

Northwest Florida

Destin • Fort Walton Beach
Pensacola • Panama City
Panama City Beach

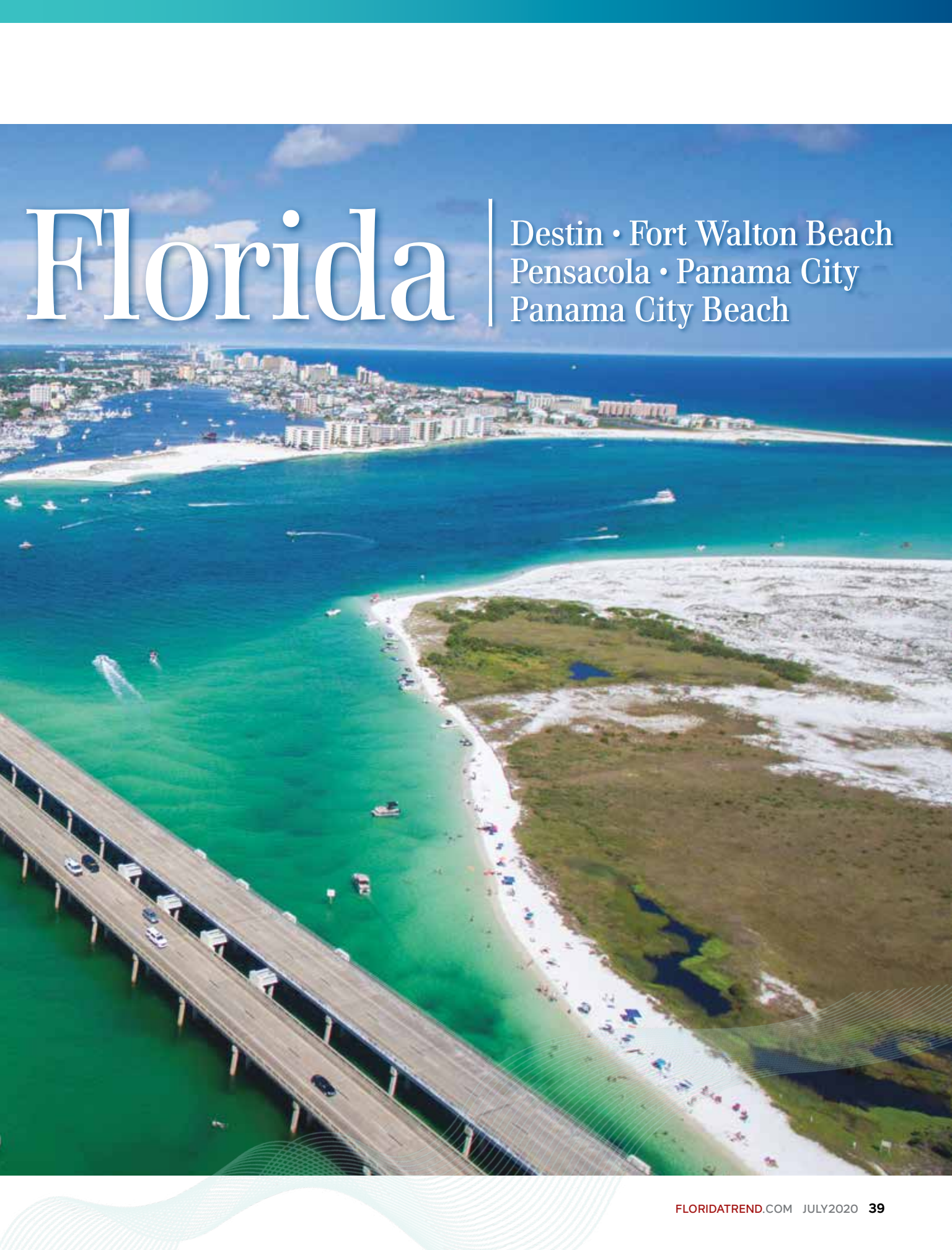


Northwest

Open for Innovation, Open for Business

Northwest Florida, stretching from Pensacola to Panama City, is like no other place in the Sunshine State. Both startups and established businesses here have deep roots in innovating for the many military and government defense programs based in the area — businesses that, in turn, use this same intellectual capital to create exciting new industries in the private sector. Construction is booming, in part because of ongoing cleanup efforts for Hurricane Michael but also because of the perennial tourism industry. Rural areas of economic opportunity in Northwest Florida include Calhoun, Franklin, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, and Washington counties and many more. Education, especially the higher ed offerings, continues to grow in transformative ways that meet the community's unique needs. And the lifestyle ... well, there are few places left that can boast such an easy, laid-back way of life with short commutes, award-winning K-12 schools, and access to cutting-edge health care — all scattered along some of the most breathtaking beaches in the world.

By Heidi Tyline King



Florida

Destin • Fort Walton Beach
Pensacola • Panama City
Panama City Beach

Port of Pensacola



“Strategically located for manufacturing, aviation/aerospace, and logistics, Florida’s Great Northwest has the skilled workforce to lead our companies to the next level in their industries.”



— Roy Baker
Business Development
Coordinator,
Opportunity Florida

The Florida Panhandle’s largest cities, Pensacola, Destin and Fort Walton Beach, and Panama City and Panama City Beach, connect a string of coastal communities to the south and rural towns to the north. In recent years, both city and county economic development groups have developed collaborative partnerships, capitalizing on each other’s strengths as a way to enhance the area.

“We operate with scrappiness and are accustomed to pooling resources to get things done,” says Jennifer Conoley, president and CEO, Florida’s Great Northwest.

Setting the Stage for Growth

Unlike the rest of Florida which developed haphazardly, the slower growth through Northwest Florida means that the area has been able to strategically control growth while also retaining much of what makes Florida great: its waterways, beaches, and forests. Being intentional about growth has become a big selling point for the area. Initiatives to reinforce and create infrastructure have resulted in easy access to the rapidly growing Southeast U.S. — and the rest of the world. Northwest Florida has built a solid foundation for attracting new business, driving economic vitality, and growing the region.

Consider these assets: Northwest Florida boasts three deep-water ports. The Port of Port St. Joe in Gulf County offers barge access to the Intracoastal Waterway and Gulf of Mexico. Port Panama City, located on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, has a 200-acre Intermodal Distribution Center with rail access. It is designated as a foreign trade zone. And the Port of Pensacola, also with access to rail service, is an enterprise zone and foreign trade zone.

Interstate 10 traverses the entire region, providing direct accessibility to a robust railroad system and the area’s growing airports. There are 17 public general aviation airports in the area plus three commercial airports — including Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport.

Making the area that much more attractive are the 18 premier industrial sites, all multimodal accessible and ready for build-out, including the new 10,500-acre Shoal River Ranch gigasite. “For the past three years, we’ve worked to bring this economic development opportunity to fruition,” says Nathan Sparks, executive director at the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County.

The site stretches from I-10 to Highway 90 and lies adjacent to Eglin Air Force Base, the largest air force base in the world. The Florida Gulf & Atlantic railroad also runs along the property’s northern boundary. And there are hundreds of skilled Air Force personnel from nearby installations each year — providing a ready-made talent pipeline for companies opting to locate at Shoal River Ranch.

“Its footprint is shovel ready, and it has all the pieces to support comprehensive large-scale economic development,” says Sparks.

Such investments are more enticing than ever to businesses looking for a sustainable and enduring economic base — especially in the uncertainty brought about by the recent pandemic. “We’re excited to welcome new business to our area,” says Conoley.





Downtown
Pensacola

A Shine for Business

The gorgeous white sand beaches and emerald gulf water are the first things that come to mind when people think of Northwest Florida. But this area is also making a name for itself. Each city within the region has a unique personality and strategy for driving economic initiatives.

Pensacola: A History of Engagement

Pensacola, the westernmost city in the Panhandle, is the county seat of Escambia County and the site of the oldest settlement in the continental U.S. Founded in 1559, it predates St. Augustine by six years, but the original settlement was abandoned after a hurricane and not reestablished until 1698. That said, the area has a long history of being a top tourist destination for vacationers from all over the Southeast who come for some downtime along the area's world-class beaches. More recently, Pensacola has grown in popularity as a great place to live and work. It's been voted one of Florida's Friendliest Cities by Trips to Discover, a USA Today 10 Best Reader's Choice for Best Florida Beach, and one of the Top 10 Best Places to Retire in Florida by Investment U.

Urban Resurgence

Several years ago, Pensacola committed to rejuvenating its downtown, a move that has paid off with fine dining, art studios, entertainment and other cultural venues moving in.

"In 1998 when we opened The Fish House, you had to convince people to come downtown," says Collier Merrill, president of Great Southern Restaurants. "If you saw a tourist, you would take a picture of them because there certainly weren't any tourists taking pictures of Pensacola."

Fast forward 20 years and downtown Pensacola is filled with hundreds of new residences, historic architecture, locally

owned boutiques, coffee shops, home-ware stores, breweries, and restaurants.

"Downtown is where everyone wants to be," says Lissa Dees, executive director, Downtown Improvement Board. "The streets are clean, people feel safe and secure, and it's become the heart-beat of our community. It's projects like these that keep communities strong and connected and give people a sense of home."

Public-private partnerships are just starting to address the downtown waterfront and other untapped resources in the area. In the next 10 years, business leaders are confident that Pensacola will garner national recognition for its urban transformation. "We're all pulling the same direction with common goals and aspirations," says Todd Thomson, president and CEO of the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce. "There is so much potential to grow Pensacola into a waterfront economic powerhouse."

Fueled by Innovation

Complementing Pensacola's urbanization is the continued growth fueled by IT, health care, government defense, real estate/construction, and manufacturing. The city is also home to Co:Lab and FloridaWest EDA, both resources for entrepreneurs and startups.

"I continue to be impressed with the diversity of real estate and the amount of equity invested," says Justin Beck, CEO and managing broker at Beck Partners. "There's so much going on. Much of it is driven by the Navy and federal government, but even multi-family housing and urbanization is playing a role. I was in Portland for 16 years and saw the same thing there. The nice thing about Northwest Florida is that we never over-built, and it's helped us maintain a solid market."

COMPANIES TO WATCH: PENSACOLA

- **EBI Management Group** – a service-disabled-veteran-owned small business providing business and technology professional services
- **Catalyst HRE** – one of the nation's largest private equity investors in health care real estate with businesses in 11 states
- **IMS ExpertServices** – a pioneer in consultative expert services and a leader in providing research for complex litigation
- **AppRiver** – a communications and data privacy company
- **GE Renewable Energy** – an onshore wind turbine machine head and hubs assembly facility
- **ActiGraph** – the leading provider of medical-grade wearable activity and sleep monitoring solutions
- **Navy Federal Credit Union** – with 8 million members
- **ST Engineering** – specializing in global technology, defense, and engineering for the aerospace, electronics, land systems, and marine sectors
- **Cognitive Big Data Systems** – founded in 2014 by Lloyd Reshard, CEO, to build vision systems for robotics and video surveillance

COMPANIES TO WATCH: OKALOOSA COUNTY

- **RaceChip** – U.S. headquarters for German-owned after-market automobile engine performance technology
- **Home Builders Institute (HBI)** – construction industry training, certification, and job placement
- **Vertex Aerospace's Aircraft Integration & Sustainment Division** – aerospace engineering and fabrication, airframe assemblies, and aircraft maintenance
- **Dynamic Software Solutions** – weapons planning software, precision-guided munitions planning
- **HSU Educational Foundation** – supporting STEM education
- **Beast Code** – IT and engineering services producing cutting edge software applications
- **MAG Aerospace** – intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance services operations

COMPANIES TO WATCH: PANAMA CITY AND PANAMA CITY BEACH

- **Advanced Composites & Metalforming Technologies** – commercial and military jet parts manufacturing
- **Additive Manufacturing Laboratory** – 3-D metal printing
- **Suzuki Motor of America** – 20-acre waterfront Suzuki Marine Technical Center USA under development
- **Oceaneering** – a leading global provider of engineered products and services
- **Berg Steel Pipe** – specializing in large-diameter line pipe manufacturing for the oil and construction industries



Scientists and engineers investigate cognition in machines and humans at the Florida Institute for Human & Machine Cognition in Pensacola.

Okaloosa County: A Unified Vision

The area is planning and building now to be ready to seize future opportunities anticipated over the next 15 years of growth.

"Local government, industry, academia and our military installations are all committed to building a diversified and sustainable community centered around top notch infrastructure systems, educational offerings, career pathways, and, of course, the enviable coastal lifestyle we've long been known for," says Nathan Sparks, executive director at the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County.

Panama City and Panama City Beach: Transforming a Way of Life

Panama City Beach, or PCB, boasts some of the prettiest beaches in the world. Shopping, entertainment, and restaurants abound, attracting more than 17 million tourists annually. What locals like is the fact that 20 percent of shoreline is set aside for recreational and public use, and the ongoing renourishment project keeps the beaches in pristine condition. Lynn Haven, Parker, and Springfield are all bedroom communities. Mexico Beach is located at the eastern end of Bay County, a much more low-key beach destination but one with the same access to sugar sand beaches and the emerald waters of the gulf.

Panama City is a phoenix rising from the ashes of Hurricane Michael. Before the storm's devastation, the military and tourism were primary economic drivers, but change has introduced new opportunities.

A Plan for Growth

The Economic Development Alliance (EDA) of Bay County has targeted these eight industries for future growth: Aviation, Aerospace, Defense, and



Applied Research Associates in Panama City is focused on research, development, test, and evaluation work in applied microbiology, bioaerosols, advanced biofuels, and renewable chemicals.

National Security; Renewable Energy and Environment; Health Sciences; Transportation and Logistics; Information Technology; Research and Engineering Services; Manufacturing; and Corporate Headquarters.

Recent economic developments include Clark and Son, a leading distribution company for custom kitchen cabinets that selected Panama City for its distribution and final assembly headquarters after a nationwide search.

Another major project is the \$6.5 million investment by St. Joe Company into Venture Crossings, a commercial project near Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport. St. Joe is also planning to build a new hotel at the airport. A 250-room Embassy Suites will be completed at Pier Park in 2021, and the TownePlace Suites was completed last year in Panama City Beach.

Casa Laxmi Foundation is constructing a new international boarding school on 260 acres in northern Bay County, including one mile of shoreline.

Rural Northwest Florida

In the logistical cross-roads of Northwest Florida, cotton, peanuts, and sawmills are important industries. Enviva Biomass, located in Cottdonale, is the world's largest producer of sustainable wood pellets. Also making news is the 9,500-square-foot expansion of Jackson Hospital in Marianna.

"Our companies partner with our technical training institutions to upskill their workers and our citizens, raising the standards of excellence in their products and the quality of life in our region," says Roy Baker, business development coordinator for Opportunity Florida.



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- Florida State University
- George Stone Technical
Center
- Gulf Coast State College
- Haney Technical Center
- Locklin Technical College
- Northwest Florida State
College
- Pensacola State College
- Troy University
- University of West
Florida

For the last five years, the Panhandle has been hard at work building synergies between industry, government, and education to build an ecosystem that capitalizes on the area's strengths. The area's 16 technical schools, state and community colleges, and universities are a valuable asset as well.

People come from all over the world to Northwest Florida to study the cutting-edge of the agricultural industry at the University of Florida's IFAS Extension in Jackson County, finishing both master's and doctorate degrees in row crops and beef cattle.

In Pensacola, Achieve Escambia is a collective impact partnership that brings together parents, educators, business owners, health providers, faith-based leaders, community organizers, residents, philanthropists, government employees, first responders, and elected officials to significantly improve cradle to career outcomes.

"This is a first-of-its-kind partnership in Florida and certainly the first true collective

impact effort in the Pensacola area, started within the business community," says Jennifer Grove, vice president of external relations, Baptist Health Care.

The University of West Florida (UWF) identified cybersecurity as an emerging field with an underdeveloped workforce and created continuing education to meet this need. Military installations across the country have a vested interest in cybersecurity. They need well-trained talent — and a workforce for military personnel to transition to after military life. Northwest Florida has recognized this need and answered it by investing in programs and businesses to retain and continue training the talent pool.

Global Business Solutions, Inc. (GBSI), a cutting-edge technology company specializing in cybersecurity training, enterprise training, and military credentialing to the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Department of Defense, developed the Accelertrain Cybersecurity Career and Technical Education curriculum now in schools across the country. The CyberPatriot program, developed by the Air Force Association, is in local middle and high schools.

And regional organizations such as Innovation Coast, IT Gulf Coast, and the Entrepreneurship & Innovation Council of Northwest Florida Forward are working to grow the innovation and technological landscape in the region through networking partnerships with the ITEN Wired annual summit.





THE MILITARY'S IMPACT ON NORTHWEST FLORIDA

- Military jobs increased 14% from 2016 to 2018 for a total of 194,847 jobs in the area.
- Defense spending totaled 33.4% of the regional economy in 2018.
- The military accounted for 92% of all GRP economic impacts, up 2% from \$22.1 billion in 2016.

Eglin Air
Force Base

In Defense of the Military

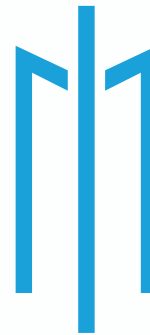
Northwest Florida is rising as a hotbed of aerospace, aviation, and cybersecurity industries.

Currently, there are nine aircraft manufacturers, four aircraft engine and engine parts manufacturers, and eight guided missile and space vehicle manufacturers in the region.

Nowhere else in the country has the proximity and access to as many aviation and military installations. There are six major military bases, all with aviation-related missions and a focus on research and development. Thousands of existing military personnel and skilled graduates in the area provide a talent pool that's trained and ready to work.

The 2020 Florida Defense Industry Economic Analysis Report confirms the military's vital presence. The 16 counties from Escambia to Jefferson account for 24 percent of the military's economic impact in Florida. Combined with spending for the National Guard and the Coast Guard, total military spending is over \$9.2 billion.

Former service members are young — the median age in the area is 36 — and well-trained, providing private businesses skilled employees. "I encourage local businesses to poach my people," says Capt. Tim Kinsella, commander, Naval Air Station Pensacola. "The military trains great employees, but this area gives them a reason to stay."



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Although the world is filled with much uncertainty, Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) is working diligently to continue providing a safe, affordable foundation on which you can build your career, your next chapter, and your future. We're more than just a campus—we're a close-knit family dedicated to your success.

NWF State College opened its doors in 1964 and has become one of Florida's premier state colleges—nationally recognized for educational excellence and community engagement. Working every day to provide a trained workforce for the next generation, NWFSC is ensuring our community's economic future by way of launching and maintaining relevant, high-quality academic programming. We offer 27 associate degrees, five bachelor's degrees and 35 certificate and professional training programs.

In partnership with the Walton County Board of County Commissioners, Walton County Sheriff's Office, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton and the Triumph Gulf Coast Board, Northwest Florida State College began construction on its Walton Works project last year. This project establishes a Center of Excellence for 10 new workforce programs, preparing students to earn industry-recognized credentials including state licenses and certifications. The Walton Works project will expand career education programs in public safety (law enforcement, fire, emergency medical technician (EMT)), cybersecurity, drone technology and building trades (plumbing, electrical, welding, millwright and construction). By 2024, a minimum of 1,570 industry-recognized certifications would be awarded at a cost of \$3,652 per certification.

Most recently, Northwest Florida State College, in partnership with Dr. Paul Hsu, the Okaloosa Aviation Board and Triumph Gulf Coast, secured funding to stand up The Aviation Center of Excellence, which will be located in the Crestview Technology Air Park at the Bob

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Sikes Airport. NWFSC will provide Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) industry-recognized certifications in airframe mechanics, powerplant mechanics and professional pilot technology at this new facility.

This transformational center serves as a catalyst for workforce training to support the growing aerospace community in our region. The College estimates this project will yield \$29 million in economic impact in terms of wages from the degree completers and those employed in support of the project.

Committed to transformation across Northwest Florida, our mission is to improve lives by providing a

high-quality, globally competitive education that is a catalyst for cultural, civic and economic development throughout the Florida Panhandle region. Ultimately, we aim to inspire our students to become something greater than themselves and move our local community forward. More than 84% of our graduates enter the job market in Okaloosa and Walton Counties, keeping homegrown talent in our own backyard.

According to EMSI Impact Report 2018, Northwest Florida State College's annual economic impact on the region is \$326.2 million of added income with more than 7,335 jobs supported.



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West Florida
Hospital, Pensacola



Exceptional Health Care

The recent pandemic has elevated the importance of access to comprehensive quality health care. This is not an issue in Northwest Florida, where several renowned health care systems have partnerships with other top medical facilities around the country.

The Destin/Okaloosa County area alone has an array of family medical, chiropractic, optical, and dental services. The Fort Walton Beach Medial Center is the only acute care hospital in the tri-county area offering open heart surgery,

an accredited advanced primary stroke center, accredited chest pain center, and a cancer care center. North Okaloosa Medical Center, Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast, and Twin Cities Hospital also provide quality health care to the area.

Pensacola is home to West Florida Hospital, a full-service facility specializing in cardiac care and cancer care. Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital Pensacola is a regional hospital with a state-of-the-art stroke center and cancer center affiliated with MD Anderson Cancer Network. And Baptist Health Care, which has nine locations including the famed Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine, has recently announced construction of a state-of-the-art \$615 million Baptist Health Care Brent Lane Campus to provide greater access and enhanced patient, visitor, and team member experience.

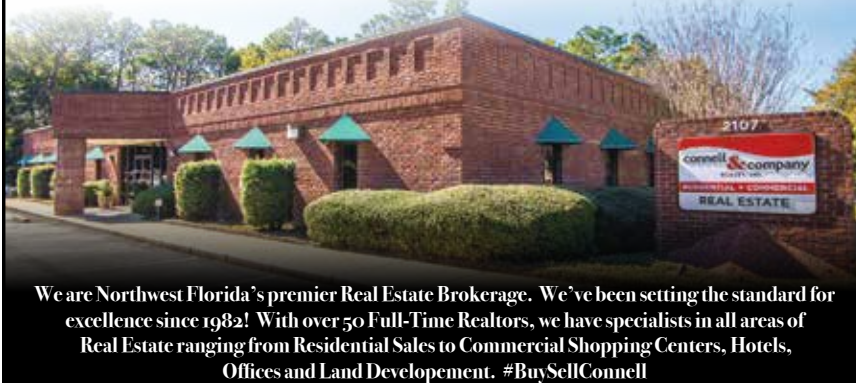
In Panama City, Bay Medical Sacred Heart is the only Level II trauma center between Pensacola and Tallahassee. The hospital is also known for its cardiac care including open heart surgery. Serving patients in a seven-county area, Bay Medical is nationally accredited as a Heart Attack and Stroke Center of Excellence by the Joint Commission.

Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center has been serving the community for more than 40 years. It has an accredited Chest Pain Center with Primary PCI with Resuscitation as recognized by the American College of Cardiology. The cancer program has achieved comprehensive designation by the Commission on Cancer and is an accredited breast program by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Cancers.



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"Within 72 hours, our students transitioned from their school to home, connecting online, in a secure classroom environment, and receiving the same quality education they had been for the entire year," says Randy Ramos, CEO, Global Business Solutions, Inc. (GBSI) and founder of ACCELETRAIN®.

ACCELETRAIN® is the next generation of classroom learning. This innovative system is a hybrid online learning model that goes beyond buildings and infrastructure, bridging educational resources. Comprised of three main components, ACCELETRAIN® provides technology that distributes the learning experience, a cloud-based platform that connects the education resources, and industry experts who support teacher professional development. In this connected environment, students, teachers, subject matter experts, and industry partners participate in the learning experience through team collaboration, engaging curriculum, supplemental materials, hands-on labs, and competitive events.

In 2012, as a partner in education and employer of cybersecurity professionals, Ramos recognized the community's economic development need for a skilled workforce in cybersecurity. GBSI worked with local high

schools to develop curriculum rigor and interactive lab activities that map to Florida Department of Education requirements. They developed materials that prepare students for industry-recognized certifications, allowing schools to capitalize on the Florida Career and Professional Education (CAPE) program funding. This led to the development of ACCELETRAIN®.

"This year, as the coronavirus pandemic forced schools to close their doors to traditional education, ACCELETRAIN® proved

its significance in supporting education continuity of operations," says Steve Samaha, GBSI Manager of Curriculum Development & Deployment. "What GBSI did with cybersecurity education can be done across the academic spectrum using ACCELETRAIN®."

As Florida wrestles with re-opening schools this Fall, ACCELETRAIN® will help schools shift from the traditional model of instructional delivery to a blended distance learning model, providing quality education to all students.



Randy Ramos
CEO, Global
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Angela Irby, Teacher
Pine Forest High School / Pensacola, Florida

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Pensacola
Beach

Life's a Beach

“The Florida Panhandle is paradise for anyone who loves the water. We also have great bike trails, hiking, camping, and food that combines Southern cooking with Cajun cuisine and a lot of fresh gulf seafood.”



— David Demarest
Director of
Communications,
Walton County
TDC

Above all, people come to Florida for the beach, and the Panhandle is no different. But what makes this stretch of shoreline so special is the combination of sugar sand and clear, emerald gulf water. Tourism has been a steady presence in Pensacola's economic development with a year-over-year 8 percent increase.

Complementing the beaches is a plethora of outdoor activities. Boating, canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding are popular in the Gulf of Mexico and on local rivers. Many of these can be experienced year-round since average high temperatures remain in the 60s and 70s throughout the winter and up to the 90s during the summer. When not outside or

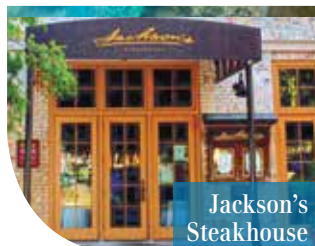
on the water, there are museums and historical sites to explore, shopping, and festivals almost every weekend of the year.

What makes these extracurricular offerings all the more special is the area's affordable housing and cost of living. Housing in Pensacola averages 62 percent of the national median, while Fort Walton Beach is at 94 percent of the national median. In Panama City, it is 83 percent.

“We offer world-class experiences right here in our own backyard,” says Walton County Tourist Development Council Director of Communications David Demarest.



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“These three organizations share a common purpose, common goal—grow this vital part of Northwest Florida.”

Dr. John Holdnak,
President of GCSC.



Bay County, Florida, is situated on the beautiful Emerald Coast between Pensacola and Tallahassee. It is known for its pristine beaches— but did you know that it is thriving in education, military presence, business, manufacturing, tourism, and so much more? Bay County is not only a great place to live, but a great place to start or continue your education, work, and have a business. At the heart of every community is its workforce, and Bay County is fortunate to have an exceptional post-secondary institution— Gulf Coast State College (GCSC). GCSC prides itself on providing high-quality educational opportunities at an affordable price. Ranked #1 lowest tuition in the state of Florida, with 95.4% of students entering the workforce or continuing their education within a year of graduation, GCSC assists in providing training attuned to emerging workforce needs of the technology, engineering, medical, and alternative energy industries.

The growth and success of Bay County could not be where it is today if it were not for the leadership of a strong public-private partnership. From elected officials, community, educational, and business leaders, the leadership of Bay County is working in a positive direction. The working partnership formed between GCSC, The St. Joe Company (St. Joe), and the Bay Economic Development Alliance (Bay EDA) spans many years and is one such example. Each entity on this team plays a distinct role in working to diversify the economy of Bay County and Northwest Florida. “Because of the partnership among our three organizations, and thoughtful leadership throughout all of our community, Bay County is creating a well-balanced and diversified economy that will impact future generations to come,” stated Becca Hardin, President, Bay EDA.

Through this partnership, the roles of company recruitment and expansion, workforce training, as well as a broad spectrum of real estate solutions, are brought to the drawing board when a company is



evaluating Bay County and Northwest Florida for an investment. In recent successful economic development projects, the partners have done exactly that. The Bay EDA works to get a company interested in the community, St. Joe assembles a turnkey solution for real estate needs, and GCSC completes the workforce training, collectively making compelling business packages for companies. “In order for a community or region to grow and provide for its citizens, certain things need to be in place: quality educational opportunities, a business community that is friendly to new investors and businesses to operate, and their employees to live,” said Jorge Gonzalez, President and CEO of St. Joe. “The relationship between these three organizations is critical in pushing Bay County forward as a great place to live and do business.”

The partnership between the entities even involves joint business development activities to show a collective and cohesive front when working with companies. International and domestic travel recruitment trips for business development activities is quite common. When a business sees this unified relationship, it provides assurance that the community is fully on board and working towards economic development success. The partnership between GCSC, St. Joe, and Bay EDA has provided a good foundation for economic diversification for Bay County and Northwest Florida.



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