

St. Johns County Development on Display, Nocatee Developer Shares Tips

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A retail strip at Nocatee

St. Johns County is one of the fastest growing areas in the state, not to mention the country.

That fact was on display Thursday night as the Urban Land Institute held a community meeting where more than 150 people heard from the county's developers about several housing projects and master planned communities.

Fittingly, the event was held at Nocatee's Crosswater Hall surrounded by the nation's third fastest-selling master planned community.

Melissa Glasgow, the director of economic development for St. Johns County, talked about the county's growth.

St. Johns has a population of 226,600 and is growing at 4 percent a year making it the 15th fastest growing county in the U.S. The unemployment rate stands at 3.5 percent and the county is averaging 2,600 single-family building permits.

St. Johns has several things going for it. Glasgow highlighted the top-ranked schools, the county being named Florida's healthiest five years running and the business-friendly environment. She lead with the fact that economic development is the number one priority for the county's board of county commissioners.

The projects on display represented thousands of houses and more than one million square-feet of commercial space. Featured projects include Celestina, Markland, Nocatee, Rivertown, Sawgrass Village, Shearwater, TrailMark and Treaty Oaks.

Greg Barbour, chief operating officer and partner at the PARC Group, was there representing Nocatee. The development started about 15 years ago.

Barbour shared a few tips with the crowd about what has allowed the PARC Group to succeed at Nocatee.

Flexible Planned Unit Development zoning allowed adjustments to plan to meet evolving market conditions and opportunities.

He pointed to CDD Bond Financing as one of the keys to success. That allowed the development to build out \$300 million of infrastructure.

Long-term outlook combined with financial stability. He spoke of the Nocatee's landowners ability to weather the recession and stay on the long-term plan as another key factor.

Working relationships with local governments. Nocatee has needed modifications to the PUD during the 15 years that it has been constructing the community.