



2011 Chamber Economic Summit: *It's the Mix that Matters*

Sponsored by
Express Employment Professionals
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The Economic Analysis: Where do we stand?

The Chamber commissioned Valdosta State University Center for Business and Economic Research to complete *Lowndes County by the Numbers: How Do We Compare With Peer and Aspirant Communities?* Dr. Cynthia R. Tori presented the results of the analysis. The analysis identifies 14 peer and aspirant communities, similar in composition to Lowndes County. Lowndes County ranks eleventh among the group on the various measures overall community health. For a complete look at *Lowndes County by the Numbers* and Dr. Tori's presentation of the analysis visit www.ValdostaChamber.com/EconomicSummit.

[Click here to view *Lowndes County by the Numbers: How Do We Compare With Peer and Aspirant Communities?*](#)

Valdosta-Lowndes County Economic Development Organizations: "We're a Team"

Following the presentation of the analysis, representatives from local economic development organizations shared their economic development strategies and solicited questions and ideas from the Economic Summit participants.

- **Myrna Ballard (Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce President)**
 - Ballard shared that the economic development organizations represented are your team and your team has a plan.
 - Ballard shared that the Chamber is working to facilitate the growth of knowledge-based jobs through Opportunity Central, the Chamber's Smart Community Initiative.
 - [Click here to view the Chamber handout describing Opportunity Central.](#)
 - [Click here to view a video of Ballard's comments.](#)
- **Michael Jetter (Valdosta-Lowndes Conference Center and Tourism Authority Interim Executive Director)**
 - Jetter describe Tourism's role in economic development as the support system for other types of economic development and that a community that is attractive to businesses and professionals will mean more economic growth across sectors.
 - Jetter commented that the economic development organizations, as a team, can come together, think together to make our community even more attractive.
 - [Click here to view a video of Jetter's comments.](#)
- **Amanda Peacock (Valdosta Main Street Manager)**
 - Peacock commented that 20% of the jobs in Valdosta are located Downtown. These are local government jobs and also private sector and knowledge-based businesses.
 - Main Street is working to bring people Downtown and recently completed and approved the Downtown Master Plan.
 - [Click here to view the approved Downtown Master Plan.](#)
 - [Click here to view a video of Peacock's comments.](#)
- **Allan Ricketts (Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority Project Manager)**
 - Ricketts shared that the panel participated in the Summit to look for opportunities to move forward and fill in the gaps.
 - Ricketts reiterated that a healthy economy is all about the mix of industries and types of jobs.
 - The Industrial Authority is learning to reach out and touch people through technology and social media.
 - Ricketts mentioned that promoting our community as a Work Ready Certified Community is very helpful in recruiting businesses.
 - [Click here to view the Industrial Authority handout describing its strategy and mission.](#)
 - [Click here to view a video of Ricketts' comments.](#)
- **Jane Shelton (Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority Member)**

Jane Shelton represented the Airport Authority in Executive Director Jim Galloway's place who could not attend the meeting.

 - Shelton shared the Airport Authority's efforts to promote Valdosta Regional Airport.
 - Shelton encouraged the business community to utilize the airport for their business and personal travel.
 - The Airport Authority recently built new hangers to better support the Industrial Authority in recruiting corporations to Valdosta-Lowndes County.
 - [Click here to view the Airport Authority handout.](#)
 - [Click here to view Shelton's comments.](#)

Questions for the Panel

[Click here to view the questions for the panel.](#)

Do you think there is a reason why we lose businesses in Valdosta-Lowndes County?

- Jetter: Valdosta-Lowndes County needs to be more attractive. We need a uniqueness.
- Ballard: Having a pro-business environment is the most important part of the economic development process. The Chamber has partnered with local governments on the SORT initiative to identify some areas that could be improved.

The local governments have been extremely responsive and are working to make sure we have the best business development process possible.

- Ricketts: Competitiveness is very important. The Industrial Authority is looking for creative ways to make sure we're a good fit for the industries we're recruiting.

How important is education and an educated workforce is to economic development in our community?

- Ballard: It is everything. It is essential.
- Ricketts: It is important to focus on all areas of our workforce. Land and workforce are the top two needs and interest of the industries we recruit.
- Walter Hobgood (Express Employment Professionals): A qualified, educated workforce is a top priority for our community. What we're hearing from our colleges and university is that we need to make sure students are prepared for that next level of education. Hobgood encouraged everyone to consider signing the CUEE petition. For more information visit www.CUEEInfo.com.

Key Ideas and Action Items from Facilitated Discussion Among Participants

1. Valdosta-Lowndes County needs to develop our healthcare sector and educate more healthcare professionals.
2. The community needs combined effort and strategy for marketing Valdosta-Lowndes County.
3. There is economic development potential in developing services for retirees and retiree attraction.
4. Economic assets that Valdosta-Lowndes County could better utilize:
 - The workforce and readiness of our workforce
 - Marketing arts and entertainment to the region
 - The energy and creativity possessed by the people in our community
 - Getting people together to make things happen, find the magic
 - VSU as a destination university
 - The potential to develop the healthcare sector (It was suggested that we look into Clarke County, GA and its physician outreach program.)
5. Communities from the study that could be further researched:
 - Houston County, GA
 - Warren County, KY
 - Rapides Parish, LA
 - Montgomery County, TN

“What’s Next...”

Chris Miller ([Illuminomics](#)) was the keynote speaker for the event, and helped participants understand where to go from here with his presentation, “What’s Next?”. [Click here to view Miller’s presentation.](#)

Chris Miller's 12 Features of a Healthy, Creative Community

1. Unity of purpose: Are we all working together?
2. Egolessness: Agree to disagree and don't sacrifice growth or interests
3. Decisive Leadership
4. Intense Desire
5. Clarity of Vision
6. Consistent Direction
7. Persistent Direction
8. Willingness to Work Together
9. Creative Approach
10. Boldness of Action
11. Continuous and Constant Communication
12. Involving the Entire Community and Maintaining Community Engagement

Other Nuggets from Chris Miller:

- Have a defined vision, descriptive plan and describe results.
- Know where your assets are, talk about them, embrace them with pride and have a unified identity.
- [Click here to view Miller’s presentation.](#)

Moving Forward

In his closing remarks, Walter Hobgood ([Express Employment Professionals](#)) inspired the group to continue to be involved. Thank you to Express Employment Professionals for being the presenting sponsor for the event. Hobgood also asked participants to mark the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 13 on their calendars for Peter Kageyama’s visit to Valdosta. Kageyama, author of [For the Love of Cities](#), will facilitate an interactive workshop focused on “Loving Valdosta-Lowndes County.”