



RACC KICKS OFF WITH WORKSHOP

(April 2007) The Regional Airport Commerce Council (RACC) held its first regional meeting Wednesday, April 4 to regionalize the efforts and involvement of the surrounding ten counties for the next phase of the airport relocation project. The meeting was a day-long marketing and branding workshop designed to update attendees on the status of the airport relocation project and get their input for future marketing and branding of the new airport as a regional resource.

The RACC is a newly formed organization under the leadership of the Airport Authority. Partners from across Northwest Florida will be assembled to focus on the regional branding and marketing of the new Panama City-Bay County International Airport. The RACC will support the Airport Authority with the airport relocation project and assist with tasks surrounding a project of this magnitude. The already formed steering committee for the group includes the Bay County Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Alliance, the Greater Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council, and the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. Hosted by the Panama City-Bay County International Airport, the workshop was held at Edgewater Beach Resort and Conference Center and sponsored by the steering committee members.

More than 100 business professionals and representatives from Tallahassee to Pensacola participated in the event. The morning session included speakers to discuss the major issues surrounding the project and provide updated and accurate information. In the afternoon session, the group divided and participated in four breakout groups centered on marketing and branding, economic development, destination draw, and organization and task force development.

In the morning session, Dr. Ed Wright discussed the economic impact the West Bay Project and airport relocation will have on the region. He described West Bay as a “once in a generation opportunity” to improve air service, preserve and protect West Bay and create an economic development platform. In order to maximize the opportunity, he noted that it will take hard work and a true regional approach.

David Anderson, Executive Director of Audubon of Florida, highlighted the importance of the planned nature center in the West Bay sector and its development process. The West Bay Nature Center hopes to incorporate edu-

cational programs, research programs, trails, observation platforms, regional environmental influence and a portal into nature.

Mike Bell, a retired executive from Delta, reviewed what air service providers look for when deciding to extend service to a new location. He emphasized the need for Northwest Florida to regionalize in order to attract low-cost carriers.

In the afternoon breakout groups, members were given the opportunity to weigh-in on the major issues surrounding the airport relocation. The marketing and branding group was facilitated by Peter Yesawich, CEO of Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell and co-facilitated by Bob Warren, President/CEO of the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. Attendees discussed a wide range of topics from air-service carriers and how to attract them, to the name of the regional destination.

The economic development breakout group was facilitated by Dr. Ed Wright and co-facilitated by Ted Clem, executive director of the Bay County Economic Development Alliance. The group discussed opportunities the airport will bring for economic development as well as growth that has already begun in the region. Some members expressed concerns for their counties being able to support the impending growth with their current infrastructure. Many agreed that a strategic plan needs to be developed for the region as a whole in order to provide the needed regional support.

Rick Dye, city president at AmSouth/Regions Bank facilitated the destination draw breakout group. The co-facilitator was Debi Knight, president of the Greater Panama City Beaches Chamber of Commerce. This group discussed what brings people to this region and what needs to be done to think more regionally in Northwest Florida.

The last breakout group included all attendees and was facilitated by Bert Howell, Consultant with BAYSOLUTIONS, and co-facilitated by Carol Roberts, president of the Bay County Chamber of Commerce. Attendees discussed what they would like to see as the next steps for the RACC and future meetings. They also reviewed the various taskforces that will be developed through the RACC and their individual roles.

For more information, or for copies of the speaker presentations and workshop packets, please call Michaela at (850) 215-3754 or email Michaela@baychamberfl.com.