

Florida Trend CUSTOM CONTENT

ST. LUCIE COUNTY







St. Lucie County

By Jeff Zbar

Conveniently located between South and Central Florida, St. Lucie County has become a symbol of economic prosperity. With ample developable land; an able and educated workforce; business and regulatory-friendly leaders; growing tech and health sectors; a thriving historic and cultural scene; and an unharried lifestyle found in few other Florida communities its size, business owners, startups and families alike are increasingly calling this center of Florida's "Treasure Coast" their home. For this and many other reasons, St. Lucie County is open for business.

Florida Trend

CUSTOM CONTENT

AT A GLANCE

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Fort Pierce
County Seat

325,000
County Population

140,785
Employed Workforce

45.3 years
Median Age

\$58,807
Median Household Income

\$231,000
Median Property Value

SOURCE: DATAUSA



Fort Pierce City Marina is home to the Southern Kingfish Association's National Championship Fishing Tournament every three years, bringing 250-300 fishing teams to Downtown Fort Pierce.

St. Lucie County: A Growing Gem on Florida's Treasure Coast

Michael Minton recalls growing up in St. Lucie County in the 1960s and '70s. He'd head west to the open lands and citrus groves, where he'd go quail hunting and exploring.

Today, many of the groves are gone and development is bringing luxury homes and professionals to the "little blue collar community" that Minton grew up amid, says the partner with Fort Pierce law firm Dean, Mead, Minton & Moore. "We've been found," he says.

St. Lucie County has found its place on the map. The county seat, Fort Pierce, was first settled in the 1850s and is named for a fort built around the time of the Third Seminole War. Development thrived with the arrival of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast rail line in 1894. In the 1950s and '60s, General Development Corporation bought up property and created what became for decades a snowbird wintry getaway.

It's not St. Lucie County's size — 688 square miles, of which 572 is land fronting 21 miles of Atlantic — that is its competitive advantage. It's the county's location equidistant from Orlando to the north and Fort Lauderdale at the center of South Florida designated

market area (DMA) to the south. Port St. Lucie is the third-largest city in Southeast Florida and seventh-biggest city in the state by population. In all, the region has 315,000 workers.

Industries here include manufacturing and logistics; marine; health care and life sciences; and green, blue and agricultural tech. The state's "Space Coast" an hour north relies on the county's workforce development efforts.

From grade school to higher education, the county is developing robust home-grown talent to meet current and future needs of families and employers alike. Higher ed includes Aviator College of Aeronautical Science and Technology; Fortis Institute-Port Saint Lucie; Keiser University; and Indian River State College, which is using a \$45 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott to build out its programs and reach.

Today, another train promises to change the county. Brightline, which rolls through St. Lucie County as it travels to and from Orlando and South Florida, will soon have a station here, bringing tourists, leisure and business travelers alike. A stop in the Treasure Coast region will make Brightline "one of the most accessible forms of transportation in Florida, giving access to nearly half of the state's residents," CEO Michael Reininger says.

"This is all in one spot centrally located an hour and a half from Disney and the [Miami] Dolphins," says County Administrator George Landry. Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce both have what business leaders and families seek, he says, "stable government, strong finances, crime is low, infrastructure is strong and relatively new."

Several years ago, the county where I-95 and the Florida Turnpike intersect, was discovered by industrial developers. The county and greater





Along the Fort Pierce waterfront, the Downtown Farmers Market attracts weekly crowds and is ranked sixth in Florida by American Farmland Trust.



“We either currently have the property or developers are developing facilities as a solution for businesses in South Florida that need to grow and expand. The highest and best use of scarce property in South Florida is expensive. Why not come up here to grow your business?”

Peter Tesch
President, Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County

Treasure Coast are home to millions of square feet of industrial and logistics space, serving the likes of FedEx Ground, Amazon and Cheney Brothers, among various manufacturers and others looking for easy access to millions of consumers — and an escape from congestion.

Property in the county is anything but scarce. After hurricanes, citrus canker and greening destroyed tens of thousands of acres of citrus groves, developers moved in (agriculture includes some citrus, other farming, and cattle). Today, developers are erecting homes, industrial parks, even FPL solar farms.

What once was a “sleepy bedroom community” now is a darling of trade, logistics and economic development, says Peter Tesch, president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County.

Local leaders are proud of the active outdoors and adventure tourism the county is known for from the Atlantic to the Okeechobee County line. There’s even a \$100 million, 600-acre motorsports park in development.

“All the things we have talked about are now in play. We’re in a desirable location, with an affordable-housing option to South Florida,” Tesch boasts. “We either currently have the property or developers are developing facilities as a solution for businesses in South Florida that need to grow and expand. The highest and best use of scarce property in South Florida is expensive. Why not come up here to grow your business?”

While elected officials are pro-growth and are investing heavily in infrastructure and utilities, Tesch says, they’ll combat sprawl at every turn. This, even as 2023 saw “incredible motion toward our goal of creating a robust and diverse economy for St. Lucie County,” wrote Tesch in the EDC’s annual report titled, “Progress in Motion.”

Leaders here walk a fine line between development and retaining that small-town feel, says Fort Pierce Mayor Linda Hudson, a local who lauds

everything from the picturesque Indian River Lagoon to the fishing, golfing and free parking at their beaches.

“We have many third- and fourth-generation people, many from farming communities,” says Hudson, who hosts a ghost walk in her city’s downtown every Halloween. “We have retirees, and people who get up to go to work every day. We are diverse.”

Tom Kindred is a county native whose father spent almost four decades in local government. Today, he is regional director with the Small Business Development Center at Indian River State College and has worked with entrepreneurs and startups, health care providers and manufacturers. To wit, the county had 8,500 new business starts in 2022. With a robust network of law and accounting firms, leading banks, including community-based MIDFLORIDA Credit Union — the fourth-largest credit union in the state — it has the infrastructure a growing community needs.

“We have all the pieces,” Kindred says. “We’re becoming the county we were destined to become.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME? FLORIDA’S TREASURE COAST

St. Lucie, Martin and Indian River counties comprise Florida’s Treasure Coast — named for the bounty lost when 11 Spanish ships wrecked offshore in a hurricane 300 years ago between the St. Lucie River and what is now Cape Canaveral.



OCULUS Surgical, a Germany-based ophthalmologic precision instrument manufacturer, has a new manufacturing facility in Port St. Lucie.

Building with Room for Growth

When Byron Russell considered where to put Cheney Brothers' next food service distribution facility, he thought about what a new warehouse would require. It would need plenty of space, great highway connections, and room for growth that his land-locked facility in Riviera Beach in Palm Beach County couldn't provide.

He looked south to find "astronomical" prices. Then he looked north — 45 miles on I-95 exactly — to find all the attributes he needed. Today, Cheney Brothers' 375,000-square-foot distribution center is located on 53 acres in Port St. Lucie — the epicenter of a growing community and around a three hours' drive to millions of hungry Floridians to the north and south.

"I see a lot of growth there in restaurants and homes," says Russell, the chairman and CEO of the \$3 billion food distributor that his maternal grandfather, Joe Cheney, opened in 1925. He's also closer to his workforce, a quarter of whom used to drive to Riviera Beach from St. Lucie County. "The new site made sense. It's a business-friendly county and the market was really starting to take off."

If a site planner went looking for the ideal location for a logistics center, St. Lucie County may be that place. It offers two highways — Florida's Turnpike and I-95, which cross in the county — nearby rail lines, and ample room for growth.

If ever its location was a secret, then the secret is out. Cheney Brothers is only the latest distribution center to rise from the former agricultural land. In fact, more than

6 million square feet of industrial facilities are recently completed, under construction or have site plan approvals in with the county.

What companies find in the county is an "aggressive posture" developed over the past five years to encourage business development, job creation and a bustling industrial, manufacturing and logistics sector, says George Landry, county administrator of St. Lucie County.

A short list of newly built industrial and warehouse sites includes Interstate Commerce Center, a 207,458-square-foot industrial building; Interstate Crossroads Logistics Center, featuring over 1 million square feet; and Kings Logistics Center, a 664,000-square-foot space.

The Sansone Group is developing Legacy Park at Tradition, a 425-acre Class-A industrial park in Port St. Lucie. Current tenants include Amazon, FedEx Ground and the Cheney Brothers' warehouse, as well as two spec buildings totalling some 700,000 square feet.

Stonemont Financial Group can boast what is the largest building in St. Lucie County — the 1.1 million-square-foot South Florida Logistics Center.

Manufacturing also has a home in the county. Phoenix Metal Products in Fort Pierce manufactures aviation equipment, and TAMCO had been operating out of five locations before the lighting company built 400,000 square feet of manufacturing and distribution space in the Tradition Center for Commerce in 2018. Accel Industries manufactures high-performance conductors.

In all, some 1,900 manufacturers employ 27,500 throughout the region, says Micah R. Daugherty with the South Florida Manufacturers Association. The sector's gross domestic product is \$4.59 billion across such sectors as boat and marine manufacturing, aircraft and aerospace components, medical-device manufacturers, fabricated metal parts and structures, cement manufacturing, and agricultural and juice producers, he says.

"Manufacturing in the Treasure Coast is evolving and has become an integral part of the local economy," he says.

The Treasure Coast has added nearly 2 million square feet of new construction in 2023, which enjoyed positive absorption, despite a flood of construction. With some of the lowest industrial land costs compared with southern counties, it is an enticing destination for businesses seeking cost-effective and accessible operations, says Kenneth M. Krasnow, vice chair of institutional investor services for Colliers in Florida.

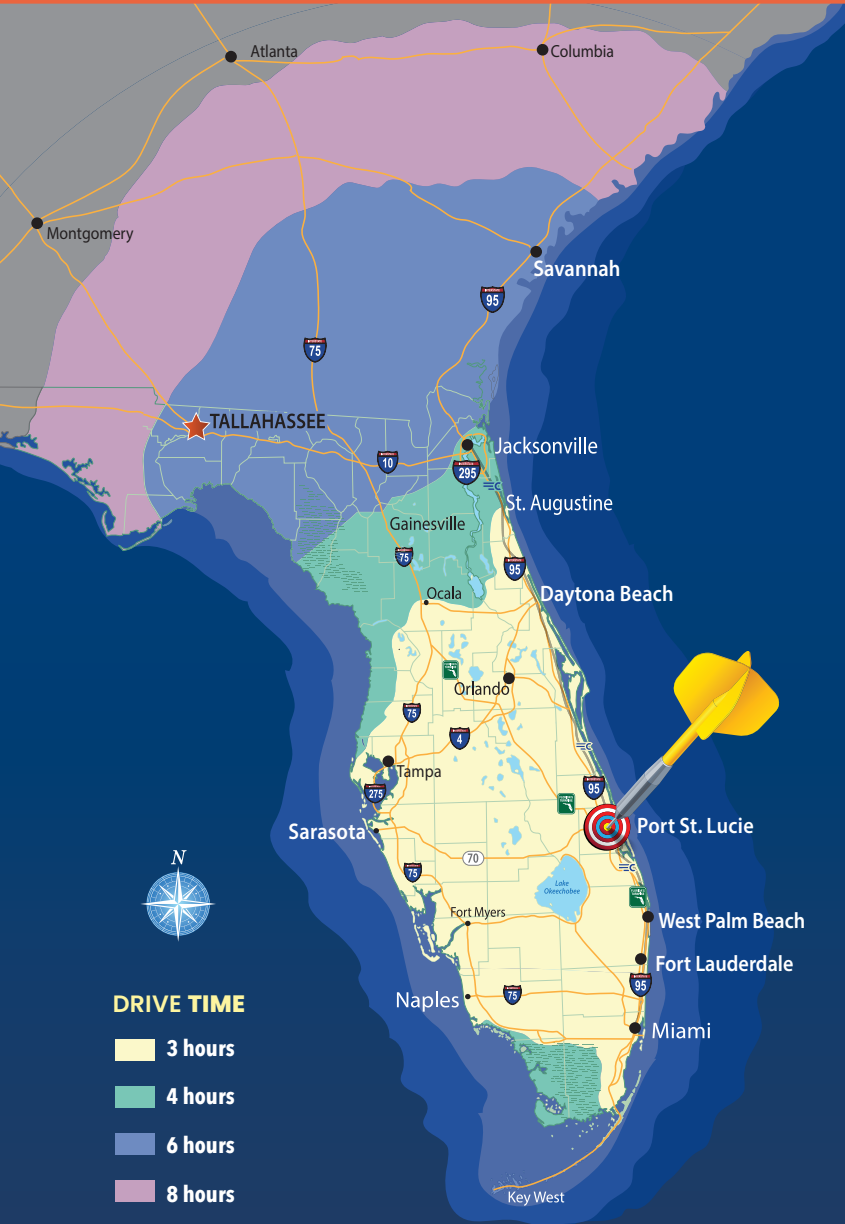
"St. Lucie County's industrial sector has undergone remarkable growth, solidifying its position as a pivotal player in Florida's economic landscape," Krasnow says. "The convergence of market drivers — location, accessibility, land availability, low costs, and a skilled workforce — coupled with ongoing housing developments and population growth, positions St. Lucie County as a dynamic and competitive hub for industrial, manufacturing, and logistics growth."



City officials and Cheney Brothers executives break ground in Legacy Park, Port St. Lucie. The 375,000 SF warehouse bolsters the company's regional distribution network.

DISCOVER

St. Lucie County, Florida



➤ Home to Port St. Lucie, the **#10** fastest-growing large city in the U.S.

– U.S. Census Bureau July 2020–July 2021

➤ **6+ million** square feet of Class A industrial space with almost **4 million** available for immediate occupancy

EXPLORE these great facilities here



➤ Regional workforce of **315,000+**

St. Lucie  EDC



2023 EXCELLENCE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD WINNER



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A Center for Leading-Edge Research

Health, technology and environmental sciences put the “research” in the “research coast.”

Given this name for the burgeoning research sector found here, St. Lucie County and the Treasure Coast continue to draw new researchers in search of the latest advancements.

Proximity to the waterways, agriculture and expanding health care sector make St. Lucie County an ideal living laboratory for the science and research sector.

Since 1971, when Harbor Branch Oceanographic Foundation was created in Fort Pierce, the region has grown into a thriving center for marine and life sciences.

Today, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, which was acquired by Florida Atlantic University in 2007, is exploring issues critical to the region — and the world. Its 200 scientists, engineers, educators, staff and students on the 144-acre campus along the Indian River Lagoon are working to uncover potential human health hazards associated with the harmful algae blooms in the nearby Indian River Lagoon and other



The Discovery pontoon is Florida Atlantic University Harbor Branch's new floating laboratory. Visitors tour the Indian River Lagoon with professional marine scientists as their guides, learning about the flora and fauna of the lagoon.

interplay between coastal zones, climates, ecosystems and mankind.

It's also helping build out the region's next generation of scientists, says James M. Sullivan, executive director of the institute.

Research universities play a long-standing role in area science and discovery. In 2020, Florida International University, a Carnegie R1 top-tier research university, acquired Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies located in Port St. Lucie. Torrey Pines had been recruited to the region in 2007.

The goal was to create a “special purpose center” to advance medicinal chemical and chemical biological

research. It was renamed the FIU Center for Translational Science. The center complements FIU's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine and the Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work.

Its mission is to train doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows to become scientists and doctors, specializing in such disciplines as lung, vascular and airway disease; brain injury and aging; inflammation, infection and immunity; environment medicine; and bioinformatics, among other areas.

Created in 2008 with a \$60 million grant from the State of Florida's Innovation Center Fund, the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute of Florida



“Florida is on the front lines of many of the environmental challenges facing the world. Training the next generation of scientists to meet these challenges is critical to our future. HBOI attracts the brightest minds and gives them the education and tools they need to help solve the most pressing issues facing our oceans and coasts.”

James M. Sullivan
Executive Director, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute

explores biomedical research. Its mission is to “translate research into health” by providing a better understanding of the human immune response to pathogens and cancers and the process of aging.

Nearby, the Florida Research & Innovation Center, located on the campus of Tradition Hospital, performs research into advancing medicine and saving lives. It has been awarded \$28.6 million in funding to date and employs almost 100 scientists and other professionals in eight labs in five cores of research.

Drawing on the region’s deep history in ecology and agriculture, the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, or UF/IFAS, collaborates locally with St. Lucie County to explore critical issues and provide community assistance in such areas as commercial horticulture, citrus, cattle, natural resources, and food and nutrition, and help residents and visitors learn more about the local environment.

These research institutions are delivering more than an examination of local and global ecology, climate and life science. They’re creating an ecosystem of high-paid researchers and scientists and support staff who are helping boost the local economy, while establishing the county and Treasure Coast as a center of scientific exploration.

Florida’s 156-mile-long Indian River Lagoon (IRL) borders five different counties and has five inlets that connect the lagoon with the Atlantic Ocean. In recent years, this estuary has experienced numerous phytoplankton bloom events because of increased seasonal temperatures coupled with environmental impacts.



Researchers from FAU's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute collect water samples to identify the presence of known or emerging toxins potentially harmful to humans.

FLORIDA ATTORNEYS SERVING THE TREASURE COAST SINCE 1987



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- Water Law



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DEAN | MEAD

Joined by the expertise of their fellow 45 attorneys located throughout Florida, Dean Mead's Treasure Coast Team works with businesses in a number of industries including: agriculture, banking, healthcare, hospitality, land use, real estate development, and technology.



Building at the Center of Growth

For developers looking to build residential communities and commercial space, St. Lucie County is ideally suited to their needs. Much of its 572 square miles that's not active agricultural land, natural preserves or lakes and waterways is prime for current and future development.

The available land, along with some 10,000 residents arriving every year, combine to create the ideal opportunity for growth. Whether luxury condominiums and waterfront homes to the east, middle-class communities suited to serve growing families, or workforce housing for the blossoming business market, developers have seen the maps and Census figures and are building for tomorrow.

Even with all the available land, infill is finding its place. To the east, a development is slated to rise on the 7.2-acre site of the former H.D. King electric plant in downtown Fort Pierce. King's Landing, a \$155 million, mixed-use project from master developer Audubon Development, will bring condominiums and apartments, more than 50,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, and a 140-room Marriott hotel, all near the Indian River Lagoon.

When it delivers in about four years, with its Spanish-style architecture from Cronk Duch Architecture in St. Augustine — another historic town, King's Landing will jibe with downtown Fort Pierce's historic vibe, says Dale Matteson, president and CEO of Audubon Development. He almost didn't bid on the city's RFP. But then he walked the streets and considered the possibilities.



Within each of the four Riverland communities, residents enjoy a social hall, resort-style pool, sports room, dining options, as well as a racquet club, wellness facility and cultural center.

"The more I looked around, the more I was intrigued by it," says Matteson, who worked with Mayor Linda Hudson, Pete Tesch, president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, and city planners to inform his approach. Audubon also is renovating the historic Coast Guard House along Seaway Trail in Fort Pierce. "The site has historic underpinnings. It's a fishing village with that old Florida charm. Fort Pierce is one of those cities time forgot."

Throughout St. Lucie County, developers have caught on. Two decades ago, Core Communities launched Tradition, a 10,000-acre master-planned enclave that helped bring "new urbanism" development with a small-town feel to the national consciousness. Tradition was acquired by Mattamy Homes in 2018.

More recently, Kolter Land's Oak Ridge Ranches in Port St. Lucie is a 3,000-acre master-planned. Built upon former citrus groves and cattle pasture, the project will

deliver some 8,600 residential units, 27 acres of commercial, schools and parks.

GL Homes broke ground on the 4,000-acre Riverland master-planned, active adult community in Port St. Lucie in 2018. To date, more than 3,000 homes have sold at its Valencia Cay, Valencia Grove and Valencia Walk at Riverland communities. Its fourth community there launched sales last year.

As the seventh-largest city in Florida, located just 30 minutes north of West Palm Beach, Port St. Lucie offers many of the perks of a large city, like world-class health care, shopping and restaurants.

"At the same time, residents can enjoy wide open spaces, nature preserves, quiet beaches, and an overall more relaxed pace of life," says Ryan Courson, GL Homes' division president. "We're very bullish on Port St. Lucie."

With most of these developments, city and county leaders hope smart planning and limited density safeguards the small-town spirit, says George Landry, county administrator of St. Lucie County. County planners are requiring more green space, and sustainable and resilient development. Consider Oak Ridge Ranches. It could have had tens of thousands of homes.

"We have a lot of acreage to grow, but density is not the key. Kolter is focused on less density, more spacious lots," Landry says. "The board is embracing the growth, but they're doing it smart. If growth is coming, we're going to try to keep some of our culture."



On an adjoining site to the mixed-use King's Landing project, 10 luxury villas are under construction, with a 49-slip city marina across the street.

OPPORTUNITY IS ON THE HORIZON

TREASURE COAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

With tremendous growth potential, Treasure Coast International Airport (FPR) spans 3,844 acres and is home to nearly 6 dozen tenants. FPR features an FAA air traffic control tower, index B aircraft rescue & firefighting services, a full service FBO, U.S. Customs and Border Protection office, and is on the cusp of achieving FAA approved commercial air service, including TSA security screening.

For businesses looking to expand or relocate, FPR has economic advantages over competitors and an ideal global location, with extensive land available to lease and develop. The airport is within Foreign Trade Zone 218 enabling competitive advantages to trade goods to and from the U.S.



St. Lucie Board of County Commissioners



TREASURE COAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

FlyTCL.com

PORT OF FORT PIERCE

St. Lucie County is enthusiastic about current and future port development. Plans are underway to develop the nearby, County-owned Harbour Pointe Park, and our strong relationship with Derecktor Shipyards, a global leader in megayacht maintenance/repair, will continue to attract marine interests worldwide. The Port of Fort Pierce features the world's largest mobile boat hoist and recently received Foreign Trade Zone, subzone designation (FTZ 218A), which will ensure the port maintains a competitive advantage into the future.

www.StLucieCo.gov/port

ST. LUCIE COUNTY
FLORIDA

StLucieCo.gov





Twin Vee's Fort Pierce factory is expanding its floor space by approximately 30,000 square feet in anticipation of adding Aquasport boats to its manufacturing line.

Growing the Marine Sector

When power sports boat maker Twin Vee PowerCats announced in 2023 that it would move manufacturing of its Aquasport line to its Fort Pierce facility from Tennessee, it cited a number of benefits. The move would increase efficiency, create cost savings across its brands and provide product oversight over its growing 100,000 square feet of production space.

"We believe by bringing production for both the Twin Vee and Aquasport brands under one roof, we can not only reduce our overall costs, but also enhance the quality and speed of our boat production," company president and CEO Joseph Visconti says in a release.

The Treasure Coast is a growing hub of manufacturing, repair and overhaul able to provide critical services not found in marine destinations elsewhere. Manufacturers include Pursuit Boats, Contender Boats and Maverick Boats, among others spanning the Treasure Coast.

In all, the marine sector employs some 10,000 in the region, and drives an economic impact of \$1.4 billion, says Justin Beard, executive director of the Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast, which represents boat makers and service providers from Martin to Indian River counties. The association also owns the Stuart Boat Show, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in January.

Those service providers include maintenance, repair, refit and new construction companies like Derecktor Ft. Pierce, known as a pioneering first shipyard designed and built specifically for megayachts.

Having recently signed a 75-year lease for its space situated directly inside Fort Pierce Inlet three nautical miles from the Atlantic Ocean, Derecktor offers deep-water access and a 1,500-ton hoist.

Manufacturers, repair centers and the industry itself is working closely with area workforce development and educators, like Indian River State College, to address one lingering issue: talent development. Beard hosts tours where career candidates can visit marine centers to see what's available. They're working to lure high school students and others eager for a high-paying, stable job in a

career many never would have thought of "growing up in a sleepy, beachside town," he says.

What they'll find is that from the Intracoastal Waterway across the Florida Inland Navigation District to Okeechobee to the Indiantown Marina in Martin County, where a possible marine trade school is being discussed, the economic impact of commercial and recreational boating spans the region.

"The marine industry has been here as long as people started fishing in the area," Beard says. "What's here in the Treasure Coast is being realized."



"To the yacht industry, St. Lucie County and Fort Pierce offer much of what Broward County and Fort Lauderdale did 60 years ago — a laid-back Old Florida vibe, great beaches and waterways, a friendly town with plenty of good local restaurants and entertainment — and a rapidly growing yacht market. With Fort Pierce inlet, the Port of

Fort Pierce, and the many beautiful area waterways, the physical advantages of St. Lucie County are the foundation for what will be home to a burgeoning yacht-centered business community."

John Koenig

Chief Marketing and Sales Officer, Derecktor Shipyards

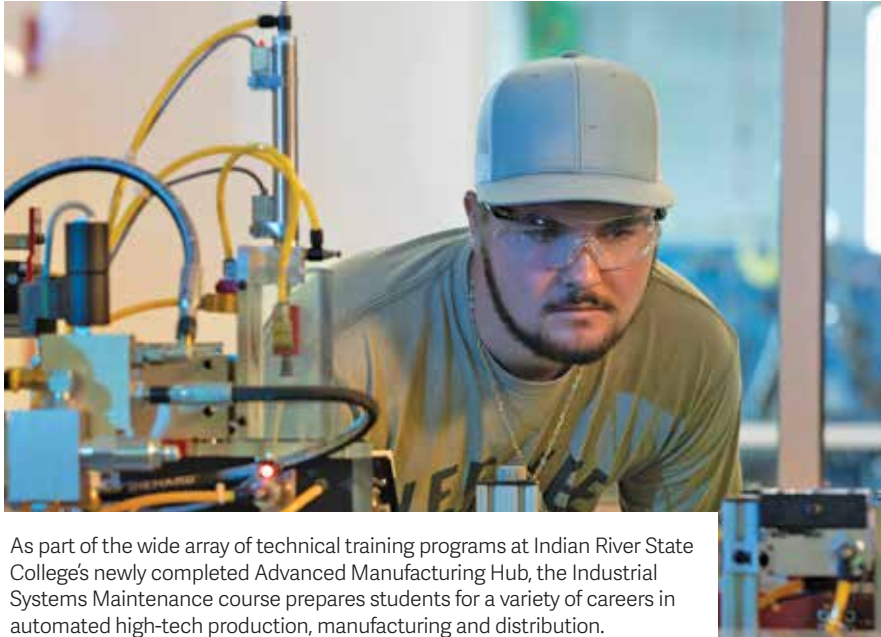
ROOTED IN CAREFREE GETAWAYS

Unplug, unwind, and rejuvenate your mind. Escape into the miles of untouched estuaries and nature preserves begging to be explored or sink your toes into the pillowy sand of our relaxed beaches. St. Lucie County, Florida offers an expansive list of ways to spend your time - on land, in the water, or on the town. Whether you choose to do everything or nothing at all, our sunny days and good vibes will be everything a vacation should be.

*Come explore. Visit us at
VisitStLucie.com*

VISIT *St. Lucie* 

FORT PIERCE • PORT ST. LUCIE • HUTCHINSON ISLAND



As part of the wide array of technical training programs at Indian River State College's newly completed Advanced Manufacturing Hub, the Industrial Systems Maintenance course prepares students for a variety of careers in automated high-tech production, manufacturing and distribution.

Grade School, Grad School and Career Training for the Future

When educators in St. Lucie County want to introduce students to their possible futures, sometimes they take the future to the student.

From grade-school programs to colleges and universities, educators across the county are looking for ways to ensure the youngest students get the highest possible education as a springboard to a place in the future workforce.

St. Lucie Public Schools partnered with the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County to perform an employer skills-gap analysis to determine what jobs high school graduates would find up to 15 years out if they decided not to go to college. Mind you, this from a district whose graduation rate already was 90%, and was growing upward of 1,800 students a year.

The district's career and technical education programs offer almost 60 disciplines targeting students, starting with middle schoolers. From the trades to allied health, they're all careers the growing community will demand. The Embry-Riddle Aerospace Academy at Fort Pierce Central High School is a satellite campus that's preparing students for careers in the state's aerospace sector located an hour north.

"Aerospace is creating jobs so fast, they can't keep up," says Jon Prince, superintendent of St. Lucie Public Schools. "Students realize what's available with career and technical education. If kids aren't going to college, they need to get into the workforce."

Workforce development spans ages. Those looking to find jobs often turn to CareerSource Research Coast. The private, non-profit workforce development agency matches — and often upskills — local talent for employers in St. Lucie, Martin and Indian River counties. Its certified workforce professionals are recognized by their peers as leaders in workforce development.

To show younger students what disciplines they may want to pursue, Indian River State College (IRCS) hosts "discover days" where they showcase different career options. Florida Atlantic University works with the school district to encourage "early exposure" to higher education, says Cara Perry, FAU's associate vice

president of research communications. Professionals volunteer for the career-speaking series. The goal is "getting kids while they're young," she says.

Once enrolled, students will find a highly diverse campus with millions of dollars in available financial aid, Perry says. Some 4,000 FAU students are placed in internships annually. Area educators are "changing hearts and minds" and helping young students find their future, says Andrew Treadwell, campus president of IRSC's Pruitt Campus.

At Keiser University Port St. Lucie Campus, the top majors are nursing, radiologic technology, psychology, business and information technology, says Linda Fitzpatrick, campus director of strategic alliance. Hospitals, urgent-care facilities, school districts and law enforcement are eager to hire graduates, she says.

What if students could graduate debt free? IRSC created the Promise program to entice high schoolers to pursue higher education. In what's become a model for other colleges, any high school graduate with a 2.0 grade point average regardless of family income will have their IRSC tuition waived. Some 80% of the students are African-American or Hispanic, equally split male to female. The student emerges career ready — and debt free.

"Workforce development is our primary mission," says Timothy Moore, president of IRSC. "There's a shift in the value of education. Is it worth going into \$150,000 in debt to go to school?"

IRSC is pushing education to where the students are. The \$35 million Eastman Advanced Workforce Training Complex, a 60,000-square-foot facility in Fort Pierce, is preparing the next generation of workers. Students learn in immersive educational environments with the latest technology and guided by experienced instructors. In partnership with the Small Business Development Center, IRSC also will offer entrepreneurial training for hopeful small business owners. In Martin County, the 400-student Indiantown Charter High School emphasizes in-demand career training.

While many economic development professionals often rely on financial incentives to lure business, Moore says the needs have changed. "Businesses don't need tax breaks any more. They're looking for educational partners and quality health care."



FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Harbor Branch
Oceanographic Institute

Ocean Science for a
**Better
World[®]**

Florida Atlantic's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute

is a world-class research organization with a focus on exploring the marine environments, studying key species and understanding the connection between humans and the ocean. **Located in St. Lucie County**, its 144-acre campus along the **Indian River Lagoon** employs more than 200 scientists, engineers, educators, staff and students who prioritize solution-oriented research, addressing critical issues impacting coastal zone, oceans and human well-being.



Discover the Indian River Lagoon on the Discovery pontoon.
Book your boat tour today. www.fau.edu/hboi/bookatour
5600 US-1, Fort Pierce, FL 34946

A Tradition of World-Class Health Care

When site selection and relocation teams scout new markets, one of the first questions raised on behalf of the employers or families is the quality of health care. With Florida one of the nation's fastest growing states, hospitals are tasked with delivering the latest care to meet a dynamic population. In St. Lucie County, new arrivals have ample choices.

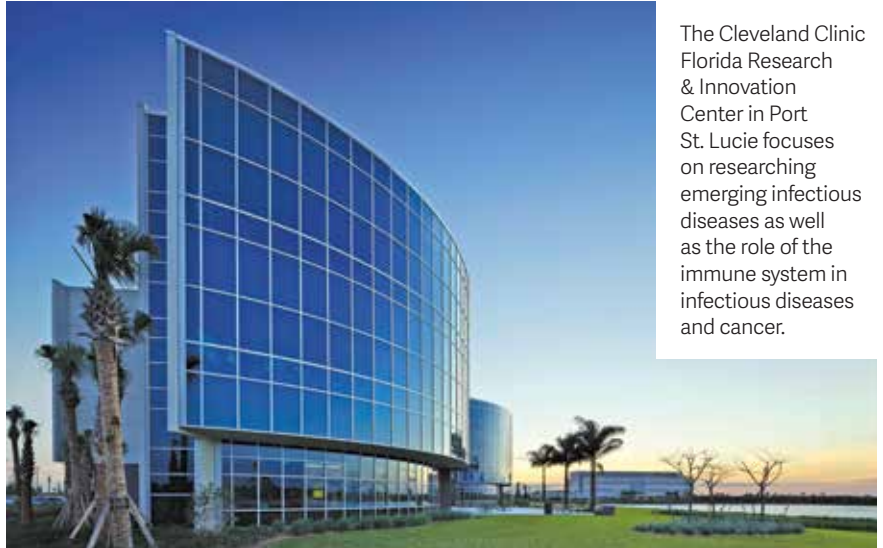
Exit I-95 into the master-planned community of Tradition in Port St. Lucie, and one of the first buildings that appears is Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital. Since expanding to the Treasure Coast in 2019, Cleveland Clinic has added medical services in that location and others serving the market.

Today, it offers cardiac cath procedures, interventional radiology, colorectal surgery, maternal-fetal medicine, neurosurgery and interventional procedures for stroke and other neurological care. In 2023, the hospital received certification as a comprehensive stroke center.

Reflective of the region's growth, in 2022, Cleveland Clinic Martin Health led the Treasure Coast with the most births and was rated high performing in 2022 and 2023 in U.S. News and World Report's Best Hospitals for Maternity Care.

In all, the network has four facilities along the Treasure Coast, from Stuart north to Vero Beach, says Rishi Singh, MD, vice president and chief medical officer with Cleveland Clinic Martin Health.

"Our short-term goals are to keep advancing quality and access to make it easier for patients to see us, whether in person or virtually," says Singh, who has recruited specialists in oncology,



The Cleveland Clinic Florida Research & Innovation Center in Port St. Lucie focuses on researching emerging infectious diseases as well as the role of the immune system in infectious diseases and cancer.

neurosurgery, otolaryngology, orthopedic surgery and heart and vascular to the network. "We plan to continue recruiting and bringing more talent to our teams."

HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital is a comprehensive, 207-bed facility with an emergency room and acute-care services, including rehabilitation, obstetrics, inpatient and outpatient surgery and orthopedic care. The 380-bed HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital provides a heart institute, level II trauma center, a comprehensive stroke center and a level III neonatal intensive care unit, as well as a pediatric emergency room.

For those in need, HANDS of St. Lucie County clinic offers more than \$11 million in critical free health and dental care. The return on each dollar invested is \$15.60 for partners such as the county, health department, school district and community services, as well as community and business organizations.

The market also is home to advanced health care research. Florida Research

and Innovation Center, located on the campus of Tradition Hospital, conducts research across five areas, including immuno-oncology and infectious diseases.

More than 97,000 nurses nationwide left the profession during and following the Covid pandemic, notes the National Institutes of Health. Florida was not an exception. In order to rebuild staffing levels, hospitals here are partnering with educators to train the next generation of providers, says Lori Matich, senior director of nursing with Tradition Hospital.

Colleges and universities, including Indian River State College and Keiser University, collaborate with hospitals to attract, train and certify talent. Two years ago, Indian River State College doubled its nursing program, investing some \$13.5 million to grow the program and transform its Pruitt Campus in Port St. Lucie into state-of-the-art nursing classrooms and simulated clinical settings to train RNs and certified nursing assistants. Its passing rate for the RN boards: 98%.

Whether students or new arrivals, "it's important that people know you have a strong educational and health care system," says Linda Fitzpatrick, director of strategic alliance with Keiser University Port St. Lucie campus. The university also trains students in health allied fields, including dietetics and nutrition and occupational therapy, among others. "We grow our own. They go to high school here, nursing school here, then go to work here."



In response to the critical need for more nurses, IRSC School of Nursing opened a 12,000-square-foot facility with state-of-the-art simulation and training stations, and intends to double the number of graduates from its nursing programs.

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Laying the Groundwork for Tomorrow

In the 1890s, Henry Flagler brought his railroad through St. Lucie County. About 130 years later, the Brightline passenger rail system rolled its first train back through the county, connecting South Florida to Orlando.

Today, with a Brightline station planned for the county, rail, the airport, seaport, a burgeoning electrical grid, and other systems vital to growth comprise the infrastructure upon which future growth will depend.

When the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County issued its 2023 annual report, it called the year Progress in Motion. For good reason; The county is growing and infrastructure is keeping up.

Those Brightline trains that rolled through brought with them a call for proposals on where to build the station in the area. The Treasure Coast International Airport, whose 3,800 acres make it one of the largest airports in the region, was working on a runway extension to 8,000 feet and another taxiway as it awaits word on approval of its Part 139 application to allow for commercial air service, says Cameron Howard, the airport director.

The St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee counties comprise Free Trade Zone #218. That, and U.S. Customs onsite, are important for a growing



The FPL Sundew Solar Energy Center, located on 484 acres, consists of 236,244 photovoltaic solar panels, produces 74.5 megawatts of clean energy and powers about 15,000 homes with renewable energy.

business sector — and those with eyes on international opportunities. “Those businesses will want to expand,” Howard says.

While not home to a cruise or large cargo sector — it once handled citrus headed north — the Port of Fort Pierce, nonetheless, serves the region’s growing personal and commercial marine industry. As only one of 14 deepwater ports in Florida — and the only one between Port of Palm Beach and Port Canaveral — the port, operated with partner Derecktor Shipyards, serves St. Lucie, Indian River, Okeechobee, Highlands, Hendry, Glades and Martin counties and has the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) railway mainline nearby. It was recognized in 2023

for its “dramatic change” as one of the nation’s “engines of economic expansion: Ports, Inland Ports and Depots,” noted industry publication Trade and Industry Development.

FPL has more than one million solar panels installed across the county, and its St. Lucie Nuclear Plant located on Hutchinson Island about eight miles southeast of Ft. Pierce has been powering more than a million homes in the region for more than 45 years. That’s atop the power generated by the Fort Pierce Utilities Authority, which serves 28,000 customers.

Along with FPL’s one million solar panels in the county, and its nuclear plant on Hutchinson Island, the Fort Pierce Utilities Authority last year broke ground on its sewer treatment plant five miles inland from the current plant’s location on the Indian River Lagoon. The \$130 million initiative is designed to both protect the lagoon, improve energy efficiency and water use, and meet future growth needs. Aggressive pursuit of various grant programs funded the plant relocation, and will return future initiatives, including for electrical grid hardening and resilience, says Javier Cisneros, director of utilities with the authority.

Next up: Plans for area regional transit to transport an eager, lower-income workforce to higher paying jobs. All together, county, municipality and private sector investments in infrastructure will fund future growth — and long-term sustainability.



“The future development of the Port of Fort Pierce is essential for the county’s focus on a blue economy. These critical waterfront areas, and our future partnerships with those developing them, will provide unique opportunities for our community which, if developed responsibly, can diversify our workforce and strengthen our economic resiliency.”

Joshua Revord
St. Lucie County Director of Port, Inlet and Beaches



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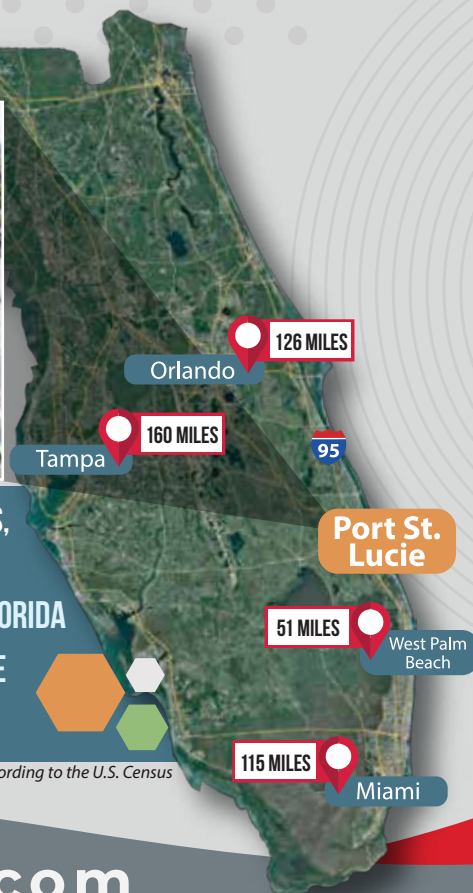
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Home to History and Culture

Walk into the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery to take a trip back in time.

The A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery is named after Albert Ernest “Beanie” Backus, a Fort Pierce painter of iconic images of the Florida landscape, he’s also known as a mentor to such African-American artists as Harold Newton and Alfred Hair.

The pioneering “Highwaymen” — and some two dozen others — sold their early works for dollars from the roadside or by going door to door to doctor’s or attorney’s offices. Today, some of those works can fetch upward of \$35,000 or more at auction. There’s a Highwaymen festival and a TV series has been discussed to tell their tale.

“Harold Newton came to my husband’s office” to sell his paintings, says Mary “Misty” Minton, whose husband, Michael, is a partner with law firm Dean, Mead, Minton & Moore. “We’re very close to having this story told.”

It’s upon that canvas that St. Lucie County’s cultural presence is drawn.

The county has an outsized presence for arts, culture and tourism. St. Lucie Cultural Alliance is the representative organization for the county’s arts and cultural sector.

Over the last decade, foundation funds have supported hundreds of charitable organizations with missions ranging from child welfare to public art, including the historic Sunrise Theater, the Lyric Theatre, the Kane Center, the Golden Gate Enrichment Center, House of Hope, the Children’s Museum, The



A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery houses paintings by A.E. Backus, a prominent Florida landscape painter who inspired the Florida Highwaymen, a group of 26 African-American landscape artists known for creating thousands of now-valuable paintings that were once sold roadside.

Elliott Museum, Boys & Girls Clubs, and the Dolphin Fountain at Indian Riverside Park, says Elizabeth Barbella, president and CEO of The Community Foundation Martin – St. Lucie.

She called local funding “the heartbeat of what’s going on in our backyard.” Nine in 10 dollars it receives stay in the community. With the pandemic-driven arrival of thousands of new residents to the region, affluent donors and families have created a giving boom. Such generosity was nothing new, Barbella says. “We live in a very generous region. As the number of residents grows, so does the interest level. As the community changes, people are wondering, ‘How can I be a part of that?’”

Culture also is funded in part by the tourism sector. Post-Covid, St. Lucie County’s tourism has been on a rebound. Tourism revenue records helped fund \$57 million in renovations at Clover Park, the spring training home of the New York Mets and the summer home of the St. Lucie Mets.

Treasure Coast tourism has found success with a bit of levity. A video podcast

and marketing campaign themed, “Don’t Come Here,” highlights different businesses and tourist attractions throughout the three-county area. The hook: “Unless you like uncrowded beaches or beautiful sunrises over the ocean.”

Charlotte Bireley, an area native and director of tourism and marketing with Visit St. Lucie in the county office of tourism, gave a short list of the region’s tourism hotspots. There is eco-tourism such as kayak tours through the mangroves and three state parks and 25,000 acres of preserves. There is world-class fishing in the ocean or the Indian River Lagoon. There are equestrian activities; historic tourism; tours of local breweries, wine and cider establishments along the TC Wine & Ale Trail; the National UDT-Seal Museum; the Heathcote Botanical Gardens; and the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery.

“We market this as an outdoor haven,” Bireley says. “It’s more affordable than other Florida destinations, an off-the-beaten-path stop equidistant from Miami and Orlando.”

The arrival of the Brightline train in the coming years will only serve to open the region to domestic and international tourists and other travelers riding between the Palm Beaches and Orlando. Bireley sees them as feeder markets passing through 32 times a day.

“If it comes to downtown Fort Pierce, which is such a walkable destination, it’s a perfect fit,” Bireley says. Brightline is currently fielding bids for the location of its Treasure Coast station. “The sky’s the limit.”



A \$2.6 million renovation project was recently completed to replace the Clover Park baseball field in time for the New York Mets spring training.

A map of Florida is shown in white against a blue background. The map is divided into counties. Several green and blue icons, representing Cleveland Clinic locations, are placed on the map. These icons are located in the Treasure Coast region (St. Johns, St. Lucie, Indian River, and Volusia counties) and in the South Florida region (Broward, Dade, and Miami-Dade counties).

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Under the visionary leadership of founder, chairman and CEO John Herring, and the strategic direction of President Jan S. Beck, supported by a seasoned leadership team, A-1 is at the forefront of industry advancements.

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A-1 Industries has been recognized as the 2022 Manufacturer of the Year from the South Florida Manufacturer's Association and as a Florida Trend 2023 Business to Watch. A-1 continues to lead the charge in using technology to innovate construction and its commitment to technology, sustainability, and its people positions it as a key player in shaping the future of home construction.

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