

## **Sumter County CEOs: new business recruitment**

Sumter County is well-positioned in physical location, financial status, available business sites, low taxes, high quality public and charter school systems, a focused and business oriented board of County Commissioners to successfully accomplish selective and significant new business recruitment during the next 24 months. The pace of recruitment will partially be based on macro economic conditions improving to give businesses the faith and desire to expand as we climb out of the worst recession in the century.

How do we best get ready to maximize recruitment possibilities. We have completed a number of the basic foundation tasks for active recruitment including a rigorous review of strengths and weaknesses, a vibrant business summit, a robust business survey, a completion of industrial site availability and soon, fundamental and strong strategic plan for retention, expansion and recruitment of business.

### **What's missing?**

The missing piece is communicating, acquainting and then recruiting potential new business development to move Sumter County. Sumter County is the best kept secret in Florida even with the dynamic Villages making a strong national presence. Like many small counties, Sumter County does not have the ability to buy recognition in the marketplace through an extensive advertising and public relations campaign. We need a new and innovative approach to build our reputation in the State, Regional and National Markets. We need a focused approach without the high expense and questionable effectiveness of extensive advertising and marketing programs (we do recommend complementary advertising program for consideration in next year's budget). Fortunately, Sumter County may be a great secret, but it also contains a secret weapon to advance the goal.

That secret weapon is the strength, expertise and connections of retired executive leaders from other parts of the country now living among the 75,000 residents of The Villages. These highly successful executives retain special connections to those locations in the country where they owned and operated businesses for long periods of time. The fact that they individually made the decision to retire to this community already demonstrates the esteem they have for Sumter County. If we can recruit them as very important volunteers, equip them with appropriate information to communicate to potential business relocations, support them with expert follow up on their first contacts and motivate them with how important these recruitments will be to the long-term economic health of the area; I believe many will see this effort as highly significant and important to accomplish.

We propose a pilot program with both the cities of Wildwood and Bushnell using sites they've already identified as "shovel ready". We will recruit a group of 8 to 12 retired executives and put in process the information and tools they need to make informed contacts to their business friends throughout the country. We will refine the plan of operation during the month of August, recruit volunteers with help of



executives associated with The Villages and commence recruitment activities in early September. We think it is healthy and appropriate to quietly begin this process and then announce the operation after we've had some initial success. The success of the program is getting them to open the door and then following up in a highly professional and organized manner. They will also be important to showcase the role of Sumter County CEOs to reinforce their interest and to help recruit additional volunteers as we expand the program. We will certainly cover any indirect and direct expenses these talented volunteers will have such as telephone calls and fax information. The fact that many of these potential Sumter County CEOs already love their new hometown only makes this transition to recruitment that much more effective. I understand that 61% of new Villagers relocated to this area as a result of testimonial encouragement from existing residents. If we can translate that same success rate to business recruitment, this approach stands to be a unique, powerful and inexpensive method to begin regional and national recruitment to Sumter County.