



## **Fort Lauderdale: A Warm and Welcoming Mecca for Business**

By Doug Lyons

Welcome to Fort Lauderdale. To the uninitiated, our city's balmy weather, the seven miles of oceanfront beaches and Intracoastal Waterway, the Las Olas Boulevard thoroughfare of boutiques, shops and fine dining, the nearby golf facilities and marinas suggest a vibrant tropical community that guarantees visitors an enjoyable stay and an unforgettable good time.

There is no doubt that Fort Lauderdale is a fun travel destination, and we appreciate the 15 million visitors who make tourism a key part of the South Florida economy. Yahoo Travel named our city the No. 2 Top 10 Beach Getaway. In addition, some of the best year-round boating, golfing and shopping can be found right here. Yet, our city is much more than sand, sun and surf. Fort Lauderdale is also an attractive destination for business and commerce.

Fort Lauderdale is fortunate to have a strong and growing business community that believes in the philosophy of developing opportunities and connecting its partners for economic growth. Collaboration runs deep in our culture. To the savvy site selector looking to either re-locate corporate headquarters to Florida, or expand regional operations in the Sunshine State, there's no better place to be than in this particular piece of paradise.

Our city is a welcoming place for business and fertile ground for growth. Here are just a few of our success stories:

- GA Telesis Composite Repair Group, LLC., one of the largest commercial aerospace firms, has more than tripled in size since 2012. The firm now has more than \$1 billion in assets.

- Gulf Building LLC. provides construction management and general contracting services and is one of the region's fastest growing firms.
- Microsoft Latin America remains the tech giant's leading regional office by producing \$1 billion in annual sales from 46 countries and territories.
- Hotwire Communications, which provides fiber-gigabit Internet service for residential applications, saw their employment numbers grow from five employees when they moved here in 2005 to roughly 660 today.

The state of Florida has long been a beacon for business executives looking to expand or re-locate, thanks to a highly favorable tax climate. There are no state or local personal income taxes in the Sunshine State. Throw in the bottom-line benefits available from property tax and sales tax exemptions, and the idea of a Florida address moves from idle thought to distinct possibility.

Fort Lauderdale, though, offers more. The city is home to a robust business culture, a cohesive mix of corporate and international regional headquarters, a growing innovative technology cluster, a burgeoning life sciences and medical research sector, not to mention our two economic mainstays – a growing marine industry and a thriving tourist trade. The city has the lowest property tax rates and the lowest unemployment rate of the 25 largest cities in Florida. The confluence of some very good economic factors is at play here.

More importantly, especially for any executive considering relocation or expansion, Fort Lauderdale offers almost immediate entree into an engaged business community that has a rich history of cohesion and cooperation.

When Keith Costello, president and CEO of First Green Bank and the board chair of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce, first arrived in Fort Lauderdale in 1985, the city in his words "... was a little bit rough around the edges." There were clubs on the beach and the city's reputation as Spring Break hangout. But, Costello saw something that made it easy for him to stay.

"Even going back to that time, what impressed me as a young banker and resonated with me then and to this day, was the leadership," Costello said. "You had these great business leaders who were around during the 80s and 90s when I

was starting my career -- Wayne Huizenga, Terry Stiles and so many others. They're still around, and they've made such an impact on this community."

What was true then remains true today. Fort Lauderdale is a city of opportunity. It is a thriving community that relies on the productivity of its business sector. Over the years, our business leaders have worked with civic organizations and local governments to address community challenges and reach for new opportunities. After years, of developing its community assets, Fort Lauderdale is seeing results.

### **'In-Town' Lifestyle with Close Proximity to the World**

What attracts newcomers to Fort Lauderdale? First and foremost, the city offers a warm and inviting quality of life. Our tropical climate fuels an appreciation for outdoor activities and an outgoing lifestyle. Fort Lauderdale sits in the middle of the nation's eighth largest metropolitan statistical area, where more than 6 million residents live from metropolitan Miami to tony West Palm Beach. The region is diverse and cosmopolitan, and Fort Lauderdale residents who make this city such a pleasant place to live, work and play are fortunate to call it "home." It's one of the few cities in the world that has an urban core where an exciting destination, or the means to get to one, is no more 20 minutes away.

"I remember a conversation I once had with Mike Jackson," Jack Seiler, the mayor of Fort Lauderdale, said. "He said, 'No one understands why I kept Autonation here. But, the fact is that I can leave my condo on the beach, drive my sports car down Las Olas Boulevard and be in my headquarters of a Fortune 500 company in a matter of seven to eight minutes.' That doesn't happen anywhere else in the world. That's the convenience [living here] I'm talking about."

Downtown Fort Lauderdale has a picturesque backdrop in the New River, a nautical landmark that offers easy access to some of the city's prime cultural attractions and entertainment venues. The Broward Center for the Performing Arts, the Museum of Discovery and Science, the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, the many boutiques, restaurants and shops along the Himmarshee and Las Olas Boulevard thoroughfares -- all it takes is a stroll along our riverfront, or a ride on one of our Water Taxis, to see the city's beauty and potential.

Tourism remains an important part of our economy. There are more than 560 hotels and lodging establishments in Fort Lauderdale and the surrounding area, and the industry supports more than 112,000 employees, according to the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau. In 2015, the greater Fort Lauderdale area welcomed 15.6 million tourists who spent an estimated \$14.2 billion. The benefits to our city residents cannot be overstated. Revenue from sales tax receipts, tips and other earnings relieve property and other tax burdens.

Make no mistake; people are noticing our city's charms and benefits. Fort Lauderdale's downtown has become a magnet for a new generation of residents who appreciate the benefits of city living. This year, 50 new buildings are going up, almost double the number from the previous year. There are 6,225 residential units either in review, approved or under construction in the downtown area, with an additional 1,173 units in various stages on Fort Lauderdale Beach.

The wave of new development has transformed a one-time warehouse and garage district just off the Flagler Village neighborhood into a major in-town multi-use development. FAT City, short for a Florida Arts and Technology, will consist of two 30-story towers with 270,000 square feet of office space, retail and hospitality and 612 residential units. In-town living is the watchword for a community just north of downtown between Federal Highway and the Florida East Coast railroad tracks that is attracting a mix of Millennials and Baby Boomers into a downtown that once lay dormant after the typical workday ended.

Our in-town residents will find a wide range of entertainment –restaurants, music, arts, sports, theater, dance and multicultural events. Imagine ending a long workweek and kicking off a Friday night with a Broadway play at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, then spending Saturday deep-sea fishing off the Atlantic coast and finishing the weekend with stroll along the New River, listening to live bands perform at the RiverWalk Sunday Jazz Festival.

To support this growing in-town community, the city of Fort Lauderdale, business organizations like the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance, continue to work with other local and state government officials to improve biking, walking and other alternative forms of transportation to benefit our growing downtown community. By the end of the year, the Brightline will provide new commuter rail service, linking downtown Fort

Lauderdale to those of Miami and West Palm Beach. Construction is also set to start this year on The Wave, a light rail streetcar system in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The project is expected to support 4,200 construction and long-term jobs and is already boosting values in property values and real estate investment.

The words 'location, location, location' has always resonated in Fort Lauderdale, which benefits from its proximity to the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and Port Everglades, two transportation hubs that are our gateways to the international marketplaces of Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America and beyond.

Every day, an average of 80,000 travelers pass through the four terminals of Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport. FLL is a dynamic and growing airport that has roughly 640 commercial daily flights on 30 airlines, serving more than 140 cities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America. With the expansion of its second runway and the renovation of its International Terminal now complete, the trajectory for FLL is only expected to go up.

Our city has another accessible airport that tailors to Fortune 500 firms and small businesses -- the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport (FXE). The airport handles more than 165,000 landings and takeoffs a year and is home to 800 aircraft, including 255 jets and 24 helicopters. FXE has 24-hour FAA air traffic control tower and the airport offers full-service fueling, maintenance and management services. The airport is conveniently located on a 200-acre industrial park containing 1.5 million square feet of office, manufacturing and warehouse space.

Port Everglades is another economic driver and a necessity for international firms considering operations in Fort Lauderdale. Our port is one of the top three cruise ports in the world and among the most active containerized cargo ports in the United States. The port is a boon for any business with overseas markets. Port Everglades currently serves more than 150 ports and 70 countries and for the third consecutive year, the port exceeded one-million TEUs, the industry's standard container measurement. Like our airport, the future for Port Everglades is bright, thanks to the scheduled Southport Turning Notch Expansion and the deepening and widening of the port's navigation channels that will allow our port to accommodate the new and larger Panamax-class cargo ships.

Water remains an important asset, and it's easy to see why the Intracoastal Waterway and the city's network of waterways are so important to the city's lifestyle and the prominent industry it sustains. Fort Lauderdale is home to one of the world's largest marine industries. It encompasses world class shipyards, manufacturing, wholesale and retail marine products and services and consists of brokers, dockage, high-tech firms and family-owned firms that have been a part of Fort Lauderdale's fabric for multiple generations. The industry has an \$11.5 billion economic impact on the region and provides an estimated 136,000 jobs that generates roughly \$4 billion a year in wages.

Every year, the city hosts the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, the world's largest in-water boat show. The boat show's economic impacts dwarfs that of the Super Bowl. It covers five-days, attracts more than 100,000 visitors and produces \$508 million in direct sales. Our city also has the nation's first-ever recreational boating foreign trade zone, one of the marine industry's recent innovations designed to boost the sector's growth and commerce.

"With nicknames like 'Yachting Capital of the World' and 'Venice of America,' Fort Lauderdale is certainly a popular place based on the concentration of marine business," Phil Purcell, executive director of the Marine Industries of South Florida says. "As such, a steady supply of global customers, complimented by the abundance of incredible waterways, access to the Atlantic Ocean, proximity to the third largest barrier coral reef in the world, and an overall South Florida boating lifestyle that makes this community attractive to employees and executives alike."

### **Where Talent Meets 'Life-Long' Learning**

Not all of Fort Lauderdale's economic engines are on the waterfront. The fact is that our city's economy has become more diversified, thanks to the growing aviation, health-care and innovation technology sectors, industries that aren't typically associated with the beach, boating or other water-related activities.

Florida ranked first in the nation as the best state for aerospace companies, according to a 2015 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey. Low taxes, moderate operating costs and the proximity of educational institutions were cited as the key factor for the state's achievement. Fort Lauderdale has all that and more.

The Greater Fort Lauderdale area was recently added to the 2016/17 Aerospace Cities of the Future by fDi Intelligence, a division of The Financial Times. The survey in particular noted that the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport "... provides an infrastructure that facilitates the development of aviation businesses." The aviation sector is big business in South Florida, with more than 46,000 workers. Thanks to our city's two airports and the John Fuhrer Downtown Heliport, Fort Lauderdale is guaranteed to continue being a player in this important industry.

IT is another big industry here. South Florida has been a part of information technology innovation since the IBM PC was first developed in the early 1980s. Today, the North Fort Lauderdale area is home to a growing technology sector. Citrix, Greyson Technologies, Hotwire Communications and Microsoft Latin America have operations here, bringing new talent into the area. The Fort Lauderdale region already ranks among the top 50 U.S. tech markets. With 800,000 information and communication technology already living in South Florida, we believe these Fort Lauderdale-based firms will continue to grow and attract new firms and start-ups, along with a younger and tech-savvy workforce.

Fort Lauderdale is also attracting its share of the region's 26,000 employees who work in South Florida's burgeoning biomedical and bioscience business. The region itself is home to dynamic and growing industry cluster with easy access to leading academic and research institutions – from Max Plank and Scripps Florida to the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine. Closer to home, OrbusNeich, a medical device company and Trivida Health, a subsidiary of the Sinocare Group that makes glucose-monitoring equipment are located in Fort Lauderdale.

Nearby Nova Southeastern University (NSU) has more than 200 ongoing research projects, including anti-cancer therapies, cardiovascular disease studies, chronic fatigue research and coral reef restoration among other subjects. The university is also one big step closer to obtaining a teaching hospital after the school obtained final approval from the state Agency for Health Care Administration to relocate Plantation General Hospital to the NSU campus in Davie.

The wonder that is commerce in Fort Lauderdale would not be possible without our diverse and talented workforce and our educational institutions. Our community is home to life-long learning as our public schools, Broward College

and the area's four-year universities have stepped up their efforts to meet the career interests of students and the needs of local industries. Our educational institutions, along with our state and regional workforce training programs, believe in taking a collaborative approach with leaders of local industries to ensure that our workforce remains competitive in today's global marketplace.

For example:

- Students at Broward College can earn a degree in Aviation Maintenance Management to prepare them for careers in the maintenance repair and overhaul of aircraft, a boon to the region's aviation sector.
- Beginning in middle school, Broward County Public Schools students can study marine science courses, with the culmination of a certificate at the marine service tech program at McFatter Technical College or the marine engineering program at Broward College.
- Nova Southeastern University and Broward College offer degree programs in supply chain management and global trade and logistics to help build a jobs sector that is expected to grow by 4.9 percent by 2020.

High quality of life, coupled with career opportunities, are certain to appeal to Millennials, and older Gen Xers and Baby Boomers in our workforce. Fort Lauderdale has the cultural amenities and entertainment that attracts newcomers. Fortunately, the city also contains a variety of education and training options that allows individuals to learn new skills and progress in their fields of interest. It's an advantage that helps turn visitors into permanent residents.

Our road to a talented workforce starts early as the Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) is committed to educating all students to help them reach their highest potential. The school district consists of 235 schools and educational centers and 103 charter schools. Over the years, the school district has been singled out for student achievement by the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest school districts. While many of the graduates --- more than 13,000 in the Class of 2016 -- will go on to attend college, many BCPS students earn post-secondary college credits towards industry-recognized technical certificates and degrees, thanks to agreements between the school district, area colleges and universities and the business community.

The colleges and universities in Fort Lauderdale area offer a variety of academic studies to meet the needs of our community. There are 40 private and public institutions of higher learning in the Fort Lauderdale area that contain degree programs, ranging from the associate to the doctoral level. Many of these institutions also offer certificate and custom training programs to help area industries with workforce development. In addition to our area colleges, universities, local companies can take advantage of several statewide and regional workforce training programs. These include CareerSource Broward, which helps area businesses find qualified employees and FloridaFlex Training Program, which is designed to assist and train firms on how to expand operations.

### **We're the Place You Never Want to Leave**

Fort Lauderdale is a world-class city, a community gem nestled amid one of the nation's most diverse and growing metropolitan communities. Our city contains an array of distinctive and safe neighborhoods – a great place to raise families, find employment and develop careers, and enjoy entertainment venues and recreational activities. For many, it's the closest thing to living in paradise.

The same can be true for your firm. Whether you're the owner of a small upstart, or a representative of a venerable corporate enterprise, Fort Lauderdale offers opportunities for all businesses in the form of an affordable business climate, a diverse and powerful local economy, a growing technology sector, a highly-skilled workforce, a well-established infrastructure of schools, higher education institutions and career-training programs and, of course, a world-class lifestyle.

Our city's location provides easy access to global markets and a professional workforce that is both multicultural and multilingual. Fort Lauderdale has excellent schools and a wide range of housing options that will attract CEOs, mid-level executives, entrepreneurs and Millennials alike. A recent survey by the Boyette Strategic Advisors consultant firm for the CEO Council of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance found that nearly 94 percent of brokers and site selectors who participated in the survey see the Fort Lauderdale area as a positive or very positive potential location for a corporate headquarters.

Fort Lauderdale remains the location of a wide array of dynamic and growing industries. Our industry leaders are part of a cohesive and engaged business

community that enjoys a solid economic development infrastructure. Organizations like the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance and others, are always available to provide up-to-date information, like business-costs analysis, commercial real estate trends and market research, to help our businesses succeed. “We have a group of community leaders that work so well together,” Seiler said. “Dan Lindblade over at the chamber works so well with Bob Swindall at the Alliance. Neither one fights for who gets credit; they fight for Fort Lauderdale.”

An excellent quality of life, opportunity, innovation and a culture of collaboration – essential ingredients that, in the words of the Fort Lauderdale chamber, help companies connect and prosper. Come join us. Check our Resource List below to find contact information to help make the eventual move here a reality. Fort Lauderdale is the destination you visit, and the place you never want to leave.

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