

Santa Has His List to Check; We Have One, Too, for Local Economic Development

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With Christmas less than a month away, it's highly likely that Santa Claus is already checking his list twice. You would have to think that jolly old St. Nick must get an early start on this list because the number of people around the world keeps rising every year. How does Santa do it?!

Here at the Lake Wales Area Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council, we have a list, too. The list items could be considered gifts as well — nice constructive and productive elements the area could use to round out or strengthen an already solid economic environment locally.

The items on our list can boost the area economy both directly and indirectly and strengthen the foundation for consistently superior industrial, business, and job recruitment and growth well into the future. The list below isn't a long one, but I and the local leaders who sit at the EDC table think the items on it are key.

We can build on our many economic development successes in the Lake Wales area with a focus on each of the following:

- **Our highways** — Excellent roads and highways form a strong pillar for economic development. U.S. Highway 27, our major north-south route, and State Road 60, our primary east-west route, are due for improvements. Of the two, U.S. 27 is the hands-down priority for a plan to relieve traffic congestion and reduce commute times.
- **Our housing** — Every community needs a good base of affordable housing. The Lake Wales area also would benefit from a higher percentage of homes for middle- to upper-income earners. The goal is to have top-earner professionals and leaders and managers of local businesses living right here, in and around beautiful Lake Wales, and having the fabric of their lives entwined with the community both personally and professionally. This need for upper-income housing is a great opportunity for area homebuilders.

- **Our airport** — We're more than excited about the major improvements that have begun and will continue at Lake Wales Municipal Airport. We're looking forward to seeing increased use of the airport for general aviation fun, and we're actively promoting the airport for commercial purposes. These would include fuel sales, aircraft maintenance and repairs, the sale of parts and accessories, airplane restoration, helicopter use, and other aviation-related services.
- **Our industry** — There's abundant room for industrial and commercial growth in greater Lake Wales, particularly in the area of the airport, along S.R. 60 east of the city, and along U.S. 27 south of S.R. 60 — all the way toward Nucor's new \$240 million steel rebar mill near Frostproof. The area on each side of U.S. 27 South also is prime for new residential and retail growth.

Our EDC — In last month's Thanksgiving column, I expressed great gratitude for each of the terrific and generous businesses and organizations that invest in and partner with the Lake Wales Economic Development Council. I'm pleased to say again that there's room for more investor-partners. There's room for you and your organization. Won't you join us? The table for local economic development doesn't have a fixed size. It can be as big and positively impactful as we want to make it.

All of the team members here at the Lake Wales Chamber-EDC join me in wishing all of a joyous holiday season and a safe and happy New Year.