



## **SB2 – International Travel & Business**

**November 20, 2014; 7:30 am- 9 am**

***The Francis: 1289 N. Palm Avenue, Sarasota, Florida***

**WES ROBERTS:** I would like to welcome Jeff Mayers. Jeff is a long-time partner of SRQ Magazine, and we're thrilled to have him as our opening presenter. He is representing the Resort at Longboat Key Club. He has been the General Manager there since November of 2012. He's been General Manager at an enormous list of spas, resorts, big names, ones you'd recognize. I'm going to pass it off. Thank you, Jeff.

**JEFF MAYERS:** On behalf of Ocean Properties, our parent company, who manages a number of properties including our own, Longboat Key Club, Lido Beach Resort, Holiday Inn at Lido Beach, Sandcastle at Lido Beach, and the Hilton, which is under construction right now, we are proud to be event sponsors today, and I look forward to the conversations, and am very much looking forward to participating with the panelists here. So I gave a little thought about what I could talk about today; I could talk about the resort, but I thought it was better to talk about business in general, particularly as it pertains to the subject today as a segue. 2014 has really been a banner year in our community, we are seeing new visitors come into the area, we're seeing the economy improve with more confidence, so all positive signs are right there. And while the trends are really positive for 2015, you can't rest on your laurels. It's imperative that we explore our market penetration, particularly in the international markets. The sports market has already proved to be a conduit for improving our relevance as a destination. The perfect example would be the World Rowing Championships. At this point our largest visitation comes from the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. In order to accommodate our international visitors, we really need a collaboration between SRQ Airport and business leaders to enhance the growth of the area. We've got to make it easier for visitors to come to our area. As we have a variety of hospitality options, from hotel rooms to condominiums, this provides options to those traveling for an extended period of time or potentially corporate relocations. The ability to access international visitors may have an impact on the business owners of the community. In closing, the time is right to move on those competitive markets, to shift share from other destinations within the state of Florida. Thank you very much.

**WES ROBERTS:** Thank you Jeff, thank you very much. I appreciate everyone who came today, wading your way through the snow banks to get here on this cold winter day. I would like to introduce Jacob Ogles. Jacob is Senior Editor for SRQ Magazine, SRQ Daily, and SRQ Media Products. He's going to tell you as the audience how you can get involved in the questions today.

**JACOB OGLES:** Welcome to SB2. You will all see question cards in the middle of your tables. What we'd like you to do is, while you're listening to the discussion, if you have questions, write them down. We'll have someone collect them, and when Wes is done with the panel I'll read them. Thank you very much.



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**WES ROBERTS:** Thank you Jacob. Our topic today is International Tourism and Business. We have a star-studded panel with a lot of different expertise. We should get information that is just tremendous from the conversation. What I'm going to do, is rather than introduce each person and go through their CV and background, is ask them to do that. So we'll go from the far end of the table to the near end of the table. Just say a sentence or two about your title, a little bitty bit about your background, and then the question to let us know a bit about yourself, since the topic is international travel, what is one of your favorite places to travel in the world, personally?

**JOAN MCGILL:** Good day. My name is Joan McGill, I'm with the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County. I'm filling in for Mark Huey. I'm Vice President for Business Development. My focus is primarily on business retention and expansion. I work with our local companies, help them grow and expand, and meet their needs in the community so that they can be successful. My favorite place that I've ever traveled is Africa. It was unlike any place I've even been.

**MAX STEWART:** Good morning. My name is Max Stewart. I am the state's Director of International Travel in the west coast of Florida, so I handle all the international travel, business, international trade shows. We are the state's accounting office. We like to joke we work on the state level. I handle 11 county regions from Citrus County all the way down to Naples. I just got back from Germany on Sunday. I think my favorite place to travel, I've been there six times, is Iceland. To see the Northern Lights is pretty funky.

**ELLIOT FALCIONE:** Good morning, I'm Elliot Falcione with the Bradenton Area Visitor's Bureau. We promote Manatee County for tourism. The favorite place I've traveled to is of course Italy. Rome is a spectacular city. About four years ago I was able to go back to where my grandfather was born in Italy - a wine vineyard village. It was very emotional. If you can go back to where your roots originated, it's pretty cool stuff.

**JEFF MAYERS:** Good morning, Jeff Mayers, Resort Manager at Longboat Key Club. I guess I don't have to do my introduction today since Wes did such a good job with that. My favorite place to travel would be the south of France. Beautiful destination, great food.

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** Good morning, Virginia Haley, I'm with Tourism for Sarasota County. We do the tourism for Sarasota County. I've traveled many fantastic places around the world, but seeing as we go back there at least once a year, the answer must be New Orleans.

**WES ROBERTS:** Let's get into it and discuss what countries and what people we talk about when we say "international". I'll start with Joan, and ask, when it comes to international businesses that are looking to bring their industry here, where are we seeing that come from?

**JOAN MCGILL:** It's interesting. We get flurries from one country, then it disappears and goes to another country. I would say over the last few years, South Africa, primarily because the owner of the company has a home here. They're bringing



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some business to Sarasota because they want to live here. That haven't done that yet because it takes time to move a country. It's hard to move a country anywhere, especially in another country, so they're looking to get a foothold. U.K. is another source. Most of those are companies looking to open an office here, get a regional headquarters to get launched in the United States. Probably most of them would be from the U.K.

**WES ROBERTS:** Max, I have a question in terms of businesses that are looking to open in Florida. Are there tax benefits or money benefits to moving their money here? This is outside of wanting to expand the business--what are some of the benefits they're looking to see?

**MAX STEWART:** Well the big thing isn't a tax benefit. Yesterday was "Hate Florida Day", because we're the only state that had weather above 50 degrees. If you can think of that when you consider where businesses what to be, especially when they want to move their businesses somewhere where they don't have to worry about their heating bill being 8,000 dollars a month. In terms of tax exemptions in the state of Florida, everyone knows that we just passed a manufacturing sales tax exemption, so that if you buy manufacturing equipment for the purpose of manufacturing, Florida now has a thing where you don't have to pay sales tax on the state level. There's a lot of grants and tax benefits. Another thing people don't know about is the manufacturer's electricity exemption. If you're manufacturing a product, you're using electricity, the sales tax at the state level, you're exempt from. So if you're manufacturing and running machines, the electricity you use is exempt from the state sales tax. A lot of companies don't even know that exists.

**WES ROBERTS:** When it comes to these sorts of topics that would make a company's CFO pay attention, have we seen a lot more competition from other countries that at least proclaim they're going to make these sorts of efforts. I've heard that Nicaragua and Costa Rica, perhaps?

**MAX STEWART:** We were at a development meeting last week, and they were actively engaging companies from these countries. They were coming around to a lot of different pavilions, especially the Florida pavilion, saying "Hey! Would you like to move your company to our country?" and the businesses said, "No. Sorry." But there's a lot of increased competition on the international market for incentives, and it's not just incentives, it's a qualified work force, which a lot of these countries don't have yet. They want to move you there, then figure that part out later. Whereas we have that in the state of Florida. Lot of companies here, lot of people trying to move around. We have a great pool of talent in the state of Florida for people who are hiring.

**WES ROBERTS:** Elliot: continuing back to the conversation of where people are coming from. In your area of expertise, where are the big draws?

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** I think United Kingdom is our number one market for international visitors. Followed by central Europe, Germany. The Germans spend more money and stay longer. The Canadians is mainly Ontario; they're mainly snowbirds, so we don't really think of them as visitors. The international visitor looks to stay in the Sarasota-Bradenton area. The international visitor is going to spend



double per day than a domestic visitor. I think the key is, why do we go after the international visitor? One, it diversifies. They spread out. They start coming in through August, and will be coming in until about January. You need that sustainable visitation to sustain jobs, to grow jobs. If domestic travel cools off, you still have an influx coming in from other markets. Just touch on South America: you look at research on the state level, they're coming in like gangbusters. When you dig deep, we're really not targeting the Brazilian or Latino markets, because we don't have enough funds, and we're putting our money on our biggest and strongest. Where we will target the Latin market is in the sports section, i.e. the IMG academy. As those athletes are coming in, maybe their parents are coming with them.

**WES ROBERTS:** Virginia, could you continue along that line--Elliot spoke to marketing to countries where we're already getting return; are there markets that we could break open, that have a lot of opportunity, that we're not reaching? What percentage of our visitors are U.K./German? Is that such a large percentage that reaching out to France is not a wise return?

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** For us, excluding Canada, you're looking at about 10 percent of the visitation is other than U.S. and Canada. Of that, U.K. is by far the strongest. We're a little different than Manatee: UK is our longest-stay, highest-spent. With international travel, unlike in the US, it's not a relationship directly with the consumer. Your relationship is with wholesale tour operators who contact either our properties or with receptive operators for blocks of hotel rooms. In UK and Germany, travel is still dominated by travel agent, both traditional bricks-and-mortar and online services. Why? Partly because they have very, very strong consumer protection laws. You started to see more personal planning with the Europeans, but then you had that lovely year with the volcano. That shut down travel for two weeks. Those who booked on their own spent thousands and thousands trying to get home; those who booked through an agent, the insurance covered everything it took to get them home. So we have a long way to go to penetrate our already-existing markets. We're seeing huge double-digit increases because we're able to now partner with some of those wholesalers which we never did in the past. And we were able to sign contracts with new wholesalers. So there's a lot of business left in those traditional markets for us to grab. And I think there are two more developments that will help us: the partnership with Delta and Virgin will make it seamless to fly to Atlanta and direct onto Delta on to SRQ. That's going to be huge. And then having Edelweiss starting in Tampa and having direct service to Frankfurt will be a real benefit. And then finally, with new markets, we're working with Charlotte, Lee, and Collier counties to make some small inroads into the Brazilian market. The Brazilian economy that was gangbusters has really faltered pretty badly. One of the things we're doing is using shopping to draw them over from Miami to the west coast.

**WES ROBERTS:** Jeff, in terms of the numerous organizations that you are a part of or on the board of, a huge focus has been on increasing the number of facilities available to attract tourists. What are some areas that we're working on making improvements?

**JEFF MAYERS:** The nice thing that I've learned about our community in our two years here is the diversity of our offlinks. I think that's what really puts us on the map. If you want great condos, we have that; if you want great art venues, we have that; if



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you want great sports venues, we have that. With the University Town Center now open, that's another great destination. The more we have to offer, the more it makes our destination the place to go. What we need to really focus on is the infrastructure. With the growth of traffic, from visitors within the United States to visitors overseas, do we have the infrastructure that can handle the volume of the traffic, the volume of the demand that's going to be placed on our community? So, moving forward, we have to understand what it is we need to improve and what it is we can offer.

**WES ROBERTS:** I don't think I've asked a question of Joan. What are some of the forces at work that help make a positive decision? You have governmental or semi-governmental entities. You have property owners and major business owners like Ocean Properties. You have the consumers, which could be the people that live here or the snowbirds. What are some of those facets that are wrestling over what the decision could be?

**JOAN MCGILL:** I'll tell you what the number one thing is that brings businesses to Sarasota. All our cultural amenities have done a great job of creating a place where people want to live. I think every business you ask, when you ask that question, they've got a connection to Sarasota. They visit here, and they come back again and again and again. One of the CEOs in the area, I asked him, and he said they vacationed here each year for his kids, then they finally moved here. Once they move here, they understand the tax benefits. Florida is a very tax-friendly state. They understand that this is a community. They look at those things to help them decide to relocate their businesses. By far the decision is made by where they want to live.

**WES ROBERTS:** Who are the organizations that serve to help that transition? Do we have push from the county government?

**JOAN MCGILL:** There are some events that help. And also, there was one CEO who had been coming here to visit his grandmother every year since he was five years old. But I think everyone in this community has a role in encouraging that. I don't think there's a single organization that is the source for all this. Our organization is learning how to intersect better with those visitors. So if they're coming for a sporting event, or if they're coming for the film festival, often we meet and we intersect with them.

**WES ROBERTS:** Max, on the state level, does that continue to be the case? Is it that the people who have businesses here are living here because the leadership want the benefits of living in Florida, or is that less dominating as more businesses move here?

**MAX STEWART:** We have this discussion all the time. What are they really looking for? There are two things we see that they're looking for on the business side. On the international side, they're looking at how are they going to get to South America? They want to reach the untapped markets. They want to be somewhere where they can have a great quality of life. They also want to move where they can start looking for new expansion opportunities. Because Europe's tapped. Every European company has tapped out the market. You're seeing a lot of companies venture out and look into the South American and Latin American markets. I've had a lot of companies go, "Can I move to Florida and go to Latin America?" and I say, "Sure,





you can go to Sarasota, go to Tampa, hop on a flight to Panama City, and you're in Latin America in five hours." They can live on the beach and be in Latin America in five hours. Those are the types of things that we see from companies. The other issue that drives them here is clusters. Sector clusters. Some companies don't need a cluster, some companies do. It just depends on the industry. They're looking at "How do I reach the new markets I want to reach?"

**WES ROBERTS:** Virginia, we're hearing pretty consistently is that what brings people to Florida is Florida, what brings people to our region is our region. The focus of the CVB's is making sure that people have those brands in mind when they're thinking about new opportunities for relocation. When you think of New Orleans, you think of the French Quarter. There's an enormous amount of things there that isn't at the top of my mind. What is the brand for Sarasota County for international tourism?

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** It is without a doubt the cultural aspects. It's what sets up apart. When we do focus groups, even people who don't know too much about our location, the one thing they know is that we have something to do with the circus. You have to remember how important circus is, particularly in European markets. That legacy is huge. So what we've been doing is targeting domestically cultural audiences. We were the prime corporate sponsor of Tanglewood this summer. You can see tangible results--four of the people we hosted have bought homes since then. So we're not just attracting visitors, we're thinking of the future art investors. And we've been marrying that with sports. In October we had big international numbers, and bigger number with sports. And it's even better, because the sporting event was an international event. Our October hotel occupancy is up 16 percent since last year. And the revenue per available room was up 30 percent since last October. Why? We have strong international visitation. They stay a long time. I have to share a quick email from a Sarasota resident who was on, two weeks ago, a cruise through the Panama canal, eavesdropping on the people next to them who all had friends rowing in the breast cancer event, and they had never heard of this place Sarasota. They thought it was a fantastic place. It shows the power of marrying our key assets together and what it can do for the brand.

**WES ROBERTS:** If you had to make that list, you started with "circus", is there one that's above it that's "beach"?

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** The fact that we have stunning beaches is great. But if you look at the Florida coastline, there are a lot of beautiful, spectacular beaches. You go to these trade shows, you see all these beaches around the world that are much easier and cheaper for our European visitors. So, if we're selling ourselves on beach, we're going to lose. The cultural events, the sporting events, being able to go out to Myakka, that's where you make that difference.

**WES ROBERTS:** In my capacity at *SRQ* I work with hundreds of clients that want to market themselves and advertise themselves. One of the most important pieces of advice I give is not "what's important about you" but "How little time the client is going to think about what's important about you?" That's a very interesting answer that "circus" would be so high on the list.



**VIRGINIA HALEY:** Well, “circus” refers to the whole cultural appeal. We have in the US two very different markets. From October to May, you have the very Midwest, Washington DC markets, very interested in beach and culture. In the summertime, you tend to have the drive market, and they are all about the beach.

**WES ROBERTS:** So, Elliott, same question. My straw poll understanding of Italy is that people are very excited about Florence. But that’s because Florence is easy to understand. You go to Florence, there’s five amazing things, and you’ve had a great experience. Rome is very hard to understand, and there’s a hundred amazing things. You don’t even have parallel experiences. What are the priority destinations or value points for Bradenton?

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** Geographical location is very important to convey to the international visitor. I think they say 25 percent of people can’t find the United States on a map. So as much as you think they know where the west coast of Florida is, you have to say, “Here’s Miami, here’s Orlando, and we’re here.” It’s nice to know that they can hang their hat on Anna-Maria Island in a self-serving accommodation for two weeks, and then they may springboard to Disney for two days. Or take a drive up to Busch Gardens. We’re not shy about saying, “An hour and a half, and you’re at Disney World”. We know they want to hang their hat on the Gulf of Mexico. It’s important just to convey the attributes of the community. The eco-parks, the farms: so important. A couple months ago Conde Nast ranked Anna-Maria Island number 26 in the top 30 islands in the world, with Anna-Maria Island being the only Florida island on that list. That’s powerful stuff. Of course, the shopping. We have the largest shopping mall in Florida, and the largest indoor mall south of the Skyway. On the sports segment, 94% of the people that come to this destination for the first time will return. So you target the first-time visitor. The sports visitors, I call it an “economic stimulus introduction tour.” You’re bringing in new dollars by bringing the athletes in. Once we get them here, we have to expose them to our amenities, and there’s a pretty good chance that they’ll come back. I think there’s two issues in Florida now about recruiting businesses. We’re losing Millenials. Every day. To places outside Florida. We have too many urban-sprawl communities. The governments can’t afford to run utility lines with such small amounts of businesses connecting. The best thing the government can do is go back into the urban core and create a more dense environment. The Millenials don’t want to own a car. They want public transportation, but they’re waiting an hour for a bus. We’ve got to focus on the Millenials, keep them here, create more of a dense urban environment so the public transportation can be more efficient and effective. I think that’s going to really appeal to businesses wanting to move to the state of Florida. There are two Millenials that work in our department, out of 1,700. The majority of supervisors are baby boomers.

**WES ROBERTS:** I want Max to talk about challenges we have to overcome, either regionally or at the state level, that there are negative stereotypes of where we live, and when you hear about them they stick out because they rankle you. Which also means that there’s a kernel of truth. And the two that would characterize them to me are, Florida is the Wal-Mart shopper of the states. Like people say there’s a “News of the Weird of Florida.” And another one is the perception of age. And the way I characterize that is that people think we definitely have an older audience here, but our audience also doesn’t live the lifestyle of older citizenry in other states. So we have these two impediments that probably ring pretty loudly with Millenials. Are



those challenges, and what can we do from a state or county perspective to affect them the other way?

**MAX STEWART:** That's right. Elliott said they want density. The younger crowd wants a more active area. That's the kind of thing you see on the news. Everyone's heard of *The Flight of the Creative Class*. It's a book out there for those of you that never read it. It's about how New Zealand attracted Peter Jackson and the whole tech industry that worked on *The Hobbit*. We have Ringling School of Art and Design here, and I have friends that went to Ringling that went to San Francisco, because they found jobs at Pixar or they found jobs at AOL. But that's what we're trying to do, is find companies that want to come here and be part of a downtown core. That kind of industry needs a cluster for itself. That's the kind of thing that we look at all the time.

**WES ROBERTS:** Chicken or the egg, a little bit. Tech companies don't perceive Florida as a place to be. They want to hire young, hip people. Austin is full of young, hip people. The companies open in Austin. So part of what you're saying is that we need to create the urban space that...

**MAX STEWART:** Yeah, but also, understand the fact of the city. USF is a great research and development facility in the field. There's a lot of young people out there looking to get into the medical or biotech fields to start creating new things. USF is creating new jobs throughout the region. That's the kind of thing that people want to hear, that you're creating the work force for those businesses.

**WES ROBERTS:** Virginia, do you want to speak to that?

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** There's one other important factor, particularly in terms of looking at it in the international market. The United States did a fantastic job in losing market share in international businesses overall--we held our own. But in the past decade, we lost huge sections of the market share. You have no idea how harmful that was. But the United States across the world is perceived as an unwelcoming and unfriendly place. If a visitor feels like they're unwelcome, and there are plenty of other choices, they're going to go to those other choices. Other countries took huge advantage of us. We were the only industrialized country in the world that did not have a national tourism marketing agency. That was finally remedied five years ago. It's known as Grand USA. Since Grand USA has been in business, we've been clawing back that market share. If you don't get that first-time visitors, it's hard to sell Florida. Some of the success that we're seeing, it's because we have a national partner to work with to turn things around. And one more thing on Millennials. There is an interesting thing that's started to happen in the last year, and that is that Millennials are flocking to these creative centers. But, they are the most unaffordable places to live. So what you're seeing is some flight of Millennials from those areas to different areas with a little bit better lifestyle.

**WES ROBERTS:** I think, following on that, taking it to Jeff, the experience that international travelers have, are we alienating them with TSA, etc? Is this a difficulty that we're creating for ourselves? Do they show up complaining?





**JEFF MAYERS:** Virginia's shaking her head yes, so I'll say yes it is. I think that it comes down to this: it is difficult to be travelling internationally. We help that by providing a great experience for our international visitors. Hopefully that will supersede the challenges they had coming here, and bring them back in future years. If I could just talk for a moment about workforce, and just having the workforce to help fuel economic development in our community. We have to ask, are we set up for the future, and make sure that we have the work force that can make the future that we seek.

**MAX STEWART:** Just on the welcome to the United States, Virginia's right. There's nothing worse than coming into JFK or Atlanta, and as you're deplaning, there's guys that are in almost SWAT gear and K-9 dogs. One time I stopped in the walkway, and a police officer with a dog said, "Keep it moving, buddy." And you want to say, are you kidding me? This is the welcome you're giving visitors to the United States? It's a problem, it's frustrating, and it really needs to be fixed. All the other countries that we go into, even Korea, the welcomes are pretty good.

**WES ROBERTS:** I wanted to ask a question of everyone in the panel, if each person could answer it in just a couple of sentences. We'll start with Joan. What is some big impediment that people could be influencing? We have a bunch of influential and powerful and interested people here, but when I talk to people, it feels like it's hard to influence anything. What is something you want people to know? What is something you want people to care about, in hopes that their caring helps make change?

**JOAN MCGILL:** I'm going to go back to our number one challenge for businesses here: the workforce. We have to overcome the image that we are a retirement community, a tourist community, and that we're not a business community. The challenge is, how can we position Sarasota as a place to do business as well as a place to live and work. Those are the two biggest challenges I see: the image of the community, and retention of the workforce and talent.

**MAX STEWART:** If you don't have global entry for coming into the country, you need to get that quick. But if you want to influence decision-makers, you need to follow the trade issues and go to the trade events that are happening throughout the state and federal government. You guys are the best ambassadors: you can tell them how great it is here. The other thing is, if you want to influence things, go on a trade mission.

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** Educate the community. A lot of the time, we get a lot of people upset about the streets filling up with visitors. They'll say, "This is our island, we don't want visitors." Then I'll ask them, "How did you find out about the island?" And they'll say, "Well, we visited the island for summer vacation." Let them know that visitors decrease property tax, visitors increase the value of their homes, visitors keep quality hospitality workers in the community. If we can have kids here, educate them here, and give them jobs here to give hospitality to our visitors, it doesn't get any better than that.

**JEFF MAYERS:** I would agree with Elliot, and would also mention workforce development. One out of every five of our workers is either directly or indirectly in the hospitality industry. And with the success that we're seeing, and the growth of



visitors coming to our area, there's a lot more hotels coming to the area. And if we're not able to expand the development of our workforce as needed, that's going to make it more difficult when visitors come here to make that favorable, lasting impression. We need to focus on what is important for develop our workforce.

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** I'm going to give two quick things: I would love it when you go back to your office to send an email to our senators and urge them to pass the travel resolution to revitalize Brand USA. Not one penny in tax dollars is spent on Brand USA. It is all paid for by visitors coming into the country. And I want to ask a question of the audience: who worked as a lifeguard, who worked at a country club, who worked in a restaurant? So you all started in the tourism industry. You are leaders in this community. I don't want to hear a one of you disparage the jobs in this community. The tourism industry is how we grow business leaders. So promise me, that when you leave here, that you will never disparage tourism industry jobs.

**WES ROBERTS:** I'm going to turn it over to Jacob in just one second, but after running the tables, there's one thing that keeps coming up over and over again and I feel like I have to bring it up: clarify "workforce development." What is the workforce category that we need to build?

**JEFF MAYERS:** I'll speak for hospitality. There are a lot of positions that are not managerial type of positions that are very important to providing the type of service that our guests seek. I think it's incumbent on the hospitality industry to introduce the hospitality industry at the high school level. You don't need to go to college to become a manager eventually, if that is what you want.

**JOAN MCGILL:** Sometimes you don't know what you're going to get until you get it. Sysco Food Systems, when they opened their plant in Lake City, they couldn't recruit enough workers. They had to get a federal grant to get people trained for their work force. So it's also about getting the workforce moved to the location.

**VIRGINIA HALEY:** I wanted to talk about some of the workforce initiatives that are going on. We're seeing more and more connections between the schools and the businesses. Career Edge just took high school principals through businesses in Sarasota County. They wanted to repeat the experience so that they could increase their exposure and understanding of the businesses in the county. We have a very large health care industry here, and they have work force needs as well. They have been meeting with employers and with State College of Florida. USF is adding insurance to its business degree. Those are the programs we have to do to keep our students here. I believe that the big issue here is that the students here do not know what the job opportunities here are. We just had a meeting with some businesses and also with the Chamber to talk about making an internship program to connect students looking for a job in the summer with businesses, and help businesses conduct an internship. That's the first time that I've seen collaboration that strong between businesses and employers.

**WES ROBERTS:** Thank you. Let me hand this over to Jacob.

**JACOB OGLES:** Thank you, Wes. I wanted to start with something that I've been wondering about the Panama Canal and the renovations that are going on. Is there



an opportunity to improve imports to the community with the Panama Canal? Or do we create jobs here to export products?

**MAX STEWART:** They're already talking about making the Panama Canal bigger again, because they're already building ships bigger than what the Canal can handle. There are a lot of opportunities for companies to bring products to this region rather than Long Beach, California. As soon as that canal opens, you're going to see a lot more product coming into the east coast of the United States. Port Manatee is the closest port in the United States to the Panama Canal. That's going to be an important driver for the area. It's also going to be significantly cheaper to export things, with Kingston, Jamaica as a transshipment point.

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** Port Manatee is looking to make a ferry from Port Manatee to Havana, Cuba. We will see that in a couple of years, and then a few years after that, we'll see some cruise ships coming in. What that would do for visitation once those cruise ships come in is redefine our area, especially in terms of shopping.

**JACOB OGLES:** How close are you guys to bringing cruises to Port Manatee?

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** I don't know exactly, but I do know that the Port Director was the Port Director for Port Everglades, in Fort Lauderdale, so if there's someone that can do it, he can do it, he was competing against Port Miami for many, many years.

**JACOB OGLES:** A question from Al Wenzel, from Premier Subsidies: Millennials and tech space are synonymous. Is there an effort to attract one big land?

**JOAN MCGILL:** No, we haven't specifically identified anything for that specific market. We would certainly welcome them, but we're focusing on growing on our own.

**JACOB OGLES:** Do you want to address whether Manatee is doing anything to attract tech companies?

**JOAN MCGILL:** There's a high-tech car manufacturer that's going to be doing some software development. I think Feld is going to be bringing laser lights and that kind of thing for rock concerts, and that's going to bring a lot of those types of companies looking into the area.

**ELLIOTT FALCIONE:** IMG Academy is becoming a little tech-y with their Gatorade science institution. They have an orthopedic surgery center in there. You see a lot of technical development in there.

**JACOB OGLES:** Does anyone else have any questions they'd like to turn in? If not, then I'm going to hand the mic right back to Wes.

**WES ROBERTS:** Thank you again, Jacob, Joan, Max, Jeff, and Virginia. I wanted to also thank our sponsors. Our sponsors are definitely change-makers.