

***The New Pioneers: Capitalizing on the Emerging Economies in
Glades/Hendry Counties***
By
***Nancy Dale, keynote address to the Inaugural Graduating Leadership Class
of the Glades/Hendry County EDCs***
June 16, 2007

Culminating six months of interactive workshops and seminars, twenty graduates of the inaugural leadership class of Glades/Hendry County Economic Development Councils received their diploma June 16, 2007 at the Clewiston Country Club with more than one hundred guests in attendance. Janice Groves, Hendry EDC Executive Director and Emcee Dan Regelski, Director of the Small Business Development Center at Florida Gulf Coast University, congratulated the graduates and encouraged them to take the foreground in leadership for the community.

Kevin Thomas of CHL and EDC Board Member introduced each graduate and highlighted the accomplishments that qualified them as selected participants in the program who plan to move forward with individual goals and objectives to accomplish over the coming year.

The keynote address was presented by Glades County author, Dr. Nancy Dale, with a message to “***The New Pioneers: Capitalizing on the Emerging Economies in Glades/Hendry Counties.***”

“Moving forward into a vision of the future, often means looking back from where we started,” said Dr. Dale talking about the two hundred year cultural heritage of the Florida pioneer “cow hunters” who settled Florida in the 1800s and those that came before dating back to the Paleoindians, and later Ponce de Leon in the 1500s who named Florida, “the land of flowers.”

“With a state population today of 18 million, up more than 300,000 since last year, we are not going to stop growth; however, we do need to manage it and attract the urban dollars into Glades/Hendry Counties for more jobs, an expanded tax base, and career opportunities for our youth.”

The emerging economies are based on what Dr. Dale termed a triangulation of nature-based/cultural heritage tourism; new green communities incorporating agriculture and habitat; and an educational consortium for the development of 21st century sustainable “green industry” technologies that provide career opportunities and economic spin offs for local businesses.

In the arena of renewable energy, Dr. Dale cited the examples of “Alico, Inc. in LaBelle investigating a cellulosic ethanol project using a \$13 million grant from the Department of Energy, and Citrus Energy, LLC in Clewiston planning to construct a 4 million gallon per year ethanol bio-refinery using citrus waste projected to produce 80 million gallons of ethanol a year.”

Dr. Dale referenced state and national research regarding the fast growing emerging multi-billion dollar economies that can be marketed and capitalized upon in Glades/Hendry Counties, emphasizing “first what we already have here in this last vast, valuable land in Florida, our nature-based and cultural heritage tourism. More than 78.6 million people visit Florida every year with an impact of \$57 billion dollars on the state economy; 189 million Americans hike, trek or travel into wilderness areas, or 94.5% of the population. Regionally, nature-based and cultural heritage tourism increased nearby county coffers, such as Charlotte Harbor watershed with more than \$3.2 billion a year into the area and \$1.8 billion a year to Florida. Glades/Hendry Counties needs to attract dollars to our pristine wilderness and cultural heritage sites, the later which additionally draws to the region more than 200,000 people.”

Dr. Dale said that Glades/Hendry Counties need to cultivate regionally a marketing image to attract more of the urban tourist dollar. She said that beaches and condos are “a dime a dozen” but that Glades/Hendry Counties “provide a unique pristine wilderness and heritage that is unique, like no other place in the world. It is a refuge from the pollution, traffic, stress and by-products of the city. People are paying to escape.”

“Incubating and capitalizing on new economies means crossing the chasm into creating highly valuable and sustainable use of the areas most valuable asset: Land,” said Dr. Dale. “Growth means not only marketing nature-based-cultural heritage tourism, but the triangulation of the \$12 billion ‘green industry’ in collaboration with educational consortiums such as Florida Gulf Coast University and Edison College to develop affordable ‘green’ housing in collaboration with the Florida Green Builders Association “ Pointing to a planned new “green” community in rural Calhoun County, “Sky Project,” was recently awarded \$1.8 million by Governor Crist along with Florida State University’s Advanced Power Systems and consortium to pay for geothermal and solar energy applications in the 624 home sites on 571 acres in Crestview about one hour from Tallahassee. The new community will dedicate half of the development to agriculture to bring back the rural centerpiece of the farmers market providing opportunities for home owners as small farmers and the opportunity to contribute to the \$14 billion organic market. Presently, there are 77 green markets in cities across Florida.” Dr. Dale said that “with agriculture in Hendry/Glades County having a long-time economic presence, Hendry County’s market value of crops is more than \$375,000 contributing to the \$87 billion agricultural industry, it is vital lifeblood in Florida. Ed Kuester of the office of the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture said

that Florida's "rural land base has experienced a five-fold increase in urban conversion from 1964 to 1997. This increase in urban land use resulted in the loss of nearly 5 million acres of valuable agricultural land during this period. According to University of Florida research, we can expect to lose another 1.3 million acres of land to urban conversion over the next ten years." Dr. Dale added that with these numbers "we cannot be in a situation to depend on foreign countries for our food supply. If new communities can incorporate agriculture, we can at least save some of the land and further develop local green markets for our food source."

Dr. Dale said that in terms of dollars into rural Calhoun County from the new Sky Project community/agriculture concept, "it is expected to bring \$22 million into the county tax fund within 12 years. Additionally, through university consortiums such as FSU assisting in the development of renewal geo-thermal and solar energy for Sky Project, these consortiums offer future careers in the billion dollar 21st Century "green technology" industry for the rural areas. In land use preservation, such as Sky Project, the new green community incorporates native habitat, open space and agriculture. Also in terms of dollars, there are federal tax incentives for green home builders, tenants, and by 2008 there is expected to be a federal tax deduction for the use of green energy. On Yahoo's web page, there is currently a contest for the "Greenest Community in Florida" with a cash prize of \$250,000 or 10 hybrid taxis."

However, housing/accommodations are a concern to attract new industries. To create affordable housing, Dr. Dale said that the "unique pioneer heritage of Glades/Hendry County can be capitalized into dollars for second home getaways for urbanites wanting to escape the city, and affordable housing for locals with new communities supporting both low and high end green "cracker houses" and log homes that also provide 21st Century technology such as wireless internet.,

In closing, Dr. Dale paraphrased poet Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken," to the graduates as the Glades/Hendry County entrepreneurs moving forward, following a path where "it bends into the undergrowth" and cannot be seen beyond the curve but encouraged the graduates to take the "road less traveled" into the future, leading the community in preservation of the land and cultural heritage in the sustainable growth of green industry communities and technology of the 21st century. In a final note, Dr. Dale posed a question to the graduates: "What is the vision of Glades/Hendry Counties ten years from now?"

At the end of the ceremony, graduates received a gift packet with a copy of two books: *A Land Remembered by Patrick Smith* and a personally inscribed copy of *Would Do, Could Do and Made Do: The Pioneer Cow Hunters Who Tamed the Last Frontier* by Nancy Dale..

The graduates:

Clifton Baldwin, Jr. First Bank of Clewiston
Derek Beck, Beck Construction
Sherri Denning, Southern Land Real Estate
Jeni Dyess, Florida Community Bank
Neftali Francisco Fernandez, M.D., Florida Dept. of Health, Hendry/Glades
County Health Dept.
Angela Hall, Port LaBelle Resorts, LLC
Estela Hernandez, Hendry County EDC
LaVita Holmes, Self-Employed – Quick Release Bail Bonds, Owner
Thomas Misotti, Owen-Ames-Kimball Company & Talkin' Monkeys Project
Sean Moore, Clewiston Chamber of Commerce
Mark Morton, Lykes Bros.
Steven Nisbet, Nisbet Enterprises – DBA McDonald's Restaurants
Cathy Perry, Home & Ranch Real Estate Company
Denise Roth, Southern Gardens Citrus
Wayne Simmons, Heritage Land Company
Kevin Thomas, CHL Holdings, Inc.
Danielle Toms, Glades Electric Cooperative
Sara Townsend, LaBelle Chamber of Commerce
Glenda Wilson, Hendry Regional Medical Center
Ronald Zimmerly, Hendry County, Grants & Special Projects.