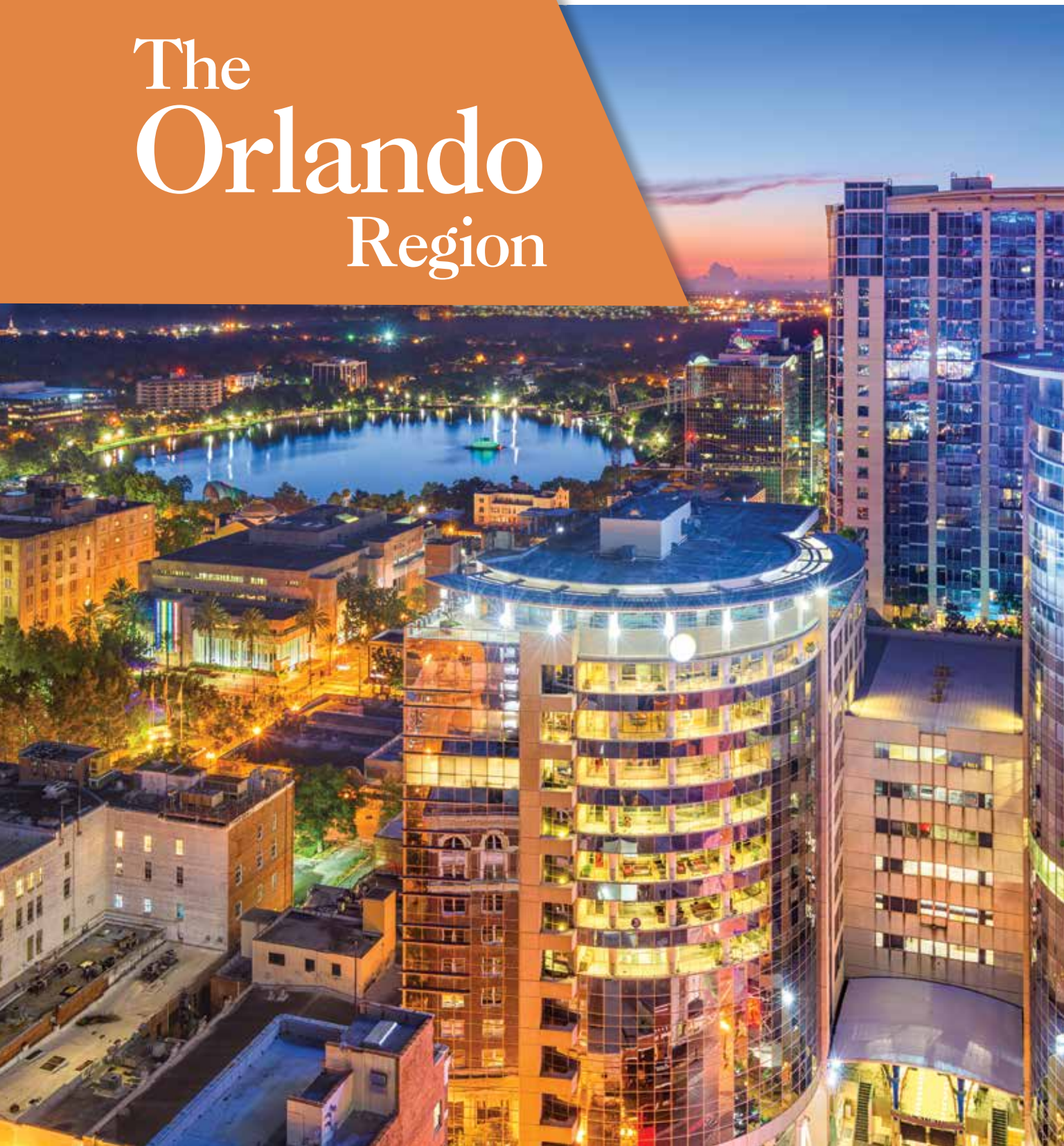


The Orlando Region



The Orlando Region





The Orlando Region's 'Next Chapter of Growth'

As the post-pandemic landscape begins to unfold, eyes are focused forward on the horizon. And with optimism.

By Michael Candelaria

Construction at Julian Apartments



They Said It

“We are starting to plan for what the next chapter of growth within our community looks like, and what we can do to facilitate and be supportive of that.”



Brooke Bonnett
Director of Economic Development / City of Orlando

Didn't Pause. Didn't Stop.

“The construction is still going on.”

That assertion came from Phil Brown, CEO of the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority and Orlando International Airport, whose revenues at Orlando International Airport plummeted more than 70% by September compared to fall 2019.

Brown is referring to a South Terminal project that would add 15 new passenger gates at OIA, just after a time when OIA traffic was down roughly 75%.

“We are starting to plan for what the next chapter of growth within our community looks like, and what we can do to facilitate and be supportive of that,” says Brooke Bonnett, director of economic development for the City of Orlando, which is in the precarious midst of nurturing downtown’s Creative Village, a 68-acre urban redevelopment project.

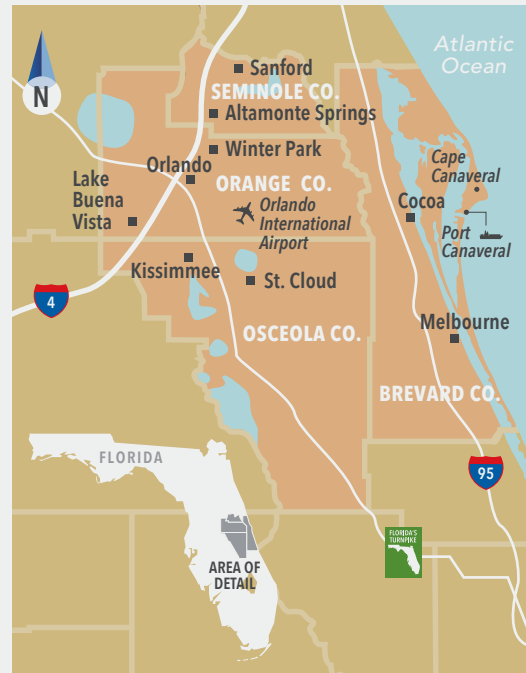
Cites Casey Barnes, vice president of business development for the Orlando Economic Partnership, whose primary tagline is “fueling Orlando’s economy by conquering shared challenges: “The fundamentals that led to our ridiculous amount of good job growth still exist. The same exact fundamentals that led to other markets outside of Florida losing jobs still exist.”

And this comment comes from Rasesh Thakkar, senior managing director of Tavistock Group, as he points to the still-vibrant growth at Lake Nona. “Anybody who says that this pandemic has not impacted things is lying,” Thakkar says. “But even in the face of this pandemic, we didn’t freeze any construction. In fact, we’ve barreled ahead. And we’ve got partners who are very strong doing the same. ... We didn’t pause; we didn’t stop.”

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pre-pandemic, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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Florida Department of Economic Opportunity 2020.



COVID-19?

The global pandemic, no doubt, has been a harsh economic reality across metro Orlando, and even the craftiest spin doctoring cannot dispute it. Truth is, the effects are evident in black and white for all to see — actually, with much red on bottom lines.

At the same time, optimism prevails across the region, which extends some 3,000 square miles and counts a population that's steadily approaching 3 million residents. Seemingly, the collective perception, at least for Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties surveyed here, is built both on ambition and analytics, tempered only a bit by the recent rear view.

Eyes are focused forward, even decades ahead, such as seen on nearly 300,000 acres of ranchland

spread across Orange, Brevard and Osceola counties. There, while planners at Deseret Cattle & Citrus aren't sure about the shape the growth will take, they're bullish on the future.

"We'll continue to maintain a seat at the table that we're planning for a future that goes beyond COVID-19 — and goes beyond some of the factors we see right now," says Don Whyte, Deseret's vice president of planning.

And talk about setting sights on the horizon. In November, this news was made: Orlando is going to be the hub site for the country's first urban and regional air mobility network — with the development of an all-electric, vertical take-off and landing aircraft for regional air mobility. (See Transportation, page 102.)

Did You Know?

While there is growth throughout the region, Osceola County leads the way as the eighth-fastest growing county nationwide by percentage change from 2010 to 2019 (38.9%), according to U.S. Census statistics.



Creative Village Park rendering



They Said It

“When you put talent right next to job generators, especially in a downtown core, it completely revitalizes and can change the tone and tenor of what is happening.”



Casey Barnes
Vice President
of Business
Development /
Orlando
Economic
Partnership

Growth Corridors

For many years, promoters of economic development across Metro Orlando have touted the region’s promise as a place to “live, work, play.”

Despite the pandemic, at least three area corridors of growth have continued to burgeon in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. Here’s how they’re doing it.

Creative Village

In October, the Orlando City Council approved a \$5.3 million agreement with Collage Cos. for the construction of the Creative Village Park. The 2.3-acre park will provide opportunities for students, residents and visitors of Creative Village to gather, play and enjoy the outdoors, including a one-acre “great lawn,” scheduled to be completed this fall.

The park is the most recent addition to the master plan of Creative Village, a 68-acre urban redevelopment project that builds on the success of Orlando’s digital media industry and a transformation of the former Amway Arena site into a mixed-use, transit-oriented, urban neighborhood. Now, as an estimated \$1.5 billion public/private partnership, it’s home to downtown Orlando campuses of the University of Central Florida and Valencia College, which opened in August 2019.

Clearly, education is the driver.

“We are providing our students — and Valencia’s — with high-quality educational opportunities so close to so many high-demand career fields,” says UCF President Alexander Cartwright.

One example: EA Tiburon, a giant video game development company (Madden NFL, among others), is relocating to Creative Village from nearby Maitland this year, partly because UCF’s Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy is already located there. EA Tiburon plans to move more than 700 workers to the headquarters, now under construction. That total could go to 1,000 employees by 2025.

Not far away is UCF’s Downtown Incubator, focusing on digital media, gaming, hospitality, smart cities and fintech. According to Cartwright, it has doubled in size since opening despite COVID-19. And, to accommodate new residents, two apartment complexes are rising to join existing units: Julian, with 409 units that will overlook the park; and 292-unit Modera Creative Village.

Additionally, Creative Village could deliver new educational and job training opportunities, along with new affordable housing. Currently, Creative Village is in phase I of a three-phase

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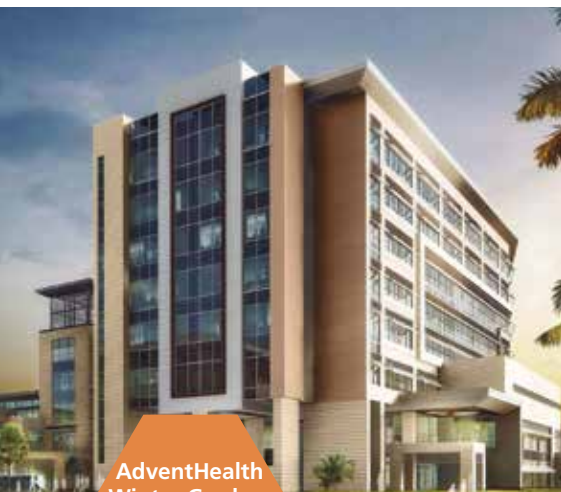
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AdventHealth Winter Garden, rendering

development plan slated to run through 2031.

“When you put talent right next to job generators, especially in a downtown core, it completely revitalizes and can change the tone and tenor of what is happening,” remarks Casey Barnes, vice president of business development for the Orlando Economic Partnership.

Osceola County

Pointing out that Osceola is the eighth fastest-growing county nationwide and the second-fastest in Florida, Viviana Janer, chair of Osceola’s Board of County Commissioners, asserts, “We have lots going on.”

Adds John Newstreet, president and CEO of the Kissimmee/Osceola Chamber of Commerce: “Osceola is really synonymous with growth. It all comes down to growth, growth, growth. ... We really have a blank horizon.”

For one, the Kissimmee Medical Arts District is firmly taking shape, with both AdventHealth Kissimmee and Osceola Regional Medical Center in “tremendous growth modes,” says Belinda Kirkegard, the City of Kissimmee’s director of economic development. The two hospitals sit within 1.5 miles of each other and have a collective \$150 million in their campus expansion pipelines.

Established in 2016, the district lies in the very heart of the city and serves as a hub for health care-related businesses. Ultimately,

the goal is to help diversify the county’s tourism-driven economy by attracting new enterprises.

AdventHealth Kissimmee, among other projects, is expanding its patient tower, which opened in 2015. The new section of the hospital is expected to open this fall. AdventHealth also has established a freestanding ER and medical clinic, partially opened and located between Kissimmee and St. Cloud.

Osceola Regional Medical Center, a 404-bed hospital owned by HCA, has a \$25 million expansion in place, encompassing new facilities and services. And Orlando Health Medical Pavilion — St. Cloud, christened last summer, brought physicians’ offices and ancillary hospital departments, along with a walk-in clinic and outpatient lab.

Another industry making news in Osceola is aviation/aerospace. The progress is coming largely by virtue of the county’s Aerospace Advancement Initiative, created in 2018 by the City of Kissimmee’s Economic Development Office and geared to attract businesses and jobs to Kissimmee Gateway Airport via economic incentives. Pre-pandemic, the airport — typically used for corporate jets or private planes — had a direct annual economic impact of \$190 million, according to a Florida Department of Transportation study.

Transportation advancements are noteworthy, too, including the late-2019 start of the county’s largest-ever investment on related infrastructure, equaling \$200 million, to get key roadway projects off ground, with work expected to be completed by 2025.

Similarly, transit-oriented development received a jump-start with the approval of a mobility-fee increase for 2021 in the county — now a 25% mobility fee discount for any building located within a mixed use project and a 50% discount for transit-oriented development. Three SunRail stops are seeing immediate results, with the Poinciana Station, which has the most adjacent developable land of any stop. An 82-acre masterplan is in the works, according to Janer.

Not to be forgotten is 500-acre NeoCity. In 2014, Osceola County, UCF and the Florida High Tech Corridor Council partnered to form BRIDG, NeoCity’s anchor tenant, which would operate an advanced manufacturing center to focus on microelectronics and act as an economic catalyst for the county.

UCF Lake Nona Medical Center is scheduled to open in March.





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Did You Know?

Lake Nona is seeking to become synonymous with 5G at Verizon Business' new 5G Innovation Hub, testing 5G use cases for connected health care, autonomous mobility, smart communities, education and retail.

One of the 5G trials underway involves testing Cellular Vehicle-To-Everything (C-V2X) technology with Beep, an autonomous mobility-as-a-service provider. According to Verizon, Nona will be the densest 5G environment in the Southeast. Lake Nona has been designated a Google city, and Cisco designated Lake Nona as its first U.S.-based iconic Smart+Connected Community.



UCF recently has since cut ties, but as 2020 ended a new potential partner had emerged under the name Project Bromine. "This potential partner is well-suited to pick up the mantle from UCF," Janer says. "They understand the specialized capabilities of the facility and are fluent in this kind of technology."

Lake Nona

Rasesh Thakkar, senior managing director of Tavistock Group, the developer/master planner of Lake Nona in southeast Orlando, describes what's happening across his 17 square miles as a "cluster that continues to emerge."

Then Thakkar gave much reason to consider that his words represent understatement.

Built from the start four-plus decades ago upon three foundational elements — education, technology and health/wellness — Lake Nona has become a global-scale community situated just beyond Orlando International Airport. And its engines

haven't turned off.

"It's a pretty unique proposition in an aerotropolis-like setting," says Thakkar.

There are more than 15,000 students attending schools throughout Lake Nona, from pre-kindergarten to doctorate degrees, and another school, Inter American University of Puerto Rico, on the way. The new campus would be the university's first full branch outside of Puerto Rico. Among others, the University of Florida Research & Academic Center and College of Pharmacy, UCF College of Medicine, UCF Burnett School of Biomedical Sciences and Valencia College are located there.

In its early days, Lake Nona frequently was referred to as Medical City. That orientation hasn't changed much, with hospital care that runs a literal A to Z. It's a partnership hospital between HCA Healthcare's North Florida Division and UCF Academic Health.

The Orlando VA Medical Center is in Lake Nona, too, as is Nemours Children's Hospital. In all, there are millions of square feet of clinical, institutional and laboratory space.

"The area now has every type of hospital," notes Thakkar. "It's quite a moment for Lake Nona."

Further, the Lake Nona Performance Club has designs on redefining the fitness center experience. Thakkar believes it will be one of the most comprehensive and thoughtfully curated in the nation.

His parting thought: "We want Lake Nona to be a true living lab so that any of the learnings and the teachings that take place here are scalable."

Orlando Health





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Metallica's scholars initiative program at Valencia College



They Said It

“It is important for institutions of higher education to be agile and innovative for the benefit of industry and their communities. We must be able to respond quickly to the changing needs of both, and challenging times also highlight the importance of providing access to opportunities for all students to help them achieve success.”



Alexander Cartwright
President /
University
of Central
Florida

The Workforce and Higher Education

Like many regions across the state and nation, Metro Orlando is encountering a conundrum. As unemployment has increased, ironically, so has the search by many industries to find skilled workers to fill open positions.

Supply and demand aren't matching up. The pandemic is reshaping the relationship between labor and education.

That's the overriding message from regional leaders these days as it relates to jobs, along with who is in line to get them across Metro Orlando, and why.

“The role of the Florida colleges is particularly important in a time like this,” says Georgia Lorenz, Ph.D., president at Seminole State College of Florida. “At this moment in time we need to focus on getting people back to work quickly.”

While educational institutions have always impacted the local labor market, their role is swiftly changing, says Bill Dymond Jr., CEO and president of Lowndes.

“There's a whole other dynamic to what today's workforce needs are,” says Dymond, also past board chair of the Orlando Economic Partnership. University of Central Florida President Alexander Cartwright agrees. His words:

“It is important for institutions of higher education to be agile and innovative for the benefit of industry and their communities.”

“One of the real advantages that Orlando and this region has is the collaborative nature between the workforce system, the educators and our nonprofit community,” says Pam Nabors, president and CEO of CareerSource Central Florida.

A case in point is CareerSource's recent Help is Here program, where in partnership with Valencia College, residents of Orange County were able to receive a \$125 weekly stipend while enrolled in Valencia's limited-time-only Accelerated Skills Training Programs at the Orange County Convention Center to train for high-demand fields.

Mirroring local needs, Valencia's Accelerated Skills Training ranges from carpentry and masonry to clinical medical assisting, electronic board assembly and IT/network support. In fiscal year 2019-2020, CareerSource Central Florida served nearly 80,000 career seekers and 4,000 businesses.

Not coincidentally, Valencia's summer enrollment was up 17%, with furloughed or laid-off workers using the time to upgrade skills through accelerated



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Ranked No. 1

UCF's Rosen College of Hospitality Management

is the No. 1 ranked hospitality and tourism program in the nation, according to Shanghai Ranking.

Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy

is the No. 1 graduate school in North America for video game design, according to the Princeton Review and PC Gamer.

University of Central Florida

has been the No. 1 supplier of graduates to the U.S. aerospace and defense industries for the past six years, according to Aviation Week.

Rollins College

is ranked the No. 1 regional university in the South, according to U.S. News & World Report's 2021 rankings of "Best Colleges."

learning, notes Stephanie Howell, the college's senior director of economic development and community affairs.

In July, Valencia made a few headlines when it was selected as one of 15 U.S. colleges to receive a \$100,000 grant from the heavy metal band Metallica's scholars initiative. The program serves low-income Orange and Osceola County residents, training them in welding, mechatronics and the operation of heavy construction equipment.

Further, Valencia is working with public schools, such as in Osceola County, where it has helped move the county from 43rd in Florida to 27th in the rate of students going to college. "We think we can get them to top 10 in the next four years," states Valencia's Sandy Shugart, who is retiring as college president in June.

Valencia, which has roughly 76,000 students within its system, employs people who work for Osceola County Public Schools as teachers and college success coaches.

Seminole State College has partnered with the Florida Department of Education on the Get There workforce education initiative, aimed at creating awareness for Career and Technical Education certificates as an alternative to the four-year university track.

The hope, according to Lorenz, is that "students can make a change in their lives for the better and start seeing results sooner."

In the fall, Seminole State launched a cloud computing associates degree and certificate while doubling down in cybersecurity. Meanwhile, allied health fields, robotics, advanced manufacturing and aeronautics were especially popular among students, Lorenz says.

Additionally, in another sign of regional collaboration, last summer Seminole State received its fourth grant from the Duke Energy Foundation since 2018 — \$10,000 as part of a workforce jump-start

initiative for adult-education students. Students can choose between electrical, heating/ventilation/air conditioning or a building-trade's technology.

At Rollins College, known for its traditional approach to higher education, President Grant Cornwell saw enrollment increases in the fall for both the Crummer Graduate School of Business and Hamilton Holt School for evening degree programs, signaling that people were looking to either finish their first degree or pursue a second.

Meanwhile, in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UCF launched 11 new graduate programs in the fall, including certificates, tracks and special-topic courses that cover fields such as business, engineering, optics and health.

For example, a cyber-risk management graduate certificate looks at current cybersecurity and privacy matters affecting organizations these days, among other specifics. UCF's College of Health Professions and Sciences added a course to its graduate clinical speech pathology program geared toward preparing clinical professionals to meet the complex needs of patients hospitalized from COVID-19 and other related conditions.

"At UCF, we strive to be porous with our community," Cartwright says, repeating a theme shared by others in higher education. "I do not see a differentiation between our university and our community — we should be intertwined, and we need to be there for each other."

In a look ahead, Tim Giuliani, president and CEO of the Orlando Economic Partnership, contends much hangs in the balance with those connections.

"Education and retraining — that is the heartbeat of what our region can or cannot become. It's the skills that the workforce, and those that need to get into the workforce, wants," Giuliani concludes.

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Luminar co-founder Jason Eichenholz: "What we're witnessing right now is the single largest transformation to transportation since the Model T."



They Said It

“Normally, you come to town and we try to convince you, essentially, that ‘Orlando. You don’t know the half of it.’ The pandemic has put the focus on that other half. ... It’s focusing on the right priorities to diversify even more than we were. So, I suspect Orlando will come out stronger.”



Tim Giuliani
President
and CEO /
Orlando
Economic
Partnership

Industries: The Other ‘Half’

Prior to the pandemic, the pie chart of “employment by industry” across the region looked a lot like it had for a long while. In other words, the tourism/hospitality sector dominated.

COVID-19 essentially shut down leisure fun/food/travel and conventions, just to name a few sectors impacted.

Other industries, meanwhile, have surged — sort of, “the other half,” according to Tim Giuliani, president and CEO at the Orlando Economic Partnership.

In that sense, the pandemic brought some holistic good news.

“Normally, you come to town and we try to convince you, essentially, that ‘Orlando. You don’t know the half of it,’” Giuliani says. “The pandemic has put the focus on that other half. ... It’s focusing on the right priorities to diversify even more than we were. So, I suspect Orlando will come out stronger.”

Technology

Nowhere is “stronger” more apparent than with the initials MS&T, where on an annual basis, modeling, simulation and training account for approximately \$6 billion in contracts for technologies related to military and defense.

Two 2020 examples of evolvement: Lockheed Martin won a \$935 million contract from the Department of Defense related to work on the stealth F-35 Lightning II aircraft. Meanwhile, L3 Harris Technologies gained a \$900 million deal to design and deploy common platforms and standards across the Air Force’s array of training simulators.

“As you know, the military never stops,” comments George Cheros, who heads the National Center for Simulation, a not-for-profit trade association with government, academic and industry members operating as an open consortium in Orlando.

In recent years, the military has increasingly turned for help to technology companies with ample R&D budgets, Cheros notes. Orlando is a site of the Army Futures Command, established in 2019 to enhance modernization by working with nontraditional companies, small businesses, startups and academia. The Navy, in partnership with the University of Central Florida and others, has created Team Orlando Tech Grove (playing off the region’s citrus heritage). Tech Grove is a collaborative environment for industry that involves tech companies interacting with military personnel to explore new simulation equipment.

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Did You Know?



The Orange County Convention Center, in collaboration with Visit Orlando, the region's primary promoter of tourism, introduced a first-of-its-kind medical concierge program for the convention/trade show industry with Orlando Health. The program achieved the Global Biorisk Advisory Council's Star Accreditation. Orlando Health began providing personalized medical services and resources to all meetings and conventions at the convention center through 2020.

Cheros calls the moves a "big paradigm change."

In turn, tech companies large and small are getting in on the action. For one, privately owned Engineering

& Computer Simulations has grown its workforce by 20%, according to founder and CEO/President Waymon Armstrong, who comments, "It's an exciting time for us through all of these extraordinary times."

Health Care

Health care had its own battlegrounds in 2020. UCF Lake Nona Medical Center is getting set to open this March, with the promise of transforming Central Florida's health care community on a journey toward an academic medical approach. Located on 25 acres adjacent to the UCF College of Medicine, it's a partnership hospital between HCA Healthcare's North Florida Division and UCF Academic Health.

At AdventHealth, although a new 12-story tower isn't expected to open until late 2022, Rothman Orthopaedic Institute announced a partnership in September. The institute, headquartered in Philadelphia with nearly 40 offices in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York, is internationally recognized for orthopedic research.

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Daryl Tol, president and CEO of AdventHealth's Central Florida Division, points to a continued regional commitment despite COVID-19. Also notably, AdventHealth has taken a major step toward developing renewable energy at its Orlando campus, adding more than 1,800 solar panels on its newest parking garage, as announced in October. The solar array — the largest solar project within Orlando city limits — is expected to save the health care system more than \$4.6 million in energy costs.

In addition, just as 2020 began, Orlando Health acquired Jewett Orthopaedic in an alliance that will result in Orlando Health Jewett Orthopedic Hospital. When complete in 2023, the facility will include up to 75 inpatient rooms, 20 operating suites, five internationally virtually connected operating suites that can be used to train surgeons worldwide and 167,000 square feet of medical office space. The hope, officials say, is the partnership will spur creation of one of the premier destination orthopedic hospitals in the Southeast.

Energy

In terms of regional investment with an eye on a brighter future, Marc Hoenstine, director of economic development at Duke Energy, points to phase two of an initiative to address grid resiliency, system reliability and storm preparation. In Central Florida, Duke Energy plans to spend as much as \$1.2 billion to improve the grid by adding sensor technology and storm prep, resulting in the addition of new local jobs, Hoenstine notes. Statewide, Duke Energy plans to spend more than \$6 billion to strengthen its grid over 10 years.

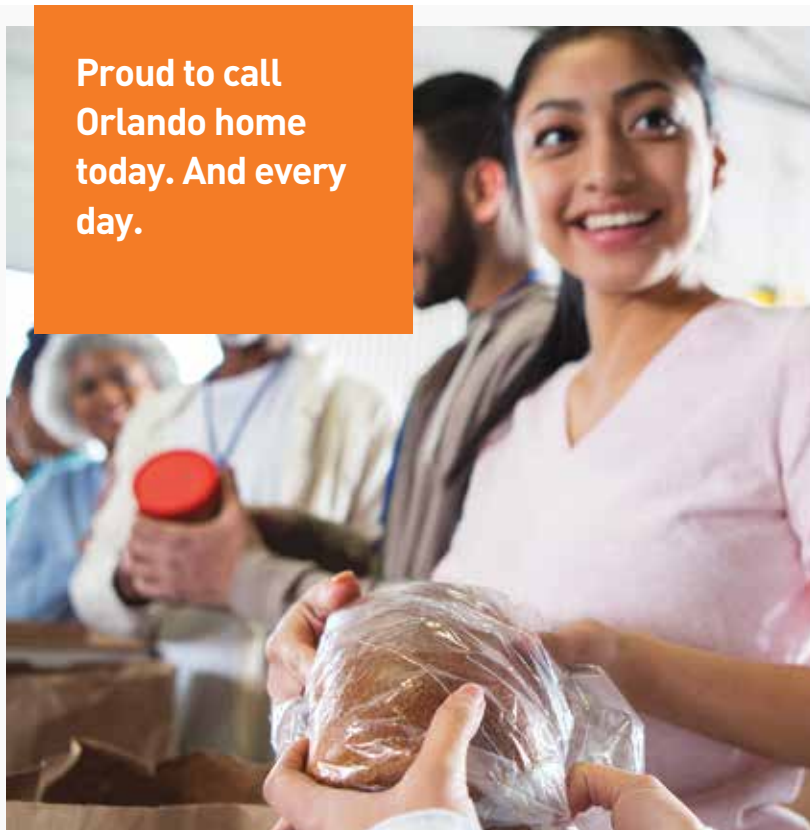
Likewise, at the Orlando Utilities Commission, Linda Ferrone, chief customer officer, says that OUC is in the midst of an integrated electric resource plan to reach net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050, with a 50% reduction by 2030.

OUC seeks to more than double its solar generation portfolio by purchasing power from two 74.5-megawatt solar farms under construction. OUC also will serve as the largest tenant of a new 223.5-megawatt solar farm.

General Vibrancy

Growth from within the region? By virtue of a merger agreement in August, Luminar Technologies is now the largest-ever exit of a startup in Orlando. As announced in August, the company merged

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KPMG Lakehouse

Orlando a great place to learn about the accounting profession? KPMG obviously thinks so. KPMG Lakehouse is an 800,000-square-foot building on 55 acres in Lake Nona with 800 single-occupancy guest rooms — to foster “new ways of thinking, learning and collaborating.” The firm’s plan, COVID-19 permitting, is to welcome up to 800 KPMG partners and professionals each week, which could lead to more than 1 million hours of in-person, professional development in 2021. The building’s opening was paused last year. The firm chose Orlando out of 50 competitors.



with Gores Metropoulos Inc., a special-purpose acquisition company sponsored by an affiliate of The Gores Group LLC.

The combined company, valued at approximately \$3 billion, puts Luminar on track to deliver the world’s first lidar sensor and software to enable autonomous consumer vehicles and trucking for volume production. Founded in 2012, Luminar has partnered with seven of the top 10 global automakers as it moves toward introducing highway self-driving and the next generation of related safety systems.

Starting in 2022, Luminar’s hardware and software will be integrated into Volvo’s global vehicle platform, the foundation for its next generation of consumer vehicles. Also, Luminar’s technology will enable a new benchmark for vehicle safety, says company founder/CEO Austin Russell.

Such triumphs large and small exist across the region, asserts Giuliani, whose Orlando Economic Partnership last March was selected by the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program to participate in the Inclusive Economic Indicators Lab, a one-year project that focuses on developing tools for tracking and driving inclusive economic outcomes. Orlando is one of only three metros participating.

“While we might be in a pandemic and

we might have some decreased numbers, if you will, there are lots of success stories and companies still moving ahead when it comes to economic development,” Giuliani says.

Not coincidentally, Jeffery Jonasen, a Gunster shareholder, has “seen a big drop-off” in his work at the law firm, where “merger and acquisition activity seems to be back to normal levels.”

The same for shareholder Ava Doppelt of Allen Dyer Doppelt & Gilchrist. She hasn’t seen “much of a drop in our [intellectual property and patent] business,” adding that technology is a “much bigger part of the [regional] economy” these days.

Not coincidentally, Zoltan Kecskes, an area builder and Realtor for Fannie Hillman + Associates, describes a robust housing market this way: “Anything under \$500,000 flies off the shelves, like it’s a bidding war left and right.”

Even in tough times, the numbers promise growth, concludes Chad Loar, regional president for West and Central Florida PNC Bank. In addition to business relocation/expansion and real estate development, Loar cites goods’ warehousing, fulfillment and logistics. “We have a lot of trend-tracking mechanisms,” Loar says, “that we continue to measure to say, ‘Look, this is a growing area.’”



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Did You Know?

The National Entrepreneur Center, established in 2003 in Orlando, represents 14 business-support organizations. Last June, the NEC announced a new online platform, in partnership with The Lonely Entrepreneur. The NEC is funded entirely through community support, primarily from Orange County government, Walt Disney World Resort, the University of Central Florida and the City of Orlando.



They Said It

“We want to get the right folks to the right resources and the right contracts so we can continue to motivate and mature our tech ecosystem. We think that’s going to be the missing link. We have no shortage of ideas. We just need to connect the dots.”



Sheena Fowler
Vice President
of Innovation /
Orlando
Economic
Partnership

Entrepreneurship Alliances

In describing innovation across Orlando, Sheena Fowler, the Orlando Economic Partnership’s vice president of such creation/development, began speaking about how young companies and entrepreneurs have been able to excel despite the obvious challenges of COVID-19. Essentially, it seemed that job loss and career insecurity had pushed the needle even further for entrepreneurship.

Fowler then made her own quick change of direction toward one of OEP’s chief 2020 initiatives: the Orlando Tech Council — with its launch, appropriately enough, occurring after just one pre-pandemic in-person meeting.

The Orlando Tech Council’s focus is on filling voids of support, as companies seek critical early footing to gain customers and contract opportunities. Subsequently, to better connect scaling businesses with available customers and contract opportunities, the tech council, in alliance with the University of Central Florida, created Orlando Tech Connect, a program designed to be a scalable process to match the needs of local companies with skills sets of other local companies.

“We want to get the right folks to the right resources and the right contracts,” Fowler explains, “so we can continue to motivate and mature our tech ecosystem. We think that’s going to be the missing link. We have no shortage of ideas. We just need to connect the dots.”

Carlos Carbonell, founder and CEO of Echo Interaction Group, uses different words to express the same thought: “Local partnerships may be the catalyst for incredible growth for a lot of startups and growing tech businesses.” Echo Interaction Group specializes in mobile applications and has developed a solution for companies to deploy augmented reality.

In turn, the Orlando Tech Council has advanced mostly by virtue of other collaborations, such as with the Orlando Entrepreneurs Alliance, which was established in 2019. The alliance supports entrepreneurs across Central Florida in pursuing their entrepreneurial journey and growing their business, according to Armstrong of Engineering & Computer Simulations, which once was its own fledgling enterprise.

“What can we do to get some startup

StarterStudio

Orlando's depth of entrepreneurial resources is exemplified by StarterStudio, which touts itself as the "only 501(c)(3) nonprofit accelerator that supports Central Florida tech startup founders with the robust and comprehensive educational programming, coaching, funding, and other resources they need to build successful companies locally." StarterStudio offers bootcamps, accelerators, and other free or low-cost programs at locations throughout the region.



that first client? Because once you get the first one, everyone else is going to follow," says Armstrong, one of the Orlando Entrepreneurs Alliance's founders.

That kind of nurturing isn't new, but it is coming in different forms across the region.

To illustrate, UCF's 20-year-old incubator concept has been reinvented with the idea of better serving scalable targeted industries. UCF's Business Incubator Network now includes three Innovation Districts, introduced in 2019, to go along with its more traditional Regional Business Growth Centers. The Business Incubator Network tracks up to 130 client companies at any time.

Each Innovation District — located to align with existing patterns of growth at Lake Nona, Central Florida Research Park/Space Coast and Downtown Orlando — includes traditional incubation services, as well as innovation labs and partnership opportunities for commercializing research. Efforts

at Lake Nona focus on life sciences, health care and medical simulation. Central Florida Research Park/Space Coast activity is centered on the defense industry; modeling, simulation and training; cyber; photonics; advanced materials; space; energy; and robotics. The Downtown Orlando center targets companies in digital media, smart city technology, financial technology and hospital/travel.

It's all about collaboration, affirms Rob Panepinto, director

of the Innovation Districts, adding that roughly half of the companies in the entire incubator program have arrived from other accelerator programs.

His UCF Business Incubator Network is now "more of a catalyst for connecting parts of the ecosystem," Panepinto says before echoing a theme that is carried throughout the region: "The incubator is not on an island. It's part of a piece of Central Florida as a whole."



Precision Periodics at UCF Innovative District Research Park

They Said It

“Could ‘grand boulevards’ — or major corridors with fewer storefronts — be an integral part of the region’s future transportation scene? We are looking at these grand boulevards and future corridors and ‘What does this look like for our future?’”



Christine Kefauver
Urban Market Development Director / HDR Inc

Transportation

Orlando is in the midst of “I-4 Ultimate” — and with a 21-mile drive through the city north into Seminole County, there’s no surprise it’s big.

Major interchanges are being reconstructed, bridges widened and/or replaced and toll express lanes added, among other components. And, although significant progress is being made, there’s still much work to do. When the project was awarded in April 2014, it was the largest public-private partnership in the country. Construction began in 2015 and is scheduled for completion in 2021.

Yet, while that Interstate-4 effort has garnered the lion’s share of attention across the region, other major projects are underway, such as the Orlando International Airport’s new South Terminal.

Pre-COVID counts were tracking 51 million annual passengers last February. That total, of course, didn’t come close. In early September, daily flights were down to roughly 360, compared to as many as 900 flights at the same time in 2019, including “no international traffic to speak of,” according to Phil Brown, CEO of the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority and Orlando International Airport.

Nonetheless, cranes remained in the air, with this remark from Brown: “Unless the bottom falls out from under tourism in Central Florida, we will need the South Terminal.”

At 1.75 million square feet initially, the new terminal is slated to open in 2022 with 15 gates — and with approximately \$227 million cut out of the project’s initial \$3 billion construction budget.

“We remain hopeful,” says Carolyn Fennell, longtime senior director of public affairs and community relations for the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority. “The key now is the challenge of this moment, and we’re



hoping that confidence will return, that we’ll attract passengers and travelers to come back, both business and local.”

At the same time, OIA is getting a new north entrance, now under construction by Central Florida Expressway Authority. Work on the \$118 million project began last spring and is expected to be completed in early 2023. It will replace loop ramps with two-lane, directional flyovers, expand State Road 528 (Beachline Expressway) to six general-use lanes and enhance aesthetics, says CFX Executive Director Laura Kelley, who called the work a “signature project that really welcomes people to the Central Florida area.”

Nearby, simultaneous work is happening to accommodate Brightline passenger rail service that will eventually connect South Florida to Central Florida via service through Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and



Florida's First Flying Taxi

"This is truly *The Jetsons* coming to reality in Central Florida's backyard."

That statement comes from Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings in a November announcement, just after he thanked Lilium, a Munich-based aviation company developing an all-electric, vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft for regional air mobility, along with Tavistock Development Co. and the City of Orlando.

Those three entities have formed a "first-of-its-kind partnership" to create the country's first urban and regional air mobility network of vertiports across Florida with a hub at Lake Nona in Orlando.

In other words, it could be Florida's first flying taxi service.

At the outset, the taxis would be able to travel up to 185 miles within one hour on a single charge. The anticipated launch of the Florida network is by 2025, says Remo Gerber, Lilium's COO, adding that the regional high-speed air mobility network "will connect key cities within the state like never before."

Lilium and Tavistock have created an architecturally significant vertiport design for its hub location that is both functional and aesthetically unique and resembles the iconic art within Lake Nona, according to Gerber. Also, a variety of standardized vertiport designs allows flexibility so that sites can be uniquely assembled or incorporated into existing transport structures in both urban and suburban developments.

Additional sites across Central Florida are being explored as part of the Florida network.

Orlando. The 170-mile Orlando extension includes 35 miles of new train right-of-way being added along State Road 528. The South Florida service was established in 2018. Orlando service is projected to start in 2022, with a proposed Tampa connection being part of a bigger picture.

In November, Brightline's expansion north to Orlando was nearly halfway completed. Notably, last August, as work continued, Brightline ended a licensing arrangement with Virgin Enterprises and entrepreneur Richard Branson.

Growth also could be on the horizon for Metro Orlando's mainstay rail service, SunRail, which began a phased opening in May 2014 and now consists of 16 stations in Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Volusia counties.

Recently, exploratory discussions have occurred between SunRail and Brightline to share a 28-mile corridor and connect to Disney in a public-private partnership, although construction completion appears to be at least a few years away. Related, the Florida Department of Transportation, which operates and funds SunRail, is in the midst of negotiating terms for transfer of control with Central Florida officials.

All of the activity represents good, for sure. Yet, there's also concern. So, in mid-September, the Orlando Economic Partnership (OEP) and its Alliance for Regional Transportation released a blueprint for transportation improvements during the coming decade to prevent becoming "victims of our success" with growth. The result is "the first regional plan of its kind," describes Tim Giuliani, OEP president and CEO.

The blueprint focuses broadly on making the case that scaling up the quality of the region's transportation network will improve safety, commerce, access to jobs and quality of life. While no specific decisions or proposals were recommended in the report, it detailed seven priority areas: accelerated growth of public transportation; emerging technologies and designs for I-4; better east-west corridors; strengthening air, space, sea, rail and road gateways; leadership in technologically advanced vehicles; a regional authority for bus and rail; and "bold" investment.

In addition, the report seeks to connect dots — calling for political and community leaders to encourage public support for funding increases and solutions for "reinventing regional transportation."

By fostering creativity, ArtReach Orlando encourages and empowers young people to explore the link between art, social justice and the healing process.



They Said It

“This is really about solving some things we didn’t solve in better times. Now, they’re particularly important because recovery will depend on us finding solutions instead of putting them on the shelf, like we do some times in better times.”



Mark Brewer
CEO /
Central
Florida
Foundation

Really Engaged Community

“We really have the ability to, across all sectors of our economy, lift people up. And if we’re successful in creating a rising tide, then no matter where you are in the economic strata, you’ll benefit. And our community will be stronger.”

Those words by Bill Dymond Jr., CEO and president of Lowndes, are emblematic of a region seeking to pull together. Dymond also served as board chair of the Orlando Economic Partnership.

Last June, officials in Orange County launched the Safer, Stronger, Together campaign at the request of county Mayor Jerry Demings. The effort — calling on local businesses and citizens to make a personal commitment to practice safety measures to control the spread of COVID-19 — originated from work by the Orange County Economic Recovery Task Force and was developed by Visit Orlando and the OEP. Further, it reflected input from an advisory team of more than 100 regional, industry and media leaders.

In addition, OEP formed a task force for diversity, equity and inclusion, involving approximately 30 business leaders to discuss what the community’s response should be for substantive social change and broad-based prosperity. The big request of

businesses is a pledge to have accountability, metrics and periodic check-ins on a variety of diversity, equity and inclusion issues. Dymond calls the effort “really engaged.”

Another example of “community” comes from the Central Florida Foundation, which is rooted in philanthropy but with tentacles extending from economic stability and livability to health care, education and social connection.

“Our job really is to bring capital to creativity and innovation and bring creativity and innovation to capital — with a focus on what the community needs to do to solve complex social problems,” says Mark Brewer, CEO of the longstanding Central Florida Foundation, adding that the timing is right.

“This is really about solving some things we didn’t solve in better times. Now, they’re particularly important because recovery will depend on us finding solutions instead of putting them on the shelf, like we do some times in better times.”

In 2020, the foundation explored where investment would be most needed post-pandemic and established Thrive Central Florida, including impact funds to address those needs.

Did You Know?

Bring Hope Home is Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida's newest service, established in response to the high demand for home-delivered food due to COVID-19. The program utilizes external delivery partners and volunteer drivers to transport both perishable and nonperishable food items. The service is available in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties, along with Lake, Volusia and Brevard. By November, the program had completed approximately 27,000 deliveries, totaling more than 517,000 meals.



"What we've done is, literally, create philanthropic investment funds that you can make an investment in, that will be endowed, and they will continually make investments, and then we will continually make reports about what are their ROIs," Brewer says, describing the result as a "petri dish for philanthropy."

Also, the Central Florida Foundation helped to reinvent the Second Harvest Food Bank by altering the model to deliver not only food, but also meals. Approximately \$1.2 million was invested to introduce direct delivery, have food/meal deliveries to neighborhood food deserts and re-engineer technology that will allow Second Harvest to operate more efficiently in the region, in which it now delivers some 300,000 meals daily.

Such community spirit isn't a surprise, comments Kelly Cohen, partner and chief marketing officer for The Southern Group, an advocacy firm in Orlando that builds business, government and community alliances. "Our business community is really connected to our elected leaders. So, priorities are not done in isolation. They're done with the idea of 'How does the public sector partner with the private sector to move these agendas forward? How do we grow in this new world, and

how do we build in this new world?'"

Indeed, while the wide world of Florida Citrus Sports was hanging in the balance, in the absence of games, the organization still committed \$3 million to an adjacent renovation. In partnership with the City of Orlando and others, historic Lake Lorna Doone Park is being remade in the shadows of Camping World Stadium. The work is ongoing. "We're looking at this as an opportunity for Citrus Sports — how can we invest in what's next," says Florida Citrus Sports CEO Steve Hogan.

And, quite apparently, Juliana Steele of United Arts of Central Florida would agree with Hogan. Last July, United Arts, the biggest funding distributor of arts and cultural organizations in the region, launched 2020 Empower the Arts, a special fundraising effort to help small and mid-size Orange County organizations stay afloat. With a goal of \$162,000, the campaign continued through mid-September and raised \$224,370, with United Arts matching at 15% for designated contributions.

"Arts and culture are the heart and soul of this community, and people love it," says Steele, interim president and CEO. "They really came forward in a big way."



Orlando Welcomes New Leadership

The Orlando Regional Chamber has a new board chair: Wendy Kurtz, president of Elizabeth Charles & Associates. Kurtz, an accredited professional and award-winning business expert, has more than 25 years of experience helping individuals, businesses and organizations develop and deliver efficient and effective marketing and communication messages. Prior to founding her public relations and business development firm in 1997, she served as manager of special events for telecommunications industry leader Sprint and as executive director for a United Way agency in Orange County.

People to Know

Meet the leaders collaborating to make a difference. These movers and shakers are responsible for growth in the Orlando Region.

Glenn Adams
Executive Partner
Holland & Knight LLP



George Aguel
President and CEO
Visit Orlando

Angela Alban
CEO, **Simetri**

Waymon Armstrong
President and CEO
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Cecelia Bonifay
Shareholder, Chair of the Land Use and Sustainable Development Practice
Akerman LLP

Mark Brewer
President/CEO
Central Florida Foundation



C. David Brown II
Partner, **Nelson Mullins Broad and Cassel**



Phil Brown
CEO, **Greater Orlando Aviation Authority and Orlando International Airport**

Derek Bruce
Managing Shareholder, Orlando Office
Gunster



Clint Bullock
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OUC, The Reliable One

Dean Cannon
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University of Central Florida



George Cheros
President & CEO
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Kelly Cohen
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The Southern Group



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Deborah German, M.D.
Vice President for
Health Affairs and Dean
**University of Central
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Shaun Germolus

Aviation Director
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Tim Giuliani
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**Orlando Economic
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**Linda Landman
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Daryl Holt
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Central Florida President, **Truist**



Mark Israel
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Derek Jones
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Garry Jones

President, **Full Sail University**



Laura Kelley

Executive Director
Central Florida Expressway Authority

Belinda Kirkegard

Director of Economic Development
City of Kissimmee

Alex Leitão

Chief Executive Officer
Orlando City Soccer Club

Chad Loar

Regional President, **West and Central Florida PNC Bank**

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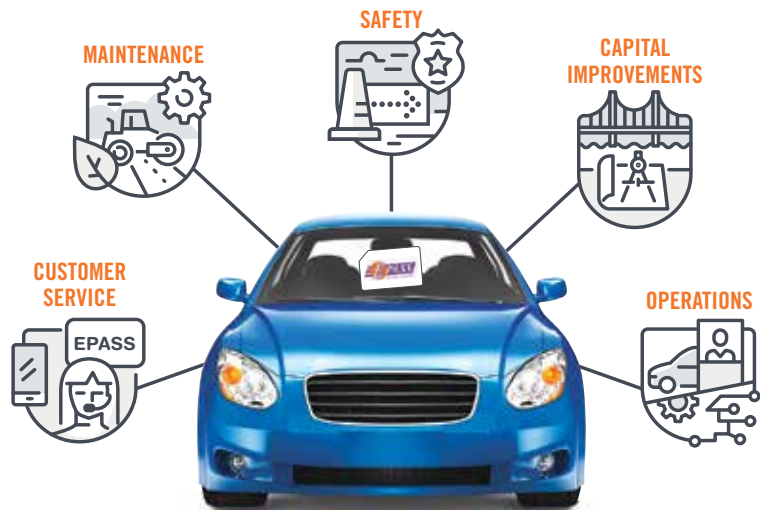
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