

**Florida Economic Development Council Celebrates 60 Years of Peer Connections,  
Professional Development and Advocacy**

*Fourteen Organizations and 3 Leaders Recognized for Outstanding Contributions to  
Florida's Burgeoning Economy*

Beth Cicchetti, CEcD, MEDP  
Executive Director  
Florida Economic Development Council  
850-212-1056  
bkirkland@FEDCOnline.org

**Tallahassee, FL** This week the Florida Economic Development Council (FEDC) celebrated 60 years of peer connections, professional development, and advocacy in Ponte Vedra, Florida at the Sawgrass Marriott. Over 300 economic, workforce, and community developers representing business, government and education gathered from across the state to engage in learning and recognition of excellence in project development, marketing Florida's competitive assets, scholarship, and leadership. FEDC was established in January 1964 as the Florida Industrial Development Council, Inc. (FIDC) to develop, encourage, promote, and protect professionalism in industrial development in the State of Florida. In 1986 the organization was renamed the Florida Economic Development Council.

Annually, this conference is made available through the FEDC Research & Education Foundation. Established in 2021, the FEDC Foundation is the educational and research affiliate of the Florida Economic Development Council, Inc. - the number one resource of economic development expertise in Florida. Through the Foundation, FEDC conducts the charitable mission of providing professional development scholarships, honoring institutional leadership, advancing Florida's competitiveness, and cultivating a new generation of trained professionals.

The pinnacle awards bestowed annually by FEDC are named appropriately for two highly regarded professionals who during their careers set the bar for excellence in Economic and Workforce Development. The Eunice Sullivan Economic Development Professional of the Year award was first given in 1985 and was renamed in 1991 to honor Eunice Sullivan, a professional in the Florida Office of Trade, Tourism, and Economic Development, for her engaging personality, wisdom, and guidance to all serving in Florida's economic development ecosystem. Established in 2007, the FEDC Workforce Development Professional of the Year award is named in honor of Lt. Governor Toni Jennings for her exceptional leadership in revamping Florida's workforce system to respond to critical business needs and continues today leading the family construction business.

The 2024 Eunice Sullivan Economic Development Professional of the Year is Jeff Hendry, Executive Director of the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) and the Florida State University Institute of Government. Jeff has been making a positive impact throughout Florida for close to 30 years and has given this industry everything he has in hopes of creating a better tomorrow. Rural Florida is Jeff's passion and his efforts have led to a consortium of 32 rural counties under the umbrella of the Florida Rural Economic Development Association (FREDA). Additionally, Jeff leads the statutorily designated North Florida Rural Area of Opportunity – 14 counties marketing their economic strengths as NFEDP and building capacity for quality jobs, sustaining wages and private capital. Collectively, these organizations have provided over 45,000 technical assistance hours focused on recruitment and expansion of business and all related aspects of project development. This training has resulted in over \$165 million of infrastructure grant funds, \$200 million of private capital investment and more than 400 professional development scholarships to expand the knowledge and capacity of often understaffed rural economic development offices.

The 2024 Toni Jennings Workforce Development Professional of the Year is Julia Dattolo, President and CEO of CareerSource Palm Beach County. With nine years of unwavering commitment to workforce development following a distinguished 22-year military career in the U.S. Navy, Julia's journey stands as a testament to her dedication and leadership. While at the helm, CareerSource Palm Beach County was able to achieve remarkable milestones, including record-low unemployment rates and the expansion of vital community services. Her pioneering efforts in virtual services during the pandemic and her relentless pursuit of innovative solutions have transformed countless lives and paved the way for a brighter future for Palm Beach County's workforce.

Each year FEDC accepts nominations for excellence in project development that results in job creation, capital investment, and increased wages in a Florida community at the Regional level, in Urban markets, and in Rural markets. These peer reviewed entries are evaluated on their alignment with economic development goals, overcoming obstacles or challenges, engagement of community stakeholders, and overall community impact.

The 2024 Regional Project of the Year was awarded to the Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality for the Amazon Robotics Fulfillment Center. With over 1,300 permanent employees, this new 3.2 million-square-foot Amazon facility is Tallahassee-Leon County's largest private-sector job creator to date. Located on Interstate 10 at the intersection of U.S. 90 East, Amazon chose a developer-readied site. Amazon offers excellent starting wages, employee training, and benefits and hired over 600 residents from

zip codes 32304, 32301, and 32303. This statistic holds significance as unemployment rates in these areas are notably higher than the average rates in Leon County.

Orlando Economic Partnership received the Urban Project of the Year award for their collaboration with Osceola County Economic Development in the establishment of a new technology park titled Green Garden Village. The vision of French-based CMG Clean Tech, S.A. (CMG), the park will become the headquarters of U.S. subsidiary Panacea Global Energy, Inc. (PGE) along with a research & development incubator, a solar PV facility, a battery manufacturing facility, a solar assisted heat pumps manufacturing facility, and more. The Green Garden Village will be a world leading campus focused on providing high-tech jobs and innovative solutions to help resolve global challenges centered around clean energy and carbon emissions, becoming a leading emerging-sector provider of clean energy products in the USA.

Rural Project of the Year honors go to the Baker County Development Commission for their consistent shepherding of Plant Agriculture Systems (Plant-AS) to a Baker County decision. This new controlled environment agriculture operation will consist of 8.9 million square feet of hydroponic growing facilities, processing, shipping, receiving and corporate offices on 772 acres in the Woodstock Industrial Park in Baker County. The commitment by Plant-AS to invest \$743 million and create 697 new, high wage jobs propels technology that will allow consumers to know more about their food than ever before.

Innovation in Marketing is the hallmark of successful economic development. In recognition of original, creative ideas and campaigns, FEDC Members of all types, sizes, and budgets are encouraged to exhibit innovative ways to communicate with, and attract, key audiences like stakeholders, talent, and new or existing businesses. As such, FEDC celebrates 11 entries from five categories: Public / Private Partnerships, Pivot & Persist, Marketing & Public Relations Organic, Paid Advertising, and Websites. The 2024 Innovation in Marketing honorees are:

#### Public / Private Partnership

Business Development Board of Palm Beach County - NYC Education Outreach Mission  
Business Development Board of Palm Beach County - Business Appreciation Bus Tour  
Business Development Board of Palm Beach County - Claim Your Future Showcase

#### Marketing & Public Relations Organic

Florida's Great Northwest - Throttle Up / Accelerate your Growth  
JAXUSA Partnership - Find Your JAX Neighborhood

#### Pivot & Persist

Metro Ocala Chamber & Economic Partnership - Project Sand

### Paid Advertising

Business Development Board of Palm Beach County - Wall Street South / Times Square  
Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance - Fort Lauderdale to the Rescue

### Website

City of St. Cloud - Centerplace for Business  
Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County – YourEDC  
FPL Powering Florida – WonderFL

One entry rose to the top and exemplifies a marketing activity or campaign that was unpredictable, effective, and meaningful. This award, named in memory of Melissa Medley, Founder and Principal of VisionFirst Advisors, went to the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County for the Claim Your Future Showcase – a collaborative venture engaging both public and private sectors. In partnership with the School District of Palm Beach County, CareerSource Palm Beach County, private and charter schools, and 50 leading corporate entities in the region, this annual event outlines the abundance of job opportunities available within Palm Beach County. Its strategic significance lies in retaining talented students before graduation, offering them a wide array of options to encourage them to stay in the community or consider returning after gaining professional experience elsewhere.

Scholarship is a pillar of the FEDC Foundation mission and FEDC has awarded \$84,000 to 44 individuals over the last decade. In 2015, the Florida High Tech Corridor Council established the Dan Webster Young Innovator Scholarship to encourage young professionals to seek the rigorous Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) credential requiring four core courses, two electives, five years of field experience, and an oral interview. The 2024 Dan Webster Young Innovator Scholarship will support Sarah Always, Economic Development Coordinator at the Pasco Economic Development Council, in her pursuit of the Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) credential.

**About Florida Economic Development Council** - The Florida Economic Development Council (FEDC) is a professional association of 500 members representing over 250 public entities, private businesses, and public-private partnerships. FEDC serves as the Florida economic development community's primary resource for peer connection, professional development, and advocacy. We engage business, education, and government leaders in key economic development initiatives to improve local communities and elevate Florida's global competitiveness.

###