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local spin

Export market a potential boon for Flagler County

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Published: Saturday, September 6, 2014 at 5:30 a.m.

A new report from the U.S. Department of Commerce found that more than 7 million jobs were supported across the United States by the export of goods in 2013 and that Florida is one of the top 15 exporting states in the nation.

The report also found that the nation's 387 metropolitan statistical areas — including Flagler County — exported goods valued at \$1.4 trillion.



Helga Van Eckert

Flagler County's \$49 million in exports in 2012 put the area last on the Commerce Department list, but that number was a solid increase over 2011's \$40 million in exports.

To get an idea of how important the export market is to the county's economy, Helga van Eckert, executive director of the Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity, offers the local spin.

How important is exporting to the county's economic growth?

Exporting is extremely important to the county's economic growth. This ranking further confirms our position that this is an area where we need to focus our business retention and expansion efforts. With 95 percent of the world's population living outside of the United States, both large and small companies benefit by entering the global market. Just as we have seen technology open the doors to rural-sourcing, it is leveling the playing field for smaller and niche businesses to compete with larger, multi-national corporations in a variety of international markets. Today, more than ever, small to mid-sized companies are in a position to compete on a global scale. The opportunities are endless.

What efforts are underway to encourage local companies to consider exporting their goods?

As previously reported by the News-Tribune, Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity has created industry-specific business retention and expansion programs as a means to better understand and assist our local businesses. Promotion of exporting is a priority for these programs. By creating an international program that leverages our global connections, we're in a position to facilitate the expansion of our existing businesses' market share; bring expanding businesses into the county; and stimulate foreign direct investment to the area.

For example, the connections established with CzechInvest through Aveo Engineering, a Prague company expanding to Flagler County, will open the lines of communication between our businesses and companies in the Czech Republic. Cultivating these relationships is key to our growth.

What kind of incentives are available for companies looking to export their goods?

There are a number of incentives for companies looking to evaluate the benefits of exporting. Through our relationships with Enterprise Florida, the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Small Business Administration, we can arrange one-on-one meetings for our local businesses with state contacts that specialize in overseas efforts, provide import/export troubleshooting, conduct market research, as well as secure financial assistance for international trade shows.

With its proximity to the port at Jacksonville and access to transportation links, can Flagler County become a significant player in the export market?

Flagler County is ideally situated to take advantage of the exporting opportunities.

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