

Florida Trend

The Issues, People and Ideas that Define Florida Business

Jacksonville and NORTHEAST FLORIDA

St. Johns County, Florida Sustainable, smart development characterizes St. Johns County's growth.

By Mark Basch
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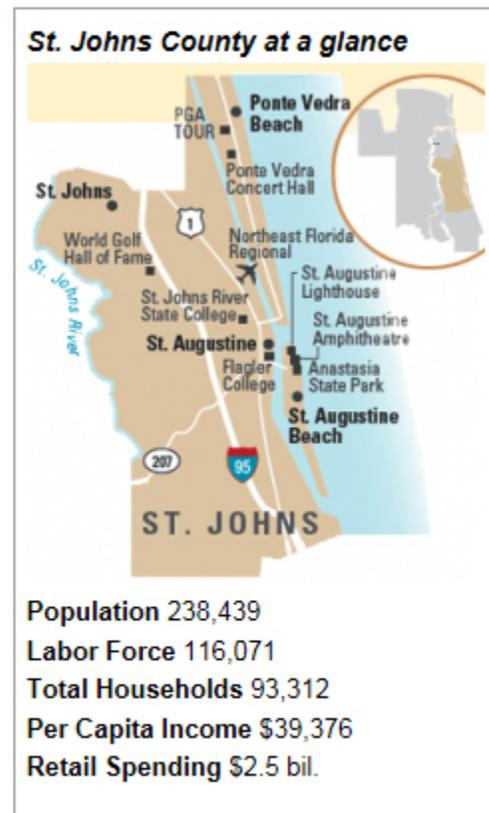
Golf Scores Long-term Benefits

St. Johns County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the U.S., and its economy has had no problem accommodating the rapid growth

While the population keeps rising — growing 24% since 2010 — St. Johns County's unemployment rate keeps shrinking, and no county in Florida had a lower jobless rate than St. Johns' 2.7% at the end of the summer 2017.

Northrop Grumman is St. Johns County's largest corporate employer, as the aerospace firm added 400 jobs to the 1,000 it already had after a recent expansion of its facility at the Northeast Florida Regional Airport in St. Augustine.

The county's biggest attraction has historically been the nation's oldest city, St. Augustine. But golf may be rivaling history as the county's claim to fame.



Golf fans already travel here to visit the World Golf Hall of Fame outside of St. Augustine and the golf resorts of Ponte Vedra Beach, but golf is also a major corporate presence in the county.

The PGA TOUR last year revealed plans to consolidate its headquarters operations from 17 buildings throughout the county to a single location in Ponte Vedra Beach, creating 300 additional jobs on top of the 800 it already has.

The PGA TOUR represents the largest corporate headquarters in the county, says Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development for St. Johns County.

“If plans play out as anticipated, the project will represent a very innovative public-private partnership generating extraordinary long-term benefit for a single project,” she says.

New Industrial Projects on Tap in the Johns County

While St. Johns County attracts attention for its leisure activities and community development, the county is also attracting new industrial projects

Two projects in process are expansions of beer distributor Burkhardt Distributing Co. and MAS HVAC, which designs and builds commercial air handlers.

Burkhardt has been operating in St. Johns County since 1989 but because of its growth, it needs a bigger facility. County commissioners approved \$426,141 in incentives to help the company build a new \$11-million, 113,000-sq.-ft. facility that will become its headquarters and distribution center.

The company, with 84 employees, may also expand the building further as it grows.

MAS HVAC is currently headquartered in Green Cove Springs, but will move to a 32,400-sq.-ft. facility in St. Johns once that building is completed.

MAS HVAC will receive up to \$160,000 in tax incentives for the \$4.15-million project.

The company had 17 to 18 employees when its incentive application was approved but said it expects to double that after the move, with jobs that pay an average of \$61,000.

Nocatee and Beyond

When the First Coast Expressway is extended to St. Johns County, it will bring you close to Nocatee, the sprawling 13,323-acre development mainly in northern St. Johns County that extends partially into southern Duval County.



Nocatee neighborhood

Nocatee has already transformed the region, certified by real estate advisory firm RCLCO as the third-fastest selling master planned community in the country.

RCLCO reported sales of 973 homes in 2016 in Nocatee after 1,105 homes were sold in 2015, when it was also ranked as the third best-selling community.

Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development for St. Johns County, says Nocatee attracts new residents with distinctive neighborhoods within the community. “Their popularity remains high as they continue to add new housing options at varying price points to further diversify their community offerings,” she says.

The growth of Nocatee is spurring more development nearby in northern St. Johns, Glasgow says.



The Pavilion at Durbin Park

For example, Twin Creeks/Beachwalk is a 1,000-acre project that will include 3,000 residences plus 2 million square feet of retail and commercial space. A 14-acre Crystal Lagoon amenity features a private beach club and sparkling blue water for swimming, sailing and other activities.

Also under development in northern St. Johns County is Durbin Park, a 1,600- acre project that will open with 700,000 square feet of retail space.