

FILM INDUSTRY REVIVAL

South Florida counties want to bring back
movie and TV productions. Will it work?

BY ASHLEY PORTERO | PAGES 14-16



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BREAKING GROUND

A two-story padel and indoor pickleball facility is proposed in Fort Lauderdale.

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SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

August 2-8, 2024
Vol. 45, No. 3, \$4.50

80 S.W. Eighth St.
Suite 2710
Miami, FL 33130

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CORRIDORS OF OPPORTUNITY: A Treasure Trove of Potential



ST. LUCIE COUNTY EDC

Since first expanding to the Treasure Coast in 2019, Cleveland Clinic Florida has grown as the region has grown in kind. Together, the health care provider and coastal market have witnessed the arrival of thousands of new residents, businesses and opportunity.

The health care provider's arrival foretold the region's impending prosperity and the services it would need, said Chirag Choudhary, VP and chief medical officer of Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital in Port St. Lucie.

"We are here to grow with our community and bring the advantages of a global leader in healthcare to the people we serve," said Choudhary, a physician named to his post earlier this year and today is part of a leadership team overseeing hospitals and outpatient centers from Stuart through Vero Beach. "We value our communities

and are building partnerships in each area to improve the health and wellness of our communities."

A new type of 'treasure'

The Treasure Coast, including Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River counties, stretches 70 miles between Palm Beach and Brevard counties. Named for the gold and silver strewn from a doomed Spanish fleet that sank in a hurricane in 1715, the region today benefits from a different treasure: prosperity.

Even before the pandemic, the region was being transformed by the arrival of people and companies looking for alternatives to the congestion of Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties to the south, and greater Orlando and even the Space Coast to the north. Thousands of homes, millions of square feet of commercial space, and countless opportunities continue to transform

"We value our communities and are building partnerships in each area to improve the health and wellness of our communities."

CHIRAG CHOUDHARY

Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital in Port St. Lucie

the once-quiet market that today has \$31.6 billion in annual gross domestic product across the three counties.

Case in point: Policom Corporation, an economic development research

firm, annually ranks the nation's 388 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in terms of economic strength, which includes job creation, wage growth, industry diversification, and the like. In 2015, the Port St. Lucie MSA, comprising St. Lucie and Martin counties, was ranked 331 as one of the weakest communities economically in the U.S. In 2024, it was ranked 94th, said Peter J. Tesch, president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County. The remainder of the Treasure Coast comprises the Sebastian-Vero Beach, Florida MSA, or Indian River County.

"It took us 10 years to become an overnight economic development success," said Tesch, whose organization has helped the region earn national praise. Area Development magazine ranked the Port St. Lucie MSA as #10 Leading Location in the U.S. for mid-sized regions. "Successful communities

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“Our new distribution center has only been open for a few months and has already exceeded all sales projections... We were pleasantly surprised with the exceptional work force that lives along the Treasure Coast.”

BYRON RUSSELL
Cheney Brothers

with robust economies have some similar characteristics: strong partnerships, an executable development strategy and an abundance of assets.”

Those assets begin with vacant, developable land ideally positioned for growth. Port St. Lucie, for example, the sixth-largest city in Florida, is 30 minutes north of West Palm Beach, less than two hours from Miami or Orlando. Residential and commercial developers are turning former citrus, farming and cattle lands into a thriving community served by Interstate 95, Florida’s Turnpike and two rail lines.

Residential development is growing to meet burgeoning needs. Riverland, a master-planned, active adult community in Port St. Lucie from GL Homes has sold over 3,000 homes in its Valencia Cay, Valencia Grove and Valencia Walk at Riverland communities.

Manufacturing where ag once grew

Yet manufacturing, logistics and warehouse facilities have arguably become the state’s most iconic development in the post-Covid era. Manufacturers in Indian River



INDIAN RIVER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

County benefit from a low cost of doing business, plus accessibility to transportation, distribution, and supply chain networks and place the county a three-hour drive to some 22 million potential customers, or 90% of Florida’s population.

Seven major facilities were delivered in 2023, accounting for some of the six million square feet being developed or occupied in St. Lucie County. A short list includes the Interstate Commerce Center, a 207,458-square-foot industrial building; Interstate Crossroads Logistics Center, featuring over one million square feet; and Kings Logistics Center, a 664,000-square-foot space. Stonemont Financial Group is behind the 1.1 million-square-foot South Florida Logistics Center, the county’s largest facility.

The 425-acre Class-A industrial Legacy Park at Tradition from The Sansone Group, features such tenants as Amazon, FedEx Ground and the new Costco Depot, a two-facility network that will span some 1.87 million square feet and employ more than 500. Also located there is the new Cheney Brothers warehouse built to relieve the

food distributor’s squeezed space near West Palm Beach.

In fact, many of its team members already commuted to Palm Beach County from the Treasure Coast, making it “the most logical location” for the company’s next major distribution center, said Byron Russell, chairman and CEO Cheney Brothers.

“Our new distribution center has only been open for a few months and has already exceeded all sales projections,” he said. “We were pleasantly surprised with the exceptional work force that lives along the Treasure Coast.”

Logistics and manufacturing are big business in a region once known primarily for agriculture. Today, some 1,900 manufacturers, most notably medical device, cement, metal fabrication, and marine, employ 27,500 throughout the greater region, or 8.4% of total employment in the area, said Micah R. Daugherty with the South Florida Manufacturer’s Association.

Known for its modest, even slow growth, Martin County almost serves as a buffer between the bustle of Palm Beach

County and the emerging markets to the north. But it’s still a thriving place for business, said Dan Hudson, interim executive director with the Business Development Board of Martin County. In addition to long standing industrial properties such as Seven J’s Industrial Park and Sands Commerce Center, Martin County is adding such parks as the South Florida Gateway, located on State Road 76, off I-95, and Sunrise Grove Commerce Center on I-95, which is permitted and ready to begin construction. The Village of Indiantown, he said, is laser focused on industrial development.

Manufacturers here are bringing novel solutions to market. In Martin County, Stuart-based Hog Technologies won the 2024 Most Innovative” award at the South Florida Manufacturing Association’s annual awards ceremony. The company performs water blasting, pavement marking, and grinding/moving technologies. Its vehicles operate in 56 countries.

With over 168,000 residents and a regional workforce of 638,000, Indian River County still relies on citrus and tourism and economic drivers. But among its most noteworthy employers are Piper Aircraft, as well as CVS, which operates a 400,000-square-foot distribution center here, said Helene Caseltine, economic development director with the Indian River County Chamber of Commerce in the county seat, Vero Beach. Land costs for industrial development are much less than many of the urban areas to the north or south. Meanwhile, modest 2% population growth hasn’t impacted Vero Beach’s and Sebastian’s “home town neighborhood feel for families,” she said.

Health care and education solutions

Known by many as a master-planned residential community, Tradition in Port St. Lucie has evolved to become a center of business, including health care. Cleveland Clinic’s Tradition Hospital is home to the



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CLEVELAND CLINIC FLORIDA

Florida Research and Innovation Center (FRIC). The institute advances medicine through groundbreaking research.

The Florida International University Center for Translational Science in Port St. Lucie explores such research themes as lung vascular and airway disease; brain injury and aging; environmental medicine; inflammation, infection, and immunity; bioinformatics; and mitochondria and metabolism. Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) has expanded their research disciplines of ocean science and engineering with the U.S. Navy.

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Indian River Research and Education Center (IRREC) and the US Department of Agricultural Research Service study aquaculture,

aquatic science, citrus horticulture, entomology, plant pathology, plant root biology, postharvest technology, smart irrigation and soil and water science.

A skilled and eager workforce is an in-demand attribute throughout the region. High school career and technical programs here are reportedly among the best in the state and are graduating students with a wide range of certifications. Indian River State College offers certificates and associate and bachelor degrees in disciplines ranging from drafting and design technology to information technology, cyber security and electronics engineering. The Florida Institute of Technology offers degrees in aerospace, electrical, mechanical, and general engineering to serve the aerospace providers from the Space Coast south to Palm Beach County.

Financial and professional services play an outsized role in this community. Accounting firm Carr, Riggs & Ingram, LLC, in Stuart serves the continued rapid growth of firms arriving to the market, especially those in manufacturing and distribution, marine industries, agriculture, and real estate. The Treasure Coast has a diverse representation of bankers, healthcare professionals, CPA firms, insurance experts and other representatives.

That includes attorneys. With offices in Vero Beach and Fort Pierce, law firm Dean Mead serves those diverse sectors, said Lee Dobbins, the firm's Fort Pierce managing shareholder. In the decades since his arrival, Dobbins has seen the market evolve from modest residences and businesses to luxury homes and high-value commercial development. While higher interest rates have slowed some

"This is very different from the last boom. People were speculating and playing with other people's money. There's still speculation, but it's all people using their own money. There's no worry about overcapacity."

LEE DOBBINS
Dean Mead

development, the calls keep coming, he said.

"There's a lot of investment, and it seems to be happening all at once all over the county," he said. "This is very different from the last boom. People were speculating and playing with other people's money. There's still speculation, but it's all people using their own money. There's no worry about overcapacity."

His own accomplishments speak to the area's growth. Dobbins worked on the approval of a master plan for a 200 acre

Q. Where is the **3rd LARGEST CITY** in South Florida?

DRIVE TIME

- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 6 hours
- 8 hours

- **#5 fastest-growing** metro area in the U.S.
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A. **Port St. Lucie:** In St. Lucie County, the gateway to South Florida, also home to Fort Pierce, the Port of Fort Pierce and Treasure Coast International Airport

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mixed-use project anchored by a nine-acre man-made surf lagoon with a resort hotel. He also negotiated and drafted a 50-year ground lease for a mega-yacht maintenance and repair facility at the Port of Fort Pierce. In fact, respected boat manufacturers based or operating along the Treasure Coast include Pursuit Boats, Contender Boats, Maverick Boats, and Twin Vee PowerCats Co., which announced in 2023 it would move manufacturing of its Aquasport line to this Fort Pierce facility.

The marine sector here employs some 10,000 in the region, and drives an economic impact of \$1.4 billion, said Justin Beard, executive director of the Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast. As a whole, the marine industry captures 4.3% of the regional gross domestic product, employing 6,750 and generating \$1.35 billion in annual output. The association's 2024 Stuart Boat Show saw nearly 10,500 attendees, delivering a 21% increase in the average visitor spend in the retail category.

Shipyards operator Derektor Fort Pierce recently signed a 75-year lease, where it operates a 1,500-ton hoist and provides deepwater access, said Joel Shine, the firm's chief commercial officer. Location, proximity to maritime routes, and investment make the region ideal.

"This attracts a global clientele seeking top-notch refit and repair services," he said. "The Treasure Coast is experiencing robust growth in the superyacht service and refit market."

From the coast to deep into its western reaches, the region continues to evolve to meet changing needs of a growing community. Treasure Coast International Airport (FPR) is awaiting its commercial scheduled service certification from the FAA. Jet charter operator Plus One Air and fixed base operator APP Jet Center both are developing new hangars; APP is also renovating its FBO operation

terminal. Aviator College is expanding its existing partnership with JetBlue, joining the airline's Gateway University pilot development program, and opening future career opportunities to Aviator College graduates.

The Economic Development Council is currently working with five active code-named projects at the airport and Airport West Commerce Park, including Project Eagle, an aviation training school affiliated with a major airline. In April, St. Lucie County issued two requests for proposals seeking qualified applicants to develop and operate aeronautical facilities on one or more parcels of 61 acres of land at the airport commerce parks.

Also taking shape is P1 Motor Club, an exclusive and unique residential club community. Unlike the hundreds of golf club communities found around Florida, P1 will feature a 4.5-mile private racetrack, sporting amenities, garages and single family residences for automotive enthusiasts.

Throughout the region, innovation and development are changing the face of the Treasure Coast. In the latest news reflective of this, Brightline named Stuart in Martin County for its next station along its South Florida-to-Orlando run. President Patrick Goddard summed up the allure of the city and the region, not only for the high-speed rail carrier, but for businesses looking for a destination to call their own.

"It's perfectly situated between Orlando and Miami and offers the state's visitors access to one of the 'happiest seaside towns in America,'" he said. "This is a big part of our expansion plans and when built it will continue to revolutionize how people move around Florida."

By any measure, the Treasure Coast serves up prosperity sought by a growing number of companies and families seeking life less congested and open for business.



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