



## FACT

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## Economic development leaders build vision, improve communication

By Mike Ford  
Staff Writer

ORANGE PARK – More than half of all Clay County residents commute outside the county for work, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and a renewed push is on to stop, or at least lessen that fact.

Like four legs of a stool, Bill Garrison, Doug Conkey, Josh Cockrell and Brian Knight are playing separate – albeit sometimes overlapping – roles in bringing 57.5 percent of Clay County's work force home to work and not in other counties.

"We have a demographic shift going on with population growth that includes the influx of younger more educated people. So, we need to continue promoting economic growth," said Garrison, president of the Clay County Economic Develop-

ment Corp. "There are different people who have done this at different times for 50 years but there are always different ideas of how to go about it and it does come together because we collaborate and help each other."

While others in Clay County also support or push for economic development, these four men have started communicating with each other about their separate projects because they all have a stake.

Talk about growth in the community is nothing new. Clay County is in the midst of transformation from a rural community to a full-fledged suburb. Getting ahead of that continued shift, as well as the population boom that is expected to come with completion of the First Coast Expressway, requires visionary leadership moving for-

ward.

"It's time to get our heads together and find out where we want to take this county," Garrison said.

Garrison reports to Cockrell and the Clay County Development Authority and Conkey and the Clay County Chamber of Commerce, as well as to the county commissioners on a regular basis. With the dust now settling from the recession, as well as last year's economic development reorganization that founded the organization Garrison heads, it is time for the key players to kick up their game, he said.

His major project these days include facilitating local businesses' efforts to export their products to other parts of the globe. Garrison does this through

## Business Briefs

### Gordon Chevrolet adds three key new employees

ORANGE PARK – Gordon Chevrolet recently added three new key employees to its staff.

Eddie Teller, body shop manager comes to the Blanding Boulevard Chevrolet dealer from Fleming Island Auto Body.

Jim Elswick brings his mechanic skills to the service department after years of service at Suburban Auto.

Jason Jeralds joins Gordon as a service writer after working at RPM Automotive and Duval Ford.



Eddie Teller



Jim Elswick



Jason Jeralds

### ScaleUp North Florida Accepting Applications

JACKSONVILLE – ScaleUp North Florida, the new U.S. Small Business Administration program based at the University of North Florida, is accepting applications for the program's first year, which will begin in early February.

The program will help up to 50 growth-oriented and high-potential small business owners to scale up their businesses, create jobs and grow their bottom lines in 2015. Applications are being accepted through Jan. 23.

ScaleUp North Florida is a year-long program, which will provide small business owners with entrepreneurial education, management support, access to capital and strategic planning assistance in order to help their companies grow. To qualify for the program, businesses must be located in the Jacksonville MSA covering Duval, St Johns, Clay, Baker and Nassau counties), be in business for at least three years, have annual revenue of \$150,000 - \$500,000 and have a desire to grow their business. There is no charge to participate in the program.

In October, UNF was awarded one of only eight ScaleUp America contracts in

# Business

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the U.S. The program's success will be measured by local economic impact, including jobs created, sales increased, new markets identified, capital accessed and a healthier bottom line for participating firms.

The program application can be accessed online at [www.scaleupnorthflorida.com](http://www.scaleupnorthflorida.com), and questions should be directed to the program's director, Jennifer Marko, at (904) 265-0750.

## Bourre Construction 2014 Clay County Builder of the Year

JACKSONVILLE – Bourre Construction was named Northeast Florida Builders Association 2014 Clay County Builder of the Year during a recent Clay Builder's Council event.

"We have a responsibility to provide the First Coast with beautiful, quality homes for every budget ranging from thoughtfully designed custom homes to homes for the first-time buyer," said Michael Bourre, owner of Bourre Construction Group. "Receiving the top industry award is a tremendous accomplishment and a testament to our dedication and hard work."

Bourre strives to provide innovative design and custom quality to all projects across Northeast Florida. The company is also gaining recognition for its interest in community development, including the renovation of local distressed homes to remodel.

Bourre Construction Group is also actively involved in charitable work including Habitat for Humanity, Daniel Kids Foundation, Boy Scouts of American and Builders Care.

The Clay County Builder of the Year award from NEFBA is awarded to the builder, developer or remodeler member who supports the industry through leadership, commitment and dedication. The award is given annually during the organization's awards and installations event.

# Growth

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Global Cities Initiative, a project of the Brookings Institute and JP Morgan Chase. Brookings expects 85 percent of all global economic growth in the next 10 years to be formed outside the U.S. Therefore, Clay County business leaders must be progressive and realize they can have a stake in the global marketplace. Knight has been exporting to South Africa and said others can follow suit, but they must first get their heads out of the sand.

"We have an inferiority complex in this county. We think we can't do things here but it's all in our heads," said Knight, chief executive officer of tech company Pragmatic Works, which has an office in South Africa.

Knight and leaders of a few other businesses, including Hi-Liner, met with a delegation from South Africa last year and started building relationships. Those from South Africa have been instrumental in helping Hi-Liner move past some political red tape in neighboring Mozambique to get a product shipment to a customer. Garrison helped facilitate that and he is also in talks with a South African manufacturer about making a \$7 million investment in Clay County.

Garrison wouldn't go into great detail, preferring to wait until the deal is made, but recruiting outside businesses to come here remains Garrison's long-term focus. He said he played a role in Ryan Melin moving Building Components Supply Inc. into Clay County with a commitment for 60 jobs and a \$2 million investment in manufacturing equipment.

"He hired a plant manager from South Florida and brought him up – he has a house on Fleming Island. That's economic development right there," Garrison said.

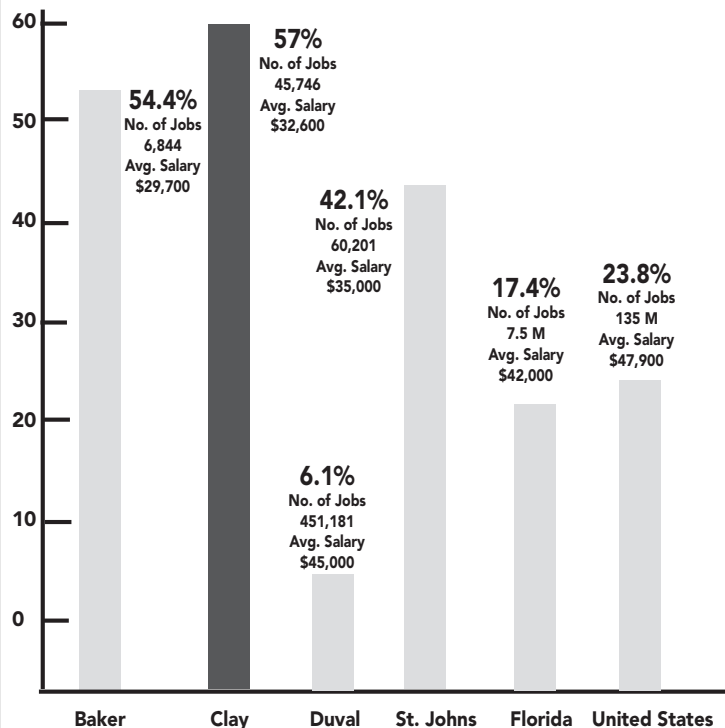
Garrison said a food processing company is looking to come to Clay County and he is working with Knight to bring private investors together with the right people to develop tech companies.

Meanwhile, as president of the Clay Chamber, Conkey has opened the board room at the chamber office to people from the University of North Florida to consult



## Commuters

Clay County has a higher percentage of residents working outside the county than any other county in Northeast Florida.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



once a week with local entrepreneurs. Funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration and state resources, the Small Business Development Center works with entrepreneurs from some 18 Florida counties.

"In Clay County, it's a part-time operation with them coming down from UNF but my goal is to raise funds for them to open a full-time office here," Conkey said.

Aside from holding regular networking events for Chamber members, Conkey works behind the scenes helping Garrison recruit because only about 10 percent of the companies Garrison pitches end up moving here. This is partly because Clay County has to compete with other regions that companies look at before moving into a new market.

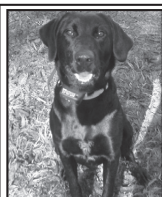
"Bill and I work together to help people network and get things like utilities lined up or answers to real estate questions. We also work with elected officials so potential businesses can meet with them because it's all about making those connections and

sharing information. It's a team effort and we all do our part to make Clay County competitive," Conkey said.

Conkey said developing a referral network for businesses to connect makes Clay County marketable in competing with other regions. Schools, parks, churches and restaurants also play a role in quality of life, though Garrison said commercial real estate and workforce are the biggest factors. Knight said businesses prefer to move into existing buildings, rather than build new ones. Therefore, real estate can be tricky, but Knight is confident in the Clay County workforce.

Knight is in the process of starting a business incubation and accelerator program that would help local entrepreneurs grow their businesses. Based on a similar effort in Boulder, Colo. Knight is in the early stages of developing it here.

"Say there's a guy on Fleming Island running a business out of his basement as a company of one. He wants to take it to the next level but isn't sure how to do it.



Bentley

## Bentley

Bentley is nearly a year old female lab mix, and a wonderful lady.

She is spayed, up to date on all shots and preventatives, and house trained. She's young and loves playing with other dogs and people. Going for a walk, or a run, getting hugs and rubs, she's the perfect dog for a family or active people wanting a loyal companion to love!

Email [info@animalrescuemovement.org](mailto:info@animalrescuemovement.org) for more information.



**For more info, volunteer or donations call 282-7888**



## Radar

Radar is five years old, a short haired domestic cat, and just a joy to know. He loves people, talks to you, does well with other cats, and is gorgeous! He's neutered, up to date on all shots, and wants his own home and family. Email [info@animalrescuemovement.org](mailto:info@animalrescuemovement.org) for more information.



Radar

If you are interested in adopting a pet, please fill out our online application at [www.animalrescuemovement.org](http://www.animalrescuemovement.org). (Click on the adoptions tab to the left.)



We'll help him do that with a formal program that has a start and a finish – it's like a school for startups that concludes with a demo day where they get to pitch their product," Knight said. "They can get funding from investors and equity firms; the average in Boulder is \$1.8 million for the first level, which gets the concept off the ground as a new business."

Knight has a dozen business leaders lined up to volunteer in Clay, Duval and St. Johns counties. He expects to add more while, at the same time, also growing Pragmatic Works with plans to expand and add jobs. Garrison said Clay County has the highest percentage of commuters in the region while also having the fifth-lowest average wage, in terms of Clay County jobs, but the second-highest household income. This means Clay County needs to compete for high-paying jobs and this is where Knight can help.

"We're starting to see a shift – our average salary is \$75,000 and I believe Clay County can add more high-paying jobs like that. It will take time, but it starts with getting out of our inferiority complex and realizing what can work in Clay County," he said.

Another project in the works is a feasibility study to see if coworking can be successful in Clay County. The concept started in San Francisco about 10 years ago and has been in Jacksonville for three years. Entrepreneurs, independent contractors and artists can share workspace to avoid working from home or share overhead expenses in lieu of having to rent expensive solo office space. Viewed as a community, coworking is built for people who spend a lot of time at coffee shops pounding the keyboard on their laptop while competing with others to use wireless Internet access.

Garrison visited CoWork Jax with Cockrell, having never heard of it before and the CCDA board invited a Jacksonville representative to speak at its November meeting. The CCDA is awaiting for respondents to its request for proposal about coworking and whether it will work in Clay County.

"What if we had something similar? Is there enough market for it? Would it compliment the small business development center Doug Conkey is trying to get off the



PHOTO BY EMILY BRIGHT

Pragmatic Works CEO Brian Knight, Clay County Development Authority spokesman Josh Cockrell, Clay County Chamber of Commerce President Doug Conkey and Clay County Economic Development Corp. President Bill Garrison are communicating and sharing ideas about the future of economic development in Clay County. While working on separate projects, the efforts spearheaded by these four men and their organizations sometimes overlap therefore, creating a blanket of coverage on the local economic development front.

## Job Statistics for Northeast Florida

	Population (2013 est)	Labor Force	Jobs	Salary	Rank	HH Income	Per capita income	% below poverty
Clay	196,300	102,700	46,000	\$32,600	5	\$59,700	\$26,400	10.1%
Baker	27,000	12,900	6,800	\$29,700	7	\$47,100	\$19,200	17.0%
Duval	885,900	471,000	451,200	\$45,000	1	\$48,900	\$26,200	15.8%
Flagler	100,000	36,200	19,800	\$30,300	6	\$48,100	\$24,800	14.4%
Nassau	75,700	39,300	19,100	\$36,700	2	\$57,200	\$29,500	11.1%
Putnam	72,600	29,800	16,100	\$33,100	4	\$34,429	\$18,800	25.5%
St. Johns	209,600	109,000	60,200	\$35,000	3	\$64,300	\$36,639	9.8%
AVERAGE:	223,871	114,414	88,457	\$34,629	na	\$51,390	\$25,934	14.8%
Florida:	19,553,000	9,610,000	9,013,000	\$42,000	na	47,300	26,500	15.6%

ground?" Cockrell said.

These are the kind of questions floating around while the group awaits bids from potential experts regarding coworking. Created by the state in the late 1950s, CCDA collaborates with Garrison's organization and the Chamber whenever it can.

Cockrell said the CCDA doesn't recruit – it looks to Garrison to do that. The CCDA's role is to help qualifying businesses secure tax-exempt bond money when needed. It has the capacity to secure up to \$10 million. He said the CCDA also partners with the military to conduct infrastructure projects

at Camp Blanding. "Economic development is a multi-faceted effort that depends on communication. We're trying to be creative and think outside the box," Cockrell said. "The wheels are turning and conversations are taking place for the good of the county and we're hoping to be a change agent."

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### Jim's Car Care Tip Of The Week:

#### Signs your alignment needs attention:

If you're wondering whether your car needs an alignment, first look at your tires. Uneven tire wear -- often, more wear on the outside of some tires -- is a prime indicator that your car is likely out of alignment. Here are a few more indicators:

- your car seems to be drifting to one side, even when you think you're driving straight
- your steering wheel vibrates
- you are driving straight, but your steering wheel isn't centered

Stop in or make an appointment, we check your alignment for free!

Jim Beaudry, Director



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\$901 +	\$100.00

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