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Ponte Vedra Beach Division



Attainable Housing Coalition
OF THE ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Workforce Housing in St. Johns County:

UNATTAINABLE

Challenges and Solutions
to Attainable Workforce Housing



Chamber
Connections



September 2023



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THE
RECORDER



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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

Help us maintain our quality of life – join the coalition!



Isabelle Renault
President/CEO
St. Johns County
Chamber of Commerce

Our quality of life depends on key amenities and services offered by the community we live in. In St. Johns County, we can rely on high-quality medical services delivered by multiple health

systems. This expertise ranked us as the second healthiest county in Florida* and will continue to get stronger with the merger of Flagler Health+ and UF Health; now UF Health St. Johns. The best public education Florida can offer is the main reason people relocate to St. Johns County. The low crime rate and the vibrant and unique restaurant and entertainment scene that our oldest city offers are other elements playing a key role in defining our quality of life.

Each of these elements relies on workers to provide the services we are accustomed to. Workers such as our nurses, teachers, first responders, cooks and servers are all hard to come by. A 2.8% unemployment rate and a record number of teacher resignations in May 2023 — an increase of 30% over the previous year — are just the tip of the iceberg contributing to the challenge St. Johns County's employers face to retain and recruit the foundational supporters of our quality of life.

Our local employers continue to rank workforce recruitment and retention as their greatest challenge. Even after qualified candidates are identified many can't find affordable housing in the region and end up declining the offer. Employees commuting from other counties are often lost once they secure a comparable job closer to where

they are living. The situation became so critical post-pandemic that in June 2022 the Chamber created a coalition to focus on the retention and recruitment of the workforce in key sectors — health care, education, manufacturing, hospitality, law enforcement and fire and rescue. We found that the availability of the workforce is tightly tied to the availability of attainable housing** in our community.

During the past year, the Chamber's Attainable Housing Coalition tackled the issue, explained what contributed to the lack of attainable housing, analyzed the situation and identified solutions to consider for our community. The findings, "Challenges, and Solutions to Attainable Workforce Housing," were presented to Chamber members at the September Economic Development Council Breakfast. The coalition also wanted to understand the economic and fiscal impact of adding attainable housing in St. Johns County. We contracted with Dr. Jerry Parrish, Florida State University's chief economist and director of State and Local Policy Analysis at the Institute of Government, to conduct an analysis. Adding 5,000 attainable housing units is estimated to generate these impacts:

- \$85.3 million in wages during the construction phase
- \$63.4 million in impact fees to cover the county's costs of infrastructure, public safety and schools.
- \$28.3 million in ad valorem tax receipts during the first five years.
- \$9.4 million in ad valorem tax receipts annually once all units are completed.
- Ability of St. Johns County employers to fill thousands of open jobs and generate more than \$500 million in additional county GDP and more than \$4 million per year in additional county tax revenue.

Contrary to perception, the building of attainable housing is a revenue generator, job

creator and an important factor in sustaining key employers in our county, including our hospitals and school system.

The solution to providing an adequate supply of attainable housing is a complex matter that needs a collaborative approach. To solve it we will need to do it together. One significant barrier to adding attainable housing to our community is residents' desire to halt residential development of any kind in St. Johns County. Large new developments have been built in recent years and most of them were approved decades ago; but the perception is that they were recently approved, generating an aversion to any new developments in our area.

Yet, we need the development of attainable housing to maintain the quality of life supported by our hospitality workers, teachers, nurses and first responders. If you believe that attainable housing is important to our quality of life, I ask that you join our coalition. By joining the Attainable Housing Coalition, you are voicing to the decision-makers of our community and to your fellow residents that the development of attainable housing is good and essential to maintain the quality of life we enjoy.

Join the coalition as we continue to work with our elected officials, builders, landowners, financial institutions and community organizations to solve this critical issue.

**According to the National County Health Rankings, published by the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation health.*

***Attainable housing refers to housing that is accessible and affordable for a significant portion of the population, particularly those with moderate to middle incomes. It is a concept that addresses the gap between traditional affordable housing, which is typically reserved for low-income individuals or families, and market-rate housing, which can be prohibitively expensive for many people.*

Isabelle Renault
President and CEO, St. Johns County
Chamber of Commerce

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER

• **Chamber Before Hours Ponte Veda:** 1912 Ocean Bar and Rooftop, Oct. 11

• **Joint Chamber at Noon:** Whitney Meyer, senior VP & chief community impact officer, Jacksonville Jaguars; Casa Marina, Oct. 12

• **Chamber After Hours St. Augustine:** The Exchange at St. Augustine, Oct. 12

• **Chamber Before Hours St. Johns:** Viva Stretch, Oct. 18

• **Chamber After Hours St. Johns:** The Blake St. Johns, Oct. 25

NOVEMBER

• **Chamber Before Hours Ponte Veda:** Vicar's Landing, Nov. 1

• **Women With Vision Council Meeting:** Speaker TBA; Palencia Golf Club, Nov. 2

• **Veteran's Day Luncheon:** Scott Mackes; Marsh Landing Country Club, Nov. 9

• **Celebrate:** The Treasury on the Plaza, Nov. 15

DECEMBER

• **Economic Development Breakfast:** World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine, Dec. 1

• **Jingle & Mingle:** Marsh Landing Country Club, Dec. 6

For further information and to register at the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce website, go to sjcchamber.com.

Locally Made roundtable held

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and St. Johns County hosted a community roundtable for creators, manufacturers and sellers of Locally Made products and services to gather input on better supporting these businesses and entrepreneurs. Supporting local artisans and product creators is essential for fostering economic growth and promoting unique handmade goods.

Scott Maynard, vice president of Economic Development with the Chamber, said, "Our goal is to significantly



contribute to the growth and success of local artisans and product creators, enriching the local economy and cultural landscape."

The Chamber utilized the roundtable to learn more about these groups' specific challenges and how to support them better. From the discussion, it was clear that St. Augustine and St. Johns County strongly support the arts, but there needs to be more communication between the different organizations.

One need is to identify a central point of focus where information can be

gathered and exchanged on the services, programs and events taking place. There is a need for performance space for all genres, affordable studio and classroom space, maker space for developing products and places to display and sell locally made products.

Other ideas included:

- Setting aside space in the Visitors Center for locally made products.
- Creating a "Locally Made" seal or tag to identify and brand locally made products. and
- Building a website to feature these goods and services.

Implementing these ideas also allows tourists to quickly identify which prod-



Contributed photo

Lori Brandel, Vystar Credit Union and chair of the Historic St. Augustine Area Council, and Diane Bradley, president of the board for the St. Augustine Arts Association.

ucts are certified as locally made. The Chamber is excited to continue work on this project.

K9s for Warriors hosts Chamber after hours



Allison Misora, director of major gifts with K9s For Warriors, speaks during a St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach division after hours event.

Photo by Susan Griffin

Chamber at Noon focuses on state of housing, income in county



Photo by Susan Griffin

Mark Nighbor with One Mark Consulting spoke at the Chamber at Noon event on Aug. 16.

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division held a Chamber at Noon event on Aug. 16 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Public Library with Mark Nighbor of One Mark Consulting as the guest speaker discussing the current housing market and income spectrum in St. Johns County.

Code Ninjas opens third location



Photo by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

A ribbon cutting event was held Aug. 25 for the third Code Ninjas location. The World Golf Village location joins Ponte Vedra and Fleming Island.

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EnterCircle Entrepreneurship Summit scheduled for Nov. 15-17

The third annual EnterCircle Entrepreneurship Summit will be held Nov. 15-17 at the link, 425 Town Plaza Ave., Ponte Vedra.

The event is expected to impact more than 350 attendees, including local high school and college students, entrepreneurs and small business owners.

The theme is “Thriving with Purpose,” and attendees are expected to gain insights through talks, workshops, breakout

rooms, panel discussions and networking sessions.

Each of the three days has a specific focus.

- Nov. 15: Focuses on small businesses and startups, featuring a startup pitch competition, startups and small business expo, charity cocktail networking and awards night.
- Nov. 16: Youth Day. High school

students will have opportunities to pitch business ideas, gain coding and design thinking experience and plan for their college and career paths.

- Nov. 17: The women’s entrepreneurship event is devoted to providing resources to women, including workshops on revenue modeling, growth strategies and financial planning.

The event will also feature speakers representing a variety of careers.

Registration is open for the business expo, Cocktail for a Cause charity networking night and the women’s entrepreneurship day event. Details on how to sign up can be found on entercircle.zone.

Sapna Foundation hosts this event in celebration of Women’s Entrepreneurship Day on Nov. 19 and Global Entrepreneurs Week from Nov. 13 to 19.

Shining a Light on Challenges and Solutions for Attainable Housing in St. Johns County



We’re proud to call St. Johns County home thanks to the high quality of life we have here. Workers in our key industries teach us, nurse us, serve us in restaurants, keep us safe and contribute to the vibrancy of our economy. But many of these workers who are the foundation of our high quality of life are unable to live in the communities they serve due to a lack of attainable housing.



Elizabeth Bernardino

Elizabeth Bernardino named Chamber’s VP of program development and marketing

Elizabeth Bernardino was named vice president of program development and marketing for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce effective June 29. In addition to overseeing marketing efforts, Bernardino will be responsible for membership experience and programming.

She brings a wealth of nonprofit and for-profit, marketing, membership and programming experience to the Chamber. As head of marketing at Weaver Fundraising (Trail’s End Popcorn for Boy Scouts), Bernardino’s primary focus was to reach, serve and retain every Council, Scout and volunteer by providing awareness, resources and support for their fundraising experience.

Prior to that, Bernardino was the senior vice president at Girl Scouts of Gateway Council and implemented strategy for many departments, including data analytics, membership sales and programs, including the cookie sale.

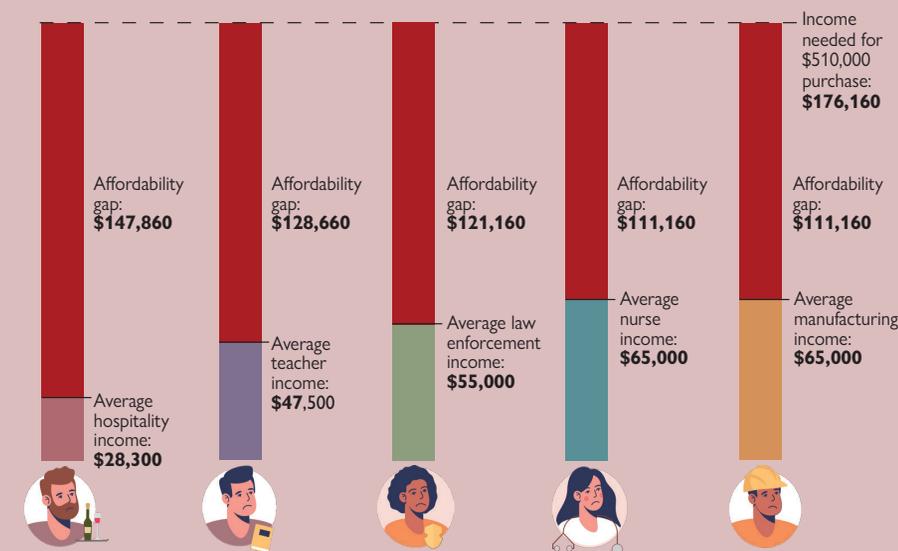
The Chamber began the search for a new vice president when the announcement was made that current Vice President of Operations & Membership Aimee Stafford would be moving back to Kentucky to be with her family.

Bernardino received her Bachelor of Science degree in integrated marketing and communications from San Diego State University. She will be responsible for recruitment and retention management, strategic marketing, brand management, member benefit management and Council and Division governance and programming.

THE CHALLENGES

Affordability

- To purchase a home at the county median price of \$510,000, buyers need an annual income of \$176,160 — more than three times the average salary of a teachers in St. Johns County.
- Average rent in St. Johns County is more than \$2,000 per month — out of reach for nearly all essential workers.



Availability

- Only 3% of available rental units are priced between \$1,000-1,500, an attainable range for only some workers; most rentals are more expensive.
- Inventory of homes for purchase in attainable price ranges has declined in recent years, while inventory of more expensive homes has risen sharply.



THE IMPACT

Essential workers often must seek housing outside of St. Johns County — sometimes even taking their job with them and impacting our local economy and quality of life.

Workers face longer commutes and add to traffic on our roads; they’re farther from convenient child care, leading to stress on families. When workers also find employment closer to their homes outside of St. Johns County, residents experience diminished services and a decline in our quality of life.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign onto the Attainable Housing Coalition to endorse smart solutions so the ones who help our community thrive can also call St. Johns County home.

Scan the QR code or visit www.sjcchamber.com/attainable-housing to add your name to the coalition.



Hardage-Giddens hosts Chamber after hours



Photo courtesy of St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce hosted an After Hours event at Hardage-Giddens St. Johns on Aug. 23.

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division hosted an After Hours event at Hardage-Giddens St. Johns on Aug. 23. The evening included networking opportunities as well as food and drinks.

PROTACTX Brazilian Jiu Jitsu opens



St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce photo

Members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce were on hand June 29 for a ribbon cutting ceremony at PROTACTX Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, which recently opened at 200 Sterling Plaza Drive, Suite 204, Ponte Vedra.

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Ponte Vedra Plastic Surgery hosts Chamber Before Hours



Karina Coryell, Latisha Akerele and Linda Thomson.

Photos by Susan Griffin

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division held a Before Hours event at Ponte Vedra Plastic Surgery on Aug. 9. Members were able to mingle and network inside and outside the location.

Riptide team cuts ribbon



St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce photo

Riptide Home Furniture had its ribbon cutting event on Aug. 31. The business is located on U.S. 1 north of Palencia.

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Paysafe Pops Series
OCT 6/7
The Music of Earth, Wind & Fire
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Concert Organ Series
OCT 14
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Family Series
OCT 15
Stories For Kids By Kids: Spooktacular

For more information and tickets call **904.354.5547** or visit Jaxsymphony.org



Bank branch opens



Photo by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

A ribbon-cutting event was held July 26 for TD Bank — Durbin Creek.

Snyder Air Conditioning, Plumbing & Electric cuts ribbon



Photo by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Snyder Air Conditioning, Plumbing & Electric held its ribbon-cutting ceremony Aug. 22. It was a morning of networking, food and celebrating.

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Wells Fargo hosts Chamber After Hours



Photo by Susan Griffin

The St. Johns County Chamber Ponte Vedra Beach Division's Chamber After Hours was held at Wells Fargo in Nocatee. Heather McDougal, regional branch manager, and her team hosted the wonderful evening of networking, food and drinks.

YMCA Pickleball Courts open



Photo by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The Brown Family YMCA at Ponte Vedra Beach held its official ribbon-cutting for the Maguire Family Pickleball Center on Aug. 8.

Director of Community and Government Relations
St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce
Director, Jax Women's Business Center

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WHAT IS THE SOLUTION
WHY YOU
WHY NOW
WHY YOU

WHAT DO YOU DO?
WHO CARES?
WHY WOULD?

Director, Jax Women's Business Center

the link

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NOV. 17
Women's Day

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- Book an Expo Table
- Register for Networking
- Sign up to Pitch your business



New THE PLAYERS executive director speaks at Chamber lunch



Photo by Anthony Richards

New executive director of THE PLAYERS, Lee Smith (fourth from the left) spoke at a joint lunch event hosted by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Veda Beach Division and the Jax Chamber on July 19 at Marsh Landing Country Club.

Outer Banks ribbon cutting held



Photo by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

A ribbon-cutting event was held Sept. 5 for the Outer Banks Boil Company.

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St. Johns County becomes more inclusive toward guests with autism

Grants reimburse businesses for training, certification

By Shaun Ryan

St. Johns County has seen some early successes as it moves toward becoming a Certified Autism Destination.

Thursday, Aug. 17, representatives of three key organizations announced that they have been certified by an independent credentialing organization for improving accessibility for those affected by autism or other sensory-sensitive conditions.

After a sufficient number of tourism- or hospitality-centered businesses and organizations achieve this certification, the county will earn the overarching designation. That threshold, which would signify certifications in entertainment, recreation, dining and lodging options, is yet to be determined.

It's a significant goal, one that makes the community more welcoming for families impacted by autism and one that could

benefit businesses that rely on tourism.

The three Certified Autism Centers are: The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and its Ponte Vedra Visitors Information Center

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau
Old Town Trolley Tours & Attractions of St. Augustine

The certifications were granted by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). To achieve certification, at least 80% of the guest-facing staff must be trained in autism and sensory disorders and pass a competency exam. The training focuses on understanding the unique needs of guests on the autism spectrum.

In addition, the IBCCES may conduct an onsite review. Certification is good for two years.

Certified businesses and organizations are featured on autismtravel.com, a resource used by travelers seeking inclusive destinations.

The local effort began four years ago, when Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault read about a community that had



Photo by Shaun Ryan

St. Johns County Commission Chair Christian Whitehurst announces a tripling of the county's allocation toward grants for businesses seeking the certification.

become a Certified Autism Destination. She investigated and realized this would make the county a more welcoming environment — not only for visitors but also for local families with neurodivergent members.

“The program assures visitors that our certified tourism and hospitality businesses have taken the necessary training and steps to provide a welcoming experience to neurodiverse guests,” Renault said. “In addition, the certification is a way to open our tourism community to new markets and be inclusive to all guests and their families.”

To help fund the effort, the Chamber and St. Johns County have launched a matching grants program that reimburses participating businesses and not-for-profits for the training. At the Aug. 17 press conference, St. Johns County Commission Chair Christian Whitehurst announced that the county would triple its investment in fiscal year 2024 to \$75,000.

The grant application can be found at sjc-chamber.com. To be considered, a business must be in the tourism or hospitality industry, have a St. Johns County address and be seeking this training and certification for its public-facing staff.

In addition to training its staff, Old Town Trolley Tours & Attractions of St. Augustine has posted sensory guides outside each of its museums. These guides provide sensory levels for visual, olfactory, auditory and tactile sensitivities so that parents can decide whether their children would be affected should they enter that space.

Old Town Trolley Tours & Attractions operates four museums: the Old Jail, the Oldest Store Museum Experience, the St. Augustine History Museum and Potter's Wax Museum.

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StJohns.UFHealth.org



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