State-led Honduras trip yields $1 million sales

By CARLA VIANNA

More than half the businesses that flew to Honduras this month on an export sales mission led by Enterprise Florida secured new trade ties. The 14 firms alone are projecting $11,335,000 in export sales within two years as a direct result of the trip.

In what Enterprise Florida—the state’s economic development agency—called a matchmaking mission, 33 persons from about 20 Florida companies and institutions flew to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on Dec. 1 for three days and were matched with potential business partners.

Among delegates were executives from PortMiami, Port Everglades and Port Miami, as well as the University of Miami, as well as Massey Ferguson, Coral Gables-based senior VP of the International Trade & Business Development division of Enterprise Florida.

The businesses included small to midsize manufacturers, small to midsize technology firms and value-added service providers.

“One of our primary missions is to help Florida companies penetrate new markets,” Mr. Mencia said, adding that most participating companies were entering the Honduran market for the first time.

Immediately after the mission, a group of Taiwanese investors met with Honduran trade officials in Coral Gables to expand trade between their nations.

Although Honduras is a small market, Mr. Mencia said, its impact in Florida reaches beyond its size.

Honduras is Florida’s ninth largest merchandise trading partner. Last year, Florida accounted for 42% of all US trade with Honduras, and the state’s total merchandise trade with Honduras is up 10% through the first six months of 2015, Enterprise says.

“With the Commodities downturn, some of our more traditional markets in South America have been a little bit on the slow side,” Mr. Mencia said. “But the reason we think Central America and Mexico will perform much better—and are performing much better—is because their economies are much more intertwined with the US.”

Last year, bilateral trade between Florida and Honduras reached $4.5 billion. This year, Mr. Mencia said, trade is expected to near $5 billion.

Honduras is also a top cargo market for both Port Everglades and Port Miami, Mr. Mencia said.

“Not only do they have the trade, but they also have the trade shows and tradeshows that bring people together,” Mr. Mencia said.

The agreement also requires the developer to spend $55 million to upgrade the Metrorail station with improved escalators and elevators and a new bus terminal and reserve 204 parking spaces for transit users.

Commissioner Danielle Levine Cava mentioned Tuesday that workforce housing is a key issue and pointed out it was part of the settlement but not a requirement. She asked about providing incentives to the developers but officials who could address her questions weren’t present.

Attorney Al Dossen, representing the developer, said Griss-Grove aims to exceed county work force housing requirements and will strive to provide 25% workforce units.

Commissioner Xavier Suarez amended the resolution to include those projects.
To close talent gap, manufacturing aims to alter perception

By Carla Visina

Changing the perception of American manufacturing is the first step in tackling the talent gap the industry faces, experts say. The manufacturing industry, which business leaders deem invaluable for a healthy Florida economy, finds it difficult to attract younger talent.

When most Americans think of a manufacturing plant, images of gears, steamstacks and heavy machinery come to mind, rather than the current reality of today's clean-cut, technology-driven facility.

"We need to prove that manufacturing is an interesting industry to pursue," said June Wolfe, president of the South Florida Manufacturers Association. "The jobs that are available today is high-level jobs.

Today's manufacturing sector boasts high wages and a stable income that has consistently surpassed the Florida average for several years.

Still, only 35% of parents in the US say they would encourage their children to pursue careers in manufacturing, according to the Manufacturing Institute, a branch of the National Association of Manufacturers that aims to close the skills gap.

Ms. Wolfe is involved in "Dream It. Do It." a program spearheaded by the institute, which works to inspire next-generation workers to pursue manufacturing careers.

Florida is home to more than 18,600 manufacturing companies that employ more than 311,000 persons, according to Enterprise Florida. The tri-county area employed about 89,000 manufacturing workers through September, according to the Labor Bureau of Statistics. About 38,000 of them were employed in the Miami area, a half-percent increase over the year.

The companies already here are expanding, Ms. Wolfe said, but "if we can't give them the workforce they need, that's the biggest deterrent for companies growing here in Florida.

Jaap Donath, the Beacon Council's senior VP of research and strategic planning, said his team from the public-private organization that seeks to add jobs in Miami-Dade County visited about 150 local manufacturing companies every year to learn about the challenges they're facing. In turn, the council pushed for local support for the proper training needed for persons entering the industry.

Broward College recently stepped up to the plate, announcing a new Advanced Manufacturing certificate program that will launch next year.

Special Overtown policing team funded again to fight crime

By Catherine Lazzari

A pilot program launched in March was renewed for fiscal 2015-16 Monday as director of the Southeast Overtown Park West Community Redevelopment Agency unanimously approved a $809,000 grant to the City of Miami. The grant will fund the salaries and equipment costs for six officers and six vehicles specifically assigned to the area to continue the enhanced baseline police services, an agency memo said.

The unit, comprising a sergeant and five duty officers, is outfitted with the CRA logo on uniforms and vehicles and will remain inside the redevelopment area for its entire shift, only leaving the neighborhood to respond to calls for homicide, shooting, robbery, assault, battery or sexual offenses.

Each week, the unit's sergeant will provide a report to Clarence Woods III, the redevelopment agency's executive director, and Miami Police chief. The police officers will also have a report from the Community police officer assigned to the area. The police and redevelopment agency (CRA) teams will monitor the cities.

"Since the inception of the CRA in 1992, crime has been a serious concern within the redevelopment area, and continues to affect the CRA's ability to execute the development plans," said CRA executive director from Woods to Keon Hardemon, the executive director and Miami commissioner, earlier this year. A finding of necessity indicated that "the mere presence and alignment of the redevelopment area is conducive for the commission of crimes, such as the sale and use of narcotics," the statement said.

The unit will continue to provide community policing, which will in addition to the new officers, can include neighborhood storefront police stations, citizen crime watch, and other methods of maintaining visible law enforcement, agency documents said.

"This is really great," Mr. Woods said when the program was rolled out. "This program will enhance the efforts we've been making with more officers, in a new alignment of the police and other crimes have decreased, "this will concentrate on the crimes areas within the redevelopment areas," he said. "It's a win-win.

"This is what community development is all about," Mr. Hardemon said then.