What types of jobs will be in high demand five or so years from now? Is the up-and-coming workforce being trained for those jobs? Will younger generations want to live, work and raise their families in Collier County—or be able to afford to?

What’s being done today to plan for economic and employment opportunities? A whole lot, if you talk to community leaders and the people who make this the focal point of their own careers. Some significant efforts are currently underway that will shape the county’s economic future.

A voter-approved one-cent sales tax that passed in November will provide funding for a career and technical center to be built on the Florida SouthWestern College Collier campus. A portion of these tax funds will also go toward creating a workforce housing land trust fund to create affordable housing. The list of projects earmarked for this new tax funding is an extensive one. The tax goes into effect this month, and the Collier Board of County Commissioners is expected to prioritize projects, so timelines for take-off aren’t yet known.

Another step forward is a recent in-depth study to determine the types of high-wage jobs that are in demand elsewhere which could be launched or brought into Collier, and fields where training is lacking locally. The deep-dive analysis is also projecting which jobs will be in demand based on future demographics to determine the types of training programs the new career and technical center should offer. The study by Hodges University and the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce was paid for by the Community Foundation of Collier County.

Planning for a stable economy, living wages and employment opportunities was a priority residents weighed in for the Collier County Community Needs and Assets Assessment, funded by the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation to analyze the community’s strengths and weaknesses. The goal of the assessment is to share findings that allow community leaders and residents to develop priorities and strategies to address identified needs.

Community Foundation President/CEO Eileen Connolly-Keesler said its in-depth analysis was spurred by the Community Assessment, which “showed us there’s a need for more technical training and to get our kids the skills they need to get into the workforce. There’s a possibility for different tracks for students to take for jobs of the future,” she said. “That was the point of the Community Assessment—if something as significant as this arises, we want to find out how we can accomplish this for our future and future generations.” The Community Foundation expects “drill down” on the findings with Hodges and the Chamber over the next several months before releasing results.

Putting the shape of the future economy under the microscope is critical. "You can't build a future overnight," said Aysegul Timur, Ph.D., Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Johnson School of Business at Hodges University. "We need to know if what we do today will be important in the future. It's important to know who we are today and based on growth, who we will become, in terms of employment opportunities."

Do you want to learn more about what’s being done to bring in high-wage jobs and groom the local workforce? The public is invited to attend a free community forum hosted by the Schulze Family Foundation to discuss the topic on Monday, Jan. 7, 5 p.m., at the Headquarters Library on Orange Blossom Drive in Naples.
A DICHOTOMY: THE ECONOMY OF WEALTH AND COST OF LIVING

One of the bigger concerns from residents surveyed for the Community Assessment is the need for living wages. The cost of living in Collier County is simply too high for those making a below-median wage. The minimum sustainable living wage for a family of four is estimated at $66,127, which would require both parents to make $15.90 hourly, according to the Community Assessment.

Beneath statistics, Collier County is a dichotomy. The per capita personal income is $45,913 statewide. On the other side of the coin, two out of five households are struggling under housing costs that run up to 30 percent higher than the state average. There are 2,000 employed females and 5,000 working males living below poverty, according to the recent Hodges study.

Forty percent of all Collier County households (28,743) are considered “cost burdened”—paying 30 percent or more of their gross income on housing expenses. Of these, 38.72 are considered “severely cost burdened,” spending more than 50 percent of their gross income on housing expenses.

It’s often said that tourism and hospitality, construction/real estate and agriculture are Collier’s trifecta. Service jobs make up 22 percent of Collier County occupations, according to a recent report by Timur. Retail, which includes restaurant workers, is the top industry. Several of these types of jobs don’t meet a $15.90 median hourly wage, for instance: $12.53 for retail salespersons; $13.90 for cooks; $12.57 for waitresses; $10.27 for food preparation and fast food; and $9.57 for cashiers.

There are two main reasons that service workers are the core of the local economy: this community is remarkably wealthy, and significant drivers of the economy revolve around tourists, seasonal residents and retirees, who shop, dine, recreate, seek entertainment, and visit their doctor’s offices and hairdressers, alongside full-time residents.

A striking statistic about Collier County is the large transfer of wealth that is brought into the community by retirees and seasonal residents. In fact, 22 percent of Collier residents live off passive income—interest, dividends and rental income—in other words, wealth amassed during their careers elsewhere. Collier ranks far higher (181.7) than the state (92.8) and nation (100) on the Woods & Poole Economic Wealth Index.

Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce CEO Michael Dalby says the downside to this is that these arrivals aren’t creating new manufacturing or corporate jobs here but “it’s not necessarily a bad thing” because the largeres creates demand across the board, especially for financial services. “The challenge is there is a mismatch between wages and the cost of living,” Dalby said. “You have people working but having a hard time making ends meet. We are seeing what we can do to add to and diversify our economy so we’re not all balanced on one economic sector.”

Corporate leaders can be lured to the region for its natural resources and quality of life, Dalby said, adding that many executives visit Southwest Florida on vacation. An example of this is the electronic payments processing company ACI, which moved its corporate headquarters from Omaha, Neb., here in 2017, lured also by state and local financial incentives. It has more than 100 employees. “We’re looking to expand the financial technology side of our economy with companies like ACI,” Dalby said.

Yet again, housing costs enter these types of negotiations. “We can call people in cold-weather places like Detroit all day long and they would be here tomorrow. But that’s the problem, you have to recruit people to live here. It’s the challenge we face: workforce housing,” said Collier County EDO Director of Business and Economic Development Jace Kentner.

That is why a main priority is growing a diverse base of higher wage jobs to break the cycle, both Dalby and Kentner said.

Slightly more than 52 percent of those 16 and older are in the workforce, with 49 percent of household incomes coming from wages and salaries. The average wage is $44,400. The balance of income comes from sources such as passive wealth, Social Security, retirement plans and self-employment.

The Chamber and the Collier County Economic Development Office (EDO) are working on several fronts in terms of workforce development and diversifying the economy. The Naples Chamber, with 13 employees, is one of the largest between Tampa and Miami. Dalby recently hired a full-time director of workplace learning to connect high school and college students with internships at local businesses to raise their awareness of job opportunities and “grow local talent so they don’t overlook us and go to Orlando or Atlanta.” The Chamber maintains the EDO’s website, works with existing businesses on expansions, and serves as the point of contact for Enterprise Florida when out-of-state companies or site selectors are considering a relocation to Collier.

Kentner coordinates financial incentive packages, makes policy recommendations, and helps to create a business-friendly environment by fast-tracking business relocations and expansions. “We’re faster than just about any place in the state of Florida,” said Kentner. He’s also overseeing the county’s five new Economic Opportunity Zones established in Immokalee, Golden Gate City and Naples Manor as part of a new national, community development program established in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 to encourage long-term investments in low-income urban and rural communities.

A full 63 percent of businesses in Collier County are small businesses with one to four employees. Kentner likes to talk about what he calls “economic gardening”—planting and growing businesses here—through its partnership with Economic Incubators, Inc., a nonprofit that operates Naples Accelerator and Florida Culinary Accelerator at Immokalee. A high school intern works on a project with her supervisor during an internship coordinated by the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce.

‘ECONOMIC GARDENING’ AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation was created in 2000, by Best Buy founder, Dick Schulze, to give back to the communities where Dick and his family grew up: Minnesota, where he built Best Buy to become the world’s largest consumer electronics retailer and in Florida, where he now maintains a permanent residence. The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation creates grant partnerships with organizations in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area in Minnesota and in Lee and Collier counties that generate transformational results in human and social services, education, health and medicine.

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and the Collier County Community Needs and Assets Assessment. Join us to share your ideas and hear from community leaders about the ways that employment and economic opportunities are being addressed for current and future residents.

Where: Collier County Headquarters Library 2385 Orange Blossom Dr. Naples, FL 34109
When: Monday, January 7, 2019 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
For more information: 239-263-9400
In partnership with the Collier County Public Library

Find out more about the Foundation and the Collier County Community Needs and Assets Assessment. Schulzefamilyfoundation.org

Upcoming Community Forums

February 11, 2019
Safety
Transportation/Infrastructure
March 11, 2019
Social Services
April 8, 2019

About the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation

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The three-year-old Naples Accelerator is a membership-based, co-working office space for second-stage entrepreneurs and start-ups to network, hold business meetings, collaborate with other entrepreneurs or potentially connect with funders. There are almost 50 members, and it has a focus on three sectors: business and financial services; emerging technologies; and health, wellness and medical. “It’s a great place for people to come to grow their companies, hire employees and really help diversify Collier County’s economy. That’s really our goal,” said Jennifer Pellechio, chief operating officer of the Naples Accelerator.

Downstairs in the Naples Accelerator building on Kraft Road is Woodstock’s Micromarket featuring local food products developed in the Florida Culinary Accelerator’s 5,000-square-foot commercial kitchen in Immokalee. Kentner noted that food product creation is a burgeoning sector in Collier County, which has a long legacy in agriculture. It is home to national companies such as Back to Nature, which makes seven organic and non-GMO cereals and granola, organic stevia company Pyure Brands, Betsy’s Best Healthy Nut Butters, and Five Star Gourmet Foods of Florida.

It’s also home to much smaller operations crafting single products that are finding their way onto store shelves. One innovative social entrepreneurship program for high school students developing and selling food products is Taste of Immokalee.

Taste of Immokalee High School students launched the social enterprise in 2014 to learn entrepreneurship and gain real-world skills. They commercially developed family recipes spotlighting Immokalee’s crops and cultures, while learning about food science, marketing, financing and accounting, operations, inventory control and public speaking. High school students throughout Collier County can participate in the voluntary program.

After reviewing customer surveys, the students decided to change up a few offerings and worked for a year with a local chef to experiment with flavor profiles. In August, Taste of Immokalee rolled out Pineapple Mango Salsa and Mandarin Tangerine BBQ Sauce in its line of six products sold at local Publix stores and Neighborhood Grocers. Taste of Immokalee also has partnered with Lipman Produce to incorporate its local, field-grown tomatoes into the salsas and sauces.

Taste of Immokalee allocates its profits toward student scholarships and community philanthropy. After Hurricane Irma, the students distributed food in Immokalee and raised $10,000 for the Benison Center to purchase a delivery truck. Since its inception, more than 100 students have been through the program and $32,500 has been awarded in scholarships.

“We are a real company. You can be book smart in the classroom, but that’s different than the reality of life,” said executive director Marie Capita. New apprenticeship and paid internship programs are increasing opportunities for real-world knowledge. “Business is part of all of our lives. You don’t have to be specifically going into business for this to be helpful for you. There are a lot of other things you learn from it.”

The commercial kitchen at Florida Culinary Accelerator at Immokalee

Chef Milade Saieh of Sweet Cravings

The entrepreneur behind Collier County startup Logiscool explains its company at the first 1 Million Cups Naples, an event to bring together Southwest Florida entrepreneurs and the community for feedback and networking. These reports are generated by the Naples Accelerator and Collier County Economic Development Office.

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MassiveU is a local tech company that’s also spreading its wings. The B2B education technology firm that delivers leading curriculum in an engaging format on all types of devices was founded by Angelo Biasi in 2013. He set up shop in the co-working space, Venture X, which “allowed me to expand or contract more quickly than if I rented the space,” he said. As it established partnerships with leading publishers such as Pearson and McGraw-Hill, and needed to expand, Biasi originally received backing by the Tamiami Angel Fund, which invests in early-stage, accelerated-growth companies. He turned to other venture capitalist groups, too. “As a tech company, we needed outside funding to scale and grow. We’re a real success story. Not only were we started here, we were funded here,” said Biasi.

The company has 12 employees as well as contractors. With a distribution agreement signed in China, MassiveU is in growth mode. In the coming year, Biasi is looking to hire more developers, managers and sales representatives to his team. “If you told me a couple years ago we would have opportunities in China, I would have said you were out of your mind,” Biasi said. “We created jobs here locally in technology and we’re proud of that.”

Photos by Fred Krieger
Over the past few decades, Collier County has gained nearly $20 billion in adjusted gross income due to wealth migration, which has contributed to the polarization of our region’s workforce.

According to an analysis of IRS data by Hoe Money Walks, Collier County gained $18.6 billion in annual adjusted gross income from 1992 to 2016. More than $5.3 billion came from Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois, both surrounding Chicago, while $5.33 billion came from Hennepin County, Minn., home to Minneapolis.

This migration of wealth has contributed to the growth of two tiers in our community, white collar, income-related jobs, and service sector jobs, which often cater to those with the ability to spend.

Take for example Collier County’s financial service industry. This sector saw a 103 increase over the last 25 years, from 4,000 jobs in January 1992 to 8,100 jobs in January 2017. And that growth is expected to continue, with 300 jobs added in the first three quarters of 2018.

These are often high-wage, high-value jobs that fluctuate depending on the economic conditions and economic disparity and maximize the sense of community.

Collier County leaders must invest in talent. As a leading medical device manufacturer, we need more than 40,000 new jobs by the year 2028, the state’s goal. We need more than 40,000 new jobs by the year 2028, the state’s goal. We also need to invest in talent. As a leading medical device manufacturer, we need more than 40,000 new jobs by the year 2028, the state’s goal.

These are often high-wage, high-value jobs that fluctuate depending on the economic conditions, while also maintaining the sense of community.

Wealth migration has created economic opportunities, but it has also left a void in the middle. We must look for ways to retain our economic base, while also maintaining the sense of place that makes Collier County a desirable place to live. It’s estimated that Collier County will need more than 40,000 new jobs by 2030 to accommodate our growing population. If we continue to work together to make the necessary infrastructure investments, we can position our economy in ways that minimize economic disparity and maximize economic opportunity.

It turns out that MassVU’s teaching platform integrates career preparation courses designed to transform “the 21st-century learner into a 21st-century learner.” For example, high school students in one course are tasked with “creating a restaurant” centered on supporting patrons with obesity and diabetes. Students take away an e-portfolio. "Employers want someone who can roll up their sleeves, work in a team environment and think critically,” Biasi said. “Those are the qualities the new workforce is looking for. We call them the four C’s: critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration.”

Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) is playing a key role in the region’s economic development by ensuring graduating seniors are ready to launch with a solid plan, professional certification or vision. It offers 39 career academies with a focus on health sciences, finance, information technology, business administration, engineering, aviation and other targeted industries.

The programs are designed so students graduate with an industry certification, such as Microsoft, Adobe and Autodesk. Information technology certifications which lead directly to employment. Engineering and entrepreneurship academies are offered in all middle and high schools, inculcating the four C’s skills needed for 21st-century learners.

The number of students graduating with industry-professional certifications has skyrocketed, CCPS Superintendent Kamela Patton, Ph.D., said, from only 850 in 2011 to 4,500 last year. Putting an emphasis on certifications was adopted into the district’s accountability plan even though “we were doing that anyway,” Patton said. The district is in its second year of coordinating internships for academy students through a partnership with the Chamber. Earning an internship requires comprehensive work-based learning activities, such as mock interviews, pointers on professional dress codes and resume creation. The internships also show the students that “even if they go away to school, they can come back here.”

Thirty percent of local graduates don’t move on to higher education, and “that’s fine because we also need the skilled trades,” Patton said. However, many students were either not aware of the local technical colleges or had never visited them.

Many don’t realize that they can apply for financial aid to attend. So the school district ensures this population of students visits the closest tech school and participates in hands-on activities.

For the fourth year, every public school seventh grader has taken a field trip to the campus of Florida Gulf Coast University to expose them to possibilities. Patton hopes to expand the program so mid-high, school juniors can visit the Florida SouthWestern State College campus and learn that they can eschew higher debt by living at home and working part-time.

“If they can see themselves somewhere, they can get there,” Patton said.

“Career in a Year” programs are offered at Lorenzo Walker and iTech. The schools provide training that matches the needs of the local economy, such as air-conditioning, medical, welding, machining and agricultural equipment mechanics. Local business leaders serve on advisory boards for each industry to provide guidance on job skills needs and connecting students with local opportunities. The district worked with Arthrex to develop a fine machining program for the manufacturing of its medical devices. Caterpillar donated hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of equipment. A new program needs to prove itself before receiving funding, so involving businesses is key for growing course offerings. Job placements are high, up to 99 percent for some of the careers.

Patton said a new, $3.5 million “Manufacturing Center for Excellence” to teach in-demand, high-tech manufacturing, made possible by a Florida Department of Economic Opportunity grant, will open by the end of this academic year as a satellite program for Tech. Officials are narrowing down on its location. Patton is also waiting to hear whether the state has approved its proposal to operate a technical program in Glades County to serve the five-county area.

District-wide, 10,520 middle and high school students are enrolled in CCPS’s Career & Technical Education courses. “We’re always asking what else we can do to build the careers that build our local economy,” Patton said, adding that the CCPS tagline is “actualizing the American dream for our kids.”