



Rural Florida:
CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

November 20-22

2024 Florida Rural Economic Development Summit

World Equestrian Center | Ocala, FL



Meet Our
SPEAKERS

Meet Our Speakers



Mason Alford

Director, Office of Small Business Innovation, Florida Department of Commerce

Mason Alford is the Director of the Office of Small Business Innovation for the Florida Department of Commerce (FloridaCommerce), where he oversees key small business lending, venture capital, disaster finance, and technical assistance programs. He is responsible for oversight and administration of the State Small Business Credit Initiative, Black Business Loan Program, Rebuild Florida Business Loan Fund, Microfinance Guarantee Program, as well as the Emergency Bridge Loan program when it is activated through Executive Order by the Governor. Mason received his Bachelor of Science in Economics and Political Science from Florida State University, and he is currently pursuing his Master of Public Administration degree from the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University.



Lacy Beasley

President, Retail Strategies

Lacy Beasley is the President of Retail Strategies, a full-service advisory firm that works with municipalities on retail and restaurant business recruitment through commercial real estate connections.

Beasley serves on the Board of Trustees for ICSC, the largest not-for-profit membership-based retail commercial real estate industry organization. She also serves on the ULI Alabama Leadership Team.

The recipient of numerous awards, the Birmingham Business Journal has named Lacy nationwide "Top 100 National Influencers in Commercial Real Estate", "Top 40 under 40 for the Decade", one of Birmingham's "Eight Emerging Influencers", "Who's Who of Commercial Real Estate" and "Women to Watch".

Lacy has spoken on retail trends and best practices in retail recruitment at hundreds of events across the U.S. and Canada. Her articles have been published in Shopping Centers Today, Site Selection Magazine, and the Alabama Retail Federation.

A graduate of Lipscomb University, she earned her bachelor's degree in Business Management.



Anthony Bedell

Senior Corporate and Government Relations Director, Becker & Poliakoff

Anthony Bedell currently serves as Senior Corporate and Government Relations Director. He advises his clients on how to use a bipartisan and diverse approach to achieve successful public policy initiatives strategically and tactically with federal, state, and local governments.

In 2017, Bedell was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and Tribal Affairs by U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Elaine L. Chao. Then in 2019, Secretary

Chao promoted him to the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs—the number two governmental affairs position in the Office of the Secretary. He also served as one of the Department's appointed representatives on the Northeast Corridor Commission and NETT Council.

Before joining U.S. DOT, Bedell was President of Red Five Strategies, a prominent government relations firm, which he started in 2014. He was also the former Director of Federal and State Government Affairs for a Fortune 500 software company.

In 2022, Governor Glenn Youngkin appointed Anthony to the Virginia Commonwealth University Board of Visitors. He currently serves on these committees: Audit, Integrity and Compliance, Intercollegiate Athletics, Finance and University Resources, Health System Committee and the VCU BOV/VCUHS BOD Joint Task Force.

Bedell is a product of Virginia's public-school systems, where he attended West Springfield High School (1986) and Virginia Commonwealth University (1996). He is also a veteran of the United States Air Force (1990-1996).



Steven Birnholz

President, Florida Council of 100 Foundation

Executive Vice President, Florida Council of 100

Mr. Birnholz joined the Florida Council of 100 in 2007 and serves as the Executive Vice President. During that time and for 3 years prior with Enterprise Florida, he has worked on economic development policy issues, as well as on issues relating to a wide range of topics such as education and workforce development, business climate competitiveness, energy, health care, growth leadership, property insurance, transportation, judicial branch governance, and water management. Prior to that, Mr. Birnholz served in various research and analysis positions in state government, including the Governor's Office, the House

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Appropriations Committee, the Senate Commerce Committee, and the Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability. Mr. Birnholz earned a Master of Business Administration from Boston University and a Bachelor of Arts, Political Science degree from the University of Florida and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. Mr. Birnholz has also recently been named President of the new Florida Council of 100 Foundation, which provides research support to the Florida Council of 100.



Richard Blackwell

Vice President of Development, Agracel, Inc.

After nearly 15 years as an economic developer, Richard made the leap to Agracel where he serves as the Vice President of Development for the Southeast Region. His focus is providing both development and acquisition solutions on the industrial real estate front for both companies and communities.

In his last stint as a local economic developer, he recruited over 1500 new jobs and over half-a-billion (\$500+ million) in new taxable investment in his six year tenure at the County level. With Agracel, he has facilitated nearly 2 million square feet spread across nearly 20 projects throughout the Southeast United States.

He is a member of the board of directors and serves as the Southeast Regional Director, which covers Florida, as a member of the executive committee for the Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC).

He is a two-time graduate of the University of South Carolina with a masters in public administration. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma - Economic Development Institute and has earned a "Master Practitioner" (EcDMP) designation as a member of the inaugural class of the Advanced Economic Development Leadership (AEDL) program.

Blackwell believes "jobs change family trees" and welcomes the challenge of working with clients to find success that creates economic ripple effects.



Rob Bowman

President, R+L Global Logistics

Rob is the President of R+L Global Logistics and has dedicated much of his career to the logistics and transportation industry. A veteran of the U.S. Army, he served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm during the Gulf War, where he also focused on logistics needs. After returning home, Rob earned a degree in Supply Chain Management from the University of Maryland.

In 2000, Rob co-founded and found success with the Accelerated Freight Group. Looking to expand and further showcase his expertise, he joined R+L Carriers in 2007. After helping expand their truckload brokerage and logistics divisions, he became the top candidate to lead R+L Global/R+L Truckload.

Under Rob's leadership, R+L Global Logistics has grown tremendously and is now one of the largest logistics companies in the United States. During all this time, Rob has also raised a family and loves spending time with his children and grandchildren.



Cathy Chambers

Senior Director, Economic Development, Florida Power & Light Company

Cathy leads and advances FPL's economic development strategy statewide and establishes partnerships nationwide. The economic development team's successes have led to repeated recognition by Site Selection in its Top Utility in Economic Development category, as a Top Utility by Business Facilities, and as one of The Best Utilities in Economic Development by Southern Business & Development.

Cathy and her team enhance and support economic development efforts throughout Florida with incentive rates for growing businesses, capacity-building community programs, and resources to local and regional economic development organizations.

The team supports business development projects throughout the state within Florida's targeted industry sectors.

Prior to joining FPL in 2019, Cathy worked for more than 20 years with chambers of commerce, regional economic development organizations and city government. She was named one of North America's Top 50 Economic Developers in 2020 by Consultant Connect. Cathy was recognized as the Florida Economic Development Professional of the Year by the Florida Economic Development Council in 2018. She is also a graduate of Leadership Florida.

Cathy holds a bachelor's degree in public administration from Miami University (OH) and a master's degree in business administration from Xavier University. She is certified as an Economic Development Finance Professional by the National Development Council and is an active member of the International Economic Development Council, Florida Economic Development Council, Utility Economic Development Association and Industrial Asset Management Council. Cathy also serves on The Aerospace Alliance Board of Directors.

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Matt Chesnut

Vice President Business & Economic Development, Space Florida

Matt Chesnut joined Space Florida in December of 2018 as a member of the business development team. Utilizing his experience in economic development in Florida, Matt works closely with economic development organizations, airport organizations, and local governments in utilizing Space Florida's tool kit in the attraction of aerospace companies. Matt's role also involves working with aerospace related businesses who are considering locating or expanding in Florida.

Before joining Space Florida, Matt worked with Team Volusia Economic Development Corporation in Daytona Beach as the Vice-President of Business Intelligence and Operations and as the Director of Economic Development for the City of Titusville, FL.

Prior to working in the economic development field, he served as City Manager for Maryville, MO.

Matt holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and a Bachelor of Science in government from Northwest Missouri State University. In 2012, Matt earned his Certified Economic Developer status through the International Economic Development Council.



Keitha Daniels

Director, Hendry County Economic Development Council

Keitha Daniels has worked for the Hendry County Economic Development Council for 6 years. Prior to that she worked for the County Administrative offices directly under the Board of County Commissioners for four years. A native of Hendry County, she graduated from LaBelle High School and Florida Southwestern State College.

Keitha currently serves on the Clewiston Chamber of Commerce, LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Committee, CareerSource SWFL, Citizens Advisory Committee, Heartland Transportation Planning Organization, Florida Heartland Economic Region of Opportunity, Florida Rural Economic Development Association, FGCU President's Advisory Committee, SWFL Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Hendry County Workforce Advisory Committee, and the Hendry County Local Technology Planning Team.



Tammy Dasher

Director, NextStep at Endeavor Academy

Tammy Dasher was selected as Director of NextStep at Endeavor Academy in August of 2021.

Mrs. Dasher has 32 years of special education experience, beginning with a teaching career that spanned two decades in the classroom at Pace High School in Pace, Florida. She also served as an autism consultant for Florida State University's Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) for nine years.

Mrs. Dasher earned her master's (1995) and bachelor's (1992) degrees in Special Education from the University of West Florida.

In 2000, she was recognized as a National Board-Certified Teacher (NBCT) in Exceptional Student Education. She earned her Behavior Analyst Board Certification (BCBA) in 2011.

During her teaching years, Mrs. Dasher spent her summers working in related areas such as job coaching and curriculum building. She also spent several summers as an instructor and administrator at Autism Pensacola's Kids for Camp program in Pensacola.



Rose Fagler

Economic Development, Weyerhaeuser

Rose Fagler is responsible for economic and business development for Weyerhaeuser's real estate developments, on the portfolio level. Weyerhaeuser is one of the world's largest private owners of timberlands, and one of the largest wood products manufacturers in the U.S., beginning operations in 1900.

Rose supports development projects in the U.S. and Canada. The portfolio includes mixed-use, master-planned communities in multiple states along with its signature community West New Bern in NC. The portfolio includes rail-served, master-planned or partner industrial parks in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Washington inclusive of two mega sites.

Her background includes strategic market and brand positioning, partner team development, strategic public engagement, branding, advertising, and sales incentives. Rose served on the Progress Energy team responsible for siting a nuclear energy campus, 200 miles of transmission lines and, worked with the University of Florida Foundation to launch the UF Water Institute. She is the recipient of the 2005 Beacon Award for Excellence in renewable energy marketing awarded by the Center of Resource Solutions, the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, for work with Gainesville Regional Utilities

Mrs. Fagler is a graduate of Frostburg State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and, named one of the university's Distinguished Alumni in 2020-2021. She and her husband Chauncey live in Fernandina Beach, Florida. They have two grown daughters, one son-in-law and one granddaughter.

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Ben Friedman

Research Manager, Duke Energy

Ben Friedman is the Research Manager for Duke Energy Florida's Economic Development team. He oversees economic development data analytics and trend research that helps the team win projects. Ben has a Certified Economic Research Professional designation from the Council for Community and Economic Research. He provides key data along with strategic guidance to the economic development team and partners in Duke's 34 county service territory. Ben has a BA from Emory University and a Master of Public Policy from Georgia State University.



Justin Garner

Sr Director of Operations – Hospitality and Marketing, World Equestrian Center

Justin oversees all hotel, restaurant, catering and support operations, including sales, finance, and marketing, at World Equestrian Center - Ocala.

Justin joined WEC in 2020 as part of the pre-opening team tasked with developing the hospitality side of the largest equestrian sports complex in the Americas, which includes two onsite hotels, off-site extended stay lodging, RV campground, 7 restaurants, and 250,000+ SF of convention and concession space.

With over 20 years' experience in hotel and restaurant leadership of properties spanning the globe from Atlanta to Hawaii, Justin is uniquely qualified to bring the WEC vision to life.



Jenn Gregory

President, Downtown Strategies

Jenn was named a "Top 50 under 40" professional by Mississippi Business Journal in 2016. She serves as President of Parents for Public Schools Starkville and is the Executive Director/Vice President of Operations for Bully Bloc, a non-partisan political action committee supporting Mississippi State University alumni in political positions within Mississippi. She is a board member of the non-profit group Mississippi 30 Day Fund, an organization focusing on the private sector supporting small businesses the state and is a Governmental Relations Chair for ICSC. Jenn was recently selected for ICSC's Next Generation Leadership Network, a two-year fellowship program for professionals under 40 in the real estate and community development industry.

Jenn is a graduate of Mississippi State University where she received a bachelor's degree in marketing and was honored with the inaugural Spirit of State leadership award. She currently serves on the Marketing Advisory Board for the College of Business at Mississippi State University.



Denise Grimsley

CEO, The Development Group

Denise Grimsley served as Florida State Senator from 2012 – 2018 following four terms in the Florida House of Representatives. During her time in the Florida legislature she chaired several appropriation committees, the Energy and Agriculture committee and has been the only female to ever chair the influential House Appropriations Committee.

A fifth-generation Floridian, Denise's service is rooted in Florida's Heartland where she was born and raised. Her degrees in Nursing and Organizational Management were obtained from South Florida State College, Polk State College and Warner University. She earned an MBA from the University of Miami and in 2013, she was awarded a Doctorate in Humane Letters; honoris causa for her work in Health Policy by Nova Southeastern University.

From 2013 - 2022 she served as Vice President/ Administrator for AdventHealth. During her tenure Grimsley led the Wauchula and Lake Placid Hospital campuses as well as several service lines of the Heartland area.

Denise Grimsley currently serves as the CEO for The Development Group. Responsible for growing the economy of Hardee County, Grimsley remains engaged and committed to her connections statewide, creating a strong community of integrity where people want to be.

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Mike Grissom

Principle, Government Relations, Buchanan

Mike's career in the political arena has taken him across thirteen states on both local, state and federal levels. Mike has formed relationships with key decision-makers and business leaders in Florida and around the country. He uses his extensive experience to advocate for his clients and help advance their business interests in Florida, specifically related to economic development issues, including aerospace and aviation, agriculture, advanced manufacturing, information technology, financial services, foreign direct investment, rural infrastructure and corporate relocation.

Mike's prior roles include time in private practice and serving as Executive Vice President of Enterprise Florida, Inc. (EFI), a public private partnership charged with job creation in the state, where he led legislative and external affairs efforts on behalf of the organization. Mike acted as the point person for communications between EFI and the Executive Office of the Governor, State Legislature, and state agencies including the Department of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Revenue, CareerSource Florida, Florida Department of Transportation, and VisitFlorida.

Mike also served as Executive Director of the Republican Party of Florida and as Senior Director of Political Affairs at the Florida Chamber of Commerce where he was the chief Liaison between the Florida Chamber and the Governor, Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer, Agriculture Commissioner, and House and Senate Campaigns. Mike also has worked as political strategist for former Governor Rick Scott and former Attorney General Bill McCollum, and worked with key officials in Kentucky, South Carolina, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

Mike resides in Tallahassee, Florida with his wife Kristen and their son Henry. He is an avid sportsman who enjoys hunting, fishing, golf, and exploring Florida's great outdoors.



Sadie Haire

Government Relations Consultant, Becker & Poliakoff

Sadie Haire is a Government Relations Consultant in Becker's Federal Lobbying Practice. She most recently served as a Legislative Assistant at Venable LLP where she was responsible for organizing federal events with campaign staff and overseeing PAC finance contributions. A 9th generation native Floridian from Madison County, Ms. Haire also proudly worked in the Florida House of Representatives, leading public relations efforts for state government events and fundraisers and managing all constituent services. As a Native American descendant, Ms. Haire specializes in Tribal issues, as well as Rural Communities, Grant Research, Crypto, Municipal Funding, Electric vehicles, Homeland Security and Energy issues.



Fred Hawkins

President, South Florida State College (SFSC)

Fred Hawkins became the president of South Florida State College (SFSC) in July 2023. He brought a wealth of public service experience to his role as a dedicated advocate for education in the state of Florida.

Prior to arriving at SFSC, Hawkins served as the president and CEO of the Osceola County Education Foundation. In 2020, Hawkins became a state representative serving Osceola County's 400,000 residents where he successfully procured over \$60 million in appropriations funding for his constituents. He served as vice chair of the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee and whip of all education committees. Hawkins also championed several crucial pieces of legislation, notably HB157, which mandates CPR training for every Florida high school student in ninth and 11th grade, displaying his commitment to youth and public safety.

Beyond his legislative endeavors, Hawkins has a history of community engagement, serving on numerous boards and organizations, including the Osceola County Planning Commission, Osceola County Charter Review Commission, and the Greater Osceola Partnership for Economic Prosperity (GOPEP), among others. He received the Legislator of the Year award from the Florida Councils of the Boy Scouts of America, Legislative Champion recognition from the National Waste & Recycling Association (NWRA), and the Florida Freedom Champion designation from Americans for Prosperity.

Before his tenure in the Florida legislature, Hawkins served three terms on the Osceola Board of County Commissioners, beginning in 2008, and served as the chairman in 2010, 2014, and 2016.

A graduate of the University of Akron with a bachelor's degree in Pre-Law and Political Science, Fred Hawkins resides in Sebring with his wife Tiffany and daughter Kendrie.

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Kyle Hudson

Operations Manager, Probes Unlimited

Kyle Hudson is a fourth generation, life-long resident of Northwest Florida. Kyle began working at a young age, developing his problem-solving skills as the operator and manager of his family-owned farm in rural Holmes County. After high school, Kyle attended Chipola College and The University of Florida, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Education and Communication. Kyle graduated from the University of Florida in 2002, at which time, he returned to his high school alma mater, Ponce de Leon High School, to teach Agricultural Science for 8 years. Kyle subsequently earned a Master of Science in Educational Leadership and School Administration in 2005 from The University of West Florida as well as a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health and Psychology from Troy University in 2015. In 2012, Kyle was elected to serve as Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller in Holmes County. In 2021, Kyle entered the field of manufacturing as Operations Manager for Probes Unlimited's newly established Florida Facility. Kyle has enjoyed having an active role in the success of Probes Unlimited thus far. When asked what makes Northwest Florida a positive climate for economic growth, Kyle states "There is a workforce second to none in our rural area. The folks here are ready, willing, and able to go to work. Our climate is prime for economic growth and I am excited to see this growth in my lifetime."



Christen Johnson

Vice President and Administrator, AdventHealth Wauchula

Born and raised in Highlands County, Christen Johnson currently serves as the Vice President and Administrator for AdventHealth Wauchula. Christen holds a Master of Business Administration from Florida Southern College and a Bachelor of Science in Public Relations from the University of Florida. She has been a member of the AdventHealth team for more than 13 years.

Raising a family, building relationships, serving others, and developing ways to expand healthcare and philanthropic efforts in Hardee and Highlands County communities are major components of Christen's purpose in life.

Passionate about giving back to her Heartland community, moving back to Highlands County a couple years after college was a perfect fit. Johnson currently resides in Sebring with her husband Jason and her two children Charlie and Gracelyn. In her spare time, she enjoys camping, gardening, baking, and raising a small hobby farm of cattle and chickens.



J. Alex Kelly

Florida Secretary of Commerce

J. Alex Kelly currently leads FloridaCommerce as Florida's Secretary of Commerce. Prior to his appointment, Kelly held the Deputy Chief of Staff role in the Governor's Office since April 2021.

Kelly has an extensive background and expertise in education and economic development having served as the Vice President for the Foundation of Excellence in Education and the Chief of Staff to then-Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran in 2019.

In total, Kelly held roles in the Florida House of Representatives on the three occasions and in the Florida Senate, including Staff Director for the Redistricting Committee in the Florida House of Representatives and Chief Analyst for the House's Select Policy Council on Strategic & Economic Planning. He served as the Chief of Staff for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, and Legislative Affairs Director at the Florida Department of Corrections and the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

Kelly earned both a bachelor's degree in political science from York University of Pennsylvania and a master's degree in political science from the University of Florida.



Mark Kruse

EVP and General Counsel, FCF/FFC

Mark serves as Executive Vice President and General Counsel and is based in Tallahassee. Mark's extensive resume includes serving as Senior Advisor on Government Relations for Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney – one of the largest law firms in the nation. He also has deep experience in Florida state government having worked as Director of Legislative Affairs and Policy Coordinator for Transportation and Economic Development for Governors Rick Scott and Ron DeSantis as well as having held several staff positions in the Florida Senate and the Florida House of Representatives. Previously, Mark served as the Director of Closing and Assistant General Counsel for Florida First Capital.

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Jerry D. Parrish, Ph.D.

Chief Economist, Metro Atlanta Chamber



Jerry D. Parrish, Ph.D. is the Chief Economist at the Metro Atlanta Chamber. Dr. Parrish was previously the Director of State and Local Policy Analysis at the Florida Institute of Government at Florida State University. Dr. Parrish is also a Faculty Adjunct in the Master's of Applied Economics Program at Florida State University.

He previously was the Chief Economist and Director of Research for the Florida Chamber Foundation. Previous to that position, Dr. Parrish was the Chief Economist and Director of the Center for Competitive Florida at Florida TaxWatch. Prior to that position, he served as the Associate Director of the Center for Economic Forecasting & Analysis (CEFA) at Florida State University. He has many years of experience in the private sector in management roles at international manufacturing companies.

He earned a B.S. in Agricultural Business and Economics from Auburn University, an M.B.A. from Bellarmine University, and M.S. in Economics from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and a Ph.D. in Economics from Auburn University.

Scarlett Phaneuf

Economic Development Representative, PowerSouth Energy



Scarlett is the Northwest Florida Economic Development Representative for PowerSouth Energy. Her previous positions include Vice President of the Bay Economic Development Alliance and Executive Director of the Walton County Economic Development Alliance.

Scarlett holds a bachelor and master's degree in architecture from the University of Florida and a Master of Business Administration from Auburn University Montgomery.

In 2018, Scarlett joined an esteemed group of professionals in becoming a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) through the International Economic Development Council. She is also a recipient of the Dan Webster Young Innovator Award and has been included in North America's Top 50 Economic Developers by Consultant Connect and Economic Development's 40 under 40 by Development Counselors International.

Scarlett and her husband, Matt, have two children and live in their hometown of Freeport, Florida.

Shellie Phelps

Executive Director, Wetumpka Area Chamber of Commerce



In her professional life, Shellie Phelps Whitfield is an unparalleled force in the realm of community and economic development. As the Executive Director of the Wetumpka Area Chamber of Commerce and as a passionate community change-maker, she has played a pivotal role in revitalizing Wetumpka, Alabama.

In her personal life, Shellie has faced a multitude of challenges that have taught her to have the courage and faith to step into the dark unknown, regardless of how terrifying it may seem. She is an adoptive mother and creative business owner who believes in the power of serendipity and constantly strives to be her most authentic and unique self.

Shellie's expertise in fostering community growth through the arts is truly remarkable. She has become a recognized authority on the subject, and her speaking engagements have taken her all across the United States. Her talks inspire and empower audiences with insights into the transformative power of art in revitalizing small towns and creating stronger, more vibrant communities. Her message of "What makes you different is actually your superpower" resonates with every age group, organization, and community that hears her.

As a community development cheerleader, Shellie's dedication to her work has left an enduring impact on Wetumpka, Elmore County, and the state of Alabama. Her ability to seamlessly blend artistry and leadership has made her a beacon of hope for communities seeking revitalization and growth.

Shellie Phelps Whitfield's journey is an inspiring testament to the boundless potential of individuals who dare to dream and act on their passions. Her legacy is one of creativity, growth, and inspiration, both in the realm of art and in the field of community development and public speaking.

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Darryl Register

Executive Director, Baker County Chamber of Commerce & Baker County Economic Development

Darryl is a lifelong Baker County resident that spent 25 years as a local business owner and economic development volunteer before accepting the position of Executive Director with the Baker County Chamber of Commerce in June of 2007. Through his position at the Chamber, Darryl also serves as Executive Director of the Baker County Development Commission and is the main point of contact for economic development in Baker County.

In addition to several local boards, Darryl also serves as a deacon in his church and as a representative of Baker County on the boards of the Northeast Florida Regional Council where he currently serves as Treasurer, the North Florida Economic Development Partnership where he is a past Chairman, the Florida Rural Economic Development Association where he is the current Chairman, and CareerSource Northeast Florida where he is a past Chairman.

Darryl and his wife of 42 years, Danette, have two children and four grandchildren. In his spare time Darryl enjoys helping on the family farm, playing golf and spending time with his family.



Jodi Tillman

Director, Big Bend Technical College

Mrs. Tillman is currently in her 38th year in Career and Technical Education. Mrs. Tillman had an award-winning teaching career for 20 years in Volusia County, where she taught Agriculture Education and was an FFA Advisor. In 2002 she was recognized as the National Agriculture Teacher of the Year. She worked for the Florida Department of Education in CTE for 6 years and for the past 11 years, has worked at Big Bend Technical College, where she served as the Director. She recently accepted a new position at the Florida Department of Corrections, where she serves as the Deputy Director for Programs and Re-entry. Mrs. Tillman has a Bachelor's in Agriculture Education and Masters in Science from the University of Florida.



Greg Vaday

Economic Development Representative, U.S. Department of Commerce

Greg Vaday is the Florida Economic Development Representative for the U.S. Department of Commerce's, Economic Development Administration (EDA). In this capacity, Mr. Vaday provides technical assistance to distressed communities across Florida and helps them access EDA grant funding opportunities to become economically resilient and support their long-term economic development. As an economic development professional, Mr. Vaday's prior community and economic development experience cuts across regional economic development, grant management, small business lending, affordable housing development, consulting, managing a regional brownfields redevelopment program and implementing federally-funded infrastructure projects.

Prior to joining EDA, Mr. Vaday served as Principal Planner for Palm Beach County's Department of Economic Sustainability, Economic Development Coordinator of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) and Urban Planner with Bermello Ajamil & Partners, Inc. in Miami. He has a Bachelor's degree in Urban and Economic Geography from the University of Toronto and a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Florida State University.



Richard Williams

Executive Director, Opportunity Florida & CareerSource Chipola

Richard Williams is Executive Director for CareerSource Chipola, a regional workforce board, and Opportunity Florida, a regional economic development group. A Northwest Florida native, he has spent almost his entire career serving rural communities in Northwest Florida.

After graduating from Texas A&M University, he returned home to work in a family-owned forestry business that became a manufacturing company still operating under the ownership of Richard and his wife Denise.

Richard is a founding board member of the Florida Rural Economic Development Association and a graduate of the Advanced Economic Development Leadership Program.

Richard helped establish Opportunity Florida and is deeply committed to rural communities. He has served on various boards ranging from the Calhoun Liberty Soil and Water Conservation District, the 2007 Blueprint Commission for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the Early Learning Coalition of

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Northwest Florida, and as president of the Florida Workforce Development Association. In 2014 he was named the Toni Jennings Workforce Development Professional of the Year.

He graduated the University of Florida's Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources as a member of the inaugural class, and Richard previously served as a member of the group's Alumni Board of Directors.

Richard says the most satisfying part of his job is getting to talk with individuals that have been able to improve their economic stability because of training they received through a workforce program or because Opportunity Florida helped a business grow or locate in the region.