

TAKING NEW FLIGHT

WITH THE SHUTTLE PROGRAM PHASING OUT, BREVARD OFFICIALS ARE PUSHING FORWARD IN PURSUIT OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN SPACE AS WELL AS AROUND THE CORNER.

by Kevin Fritz

DID YOU KNOW?

- NASA/Kennedy Space Center's overall reach in Central Florida creates 32,700 jobs and \$1.7 billion in household income.
- 95.8 percent of all NASA contract dollars spent in Florida in fiscal year 2006 stayed in Central Florida (96 cents of every dollar).
- 1,922 of the 13,630 on-site/near-site workers at KSC in fiscal year 2006 lived in Central Florida counties other than Brevard.
- The average annual salary for KSC on-site workers in fiscal year 2006 was \$72,000.

Being charged with the economic development of a county that is directly associated with the nation's space program can be one of the most exciting jobs anywhere. After all, there is already talk of permanently manned research facilities on the surface of the moon, along with orbiting tourist "hotels" for weekend getaways.

Yet, the job also can be quite challenging, especially now, because a major threat to local employment looms with the inevitable shuttering of the space shuttle. Just ask Lynda Weatherman, president and CEO of the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast.

"The shuttle program will sunset in 2010, and the next generation of space exploration will begin in 2013," says Weatherman. "That leaves a three-year gap and will affect about 3,500 jobs."

Indeed, while the Space Coast EDC is responsible for the economic stability and growth of all of Brevard — and the economy is driven by a variety of other sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, education, financial services and construction — it's the chloroforming of the shuttle program that is getting much of the current attention.

"We have been working on this issue since 2005," Weatherman continues.

Within every dark cloud there exists a

silver lining, though. Weatherman says ending one space program opens the door for another venture and that the EDC is preparing for the future.

One key component of the solution was helping Lockheed Martin secure the Crew Exploration Vehicle contract from NASA and bring the Final Assembly and Checkout operations to Kennedy Space Center. The CEV, America's new spacecraft for human space exploration, will bring 450 jobs directly to the area.

"The CEV will help mitigate the job loss. It's only 450 jobs of the 3,500, but it's a step in the right direction," Weatherman comments.

Weatherman points to the domino effect of helping a company like Lockheed, which she says is the focus of the EDC. "This opens different chapters in the book to contract with NASA," she explains.

Frank DiBello, chairman of the EDC's Space Advisory Committee, adds that the EDC has a plan in place for developing a supply chain to accommodate the vast opportunities that await the post-space shuttle era. DiBello also is president of the ITV Group, which specializes in technology development and space industry investments.

"To build the next generation of space exploration will take thousands of subcontractors," he says. "The EDC is trying to expand the supply chain."

The next-generation space program will include not only the CEV, but also support of the launch vehicle, system engineering for the lunar descent module, and the design and architecture for ground support infrastructure. "These will all be required if we are going to the moon," DiBello says. "And we will be going back to the moon and to the space station." He also notes that the EDC's supply-chain program is a "great fit" for the current National Space Policy, which puts more reliance on the commercial sector wherever possible.

In addition, there will be a need to support all the launch companies that will be traveling back and forth to the space station, and to support the payload providers who want to conduct research.

The most promising opportunities that await the Space Coast, however, will

be working with space tourism companies. Those commercial entities will be offering inimitable adventures, such as a zero-gravity experience in low orbit. By 2020, according to DiBello, there

will be hotellike structures available for long weekend orbit getaways.

Of course, this will all take some time and a lot of effort, but the leaders at the Space Coast EDC are prepared to make

it come to fruition, as well as have it happen for the benefit of all of Central Florida.

"It's a partnership," concludes Weatherman. "It's an economic partnership."

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