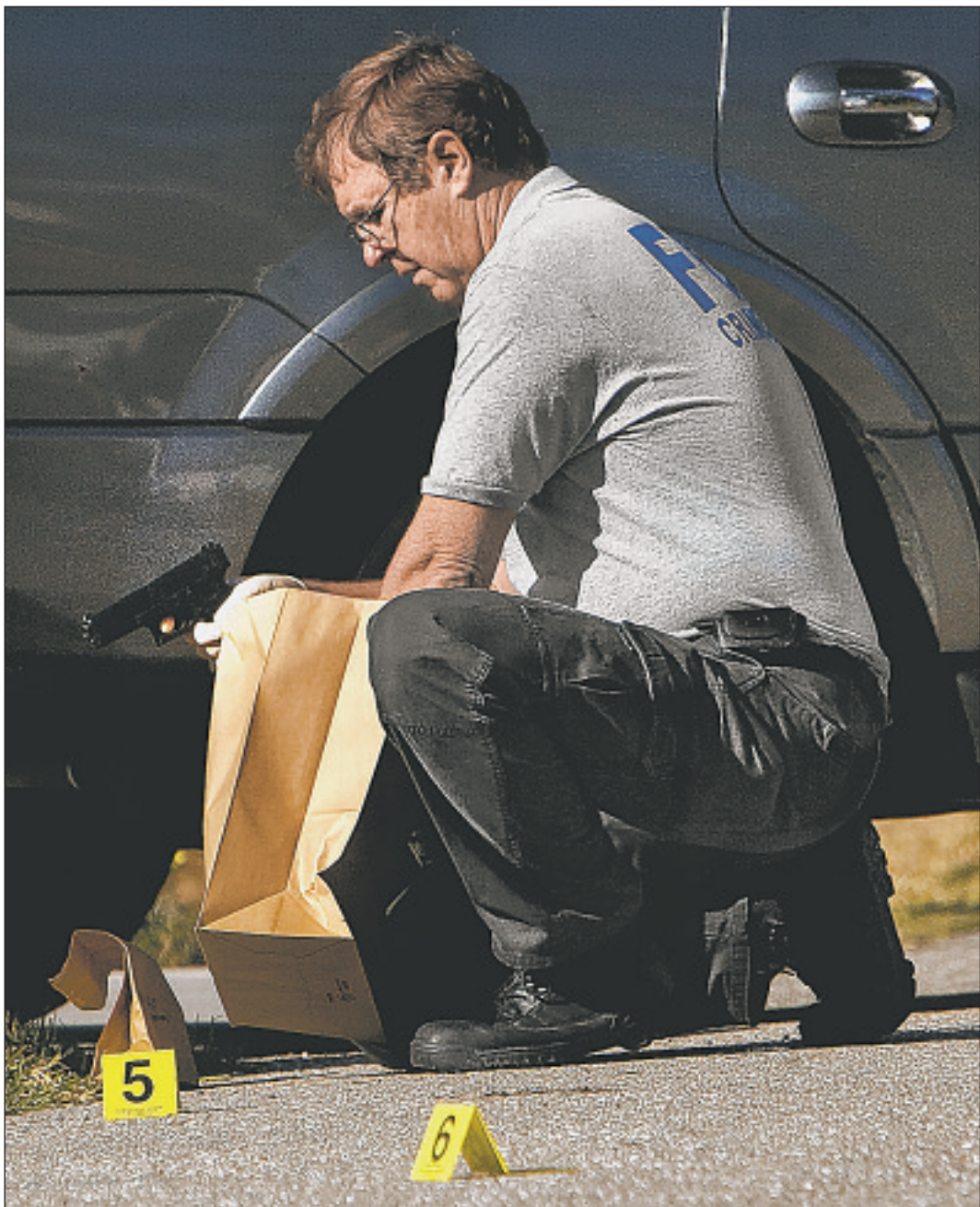
A Lehigh Acres woman is arrested after allegedly teaching children to shoplift. **LOCAL & STATE, B2**

CORRECTION

Jaciel Valdivias of Fort Myers received a peripheral stem cell transplant in January 2007. The time frame was incorrect in a story on Monday’s front page.

The Publix supermarket opening Feb. 5 at San Carlos Boulevard and Summerlin Road in south Fort Myers will not have a pharmacy. A story on Monday’s front page was incorrect.

FATAL SHOWDOWN: THE END OF A CAREER CRIMINAL



ANDREW WEST/THE NEWS-PRESS

A Florida Department of Law Enforcement official takes a gun as evidence Monday at the scene of a fatal shooting involving federal agents. A gun reported stolen by a Lee County corrections officer was found near Arthur Coleman, who was killed by agents.

Police shoot fugitive to death

Shot also fired at other car with 2 babies inside

BY RACHEL MYERS
rmyers@news-press.com

If it had gone according to Arthur Coleman’s plan Monday, he would have eluded law enforcement for the fourth time in a month. But that strategy became undone after the 33-year-old Coleman struck a federal agent while trying to flee in a stolen car. Two agents opened fire,

fatally wounding him. At Coleman’s side, investigators later discovered a gun reported stolen a month earlier from a corrections deputy. As flashes from gunshots cut through the early morning darkness, Coleman’s girlfriend, Kevondra Marion, 21, was driving another car with her two babies in the back seat. She nearly ran over a Fort Myers police officer, who in turn fired a single shot at the hood of

See **SHOOTING A3** Also see guns **A3**



COLEMAN
Struck officer with stolen car



MARION
Arrested for assault

news-press.com/crime
Photo gallery: See images from the scene.
Video: Law enforcement investigate fatal shooting.



SW Fla. location is asset, curse

Agencies seek chances to expand commerce

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

A knock against Southwest Florida’s emergence as a national force is that we’re off the radar, figuratively and geographically. Yet area business leaders say we could be a bustling international hub for trade and tourism. That tucked-away location, they say, can be an asset. Fort Myers has America’s closest major airport to Cancun and is well-aligned for direct flights to Central and South America. Trade with all of the Caribbean could be developed. Consider these facts: • Lee County’s fastest-growing demographic is Hispanic people, now 16.1 percent of Lee residents, according to the U.S. Census. • Southwest Florida is due north of the Panama Canal, where a \$5 billion widening is expected to create a pipeline of trade between Asia, America and Europe. This week, The News-Press is outlining five strategies to improve Lee County’s economic bottom line. Solution No. 2 is tapping into Latin America and Europe for trade and tourism. Southwest Florida’s manufacturing base is small, and the region relies on products from elsewhere to sustain itself.

See **ECONOMY A2**

ABOUT THE SERIES

This week, The News-Press is exploring five solutions that can diversify Lee County and create a more stable economy. Here is the schedule of stories:
Monday: Green technology
Today: International trade and travel
Wednesday: Medical research
Thursday: Geriatric research
Friday: CEO recruitment

Total of 33,000 people lose their job in one day

The News-Press wire services

ST. LOUIS — The job cuts came heavily Monday — bad news from some of the big names of American commerce. Caterpillar. Pfizer. The Home Depot. Sprint Nextel. General Motors. Texas Instruments. When it was done, about 33,000 more people faced unemployment, soon to be pitched into the worst job market in a quarter-century and an economy that seems to get gloomier by the week. Nowadays, workers from

cashiers to software engineers are getting pink slips in a market that doesn’t discriminate. More than a half-million jobs were cut in each of the past two months nationwide, and January is on a similar pace. “Businesses are cutting jobs at a rapid pace,” said Sara Johnson, an economist with IHS Global Insight. “They’re reacting perhaps more quickly than in the past, anticipating that this will be a deep and lengthy recession, so there’s less incentive to ride it out by holding onto their workers.

“Clearly, the labor markets will get worse before they get better,” she said. The unemployment rate, now at a 16-year high of 7.2 percent, could hit 10 percent later this year or early next year, under some analysts’ projections. Caterpillar Inc., the world’s largest maker of mining and construction equipment, disclosed 5,000 new layoffs of white-collar workers, which will occur globally by the end of March. Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc., and Sprint Nextel Corp., the

country’s third-largest wireless provider, said they each will slash 8,000 jobs. Home Depot Inc., the biggest home improvement retailer in the U.S., will get rid of 7,000 jobs, and General Motors Corp. said it will cut 2,000 jobs at plants in Michigan and Ohio because of slow sales. Texas Instruments Inc., which makes chips for cell phones and other gadgets, will cut 3,400 jobs due to slumping demand. Also see Home Depot **B9**



From the cover

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If you see an error in The News-Press contact Sheldon Zoldan, 335-0560 or szoldan@news-press.com. Corrections appear on the first page of the section in which the error was made.

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SOLAR

Continued from A1

BSU is in the exploratory stage, so how much space a solar farm would take up — and what would become of the remaining land — has yet to be determined.

Current rules allow for only one house per 10 acres in the DR/GR.

But a comprehensive study showed that not all of that property is vital and

could be opened up for housing or other uses.

Bonita Councilman Richard Ferreira is pushing to have solar farms become one of the possible uses for development in the DR/GR. He said that while the study shows that as many as five homes could be built for every 10 acres, the city isn't sure if it wants to allow for more homes.

"I think BSU would like to see more than that so that they could make it feasible to run water and

sewer lines out there," Ferreira said. "So, when I met with them, I asked them about solar energy. With the 300 acres they have out there, they could use solar energy to reduce the cost of running pumps and removing salt from its reverse osmosis plant.

"By way of reference, 5 acres of solar (equipment) usually generates about 1 megawatt of energy," Ferreira said. "That will run a lot of pumps. With the sunshine we have, we're wast-

ing solar potential. This could result in tremendous savings in costs both monetarily and environmentally."

Bonita Springs Assistant City Manager Barbara Barnes-Buchanan said a solar farm "could be included" among the potential uses for that land and expects a full discussion on it following the completion of a sheet flow study of DR/GR later this spring.

William Heckenstaller,

president of Gulf City Solar — a Bonita Springs firm that installs solar panels to a variety of things ranging from golf carts and generators to water pumps, built a solar farm in South Africa four years ago.

"It does nothing other than catch water," he said of the farm. We spread it out over 10 acres. It's still running and we haven't heard one complaint ... Now, they're thinking of adding natural gas pumps to it."

CELEBRITY BUZZ

Plies hosts several Super Bowl events

Fort Myers rapper Plies is celebrating the Super Bowl in typical "goon" fashion: a big yacht party, a concert and, oh, yes, strip-
p e r
Olympics. "Plies Week" kicked off Monday night with the stripper show at the Tampa Live nightclub. According to Plies Web site, the show features dancers competing for the gold medal in exotic dancing and the title "Baddest Broad of the Bay."

That's just a start. Leading up to Sunday's football game in Tampa, the self-styled goon is holding publicity events such as a fundraising party on a yacht, an industry party hosted by Plies and the 2010 "Bust It Baby" calendar models, and a Goon & Goonette bash.

The whole thing culminates Saturday with a car-and-bike show at Tampa's Hip Hop Soda Shop, plus a concert by Plies. The rapper plans to shoot a video for his song "Plenty Money," according to his Web site.

Plies couldn't be reached for comment. It's unclear how many of the events he'll be attending.

The Fort Myers native

released his album "Da REAList" in December.

For more information, go to Plies' Web site at pliesworld.com.

'Thriller' planned for B'way stage

NEW YORK — "Thriller" a Broadway musical?

Producer James L. Nederlander says he has acquired the rights for a stage version of Michael Jackson's iconic music-video spoof of horror films. The show will include songs from two of the pop king's best-selling albums, "Thriller" and "Off the Wall."

"The Nederlanders and Michael Jackson represent live theater and musical excellence, so let the music begin," Tohme Tohme, a spokesman for Jackson, said Monday.

No word yet on what songs will be included.

Roddenberrys boldly go to space

LOS ANGELES — The creator of "Star Trek" and his wife will spend eternity together in space.

Celestis Inc., a company that specializes in "memorial spaceflights," said Monday that it will ship the remains of Gene Roddenberry and Majel Barrett Roddenberry into space next year.

The couple's cremated remains will be sealed into specially made capsules designed to withstand the rigors of space travel.

A rocket-launched spacecraft will carry the capsules, along with digitized tributes from fans.

— From staff and wire reports

CELEBRITY BIRTHDAYS

Singer Bobby "Blue" Bland is 79. Actor James Cromwell ("Babe") is 69. Drummer Nick Mason of Pink Floyd is 64. Dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov is 61. Country singer Cheryl White of The Whites is 54. Actress Mimi Rogers is 53. TV commentator Keith Olbermann is 50. Actress Bridget Fonda is 45. Actor Alan Cumming ("Spy Kids") is 44. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 41.

HOMES

Continued from A1

Realtor Sheldon Beck with Amerivest Realty in Fort Myers said the brisk pace in December is notable because the month is typically a little slow due to the holidays.

"This year, there was no pause. I was working with people right through the Christmas holidays," Beck said.

Buyers come mostly from the Midwest, Northeast and Europe, Beck said.

Gary Bottari, a Realtor with Re/Max Downtown, said the sales numbers could be higher, but second-home and investment buyers are still struggling to get credit from banks.

"If you are an owner-occupied buyer, you have a good shot of getting financing at a good rate," he said. "If you are a second-home or investment buyer, it is challenging."

Bottari helped second-home buyer Nick Capaccio of Chicago find a condo at Tarpon Point.

"Anything and everything is in that market right now," Capaccio said.

Condominium sales in December increased 46 percent to 212, up from 145 in

Existing home sales

Lee County

Realtor sales	DECEMBER 2008	DECEMBER 2007	PERCENT CHANGE
Single-family homes	1,064	432	▲146%
Condominiums	212	107	▲98%

Median sales price	DECEMBER 2008	DECEMBER 2007	PERCENT CHANGE
Single-family homes	\$106,900	\$215,200	▼-50%
Condominiums	\$147,000	\$192,200	▼-24%

SOURCE: FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS

THE NEWS-PRESS

December 2007. The median condo price also fell to \$147,000, down 24 percent since December 2007.

For the year, 2,011 existing condos sold in Lee, up 19 percent from the 1,684 in 2007. The median price was \$192,900, down 18 percent from \$234,700 in 2007.

Collier County numbers are included in a statewide report.

Statewide, existing home sales continued to rise in December as prices fell. Realtors helped sell 11,053 homes in December, a 27 percent increase compared to the same period a year ago, according to the Florida Association of Realtors.

Nationally, sales of existing homes rose 6.5 percent to an annual rate of 4.74 million in December, from a downwardly revised pace of 4.45 million in November,

news-press.com

Searchable databases: Search median home prices and the number of homes sold since 2002; find homes for sale and recently sold homes.

the National Association of Realtors said Monday.

The nationwide median sales price plunged to \$175,400, down 15.3 percent from \$207,000 a year ago. That was the lowest price since May 2003 and the biggest year-over-year drop on records going back to 1968. With sales of foreclosures and other distressed properties making up about 45 percent of sales, many economists expect prices to keep falling through 2009.

— The Associated Press contributed to this report.

ECONOMY

Continued from A1

Across Florida, though, seaports are gearing up for what a widened Panama Canal can bring: Bigger ships with more cargo, and ports with more jobs and higher revenue.

"Whoever can adapt, whoever can accommodate the larger ships, will get them," said Todd Gates, whose local company opened a Latin America office and is building retail stores, homes, hotels and health-care centers in Panama. "It's a race between Fort Lauderdale, Tampa and Miami."

Lee County will miss the boat.

Florida has 14 shipping ports, the closest of which is Port Manatee — 99 miles from downtown Fort Myers. That means ships cruise past Southwest Florida en route to a trio of ports around Tampa Bay or three ports in the Panhandle. Then, that fruit, fuel or furniture is loaded onto a truck and shipped down Interstate 75 to local retailers.

There is no discussion at the local or state level of a shipping port in Collier, Lee or Charlotte counties. The Florida Ports Council in Tallahassee could not be reached Monday.

Fort Myers may not be importing automobiles from Japan or exporting heavy machinery to Brazil, but its airport is handling plenty of cargo. In 2008, about 33.8 million pounds of freight came through Southwest Florida International Airport.

Without a shipyard, the airport is Lee's means to international trade. "Air transportation is critical to the future growth of our region," said Victoria Moreland, Lee County Port Authority spokeswoman. "We are well-positioned for the future."

Gary Jackson, director of the Regional Economic Research Institute at Florida Gulf Coast University, said Southwest Florida is not exporting many products, but it is exporting talent.

"The world is becoming an information world, and we could export some of these services," said Jackson, pointing out that he

sees many business travelers flying out of town for work. "We won't necessarily be putting together widgets, but we can be a part of the design phase."

Gates said a dozen area businesses have established offices in Panama, mostly in construction-related fields. Building in Lee has come to a standstill, but Panama has an up-and-coming economy, Gates said.

That fits into Jackson's definition of trade.

"The idea of trade is that you produce what you're good at, and don't produce what you're not good at, so you trade for that," he said.

TOURISM

A Puerto Rican city tops the wish list of destinations at Southwest Florida International Airport.

"San Juan is an excellent point to break into that market," said Bob Ball, executive director for the Port Authority. "People can travel to Puerto Rico without passports, so we are coordinating with them in hopes of sparking interest from some airlines to initiate service there."

Airport officials have long wanted direct flights to Puerto Rico, the runaway most-wanted destination in a 2007 airport survey of Hispanic travelers. Airlines willing to test any offshore market qualify for reduced fees for three years, provided they make at least one flight per week for a minimum of four months annually. Still, the incentives haven't netted a taker willing to serve the Caribbean basin.

About 70 percent of Lee County's visitors arrive by air. Tourism accounts for one in five jobs in Lee.

Landing that first Latin American flight could be a boon, but what are those travelers going to do once they step off the plane? Tony Lapi, president of Rochester Resorts, said Southwest Florida has not challenged Miami and Orlando's pipeline into Latin America because this region has little nightlife.

"They like to go out to dinner at 9:30, 10 o'clock," said Lapi, whose company manages three Sanibel and Captiva hotels. "In our island, we're rolling up the sidewalks at 9 o'clock. There was that diversity there. They can go to Miami, and boy it's rolling at nighttime, and the same thing at Disney."

Veronica Culbertson, president of the Southwest Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said her agency made a big push in recent years into developing nonstop flights with Latin America, but its attention shifted back to local businesses struggling under economic pressures.

"Until we get more free-trade zones, and more options, our area is going to be like a baby," she said. "Our area will be growing."

While Ball plugs away at San Juan, he's keeping an eye on Europe. The euro and British pound still have favorable exchange rates, and "they're having another brutal winter in Europe," Ball said.

In 2005, the airport served three German cities and two Canadian cities. Now, it's down to Toronto and Dusseldorf, Germany. Ball is hoping Air Berlin ramps up its offerings beyond three weekly flights to and from Dusseldorf, a European hub.

"They have excellent connecting service to all parts of Europe, so we're now seeing people come from Russia, Poland, a lot of people from Holland, Austria," Ball said.

Access to new, nonstop international markets is paramount as Lee tries to broaden its economic reach. "The easier it is to access our market, the more likely they will come," said Nancy Hamilton, communications director for Lee's Visitor & Convention Bureau.



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Pg A2

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SPORTS | C1

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SPORTS | C1

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BONITA NEWS-PRESS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2009 | PUBLISHED SINCE 1884

BONITA 50¢

All or nothing, Crist tells insurer

State Farm wants out of homeowner market

Staff and wire reports

State Farm should not be allowed to do any business in Florida if it pulls out of the state's property insurance market, Gov. Charlie Crist said Tuesday.

The company announced plans Tuesday to withdraw from Florida's property insurance marketplace, abandoning 1.2 million

policies with more than \$1 billion in annual premiums. It wants to keep writing auto insurance in Florida.

The company claims billions of dollars in losses from hurricanes in 2004 and 2005 and the state has rejected the company's proposed 47 percent increase to property insurance premiums.

"When you look at our financial situation, we have no alternative," State Farm Florida President Jim Thompson said. "We're going to be out of this busi-

ness. We will not have the resources to pay claims."

Fort Myers customer William Barber, who has a condo unit policy, said State Farm should not be allowed to offer only auto coverage.

"They should get out totally or offer all policies," Barber said. "I think they are trying to blackmail the state. It may be a serious threat, but the state needs to get tough with them."

See **STATE FARM** A2

State Farm

Number of policies in force as of Sept. 30, and the written premium for them for the year previous. State Farm Florida announced Tuesday it intends to pull out of the property-insurance market leaving 1.2 million policyholders to find other coverage.

	Policies		Total premiums (millions of dollars)	
	FLORIDA	LEE	FLORIDA	LEE
Homeowners	703,357	27,324	\$1,054.9	\$46.6
Condo unit owners	79,833	8,032	\$55.8	\$5.6
Tenants	126,676	1,856	\$13.1	\$0.4
Boat owners	57,982	n/a	\$58.7	n/a
Mobile homeowners	14,533	1,104	\$15.2	\$1

SOURCE: FLORIDA OFFICE OF INSURANCE REGULATION

THE NEWS-PRESS

PROPERTY INSURANCE

To seek a referral for property insurance, log on to the Florida Market Assistance Program at FMAP.org.

news-press.com

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GROWING INTEREST: URBAN FARMS CATCH ON



PHOTOS BY AMANDA INSCORE/THE NEWS-PRESS

Denise Muir, the owner of Rabbit Run Farm, walks through rows of crops to pick lettuce Friday in Buckingham.

Locally grown produce a fertile find

BY DREW STERWALD
dsterwald@news-press.com

Ivory-striped purple eggplants. Hydroponically grown strawberries and golden pear-shaped tomatoes. Frilly yellow popcorn shoots tossed on plates in upscale restaurants.

So-called urban farms are sprouting around Southwest Florida, cultivating a colorful cornucopia of produce and changing the agricultural landscape.

"If we have 20 people making most of their livelihood from this and making \$100,000 a year, you're looking at a significant portion of agriculture income in Lee County," said Roy Beckford, the Lee County Extension agriculture and natural resources agent. "That's impactful."

After years of farmland being eaten up by development, small growers are



Denise Muir browses a row of lettuce Friday at Rabbit Run Farm in Buckingham. She grows 10 varieties of lettuce on the farm. For more images of urban farms sprouting up across SW Florida, go to news-press.com/galleries.

turning the tables by nurturing specialty, hydroponic or organic produce on little plots of land. Their crops appeal to consumers who want to know where and how their peas and carrots are grown at a time when food

poisoning scares continue.

Would-be farmers are eager to weed it and reap, while consumers' appetites for organic or sustainably grown food intensify.

See **FARMING** A3

URBAN FARM CLASS

There are still a few spaces available for "Urban Farming 101," a five-week evening course beginning Thursday at the Southwest Florida Enterprise Center. Roy Beckford of the University of Florida Institute Food and Agricultural Sciences will instruct people who want to use small plots of land to grow produce to sell. Course hours are 5-7 p.m. at the center, 3903 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Myers. Cost is \$25. Call 321-7086 to register.

INSIDE TASTE

Slow Food Southwest Florida promotes local food.

Gov vetoes cuts of \$365 million

BY RYAN HIRAKI
rhiraki@news-press.com

Lee County teachers will not lose their opportunity to earn merit pay. Corrections officers will not lose their jobs. Environmentally sensitive land may not be lost to development.

Gov. Charlie Crist on Tuesday vetoed \$365 million of the \$2.6 billion budget shortfall the Legislature had to overcome this month, using cuts, reserves and higher traffic and court fees.

The vetoes — reversing \$90.9 million in spending cuts and \$273.6 million in diversions from trust funds — drew a mixed reaction through the state, where an economic crisis has made balancing the budget a challenge.

"We are grateful for the vetoes," said Gretel Plessinger, a spokeswoman



CRIST
Restores several programs

with the state's Department of Corrections. "It means we won't have to be cutting any more."

The department had to lay off 66 probation officers, five from the Fort Myers circuit, which includes Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties. Those officers had yet to work for the state for a year and, therefore, still were on probationary status.

Without the governor's veto, 88 more jobs would have been cut, from the level of probation officers to administration. Plessinger said the department had yet to determine who would be

See **CRIST** A3

Biotechnology may be an answer for Lee

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

The Scripps Research Institute may forever be known as the one that got away.

Lee County nearly reeled in the international biomedical research group six years ago. It would have created a hub of biotechnology, infusing hundreds of scientists and millions in research grants into Southwest Florida's economy. Spinoff companies would have rushed to Lee.

Instead, Scripps tapped Palm Beach County, forcing Edison State College to cancel its biotech program before it ever started.

Despite the letdown, hope is emerging southern Florida someday could

See **ECONOMY** A2



ABOUT THE SERIES

This week: The News-Press is exploring five solutions that can diversify Lee County and create a more stable economy. Here is the schedule of stories:
Monday: Green technology
Tuesday: International trade and travel
Today: Medical research
Thursday: Geriatric research
Friday: CEO recruitment

CONTACT US

Is biotechnology the answer? What strategies can help diversify Lee County's economy? E-mail your suggestions and ideas to economy@news-press.com.

News Digest



Pulitzer winner John Updike dies

Author of "Rabbit" tetralogy was 76.
NATION & WORLD, A4

Airport traffic dip causes cutbacks

Lee County Port Authority is doing some belt-tightening, including a partial hiring freeze.
BUSINESS, D1

Notice to our readers

Today's Marmaduke and Ziggy comic strips are on Page **B7**. Annie's Mailbox is on Page **B8**.

Newborn octuplets doing 'amazingly well'

The Associated Press

BELLFLOWER, CALIF. — Just think: eight cribs, eight highchairs, eight strollers (or maybe four double-strollers), and far too many dirty diapers to count.

A woman in Southern California gave birth Monday to the second set of octuplets ever delivered alive in the United States.

Doctors described the six boys and two girls as a feisty bunch who made

their entrance kicking and crying and seemed to be doing remarkably well, despite arriving nine weeks premature. They ranged in weight from 1 pound, 8 ounces, to 3 pounds, 4 ounces.

"We were fortunate that this patient was extremely strong, very courageous and able to handle these births," said Dr. Karen E. Maples, who is chief of service for obstetrics and gynecology at Kaiser Per-

manente Bellflower Medical Center and delivered Baby No. 8.

No pictures of the children were released, and at the mother's request doctors declined to reveal her name.

The chances of delivering eight babies naturally are "unbelievably rare," said Dr. Richard Paulson, director of the fertility program at the University of Southern California.

"They are doing amaz-

ingly well at this time," said Dr. Mandhir Gupta, a neonatologist who was part of the team of 46 doctors, nurses and others who took part in the cesarean section delivery. But he added: "I won't be able to comment on chances of survival because we've never had eight babies born at 30 weeks before."

The odds of survival drop off dramatically in multiple births.



From the cover

A2 | NATION & WORLD | ***

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ECONOMY

Continued from A1

resemble North Carolina's research triangle or California's Silicon Valley, only larger geographically.

"It could grow into a horseshoe," said Greg Pilant, president and CEO of GreyStone Pharmaceuticals in Fort Myers. "The competition is Virginia, Maryland, California and North Carolina. There is no question southern Florida will continue to take more market share of our types of businesses.

"We need to think of it as a team, not our county vs. their county."

This week, The News-Press is examining five strategies to enhance Lee County's economy. Solution No. 3 is building upon the East Coast's bioscience push to ignite biotech businesses locally.

Bioscience involves any type of life science research, from developing cancer treatments and new drugs to fertilizers that speed up plant growth.

Starting small

Southwest Florida is not void of bioscience companies. They're just small.

Pilant's company employs 15 individuals developing wound care technology to expedite the healing process. Tigris Pharmaceuticals in Bonita Springs employs six researching cancer treatments.

Finding out which companies are here and what they do is a mission of BioFlorida, a state biotech association that is launching a Southwest Florida chapter next month. Local chairman Bill Knab estimates 25 companies in Lee and Collier counties delve into life sciences. By joining forces, the region can compete at a higher level and promote one vision, he said. It may not be enough to land a Scripps, but bioscience businesses can drop anchors in any community. Why not here?

Companies that enter a community often spawn similar businesses, develop-

ing clusters like Silicon Valley. Before Scripps even finished building its Jupiter facility, the German-based Max Planck Institute announced it would construct its first U.S. center nearby.

Lee County has a 10 percent unemployment rate, a high tally because its economy hinges on tourism, real estate and construction. Diversifying the job base with new types of careers is critical in the recovery process.

Knab said pursuing bioscience clusters will aid the local economy, and Lee has four assets to do that:

- Available land and research parks: The Madden Research Loop, a \$15 million facility near the airport, will break ground this year, eventually employing 800.

- A university with research links: Florida Gulf Coast University has its first cohort of bioengineering students set to graduate in April, and faculty are able to build upon research from their colleagues at other Florida public universities.

- Support from the community: Lee County offers economic incentives to lure new companies in the field of life sciences.

- An ample work force: Southwest Florida lacks ready-made scientists and researchers, but the region is an attractive location and businesses can recruit graduates from other Florida universities.

May be too late

If creating a cluster of biotechnology companies was easy, every community would be doing it. Harry Orf, Scripps' vice president of scientific operations, expects the state to be blanketed with biotech companies. Southwest Florida, however, will have to play catchup. The region ranks second-to-last in bioscience companies, trailing only South Central Florida, mostly rural communities without a university nearby.

"It's difficult to jumpstart without that base already there," said Orf, who's owned a condomini-

news-press.com /economy

Multimedia: Watch a special presentation about ideas that will help Lee County in the effort to improve the economic outlook.

um in Fort Myers for 20 years. "You have to attract existing companies with incentives, but also generate new ideas coming out of the universities so those elements can come together."

Administration at Edison was convinced Lee would become a biotech hub, creating an entire degree program hinging on Scripps' arrival in Florida.

"We were gearing up for that, and even hired someone to lead our program," said Mary Lewis, assistant dean of health professions. "Then, they chose the other coast, and we had to cancel the program. If we cannot find a place for our students to do clinicals, then we cannot have a program."

FGCU maintains a biotechnology program; program leader Takashi Ueda could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

John Albion, president of the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce, cautions duplicating a field that's hot elsewhere often means you're too late; the money already has been made.

"Those are the people that got burned," Albion said. "Let's not do the same thing when we look at our economy and say 'Ooh, biotech is the place to go' because that's where everyone is looking and race over there, and maybe the best fruit is already picked."

It's not, Orf said. Bioscience will impact health care, energy, food and medicine for the next century, he said.

Gainesville had no biotech companies in 1994, Knab said, and now the region is second only to Southeast Florida. Lee, Collier and Charlotte can duplicate that surge.

"We are at the starting point," Knab said. "We have all the right pieces on the chess board. Now it's time to start playing."

STATE FARM

Continued from A1

Crist said he doesn't believe companies who don't want to take part in the riskier property and casualty market should be allowed to profit from the more lucrative auto insurance sector.

"I would imagine some very good, enterprising members of the House and Senate will take a look at it in March," Crist said, adding that Florida could make it without the Illinois-based company known for its "Good Neighbor" motto.

House Speaker Ray Sansom asked to have State Farm officials appear before a committee next week to discuss possible consequences.

"I think that Floridians will be much better off without them," Crist said. "My concern is that we have a good market for Floridians to get homeowners insurance."

State Farm Florida, established in 1998 as a subsidiary of State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company to underwrite Florida's property market, is continuing its appeal for its increase in the courts, but Thompson said Tuesday's announcement was not a negotiating ploy.

"If we had not taken these steps, it would have resulted in insolvency," said Thompson, who said the company is losing \$20 million a month on its Florida property business, paying out \$1.21 for every dollar coming in.

State Farm spokesman Chris Neal said State Farm's 2.8 million auto customers and those with life and health insurance policies in the state are not affected by the company's decision.

In its statement, State Farm said it has been unable to obtain regulatory approval from Florida officials on higher rates for its property insurance for homeowners, renters and others who own condominiums, boats and businesses.

The effect on policyholders is still several months off and would likely take two years to complete.

Jay Cabai of Fort Myers holds multiple State Farm policies, including property insurance for his home and his business.

"I think that Floridians will be much better off without them. My concern is that we have a good market for Floridians to get homeowners insurance"

— Gov. Charlie Crist

"I will give them a couple of months to see how this shakes out out of loyalty to my agent, but I can only wait so long before I start shopping for insurance," Cabai said.

State Farm can't do anything before completing a regulatory review in 90 days and is then prohibited by law from ending any policy before giving a six-month notice.

"Nobody has to do anything today," Thompson said of policyholders.

If Florida Insurance Commissioner Kevin McCarty does not approve the State Farm request, the company could turn to the courts.

Four State Farm executives — including chief executive officer Ed Rust and Thompson — met with McCarty's staff at the Office of Insurance Regulation for an hour Tuesday to inform them of their decision.

In a release from his office, McCarty called the State Farm decision disappointing, but not surprising.

"I will do everything within my power to protect Florida consumers from unnecessary destabilization of the insurance market," said McCarty. "Florida already has new companies who are eagerly looking to grow their businesses and will welcome the opportunity to add more customers."

State Farm employs more than 5,000 people in Florida, including 800 agents, Thompson said.

State Farm Florida spokeswoman Michal Connolly said it was too soon to speculate on the impact on those agents.

Local agents did not return calls seeking comment.

— Staff writer Tim Engstrom, the Florida Capital Bureau and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

CELEBRITY BUZZ

Quartet shake lip-syncing swipes

NEW YORK — Gabriela Montero says she and the other members of the Obama inauguration quartet were not trying to fool anybody by having recorded music played in

the biting cold.

Shaken by comparisons to lip-syncers Milli Vanilli, the pianist insists she and fellow musicians Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman and Anthony McGill "did the right thing."

"What is upsetting me these days is the fact that

we put so much love into this, with a very profound desire to make it so beautiful," she said.

Montero said the quartet actually did play, but the music was drowned out by the amplified music.

— The Associated Press

CELEBRITY BIRTHDAYS

Actor Alan Alda is 73. Actress Barbi Benton is 59. Singer Sam Phillips is 47. Singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan is 41. Singer Joey Fatone of 'N Sync is 32. Singer Nick Carter of Backstreet Boys is 29. Actor Elijah Wood ("The Lord of the Rings") is 28.

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CROWN ROYAL 222.69 750 \$37.99 1.75	RON RICO WHITE • GOLD RUM 3 FOR 36 \$12.99 1.75	CUTTY SARK SCOTCH \$22.99 1.75	LINDEMAN'S WINES 6 FOR 33 After Rebate \$7.99 1.5
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MARKET ROUNDUP | D2

Reports of a plan to absorb bad bank assets drive optimism and stock prices higher

TOP ADVANCERS | D2

Financial stocks were the most actively traded and the biggest gainers on Wall Street Wednesday

Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2009

1,558.34 +53.44 Nasdaq	874.09 +28.38 S&P 500	8,375.45 +200.72 Dow Jones	1,420.92 +21.36 American Stock	473.02 +17.44 Russell 2000	8,813.84 +289.59 Wilshire 5000	\$42.16 +58 Oil
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BUSINESS DIGEST

Chico's brand president resigns

The brand president of Chico's stores, Michele M. Cloutier, resigned Wednesday, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Cloutier joined the Fort Myers-based company in September 2006 as executive vice president/general merchandise manager for the Chico's brand. She was named brand president in October 2007.

Cloutier has also worked for Ann Taylor, Gap, Gap Body and Banana Republic.

Chief executive officer Scott Edmonds retired earlier this month and was replaced by board member David Dyer, the former CEO of Tommy Hilfiger Inc.

Grub Cab delivers restaurant food

Grub Cab, a restaurant delivery service, has opened in Fort Myers. The service company delivers foods for select restaurants in the area, including Uno Chicago Grill, Fowler Street Grill, Shrimp Shack and ethnic restaurants from Indian to Italian.

To order online, visit grubcab.com or call 278-GRUB (4782).

Real estate firm hires new sales employee

Robert Miller has joined the sales and marketing team of Management Group 1, a Fort Myers-based residential and investment property firm. He has successfully sold and marketed printed security products to foreign governments and venture capitalists worldwide.

Networking group to meet Feb. 25

The Bridge Networking group will conduct a networking event from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 25, at Rene's on Winkler, 7050 Winkler Road.

The event features food, drink, display tables for business sponsors and raffle items. Tickets are \$15 with online RSVP or \$20 without. Cash, MasterCard, VISA or Discover at the door. Pre-pay on line at thebridgenetworking.com.

Bank promotes vice president



BUSCHLE

Andrew L. Buschle, a senior vice president of Bank of Florida - South-west, has been promoted to the position of market manager for Collier and Lee counties. In his new role, he is responsible for business development, relationship management and the profitability of the bank's five Southwest Florida financial centers.

Seniors may heal economy

Research to help older adults could cluster here

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
dbreitenstein@news-press.com

A trip to Perkins at 4 o'clock or Bonita Beach at sunset reveals an obvious demographic: Lee County's population is older than many locales.

The region can cash in on those seniors, beyond early bird dinner

specials and senior discounts at Bealls.

Area business leaders say Lee County can promote itself nationally as a senior research cluster where pharmaceutical companies come to test new drugs. Or it can be a retirement haven where seniors can golf, visit a doctor and join a support group without having to hop in the car.

Lee's senior population is only going to grow stronger as the first

See **ECONOMY D2**



CONTACT US

How can Lee County adapt to benefit from its senior population? In what ways can Lee prepare for an influx of baby boomers? E-mail your suggestions and ideas to economy@news-press.com.

ABOUT THE SERIES

This week, The News-Press is exploring five solutions that can diversify Lee County and create a more stable economy. Here is the schedule of stories:

Monday: Green technology
Tuesday: International trade and travel
Wednesday: Medical research
Today: Geriatric research
Friday: CEO recruitment

NORTH FORT MYERS: CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2009 membership drive draws business owners



PHOTOS BY TERRY ALLEN WILLIAMS/THE NEWS-PRESS

Dina Porter, executive director of the North Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce, works at her desk Tuesday morning near the entrance to the new chamber office on the Shell Factory grounds in North Fort Myers. The new office is also the North Fort Myers Visitors Center.

Chamber moves its office to Shell Factory

BY DON MANLEY
dmanley@news-press.com

Despite the bleak economic picture, the North Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce is working to increase membership.

Roughly 300 business people were on the organization's rolls two years ago, a total that has fallen to around 196 today, as the economy forces some establishments to close and others to slash spending to survive.

But chamber President John Gardner is optimistic about reversing the downward trend, given the appearance of new businesses in the community and the benefits offered by the organization.

"It has certainly changed the dynamics of the chamber," he said of the downturn. "As some members go out of business, it certainly affects memberships and revenues. But we try to forge relationships as they (new members) come on board and get them involved in networking opportunities. It also means there's no better time to be a member and get involved in the networking opportunities that we have."

The chamber is banking on a recent change to help boost its



North Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Dina Porter, left, and volunteer Al Weisbecker, center, help visitor Saverio Creti Tuesday in the new chamber office.

IF YOU GO

What: Ribbon-cutting and grand opening of new office for the North Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce

When: Today, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Where: Shell Factory, 2787 N. Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41), Unit 10, North Fort Myers

Featuring: music, hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar

growth and bring added value to members and the community. The organization has moved its offices to the Shell Factory grounds, off U.S. 41, a couple of miles north of its home for six

years in a plaza on North Key Drive and behind Lenny C's Pizza.

Gardner, who's the owner-agent for Lee County Insurance, said the return to the Shell Factory was prompted by the heightened visibility and exposure offered by the facility, which draws about 70,000 visitors a year.

The Shell Factory had been the chamber's home prior to its move to the plaza. A grand-opening ceremony is set for 5:30

See **CHAMBER D2**

Panel delivers gloomy outlook

Commercial real estate not at bottom

BY DICK HOGAN
dhogan@news-press.com

The bottom for commercial real estate isn't here yet, experts told the ninth annual Real Estate Outlook Conference on Wednesday.

The conference, at Harborside Event Center in downtown Fort Myers, is presented by the Florida Chapter Southwest District of CCIM, an organization of experienced commercial real estate agents.

Expect some failures in commercial projects because of the current financial downturn, especially in restaurants and other retail operations, said Shelton Weeks, director of the Lucas Institute for Real Estate Development & Finance at Florida Gulf Coast University.

"I would think we'll see some foreclosures in the short run," he said.

Matthew Rocco, senior vice president and regional director for Charlotte, N.C.-based Grandbridge Real estate Capital, a commercial investment banking company, said he also expects to see more foreclosures.

"Hotels will probably be at the top of the list" as consumers find their spending constrained by tighter lending practices, he said.

None of the experts thought that Southwest Florida has seen the bottom yet in the commercial

See **CCIM D2**

WHAT IS A CCIM?

CCIM stands for Certified Commercial Investment Member, and designates an expert in commercial and investment properties.

Farmers wade through the weather-related wreckage

BY CHRIS UMPIERRE
cumpierre@news-press.com

Naples grower Frank Oakes lost 150 of his 600 tomato plants because of the frigid temperatures that swarmed Southwest Florida on Jan. 22.

Oakes was one of several local growers who fretted about their crops Wednesday, six days after

temperatures dropped to the mid-20s in parts of Collier County and to 33 degrees in Fort Myers.

After watching their crops thaw, several local growers said Wednesday that the Jan. 22 freeze could have a trickle-down effect to Southwest Floridians shopping for vegetables.

"Millions of dollars

were lost (from the freeze) and there will be a shortage of vegetables that we produce in this area," said Les Baucum, an agriculturalist with the University of Florida Hendry County Extension Office.

Collier and Hendry counties seemed to get hit the worst in Southwest Florida, Baucum said. He added that there could be

some good news for local growers who were able to salvage some crops.

"Green beans, for instance, got zapped around here," Baucum said. "But there were some areas where beans are still harvestable. For growers that have some left, it should mean better prices."

Oakes, who grows 42

types of vegetables for his Food & Thought Organic Market in Naples, said he had frost damage on his tomatoes and strawberries even though he watered them and covered them with blankets.

"It was under 30 degrees over here for eight hours, so the cold was so

See **CROPS D2**

Running on empty?

Visit news-press.com/business for the lowest gas prices in SW Fla.

GAS PRICES

The average price for unleaded regular gasoline and diesel in Fort Myers and Cape Coral.

	REGULAR	DIESEL
Wednesday	\$1.941	\$2.399
Tuesday	\$1.936	\$2.393
Month ago	\$1.670	\$2.451
Year ago	\$3.116	\$3.399
Record high	\$4.064*	\$4.848**
State avg.	\$1.905	\$2.430
National avg.	\$1.842	\$2.396

*Recorded on July 17

**Recorded on July 17

SOURCE: AAA THE NEWS-PRESS

D2 | THE NEWS-PRESS, BUSINESS & MONEY, THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2009 ***

MARKET ROUNDUP

Stocks jump on reports of plan for bad bank assets

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The optimism is building on Wall Street. Financial stocks led Wall Street sharply higher Wednesday on investor hopes the Obama administration will create banks to absorb the bad assets weighing down the financial system. The Standard & Poor's 500 index, a benchmark for the overall stock market, completed its first four-day rally since late November. And the Dow Jones industrial average jumped 201 points.

Financial companies surged on the notion that the government could take soured debt like defaulting mortgages off the hands of banks and place them in a so-called bad bank to hold toxic assets. Investors have been worrying that banks won't be able to resume more normal levels of lending without somehow dumping or walling off the bad debt that is corroding their balance sheets. And the economy can't recover from a 14-month-old recession without improvements in lending and consumer confidence.

Robert B. MacIntosh, chief economist at Eaton Vance Investment Management in Boston, said many questions remain about how a plan would work to take up bad assets. He added, though, that financial stocks have been so beaten down that a rally isn't a surprise.

"The financials are just begging for good news here," he said.

Bank shares jumped: Wells Fargo & Co. surged 31 percent, Citigroup Inc. jumped 19 percent and Bank of America added 13 percent.

Investors showed little reaction to an economic assessment statement from the Federal Reserve that contained almost no news. The central bank left interest rates near zero percent after its two-day meeting. Policymakers also predicted a gradual recovery in the economy will begin later this year but they cautioned that significant risks remain.

"I don't think there is anything terribly surprising here. I think the surprise, or the good news of the day, was the bad bank proposal," said Jerry Webman, chief economist at Oppenheimer Funds Inc. in New York.

LOCAL PUBLIC COMPANIES *

Businesses based in SW Florida. In "Mkt" column, N = NYSE, O = Nasdaq

52-week		Issue	Mkt	Div	Sales		PE	(Hun.)	High	Low	Last	Chg
High	Low											
50.32	22.34	Allico	O	1.10	49	117	32.60	30.89	31.92		+.85	
6.24	.71	BeasleyB	O		6				1.61			
10.92	1.72	Chicos	N			40873	4.44	3.92	4.33		+44	
8.20	.79	HltMgmt	N		3	21941	1.93	1.69	1.84		+0.09	
2.48	.15	MIVA	O			993	.18	.16	.17		-.02	
2.56	.12	SrceIntlk	O			677	.13	.12	.12			
9.38	3.75	TIB Fnd	O	.25b		3	3.98	3.97	3.98		+13	

* Traded on major exchanges

news-press.com/extras: Searchable database of Southwest Florida's public companies' performance

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Rates for trades of \$1 million minimum.

	Foreign currency in dollars		Yesterday	Dollar in foreign currency	
	Yesterday	Previous		Yesterday	Previous
Argentina (peso)	.2867	.2874	3.4875	3.4800	
Australia (dollar)	.6664	.6624	1.5006	1.5096	
Brazil (real)	.4398	.4271	2.2737	2.3415	
Britain (pound)	1.4246	1.4152	.7019	.7066	
Canada (dollar)	.8225	.8155	1.2157	1.2263	
China (yuan)	.1461	.1461	6.8423	6.8440	
Denmark (krone)	.1763	.1767	5.6721	5.6593	
Euro (€)	1.3139	1.3178	.7611	.7588	
India (rupee)	.0205	.0205	48.845	48.788	
Indonesia (rupiah)	.000088	.000089	11393.00	11193.00	
Israel (shekel)	.2500	.2502	3.9999	3.9964	
Japan (yen)	.011941	.011248	90.57	88.90	
Mexico (peso)	.071015	.070178	14.0815	14.2495	
Norway (krone)	.1481	.1476	6.7500	6.7740	
Russia (ruble)	.0296	.0303	33.8226	33.0273	
Saudi Arab (riyal)	.2665	.2665	3.7522	3.7519	
So. Korea (won)	.000730	.000719	1369.35	1391.10	
Sweden (krona)	.1241	.1240	8.0580	8.0645	
Switzerland (franc)	.8666	.8792	1.1539	1.1373	
Taiwan (dollar)	.0297	.0297	33.70	33.69	

WHAT STOCKS DID

	NYSE	NASDAQ	AMEX
Volume	6,072,872,957	2,111,717,046	413,293,935
Advanced	2703	2154	395
Declined	409	607	181
Unchanged	36	150	79
New Highs	2	2	1
New Lows	12	40	7

FUTURES

SUGAR	Settle	Chg	OJ	Settle	Chg
Mar 09	12.87	-.04	Mar 09	71.30	-2.55
May 09	13.20	+.04	May 09	75.15	-2.35
Jul 09	13.36	+.06	Jul 09	79.00	-2.05
Oct 09	13.71	+.11	Sep 09	83.05	-2.00
Jan 10	14.11	+.11	Nov 09	86.05	-2.00
Mar 10	14.19	+.16	Jan 10	89.05	-2.00
May 10	14.04	+.14	Mar 10	92.05	-2.00
Previous day's sales:100,048			Previous day's sales:834		
Previous day's open int:570,233			Previous day's open int:28,066		

CHICAGO MERCANTILE EXCHANGE

CATTLE			FEEDER CATTLE			HOGS		
Settle	Chg		Settle	Chg		Settle	Chg	
Feb 09	81.17	-1.10	Jan 09	94.20	+1.10	Feb 09	56.72	+9.7
Apr 09	84.42	+.02	Mar 09	90.57	+3.30	Apr 09	61.35	+.65
Jun 09	82.30		Apr 09	91.80	+.28	May 09	72.82	+.90
Aug 09	82.62	-.43	May 09	93.50	+3.30	Jun 09	73.82	+.62
Oct 09	86.40	-.45	Aug 09	95.60	+.28	Jul 09	73.75	+.85
Dec 09	89.20		Sep 09	95.80		Aug 09	72.35	+.78
Feb 10	90.50		Oct 09	95.60	-.15	Oct 09	65.35	+.45
Prev. sales:32,682			Prev. sales:4,076			Prev. sales:32,767		
Prev. open int:206,732			Prev. open int:21,387			Prev. open int:129,094		

CHICAGO BOARD OF TRADE

CORN			SOYBEANS			WHEAT		
Settle	Chg		Settle	Chg		Settle	Chg	
Mar 09	384.50	+7	Mar 09	982.50	+6.50	Mar 09	595.25	+10.50
May 09	395.50	+7	May 09	990	+6.25	May 09	608	+10.50
Jul 09	406.25	+7	Jul 09	997.50	+5.75	Jul 09	619.50	+10.50
Sep 09	416.50	+7	Aug 09	991	+5.50	Sep 09	642	+10
Dec 09	430	+7	Sep 09	963	-.2	Dec 09	663.75	+10.75
Mar 10	443.50	+7.50	Nov 09	934.50	+1	Mar 10	678.50	+10.75
May 10	450.50	+7	Jan 10	944	-1.75	May 10	678.75	+11
Prev. sales:177,093			Prev. sales:136,186			Prev. sales:42,981		
Prev. open int:795,800			Prev. open int:321,280			Prev. open int:278,265		

TORONTO EXCHANGE

Stock	Last	Ch	Stock	Last	Ch
RoyalBank	31.67	+1.01	Agnico Eagle	63.19	-1.04
T.D. Bank	42.38	+2.65	ImperialOil	39.79	+.54
ManulifeFin	21.91	+.51	EnbridgeInc	40.46	+.41
BarrickGold	43.98	-.159	ShoppersDrug	45.00	-.99
Bk. NS	31.17	+1.57	IndAlliance	20.35	
BM/Montreal	33.70	+1.01	GMP/CapTrdn	6.00	+20
BCE Inc	25.60	+10	MagnaIntAS	36.88	+.89
EnCanaCorp	57.22	+2.68	LabradorIn	22.65	+.64
CIBC	48.41	+2.81	Bombardier	4.67	
GlaxoHes	45.89	+1.61	Hydrogenics	.54	
SunLifeFin	27.03	+1.09	WestJetAirvr	14.14	+21
RogersCommB	34.79	+.98	TransGpPY	45.99	+.99
AgrumInc	43.15	+2.00			

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NYSE MOST ACTIVE		
Citigroup Inc.	\$4.21	+\$0.66
Bank of America Corp.	\$7.39	+\$0.89
Wells Fargo & Co.	\$21.19	+\$5.00

NASDAQ MOST ACTIVE		
PowerShares QQQ Trust	\$30.35	+\$1.03
Microsoft Corp.	\$18.04	+\$0.38
Cisco Systems Inc.	\$16.88	+\$0.15

ECONOMY

Continued from D1

wave of 76 million baby boomers reaches retirement and moves south.

"Can we figure out how to build off that to do something special?" said Jim Nathan, president of Lee Memorial Health System. "We're twice the national average in over age 65 population. The rebuilding of our economy is going to come off of, still, retirees coming to Florida because it's warmer here."

"Could we be a laboratory of the future for how seniors live?"

This week, The News-Press is exploring five strategies to enhance Lee County's economy. Solution No. 4 is playing off the region's demographics to conduct senior-related medical and lifestyle research.

According to the U.S. Census, 127,133 Lee residents are at least 65 years old. That's 22.4 percent of the population; the national average is 12.5 percent.

Senior research

Thousands of seniors already call Southwest Florida home, but a glut of baby boomers nearing retirement will continue streaming this way.

"They are getting older, getting gray hair, getting sick and moving down here," said Edmundo Muniz, president and CEO of Tigris Pharmaceuticals in Bonita Springs.

Tigris is developing drugs and therapies for cancer patients, and Muniz said it makes sense for more companies to begin research projects in Southwest Florida that directly affect residents of Southwest Florida.

"This would be a great area for trials," said Dot Beard, 82, of Fort Myers. "It would be great for anyone doing research on older people, because we sure have got a lot of them here."

And the need for new medicine and technology for seniors will only increase with time.

"There will be twice as many people with cancer in 15 years," Muniz said. "There will be 37 percent more cardiovascular dis-

eases. Diabetes is an epidemic; it will skyrocket 70 percent in the next 10 years."

With so many seniors right here, Dotty St. Amand believes Southwest Florida can promote itself as a testing ground for senior-related research, clinical trials and medical innovation.

"All of the drugs the FDA has approved for Alzheimer's were studied here," said St. Amand, executive director of the Alvin A. Dubin Alzheimer's Resource Center in Fort Myers. About 22,000 Lee residents are living with Alzheimer's, she said.

Dr. Constantine Mantz, medical director for 21st Century Oncology in Fort Myers, said the company tests several hundred patients at any given time. Its current studies include radiation therapy for gynecological and prostate cancer, and implantable devices to deliver breast cancer treatments.

Aside from its day-to-day operation, 21st Century Oncology employs 10 to 20 statisticians, mathematicians, study coordinators, nurses and doctors. Few staffers have local ties, though.

"These are people we have to hire from somewhere else," said Mantz, adding that Southwest Florida's colleges are not yet producing graduates with high-level medical or research specialties. There are no medical schools within 100 miles of Fort Myers.

Sue Maxwell, director of older adult services for Lee Memorial Health System, isn't convinced seniors are eager to be guinea pigs for researchers. Also, studies often have strict parameters that prevent older patients from joining.

Regardless, Maxwell says seniors are a major force with time, assets and skills that cannot be overlooked.

"The citrus industry and Mickey Mouse industry does not compare to what we've got with the senior industry," Maxwell said.

Senior community

Lee and Collier counties are home to about 170 golf courses, many of

NYSE TOP ADVANCERS		
Lloyds Banking Group PLC	\$6.33	+\$2.51
MGIC Investment Corp.	\$3.32	+\$1.06
The Royal Bank of Scotland Group	\$6.43	+\$2.01

NYSE TOP DECLINERS		
Allied Capital Corp.	\$1.91	-\$1.69
Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.	\$9.06	-\$1.34
Newmont Mining Corp.	\$38.61	-\$3.10

CHAMBER

Continued from D1

p.m. today for the new office, which doubles as the North Fort Myers Visitors Center.

"I refer to it as going back home," said Ruth Kuehn, co-owner of Far and Away Travel and a member of the North Fort Myers chamber for 10 years. "They're right there at the Shell Factory, which gets a lot of foot traffic. You can say you're at the Shell Factory and everybody knows where it is, including the snowbirds. The visibility is what we're after, including new members."

The chamber also kicked off a two-month-long membership drive Jan. 1 and is trying to lure newcomers with such perks as expanded networking events, a member-to-member discount program, and opportunities to promote their business. Gardner, whose term began Jan. 1, said he's also working to add value to memberships by bringing in speakers to discuss important topics such as new laws and proposed legislation, and customer service practices.

Gardner said seven new members have joined this month and another 15 have committed to joining. Memberships average \$200 a year.

Businesses are looking to maximize the return on each dollar spent, as the recession deepens, which can make chamber membership even more of a value, said the organization's executive director, Dina Porter.

"I think when it comes to businesses that have limited income — and they're looking to get the most out of their marketing — that they're all looking toward something that will give them marketing and referral leads," she said. "Everybody has to help themselves and others. That's what's good about a chamber. Everybody's dedicated to each other, like a family."

Richard Dunmire became a member two months ago. A North Fort Myers resident for 37 years, he operates the Shell Factory Flea Market, which uses part of the attraction's grounds on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Two factors prompted him to join. "The main reason was because of Dina and the fact they moved back to the Shell Factory, because it's a necessary part of our economy," he said.

markets will do something."

Southwest Florida's citrus industry seemed to survive the freeze, area growers said.

"Citrus was more cold tolerant than agricultural (crops) and this was a one-night freeze," said George Austin, who grows citrus in Alva. "Historically, we have the most damage to the citrus industry if the freeze hits us for at least two days."

deep, so long that the blankets didn't ward it off," Oakes said.

In addition to his 150 tomato plants, Oakes also lost the squash, beans and cucumbers he hadn't picked before the freeze. "This was a real good kick in the shins," Oakes

taking in less revenue but include a provision that the landlord shares in the tenant's increased income when the economy recovers.

National real estate trainer Michael Lipsey, based in Longwood, advised agents to stick to the basics and don't worry about national economic conditions you can't control.

"Only concern yourself with what you can control," Lipsey said, advising the audience to turn off CNBC in their offices because it's likely to be carrying mainly negative stories that could spook clients already skittish because of the economy.

Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, a former state representative from Cape Coral, told the conference there are

— not the 80 percent that was available until recently, Rocco said.

He urged landlords to put a premium on "keeping a tenant in place" even at a relatively low rental rate.

Steven Moreira, CEO of Magic Companies, which buys, brokers and finances residential commercial projects in Florida, said that "I think every landlord should be encouraged to cut deals right now and just leave the tenants in there."

Larry Foster, a commercial real estate agent with CB Richard Ellis, Fort Myers-Naples, said consumers are no longer spending as much. "The spigot was shut off."

Now, he suggested, landlords might want to reduce rent for a tenant



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VISITORS GUIDE | **INSIDE TODAY**
Your ultimate guide to fun
in the sun in Southwest Florida.

GULF COASTING | **INSIDE**
Pieces from artist Fernando Botero's
collection at Naples Museum of Art.



BONITA NEWS-PRESS

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BONITA 50¢

Lee braces for \$158 million cut

Sheriff plans to freeze hiring, shift job titles

BY RACHEL MYERS and GABRIELLA SOUZA
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The soft economy will force Lee County to cut an additional \$46 million from this year's budget, county officials say. Where



SCOTT
Lee County
sheriff

manager.

The shortfall in tax money means the sheriff's office anticipates a hiring freeze and shifting of job titles for some of its 1,544 employees for the next fiscal year, which begins in October.

those reductions are to come from hasn't been determined.

Next year, the county could have to cut the budget another \$112 million, said Bill Hammond, deputy county

manager. The shortfall in tax money means the sheriff's office anticipates a hiring freeze and shifting of job titles for some of its 1,544 employees for the next fiscal year, which begins in October.

The budget news came during management meetings Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

"We've had a truckload of money for years," Hammond said. "Everybody's concerned right now."

The county passed a \$441 million operating budget in September for the fiscal year that started

Oct. 1. This year's budget was a 2.7 percent decrease from the year before.

Now, County Manager Don Stilwell will meet with the county commission to discuss how the reductions could take place, Hammond said, and the process of deciding where to make the cuts could begin in February.

Commissioner Ray Judah said the county would hold off on

See **FREEZE** A2

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Documents: Read the memo Sheriff Mike Scott issued to his employees.

Databases: See the salaries of Lee County employees, including those at the sheriff's office.

INSIDE

Chico's FAS will lay off 180 people at its Fort Myers headquarters. The move will save the company about \$15 million over the next year. **Business, D1**

LOCAL BUSINESSES: FORCED TO FIND SOLUTIONS

Cutting corners ... not jobs



TERRY ALLEN WILLIAMS/THE NEWS-PRESS

Hairstylist Summer Sullivan works with client Samantha Mariani at the Red Salon and Spa in south Fort Myers.

Hours and wages among casualties

BY LAURA RUANE
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Take the initiative: Tighten the belt to save jobs.

That's the mantra of some Southwest Florida businesses where workers and their bosses are looking toward a leaner economy — and making do with less pay and fewer perks.

"Employers are doing whatever they can to hold on to staff. ... They're being resourceful and analytical," said Barbara Hartman, spokeswoman for the Career and Service Center in Fort Myers.

news-press.com/galleries

Photo gallery: More images from the Red Salon and Spa.

Some local examples: A salon is moving new stylists away from hourly pay, expecting them instead to quickly build a client base, and to live on commissions.

The owner of a public relations company and many on her staff took 5 percent pay cuts. Others are working fewer hours.

This scrimping is no fun for anyone, but neither is the job outlook: In Lee County alone, a 10 percent unemployment rate in December meant about 28,400 people were out of work. Layoffs are expected

to push that rate higher in the months ahead.

President Obama alluded to private-sector sacrifice in his inaugural address Jan. 20: "For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is ... the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours."

Workers at Universal Pipe & Steel in Fort Myers demonstrated that selflessness. When orders slowed last fall, "the single guys volunteered to work four days a week, and the married guys stayed on

five days a week, so they could support their families," said Lou Lehman, company president and founder. Business has picked up in the new year, ending the need for the unpaid days off, Lehman added.

Not every workplace sacrifice is voluntary.

Gannett Co., which owns The News-Press among 85 American newspapers, imposed one-week unpaid furloughs for most of its employees — including top executives such as CEO Craig Dubow — to be taken during 2009's first quarter. Company leaders think the move could help minimize the need for further layoffs

See **TIGHTEN** A3

Lee should convince visiting CEOs to stay

Their firms would diversify economy

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
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The rich and powerful like Southwest Florida.

They come to enjoy golf, sunshine and cocktail parties. Many have invested in mansions stretching from Sanibel to Naples.

"We've got a lot of CEOs from Fortune 500 companies who live in our communities," said David Lucas, chairman of the board for the Bonita Bay Group. Lucas said many of those executives see the region through a tourist's eyes — a destination to relax and forget about the rigors of Wall Street.

This week, The News-Press is outlining five strategies to assist Lee County's future economic growth. Solution No. 5 is identifying executives with ties here, and then



ABOUT THIS SERIES

This week, The News-Press is exploring five solutions that can diversify Lee County and create a more stable economy. Here is the schedule of stories:

Monday: Green technology

Tuesday: International trade and travel

Wednesday: Medical research

Thursday: Geriatric research

Today: CEO recruitment

CONTACT US

How should Lee County go about finding these CEOs? What would you ask retired executives to do? E-mail your ideas and suggestions to economy@news-press.com.

convincing them Southwest Florida also is a great place to do business. At the very least, the county can tap into their expertise for ideas on how it can

See **CEOs** A9

It started in Immokalee, and it won't end Sunday

Edgerrin James has a Super date

BY DAVID DORSEY
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TAMPA — Sunday's Super Bowl would seem a superb place for Edgerrin James to cap a stellar NFL career.

Except for one thing. James, a 1996 Immokalee High School graduate and the 11th all-time leading rusher in NFL history, has no plans to retire any time soon.

James will turn 31 Aug. 1, just before the start of what he plans to be his 11th NFL season, whether it be with the Arizona Cardinals or another team.

"I'll still be playing," James said. "I think you

See **JAMES** A3



Edgerrin James.

news-press.com/superbowl

Live Chat: Super Bowl chat with columnist Mike Lopresti from Tampa scheduled for 11:45 a.m. Log on to ask about the teams, players and events.

Videos and photo galleries: See daily video reports from Tampa and photos from media day throughout the week.

IN SPORTS

A look at where Edgerrin James ranks among all-time NFL running backs. **C1**



BLAGOJEVICH IMPEACHED

59-0

The vote by which Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich was ousted from office over charges he tried to sell, among other things, Barack Obama's Senate seat.

21

Years since the last U.S. governor was removed from office (Arizona's Evan Mecham, 1988).

No. 1

Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn, one of Blagojevich's critics, is his replacement as governor.

COMPLETE COVERAGE, PAGE A4

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CEOs

Continued from A1

grow the economy. Several such quests already are under way. Lee County's Horizon Council, a group of business and government leaders, created a task force that's going to ask locals in the know — real estate agents, home builders and social clubs — to spill the beans on which influential folks live here. A think tank called the Searching for Solutions Institute also is forming to convene movers and shakers for brainstorming ses-

sions about the economy, education, health care, the environment and energy. If anyone can fix the region's problems, said executive director Lynne Groth, it's those CEOs who rose to the pinnacle of their companies with innovative ideas. "We haven't been able to harness all of that brainpower," Groth said. One potential roadblock is executives come here seeking anonymity and escape from their day jobs. Few locals know just who visits or lives here, and those who do won't reveal that information. Still, opportunities arise.

Active executives

Greg Scasny, senior partner with Golden Technologies, visited the region many times on fishing trips, escaping the harsh winters of Indiana. He bumped into a few local business leaders, collected market data and was so impressed with the business environment that he moved the company to Naples. Although some critics question whether Southwest Florida has an amply trained, educated work force, Scasny said employees don't always have to be

fresh out of college. Golden recently hired a former Hewlett-Packard division head who was living in the area. "He was bored and looking for something to do," Scasny said. "You're not going to find this kind of talent anywhere in the world." John Sprecher, chief creative officer for NOISE Branding Communications on Sanibel, was splitting his time between Milwaukee and Southwest Florida for five years. One year, he just decided to bring the business with him. "We saw a great opportunity for our company in this market to do the type of work we do," he said.

Ben Wright, founder and CEO of Denver-based Atlas Advertising, is working with Lee's economic development office on marketing and branding initiatives. While it's not feasible that every Fortune 500 executive would relocate here and bring the company along, the county does have a pro-business climate that could attract smaller companies. "They think they have to endure the traffic of New York City or cold of Chicago, but in some cases, they don't," Wright said.

Retired execs

Bonita Bay is a magnet for corporate bigwigs. Best Buy founder Richard Schulze has a 23,254-square-foot preserve home there. Around the bend is former Pfizer CEO William Steere's 12,253-square-foot harbor home and former Kmart executive vice president Dick Miller's 7,903-square-foot ranch home. Lucas has led Bonita Bay for 25 years, long enough to document the development phases of resident retirees.

"At first, all they want to do is play golf and go to cocktail parties, but they realize there is more to life than that," Lucas said. It takes a few years, but most join local civic groups and venture into philanthropy, becoming active members of the community instead of just visitors. Jack Eikenberg of Bonita Springs went through those phases. After retiring as CEO of Mr. Coffee Inc., Eikenberg started a consulting business, but that also became hectic. He settled into Bonita Springs as a retiree nine years ago, then started attending a few school board meetings, then hospital board meetings, then Lee's Smart Growth Committee meetings. Before long, his calendar was full. Eikenberg believes Lee can tap into the executives' knowledge base, but must focus on year-round residents, not just visitors with a fancy job title. "A large majority of them are snowbirds, and a lot of them still have their loyalties back home," Eikenberg said.

Norman Augustine, a part-time Sanibel resident, is the former president and CEO of Lockheed Martin. He has homes in Colorado and Maryland, and has not yet integrated into Southwest Florida's social and philanthropic scene. However, he's willing and able once his weeks here turn into months, and believes local leaders shouldn't be bashful in their search for ideas. "Just ask," Augustine said. That willingness does not surprise Patty Breedlove, associate director of a University of Florida program that tracks startup companies delving into bioscience. "These guys and women are smart, and maybe do not want to run a company anymore, but could serve on an organization's board of directors," Breedlove said. "With entrepreneurs, it gets into their blood. They don't want to stop."



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