



# ST. JOHNS C O U N T Y C H A M B E R O F C O M M E R C E



## EDC ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2022-23

# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

## FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023



**CHAIR**  
**Orville Dothage**  
Northrop Grumman Corp.



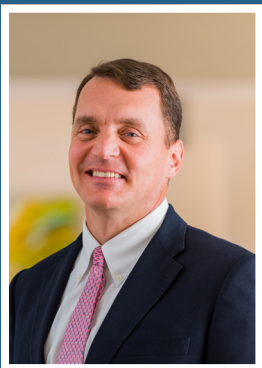
**VICE CHAIR**  
**Christina Upchurch**  
St. Johns County School District



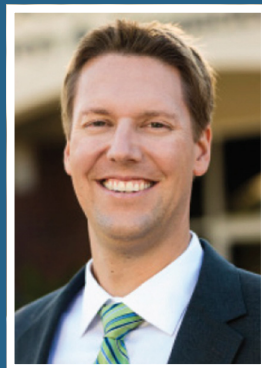
**IMMEDIATE  
PAST CHAIR**  
**Mike Koppenhafer**  
Fisher Koppenhafer  
Architecture and Interior  
Design



**CHAMBER  
CHAIR**  
**Beth Sweeny**  
Flagler College & Chair of St.  
Johns County Chamber of  
Commerce



**Carlton DeVoight**  
UF Health St. Johns



**Andrew Jackson**  
Jackson Law Group



**Victor Raymos**  
St. Augustine & St  
Johns County Board of  
Realtors & MLS



**Dirk Schroeder**  
Century 21 St.  
Augustine Properties

# WORD FROM THE CHAIR

St. Johns County continues to grow despite rising interest rates and inflation. At the end of the fiscal year, we had a 2.8% unemployment rate and added more than 43,000 workers to the labor force. Businesses continued to look to grow and expand in St. Johns County. As the fiscal year ended, there were 23 active prospects in the development pipeline, with 60% falling within the identified targeted industries. New inquiries have slowed over the previous year, but the County is still actively pursuing new opportunities.

The County Commissioners approved two industrial incentive packages during the last fiscal year. Project Krew was approved for a \$5,800,000 incentive package to bring 400 jobs to the County in the targeted health and life sciences area. The project would also significantly increase the County's stock of high-tech capital (i.e., robotics equipment) and high-skilled labor. KeHE was also approved for their new 530,000-square-foot warehouse and distribution center that will add 100 jobs to the 346 already here.

The Flagler Health + and UF Health merger announcement created tremendous interest in the future and advancement of healthcare in St. Johns County and the Jacksonville MSA. At an Economic Development Council breakfast, Mr. Carlton Devooght, president and CEO of Flagler Health +, and Dr. David Nelson, senior vice president for health affairs at the University of Florida and president of UF Health, discussed the merger and why it will be a win for everyone in the region. One of the first announcements was the construction of the much-anticipated Durbin Park Health Complex. This exciting merger will continue to elevate St. Johns County as a major healthcare hub for the Southeast.

The Chamber also completed an extensive study on housing in the region, which led to the launch of the Attainable Workforce Housing Coalition. The purpose of this group is to bring attention and focus of this critical to the public and elected officials. With the average cost of a new home in St. Johns County exceeding \$550,000, it is impossible for many of our employees to find housing. The goal is to create additional options so individuals can live in the county where they work.

Entrepreneurship continued to be a significant focus of the EDC. The Pitch Factory program prepared entrepreneurs by providing a seven-session program taught by local experts. Participants develop a general understanding of starting a new business and how to identify available resources to bring their business along. The program allows each participant to pitch their idea to a panel and receive feedback.

The Chamber and our business partners have a strong spirit of cooperation and collaboration. I want to thank everyone at the Chamber for all their hard work this past year. I look forward to my continued involvement as the Immediate Past Chair of the Economic Development Council and can confidently turn over leadership to Carlton DeVooght as Chair.

Regards,

*Orv Dothage*

Orv Dothage  
Chair, Executive Committee  
Economic Development Council 2022-2023

# MISSION & PARTNERSHIPS

The Economic Development Council (EDC) provides support to business owners, executives, and entrepreneurs who seek to start, expand or relocate enterprises in St. Johns County.

Our efforts are leveraged by collaboration and cooperation with federal, state, regional, and local partners. The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Council wishes to specifically recognize the following partners for their positive contributions to economic development in St. Johns County.

## MISSION

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The mission of the Economic Development Council is multifaceted: to promote the economic growth of St. Johns County by attracting new business and industry into the community, enhancing the growth and expansion of existing business and industry, fostering entrepreneurialism and innovation, and supporting workforce development and business education programs.

## PARTNERSHIPS

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Economic development is a purposeful and collaborative endeavor in which the St. Johns County Chamber is fortunate to count the following organizations as partners:

## ST. JOHNS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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Economic Development is the number one priority of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. Capitalizing on its global appeal, St. Johns County is poised for economic growth through its strategic location, favorable climate, local economic development incentives, and outstanding community services.

## OTHER PARTNERS

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- CareerSource Northeast Florida
- City of St. Augustine
- City of St. Augustine Beach
- First Coast Manufacturers Association
- First Coast Technical College
- Flagler College Innovation Center
- Florida Chamber of Commerce
- Florida Commerce
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Florida Economic Development Council
- Industrial Development Authority
- Jacksonville Transportation Authority
- JAXPORT
- JAXUSA
- Northeast Florida Regional Airport
- Northeast Florida Regional Council
- SCORE
- Small Business Development Center
- St. Johns County

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year started with a real-life test of our ESF-18 readiness. Hurricane Ian blew through St. Johns County and was followed by Hurricane Nicole forty-one days later. As part of our ESF 18 Emergency Response/Disaster Recovery efforts, the Chamber coordinated educational programming and secured business resources to access for both storms. A dedicated web page was developed to house links to recovery documents and provide information. The staff called or visited over 150 affected businesses in the days following the storms to provide additional information and support.

During the second quarter Flagler Health+ and UF Health, the University of Florida's academic health center, announced that they had entered an exclusive, non-binding letter of intent to develop plans to transform healthcare delivery in the region with a bold vision for the future. That final merger took place on September 1 with the announcement of UF Health St. Johns.

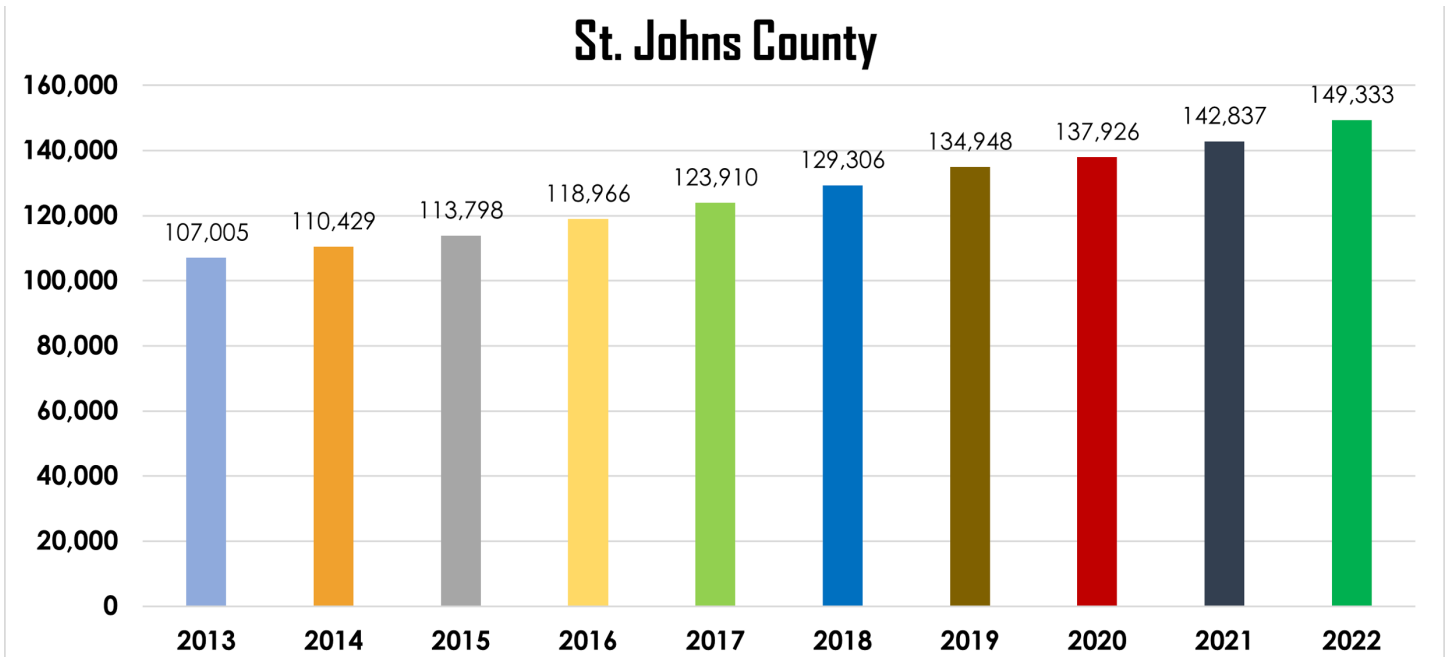
The third quarter continued to show growth despite rising interest rates. St. Johns County announced it received \$59 million in appropriations from the State of Florida. Funded projects include \$25 million for the complete restoration of the critically eroded North Ponte Vedra Beach and \$15 million to extend County Road 2209 to International Golf Parkway.

Entrepreneurship was also center stage this year. In collaboration with the JAX Chamber's Jacksonville Women's Business Center, the Chamber held our annual Pitch Factory program. This seven-week entrepreneurial education course helps participants elevate their business through an intensive training program designed to assist with developing and refining the entrepreneur's value proposition. There were 34 individuals in this summer's cohort, all excited to learn more about how to launch their business idea.

The St. Johns County Board of Commissioners approved two economic development incentive programs for businesses in 2022-23. Project Krew will operate an advanced manufacturing facility in a large-scale industrial building in St. Johns County. In addition to offering career opportunities with substantial benefits, Project Krew would add to the County's manufacturing, health and life sciences profile and significantly increase the County's stock of high-tech capital (i.e., robotics equipment) and high-skilled labor. KeHE Corporation also received approval and will construct a new 530,000-square-foot distribution center that will add 100 additional jobs to the 340 that already exist in the County.

At the end of the year, the Chamber wrapped up an 18-month study on the housing crisis in St. Johns County. Our fourth quarter Economic Development Council breakfast focused on Attainable Housing. Dr. Jerry Parrish from Florida State University and Mr. Mark Nighbor from One Mark Consulting presented their findings on housing in our region. This study showed the current affordability gap and highlighted the opportunity cost and tax revenue loss of not having attainable housing options in St. Johns County. Many essential workers are forced to buy or rent homes outside St. Johns County due to a need for more local options. The Chamber formed an Attainable Housing Coalition to continue to gather support and additional information that will be provided to elected officials, along with policy suggestions and other partnership opportunities to assist in bridging this gap.

# CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE



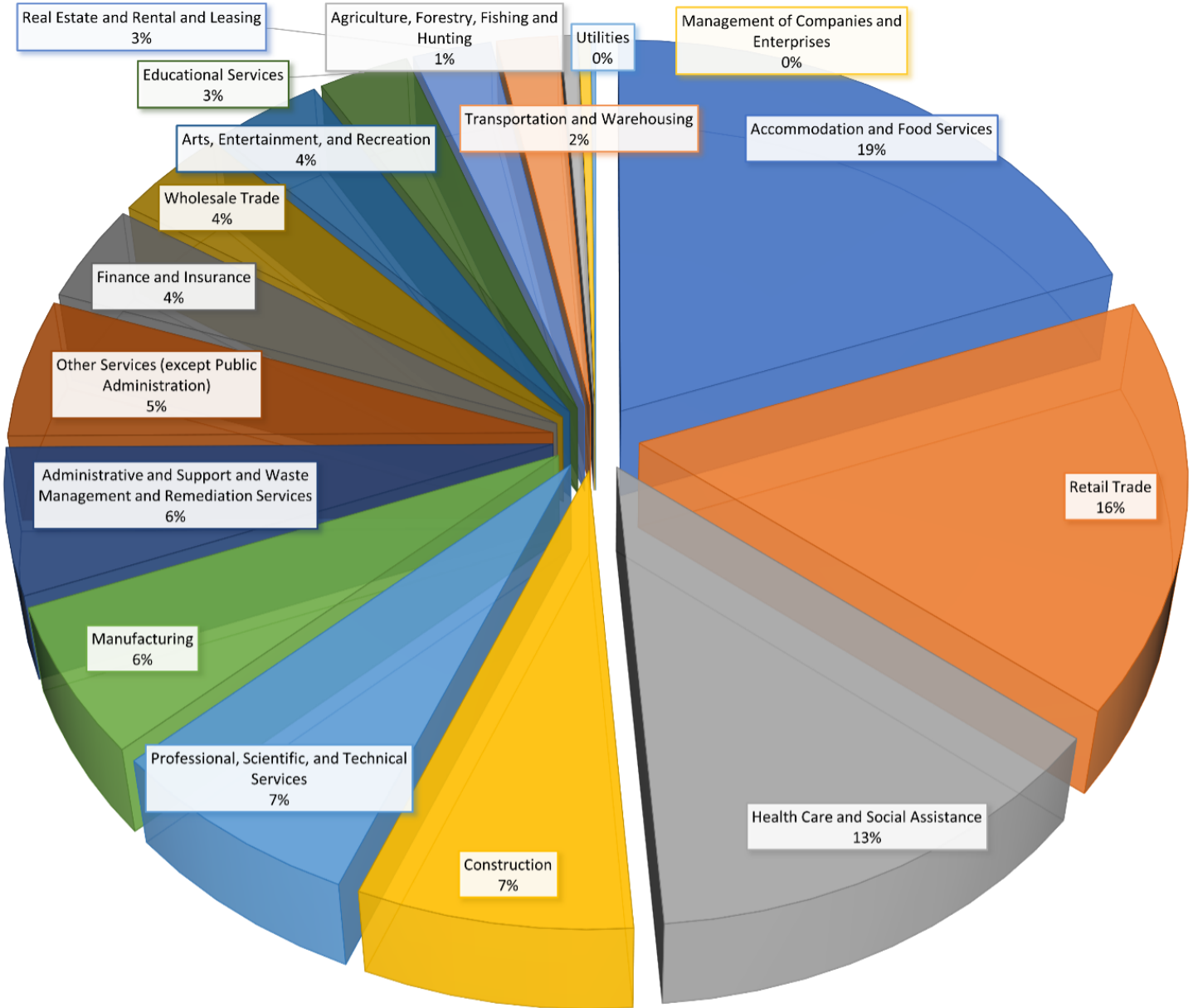
Source: Economic Research Division, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

Over the last decade, St. Johns County has experienced continued growth in the civilian labor force. In 2022, the county added 6,496 civilian jobs representing an increase of 4.3 percent over 2021.



# EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

## St. Johns County



Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

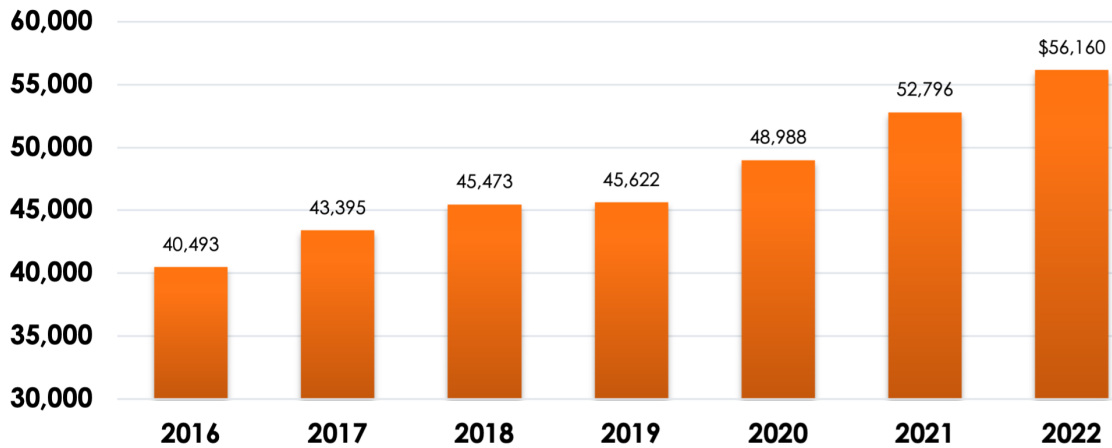
Data as of 2023Q1

Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

The above chart outlines the total employment by industry sector for St. Johns County residents based on 2022 employment data. Tourism and Retail make up a significant portion of the employment in St. Johns County. That is followed by healthcare and social assistance jobs.

# AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES & PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS

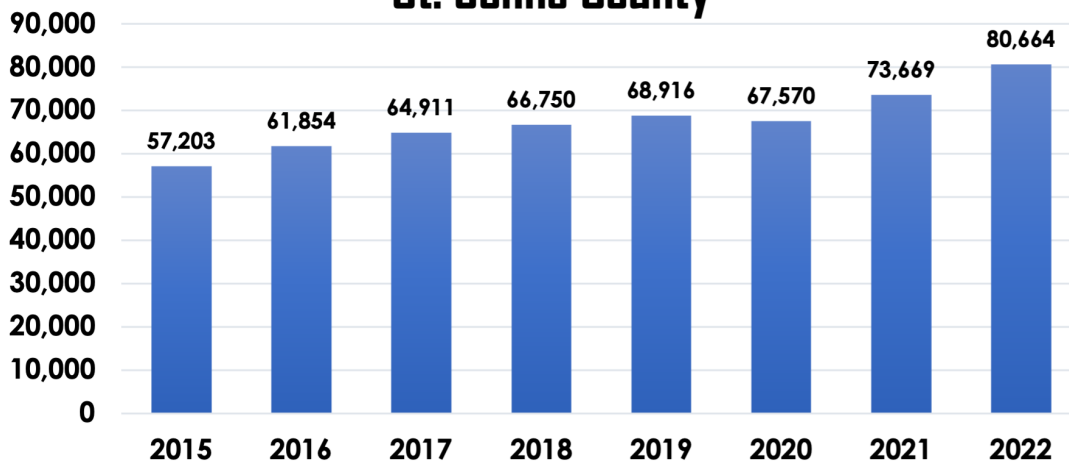
## Private Sector Average Annual Wages St. Johns County



Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Workforce Statistics and Economic Research, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Program (QCEW).

As detailed by the above chart, average annual wages in St. Johns County have increased annually for several years. Average wages increased 6.37 percent in 2022 to over \$56,000.

## Private Sector Jobs St. Johns County



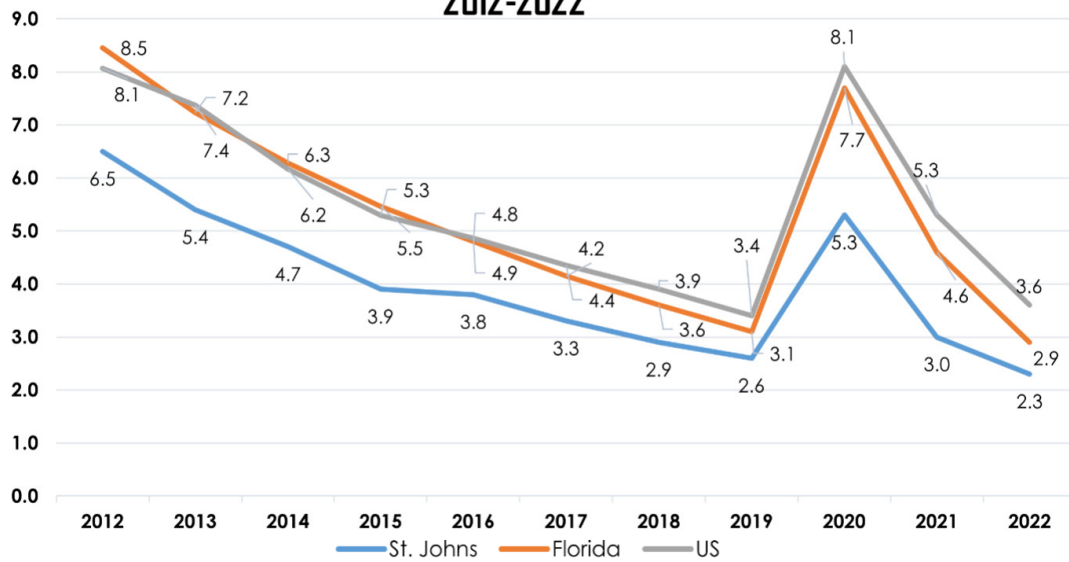
Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity  
Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages

Coming off strong tourism activity and the diminishing effects of the pandemic, private employment increased dramatically. After being down 2.1% in 2020 this year brought a second year of increases over 9 percent.



# UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

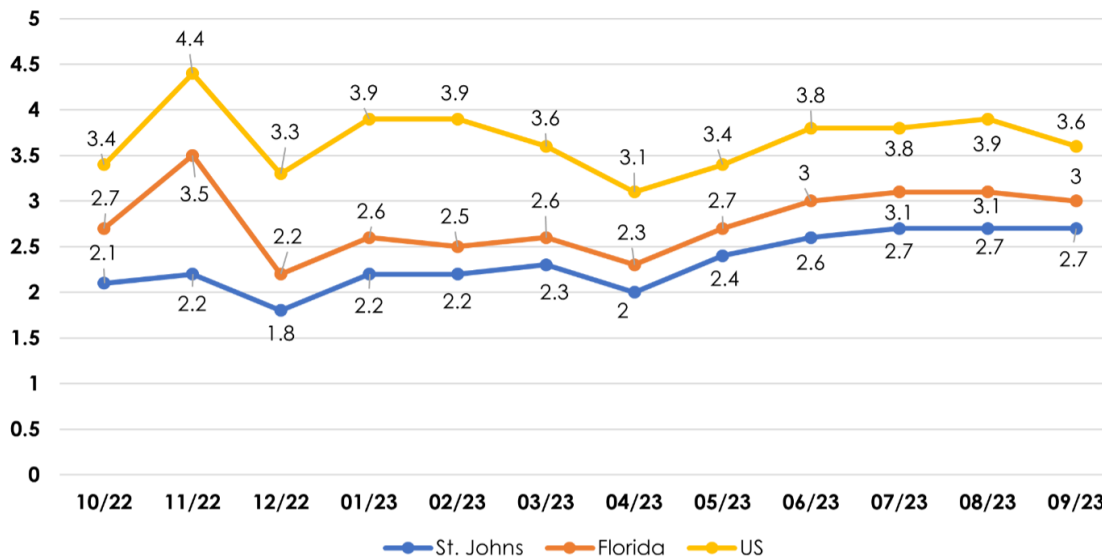
## Annual Unemployment Rate Comparison St. Johns County - State of Florida - United States 2012-2022



Sources: Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Economic Research Division, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Rates are not seasonally adjusted.

In 2022, St. Johns County’s Annual Unemployment rate dropped significantly as the pandemic waned and inflation fears calmed, with an average unemployment rate of 2.3%, below both the state average of 2.9% and the national average of 3.6%.

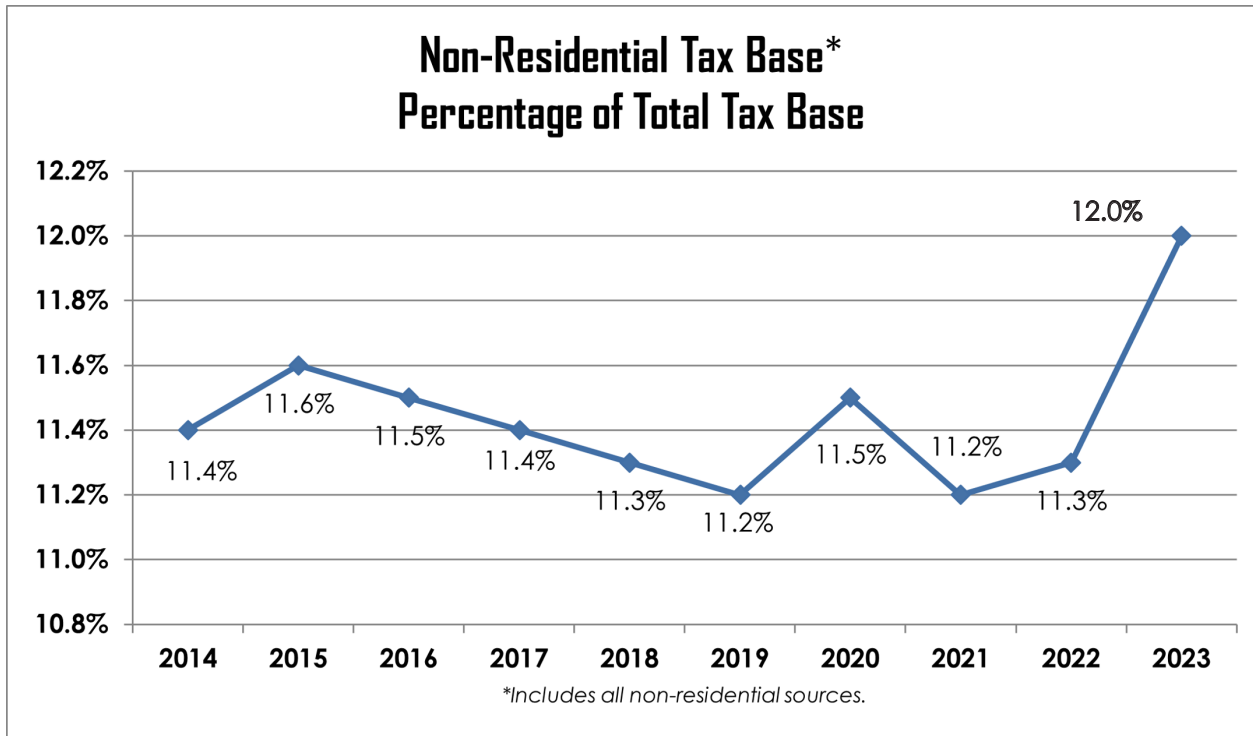
## Unemployment Rate Comparison FY 22-23 St. Johns County - State of Florida - United States



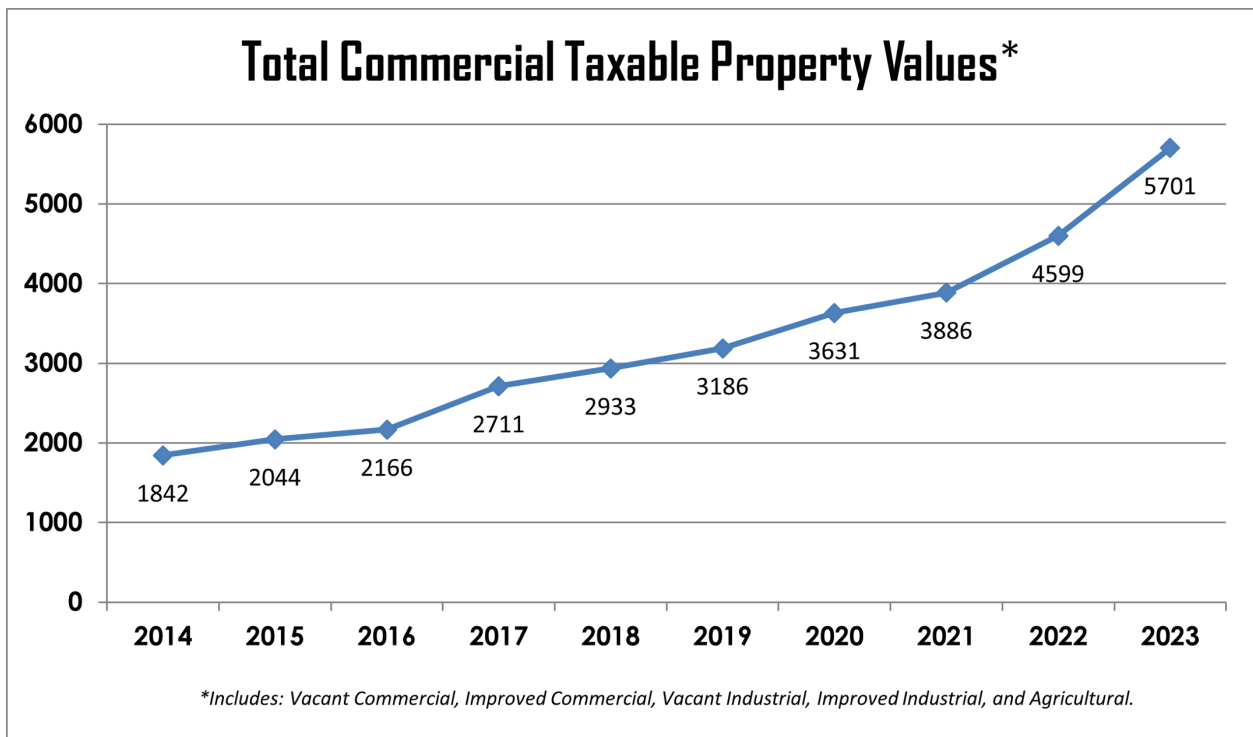
Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. Rates are not seasonally adjusted.

Despite inflation continuing to be an issue nationwide, the unemployment rate for St. Johns County trended below the state and nation. At the end of the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year, the DEO reported an unemployment rate of 2.7% for St. Johns County as compared to Florida at 3.0% and the U.S. at 3.6%. This was an increase from the same time in 2021-22, but still remains historically low.

# NON-RESIDENTIAL TAX BASE & COMMERCIAL PROPERTY VALUE



Source: St. Johns County Office of Management and Budget. See chart on following page.



Source: St. Johns County Office of Management and Budget. Values shown in millions

- A key indicator of the economic health of St. Johns County is the percentage of our tax base fueled by non-residential sources. Growing this percentage continues to be a priority of the Chamber and EDC Team. The Chamber and EDC remain focused on continuing our collaborative efforts with St. Johns County and other partners to attract new industry, retain and nurture the growth of existing businesses as well as encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.
- The percentage of the County’s nonresidential tax base increased to its highest level in a decade in 2023 due to the high growth of retail business in the region. While St. Johns County continues to experience a high growth rate of residential building, it is important to note that the total value of the commercial tax base increased by 78.9% in the last 5 years.
- The value of the commercial tax base increased to \$5,701,775,942 for 2023 while the taxable property value for residential property increased to \$ 40,242,958,342.
- In 2023, St. Johns County recorded \$ 1,615,212,064 in personal property as taxable value, representing 3.6% of the total tax base. In 2022, personal property as taxable value totaled \$1,418,447,472 or 3.7% of the total tax base. Personal property tax is generated entirely by businesses.

# CAREERSOURCE NORTHEAST FLORIDA PARTNERSHIP

In partnership with CareerSource Northeast Florida, Chamber staff conducted thirty (30) industry visits in FY 2022-2023. Visits were conducted in person with existing St. Johns County companies in various industries including business technology, construction, marketing, manufacturing, engineering, and tourism. Through these workforce surveys and additional conversations with businesses across the county, the Chamber collected data regarding the current and anticipated state of the local economy and workforce, the challenges businesses face recruiting and retaining team members and where additional support and training resources were needed.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

The following local businesses were surveyed in FY 2022-2032:

- |                                    |   |                               |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| • The Exchange at St. Augustine    | • Bartram Dental Practice and Dental Assisting School | • Solar Stik, Inc.            |
| • PowerWeb Video                   | • Atlas Physical Therapy                              | • Answer Aide                 |
| • Snyder AC, Plumbing and Electric | • Oxifresh  | • Women’s Care                |
| • McGraw Inc.                      | • Prime IV  | • Vermeer Southeast           |
| • A Great Sun Solar Energy         | • YMCA - Nocatee                                      | • Haymaker Coffee             |
| • ABA Connection                   | • The Blake   | • St. Johns Public Schools    |
| • Daybreak Convenience Stores      | • Encompass Healthcare                                | • Herff Jones                 |
| • Femmewell                        | • Vicar’s Landing                                     | • BestBets                    |
|                                    | • AndersonOrd   | • Vested Metals International |
|                                    | • The Superr  | • Fishbites                   |
|                                    | • HuGus Group   | • Volato Aviation             |

# TAXABLE PROPERTY VALUES BY CATEGORY ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Tax Year:	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Residential</b>						
Vacant	1,041,245,604	1,148,020,179	1,211,996,088	1,280,539,095	1,582,292,674	1,757,284,039
Single Family	17,724,099,068	19,552,760,935	21,749,946,516	24,036,255,305	28,480,635,350	33,077,683,056
Mobile Homes	225,828,030	242,127,829	267,052,799	293,769,271	358,274,934	411,938,444
Multi Family less than 10 units	430,284,218	464,833,390	503,075,384	534,432,550	623,410,494	695,145,489
Multi Family 10 units or more	125,605,448	165,601,149	276,437,219	370,903,319	422,813,730	573,643,012
Condominium	2,506,849,573	2,685,777,559	2,859,788,610	3,013,582,848	3,365,281,192	3,726,957,412
Retirement Homes & Miscellaneous	252,420	267,022	249,694	249,494	269,044	306,890
Sub total Residential	22,054,164,361	24,259,388,063	26,868,546,310	29,529,731,882	34,832,977,418	40,242,958,342
<b>% Residential</b>	<b>84.9%</b>	<b>85.1%</b>	<b>84.8%</b>	<b>85.1%</b>	<b>85.3%</b>	<b>84.5%</b>
<b>Non-Residential</b>						
Vacant Commercial	178,544,152	209,871,093	241,515,173	324,188,297	473,165,068	678,827,479
Improved Commercial	1,895,235,405	2,098,358,778	2,326,482,388	2,473,758,043	2,823,911,918	3,477,652,548
Vacant Industrial	12,253,943	11,085,645	9,440,483	14,230,065	-	-
Improved Industrial	337,171,420	382,691,827	430,703,362	449,413,569	491,133,139	596,986,945
Agricultural	121,370,377	131,635,165	141,361,226	136,710,308	187,052,150	197,393,901
Institutional	191,136,541	195,957,406	250,614,441	254,109,925	271,972,636	353,244,247
Government	18,009,140	18,185,263	19,570,774	19,242,910	19,390,715	20,737,780
Leasehold Interest	5,199,675	5,174,939	5,581,132	5,482,226	5,628,230	6,166,909
Miscellaneous	23,930,699	24,828,428	32,549,856	35,397,738	36,610,545	31,604,187
Non-Agricultural Acreage	112,738,496	70,816,656	136,935,717	135,879,360	254,905,266	295,146,800
Centrally Assessed	37,618,440	37,723,415	37,238,339	38,230,616	41,422,956	44,015,146
Sub total Business-Commercial/Industrial	2,933,208,288	3,186,328,615	3,631,992,891	3,886,643,057	4,605,192,623	5,701,775,942
<b>% Business-Commercial/Industrial</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>
<b>Personal Property</b>						
Personal Property	983,598,778	1,045,979,904	1,177,510,012	1,266,598,067	1,418,447,472	1,695,212,064
<b>% Personal Property</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>
Total taxable value	25,970,971,427	28,491,696,582	31,678,049,213	34,682,973,006	40,856,617,513	47,639,946,348
Sub total exempt value	10,486,433,151	11,277,361,364	12,625,707,674	13,918,808,994	25,204,201,506	31,496,773,476
Total just value	36,457,404,578	39,769,057,946	44,303,756,887	48,601,782,000	66,060,819,019	79,136,719,824
<b>Exempt value as % of total just value</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>38.2</b>	<b>39.8</b>

Source: St. Johns County Office of Management and Budget

# POPULATION GROWTH & EDUCATION LEVELS

## POPULATION

	St. Johns County	Jacksonville MSA	Florida	USA
<b>Population</b>				
2000 Total Population	123,135	1,122,750	15,982,378	281,421,906
2010 Total Population	190,039	1,345,996	18,801,310	308,745,538
2020 Total Population	265,512	1,704,220	21,587,015	333,793,107
2023 Total Population	311,014	1,861,118	22,114,754	333,934,112
2010-2023 Population: Annual Growth Rate	4.50%	1.60%	1.30%	0.70%
2022-2027 Population: Annual Growth Rate	2.48%	1.67%	1.33%	0.72%
Median Age	42.5	39.9	42.8	38.9

## EDUCATION LEVELS

	St. Johns County	Jacksonville MSA	Florida	USA
<b>Educational Attainment (population 25+)</b>				
2021 Population Age 25+: Less than 9th Grade (%)	1.10%	1.60%	2.90%	2.90%
2021 Population Age 25+: 9-12th Grade/No Diploma (%)	2.20%	4.20%	4.70%	4.10%
2021 Population Age 25+: High School Diploma (%)	12.20%	16.60%	17.50%	16.00%
2021 Population Age 25+: GED/Alternative Credential (%)	2.60%	3.40%	3.10%	2.80%
2021 Population Age 25+: Some College/No Degree (%)	12.30%	13.50%	12.80%	12.60%
2021 Population Age 25+: Associate's Degree (%)	6.80%	7.70%	7.90%	6.50%
2021 Population Age 25+: Bachelor's Degree (%)	21.20%	15.10%	14.90%	15.00%
2021 Population Age 25+: Graduate/Professional Degree (%)	12.70%	8.20%	8.80%	9.30%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

## RAPID POPULATION GROWTH

From 2010 to 2023, the population of St. Johns County grew 63.7% from 190,039 in 2010 to 311,014 as of July 1, 2023.

## HIGHLY EDUCATED

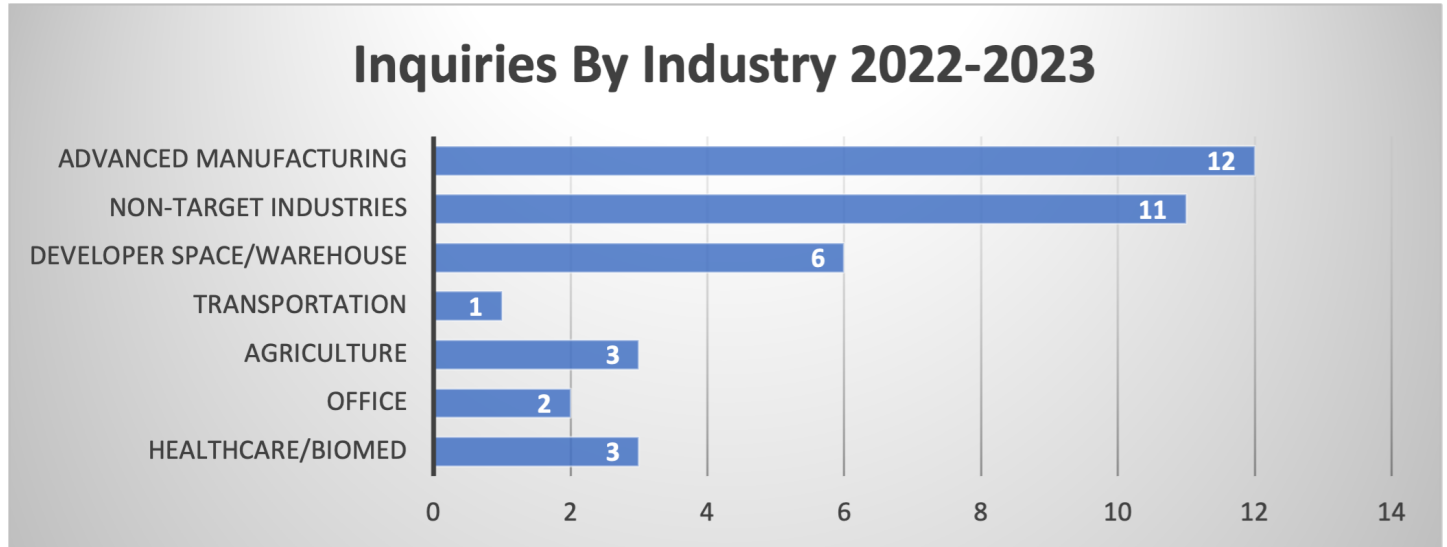
Of St. Johns County residents aged 25+, 96% are high school graduates and 40% have earned at least an Associate's Degree.

## ST. JOHNS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

St. Johns County is a rapidly growing education district with 59,634 students enrolled in grades K-12 as of September 2023 and 51 schools across the county. Two new schools are completing construction currently with one planned to open in 24-25 and the other in 25-26.

# ST. JOHNS COUNTY PROJECT PIPELINE

## NEW INQUIRIES FOR 2022-2023



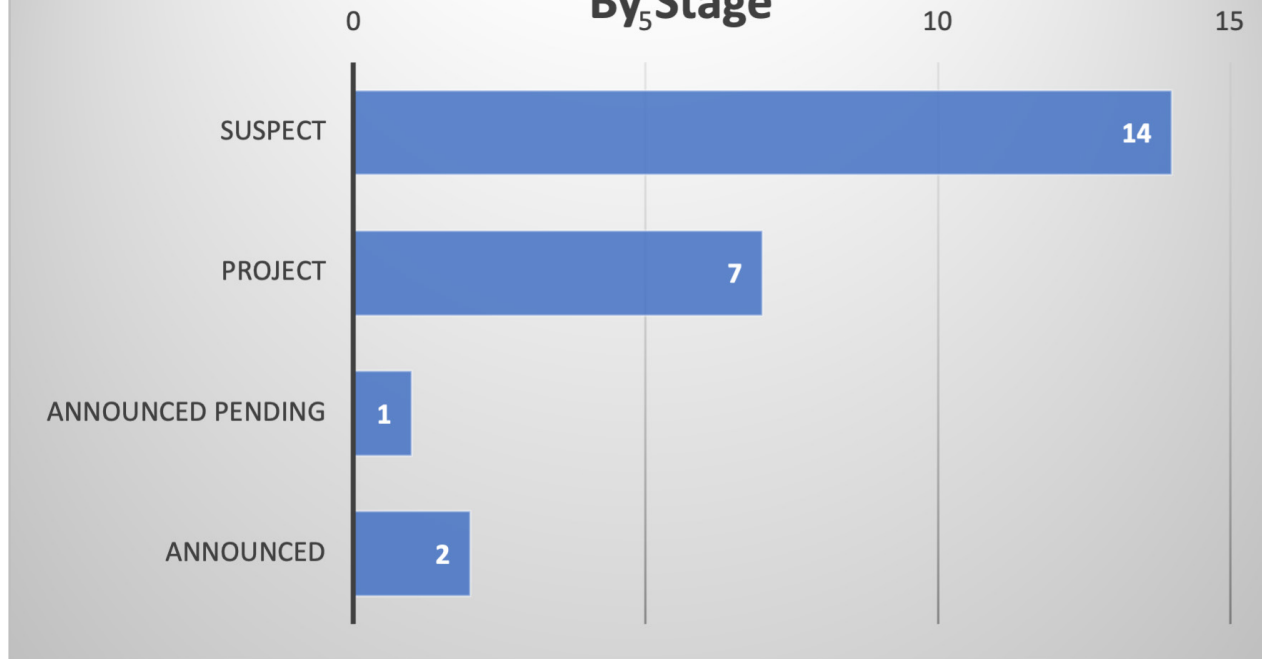
- Through the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and St. Johns County Government continued to receive and respond to inquiries from relocating, existing, and new businesses interested in expanding or starting a new venture in St. Johns County. These inquiries originated from Enterprise Florida Inc. (EFI), JAXUSA, Florida Power and Light, local referrals, or direct company outreach.
- New inquiries received for the year totaled forty-seven (38) representing various industries including Advanced Manufacturing (12), Spec Space/Warehouse (6), Agriculture (3), Healthcare/BioMed (3), Non-Target Industries (11), and others in Transportation and Office Space.

## Q4 – ALL PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY STAGES OF A PROJECT IN THE PIPELINE

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Suspect	EFI referrals, JAXUSA referrals, Chamber Member/Local Referrals, and Direct Inquiries with at least a 10% potential of moving forward.
Project	The project has real potential to select St. Johns County for new business, relocation, or expansion. The representative either has an existing business, has visited, or plans to visit St. Johns County.
Imminent	St. Johns County has been shortlisted among other potential locations.
Announced Pending	The project has selected St. Johns County and awaiting final approvals from County and other agencies to move forward.
Announced	The project has selected St. Johns County and all final approvals are complete.

## 2022-2023 Year End Prospects in the Pipeline

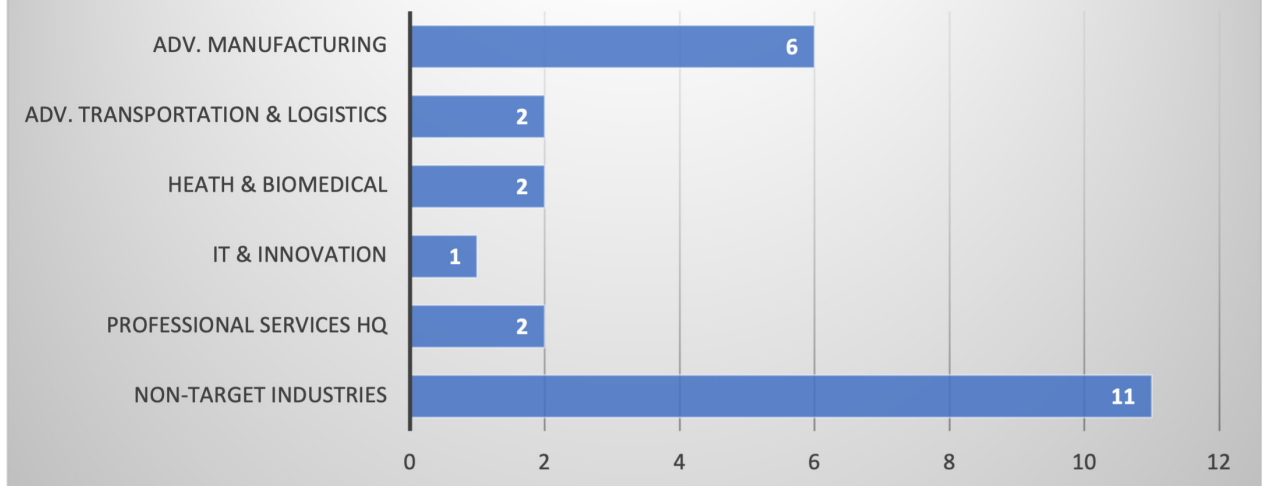
### By Stage



- At the end of the fiscal year 2022-2023, there were a total of 24 active businesses in the pipeline. These included new businesses along with several existing businesses that were seeking to expand.
- KeHe and Baptist Health and Wolfson Childrens St. Augustine Emergency and Imaging Center were announced this year.

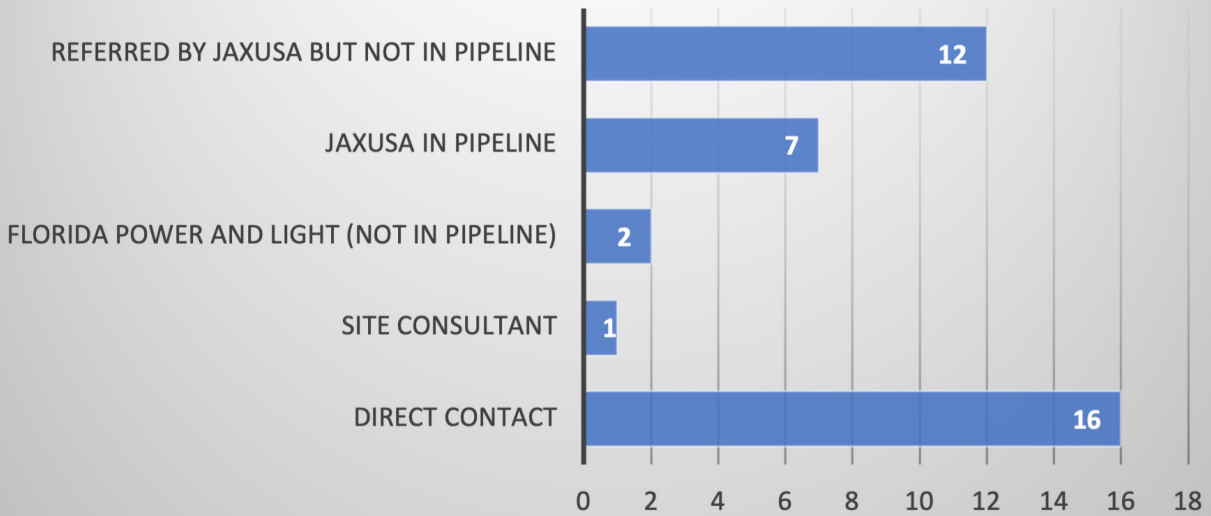
## 2022-2023 Year End Prospects in the Pipeline

### By Industry



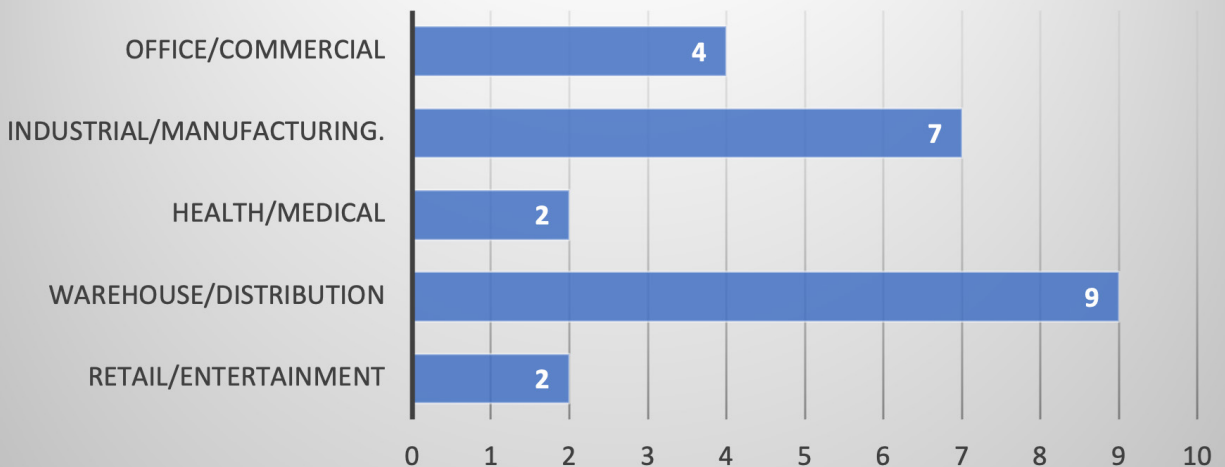
- Non-target industries and advanced manufacturing represent the majority of the current projects in the pipeline with 11 projects.
- There are a total of thirteen (13) businesses in the pipeline for the target industries of Advanced Manufacturing (6 projects), Advanced Logistics (2 projects), Health and Biomedical (2 projects), IT & Innovation (1 project), and Professional Services HQ (2 projects).

## 2022-2023 Prospects in the Pipeline By Source



- There were 14 projects referred this year from JaxUSA and Florida Power and Light that we were unable to pursue due to a lack of site-ready land, existing spec space, or not meeting all the referral requirements. There will be additional space coming online in 2023-2024 that will make St. Johns County more competitive in responding to inquiries.
- Twenty-four (24) projects remained in the pipeline.

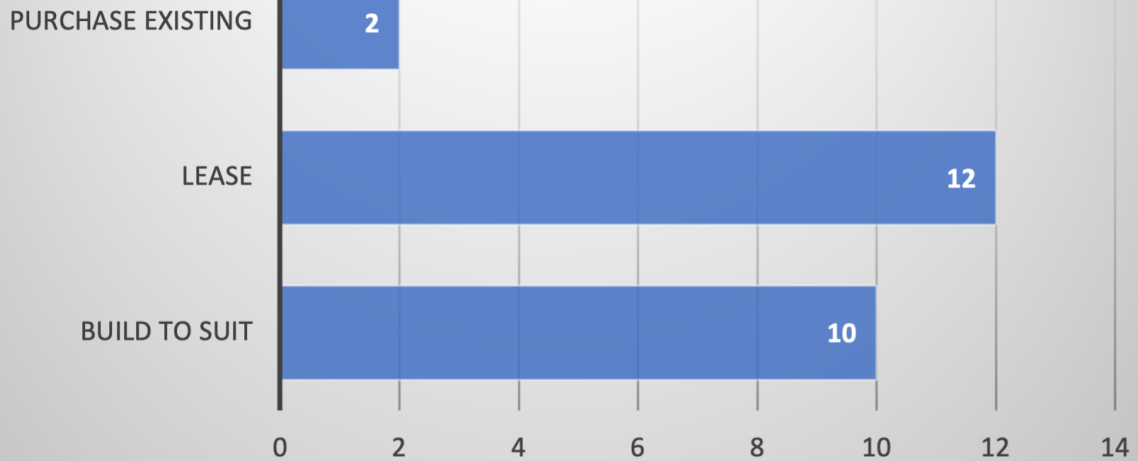
## 2022-2023 Prospects in the Pipeline By Facility Function



- Current projects in the pipeline seek office or commercial space (4 projects), industrial or manufacturing space (7 projects), health or medical facilities (2 projects), warehouse/distribution (9 projects), and retail space (2 projects).

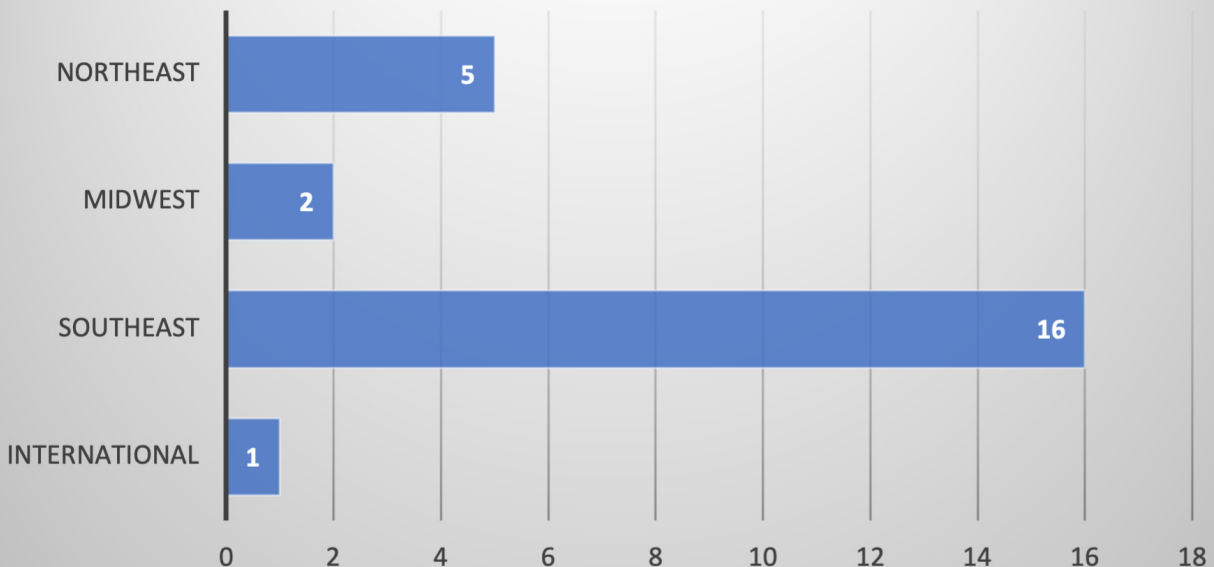


## 2022-2023 Prospects in Pipeline By Occupancy Needs



- The majority of the current projects in the pipeline seek to build-to-suit (10 projects) or lease existing space (12 projects). Two projects indicated an interest in purchasing an existing building in St. Johns County.

## 2022-2023 Prospects in the Pipeline By Geographic Location



- Most of the projects (16 projects) in the pipeline originate from the Southeast. Five (5) projects originate from the Northeast including New York and New Jersey. Two (2) projects originate from the Midwest and one was international in origin.
- Most listed a project's site location, workforce, quality of education, and quality of life as critical factors for considering or selecting St. Johns County.

# ROUNDTABLE SERIES

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and the St. Johns County Economic Development Office held a series of roundtable discussions in 2022-2023. Those included a Resiliency Roundtable, Health and Wellness Roundtable and a Locally Made Products Roundtable.

The resiliency roundtable, *Beyond Weathering the Storm: How to Thrive, Not Just Survive*, was held on April 14 at Our Lady of La Leche at Mission Nombre de Dios. The event was open-to-the-public and included a discussion about short and long-term solutions plus simple to sophisticated methods to protect homes and businesses from flooding, storms, and hurricanes. Potential funding opportunities to strengthen local businesses and private residences, along with updates on actions being taken by St. Johns County and the City of St. Augustine to prepare were covered.



Westly Woodward, St. Johns County Growth Management

The presentation addressed hurricane season which runs from June 1 until November 30, with several invited speakers during an interactive meeting including Marge Cirillo, a consultant at Florida Small Business Development Center, Jessica Beach, Chief Resilience Officer and a professional engineer with the City of St. Augustine, and Westly Woodward, Floodplain Manager with St. Johns County Growth Management.

After the talk, event transportation sponsor Old Town Trolley Tours of St. Augustine and Historic Tours of America, hosted 20 attendees on a short trip to the St. Augustine Wastewater Plant on Riberia Street for a tour. Participants learned about local water use and waste treatment, how the City staff protects the facility and secures safety measures for local property owners and businesses, and the use of hardening methods and advanced pumping stations, among many others.

The second roundtable focused on Health and Wellness in St. Johns County. This invitation only event brought representatives from all the top healthcare partners in our region along with other supporting clients. This roundtable was identified based on the results of a countywide survey that listed health and wellness as one of the top business clusters in our region. The goal was to identify strengths and challenges the industry is facing here.



Health and Wellness Roundtable

It was quickly agreed that the large influx in population has increased the demand for quality healthcare in this area and that multiple providers are entering the market because of that growth. The group also saw a potential direct correlation in the growth of healthcare here and the opportunity to attract new industry and R&D collaborations and studies.

The greatest challenges were centered around workforce development. There is currently a labor shortage of nurses, technician services like lab techs, pharmacy techs and scrub/surgical techs. The educational institutions in this region cannot currently meet the demand. Some groups like UF Health St. Johns have started apprenticeship programs to train their own surgical technicians. Due to the success of this program, they hope to expand it to other areas. Local schools like First Coast Technical College, St. Johns River State College, and Jacksonville University are working to expand their programs. Jacksonville University recently announced a new nursing program in North St. Johns County in partnership with Ascension St. Vincent's hospital. Recruitment of staff from outside the county is often challenging due to the high cost of living in St. Johns County.

Other challenges included the ability to collaborate across providers and support each other. There is a strong need for a centralized healthcare data port so health histories can be seen by all providers. Some of the ancillary agencies would like to develop partnerships with the larger providers to help meet the medical needs of all residents. Those might include services like mid-wife, massage therapy, chiropractic services and others.



Finally, it was universally agreed that as a region there needed to be more support for mental health and behavioral health. As the region continues to grow, we will also see challenges to ensuring that the mental health needs of those less fortunate are met. While some funding exists through the state and federal government, it is not being increased at the rate of population growth and more is needed. Insurance, regulatory guidelines, supply chain, permitting, and construction costs are other challenges that were listed.

The last roundtable for the year focused on locally made products and services to gather input on better supporting these businesses and entrepreneurs. Supporting local artisans and product creators is essential for fostering economic growth and promoting unique handmade goods. Scott Maynard, vice president of Economic Development with the Chamber, said, "Our goal is to significantly contribute to the growth and success of local artisans and product creators, enriching the local economy and cultural landscape."

The Chamber utilized the roundtable to learn more about these groups' specific challenges and how to support them better. From the discussion, it was clear that St. Augustine and St. Johns County strongly support the arts, but there needs to be more communication between the different organizations. One need is to identify a central point of focus where information can be gathered and exchanged on the services, programs, and events taking place. There is a need for performance space for all genres, affordable studio and classroom space, maker space for developing products, and places to display and sell locally made products.

Other ideas included:

- Setting aside space in the Visitors Center for locally made products.
- Creating a "Locally Made" seal or tag to identify and brand locally made products. and
- Building a website to feature these goods and services.

Implementing these ideas also allows tourists to quickly identify which products are certified as locally made. The Chamber is excited to continue work on this project.

# AUTISM CERTIFIED DESTINATION CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and its Ponte Vedra Visitors Information Center, St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau (VCB), Old Town Trolley Tours® & Attractions of St. Augustine, and St. Augustine Sailing proudly announce their achievement as Certified Autism Centers™ (CAC). These certifications, granted by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), reflect the commitment of these organizations to welcome and support autistic and sensory-sensitive visitors. The certification program is funded with a matching grant from the St. Johns County Tourist Development Council. The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce is proud to be working with the County on reviewing grant applications from tourism and hospitality businesses. Members of the Grant Review Committee are Stephen Hudson, Committee Chair from Digital Mark; Todd Hickey, from Marriott Sawgrass, and Erin Wallner, from UF Health St. Johns.



*Isabelle Renault, SJC Chamber, Dave Chatterton, Historic Tours of America, Meredith Tekin, IBCCES and Susan Phillips, St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra, and The Beaches Visitors and Convention Center*

To earn this distinction, the staff at the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, the VCB, Old Town Trolley Tours® & Attractions of St. Augustine, and St. Augustine Sailing completed a specialized training program focused on understanding the unique needs of individuals on the Autism Spectrum. Additionally, IBCCES conducted on-site reviews of the facilities to provide further accommodations and sensory guides for each attraction, including Old Town Trolley Tours®, Old Jail, Oldest Store Museum Experience, St. Augustine History Museum, and Potter's Wax Museum, ensuring guests are well-prepared for their visit.

As part of its work on tourism development for the St. Johns County Tourist Development Council, the Chamber is leading the Autism Certification Program and managing the matching grant. "The program assures visitors that our certified tourism and hospitality businesses have taken the necessary training and steps to provide a welcoming experience to neurodiverse guests. In addition, the certification is a way to open our tourism community to new markets and be inclusive to all guests and their families," said Isabelle Renault, the Chamber's President and CEO. "Our ultimate goal is for our community to become an Autism Certified Destination."

"Historic Tours of America, the parent company of Old Town Trolley Tours & Attractions of St. Augustine, takes pride in creating amazing vacation memories for all our guests. Our goal is to make St. Augustine a certified destination city, with various locations trained to accommodate families with members on the autism spectrum," shared Dave Chatterton, General Manager of Old Town Trolley Tours & Attractions of St. Augustine. "As a prominent attraction in the County, achieving IBCCES training and certification, we hope to inspire

other organizations to follow suit. Providing opportunities for individuals and families to safely experience St. Augustine's rich history, culture, and old-world charms is a crucial aspect of enhancing the quality of life for autistic individuals, and we are committed to enabling that to the best of our ability."

The accessibility initiative, spearheaded by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, aims to achieve the Certified Autism Destination™ designation. This initiative will ensure that the area offers multiple certified entertainment, recreation, and lodging options for autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals and their families.

"St. Johns County is proud to offer funding for this initiative that will increase the accessibility of the resources that make our destination truly unique while expanding and strengthening our tourism base," said Tera Meeks, St. Johns County Director of Tourism and Cultural Development. "We look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year as we all work towards becoming a more welcoming destination for autistic and sensory-sensitive visitors."

"We are so committed to this community cause and its positive impact on tourism that the St. Johns Board of County Commission has recommended tripling its budget in fiscal year 2024 for reimbursement grants to tourism-based businesses who receive Autism Destination Certification. St. Johns County is on the leading edge of this pursuit for autism certification in the State of Florida," Commission Chairman Christian Whitehurst said.

The prevalence of autism diagnoses has increased to 1 in 36 children in the US and 1 in 6 people with sensory needs. As a result, it has become increasingly vital to equip community organizations with the necessary knowledge and tools to engage and assist these individuals effectively. The Certified Autism Center™ designation by these organizations marks a significant step forward for the larger movement.

Susan Phillips, President and CEO of the VCB, said, "The VCB believes that tourism should be accessible to all. Through our training and certification from IBCCES, we hope to be a model for our entire tourism community and inspire them to follow our lead in making travel experiences more inclusive and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their unique needs." Rose Ann Points, owner, captain, and broker with St. Augustine Sailing, agrees. She said, "This certification program is aligned with our core values. We believe in the transformative power of sailing and believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience the joy and sense of accomplishment that comes from being on the water. The resources this training provides will help us adapt our programs to ensure that individuals with autism can fully participate in and benefit from our sailing experiences."

For over two decades, the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) has been a leader in providing cognitive disorder training and certification for professionals worldwide, including those in healthcare, education, public safety, travel, and corporate sectors. As the only credentialing board offering travel and entertainment industry-specific programs, IBCCES provides training from subject matter experts and autistic self-advocates, along with long-term support, continuous learning, on-site reviews, and renewal requirements to ensure continued growth and lasting impact.

"We are thrilled to award the Certified Autism Center™ designation to the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, VCB, and Old Town Trolley Tours® & Attractions of St. Augustine," said Myron Pincomb, Board Chairman of IBCCES "With IBCCES training and certification, these organizations can enhance their ability to accommodate and assist all guests, offering inclusive and accessible entertainment options for families. We commend their commitment to creating a welcoming destination for autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals."

To support families seeking certified options and resources, IBCCES has developed AutismTravel.com and CertifiedAutismCenter.com. These free online platforms serve as valuable resources, providing information about various organizations that have met the requirements for the Certified Autism Center™ designation.



# BUSINESS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Part of the mission of the EDC focuses on supporting workforce development and providing professional development opportunities for our members. The Chamber and its partners hosted more than 100 educational and networking workshops for St. Johns County Businesses. The EDC Quarterly Breakfast Series features professional programming by industry experts, business leaders, and public policy experts. This year's series provided a diverse look at issues facing our community with a specific focus on the workforce.

## DECEMBER 2022

As the excitement of the World Cup reached a fevered pitch, the EDC welcomed the leadership team from the new United Soccer League (USL) franchise at this quarter's breakfast. Steve Livingstone and Tony Allegretti, both founding owners and managing directors of the new Northeast Florida USL Professional Men's and Women's teams spoke at the event. Steve used a powerful video, a tutorial on the game of soccer and tremendous presentation to describe the economic impact professional soccer will bring to St. Johns County. We learned:



Steve Livingstone, United Soccer League

- Per Nielsen, NE Florida contains 284,650 soccer fans (from a population of 1.5 million).
- Their men's and women's soccer teams will partner with the Florida Elite Soccer Academy (headquartered in St. Johns County).
- There are a large number of fans in St. Johns County and the potential economic impact for the county over the next 10 years exceeds \$400 million dollars. This will create over 3,000 direct and indirect jobs and strengthen our position in the sports tourism market.
- The top priority is finalizing the site selection and beginning construction within 3-6 months. The facility is expected to hold 15,000 and can be used for purposes other than soccer. They envision hosting high school graduations, lacrosse, football, and rugby tournaments, and tented events like farmers markets. The group is seeking around 40 acres (10 for facility and 30 for parking). The sports campus is scheduled to include a facility for the special needs community and could be used for a variety of events including The Special Olympics.
- The goal for completion is 2026 which coincides with the next World Cup in North America.

Attendees were encouraged to visit the JaxUSL website at <https://www.jaxusl.com/> to suggest colors, team names, like the Facebook page, make a down payment for future season tickets, and more. The goal is to make this a true community project that all Northeast Florida can rally around.

## MARCH 2023



From left, Viv Helwig and Jorge Arce answer questions from Scott Maynard, St. Johns Chamber of Commerce vice president of economic development, at the Chamber's Economic Development Quarterly Breakfast.

This quarterly breakfast focused on the export market and what it can mean for local businesses. Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault kicked off the morning program providing a wider context for the focus on exporting, saying the business organization surveyed members and found the top challenge facing businesses was getting help increasing sales. For the Economic Development Council, that translates to exporting, she said. “Exporting is not reserved for larger companies,” Renault said. “We want to de-mystify exporting.”

The breakfast program featured presentations from Jorge Arce, director and senior trade specialist with the Commerce Department’s U.S. Commercial Service in Jacksonville. Arce was blunt in his pitch for companies to embrace the export market. “Eighty-five percent of the world’s purchasing power is outside of the United States and growing,” he said, adding that exporting can make companies more resilient in the face of domestic economic cycles. Echoing Renault, Arce said while most people think the export market is the preserve of large corporations, in reality nearly three-quarters of U.S. exports come from companies with fewer than 50 employees – and many have less than 20 workers.

For those business owners concerned about reaching customers outside the United States, Arce said that 70% of internet traffic in the U.S. comes from overseas users. “The United States is a fishbowl to the world,” he said. “The world is fascinated by the United States.” Arce said American companies have a lot of advantages competing in the global marketplace, including a reputation for high-quality products, high technology, support and customer service. “The U.S. market is tough and very competitive,” he said. “That’s why we have world-class products. One of the most important things to remember is investing the time and resources to do it right. “International trade is a marathon,” he said. “It’s the long game, a strategic commitment.”

The necessity to stay focused when entering the export market was confirmed by the morning’s other speaker, Viv Helwig, president of Vested Metals International in St. Augustine. Helwig said it was only after establishing the business in the domestic market that the idea of exporting began to take shape. “We know our market and our industry had the potential to grow internationally,” he said. Helwig outlined the steps his company took to enter the export market, including getting help from state and federal partners to navigate the process, and making sure the business was ready to take that big step.

“You have to be willing to dedicate the appropriate resources,” he said, including hiring employees with a global perspective. Helwig also spoke of the importance of participating in government-sponsored foreign trade missions as an important consideration and recounted his experiences meeting with trade representatives. Overall, he said getting into the export market has been a good decision for his company. “International trade is going to be a very important market for us,” he said.



The Flagler Health + and UF Health merger announcement has created tremendous interest in the future and advancement of healthcare in St. Johns County and the Jacksonville MSA. Mr. Carlton Devooght, president and CEO of Flagler Health +, and Dr. David Nelson, senior vice president for health affairs at the University of Florida and president of UF Health, discussed the merger and why it will be a win for everyone in the region. One of the key questions was why merge and why now?

DeVooght, appointed president and CEO in March 2022, was just three months into his new job when he spoke with the Flagler Health+ Board of Directors about the need to join a like-minded health system to help enhance local health care services and expand access to care. There were several reasons for this. “In order to grow, we had to have access to capital markets,” said DeVooght. That meant having a partner with greater scale. In this regard, UF Health, a \$5 billion organization, would be an ideal partner.”

Another goal was the completion of the Flagler Health+ Durbin Park campus, which will feature an acute-care hospital, an outpatient surgery center, medical offices and more on its 42.5-acre campus. This, along with the additional hospitals and health care complexes in the Flagler Health + system, will tie together with UF Health operations north, south, and west of St. Johns County.

UF Health plans to make a strong investment in the community. “One of the things we promised when we came to the table is to invest, invest not only in the St. Augustine campus but the Flagler footprint,” said Nelson. “This also means the introduction of medical training programs, new electronic health records and full connectivity across the whole system.” This will provide more options and choices for residents.

There is also a strong commitment to retain the local hospital feel and level of care Flagler Health + has established in the county. Devooght said, “You cannot provide the best quality care if you don’t have the best staff that feels empowered to do what they need to do for their patients, and so it is that commitment to that culture, those values, that led us to UF as a partner.” The merger of Flagler Health + and UF Health will have a positive and long-term impact on healthcare in our region for years to come.





Isabelle Renault, President, and CEO of the SJC Chamber, Dr. Jerry Parrish, Florida State University, Mark Nighbor, One Mark Consulting, and Scott Maynard, SJC Chamber

Our fourth quarter Economic Development Council breakfast focused on Attainable Housing. Essential workers play a vital role in providing services that uphold the high quality of life we desire and expect in St. Johns County. We rely on these fundamental workers to keep us healthy and safe, educate our children, and respond to crises. However, many workers are forced to buy or rent homes outside St. Johns County due to a lack of attainable housing. Their absence can lead to declining quality of life for all St. Johns County residents. Mark Nighbor, CEO of One Mark Consulting, presented his research and the Attainable Workforce Housing Report. This report focuses on these workers' challenges, providing a high quality of life for all of St. Johns County's citizens, and proposes solutions to address this critical issue. Developing policies and partnerships to address the county's vital workforce housing needs requires a complete understanding of the complex dynamics of the housing market and the economic contexts underpinning attainable housing.

Using a variety of charts and graphs from the chamber's Attainable Housing Coalition report, Nighbor showed how the supply of housing stock in the price range workers could afford has skewed toward more expensive homes. "The supply of homes has skewed toward the higher range," he said. Nighbor said St. Johns County is not alone in facing the lack of attainable housing, adding that the solution will not be a simple fix. "No silver bullet will fix the problem," he said. Some possible solutions cited by Nighbor include government programs, builder and development incentives, and changes to land use regulations, comprehensive plans, and zoning regulations to foster the development of attainable housing stock.

The program continued with a presentation from Jerry Parrish, chief economist at the Metro Atlanta Chamber and former chief economist and director of research for the Florida Chamber Foundation. Using examples of 1,200-square-foot single-family homes, Parrish highlighted the economic impact of the construction of several thousand housing units over a five-year period on the community. He said building 5,000 attainable housing units in that timeframe would create nearly 1,500 jobs and provide local governments with \$63 million in impact fees and nearly \$10 million annually in county and school property tax revenue. "This is where the big economic impact comes," he said. "It is a way to diversify your economy."

Wrapping up the breakfast event, Maynard said fixing the housing problem requires cooperation and collaboration. "It is going to be a series of solutions that all levels and is going to require public and private input to make it happen," he said. Visit the [Workforce Housing Coalition](#) website to learn more and sign on to support these efforts.



# CHAMBER SUPPORTS NEW COUNTY BRANDING EFFORT



# St. Johns County

**FLORIDA AT FIRST SIGHT**

St. Johns County Commissioners recently announced the launch of a new countywide brand developed to showcase and reflect the unique assets of the community. The new brand, created based on extensive community research, highlights the attributes that make St. Johns County unique, including its waterways, natural resources, history, and abundant opportunities for outdoor activities. The brand embodies those assets with its tagline – **Florida at First Sight**.

Isabelle Renault, President and CEO of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce spoke at a recent County Commission meeting in support of the project. She said, “I want to congratulate you and thank you for the research that has resulted in this inaugural brand for St. Johns County. First, as the Chamber of Commerce, I want to let you know that we really appreciate seeing that this brand was developed by a local business since they are invested in our community. Your branding consultant captured the input and turned it into a critical tool for promoting St. Johns County and communicating who we are. The new brand allows us to have a stronger and more modern unified voice and is versatile enough to work across a wide range of uses. In fact, it will elevate our joint economic development efforts as we partner with this commission to tell the St. Johns County business success story. These efforts will help bring additional desirable, targeted businesses here to St. Johns County, which in return will bring high-wage jobs for residents, adding to St. Johns County’s quality of life.”

Renault went on to say, “In addition, the nature and architectural elements highlighted in the logos lend themselves to share our tourism success story as well. I want people to understand that this branding effort is more than a logo. Not only it is a necessity for telling the story of who we are today, but it also serves as a launch pad in guiding future initiatives as we continue to strategically refine who we will be tomorrow.”

The new brand, designed by St. Augustine-based company Future Friends, will be used throughout the various county departments, and implemented in phases. In the coming months, residents can expect to start seeing the new branding reflected on the county website, social media, vehicles, and staff uniforms. The county seal will remain in use and will be limited primarily to official records and documents pertaining to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners.

The new brand will also be at the forefront of St. Johns County's economic development efforts when marketing to potential businesses looking to relocate or expand in St. Johns County. These marketing efforts aim to provide more high-wage jobs for St. Johns County residents and increase the county's commercial tax base. Having a brand that highlights the natural and historical assets of the community will strengthen that effort.

The branding project has been supported and funded in part by the St. Johns County Industrial Development Authority (IDA). "In St. Johns County's 200-plus year history, this is the first time that a brand has been developed for the county," said Hunter Conrad, County Administrator for St. Johns County. "We are incredibly grateful for the community support and feedback as well as the St. Johns County IDA for supporting this important initiative in helping us build a professional brand that conveys our values as a county."

"The St. Johns County IDA is proud to support this branding endeavor," said Kevin Kennedy, chair of the St. Johns County IDA. "This new brand will further enhance the county's focus on economic development, helping to create an even better quality of life for the residents in our community."



# ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOSTS ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL PITCH FACTORY

## PITCH FACTORY

PRESENTED BY ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Pitch Factory program concluded this summer's program on July 13. This cohort had over 30 participants, and 17 competed in the final pitches. After the final pitch, participants received valuable feedback from the judges and developed knowledge and confidence to take their business to the next level. Mentorship continues throughout the year.

The Chamber is honored to partner with the Women's Business Center and the JAX Chamber to bring an exciting opportunity for entrepreneurs in St. Johns County. Inspired by the JAX Bridges program, "The Pitch Factory" is a six-week workshop that will prepare entrepreneurs to bring their businesses to the next level by helping to develop and refine their pitches and strategy.

Through a Women's Business Center grant and our generous sponsor, North Avenue Capital, this program is offered free of charge to allow everyone the opportunity to participate. Thank you to Ascension St. Vincent's Hospital for hosting this year's classes in their training space.





2023 Pitch Factory Participants

JACKSONVILLE  
**WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER**  
CHAMBER FOUNDATION



**Ascension  
St. Vincent's**



**NORTH AVENUE**  
C A P I T A L

