[Wes Roberts, Publisher, SRQ Media Group]: Today we are launching the SM2 Program. We have our sponsors from SRQ Airport, and in particular, we’d like to recognize two members of the Sarasota-Manatee Airport Authority Board of Commissioners who are joining us today, Henry Rodriguez and Bob Waechter [applause]. Also thank you to our sponsor Seaside Bank [applause] and Sign Zoo [applause]. I have to leave the script for just a second to let you know that on your tables are little cards called “question cards,” or “Q&A” cards, or something to that effect, they’re in the middle of the table. We are going to have a Q&A at the end of the discussion but rather than having people shout out questions—and maybe you can’t really hear them and maybe they don’t go in the most effective order—if you could write questions down as they occur to you during the panel discussion and just before the Q&A, some members of the SRQ staff will come out, collect all of those Q&A questions and then a moderator will choose from those questions which ones get asked in the panel so use some cards and put some good ones on there. Finally, our guest presenter needs little in the way of introduction, I won’t give him a very long one, it’s Rick Piccolo, President and CEO of the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. [Applause] Rick is a staunch supporter of regional business and a community advocate. He joins us for this special presentation on the economic impact of our local airport, the SRQ Airport, and is the moderator of our panel discussion. Thank you to you all for being here, and welcome, Rick. [Applause]

[Rick Piccolo, Sarasota-Manatee International Airport]: Thank you Wes, I appreciate that kind introduction. SRQ Airport and SRQ Media have enjoyed a great partnership over the years. We’re looking forward to this regional breakfast series as being another great event and we have a great panel for our first breakfast, but before I get into the panel discussion, one of the advantages of being the moderator is you get an opportunity to put in a shameless plug for your own business before we discuss the region’s business. I want to spend just a few moments discussing the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, especially as it relates to the region’s economy. I think you will find many of the remarks eye-opening to say the least.

While SRQ may be small in comparison to Tampa International, it is a major player in the local economy. In 2010, the Florida Department of Transportation did an economic impact study of all 20 commercial air service airports in Florida. That study revealed that SRQ has an annual economic impact of over $966 million, nearly a billion dollars a year. Over 1,400 jobs in the bi-county area are derived from the activities of SRQ with over 50 businesses located on the airport itself and over 1,800 employees on the airport itself. SRQ handles over 1.3 million passengers per year, and has over 110,000 operations per year, landings and take-off. Believe it or not,
passengers spent $272 million in 2011 on airline tickets out of SRQ. And given the continuing airline consolidation and increasing airline fares, I would guess that number will surpass $300 million this year. More importantly, the airport provides all this economic benefit to the community at no cost to the community. That’s right, the Sarasota-Manatee Airport Authority has no taxing power, and its $21 million annual operation and maintenance and service expenses are funded through its business operations. Last year, SRQ ran a $1,065,000 surplus from our business operations. In two more years, the airport will be debt free and have paid off $150 million of interest and debt service payments on the terminal that was built in 1980. I challenge you to find another government agency that is self-sufficient from its business operation, runs an operating surplus and provides the community with nearly $1 billion per year of economic value without taking at least $2 billion from your pockets to duplicate that. In addition to the economic impact, SRQ generates millions of dollars of sales tax revenue that goes to the state and local governments to provide services and capital improvements. The Airport Authority and its tenants pay over $300,000 a year property taxes to the two counties as well. Truly, we are a contributing member to the economic vitality of the region. While our financial picture and facilities are very sound, it does not mean we are not without challenge. As you may know, we have recently suffered a setback when Southwest Airlines bought AirTran Airways and pulled their service from SRQ. AirTran was carrying over 360,000 passengers and was 30% of our business. I’m happy to report that since that time, United Airlines has announced that they will return to SRQ November 4—with non-stop service to Chicago O’Hare and we expect them to grow with additional flights and destinations in the future. JetBlue added daily non-stop service to New York LaGuardia, Delta has updates for their aircraft and will also be adding daily service to LaGuardia in December, and Air Canada will also be upgrading aircraft in SRQ this winter. We estimate that by winter, we will have recovered 95% of the seats we lost by Southwest’s bad decision.

Now as a member of the community, you can play a part. We have recently unveiled a “Do You SRQ?” campaign and it’s very simple: we are asking local businesses to sign the SRQ Advocate Plan. It’s very simple and it doesn’t cost you a dime. The pledge commits your organization to the following: first, you’ll always check flights from SRQ first for your travel. Second, whoever in the organization approves travel will make sure your employees justify when they travel from another airport. We realize that there may be times that pricing or schedule requires you to use another facility, but we would ask that you make sure it’s necessary. Third, we ask that when you fly from another airport, you only use the carriers that also serve your community, that is Delta, US Air, United, JetBlue and Air Canada. Yes, we are asking you not to fly Southwest [laughter]. Besides,
they can’t get you to Paris with frequent flyer miles because they never leave the lower 48. Fourth, we ask you to encourage your friends and relatives to use SRQ as well. Finally, we ask you to look at the total cost of your trip from the time you leave your door until the time you get back to your door, not from the time you lift off to the time you touch down on the runway. Those ground costs can really add up for gas, parking, cab or limo charges, and in the end, you may find your trip actually costs you more. If you wish to sign the pledge, they are at your table. The more firms we can get to sign up, the easier it is for us to attract more air service. In the meantime, we will be displaying your company’s name on the advocate wall at the airport to show the community the local firms supporting the local airport. Together we can utilize the strength of regional perspective to bring more jobs and economic activity to the region. Well, I believe I’ve grabbed my return on investments, and now it’s time to get to the main event.

As today’s moderator on regional economic development, I hope to engage our four panelists in sharing and dissecting, if I may, the opportunities that lie within our reach in Sarasota and Manatee County. We want to keep the conversations as organic as possible, encourage back and forth discussion. I know our panelists would agree with me, we could spend days on this topic. We have the next hour to dive as deeply as we can to better understand the work that is on-going, to articulate, strategize, implement and plan a successful and sustainable regional economy.

To begin our discussion, we’ve asked each of our panelists to introduce themselves briefly and to share your most “aha” moment on the broader topic of economic development.

[Bob Bartz, President, Manatee Chamber of Commerce]: Thank you Rick, it’s a pleasure to be here this morning. I was born in Iowa, went to the University of South Dakota, a long ways from here. I’ve been with the Manatee Chamber for 30 years. Before coming to Manatee County I was with the Hollywood, Florida Chamber near where Steve [Queior] was, and prior to that, the Grinnell, Iowa Chamber of Commerce. I’m a graduate from the Institute for Organizational Management at the University of Colorado, and did six years post-graduate with the University of Georgia. I’m married, have a wife, Vicky, a son, Jason, and two beautiful granddaughters. “Aha” moments … I can’t say that I’ve had an “aha” moment on economic development but I can say that I think the way really successful communities go about making their community a desirable community is making it sustainable, high quality of life and if you couple that with a focus for teaching the marketing plan, I think that we’ll find ourselves being a destination for business and human capitol. Thank you.
[Sharon Hillstrom, President and CEO, Manatee Economic Development Corporation]

Thanks, Bob. Good morning, I’m Sharon Hillstrom, president and CEO of the Manatee Economic Development Corporation. I’m originally from the Chicago area, actually moved throughout the Midwest. My dad worked for Chevrolet so every time there was a promotion there was a move. So I lived in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and then back to Illinois, and graduated from Arizona State University because every kid from Illinois wanted to go where it was warm. My background is in sales and marketing; for any of you that are from Michigan, I started off at Jacobsen’s department stores in sales promotions so did all their fashion shows and seminars. It’s interesting that they would hire a 23-year-old right out of college for that job but it was a great experience for me. Then I worked for a film developing company called Fox Photo based out of San Antonio. They were the company that did the film processing for when we used to do the overnight processing, and of course no one really does that anymore. In my time there I went through a buyout a merger in three years, so I had three different bosses and that was an interesting experience.

Subsequent to that, I moved down to Florida and have lived in Manatee County for 22 years. Also ran a small business, did the business management for that, so I have a clear understanding of what it’s like to deal with overhead and make payroll and all those good things. I have two great children, Patrick and Sarah. One’s in San Francisco and one’s a junior at Notre Dame so I’m hoping that one day they’ll come back this way but I guess that’s our job in economic development to bring those kinds of opportunities here so those kids can come back. Thank you.

[Mark Huey, President and CEO, Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County]

Good morning. I’m Mark Huey, President and CEO of the Economic Development Corporation Sarasota County. It’s great to be with you. My background is eclectic; it’s been mostly in the Tampa area. I spent about a third of my career in commercial development and commercial real estate. I was the original project manager on Carillon where Raymond James is headquartered that was one of our original projects. The company I worked for specializes in corporate build-to-suit projects and that’s where I first got exposed to economics at all. We were the private guys trying to work with local economic development corporations and bringing companies to the Tampa area. I then worked in the non-profit arena primarily in affordable housing and that’s where I got exposed to public/private partnerships. As you know, affordable housing doesn’t happen without public sector engagement. It’s a very sophisticated engagement, very complicated, and that’s my first exposure to how the public and private sectors were working. Then most recently, I was heading up economic development for the City of Tampa and I got to oversee all the redevelopment work we did there—downtown, Channelside, Ybor City and work on job recruiting along with business growth initiatives. Then in the private sector, then in the non-profit arena, then in the public sector.
Then I was tapped nicely for the role at the EDC, which I’ve been involved in for about 15 months. It’s been great getting to know the community; so many of you here in the audience have helped me learn about Sarasota County and already be able to make a difference, so that’s been great. I have 4 kids: one out of school, two in school in college, and one just started high school here in Sarasota County, and again we’re happy to be here.

[Steve Queior, President and CEO, Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce] Thanks, I think I’ll stand up so I can see the people in the back for a second here. I’m Steve Queior from the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. If you wonder about the name Queior, we are French Canadian, we came across the border and came back to upstate New York and I went to undergraduate school there at a place called Colgate University and then followed up with a master’s in Public Administration at Indiana University when I thought I wanted to go to work for folks like [Sarasota County Commissioners] Jon Thaxton and Joe Barbeatta in the public sector, but then I followed up with a master’s in business administration and fell into this chamber of commerce work more than 30 years ago. So this is my third chamber and third community, the previous ones being South Bend, Indiana, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and I think Greater Sarasota/Sarasota-Manatee is the best community and the best chamber and chamber partners I’ve had the opportunity to work with. My wife is a nurse, my daughter is out in San Francisco, and so I think this issue of career opportunities and good jobs for the next generation is near and dear to my heart. Many of my board members have the same situation of kind of suffering the brain drain, having to go to Atlanta or Philadelphia to see your grandkids. We want to improve the opportunities so that the young professional generation stays right here on the Suncoast. One “aha” moment I would share is that there are so many new leaders in our region, two of them right here. Bob has been here longer than I but I feel like an old hen. Look at the City Managers, [County Manager] Randy Reid, new county and college leaders. So where’s the challenge in that? These folks might not be connected, might not know some of the institutional history, opportunities in our community. The opportunity is to bring all these new leaders together to do things we haven’t accomplished before.

[Sharon] So my “aha” moment in economic development was a couple of years ago when we were doing our strategic planning and we did this SWOT analysis and this strength and opportunity kept coming up, and guess what? It was sports. “Aha.” Why didn’t we think about this before? So, subsequently, a lot of really cool things have happened with sports performance in the region, and I expect that to continue to be a terrific economic driver for us, so that was my “aha” moment.
[Mark] You can imagine, being new to Sarasota County, I have an “aha” moment daily. But one that was special to me—is Mr. Reid here?—We were introducing Randy to a company that we were trying to help for awhile. It was a young start up company that is called Lucid Global, you have heard about them. And Larry is involved in this indirectly. But during the course of the meeting, Jeff Hazleton, who is their chief technology officer. Jeff is a graduate of Ringling and went to San Diego, got involved in the technology startup world and then wanted to come back here, and has started up this company. And during the course of the meeting, he revealed that they had just hired ten Ringling graduates [applause]. Not just that, but they had been the largest, and at the time they weren’t quite sure because all the final numbers hadn’t been posted, but I think it’s been confirmed that they were the largest hirer of Ringling—single company hirer—of graduates for this class. And it just said a couple of things. First of all, this brain drain? If you can create jobs, you can stop it. And secondly, that young people coming out of these institutions love this area, and that if they have a job opportunity, they would love to stay here and work here. So that is a great “aha” moment.

[Rick] What none of them told you is that they all like French wine, long walks on the beach, and curling up with a good book at night. The way I’m going to do this is that I’m not going to have all four panelists answer the same question all the time. I kind of divided up into two chamber leaders and two economic leaders, so I’ll try to keep those questions along those lines.

First set up question is going to go to our chamber leaders Bob and Steve. Give us a little insight into what our local economy looks like, the types of companies that are doing business here.

[Steve] You can look at Sarasota and then you can look at the two-county region, which is a tremendous footprint. And with the bigger footprint I think we have quite a broader base and strength of companies and balance, and frankly you see some more manufacturing and warehouse distribution logistics and so in Manatee County. I’ll let Bob expand on that. Sarasota County of course has relied faithfully on real estate and tourism, perhaps too much in the sense that we seek diversification to avoid big ups and downs when oil shock causes transportation for tourists to increase or financing affects the housing bubble. We have a tremendous strength in what’s called the fire category: finance, insurance and real estate. And to the extent we build on that with companies like FCCI that export products or services, if you will, new dollars are coming into the local economy and we’re just not providing services for one another on a local basis. It’s a good thing and we grow it. We have four new computer software, especially made manufacturing, that some people are aware of in Sarasota County. And the two other huge factors I want to end with
are healthcare and education. So the colleges are a tremendous resource in their own economic impact as well as a tool to group our economy, and healthcare is huge here.

[Bob] Thank you, Steve. Like most communities in Florida, the service industry is by far the largest in our community. I think our greatest challenge as we move forward is to continue to diversify our economy. Before this past little slip in the economy, I thought we were quite diversified in Manatee County. We had a strong agricultural base. We have a very strong healthcare base—fastest growing currently. We relied most on housing, as did much of Florida. Tourism has been a tremendous factor. Manufacturing had been 15% of our total labor force. So, well diversified. But I think one of our lessons was we need to continue to work together to diversify our community to ensure that we do not experience what we have most recently. Even though tourism is coming back now very strong—we had records in 2012— and housing is up 29% over a year ago and trends are moving in the right direction, we can’t get comfortable with what we’ve done in the past.

[Rick] For Mark and Sharon, the question would be how would you articulate each counties competitive selling assets, and if you could, which ones are shared with both counties, and which ones do you believe are inherently indigenous to one county or the other? Sharon, you start off.

[Sharon] Sure, let’s see. I think I’ll speak to our competitive strengths in Manatee County. One of the things we always talk about is our business-friendly government. Over the past—I would say—five years, there have been some significant dynamic changes that have occurred in county government. Extremely business-friendly. Our county administrator Ed Hunzeker came in and said we need to work with business and not set up barriers to them being successful in Manatee County. And it has been just a pleasure to work with them, and they have created a reputation in the region as a great government to work with. We also have a seaport, Port Manatee. It’s a wonderful port; it’s one of the youngest ports in the state of Florida. It’s well situated because it’s in a rural location. If you haven’t taken a tour of Port Manatee, I highly recommend you take a peak at it. We are the closest deepwater port to the Panama Canal, and they are expanding the Panama Canal so we expect to realize some economic impact from that. We have a lot of land to develop in Manatee County, which is also always appealing. We have a lot of commercial space available and right now it’s very reasonably priced, so that’s appealing. We have a unique asset to us which would be our sports performance sector and I’ll share why it’s unique. When Mark and I go speak with site consultants, we usually go on these missions where we go as a region, so there’s five of us there to speak with a site consultant. You have about a nanosecond to say something interesting and unique about your community. I talk about Port Manatee and I talk about sports performance and they go ‘what’s sports performance?’ And I go into ‘yeah we have this sports
training facility in Manatee County, we have the Pittsburg Pirates, we have the Bradenton Marauders, we have an ice arena that trained Olympic athletes.' So that gets their attention and it’s that one little thing that makes you stand out. In fact, we’re actually working with a marketing firm right now, and in their market research for us they found 27 site consultants and they said they remembered Manatee from me being there talking about sports performance, and that said something to me. It also communicates a different message about where we live: that we’re an active community, we have people that are willing, ready, and able to go to work for your company. Additionally, we have a medical school in Manatee County and we have a dental school. We share a lot of great assets between the two counties. Of course, we have the airport, and we share institutions of higher learning. I have to say, whenever I’m on a business recruitment mission, I talk about the region—I talk about Ringling; I talk about the great arts in Sarasota, the great arts in Manatee. So we have a very compelling story to tell and it’s a great product for us to sell. So it’s just a matter of getting out there and letting people know all the great assets that we have here.

[Mark] When I think about Sarasota County and the different ways it is described and interpreted and felt by folks, I think the best handful of words that I can think about is ‘Florida’s Creative Coast.’ And I think that just embraces so much of what people feel about Sarasota County. It’s more than about Ringling College; it’s about all the colleges, New College and USF. It’s about Mote Marine and the innovative research that’s going on there. It’s about healthcare and Sarasota Memorial and a launching pad for a company creating medical device technology. The coast part just celebrates our natural beauty here and the wonderful outdoor lifestyle we get to enjoy. And when you look at it historically, the companies that have come here, they have been privately held, small, community-sized companies, and the owner got to decide, ‘where do I want to live?’ and they want to live on the creative coast and enjoy the arts, enjoy the creativity, the incredible outdoor and natural setting, and I think that will continue to be our strength.

[Rick] My next question is going to go to all four of you. How does Sarasota and Manatee County look from your organization, as well as governmentally the agencies collaborating and partnering?

[Steve] There are a couple of dozen examples, so let me try to do two or three. Picking up in terms—Sharon talked to prospects—just by virtue of schedules last year when the governor and Enterprise Florida took a trade mission to Montreal and Toronto, I was able to go because jointly eight regional organizations came together to work on an international council and my schedule allowed me to go. So I was loaded up with materials from Mark’s office, but also the Manatee EDC materials. And when we sat down, 16 appointments with companies in Montreal and 16 in Toronto—this was under the umbrella of the Tampa Bay partnership—we laid it out and said
‘here’s where we are on the west coast of Florida, and if you want to look at Manatee, you can contact these folks, and look at Sarasota here.’ When you go up to the international scale, the region certainly tells first so we cooperated at that level. I think some of the great cooperation is also in building assets, and our moderator Rick Piccolo has been a hardworking community leader in trying to realize the potential of a rowing destination not only for America but for the world. And at the Nathan Benderson Park, this new rowing complex is coming along to literally bring tens of thousands of new people here every year and those folks start the economic wheel turning. So not only is that cross-county collaboration because the rowing set up has the long course up at the Manatee River, what it will be the sprint course up at the county line there and its down by Osprey, which has a training facility too. So we work together at marketing and work together more and more to develop our assets.

[Mark] I would start by saying that we compete as much as we work together. I think we need to acknowledge at the end of the day both Sharon and I are responsible to stakeholders in our respective communities and so when you talk about it, the question was to develop and bring business in. We have our own approaches to that, and I haven’t included Sharon on a sales call, and she hasn’t included me. But having said that, we’ve worked together with the Tampa Bay Partnership, so one way we work together is through the regional marketing efforts of the Tampa Bay Partnership. And secondly, I think we’re always going to look for ways where our economical development activities can be shared. And while they don’t necessarily relate to attracting business, we haven’t been able to figure that out yet but we’re talking about that and we have had some conversation about how we might work together on that. There are other areas where we work together. Just yesterday we were part of a skills gap study for information technology. It’s a Sarasota/Manatee issue, it’s a Tampa Bay issue, it’s a Florida and national issue. There are company owners here who struggle to attract the right kind of IT talent in their community. We’re working together on a collaborative study between ourselves and Tampa Bay to really see if there are ways to help companies in that way. We have collaborated in the past on international. There’s a program we founded, one of the eight original founders in the state of Florida called Grow Florida, which targets growth companies in our area. We work with Manatee County on that and supporting companies in Manatee County because it’s an efficient way to go about it. So we’re always looking for ways we can creatively partner, not necessarily the attracting businesses but we have found ways to work together.

[Sharon] I have to say getting to know Mark has been a pleasure, and we’ve had some great conversations and I’m sure that relationship will continue and I look forward to that. In terms of collaboration, we’ve actually done quite a bit together. Not necessarily on the business recruitment
The role of chambers of commerce and economic development, I believe, is to work on the product. The product in our case is the community. We make this community a desirable community so that economic development people can sell that community, so it’s a teamwork approach. And several things Steve and I share: opportunities to work with Rick on the airport and on several initiatives. We look to work with them further in the future. We worked together with USF on initiatives. We started an organization a few years ago called Start Ups, which is a transportation advocacy group, and it’s had some successes in both counties; it’s a two-county partnership. The Young Professionals Organizations are meeting together, and it’s very important that our communities, our region, be appealing to the young people that they want to stay here, and that they feel comfortable when they’re recruited to this area, they look around and see other people like themselves so they don’t feel like they have to go back to Birmingham or Atlanta if the job doesn’t work out for them. And Ringling and all the other institutions have done a wonderful job there. Green Business initiatives are something we are working together on to make sure this community is sustainable. Again, when Sharon and Mark bring in these people to the workforce, they’re going to find that this community is ongoing and appealing to them. The number of other showcase events and networking events has been worked on together and we’re doing even more. Just recently, the two executive committees met, looked at some joint initiatives and planned to do
that ongoing. I think also some of the assets that we are very proud of are the art and culture in Sarasota and we are starting to learn from you, and Johnette Isham is here and doing a great job with Realize Bradenton. I know Mark and Steve feel that Port Manatee is their port as well, and one project we are working very hard on right now is to get a port connector road from I-75 to the port so we can move our goods and services in a very efficient and affordable fashion. If you look at what happened in Miami, right now they’re digging a tunnel to get their products to the transportation corridor. And in Tampa, they had to build a double decker road. So we want to avoid that expense and we’re working together. As Sharon has pointed out, that will be very important to our future economy.

[Rick] On the next question, let’s talk about collaborations but also challenges. Can you lay out what are the biggest challenges you think the region faces—whether it’s government, whether it’s resources or funding, whether it’s problematic—what are the biggest challenges we face and then how can we work collaboratively from a regional standpoint? Let’s go for all of us and as I know the clock is ticking on us so I want to try and get the heavy questions in. And also, from a regional standpoint, do you think the collaboration has improved over the last decade versus where we used to be?

[Bob] Absolutely. When I came here 30 years ago, I don’t know if I even told Steve this, we got the Chamber executive committees together again and we hired a facilitator, and we hired that facilitator to try to build relationships between the two counties and we asked them these questions: ‘How do you and Sarasota perceive Manatee County? How do you perceive Manatee County and how do you perceive Sarasota County?’ and vice versa. And the results at that time could be predicted. We wrote up on the wall that folks in Sarasota thought that everyone in Manatee drove pickup trucks. And folks in Manatee County felt that everyone in Sarasota drove a Mercedes. We’ve come along way since that. I would echo what Sharon says; we are so fortunate to have a government that is as friendly and wanting us to be successful. Without them in these very, very challenging times, we wouldn’t be able to be what we are. We certainly have infrastructure challenges that we’re addressing. Funding is a crisis point for virtually all right now. But again, I would say trying to be positive is with the governments we’ve got and the governments we’re going to have in the near future; they’re going to be such an asset to help us be successful.

[Sharon] My thought about what our biggest challenge is not just for Sarasota/Manatee but it’s really for the state of Florida. While tourism is a wonderful economic driver, and we want that to continue and we want retired people to come down here and buy houses and use all the services that everybody provides, we do not appear as a business destination. That is our biggest challenge
as a state and as a region. I was at a conference last week where we were discussing that very issue. Enterprise Florida, which is the state economic development organization, is embarking on a new brand for the state of Florida as a business destination. We are actually in our organization following suit in that because we are rewriting our organization and creating a marketing plan to market our areas as a business destination. But I think just on a global perspective, that is probably our biggest challenge and we know we’re a great business destination. We don’t have state income tax, we’re a right-to-work state, we have land, we have commercial property available, we have a great workforce, we have great training institutions, so it’s just a matter of changing the perception of what Florida is and then, in time, what our region also provides.

[Mark] What I want to talk about is the earlier theme about regional cooperation. I think increasingly that private investment can go anywhere and they want to go to a community where there’s a business friendly environment and where they can see regional cooperation where chambers and EDCs and governmental amenities are working together to feel good, whatever challenges they might have. You know every community has challenges. No community has the perfect workforce. No community has every infrastructure problem figured out. No community has x, y, and z, and investment businesses know that. Where they want to go are communities that are rallying together regionally and are working on their issues in productive ways and are getting things done. And so I think for our economic future, we are all challenged to keep doing that better. I was encouraged by the joint meeting of the commissions that occurred a few months ago and I think more of that needs to happen. And it’s not just about meetings. It’s not just about talking, because private investment is used to hearing all this talk, all those people who are paid to say good things about the community. Our actions in working together regionally I think are going to be ardently some of the most important things affecting our economic future.

[Steve] Thanks. I believe collaboration is increasing steadily, incrementally and it’s absolutely critical that it’s going in that direction at an accelerated pace. To get to the meat of the challenge issue, let me take all three things. We talked about these generally at the Chamber but particularly at our Sarasota Tomorrow Initiative that works to take down heavy lifting issues to improve our prosperity. One of them is, it kind of goes back to newcomers to the community and lack of history here and there is a tendency for people who move here, particularly from larger metro areas where the quality of life to say ‘I’m here now. Let’s shut the door at the county line or the region line; I don’t need one more car on the road.’ What people need to keep in mind is our deaths outnumber our births by about 2:1. So if we are not aware of our older age, particularly in Sarasota County, most of our population are not having kids and not replacing themselves, so we if don’t have a substantial net in migration, we will eventually shrink and wither up. So this whole mentality about
being hungry and eager for good companies, good jobs and economic development is a challenge we need to address I think. Second challenge is using 19th century structures to address 21st century issues and opportunities. And those might be governmental in some senses but they might be civic in other structures and it’s the way we did it 30, 50, 70 years ago; it’s a different world now, so I think we need to look at those. And lastly, the largest issue, I think, is the skills gap. When the baby boomer’s 401ks that got knocked down to 201ks, when they come back up in value and they start retiring in droves, we lose all those skilled workers and our region will suffer horrifically if we don’t address our workforce needs. The better we address them, we will be a winner as a region.

[Rick] One last question and we’ll be opening it up to the audience. This is a little quicker, a little easier. If successful, what does our area look like 20 years from now? What is the biggest change? I’ll let all four of you give a quick answer to that. Why don’t we start off with Mark and let the middle of the room go first.

[Mark] Huge airport. (laughter) Strong chambers. (laughter) SRQ Magazine #1 in the country. (applause) I just see if we can take our assets and our advantages, and I think of a college town, that we’re known as a college town. I think about, again, the local Lucid Globals and having not just a handful of those here but a hundred of those here, and I think about what we’re going to be able to do with an area of sports tourism. Again, we have enviable assets. And as Sharon said, getting the story out and solving some of our regional issues, we have huge, huge potential in all those areas.

[Sharon] Well I think we’re in an exciting time. I think, and I state this all the time, I think we’re poised for greatness, and just because of all the assets that we have talked about. But what I see us as in 20 years is, I would like to see us as a world class destination as a natural laboratory for research and development of products in sports and for the boomer generation. Especially with the Institution for the Ages and Tom Essleman leading that group, I see some really exciting opportunities for us and I’m very glad to be a part of the process.

[Bob] I’m going to approach it from a more technical standpoint, but our county commission has been working for almost two years now on a question ‘How do you want to grow?’ And looking out on to the year 2035, and they’ve been getting a lot of private sector input, now the county commission and the planning commission is going to have to make a decision, and they’re looking at three different approaches. Do we continue doing what we are doing now, with a very suburban approach? Do we look at more redevelopment and infill that would confine growth to more south of the river and west of I-75? Or do we look at developing activity centers in the unincorporated
areas? And once they make that decision, and our land use codes impact the amendments, our roads, our libraries, everything will be focused to meet those various needs and I think it’s going to be very important to how we do grow and Sharon markets the community in the future and where we go with the services to make that company successful. So I’m very encouraged. I think I know what the answer is going to be—I hope I do anyway—but I think this is what’s going to be driving Manatee County in the future.

[Steve] Three things about twenty years down the road I think I’m going to resonate what Mark Huey said in the sense that great colleges and universities, I think that’s central to our vision. Second, organizationally, I think there will be some co-locations, new affiliations, and potential mergers. You know, we have literally hundreds and hundreds of not-for-profit and civic organizations, maybe quasi-governmental operations, but for efficiency and effectiveness I think many will come together more organizationally. And then just in strategic and operational senses I think we will function much more as a unified two county region.

[Rick] I want to thank all of our special guests—Bob, Sharon, Mark, Steve—today for serving on the SM2’s first panel. We thoroughly enjoyed our conversation here and I know the dialogue will continue. Please give them a round of applause. [applause] I’d now like to turn to the audience question and answer, which will be facilitated by SRQ magazine’s Senior Editor Jacob Ogles. If you have question cards, please hold them up so we can collect them and then Jacob, if you’ll please come up. And please remember to sign those pledges and leave them at the back of the room. Thank you very much. [applause]

[Jacob Ogles, SRQ] Thank you so much, Rick. That was a great moderating job you did. This panel is discussing a lot of very complicated issues, and keeping us on track was really valuable, so thank you very much, and if everybody could give a round of applause for Rick. [applause] I’d also like to plug something ourselves. You guys see that you have SRQ magazines at your table. We have our annual economic report which we put in this issue, and anybody who hasn’t read it cover to cover really needs to do so, not just because we slaved and worked a long time over it but because it will inform you in really important ways about what the future of this community is going to look like in the near term and the long term.

Panel, I wanted to ask you, and Mark, I want to play off something you were just mentioning about the college town atmosphere. As we find ways to develop this workforce in our area, how do we make sure that more of the talent that is developed locally stays in this region? Mark, you can start then anyone who wants to chime in after that would be great.
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[Mark] I think as a global story, you’ve got to have jobs. And I think that’s certainly a big part of the puzzle and something we feel ownership over. Secondly, it’s the place making, part of what we’ve been talking about and we have to continue to think about what that workforce wants. On the very highest levels, it is not complicated. It’s really like going to your customer in your businesses everyday and figuring out what they want—the kind of community they want to live in—and then working hard as a community to deliver on that. And that’s why that term ‘college town’ seems to capture a lot of that for me when we just imagine what that’s all about. And I don’t mean necessarily the Ybor City side of it, but those are the things we need to be working on. And there’s affordable housing peaks. There’s frankly a topic we haven’t been talking about but that is very important in economic development, and that’s diversity. So there’s a lot of dimensions to these issues, but those would be a couple of initial thoughts that I would have.

[Steve] A very short answer to this is internships and more internships. Anecdotally, we’ve found that at least 8 out of 10 local college graduates that pursue careers here have experienced something between the bars and the beaches by an internship at a real company or organization. And so the seven colleges and universities, seven or eight in the area have come together and there’s now a website where an employer can go to one place and be linked directly to the contact people. Create more internships and we will retain more of our best and brightest.

[Jacob] We have this question from Tom Esselman from The Institute for the Ages: 'How can government and business investments help turn our aging demographic into an asset and how might this become a benefit for regional collaboration?'

[Mark] This is the Institute for the Ages question, right? That’s a conversation that’s been happening for a decade or so. And these two efforts have been launched out of that. The strategic plan of the Economic Development Corporation is now in its 4th year at this aging platform as an economic driver that was embodied in your question: Can we be a place where products, where services, where policies are tested and then developed in a way that leads to job creation? And the institute is the tip of the spear for that, so I think the community has invested. The county is invested in that, the county commission is invested in that, philanthropic groups, our organizations, the Chamber has invested in the startup of that organization all believing there is an opportunity. It’s at its early stages; we’re all enjoying engaging with Tom Esselman and helping to shape the direction of that. But it’s a big idea and I think it offers a lot of opportunity and it goes back to this Florida Creative Coast. We’re thinking differently—aren’t we?—about that aging demographic.
[Sharon] You know, we were talking about “aha” moments and I think that might have been an “aha” moment for Sarasota County. Look at what you have and capitalize on that and market that in a positive, productive manner. And when I mentioned before about my 20-year view of the natural laboratory, it just makes sense. So I think having the right leadership to take this idea forward, and when you consider how many of us will consider retiring in the not too distant future, we will all be benefiting from those kinds of products and services that this area could be testing. So I think there’s all kinds of possibilities; obviously it’s just in the beginning stages but I think there’s tremendous opportunity for that particular idea.

[Bob] I agree. I think the best thing—the first thing you have to do is ask both audiences and young professionals we serve them every other year and say what do you want in this community? What will it take for you to stay in this community? And go about trying to address those things. Conversely, we’re meeting with organizations that are populated by more senior individuals that have a tremendous amount of talent. At least I know our community hasn’t maybe done a better job at getting those folks to share those talents to make this a better place to live and work. Many of them, not by choice, are working longer and will continue to work longer, so we need to appeal to both audiences. What we have found though, and if you look at any AARP Magazine, and I’m not ashamed to say that I’m a member of that organization now, when they did a study on this, both groups want the same kind of community. They want vibrant downtowns, and they want restaurants, and choices to go to, and again they want those jobs that Sharon and Mark are working so hard on. I think we have a bright future; I certainly wouldn’t want to be back in Iowa and some other areas. I think Florida’s positioned well, moving through this cycle a little bit slower than we all want to, but I think this is going to be a wonderful place to live for our children and grandchildren.

[Steve] Just to pitch on Sharon’s comment on building on our assets, The Institute for the Ages can leverage our older demographic but we have created a very high quality healthcare in this region, in part to serve so many people that move here from elsewhere, and we can broaden our sights for what I’ll call ‘medically based economic development.’ Just like with sports and recreational tourism that builds on one of our competitive advantages, which is we’re a twelve month a year climate and the Harvard, Notre Dame, Wisconsin and Michigan crew teams can’t practice for four months of the year because the water is solid up there so using the weather twelve months a year, sports and recreational tourism can really be an asset. And Institute for the Ages is just leveraging another asset that we have.
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Jacob] I’ve got a couple of questions along the same line and I’m going to chose the one that words this in the most fun way. Matthew Anderson from Milestone Marketing asks, ‘If we are stronger as a region, why should we maintain separate economic development organizations?’ I think I’m going to kick this to Sharon.

Sharon] Thanks, Jacob! (laughter) Well because I think at this point in time it’s probably where we’re at. That’s not to say that in the future that potential doesn’t exist, but I think both communities right now are going through some dynamic changes and right now this is the right thing for us to do. And I think that’s all I’m going to say about that.

Mark] I think there’s a long history—I’m the new guy, so it’s kind of easy for me to sit back and say ‘the airport’s regional, USF is regional, Ringling is regional, Suncoast Workforce is regional, all of our institutions, and many of those that drive economic development, are regional.’ And so in a sense this is a no brainer. And I think in the 10,000 foot view, we get that. I have a contract with the county commissioners and we have funding that is associated with that. She has local relationships and partnerships, so it’s really not our decision, it’s our leadership. And that’s why I was encouraged by the joint commission meetings, by our joint board meetings. The more that our public and private leadership begin to work together and strategize to get together, I think the more we get to where we all know we need to be.

Steve] Just a comment, Mark and I and 27 other community representatives got back recently from the Charleston, South Carolina area that was clobbered with a naval base closure and tens of thousands of job loss. We incurred actually in this recession about a 15,000 greater job loss. Tens and tens and tens of thousands of theirs happened with a newspaper announcement one morning. So they came together and accelerated their developmental regional tools and in fact their economic development and metro chamber set up on a three-county basis. That didn’t happen overnight; it took years. But I would suggest we’re all open to moving in the direction that will work best.

Jacob] I have a question here from Laura Benson: ‘If we are truly talking about regional, what about Venice and North Port? And how do we insure their participation and any growth in the region?’

Mark] Gosh, I’m really sorry if we gave any impression that they weren’t. We’re working on a project right now that is based in Venice that is, considering all other things equal, they would move out of our area. But the reason they don’t want to is because of the workforce in North Port. They’re
a huge part. You've got Tervis in Venice, you've got PGT in Venice. There's still a lot of undeveloped industrial property down there. That's going to be a key economic driver from a real estate standpoint and it's a great location to attract the regional workforce. And for North Port, it's really just a matter of time before companies start locating there and employers start locating there as they do have a great workforce that is being recognized, as this company that I just described to you has done. And again, that word will get out in the market more and more just like all communities whose suburbs develop residentially and initially. But then people say 'Why don't I just locate my business there?' That's going to happen for North Port and we're excited as the EDC to be a part of that.

[Steve] A quick comment as the other Sarasota County-based person here. There's a group that keeps somewhat of a low profile with the acronym of COBA: the Coalition of Business Associations. And that allows business organizations from Venice and North Port to communicate and work for all of us that work together on countywide or region-wide issues. I'll point out that chambers from Venice and North Port and Siesta Key and others and our chamber have collaborated on various projects. One's a small business assistance web portal you get to by energizemybiz.com. That said, we can certainly do more together, particularly once we find the time to do so.

[Jacob] This question from Rod Warner: 'What region is your most active competitor; in other words, who's eating your lunch?'

[Mark] If I can start at Tampa Bay, in my experience, we haven't competed enough with—it's always the same players. It's Jacksonville. In some cases Tampa. It's Boston. We lost a deal to Dallas. It's Charlotte. So all the communities you're aware of, it's not a mystery: we compete against them. And you know those communities are having meetings just like this. They have their volunteer organizations, they are lined up to do the same things we are trying to do to attract talent and to attract the jobs of the future. That's why forums like this and the work we're trying to do are so important. There isn't one particular region we lose out to, and I think increasingly, it hasn't occurred while I've been here, we'll lose deals to other local cities, so the world is just changing. Lucid Global could be anywhere in the world, but that's our marketplace.

[Sharon] And just to echo what Mark said, economic development is so highly competitive. I mean it's just a competitive business. And I would say more states that we compete with, typically Texas is one, they're very, very aggressive with their economic development. Of course, the Southern states as well: Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina. They're offering some things that we're
just not in a position to do right now. They have pretty land, things like that, so we just have to position ourselves in a way that’s very competitive, and we’ve been successful quite frankly. Over the past two years in Manatee County, we’ve landed over sixty projects creating over 4,000 jobs in the next five years. We are getting better at being competitive. That’s the state’s initiative. We’ve got a governor that wants to be the number one business destination in the United States and the world, quite frankly. So things are heading in the right direction and I think we’re seeing many more positives than eating our lunch, so to speak.

[Steve] We didn’t mention political influence, but compete for our fair share of federal attention and state resources and Bob and his chamber have an important issue identified with Medicare funding for our doctors in our area. And if you take over 700,000 people and over 25,000 companies, over 250,000 workers, combine them and our political clout together, we’ll definitely succeed more in our competing for resources and appropriate attention.

[Jacob] All right, thank you guys. I’m going to hand things back over to our publisher Wes Roberts.

[Wes] And thank you Jacob! (applause) Jacob tells me we didn’t even get to half of the questions, even after you take out the duplicates. So something we might ask the panelists for, I won’t put them on the spot here, but maybe after the panel or by email, some of the questions can be sent to you guys. Not all to everyone because that wouldn’t be good to write up a 200-page document, but some of the questions that didn’t get answered, our editorial team will see if we can get answers. And then, everything that was said today is going to be part of a transcript that will be available online as soon as the transcript is done. I can’t promise you exactly how long that will take but we have all your emails and you will know, so it shouldn’t be that long. If I can ask everyone to thank both yourselves as the audience for great questions and for our panelists for a round of applause (applause). A big thank you to moderator Rick Piccolo (applause). SM2 sponsors: the SRQ Airport, Sign Zoo, and Seaside Bank. And two quick points of recognition, one to Marina Jack for giving us such a wonderful venue and a wonderful space for allowing us to use it and then also for Tervis for providing these beautiful SRQ cups that you can see sitting here up at the front; they did come up in the discussion a little bit. As everyone leaves, I would ask you to make sure that you sign off on your ‘Do You SRQ’ pledge; SRQ magazine has naturally enough done it. While I’m up here, this is actually the first time for some reason I’ve had a microphone in my hand in awhile, I forgot to introduce myself at the front. Maybe because I feel like I know so many people here. I’m Wes Roberts; I’m the publisher for SRQ Media Group and one of the co-owners. And also I really like that all the panelists said a little something about themselves and I guess I wanted to share a little in time that I actually typed on my phone. We were talking about inspiration and passion and I want...
to say that I don’t know anyone that works harder with more passion or more effectively than my wife Lisl Liang (applause), I’m just getting started. She’s the company president at SRQ, which I think all of you know. And in the last 45 days, some amazing accomplishments and some amazing things have happened. In her role as editor at SRQ she’s garnered the magazine recognition as best magazine on the west coast of Florida; that’s the fourth year (applause). I don’t mean to wear everyone’s hands out. Many of you also know that Lisl was also named the incoming chair-elect for the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, which is a huge, huge point of recognition. Good luck. We all know what they’re in for. And then just last week, we learned that the baby she is carrying is going to be a little girl. So my inspiration is my wife and she’s the most amazing woman I know. In addition, the next SM2 symposium is on regional workforce development. It will be hosted here at Marina Jack on Thursday, November 15. You may want to reserve your tickets soon; I think you can reserve your tickets as you go out the door. As we said, this event sold out from our original allotment of numbers. We expanded it but if you look at the back, there’s only that much room to add to the next one, so I’m sure it will sell out. Thank you, and see you in November.
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ADDENDUM: Additional Audience Questions Answered

As promised, SRQ asked our panelists some of the questions we didn’t have time to include in the active Q&A session of the September 20, 2012 event.

1. "What one thing would you encourage local elected officials in both counties to do to promote collaboration on economic development on a regional basis?"

[Steve] Let me suggest that the elected officials consider a process of four over-lapping steps:
   · Connect, by getting together more often
   · Learn more about regional issues and resources, by regularly sharing more information
   · Experience all corners of our region, by going on tours and participating in “plunges” that immerse officials in areas less familiar to them
   · Consider, sooner rather than later, applying best practices for regional collaboration, by customizing what has worked well elsewhere to create regional success here on the Suncoast.

"Any thought to exploiting the value of incoming retirees as economic development resources, i.e. executive talent, entrepreneurship, ambassadorship to former communities and industries?"

[Sharon] We certainly recognize the wealth of talent in our community, particularly as it relates to the retired executives living in the region. We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways to engage them in various areas of economic development. Their knowledge, experience and network of contacts domestically and internationally is another unique and valuable asset we should actively develop.