



**CHEERS TO 40 YEARS!  
1984-2024**



**2024 ANNUAL  
REPORT**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**3 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**

**4 INVESTOR MEETINGS**

**6 DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY**

**8 HIGH SKILL HIGH WAGE CITY VISIT**

**10 LEDC INITIATIVE UPDATE**

**14 ADVOCACY**

**15 LEDC TEAM**

# A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



The Lakeland Economic Development Council (LEDC) is celebrating our 40th anniversary this year. Prior to 1984, the LEDC was a department of the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce called the Committee of 100. From 1984 to 1988 the LEDC was funded by a community campaign called 2nd Century.

In 1988, George Jenkins (Publix) invited industry and community leaders to Lone Palm and asked them to join him in making an annual investment in the LEDC. Mr. George's legacy of community leadership and philanthropy continues to inspire our organization and leaders today.

Business leaders who have faithfully served as LEDC Chairs (LEDC Chairs serve 2-year terms) include:

1985-86	D. Burke Kibler, Holland & Knight	2005-06	John Fitzwater, The Ledger
1987-88	Mark Hollis, Publix	2007-08	Bill Mutz, Lakeland Automall
1989-90	Scott Linder, Linder Industrial Machinery	2009-10	Scott Franklin, Lanier Upshaw
1991-92	Bill Loftin, Loftin Real Estate	2011-12	Jeff Chamberlain, Publix
1993-94	Snow Martin Jr., Martin & Martin	2013-14	Ira Anderson, Wall Titus
1995-96	Tom Moore, Universal Building Specialties	2015-16	Brian Philpot, AgAmerica
1997-98	Barney Barnett, Publix	2017-18	David Hallock, GrayRobinson
1999-00	Bob Becker, Leisure Way	2019-20	Wesley Beck, ASPYRE Properties
2001-02	Bruce Abels, Saddle Creek Logistics	2021-22	Todd Baylis, Qgiv
2003-04	Dave Curry, Curry Controls	2023-24	Cory Petcoff, Baron Realty

In honor of those that have served and to celebrate their legacy, this year's Annual Report, features the anniversaries of LEDC-founded organizations and programs that you and these leaders have created, served, and funded over the years.

The success we have had in recruiting and retaining new and existing business over the last four decades has afforded us the opportunity to expand our mission into these areas.

At the end of the day, our mission is not just about absorbing square footage, capital investment and jobs, it's about creating a community that our children want to live in and experience. Thank you for your continued support of the LEDC. Together, we are changing one life at a time. Happy Anniversary LEDC!

**Steve Scruggs**  
LEDC President

# INVESTOR MEETINGS

## Panels

Industry panels are a helpful way to hear diverse opinions on topics important to our membership. In May, we heard from several business owners who have sold their respective businesses. Wesley Beck (Florida Flavors), Jay Chastain (Chastain Skillman), Todd Baylis (Qgiv), Corey Miller (Miller Construction Management), and Keith Albritton (Allen & Company) all spoke about how they arrived at the decision to sell their businesses, the opportunities and challenges it presented and why many of them are still actively engaged in the day-to-day business operations.



In August, we explored the experience of relocating to Lakeland for employment through the eyes of Lakeland Regional Health's new medical residents.



## Site Visits

We hosted members at three off-site locations this year. In January, we received an update from Lakeland International Airport as well as Amazon Air and Avelo Airlines. We also explored Lakeland's newest multifamily developments, Welcome Canary and Prospect Lake Wire.



# Member & Industry Updates

This year our members heard from the people and businesses that are making an impact on the Lakeland economy – from new companies to existing industry expansion; explosive growth in our health care sector; new leadership at our educational institutions and much more.



# 2024 DEVELOPMENT THEMES

## EXPANDING INDUSTRY

As has been the trend over our 40-year history, existing industry expansions breed the most opportunity for job growth and capital investment, especially in more economically turbulent times. This year existing industry introduced over \$500M in capital investment projects to be completed over the next 5 years including the Publix Downtown Technology Campus, pictured right. From manufacturing to office to distribution, our targeted industry clusters continue to create jobs and opportunity for our community.



## INVENTORY DEVELOPMENT

Lakeland's central location and access to major highways, seaports, and rail continue to make it a leading industrial hub. Because of this, we've enjoyed low vacancy rates around 6% in our existing buildings. To meet demand for space, developers continue to invest in speculative industrial buildings, attracting both new and established businesses. In 2024, three major speculative projects totaling 1.4 million SF either opened or began construction.



## AVIATION CLUSTER

Lakeland International Airport's (LAL) 70+ businesses now employ over 3,000. LAL is currently the 3rd largest cargo airport in Florida, largely due to Amazon Air. Passenger service returned to LAL with the launch of Avelo Airlines flights this Summer from Lakeland to New Haven, CT. Due to the immediate success of these flights, Avelo added 7 new destinations this fall and will be adding a 9th in March 2025.



# FEATURED DEVELOPMENTS



## VERITIV

Veritiv Corporation, headquartered in Atlanta, GA significantly increased their Lakeland footprint expanding from 200,000 SF to 530,000 SF at CenterState Logistics East on Interstate 4 (pictured above). Veritiv is a leading provider of packaging, print and facility solutions, including packaging design, supply chain management, cleaning supplies and paper products.



## LG ELECTRONICS

LG Electronics, headquartered in NJ near NYC, leased 348,000 SF at Lakeland Commerce Center on Drane Field Road near County Line Road. LG's Lakeland location will be a distribution facility for their appliance business including washers, dryers, dishwashers, TVs, refrigerators, etc.

## SEALED AIR

Sealed Air Corporation, a SEE company headquartered in Charlotte, NC, and inventor of Bubble Wrap, recently leased 75,000 SF at Lakeland Commerce Center on Drane Field Road near County Line Road. The Lakeland facility will manufacture packaging materials including Bubble Wrap.

## OVERALL ACTIVITY

### VERITIV

DISTRIBUTION

530,000 SF; 50 JOBS; \$45M CapEx

### LG ELECTRONICS

DISTRIBUTION

348,000 SF; 50 JOBS; \$15M CapEx

### SAFELITE AUTO GLASS

DISTRIBUTION

178,000 SF; 25 JOBS; \$10M CapEx

### SCHWARZ PARTNERS

DISTRIBUTION

104,000 SF; 10 JOBS; \$6M CapEx

### BLUE COMMERCE

LOGISTICS

78,000 SF; 20 JOBS; \$8.5M CapEx

### SEALED AIR CORPORATION

MANUFACTURING

75,000 SF; 25 JOBS; \$7.5M CapEx

### GRUMA

DISTRIBUTION

56,000 SF; 15 JOBS; \$3M CapEx

### CLASSIC METALS OF LAKELAND

MANUFACTURING

54,000 SF; 20 JOBS; \$5M CapEx

### MIDFLORIDA CREDIT UNION

OFFICE

40,000 SF; 10 JOBS; \$10M CapEx

### FEDEX CORPORATION

OFFICE

28,000 SF; \$5M CapEx

### CREATIVE GOODS COMPANY

LOGISTICS

22,000 SF; 10 JOBS; \$2M CapEx

### DISCOUNT AUTO PARTS

MANUFACTURING

15,000 SF; 10 JOBS; \$4M CapEx

### TOTAL:

1,500,000+ SF

245 JOBS

\$121,000,000 CapEx

# HIGH SKILL HIGH WAGE



## PITTSBURGH CITY VISIT

Twenty-two High Skill High Wage investors traveled to Pittsburgh, PA April 8-12th. City Visits focus on high skill high wage jobs, higher education, health care, downtown development and redevelopment, and entrepreneurship. The goal is to bring best practices back to Lakeland. Highlights of the Pittsburgh trip include:

1) Graduate Medical Education – Lakeland Regional recently welcomed their 2nd GME class, 69 new residents, to Lakeland this Summer. UPMC & Allegheny Health, two of the largest health care networks in the country, employ over 2,500 residents in their hospitals. Our discussions focused on recruiting and retaining these residents in our community once they have completed their residency programs.

2) Robotics & Autonomous Vehicles (AV) – Lakeland has a large concentration of manufacturing and warehouse operations but to compete in the future, many of them will need to adapt to AI, Robotics and Automation.



National Robotics  
Engineering Center  
Dr. Herman Herman



Carnegie  
Mellon





Polk County is also home to SunTrax, where research, development and testing of emerging transportation technologies occurs. We learned best practices from experts at Carnegie Mellon University, ground zero for robotics and autonomous vehicle research. We also met with two of the largest autonomous vehicle companies in the world, who have pivoted their research and AV implementation from cars to freight. This has many applications for our manufacturers and logistics companies.



3) Development & Redevelopment – Pittsburgh's downtown has struggled to recover from the pandemic, primarily due to its outsized focus on office with very little residential in the core. By contrast, the nearby Strip District thrives with a balanced mix of office, retail, restaurants, entertainment, and residential spaces. With its scale (size of area, building height, architecture, etc.) resembling downtown Lakeland, the Strip District developers and community leaders provided valuable insights and best practices to implement in Lakeland.



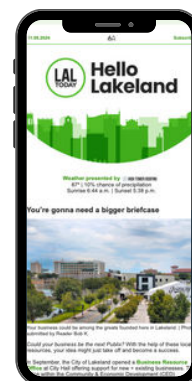
# LEDC INITIATIVES

For the past four decades, the LEDC has worked to identify obstacles to Lakeland's economic growth and address them by launching targeted initiatives. Many of these initiatives have gone on to become sustainable, independent programs and organizations. In the following pages, you'll find updates on several of these initiatives.



## LALTODAY & NEWTOLAKELAND.COM

Lakeland wrestled for years with the question of how to combat "brain drain" and attract and retain Lakeland's college graduates and young professionals. The LEDC asked, "How might we effectively communicate Lakeland's value proposition to the next generation." After creating our own resource-intensive YLakeland program, the LEDC discovered 6AM City during a City Visit to Greenville, SC. 6AM City's morning newsletter aimed to share positive community news and excite residents to become active within their community. Inspired, the LEDC invited cofounders Ryan Johnston and Ryan Heafy to Lakeland. 6AM City opened their 5th office in Lakeland and launched LALToday. Five years later, 6AM is in 26 cities nationwide and our LALToday daily newsletter has 40,000 subscribers and significant online engagement. In 2022, the LEDC partnered with 6AM again to create NewToLakeland.com to answer the 50 most frequently asked questions of people looking to move to Lakeland.



**NEW TO Lakeland**  
YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LAKELAND, FL



2019 Lakeland Leads Investors visit IDEA Public Schools in San Antonio, Texas

## LAKELAND LEADS

Five years ago, the LEDC turned heads by publicly sharing research that showed that the perception of the quality of our educational offerings in Lakeland was a hinderance to company recruitment and employee retention. Community business leaders answered the rallying cry and formed a new 501(c)3, Lakeland Leads, to focus on improving our schools. Today, Lakeland Leads is a thriving non-profit under the direction of Dr. Melody Rider. In 2024, Lakeland Leads rebranded as ConnectED Polk to better reflect their mission and reach. ConnectED walks alongside Polk County Public Schools and other educational organizations to support their efforts and fill the gaps to prepare our future workforce by connecting the students and faculty to industry. This year, ConnectED celebrated the success of several initiatives:

- Adoption of School Links career connection software by Polk County Public Schools
- Opening of IDEA Lakeland public charter school with 100% enrollment
- Successful lobbying and award of \$2.5M by the State Legislature for Junior Achievement's BizTown/Finance Park at Tenoroc High School



Anniversary

10  
YEARS



2024 Catapult Members

## CATAPULT LAKELAND

In 2011, LEDC visited San Francisco for their City Visit. While there was plenty to explore around entrepreneurship, there wasn't a clear correlation to Lakeland. In 2013, investors visited Chattanooga and started to see how private philanthropy had created a framework to support entrepreneurs. From there, LEDC leaders mobilized the troops and developed a plan. Thanks to Wesley Beck who offered the basement of his Bank of America building, the LEDC's Catapult Lakeland program was born, supporting 80 members in its first year. Fast forward 10 years, Catapult Lakeland is its own 501(c)3 with six employees, over 250 members and a budget over \$1.5M. To date, over 50 businesses have fully launched from Catapult. Through the support of Lakeland's financial institutions, Catapult's Launch grant program has awarded over \$430,000 to entrepreneurs purchasing equipment to level-up their business. Over the last decade, Catapult has continued to evolve its model to determine the best ways to provide support to founders and the Lakeland start-up ecosystem.



Original Catapult 2014



Catapult™

2024 Session 2  
SLP Graduates



## SUMMER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



In 2008, the LEDC launched its first Summer Leadership Program after learning about a similar talent retention and leadership training program during their City Visit to Memphis. With the program paused during the pandemic summers of 2020 and 2021, this year marked the 15th year of the program. We welcomed 88 young professionals from 27 different companies. The program was revamped this year to be more focused around themed days and interactive workshops:

- Community & Connection Day Teambuilding
- Leadership Within the Workplace
- Leadership Outside of the Workplace
- Love Lakeland Day (tours)
- Building Your Community Within the Community



This year James Simpson (FSC '24) returned as the SLP program coordinator and was assisted by Carter Sandman (Samford '26).

To date, 953 people have completed the Summer Leadership Program representing over 100 companies.



# ADVOCACY



The LEDC hosted Congressman Scott Franklin's DC-based staff for an update on Lakeland's economy, a tour of Catapult, and a discussion on the type of support our community needs such as funding for wastewater and road infrastructure.

Advocacy and the behind-the-scenes foundational work to prepare for Lakeland's future is a prominent part of the LEDC's annual strategy. This year was no exception.



The future opportunities at Florida Polytechnic University are plentiful and the LEDC wasted no time meeting with the newly appointed President, Dr. Devin Stephenson, to strategize. From how to better leverage the university to attract industry and research partners, to possible ways the university can grow its footprint, Dr. Stephenson and his Board of Trustees have been receptive to innovative ideas. The LEDC was invited to present at their Board of Trustees meeting and participate in their strategic planning retreat.



Maintaining a pro-business environment and prioritizing needs to meet the demands of business and the citizenry is paramount to the success of the Lakeland economy. We have worked closely this year with our State, County, and City elected officials and administrations to maintain competitive rates on property taxes, utilities, and working towards a balanced budget in future years.



# LEDC BOARD



**Cory Petcoff**  
Baron Realty



**Todd Baylis**  
Qgiv



**Mark Cabrera**  
Saddle Creek  
Logistics



**Danielle Drummond**  
Lakeland Regional  
Health



**Mike Smith**  
Publix



**Karen Turner**  
Lockheed Martin



**Will Harrell**  
William H. Harrell, PLLC



**Callie Neslund**  
GiveWell

# LEDC TEAM



**Steve Scruggs**  
President



**Katie Decker**  
Senior VP



**Laura Taylor**  
VP Operations



**Abbas (AJ) Jaffer**  
VP Business Development



863.687.3788



502 E. Main St. Lakeland, FL 33801



[www.lakelandedc.com](http://www.lakelandedc.com)