

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 15, 2009

CONTACT: Vilma Quintana, myregion.org

Telephone: 407.835.2520

VILMA.QUINTANA@ORLANDO.ORG

myregion.org Unveils 2009 Progress Report for the Central Florida Region ***Where in the World are We?***

Orlando, FL – Much has been accomplished since Central Florida leaders began working together across jurisdictional and sector boundaries nearly 10 years ago, in an effort to position Central Florida as one of the leading global regions of the 21st century.

Today, more than 200 government, business and civic leaders in the seven-county Central Florida region (Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and Volusia counties) gathered at the Home Builders Association of Metro Orlando to hear the results a new study released by the *myregion.org* Board of Directors, *Where in the World are We? - 2009 Progress Report for the Central Florida Region*. The report is funded by the Central Florida Partnership, METROPLAN ORLANDO, Progress Energy and WORKFORCE CENTRAL FLORIDA.

myregion.org Chairman Ed Timberlake, Seaside National Bank & Trust, opened the meeting and introduced Jacob Stuart, President, Central Florida Partnership and founding President of *myregion.org*, who took participants down “memory lane” with a Power Point presentation, highlighting some of the most important milestones and accomplishments in 10 years of regional collaboration and cooperation.

“Ten years ago, losing the bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics, helped us realize that working together in a regional context could be important to Central Florida,” said Stuart. “Also occurring around the same time was an example of positive collaboration by multiple counties as the Volusia County MPO and METROPLAN ORLANDO successfully worked together to build a new I-4 bridge over the St. John’s River. Afterward, the Central Florida MPO Alliance materialized from the partnership between Volusia and Metro Orlando, which includes six transportation organizations in nine counties. Today, our region and our State have taken a giant step backward by failing to pass legislation in support of *SunRail*, a much-needed transportation alternative, deciding to maintain the status quo,” he concluded.

The Progress Report, presented by John Kaliski, Principal at Cambridge Systematics, Inc., examines the six regional priorities identified early in the decade when Central Floridians first asked themselves the question, “How can Central Florida compete in the global economy while still maintaining a high standard quality of life for its residents.” This led to the creation of *myregion.org*, a Regional Development Program focused on “Regional Research and Resolves,” which with the help of many regional partners, has developed this first-ever regional research to explore our knowledge about Central Florida and better understand “who we are” and “what matters most.”

For two years, *myregion.org* engaged over 3,000 citizens and leaders from across the region, identified six key priorities – Economic Leadership, Education, Environment, Quality of Life, Smart, Quality Growth, and Regional Resolves and Cooperation – and developed 10 Regional Resolves or structural organizations and functions that our region would need to create, if we were indeed going to start thinking and acting regionally. (Please see 10 Regional Resolves attached.)

Ten years later, *Where in the World are We – 2009 Progress Report for the Central Florida Region*, measures progress from three perspectives: changes in key quantitative indicators since the year 2000; key qualitative success stories of how our region has worked together; and comparisons with seven other major regions in the United States as well as major global competitors.

“Now, more than ever, the uncertainty of the world makes it imperative that Central Florida leaders think and act regionally,” said Kaliski. “The region is poised for great success, but whether we will achieve progress largely depends on the ability of our greatest asset – our people – to set clear priorities and work together to accomplish them.”

A 21-member Progress Report Task Force guided the report, which compares Central Florida with regions of similar size today (San Diego, Phoenix, Denver-Boulder and Tampa Bay) as well as with regions that will be similar in size to Central Florida in the year 2050 (San Francisco-San Jose, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Washington-Baltimore).

The report also celebrates the region’s progress, and identifies the challenges we must continue to address together. At the event, Shelley Lauten, President of *myregion.org*, highlighted some of the “world-class” organizations and initiatives that have committed their efforts to achieving regional solutions and success, and that helped “moved the needle” on the region’s economic competitiveness and quality of life.

Government, business and civic leaders from the seven-county region provided personal comments and reactions to the accomplishments that the region has made in these areas and challenged the audience not to rely on our previous successes but to “go beyond where we are today” in order to take the region to the next level.

Participants then engaged in table discussions to “imagine” the possibilities for our region in 50 years if Central Florida leaders were to base decisions on an agreed upon set of priorities and principles and to identify the priorities, activities and alliances that the region must focus on in order to advance our Regional Agenda. These recommendations were then presented for reaction and response, to a panel of experts, which included Florida State Representative Stephen L. Precourt, among others.

Some of the key conclusions that can be drawn from the 2009 Progress Report for the Central Florida Region are:

Economic Leadership

Rapid job growth through most of the decade ends with a sharp recession, and wage levels remain below average. Seeds of future growth appear in life sciences, green industry, and creative arts – but legacy industries including tourism, aerospace and agriculture face competitive threats.

When the seven county Central Florida Region referenced by *myregion.org* is combined with the seven county Tampa Bay Region to form a Super Region running from Daytona Beach to the Gulf of Mexico, the combined population of 7.1 million people ranks seventh in the United States. On its own, with 3.7 million residents, Central Florida is the 14th most populous region in the nation and the 85th largest in the world.

One key indicator often associated with growing high tech industries is the amount of Research & Development that is reinvested in growing and cultivating industries. Central Florida falls woefully short in this area with an average R&D per employee of only \$60 per worker, compared to \$145 for the state of Florida and \$273 for the nation. However, Central Florida has nearly doubled the amount of R&D spending per worker since 2000, so the region is improving. If Central Florida is serious about continuing to attract an innovative work class, the amount of R&D investment must dramatically increase.

Health and Creative Arts have grown at an annual growth rate of nearly 3% or higher while Trade/Transportation and High Tech have also shown steady annual growth. This is a positive sign in the effort to diversify and increase employment in higher wage industries. Between 2001 and 2007, Central Florida saw annual growth in Tourism and Construction jobs, while natural resources and aerospace has seen a decline.

Education

While progress is being made particularly at the pre K-12 level, our ability to provide a skilled workforce may slow progress toward a more diverse economy. We're making progress, but the world remains well ahead.

Currently, 25 percent of all adult residents of Central Florida have at least earned a Bachelors Degree. That represents a 20% increase over the last decade. That percentage is still 5 points below the national average, ranking last among the eight comparable regions, but higher than Japan and the European Union.

Two areas of improvement include the voluntary preschool program and the increase in high school diplomas. In 2008, 89% of students enrolling in public school kindergarten programs were deemed ready to start kindergarten and 81% of Central Florida's high school students received a diploma, compared to only 65% in 2000. Central Florida also saw an increase in the number of students continuing their education with 60% of all students moving on to community colleges or four year institutions in 2008, compared to 51% in 2000.

The region falls short in the percentage of students attending college in Central Florida who receive degrees in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) with only 20% receiving a degree in a STEM field, compared to 28% statewide and 30% nationally. For Central Florida to compete on a national and global scale, the education level of our workforce must continue to increase.

Environment

Our unique environment remains at risk from development, but a foundation for better stewardship has been established. Future challenges are enormous: save the region's most precious lands and waters, stretch our limited water supply, and reduce energy consumption.

Central Florida residents have reduced fresh water usage by 39 gallons per day over the last five years to 148 gallons per person. Efforts made by Naturally Central Florida and the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council have led to the development of a detailed mapping of the seven "must save" environmental assets of Central Florida.

Overall, Central Florida residents generate more waste, use more electricity and consume more gas than the national average in each area, and recycle at a slightly higher rate than the national average. An increase in the amount of coastal erosion is a concern, as is future air quality, but overall the region is making great strides in creating a sustainable environment.

Quality of Life

In-migration slows as residents become more concerned about Central Florida's economic future. Crime is down, but public health concerns remain. We offer many amenities, but we stand out globally in only a few areas.

For decades, Central Florida has been the place where people from other parts of the country and world come not just for entertainment, but also to raise families and retire. That migration has dramatically slowed over the last two years, but it is expected that the in-migration will resume as the economy recovers. Central Florida trails the nation in a number of key quality of life areas, including public safety, affordable housing and volunteerism and must address these issues in the future.

Central Florida residents have traditionally been happier with the direction of their community than the national average. As recently as the spring of 2006, 58% of Central Florida residents thought the region was headed in the right direction with only 27% thinking things were moving in the wrong direction.

By September 2007 more Central Florida residents felt things were moving in the wrong track and in January 2008 46 percent of regional residents saw things moving in the wrong direction, compared to 40% believing things were moving in the right direction.

Smart, Quality Growth

Growth within our urban centers is on par with or behind Brazil, India and China.

Between 2000-2006, more than 600,000 acres of land was developed within our seven county region. That means that more than 20% of all land that is developed across the region has gone into development since 2000.

The "How Shall We Grow?" Initiative produced consensus and a framework for a new approach to development in Central Florida and many cities and counties are looking at opportunities to enact the regional themes in their comprehensive plans. 20,000 residents preferred one that focuses populations more into urban core population centers, preserves more of our open space and creates transportation alternatives focused around transit corridors.

Our cities support far fewer residents per acre than other metropolitan areas and unless we can alter that trend, we will struggle to change our tendency toward sprawling development.

The region has spent the last several years moving forward to develop alternative transportation opportunities, but the loss of *SunRail* is certainly a major hit for the region.

Regional Cooperation

From transportation to public safety to schools, there are few issues where a regional dialogue has not begun. Will all of these initiatives result in action? We've seen historic progress and are recognized throughout the United States as a leader on global collaboration. There are more than 54 organizations across the region currently looking at specific issues from a regional perspective.

Among the organizations leading the way are the *Congress of Regional Leaders*, the MPO Alliance, the Central Florida and East Central Florida Regional Planning Councils, and *myregion.org*. The creation of the Congress of Regional Leaders has provided an ideal opportunity for discussions among high-level elected officials in a meaningful and supportive manner. This organization has already produced valuable results and will continue to grow stronger as the need for working together as a region continues to grow.

"Much has been done in 10 years but much more can still be done in all these areas," said Shelley Lauten, President of *myregion.org*. "*myregion.org* will continue to work with regional leaders and educate and inform citizens to build regional consensus and regional resolve to ensure Central Florida's position in the global stage."

The complete report – ***Where in the World are We? - 2009 Progress Report for the Central Florida Region*** – is available online at www.myregion.org. To schedule a Power Point presentation of these findings to your organization, business or community group, please contact Vilma Quintana, Vice President of Community Engagement for *myregion.org*, at 407.835.2520 or at vilma.Quintana@orlando.org.

myregion.org is one of four lines of business by which the Central Florida Partnership focuses on "Regional Research and Resolves." By identifying and examining the changing demographics and powerful trends that are shaping the Central Florida Region – *myregion.org* is helping to identify the issues and challenges that affect our future. Working together with the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce (Regional Entrepreneurship), BusinessForce (Public Policy Advocacy), and Leadership Orlando (Regional Leadership), the Central Florida Partnership is moving "Ideas to Results."