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MELBOURNE REGIONAL CHAMBER HOSTS BOARD & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Asks the Hard Questions Required to Move the Space Coast Forward

Melbourne, FL – September 2019 – The Melbourne Regional Chamber (MRC) held its inaugural Board & Community Leadership Retreat at the Wyndham Grand Jupiter, the weekend of September 13 – 14. This one-of-a-kind event convened two distinct panels of our region’s most influential leaders and included a session with Sheriff Wayne Ivey with an audience of 100+ participants comprised of MRC board members, elected officials, business owners, and key community partners. Facilitating the overall event was Tony Carvajal, Executive Vice President of the Florida Chamber Foundation.

The Industry & Infrastructure Panel focused on the workforce needs of the region’s largest job creators and the infrastructure needed to accommodate growth. The panel members included top leaders in the aerospace industry, Brevard County’s largest business sector.

Gary Spulak, President of Embraer Aircraft Holding, Inc., speaking on the region’s commitment to building and maintaining capacity, advised that “Brevard County is now front and center to the world. We’re here, we bought in and we’ll be with you 100%, but the crossroads period is here – now – and private sector money is building the future.”

Rick Simonian, L3Harris, VP Strategy & Business Development, discussed factors that led L3Harris to choose to remain in Brevard County, “Three governors were after us. It was high stakes, and incentives played a big part in it.” Derek Descovich, Director of Site Integration for the Northrop Grumman Manned Aircraft Design Center of Excellence, agreed on the importance of incentives, stating, “We [Northrop Grumman] would not necessarily have come to Florida had the state not offered incentives, and those have more than paid for themselves.”

The panel’s discussion also led to the importance of businesses in the region speaking with a unified voice on important issues. “The Melbourne Regional Chamber is the voice of business in our community,” said Greg Donovan, Executive Director of the Orlando Melbourne International Airport.

“The Chamber is heading in a new direction where we champion advocacy efforts on behalf of our members and convene stakeholders to discuss the collaborative solutions to challenges facing our business community,” explained Todd Pokrywa, Melbourne Regional Chamber Board Chair-Elect and President of The Viera Company. “Our effort to communicate the very tangible needs of many diverse businesses and employers located within our region has demanded of us a new perspective. Our overall business climate must reflect that we understand how to leverage opportunities while also being good stewards of such a unique place. We’re being responsive to the changing needs of our community, and that requires new thinking.”

Next was the Workforce & Housing Panel, where panelists were asked how each entity connects to the overall economy, among other questions.

“A multitude of issues, challenges, opportunities and solutions were discussed during the retreat. The Chamber is using those substantial discussions to craft its legislative agenda for Florida’s upcoming 2020 legislative session as



well as identify its 2020 initiatives and priorities,” said Michael Ayers, President & CEO of the Melbourne Regional Chamber.

The Melbourne Regional Chamber (MRC) is a 5-star accredited Chamber from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that was founded in 1925. MRC represents 1,100-plus members making it the largest business organization in the East Central Florida region. Its mission is to develop and promote the business interests of our members through representation, advocacy education and support while contributing to the growth and prosperity of a vibrant business community. For more information, visit www.MelbourneRegionalChamber.com.

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Panelist Details:

The Industry & Infrastructure panel consisted of Gary Spulak, President of Embraer Aircraft Holding, Inc., Mark Bontrager, VP Spaceport Operations for Space Florida, Chuck Shaffer, COO/CFO of Seacoast Banking Corporation of Florida, Rick Simonian, VP Strategy & Business Development L3Harris, Greg Donovan, Executive Director of the Orlando Melbourne International Airport, Derek Descovich, Director of Site Integration for the Northrop Grumman Manned Aircraft Design Center of Excellence, and Lisa Steffen, General Manager, Melbourne CNS Programs, Commercial Avionics, Collins Aerospace. The panel was moderated by Todd Pokrywa, President of The Viera Company and Melbourne Regional Chamber Chair-Elect.

Participating Workforce & Housing Panel panelists were Dr. Mark Mullins, Superintendent of Brevard Public Schools, Dr. Linda Miedema, VP Academic Affairs, Eastern Florida State College, Dr. Marshall Willman, President, Florida Preparatory Academy, Jeff Arnott, Adult Education Director, Brevard Public Schools, Ian Golden, Director of Brevard County Housing & Human Services Department, and Dr. Monica Baloga, Sr. VP for Academic Administration, Florida Institute of Technology. Moderating the panel was Travis Proctor, President, Artemis IT.