

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

French tech companies to visit SW Fla.

By THYRIE BLAND NEWS-PRESS

At least 12 tech-related companies located in France that are interested in bringing their businesses to the United States are planning to visit Southwest Florida this month, Marshall Goodman, director of Naples Accelerator, said this week.

The companies' interest in this area comes after a delegation of about 20 people from Charlotte, Lee and Collier counties spent last week in France and visited with more than 50 companies. The group included Goodman, state Senator Garrett Richter and Florida Gulf Coast University President Wilson Bradshaw.

The businesses are going to come here Oct. 19-21. Goodman said the plan is to show off the three-county area during the companies' visit.

"Our main focus of the trip was first to develop partnerships with these organizations but also to meet these companies, meet these young entrepreneurs, and hopefully, recruit some of them to Southwest Florida," Goodman said.

The Southwest Florida delegation was hosted by Retis, a French innovation network that runs incubators, which are organizations that help startup companies. The group toured and had meetings at Sophia Antipolis, a high-tech research park, Team Cote d'Azur, an economic development agency, and TVT Innovation, a research group.

"We spent a lot of time saying why they should be here and not in Silicon Valley," said Bradshaw.

Bradshaw said while he was in France he touted the people of Southwest Florida, its educated workforce and its diverse institutions of higher education.

"We learned a lot on that mission, but they also learned a lot about Southwest Florida," Bradshaw said. "And we are very hopeful that we will be able to form some new exciting partnerships."

Bradshaw said he is hopeful that the trip to France will result in companies wanting to partner with Florida Gulf Coast University.

"What they are interested in having is really a highly educated and innovative workforce," he said. "We do have. ... the program in software engineering. They were particularly interested in that. They were interested in our college of engineering and some of its programs. This is how these things get started."

David Miller, executive director of The Chamber of Southwest Florida, said he was glad to hear about Southwest Florida leaders getting together and trying to bring in more jobs. He said the area is in need of more middle-class and upper-middle-class jobs.

He said one key to attracting new companies to Southwest Florida is having a well-trained workforce. He said companies won't come here without it.

"We have been losing our youth, and we need to retain them," Miller said. "We are still losing them. There is no doubt, but we are losing less."

Miller said in order for college graduates to remain in Southwest Florida the area must be able to offer them well-paying jobs.

"We have the sunshine and, now we need the jobs," he said. "We have the education system, and now we need some outreach. I believe that we are starting to do that."

Cleared for take-off

Board endorses Charlotte expansion of WMU aviation program

By GARY ROBERTS Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH. - With the Western Michigan University Board of Trustees voting unanimously on Tuesday to expand academic programs to Florida, a roomful of administrators and faculty erupted in applause, signaling the start of an enthusiastic and mutually beneficial alliance with Southwest Florida.

"It's an opportunity to build great relationships, to share with others the really marvelous resources that we have, and we're happy to do so," said John Dunn, WMU president.

"This is about education, it's about economic development. We've got a lot of work to do."

The Florida initiative began with board approval to seek a provisional license from the Florida Department of Education to establish a physical presence in the Sunshine State.

Having already determined market demand and identified programs to meet those needs, a permanent license for WMU could be achieved in five years.

By affiliating with Florida SouthWestern State College, the WMU Cooley School of Law in Tampa and other health care programs in Charlotte County, WMU is poised for growth in both enrollment and revenue by delivering education that connects economic drivers and community needs in Southwest Florida.

With \$2.5 million of WMU seed money, matched by a Florida state grant, facilities for both WMU and FSW will soon sprout at the north end of the Punta Gorda Airport.

By September 2017, 50 aviation students are expected to arrive for academic study, along with several dozen international students interested solely in flight training.

After that, the sky's the limit.

Dawn Gaymer, WMU associate provost for extended university programs, told WMU trustees that the university is reaching out to Florida because it is ripe with potential. In fact, there is no public university in Florida that offers an aviation program, she said, allowing Western Michigan to fill a huge void.

"I've been doing this work for 25 years and I've never seen a greater demand than what we have in the aviation market, both nationally and internationally," Gaymer said.

There are other academic programs that hold great promise as well. Local conservation groups are encouraging WMU to come to Southwest Florida as a research institution. Health care is another WMU priority where Charlotte County may hold the key.

Gaymer said the top hurdle to growth of its physician assistant program is the need for clinical rotation, a place where students gain real-life experience. Such an arrangement is just getting started at Fawcett Memorial Hospital and other health clinics.

By 2021, Gaymer said the academic programs in Southwest Florida could increase the head count of WMU students by 1,500, along with adding more than \$12 million to university revenue. And WMU would bolster donor relations and the WMU brand in the

area.

A main catalyst to gaining a foothold in the region is the budding relationship with FSW, Gaymer said. With the Charlotte campus less than a mile from the Punta Gorda Airport, students will be able to commute between their academic classes and flight training.

Under the proposed aviation program, FSW would provide a two year program and WMU would complete a four year degree in aviation technology as well as pilot training.

With FSW already exploring more aviation- related curriculum, as well as the possibility of building dormitories at the Charlotte campus, an aviation program would serve the needs of both schools.

"(FSW) has just completely rolled out the red carpet for Western Michigan University and sees us as a really significant partner for their future," Gaymer said. "The economic development in this region is aligning with the strengths of WMU."

Charlotte officials also were exuberant about the potential for cooperating interests.

"This is exciting news that is a big positive for Charlotte County, both economically and educationally," Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch said. "It's an indication of how bright our future should be."

Enterprise Zone

To encourage economic development in economically distressed areas of the state, in 1982 Florida launched an Enterprise Zone program by providing incentives to induce private investment. At the 2015 legislative session, extension of the Enterprise Zone program was not authorized, and the program will sunset on Dec. 31, 2015.

Incentives include business machinery and equipment sales tax refund, building materials sales tax refund, job tax credit, and property tax credit for Florida corporations. To qualify for the incentives, a business or home must be within the Enterprise Zone, and further specific eligibility criteria must be met. The Charlotte County Enterprise Zone was approved by the state in 2013. The zone includes portions of the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park, Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), Parkside CRA, and Punta Gorda, totaling approximately 16 square miles.

Visit http://FloridasInnovationCoast.com/index.php/site_selection/enterprise_zone for more information.

Applications must be approved by the Florida Department of Revenue before the sunset date.

For more information contact Debrah Forester, Redevelopment Manager with the Charlotte County Economic Development Department, at 941-764-4943 or Debrah.Forester@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Enterprise Florida names new chief marketing officer ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Florida produce companies merge ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Region's home prices increase most in U.S. in August ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Oakridge Global Energy Solutions to expand, create 1,000 jobs in Brevard County ([Florida Trend](#))
- Viacom moves into new film studio in downtown Miami ([Miami Herald](#))
- Two Miami-based biopharmaceutical companies merge ([Miami Herald](#))
- Florida added 15,700 jobs in September, second highest in nation ([Florida Trend](#))
- Boca museum to serve as tourism hub ([Palm Beach Post](#))
- Wesley Chapel medical tech firm plans to add 500 jobs ([Tampa Bay Times](#))
- STEM jobs: Tampa Bay leads Florida but can it become a bigger tech player? ([Tampa Bay Times](#))

- Trademarks, Service, Collective & Certification Marks ([Florida Small Business](#))
- Reasons to start an ecommerce business ([Entrepreneur](#))
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