



Alex Berisha

**ACELA-RATE** High speed rail is coming to Central Florida. The Acela Express (pictured here) operates in the Northeast and may be a model for the Tampa-Orlando line.

# Building Momentum

**A stop on the high speed rail line, a funky new business incubator, and tourism gets Lego-ed.**

In January, President Obama announced the awarding of a \$1.25-billion “down payment” to Florida to build a high speed rail system between Tampa and Orlando. The route would include a stop in Polk County.

“This just might be the biggest economic boon we will see in many years,” says Tom Patton, executive director of the Central Florida Development Council (CFDC).

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Patton says the county expects the project to provide 20,000 jobs or more, derived directly from working on the new rail system and its infrastructure and the “multiplier effect.”

“We have a chance to be the frontrunner, to be cutting-edge,” says Patton. “Imagine getting off the plane in Orlando and connecting to a transit system that takes you to Disney, to Tampa and the Pinellas County beaches and to Legoland here in Polk.”

The challenge, Patton says, is connecting other mediums like metro rail and bus services to the high speed rail system. In Polk that could hinge on voter approval of a sales tax referendum in November to fund countywide transit.

In the meantime, Winter Haven’s proposed CSX intermodal rail terminal and transportation hub may finally come to fruition. A much-discussed project over the past few years, it got mired in controversy and then stalled due to the economy. But now with the Florida Legislature approving funding for Sun Rail, an Orlando-based commuter rail line that will serve Central Florida, it seems the Winter Haven terminal has the green light.

“Once CSX and the state dot all of the i’s and cross the t’s, it means it’s possible for dirt to get moved sometime in August or

by Janan Talafer • [jvt916@verizon.net](mailto:jvt916@verizon.net)

September of this year," says Jack Barnhart, executive director of the East Polk Committee of 100.

Orlando's gain is a big win for Winter Haven because CSX's rail hub in Orlando will get shifted to one to be built in Winter Haven, says Ron Morrow, formerly with the East Polk Committee of 100 and a contractor with CSX Real Estate.

The new Winter Haven terminal is expected to be a major freight logistics center that offloads consumer products and cars from trucks arriving from the Port of Tampa. The goods are then transferred to CSX rail lines for distribution around the country.

In 2007, CSX purchased 318 acres from the city to build the rail terminal and transportation hub in Winter Haven. Plans also call for an adjacent 930-acre industrial park to house affiliated warehouses and distribution centers, light manufacturing and offices.

"This is a seed that will fuel the growth of this economy," says Morrow. "It will take a good 15 to 20 years to build it out, but it will be continually fueling the economic base of all of Central Florida."

## Incubating Innovation

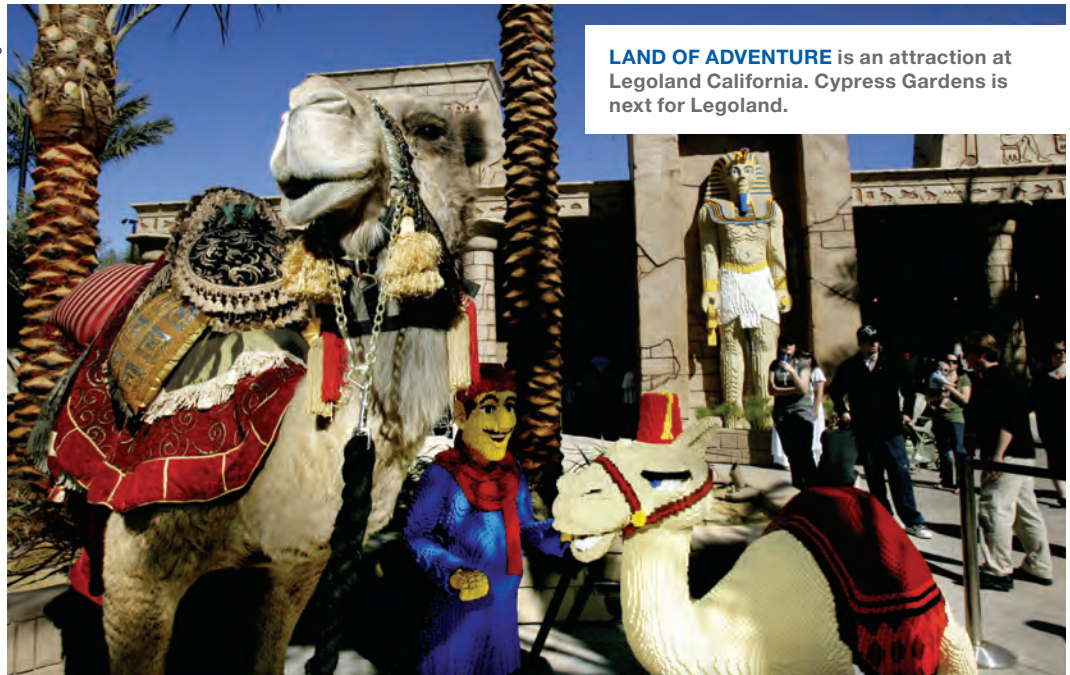
Downtown Lakeland is home to what may be the state's coolest, newest business technology incubator.

It's called Blue Sky West, part of the new University of South Florida Polytechnic, and it includes a bright red playground slide, a lime green and orange color scheme, two old-fashioned phone booths and a dune buggy. Not your typical office space.

"It's a fun, funky and innovative place to work," says Eddie Hill, assistant program director. "It's a freewheeling and creative space with a lot of energy."

Blue Sky uses an "open source company development" model that fosters collaboration between business owners, faculty members and students. Except for two offices with doors, the remainder of the 6,000-square-foot facility is open work space to encourage

Legoland



**LAND OF ADVENTURE** is an attraction at Legoland California. Cypress Gardens is next for Legoland.

sharing information, ideas and expertise, says Hill.

The Blue Sky program has two business components – Blue Sky West, which is the incubator, and Blue Sky East, a business accelerator in a more traditional facility at 6/10 Corporation's Inland Fiber and Data Technology Park in Winter Haven.

While the incubator is for startups, the accelerator is for companies with an established product and customers that need help with marketing, research or investors to grow to the next level, says Didier Rousseliere, USF Polytechnic director of business incubation programs and global partnerships.

Already USF Polytechnic has forged an agreement with two French schools: Euromed Marseilles School of Management and Polytech Marseille, an engineering program with a research arm in the field of radio frequency identification (RFID).

The fact that RFID is an important technology for supply chain management – a key industry in Polk County – is not random, Rousseliere says. "We're aligning our academic programs and shaping the curriculum to be a mix of education and economic development goals."

## A Strategy for the Future

Two years ago, the CFDC, Polk County's economic development arm, contracted with SRI (Stanford Research International) to develop a comprehensive review of Central Florida's industry base. The goal was to take a historical look at industry in the

"We've re-branded and re-positioned Polk from what it has been known as for the last 20 years."

– Rodney Carson  
CFDC



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**POLK COUNTY**

• CORPORATE REPORT

county, identify the current top business clusters and then develop a new economic development strategy for the future.

The study looked at Polk as part of a large "super region" stretching from Tampa to Orlando and including much of Central Florida, says Rodney Carson, CFDC director of economic development.

"Historically the east side of Polk has been more affiliated with Orlando and the west with Tampa," says Carson. "We thought about how we could bring both sides of the county together while taking advantage of the resources of the bigger markets on either side."

The survey results were "a great tool for bringing us together as one economy, but still maintaining separate suburban marketplaces," he says. It also prompted the CFDC to change its way of doing business.

In 1980, the top industry clusters for the region were phosphate, agriculture, cattle and tourism. Today, says Carson, the fastest growing clusters are logistics and supply chain management; life sciences and medical services; financial services; research and engineering services; agri-technology and agri-business.

Those findings led to a "significant revamping of our marketing pieces and how we target outreach economic development events," says Carson. "We've re-branded and re-positioned Polk from what it has been known as for the last 20 years."

One of the new goals is to aggressively reach out to the international market. According to the CFDC, 91 foreign-owned companies representing 19 countries around the world are in Polk County. "In the last two years, foreign direct investment has been up 100 percent," says Carson. "That is exactly the kind of success we are hoping for."

USF Polytechnic's interest in global partnerships will tie right in. Rousseliere envisions the Blue Sky East business accelerator as a "soft landing zone" for foreign companies who might want to set

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up a U.S. operation. "It's a win-win," says Rousseliere. "Students gain an international experience and foreign companies have a chance to find local partners and develop a market here in the U.S."

## Recruitment & Retention

The last few years brought a number of high profile companies to the area, including Aldi Foods, GTECH (an instant lottery printing company) and WellDyne, a pharmacy mail service.

This year, Metromont Corporation announced plans for a 50,000-square-foot manufacturing facility on 80 acres south of Bartow. The South Carolina-based company expects to invest about \$10-million in the new plant and generate about 100 jobs over a three-year time period. According to Jay Cariveau, director of business development and marketing, setting up a facility in Bartow made sense because of its central location, access to divided highways and interstates, and the location near another Bartow-based heavy industrial plant.

"We've been doing work in Florida for over 15 years and used to ship product from our Atlanta facility," says Cariveau. "Our customers have been asking us to relocate to Florida for years." Metromont supplies pre-cast and pre-stressed concrete products for the construction industry.

In addition, Treatt USA, a Great Britain-owned flavors and essence company with a Lakeland operation, announced it was acquiring additional land for future expansion. And Saddle Creek Corporation, an integrated logistics services company with a long-time Lakeland headquarters, announced it was acquiring a California third-party logistics company, a decision that gives it increased geographic coverage with eight warehouse locations in California and Dallas/Fort Worth.

But for the most part, the economic downturn has meant more focus on stimulating the local economy by assisting exist-

ing companies expand, lease additional space or retrofit their facilities, says Claudia Tritton, business development director for the Lakeland Economic Development Council (LEDC).

Keymark Florida and Quantum Marketing are among the local businesses the LEDC recently helped. Keymark, a manufacturer of residential aluminum window frames and pool enclosure screens, is diversifying its product mix and adding a new commercial line, says Tritton. The company decided to lease an additional 106,000 square feet of space on top of its existing 147,000-square-foot



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facility at the Ruthvens Business Park. About 68 more people will be hired.

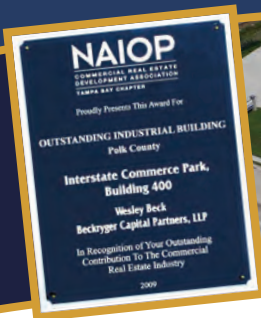
Quantum Marketing is also retrofitting its facility to expand its product lines and consolidate operations after acquiring a California-based competitor, says Tritton. The company, which manufactures air conditioning, power steering and engine lubrication additives for cars, is making a \$5-million investment on its plant and expects to hire 38 more employees.

### Lego Fever

Winter Haven's historic Cypress Gardens is set to become the world's largest "Legoland."

Merlin Entertainment Group, a British-based international theme park operator, is buying the park and transforming it into a giant Lego-themed attraction.

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## High-Tech Haven

6/10 Corporation's new high-tech, Inland Fiber and Technology Park in Winter Haven is helping bring this part of Central Florida up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

"Historically Winter Haven has not been known as a high-tech

area," says Tim Nissen, a spokesperson for 6/10 Corporation. "Now we have facilities that are tailor-made for technology companies."

When 6/10 acquired the complex, the existing buildings were already set up for carrier-grade fiber-optics and able to withstand hurricane-force

winds, says Nissen, but the company upgraded further with back-up generators and additional infrastructure.

USF Polytechnic's Blue Sky business accelerator is now located in one of the buildings, as are several small tech companies, including Doculex and Elephant Outlook.

A unique feature of the new park is the Florida Business Continuity Center – sort of a disaster recovery program that offers corporations the opportunity to temporarily relocate workers to the Winter Haven business park after a natural disaster like flooding or a hurricane, says Nissen.

"We think there is a real demand for this type of program that could allow companies to remain open and in business while they get back on their feet," says Nissen. "We're in driving distance from anywhere in Florida and it's certainly more convenient than setting up a temporary operation out of state."

6/10 envisions a fractional leasing option where organizations can lay claim to just the amount of work stations they need. It's a brand-new venture, so there are no takers yet, but Nissen says he has had interest from companies around the state. The space is being configured with approximately 240 work stations.

For the local economy, it's "a tremendous boost," says Mark Jackson, Polk County's director of tourism and sports marketing.

"In the short run, hundreds of jobs will be created and several hundred million dollars in capital investment will enhance the economy," says Jackson. "In the long run, when the park opens, the visibility from Merlin's worldwide presence and marketing savvy will enhance the county's image as a tourist destination."

Merlin Entertainment, which owns similar Legoland themed parks in California, Germany, England and Denmark, intends to redevelop Cypress Gardens into a Legoland while preserving the gardens and the ski shows. Projected opening date is sometime in 2011.

Another tourist draw: The new \$30-million Lake Myrtle Sports Complex in Auburndale.

Jackson expects the complex and its events to generate more than \$50-million annually. The complex, dedicated to youth and collegiate sports, features 11 multi-purpose sports fields, a 1,500-seat stadium, four youth baseball and five collegiate-sized baseball fields.

A new 16,500-square-foot facility on the property is headquarters for the Florida Youth Soccer Association, along with gallery space for the Florida Sports Hall of Fame and offices for Polk County Sports Marketing and the CFDC. Future plans call for additional sports fields, a second indoor facility and the acquisition of adjacent land which includes a nine-acre lake for a possible water ski park. There is also the possibility of the USA Water Ski Governing Board moving its official training facility to Lake Myrtle.

## News from the 'Burbs

The East Polk Committee of 100 was established in 1996 to help focus the economic development interests of a number of cities, including Auburndale, Davenport, Dundee, Eagle Lake, Fort Meade, Frostproof, Haines City, Lake Alfred, Lake Hamilton, Lake Wales, Polk City and Winter Haven.

A few examples: Last year in Frostproof, Lemon-X expanded its operations into a 12,000-square-foot former juice facility. And in Haines City, Cellynne, a paper products manufacturer, completed a \$37-million headquarters expansion. Haines City also finished a \$28-million community project that brought a new

banquet hall, aquatic center, tennis and basketball courts and a walking trail to Lake Eva Park.

In Lake Wales, major activities include the redevelopment of a K-Mart into a small business entrepreneur site and the opening of a Polk State College branch in the former city hall building.

Land west of Fort Meade and south of Mulberry is being considered for a new luxury resort proposed by phosphate giant Mosaic. The company owns some 16,000 acres of reclaimed land near the Polk-Hardee county line. Earlier this year Polk's planning commission voted unanimously to approve

Tom Hagerly, USF Polytechnic



**BIG CHANGES** Winter Haven Hospital expects its \$40-million expansion to be complete by early summer.



Winter Haven Hospital

## Health Care Business

Residential and commercial development might be slow, but that isn't stopping hospitals from expanding or developers like Sarasota-based Civix from moving forward on a new 75-acre medical facility park

Although Terry Dorman, executive vice president of Civix,

initial plans, which include the development of vacation homes, hotels, cabins, recreational facilities and golf courses.

In Bartow, the Clear Springs development is making progress, announcing that groundbreaking for infrastructure like roads and utilities will take place this summer, paving the way for Polk State College to develop an advanced technology center there. The college center will be part of a planned 478-acre corporate park.

admits that the company's project on U.S. 27 in Haines City got delayed because of the economy, he's hopeful that construction will begin some time this summer once financing is in place.

The project, dubbed MedEplex, calls for two 44,000-square-foot medical office buildings. In addition, says Dorman, there will be a 38,000-square-foot outpatient rehab center, a skilled nursing facility and an adult living facility. Polk State

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College has also acquired 11 acres for development of a future campus center.

"The location of MedEplex is right next to the Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center," says Dorman. "This area will be a major medical-related employment center once it is built out."

Construction plans are also underway at Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center, which is currently expanding its Fast Track Emergency Department. "Enlarging Fast Track will make more room available in the main ER for the increase in high acuity patients," says CEO Jay Finnegan. The hospital is also undertaking a \$2-million investment to add a third cardiac catheterization lab, which will involve adding a second shift and hiring 15 employees.

Winter Haven Hospital expects to have its \$40-million facility expansion plan complete by early summer, says spokesperson Joel Thomas. For the first time, the hospital's cancer center will offer on-site medical oncology services in partnership with the University of Florida College of Medicine and Shands Health Care. Winter Haven Hospital has been affiliated with UF and Shands for over a decade, says Thomas.

Lakeland Regional Medical Center's cancer center program is getting an upgrade as well. The hospital is adding 27,000 square feet to its current facility, which will double the number of exam and procedure rooms to 50. The \$6.6-million project is expected to be completed by 2011. Earlier this year, the hospital completed an upgrade to the emergency department, adding 26 more beds to meet demand. According to spokesperson Cindy Sternlicht, Lakeland Regional has the busiest "single-site" emergency department in the state with some 155,000 visits each year.

## Education Update

USF Polytechnic launched the new Blue Sky incubator and business accelerator programs and continues to move forward on its plan for a 171-acre campus at the intersection of Interstate 4 and the Polk Parkway.

In 2009 the university selected contemporary architect Santiago Calatrava to design the first building on the new campus, a 100,000-

square-foot Science & Technology facility, scheduled to open in late summer 2012. The new building is expected to be the cornerstone for all future design projects on campus.

Polk State College changed its name last year from Polk Community College and kicked off its first four-year degree program – a bachelor's in applied science with a specialty in safety management, public administration or business administration. A record 169 students are in the inaugural class, says college President Eileen Holden.

Polk State is also growing its physical presence. Two new campus centers are planned – one at the future Civix medical park in Haines City and one in Bartow at the Clear Springs development. Both sites are in addition to the full-service campuses in Lakeland and Winter Haven, a new satellite center in downtown Lake Wales and a center near the Lakeland Airport, where the corporate college and medical imaging program are located.

Holden considers the college, like USF Polytechnic, a catalyst for economic development aligned with the needs of business and industry.

"Our job is to raise the quality of life and the average salary for people in our market," she says. ■

"We have a chance to be the frontrunner, to be cutting-edge."

– The CFDC's Tom Patton says of high speed rail.

## Smart Grid & Solar Power



The City of Lakeland's effort to pursue sustainable energy got a big push forward with the approval of a \$20-million grant from the federal government for Lakeland Electric to implement smart grid technology. A new high-tech device will allow customers to better manage their energy consumption and the rates they pay by controlling the time appliances in a home are turned on and off. The company expects to begin installing the new devices this summer.

Lakeland Electric has also signed an agreement with SunEdison, the largest solar energy services provider in the country. Under the new partnership, SunEdison will finance and set up the photovoltaic solar energy system, which will include a combination of rooftop and ground level solar panels. The project is expected to be in operation by 2018 and is the largest utility-sponsored solar program of its kind, according to a Lakeland Electric statement. In addition, Lakeland Electric is working with Regenesys SolarPower to bring the first utility-sponsored solar water heater program to customers in its service market.