



P.O. Box 1850 • 235 W. 5th Street ♦ tel: (850)785-5206 ♦ fax: (850)763-6229 ♦ www.888baysite.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Beverly Wakstein, 785-5206

Economic Development Alliance Leads Largest Community Based Outbound Trade Mission to Mexico

Panama City, FL (Nov. 20, 2003)--Eager to establish trade, education and culture relationships with Mexico, the Economic Development Alliance of Bay County, in conjunction with Enterprise Florida and the U.S. Commercial Service coordinated an Outbound Trade Mission and Sister City Agreement with Mexico the week of November 9-14.

The team participating in the mission consisted of twenty-five business and community leaders, making it the largest community based outbound trade mission from the state of Florida. On the mission, participants visited two cities: Mexico City, the capital city of Mexico and Merida, a port city located on the Yucatan Peninsula. While in each city, participants went on pre-arranged appointments made by Enterprise Florida and the U.S. Commercial Service. Mike Ross, President of Aculab, USA Inc. has participated in several trade missions before but was very pleased with the results from this mission. "The whole trade event out performed my expectations. It seem like everyone who participated had this same view. I had nine quality appointments, five in Mexico City and four in Merida, all of which would like a follow up meetings some time around the first of the year. As a result of the mission, I have begun interviewing for a staff member to reside in Mexico City and hope to have the position filled by the upcoming summer. One prospect requires immediate evaluation product for applications they are currently bidding on. Of all of the trade missions I have participated in, there was no other one that was more effective"

The central mission of the trip was to expose area business owners to opportunities for more cost effective and timely import and export of goods. The business community of Merida, the capital and commercial/industrial center of Yucatan, is strongly oriented toward doing

business with the United States with a particular preference for Florida-based firms due to proximity and language.

“Historically, international trade has been considered an option for only the largest companies. In today’s environment, and with the help of technology, even small business can find tremendous opportunity in foreign markets without risking substantial investment. Trade missions provide a first step for local industry to diversify their customer base.” said Tom Neubauer, Chairman of the Economic Development Alliance.

“Geographically it just makes sense to develop trade with the southern states of Mexico. Ocean transportation from that region can be more efficient than shipping by rail or truck- especially to the southeastern United States,” stated Wayne Stubbs, Port Director of Port Panama City.

In addition to the trade mission, a Sister City Agreement was made between Bay County and Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. The sister city agreement was endorsed by the Bay County Commission, Panama City, Panama City Beach, Lynn Haven, Callaway and essentially all of the cities and municipalities in Bay County in the form of resolutions of support. Panama City Mayor Gerry Clemons and Bay County Commissioner, Cornel Brock, signed the official statement of principal of mutual interest while in Merida.

“We would like to view Merida as the gateway to Mexico and for Merida to view Bay County and Panama City as the gateway to America, stated County Commissioner Cornel Brock at the official signing ceremony. The Sister City Program works to promote cultural understanding and education, social development and economic growth, and as an international membership organization, officially certifies links between U.S. communities and those abroad to ensure their sustained commitment and success in the mission. As part of this agreement, representatives from Bay Arts Alliance, FSU Panama City, and Gulf Coast Community College participated.

About the Economic Development Alliance (EDA)

The EDA is a public/private partnership whose mission is to establish Bay County as a globally competitive environment to conduct business; encourage economic growth that enhances our standard of living and quality of life; and facilitate the creation of an environment that encourages the expansion of existing business and the location of new business.

###