

# NEWS RELEASE

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## WALTON AREA CHAMBER & WALTON COUNTY TO HOST FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

### National Experts and State Leaders to Address Northwest Florida Businesses Issues & Opportunities

**Santa Rosa Beach, Florida – (July 22, 08)** – Walton Area Chamber of Commerce President/ CEO Dawn Moliterno today announced plans in partnership with Walton County, Florida's Great Northwest, Crestview Area Chamber of Commerce, Greater Panama City Beaches Chamber, Coastal Vision 3000/THE Beach, The Building Industry Association of Okaloosa & Walton Counties, Inc. (BIA), Bay County Chamber of Commerce, Niceville Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce, The Florida Association of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Emerald Coast Association of Realtors, The Walton Sun, The Destin Log, The Northwest Florida Daily News, and the Greater Ft. Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce to bring a range of state and national economic development and tourism experts to the region for a three-day regional leadership conference. Speakers and panelists will be offering actionable advice on how to stimulate economic activity in the Northwest Florida market.

The conference, "*Stimulating the Economy with Transportation, NW Florida's Gulf Coast 'Cleared for Take-Off,'*" is scheduled for October 15 - 17, 2008 at the Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort in Destin, Florida.

"With the development of 'THE Beach' as a regional brand and broad-based effort to secure better, more competitively-priced air service for the region, we've seen a renewed focus on regional economic development and tourism industry issues," said Walton Area Chamber Chair Lori Kelley. "To respond to the growing regional interest, we've recruited several national and state thought leaders to provide expertise, advice and inspiration to our members and guests."

"We have a once in a generation opportunity in Northwest Florida to create a strong foundation to attract high-quality, high-wage jobs to our region," said Representative Ray Sansom, Speaker Designate of the Florida House of Representatives. "Given the region's rapidly improving infrastructure and the commitment of the Northwest Florida business community, our goal is to develop a strategy to a vibrant, diversified, growing economy that benefits us all. This conference is an important step in setting that strategy."

"The new Panama City airport gives our region an extraordinary competitive advantage when trying to attract new businesses and high-quality jobs," said State Senator Don Gaetz. "This is the first international airport built in this country in fifteen years. We have to work together to maximize the opportunity this represents."

"We want this to be a real 'hands-on,' interactive event where regional business leaders can exchange ideas and hear from experts who've used transportation infrastructure to stimulate tourism and regional economies elsewhere," said Walton Area Chamber Chair-Elect John Forrester. "We want to

provide the business community and guests a forum for them to learn specifically how Northwest Florida's improving transportation infrastructure can improve their bottom line."

The conference tentatively includes presentations from:

- Dr. John Kasarda, Kenan Distinguished Professor of Management and Director of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School, an internationally recognized expert on using airports to drive regional economic development.
- Rick Schneider, Vice President, Global Business Development, Travelocity Partner Network, a highly regarded expert on using Online Travel Agencies to drive tourism revenues.
- Michael Pusateri, President and CEO, Vantage Strategy; a Senior Research Scholar at George Washington University; and formerly Senior Vice President of Strategy and COO of the Travel Industry Association of America.
- Professor Darryl Jenkins, author of the *Handbook of Airline Economics*, and one of the best-known authorities on aviation in Washington, D.C. Jenkins has extensive experience working with local communities to win low-cost air service. He is a regular commentator in the national press, including CNN, CNBC, ABC News, NBC News, the Nightly Business Report and various other cable programs.
- Dr. Mark Bonn, Associate Editor for *The Journal of Travel Research*, and a tenured Full Professor in the College of Business, Dedman School of Hospitality, at Florida State University and a member of the Graduate Faculty, Department of Marketing. Dr. Bonn specializes in marketing, research and educational programs for the Hospitality, Travel, and Tourism industry.
- Richard B. Jennings, President, Realty Capital International LLC, a global real estate investment banking advisory firm in New York City. Mr. Jennings received his MBA from Harvard Business School and holds a B.A. in Economics from Yale University where he graduated Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa

In addition, the conference will include presentations from:

- Representative Ray Sansom, Speaker Designate of the Florida House of Representatives.
- Florida Senator Don Gaetz, Chairman of the Committee on Education (K-12).
- Florida Senator Durell Peaden, M.D. Chairman of Health & Human Services Appropriations
- Allan G. Bense, Former Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and Vice Chairman of Enterprise Florida.
- Bart Pullum, Commissioner on the Florida Transportation Commission.
- Jay Odom, Vice Chairman of the Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority.
- Al Wenstrand, President, Florida's Great Northwest.
- Maj. Gen. David W. Eidsaune, Commander, Air Armament Center, and the Air Force Program Executive Officer for Weapons, Air Force Materiel Command, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.
- All three NW Florida Airport Authority Director's
- Jerry Ray, St Joe, Senior Vice President, Strategic Alliances
- Davage "Buddy" Runnels, Jr. & Mel Ponder, Coastal Vision 3000, THE Beach
- Leah Woolford, CEO, www.USDM.net

The event also includes ample opportunities to network with state and regional leaders, a golf tournament at the Raven Golf Club with state legislators, and the Chamber's Annual Dinner. The keynote speaker is **John Foley, performance expert, Former Lead solo, U.S. Navy's Blue Angels sponsored by First American Title Insurance Company & WinMultimedia/30A Guide.com.**

John is highly energetic and charismatic, John Foley presents a compelling new look at performance, inspiring professional excellence and personal fulfillment. Using Blue Angel methodology as a model, John has developed a unique approach that equips others to make the same journey toward excellence. His message, delivered with contagious enthusiasm, emphasizes principles of trust, alignment, clarity, and commitment, positioning individuals and teams to achieve and sustain higher levels of excellence than they ever dreamed possible.

To reserve your space at the Fall Leadership Conference, contact the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce, 850-267-0683.

Visit [www.waltonareachamber.com](http://www.waltonareachamber.com) to register for conference news updates and receive the final conference schedule.

*For More Information Contact:*  
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