

Economic development lifts North County; Titusville seen as growing market

By Ken Datzman

TITUSVILLE — With business-investment dollars continuing to flow into all types and all sizes of projects, the North Brevard economy is poised to reach new heights in 2019.

New homes and apartments are being built. New hotels are being constructed. A new shopping center has opened. Manufacturing businesses are expanding. Commercial aerospace companies have taken a stake positioning themselves for the future. With the newly constructed 80-bed Palm Point Behavioral Health Center, an estimated \$10 million investment, health-care entities are on the rise. And a new wave of tourism is underway as Titusville has been designated as Florida's second "Trail Town."

All this activity is creating jobs, uplifting the economy, and driving momentum. This part of the county has staged a remarkable turnaround from a decade ago.

Documenting the different phases of the Titusville turnaround over the years would make an interesting MBA capstone project at a business school.

About 10 years ago, Titusville was on a fast downside as NASA's space-shuttle program came to an end and thousands of people lost their jobs. It was around the time when the economy blew up, sending prices of just about every asset classification South, fast. The U.S. financial collapse led to the so-called "Great Recession," which started in 2007 and spread globally.

Titusville was slammed as hard as any city in America during that time. What resulted from the negativity swirling around Titusville, which was founded in 1867 by Confederate Col. Henry Theodore Titus, was a much more united city, one whose leaders were determined to reboot its economy with new ideas and new strategies to attract business investment.

"Titusville found itself in a situation a number of years ago where it really had to come together to get the economy moving again, and the spirit of that cooperation still exists today," said Troy Post, the executive director of the North Brevard Economic Development Zone, whose organization has played a major role in the rebirth of the city as it pertains to commerce.

"We have all come together and the progress that is being made is evident today throughout the city, and it continues. We're excited about the future of North Brevard."

"Titusville has something unique, in that all the different entities work together," added Edyie McCall, the economic development director for the City of Titusville. "We are not competing with each other. We understand each other's role and each organization works to complement what the other is doing. Everybody has been a team player. You win as a team."

And Titusville has been doing a lot of winning of late, attracting businesses across various sectors — in space and aerospace, transportation and logistics, precision plastics, satellite communications, automotive restoration parts, marine design, hospitality, and retail, for example.

The capital investments by businesses include: Embraer Aero Seating Technologies, \$8 million; Blue Origin, \$205 million; OneWeb Satellites, \$85 million; Lockheed Martin Corp., \$80 million; and the new Titus Landing retail mall, \$60 million. That's just a sampling.

The small-business market is vibrant, too. Month after month, there has been a flurry of new business licenses issued in Titusville. According to the senior area manager for the U.S.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Titusville is entering a new era of business growth, as companies of all types continue to make investments in North Brevard. The city has seen a surge in the construction of new hotels and housing growth has been strong. The newly opened \$60 million Titus Landing retail mall has given the city a big lift. From left, the team includes: Edyie McCall, economic development director, City of Titusville; Marcia Gaedcke, president, Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce; and Troy Post, executive director, North Brevard Economic Development Zone. They are at Titus Landing.

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North Brevard

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Small Business Administration–Southern District of Florida, Vincent Lopresti, SBA programs have been fueling a “dramatic increase” in capital investment within Brevard, particularly in the north part of the county. Over the last year, the SBA has successfully processed 121 loans for Brevard businesses, representing a total loan volume of more than \$40 million.

“The small-business market continues to grow and expand in North Brevard, and that’s great to see,” said McCall. “Entrepreneurial activity has been increasing.”

Some of the organizations that have played a central role in the rebirth of Titusville are the North Brevard Economic Development Zone, the City of Titusville, Greater Titusville Renaissance Inc., the Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast, and the Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce.

“The big thread that emerged out of the recession and the retirement of the space-shuttle program is the strong partnership that has been forged among the various organizations,” said Marcia Gaedcke, who just marked her 20th year as president of Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce.

“We’re happy to be part of it. I’m not sure every community enjoys this type of relationship.”

Her organization manages the “Welcome Center” for the City of Titusville. “More than 20,000 people have gone through the Welcome Center in the last two years,” said Gaedcke. “So nearly 1,000 people a month are visiting the Welcome Center and picking up pamphlets and learning more about the area, including the trails. That is a really high number of visitors.”

“One of my recreational passions for the last two and half years has been seeing the trails come through Titusville. And Marcia has played a key role in that endeavor,” said McCall.

On Feb. 23, an event called “Gear Up. Ride it Down” will be held in Titusville. People can blaze the trails in Titusville, starting at the Welcome Center in downtown. Three major trails converge in that city. They include the Coast-to-Coast Trail, part of a 250-mile trail that will link Titusville with St. Petersburg. To register for the event, visit Titusville.org/RideItDown.

This is part of the 10th annual Florida Scrub-Jay Festival, which highlights the Sunshine State’s only endemic bird and the other critical species that rely on the Scrub-Jay. The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is partnering with the Titusville Area Chamber hosting the free event at the Welcome Center.

“Every four years the Festival rotates around wildlife refuges that have Scrub-Jay populations,” said Gaedcke. “This year it’s Titusville’s opportunity to be the host. It was moved to downtown Titusville to get more exposure. And we thought it was a great time to present our second trail ride. The trail ride will focus on the environment and particular birds. When the ride ends in downtown Titusville, it will kick off the start of the Scrub-Jay Festival. The riders can stay and enjoy all that the Festival has to offer.”

“We have a lot of great tourism venues in North Brevard and we want to highlight them,” said Post, adding, “The Brevard County Commissioner for this area (District 1), Rita Pritchett, is very interested in developing an indoor sports arena, which would complement what the United States Specialty Sports Association is doing in Viera. We think youth sports is yet another sector that we can tap and build on.”

The establishment of the North Brevard Economic Development Zone, created in July 2011 by the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners, was the beginning of a giant step forward toward progress in the city.

The North Brevard Economic Development Zone is a Special Dependent District under Florida Statutes (Chapters 125 and 189).

It was formed with the goal of spurring job growth and economic development in North Brevard following the end of the space-shuttle program. The North Brevard Economic Development Zone seeks to provide assistance to businesses prepared to make a substantial capital investment in the area and create a significant number of jobs.

The North Brevard Economic Development Zone includes the communities of Titusville, Mims, Scottsmeer, Port St. John, and portions of Cocoa and unincorporated Brevard County.

This 200-square-mile tax-increment financing district generates incentive dollars for inducing business recruitment and commercial redevelopment.

“One of our early projects was Titus Landing,” said Post, referring to the new 350,000-square-foot outdoor “lifestyle center” anchored by Hobby Lobby, Epic Theatres, and Beall’s department store, among others, and also featuring a medical office building for Parrish Medical Center and its health-care partner, the Mayo Clinic.

“Not only did the Titus Landing project revitalize the 30-acre parcel where the old Miracle City Mall was (built in 1969), it also addressed some of the stormwater issues the city was experiencing largely along U.S. 1. Additionally, Titus Landing gave people in the area something to celebrate and see as a focal point for the rebirth of Titusville. We’re proud of what the developers did with that project.”

Titus Landing was a joint development, bringing together Exxel Project Management of Columbus, Ohio, and the AG Development Group Inc. of Tampa. The development is anticipated to generate new revenue for both the city and county, with an estimated ad valorem tax impact of \$1.4 million and new sales tax collections of more than \$1.8 million.

“We had to find a developer willing to take a risk and invest some money in the project. As a way to induce them to do that, the North Brevard Economic Development Zone was set up to provide a financial grant to them once they met certain criteria,” said Post.

The North Brevard Economic Development Zone has been led by Post, a seasoned economic development professional, for the last six years. He was recruited to shape the upstart entity and lead it into the future.

Before coming to the Space Coast, Post was the executive director at the Development Authority of Columbia County in Georgia, in the Augusta area. He led that countywide economic development agency in eastern Georgia.

“One of the benefits of that job allowed me to work the Masters Tournament every year,” said Post, who holds designations as a Certified Business Economist and as a Certified Economic Developer.

“We would bring in some of our industrial prospects and give them passes so they could walk the course. My favorite thing was watching the Par-3 Contest held each year at the Masters.”

Of all the traditions at the Masters, none is more enduring than the Par-3 Contest held on Wednesday of Tournament Week. The inaugural exhibition was held in 1960 and won by Sam Snead.

Post has steered the North Brevard Economic Development Zone to a host of achievements and has worked with other entities to continue to move the community forward.

In 2017, his organization and the Economic Development Commission of Florida’s Space Coast won the “Bronze Excellence in Economic Development Award”

presented by the International Economic Development Council, a nonprofit organization with more than 5,000 members.

The award was for the “creation of a local economic development tool.” The project won in the category of “Multi-Year Economic Development” in the United States.

The North Brevard Economic Development Zone has since leveraged its annual allocation of tax revenue to induce planned capital investment totaling more than \$314 million.

Working with private aerospace firms such as Blue Origin and OneWeb Satellites, along with non-aerospace businesses such as Barn Light Electric and Ecklers Industries, the North Brevard Economic Development Zone anticipates the creation of more than 2,000 new jobs for the area through the application of its incentive programs, thus helping to stabilize the economy and diversify its base.

“Because of the work of the North Brevard Economic Development Zone, we are seeing new growth in the area,” said McCall. “We are attracting some really great companies that offer high-wage jobs. And the people who are filling the positions are buying homes. Titusville is seeing solid growth in the residential and multifamily markets.”

For the 2018 fiscal year (Oct. 1 through Sept. 30), Titusville’s “Local Government Development Data” shows 302 residential units and COs, compared to 322 in Melbourne. In 2014, Titusville posted just 55 completions and Melbourne came in with 211.

“So you can see the kind of residential growth we have been experiencing in Titusville. It’s exciting,” said McCall, adding that the first phase of the new luxury development Antigua Bay is underway. The development, fronting the Indian River, will feature more than 2,000 condominiums and 400 private homes.

There has been so much business activity happening that Titusville City Manager Scott Laresse created a monthly publication titled “Talking Points,” which highlights new projects and business growth in general.

“The publication is really beneficial informing our residents about the projects and advances being made in the area,” said McCall. “Talking Points, for instance, provides an in-depth look at each piece of property that is being developed in North Brevard as well as site plans that are being reviewed, and much more.”

One sector that has really blossomed for Titusville has been the construction of hotels. They have come in bunches. The first wave began in 2017 when the Hotel Development and Management Group of Ocala laid the groundwork for a TownPlace Suites, part of the Marriott family of properties. The 15,000-square-foot, 112-room hotel is open for business.

Extended Stay America broke ground on a four-story 124-room property. And there are two more new hotels set for Titusville. BBL Hospitality is building a 118-room Hyatt Place Hotel along U.S. Highway 1 at the entrance to Riverfront Center Boulevard (formerly Vectorspace Boulevard), adjacent to Boeing’s facility. The Michael Gaich Co., a local firm, is developing Hyatt Place. The hotel is under construction. “Michael (Gaich) has worked on that project for a number of years, and now it has become a reality,” said McCall.

Looking five years out in North Brevard, Post said he sees a “much more diversified economy. We are part of the Central Florida economy, and there is a lot of activity going on throughout the I-4 corridor that we can take advantage of and build on and complement in the areas of everything from computer simulation to manufacturing. We think North Brevard is well positioned to grow its economy. The future looks bright.”