

# Polk County

By Susan Shalhoub

## Polk County has big plans.

Areas like downtown Lakeland have a built-in, cool vibe that can't be easily formulated — Lake Wales and Winter Haven have an organic character that makes them unique. Paired with strong leadership and economic development, Polk is poised to be unstoppable.

“We have 17 very unique cities and dynamic business leaders, with creative redevelopment groups that are supported by the city and care about value and profit, not just profit.”



— Mike Herr  
City Manager,  
City of Winter Haven

The trade, transportation and utilities industry category showed Polk County's highest percentage of average annual employment, 25.3%, in 2018.

—Florida Legislature  
Office of Economic and  
Demographic Research

Top employers — such as Publix Super Markets (12,500 employees), Walmart (4,250), Lowe's (1,056), Amazon (900+), Rooms To Go (800) and Advance Auto Parts (615) — have distribution/warehousing operations in Polk County.

—Central Florida  
Development Council



Downtown Winter Haven

## Multifaceted Economy, Location Are Polk County's Strengths

A central location along I-4 and focus on innovation, technology and manufacturing create a place to have a real impact.

Citing its business-friendly climate and balance of economic growth with smaller-community character, Sean Malott, president and CEO of the Central Florida Development Council, calls it a great time to be in Polk County. He and other business leaders see connectedness, diversity, communication, innovation and location as key in Polk's upward mobility. The fact that the county is on the smaller side is an attribute, he says.

“You can locate in Polk County and have a community rallying behind you to help you be successful,” Malott says. “It's possible to have a real impact here, while in a larger metro market, it's easier to get lost.”

Connectivity is what makes the difference, Malott says, especially connections between businesses and higher education, yielding workforce strength. With some seven higher education institutions producing world-class graduates, companies are looking to put those graduates to work here, he says.

As a result of these partnerships, everyone benefits.

### Companies welcome

Malott gives innovative air-filtration system maker Molekule as an example of connectedness.

With its beginnings in a University of South Florida (USF) startup program, the company grew in San Francisco, outsourcing manufacturing before deciding on Lakeland for its research and advanced-manufacturing hub. It became official last year, with the company investing in renovation, acquiring a Lakeland address and initially hiring 12 people.

The city offered tax incentives in return for high-paying jobs, Malott says. The job creation effort overall is the result of a partnership with his organization, Molekule, USF, Florida Polytechnic University and the Lakeland Economic Development Council.

Cities here and the entities within them work together.



Citizens Bank & Trust, founded in 1920, helped develop the area around Frostproof.



Polk County is a distribution hub.



A Central Florida Innovation District is planned.



Agriculture remains an economic driver.

**25%**

EMPLOYED: TRADE  
TRANSPORTATION  
UTILITY

**#1**

FASTEST GROWING  
METRO AREA  
(LAKELAND/WINTER HAVEN, 2018)

**#8**

MANUFACTURING JOBS  
(LAKELAND/WINTER HAVEN)

**26%**

EMPLOYED:  
AGRICULTURE

### Diversified markets

Greg Littleton is president and CEO of Citizens Bank & Trust, which has made Polk County its home for 100 years. Active in various economic-development efforts, he sees great opportunity in the county's diverse industries — especially for an area long dependent on citrus, phosphate and tourism.

"I don't think anyone realized the potential," he says.

Littleton calls steel producer Nucor's investment in Frostproof — a \$240-million micro-mill to recycle scrap metal — "a huge win for our side of the county and city."

He also points to SunTrax, Auburndale's under-development test facility for innovative transportation, led by the state's Department of Transportation and Turnpike Enterprise, as an example of Polk County looking ahead to markets of the future.

The Central Florida Development Council is planning an innovation district near Florida Polytechnic University to recruit tech companies to the area with residential, business and research opportunities.

Polk has innate economic value, as well.

### Location logistics

Longtime Auburndale City Manager



MAP: TERESANNE COSSETTA RUSSELL

Bobby Green sees its location as part of Polk's appeal. He notes that in the late 1800s, when South Florida Railroad came through Polk County, the area held advantages because of where it was placed. It's an asset that remains.

With Polk "smack dab in the middle of the state, between the Atlantic and the Gulf, between Tampa and Orlando, which are two of the best airports in the world," he says, "it's just right for companies needing quick delivery. It makes sense, then, that Amazon and Publix have located here."

Green also points to the Polk Cooperative Water District as an example of cities working together as they head into the future. The cooperative has identified water-supply projects and has moved forward together in addressing needs.

Another example of a united front, the cooperative makes it a great place to locate a business and a great place to live.

"If it is good for one of our cities, it's likely good for Polk County," he says. "And if it's good for Polk County, it's good for all our cities."



*Restored historic downtown Winter Haven is home to galleries, restaurants, shopping, the musical venue Derry Down, historic Ritz Theatre and Theatre Winter Haven.*

“Polk County is the best place for business in good times and difficult times. Our cities are resilient and work tirelessly to see businesses achieve their goals and be supportive when they are struggling.”

— **Lindsay B. Zimmerman**  
VP of Investor Relations & Marketing,  
Central Florida Development Council



Downtown Winter Haven won the 2019 Great Places in Florida People's Choice Award from the Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association.

- American Planning Association

## Downtown Revitalizations Focus on Third Spaces

Lakeland and Winter Haven are among those in Polk County investing in their downtowns.

Leaders realize that for cities to be successful, they need more than just offices and schools. People need places where they can dine, walk and shop. These “third spaces” maximize a community's environment and enrich the lives of those who call it home.

Lakeland Community & Economic Development Director Nicole Travis — who was responsible for streamlining city permitting procedures by soliciting feedback from local engineers, builders and contractors — says the focus is a serious one.

“Our downtown is expanding,” she says, adding that municipal leaders know the importance of working together to leverage strengths for third spaces and other initiatives.

Travis mentions Lakeland's parks and the Lake Mirror promenade, with its wildlife, sculpture and Hollis Garden within, for example.

The Joinery offers retail and restaurant options. Munn Park hosts events like food-truck rallies and car shows, with activities like open-mike sessions at Swan Brewing.

Catapult Lakeland, meanwhile, is a downtown co-working facility on Lake Mirror. Having recently relocated and tripled in size, its 38,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art space includes a commissary kitchen for food startups and a manufacturing area.

“They can grow their business without initially having to invest in equipment and infrastructure,” says Christina Graham, executive director of Catapult Lakeland. “One of our goals is that entrepreneurs use this as a starting space and launching pad — and that they move out, hire and occupy space here in Lakeland.”



*Swan Brewing in Lakeland features 30 taps.*

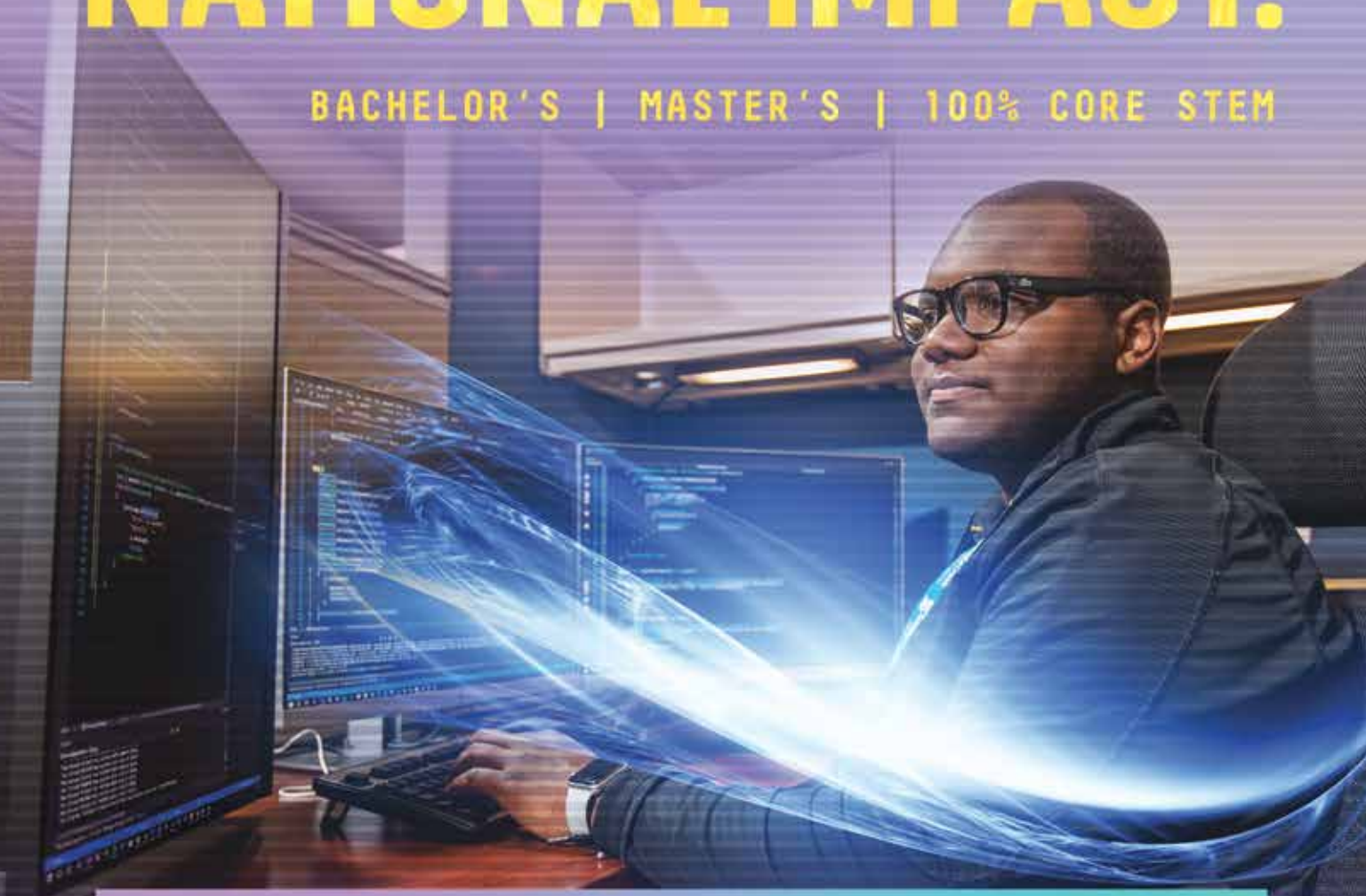


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*Redevelopment is underway in historic downtown Lakeland along Massachusetts Avenue.*



**Dynamic emerging downtowns, surging cultural tourism and natural outdoor assets are making Polk County an increasingly enviable spot to grow a business, or a family.**

**Lake Wales' Main Street America program is said to be Florida's first. Home to Bok Tower Gardens, the Lake Wales Main Street downtown revitalization strategy focuses on the city as a living work of art.**

Ashley Cheek, vice president of business development for private nonprofit Lakeland Economic Development Council (LEDC), says Catapult has set the stage for downtown revitalization.

"We've learned to be scrappy because we haven't had a lot of money here. We've had to be nimble to recalibrate. We're accustomed to having tough conversations," says Kim Long, executive director, Polk Vision.

"We have to have employees to support businesses," says Cheek. "But we also have to give people experiences," like third spaces provide.

## Winter Haven

Winter Haven has four branding pillars in its downtown revitalization, according to Katie Worthington Decker, president and CEO of the Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce: Downtown is Our Stage, with an arts focus; Lakeside Lifestyle; Family-Friendly Destination (it is, after all, home to LEGOLAND); and Collaborative Business Community.

The community's accomplishments are racking up.

Anita Strang, executive director of Main Street Winter Haven, cites Gram Parsons Derry Down as a downtown Winter Haven success story. The historic music venue — named for the former member of The Byrds and the father of Cosmic American Music, Gram Parsons — was restored in 2016.

"It's cultural tourism," says Strang, "and has done exactly what we were hoping for: It's providing space for live music and it's used in a partnership with Polk County schools' Young Musicians program. We track ticket sales through ZIP codes." Just

over 40% of ticket holders travel into the county to catch a show, she says.

Part of the national Main Street program, Main Street Winter Haven bases downtown efforts on historic relevance.

Another example: Its tours of architecture by Gene Leedy, a founder of the Sarasota School of Architecture design style. A Winter Haven resident, the majority of Leedy's structures are here.

The redesign of part of the city's South Central Park area, meanwhile, wrapped up in 2018, adding open space, preserving parking and leveraging the city's grid system. Streetscape improvements include human and canine drinking fountains, interactive visitor kiosks, shaded bike-repair areas and landscaping.

"It changed the traffic flow and corrected an old highway through downtown, which did not feel very welcoming to cross," says Strang of the project.

She sees more residential space downtown in Winter Haven's future.

"People want to live close to where they work, cycle, shop and eat. We're near the lake, near the hospital ... you could live right downtown and access most everything."

**"Any business moving to Lakeland can depend on being a partner with the city."**



— **Nicole Travis**  
Director, Community & Economic Development,  
City of Lakeland



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*SunTrax, a project of Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, provides an oval track for testing self-driving vehicles.*

“Companies are coming here to locate, not just to recruit.”



— **Sean Malott**  
President & CEO,  
Central Florida  
Development Council

In Davenport, Walmart's two-building e-commerce fulfillment center that opened in 2017 was the first in Florida. It's 2.2 million square feet — about the size of 20 football fields.

—**Central Florida Development Council**

In February of 1951, Publix — founded in Winter Haven — built a warehouse and office complex near U.S. 92 in Lakeland. At 125,000 square feet, it was billed as the most modern structure of its kind in the nation.

—**Publix blog**

## Distribution/Transportation Technologies

Polk County's location and workforce make it central in getting things from here to there.

Though built-in resources like highway, railway and central access have been part of the fabric of Polk County for what seems like forever, its positioning is not taken for granted. Business and government leaders here see the value of the county's placement, and work to maximize its benefits.

SunTrax is a facility right off I-4, which is destined to become a center for transportation innovation, with a 2.25-mile oval track to safety test autonomous vehicles. The 475-acre research-and-development facility will also include a 27,000-square-foot warehouse building, 20,000-square-foot Welcome Center with offices and classrooms, and a sensor test chamber, says Kelda Senior, SunTrax business development manager, Florida Department of Transportation (DOT).

“Phase 3 is a sensor chamber that tests conditions for torrential downpours, wind ... all of which autonomous vehicles have to navigate through here in our Florida environments,” says Senior, as well as conditions such as fog and dust. She notes that the sensor chambers use old



*The first Publix Food Store was opened in 1930 in Winter Haven. Today, Publix has more than 1,100 super markets.*

technology in a new way, making use of cameras and sensors in ways they've been used in theme-park ride technology in the past.

The SunTrax facility broke ground in 2017. Phase One, with a price tag of \$42.5 million, was completed last May, Senior says. Phase Two began last fall, with a budget estimate of about \$100 million. The entire project is due for completion at the end of 2021.

Senior says that the close proximity of Florida Polytechnic University, which specializes in STEM subjects such as autonomous vehicles, will be of value to students there. She also notes proximity to attractions will aid in getting startups or established manufacturers to Polk County, hopefully with family in tow.

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# Manufacturing & Agriculture

Manufacturers value area's assets; agriculture endures

Food, chemical, paper goods, building materials and more are all made right here. With an ideal central location for

shipping and a commitment to improving innovation and technology — not to mention a skilled hiring pool — the art

of making things is alive, well and growing in Polk.

According to Polk State College, there are well over 440 manufacturers here, including Publix Super Markets; The Coca-Cola Company; phosphate crop fertilizer maker Mosaic; Pepperidge Farm; TriCircle Pavers; and Nucor, the largest steel producer in the U.S.

## Victory set in steel

Nucor's arrival in Frostproof last year was a stunning accomplishment for the area's economic outlook, winning the Central Florida Development Council (CFDC) a 2019 Urban Deal of the Year Award from the Florida Economic Development Council.

The 400-acre site in Frostproof was ideal for a rebar micro mill to recycle steel, for myriad reasons, Nucor Steel Florida Inc. Controller Corey Allain says, including room for potential growth, rail and highway access, and scrap-metal facilities.

## Agriculture legacy lives on

Since the 1800s, agriculture and mining have been economic drivers, in areas of citrus, phosphate and cattle. According to the Polk County Farm Bureau, the citrus industry is dominant here, with farmland comprising about 45% of county land overall.

According to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), there are 77,520 jobs in agriculture or related industries in Polk County, 26.8% of all jobs here.

“Agritechnology and diversification in commodities are game-changers.”



— Nelson Kirkland  
Member,  
Polk County Farm Bureau  
Board of Directors

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The Lakeland Linder International Airport leases space to NOAA's hurricane hunters.

“Investments such as SunTrax will allow for the development and safe deployment of technologies that will reduce congestion and move people and goods more efficiently.”



— **Nicola Liquori**  
Executive Director &  
CEO,  
Florida's Turnpike  
Enterprise

Combined, airports in Lakeland, Bartow, Winter Haven and Lake Wales have an economic impact of more than \$878 million.

— **March 2019 Aviation Economic Impact Study, Florida Department of Transportation**

## Transportation Assets Mesh with Innovation

Industry and education partnerships add jobs and value.

Set in its prime location between Tampa and Orlando, the county has a comprehensive network of railroads and roads. These longtime assets — still in place today — are now alongside futuristic projects, such as SunTrax in Auburndale.

While Polk's rail lines are a nod to its past and present, SunTrax, run by Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, has its wheels decidedly in the future.

“Users may be auto manufacturers from different parts of the country,” says Kelda Senior, SunTrax business development manager, calling the test facility the first of its kind in the Southeast. The area holds great benefit for projects like SunTrax, she says. “The talent pool is here, with high-quality state university systems,” says Senior, creating a ready-made local workforce.

### Opportunity that's airborne

Lakeland Linder International — the state's 19th busiest airport — has its future as a hub of education and industry well defined. It leases out 1.2 million square feet of space to various organizations, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for its “hurricane hunters,” specialized hurricane forecasting aircraft.

With Amazon utilizing 47 acres for its \$100-million air-cargo hub and bringing

800 to 1,000 jobs, the shipping giant has an option to develop another 60 acres as well, according to Airport Director Gene Conrad. “With the Florida Department of Transportation reporting airport economic impact now at \$574 million annually, with Amazon, in about three years it could be well over \$1 billion a year,” Conrad says.

The airport's master plan, now under Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) review, includes another 70 acres that could be used for large hangars for aircraft maintenance and repair, Conrad says — creating even more jobs and value to companies here.

The airport is also a hub for STEM-related aerospace education.

Its Aerospace Center for Excellence (ACE) just broke ground on Project SkyLab, a \$4.6-million expansion of learning and exhibit space, backed by partnerships with higher education institutions. ACE's six-day Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo, held each spring, funds scholarships for aviation-training. The airport also hosts Central Florida Aerospace Academy, Polk State College aerospace programs and Triviss Technical College.

“This is what differentiates us,” says Conrad, noting aviation workforce shortages. “These programs don't exist anywhere else.”

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*Polk County is a well known warehousing/distribution hub for larger companies.*



## Polk: Where to Be for Warehousing

Top companies opt for warehouse/distribution in Polk County.

Companies like Amazon, Walmart, Publix, FedEx, IKEA, Best Buy, Gatorade, Havertys and Saddle Creek Logistics — along with many others — opt for warehouse/distribution operations in Polk County.

The area is a hotbed of warehouse and distribution space, with more on

the way, says Greg Ruthven, president and director of The Ruthvens, which builds and leases warehouses, and has for decades.

He says road corridors in Polk are a big enticement for companies.

"It's perfect for distribution

statewide. I-95 is close, U.S. 27 is probably 14 minutes away. Lakeland doesn't have the traffic Orlando does — and Tampa's getting to be just as bad as Orlando," he says. "It's the No. 1 reason Lakeland is called the Distribution Hub of Florida."

The workforce here is another

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## Top Employers in Polk County

Publix Super Markets	12,500 employees
Walmart	4,250 employees
Lowe's	1,056 employees
Amazon	900+ employees
Rooms To Go	800 employees

- Central Florida Development Council statistics.

driver, he says, with jobs relatively easy to fill, adding that the business-friendly climate is another huge bonus.

### Up and coming

Amazon — which already has fulfillment centers in Davenport and Lakeland — also has one in Auburndale under construction. Amazon has said the location, where items will be picked, packed and shipped, will create over 500 full-time jobs beginning at \$15 an hour with immediate benefits.

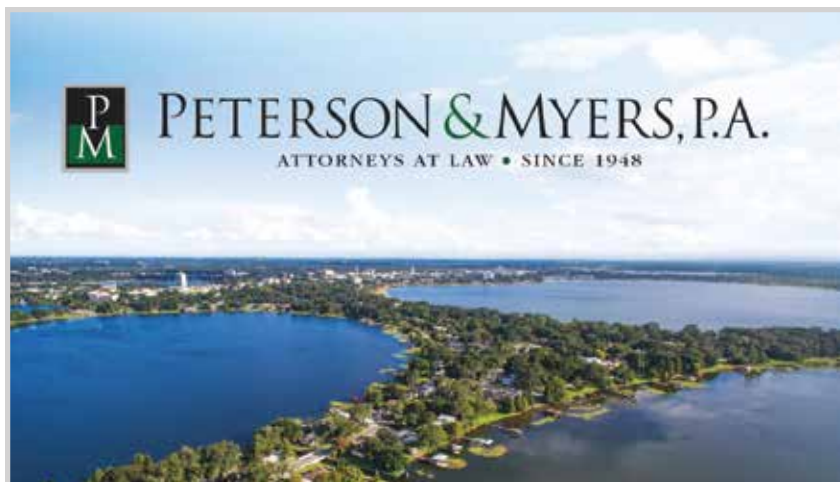
Ruthven East Lakeland Industrial Park, meanwhile, with tenants Walmart and Southeast Pet, will be 428,092 square feet total when completed this summer, Ruthven says. The third building in the park, near I-4, is slated for completion in July.

The projects are not a complete list of the warehousing and logistics facilities in the works in Polk but represent the scope of opportunity found here.

“Larger companies are coming in with huge distribution warehouses and really putting us on the map.”



— Greg Ruthven  
President & CEO,  
The Ruthvens



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Rendering of Lakeland Regional Health's new Behavioral Health & Wellness center, set to open in 2021.



“We are very much a learning organization. We open up our doors [to students] and allow them to have good hands-on experiences — hopefully with us — but beneficial regardless of where they go.”



— Danielle Drummond  
President and CEO-elect,  
Lakeland Regional Health

With over 5,400 total team members, Lakeland Regional Health is the second-largest private employer in the county. It was chosen as the 2019 Florida Caregiver of the Year by Florida Hospital Association.

-Lakeland Regional Health

Bartow Regional Medical Center is accredited as a Center of Excellence for practicing the gold standard of robotic surgery.

- Surgical Review Corporation

## Health Care Access on Upward Track

Polk County's main health care entities are all growing, expanding and innovating to maximize the care and research they offer.

### Lakeland Regional Health

Lakeland Regional Health — which owns Lakeland Regional Health Medical Center — celebrated the opening of its largest expansion to date in 2018: The Carol Jenkins Barnett Pavilion for Women and Children, a \$275-million facility.

“This kind of care was something not available here,” says Danielle Drummond, the non-profit, independent health care organization's president and CEO-elect, who will succeed Elaine C. Thompson. “Patients and families were having to leave Polk County,” for surgeries and treatment.

Drummond says partnerships with organizations like Nemours Children's Health and the Mayo Clinic Care Network have helped make the new facility and other system improvements possible.

Lakeland Regional opened its Biplanar NeuroInterventional Suite in 2018.

The system plans a 96-bed Center for Behavioral Health & Wellness in 2021, on the south side of its medical-center campus.

### AdventHealth

Altamonte Springs-based AdventHealth now owns AdventHealth Lake Wales (160 beds) and AdventHealth Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center (193 beds), in Davenport.

There are 1,200 employees between the two facilities.

AdventHealth has invested \$100 million for the entities, now part of its portfolio of 50 hospital campuses across nine states.

“We are excited about expanding our network. In these facilities alone, we are investing \$15 million,” says Brian Adams, AdventHealth market CEO. “Our investment represents a long-term commitment to health care in Polk County.”

### BayCare Health System

Non-profit BayCare owns Bartow Regional Medical Center in Bartow (72 beds), along with Winter Haven Hospital (458 beds) and Winter Haven Women's Hospital (61 beds). Through medical and pharmacy residencies, along with community-education efforts, the hospitals work to train and inform.

BayCare investments continue beyond hands-on trainings and sessions on relevant health issues. According to its website, the company has \$1.76 billion in capital improvements planned across its 15 campuses in the 2017-2021 time period.

It's work that has already begun.

Last year, BayCare renovated Bartow Regional, an acute-care hospital. It also achieved accreditation as a Level-1 Adult Cardiac Lab.

### Watson Clinic

Lakeland multispecialty medical group Watson Clinic, which has been in existence for eight decades, has over 220 board-certified physicians. The new Watson Clinic Urgent Care South opened this year to walk-in patients with non-emergency conditions. It has X-rays and scans on site, with weekend hours.



**CENTRAL FLORIDA**  
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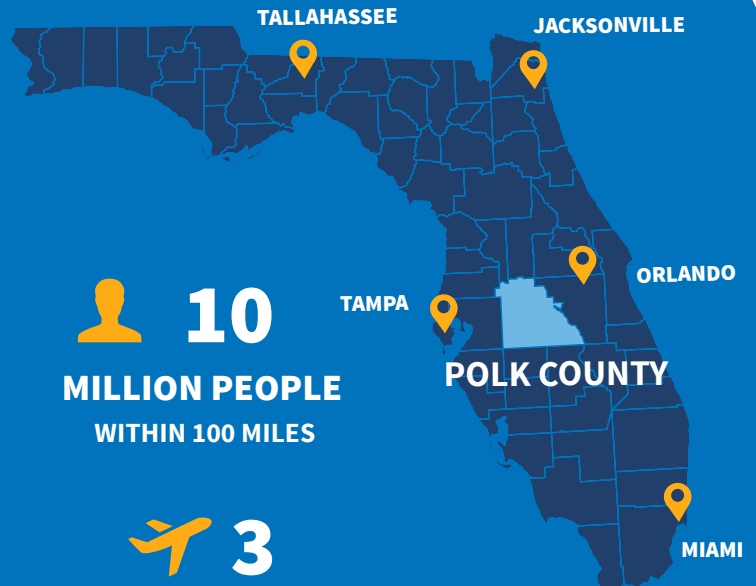
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## POLK COUNTY

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— **Randy Avent**  
President,  
Florida Polytechnic  
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— **Angela Garcia Falconetti**  
President, Polk  
State College

The oldest private college in Florida, Florida Southern College was founded in Orlando in 1883 as South Florida Institute.

— **Florida Southern College**

Polk State College has a 96.9% job-placement and transfer rate, the second highest in the Florida College System.

— **Polk State College**



Florida Southern College, Polk State College and Florida Polytechnic University

## Education Institutions Prepare Students for Growing Fields

Schools guide students entering the workplace.

Polk County schools are growing enrollment, facilities and partnerships with area industry to provide needed workforce skills. Experts say that targeting key areas like aviation aids in job placements that enrich the local economy.

Founded in 2012, Lakeland's Florida Polytechnic University is the only public polytechnic university in the state. Focusing on STEM subjects, with two graduate programs, nine undergraduate programs and 31 concentrations, Florida Poly is an active player in area economic development. Its strategic plan includes creation of a research park for business, education and government partnerships.

Florida Southern College — a top college for producing Fulbright U.S. students for the second consecutive year — offers majors such as registered nursing, elementary education and teaching. This year, The Princeton Review named it one of the best on-campus schools for earning an MBA.

Polk State College, with campuses in Lakeland and Winter Haven, has an enrollment of about 16,000. More than 70% of graduates stay in Polk County, working in manufacturing, aerospace, business, health care or education.

Southeastern University of Lakeland, a Christian college, offers affordable degree tracks in areas such as finance, aviation and nursing. Last year its total enrollment was 9,894, quadrupling in the past eight years. New dorms and office space have been built, and a welcome center and track-and-field facility

are in the works.

Warner University and Webber International University are both in Lake Wales. Warner trains graduates to work in high-paying area jobs. “If students stay in the community, they are contributing financially,” says Andrea Thies, vice president of advancement at Warner University.

Webber students hail from 29 states and 48 countries, and the school has been recognized by The Princeton Review as a Best in the Southeast and Best Value college.

Keiser University, with an overall enrollment of 20,000, has a Lakeland campus and degrees ranging from associate to doctoral, in over 100 fields.

Southern Technical College of Auburndale provides programs such as heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), welding, medical assisting and electrical trades.

There are also programs in place like Polk Career Academies for public middle and high school students.



Photo courtesy of  
Florida Southern  
College

### Anne Kerr

President,  
Florida Southern College

Florida Southern College President Anne Kerr has made significant increases to the number and quality of majors offered at FSC as well as enrollment, now at over 3,500. The campus is a testament to the legendary design of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Leading the school since 2004, Kerr helps ensure FSC is a resource for not only Polk County, but the world in terms of academics, history and innovation.

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Performers at the Polk Theatre included Tommy Dorsey, Gene Autrey, Glenn Miller and Elvis Presley.

**-The Polk Theatre**

Students from Florida Dance Theatre in Lakeland have gone on to join organizations such as the Joffrey Ballet, Ballet Met, Memphis Ballet and other companies.

**-Florida Dance Theatre**

Home to the largest collection of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture all in one place, Florida Southern College Historic District is a National Historic Landmark.

**-Florida Southern College**



## Cultural Resources

Polk County’s dedication to cultural programming, revitalization and recreation promote a high quality of life.

From the Bok Tower Gardens, to the Smithsonian-affiliated Polk Museum of Art at Florida Southern College, to the historic Polk Theatre, to the Imperial Symphony Orchestra, arts and culture has always been strong here.

Explorations V Children’s Museum is relocating to Lakeland’s Bonnet Springs Park next year to expand its play space and hands-on exhibits. It’s the only facility of its kind in Central Florida.

“We have over 100 arts events every month in Polk County,” says Meri Mass, executive director of the Polk Arts Alliance, ranging from theater and music, to pottery and painting. The alliance, recognized by the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, advocates for arts resources and programs.

Cultural tourism attendance is up about 30% since 2012, when a grant program to fund arts marketing here was approved. Arts groups collaborate with one another to maximize every dollar.

### Stage set for success

Lake Wales Arts Council has expanded its programs over the last few years.

“We provide fine-arts educational opportunities through camps, classes, community outreach components and providing access to award-winning performance artists,” says Lake Wales Art Council Executive Director Andrew Allen.



*Bok Tower Gardens has hosted more than 23 million visitors since 1929.*

Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Jim Salestrom, of country-rock band Timberline — a member of Dolly Parton’s band for over a decade — performed a concert at the Lake Wales Arts Center.

Both Mass and Allen note the importance of a strong arts community as an economic driver.

Art education and art exposure for young people are part of the mission of the alliance and the council.

“These kids are learning skills that can take them right into the workforce,” says Allen.



*Bonnet Springs Park rendering, the Polk Theatre and Polk Museum of Art*

## Robust Recreation

Polk is a world-class destination for training and competition, from baseball and basketball to water skiing and golf.

Host to the Detroit Tigers, the area has a rich history as Spring Training Central for major-league baseball and its Class-A affiliate team, the Lakeland Flying Tigers.

Professional basketball is big in Polk County as well, with the Lakeland Magic.

But that doesn't mean that Central Florida's Polk County Sports Marketing (PCSM) isn't maintaining its reign as Water Ski Capital of the World, as well, says Marc Zimmerman, the organization's senior economic development manager. Or that college sports aren't also popular here. When it comes to sports, economic leaders look to maximize opportunities.



*The stadium in Tiger Town is the spring training home of the Detroit Tigers.*

Zimmerman cites \$158.4 million in economic impact from Polk County sports events in 2019, a number that's steadily rising.



*The Streamsong resort is a world-class golf resort in Bowling Green.*



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## Athletic hubs

The \$25-million AdventHealth Fieldhouse and Conference Center opened in January in Winter Haven. At over 58,000 square feet, the facility has six basketball courts, twice as many volleyball courts, a black-box theater, fitness center, Olympic pool and concourse area. The new Feltrim Sports Village in Haines City, meanwhile, hosts sports camps and competitions, with an all-turf soccer and football stadium that seats 2,500. The sports village is part of a resort, Balmoral. Developer and Feltrim Group CEO Garrett Kenny calls Balmoral a "horizontal hotel," with single-family pool homes for rent.

The resort's event center, for things like celebratory dinners, is planned to open this summer.

Florida Youth Soccer and Florida State Soccer associations are headquartered right in Auburndale.

Polk City is also home to the USA Water Ski & Wake Sports Foundation. It's opened Elite Cable Park at Lake Myrtle, for lessons and competitions, part of the new USA Water Sports Complex that is under construction.

Bowling Green's scenic Streamsong is a golf resort built on 16,000 acres by award-winning architects — on a former phosphate mine. The resort, which attracts international visitors, includes a 228-room hotel and restaurants.

LEGOLAND's 150-acre theme park in Winter Haven is getting ready to officially open its new, second hotel — which has a pirate theme.

"I've been in Polk County for 20 years," says Kenny of Feltrim Group. "I like to operate where development is coming to rather than where it's been. I see huge potential in Polk."



Balmoral Resort offers guests a unique luxury stay in an upscale community.



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[polk.edu](http://polk.edu)

Polk State College is committed to equal access/equal opportunity in its programs, activities, and employment. For additional information, visit [polk.edu/equity](http://polk.edu/equity).

# People to Know

Build relationships in the community with Polk County business leaders.

**Dr. Steven Achinger**  
Managing Partner, Watson Clinic

**Brian Adams**  
Market CEO, AdventHealth

**Bart Allen**  
Attorney at Law, Peterson & Myers



**Randy Avent**  
President, Florida  
Polytechnic University

**Bill Beasley**  
Polk County Manager, Polk County

**Nathaniel Birdsong**  
Mayor Pro-Tem, City of Winter Haven

**Steve Boyington**  
Principal, The Lunz Group

**Jim Bullock**  
Director of Sales & Marketing,  
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**David Bunch**  
SIOR, Hauger Bunch

**Ryan Buskirk**  
President, Lake Wales Main Street



**Jacqueline Byrd**  
Superintendent of  
Schools, Polk County  
Public Schools

**Mark Cabrera**  
President & CEO, SaddleCreek

**Stacy Campbell-Domineck**  
President and CEO, CareerSource Polk

**Rob Clancey**  
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**Gene Conrad**  
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**John Corbett**  
President & CEO, CenterState Bank

**Bradley Dantzler**  
Mayor, City of Winter Haven



**Katie Worthington  
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President/CEO, Greater  
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**Dale Dreyer**  
EVP and Regional President of Central  
Florida, CenterState Bank



**Danielle  
Drummond**  
EVP/COO, Lakeland  
Regional Health

**Chandra Frederick**  
Assistant County Manager,  
Polk County Board of County  
Commissioners

**Eugene Fultz**  
Mayor, City of Lake Wales



**Angela Garcia  
Falconetti**  
President, Polk State  
College

**Bobby Green**  
City Manager, City of Auburndale

**John Helms**  
Executive Director, Bartow Municipal  
Airport Development Authority



**Mike Herr**  
City Manager, City of  
Winter Haven

**Tim Hoeft**  
Managing Principal, Straughn Trout  
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**Kent Ingle**  
President, Southeastern University

**Mark Jackson**  
Executive Director, Visit Central Florida

**Patricia Jackson**  
City Manager, City of Polk City

**Cyndi Jantomaso**  
President & CEO, Haines City Economic  
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**Todd Jones**  
President, Publix Super Markets, Inc.



**Garrett Kenny**  
Founder & CEO, Feltrim  
Group



**Anne Kerr**  
President, Florida  
Southern College



**Kevin Kieft**  
President/CEO, Lake Wales  
Area Chamber of  
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**Joe LaCascia**  
Mayor, City of Polk City

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