

# **Proposed Sarasota County Communications Plan**

*Global Urban Development, December 2010*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The foundation for Sarasota County’s economic development strategy to become a “Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability” is the overall commitment to and track record of accomplishment with respect to sustainability. Sarasota County has justly earned a statewide and national reputation over the past decade as one of the leading sustainable counties in the U.S. The list of initiatives, from A to Z, is considerably lengthy and quite impressive.

As Sarasota County moved farther along the path of sustainability over the past decade, it increasingly began to highlight and emphasize the clear economic benefits for businesses and households. These include the Get Energy Smart Retrofit Program, Green Business Partnership, EDC Sustainable Systems Platform, SCVB promotion of Eco-tourism, and the Energy Economic Zone (EEZ).

Having clearly established the environmental, health, and quality of life advantages of sustainability, and the considerable economic benefits including *Green Savings*, *Green Opportunities*, *Green Talent*, and *Green Places*, Sarasota County is now poised to move farther along the path of sustainability, by designing and implementing a full-scale Sustainable Economic Development Strategy to grow businesses, jobs, and incomes for everyone and every place within Sarasota County. Government, business, and civic leaders are increasingly viewing Sustainable Economic Development as the natural next step along Sarasota County’s pathway to sustainability.

During the past decade, Sarasota County’s public, private, academic, civic, and community institutions have engaged in extensive communications, education, and outreach to inform fellow citizens and visitors about the need for and benefits of greater sustainability. This Communications Plan outlines how Sarasota County can more effectively utilize its existing and very extensive sustainability communications infrastructure in order to educate, inform, and inspire its own population, as well as Clean Tech and Green entrepreneurs and investors and Green Talent of all ages from throughout the world, to make Sarasota County a global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.

The key to the success of such a Sustainable Economic Development Communications Plan will be to create a unified brand, and then communicate that brand consistently, over time, in a coordinated fashion, involving all of the key public, private, and civic institutions, organizations, and stakeholders, using all available media outreach opportunities.

Global Urban Development's proposed Communications Plan involves 10 key recommendations:

1. Develop a unified brand for image making, consensus-building, and marketing Sarasota County as an attractive place and sustainable community to visit, live, work, play, and locate a business.
  - The unified brand should be communicated by every organization and institution within the community -- in the public, private, and civic sectors -- not just in words and images, but more importantly, in real life.
  - A vital component of the overall brand is that Sarasota County actively supports the dynamic success of Clean Tech companies and Green businesses, in word and deed.
  - Another key component of the overall brand is that Sarasota County is at the forefront of Sustainable Economic Development and is on its way to becoming a global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.
  - A further essential element of the overall brand is that Sarasota County is a magnet for professionally skilled and highly entrepreneurial Green Talent of all ages, including a large pool of active and experienced Green Talent in the 50 to 80 year-old age range.
2. Ensure that all County-related Internet websites and communications media reflect the spirit and content of the unified brand, and connect with social media to broaden the reach and appeal of the message.
3. Mobilize the current countywide public, private, and civic sustainability communications and education infrastructure to expand the message to include Sustainable Economic Development and the unified brand.
4. Utilize the current advertising and marketing budgets of public, private, and civic organizations to incorporate messages from the unified brand.
5. Establish a Sustainability News Service to identify and communicate local news and feature stories, both within Sarasota County and worldwide through a wide range of media and venues. This should include a Sustainability Speaker's Bureau and a Sustainability Writer's Bureau, both intended to reach local, state, national, and global audiences, with a preference for involving local talent as much as possible.
6. Collaborate with the Ringling College of Art and Design, Sanborn Studios, and many other local sources of creative talent, to produce and communicate entertainment and educational media directly related to the unified brand.

7. Encourage homeowner and condominium associations to save money through energy/water/resource efficiency and renewable energy, including becoming certified as Green Lodging. Organize a local cable television program featuring Green Savings and Sustainable Economic Development success stories involving residential associations as well as many other local stakeholders.
8. Expand marketing of Eco-tourism to Sustainable Tourism, with a Sustainability Trail and a Wellness Trail that feature a wide range of sites and experiences, including aspects of the trip itself, such as Green Lodging and healthy and sustainable transportation.
9. Actively recruit sustainability and Sustainable Economic Development professional conventions, conferences, meetings, trade shows, exhibitions, retreats, and special events to be held in Sarasota County.
10. Organize meetings, conferences, festivals, exhibitions, and special events in Sarasota County that highlight and promote sustainability and Sustainable Economic Development.

## **I. Context: Sarasota County's Commitment to Sustainability**

### ***Step One: Blazing the Trail***

The foundation for Sarasota County's economic development strategy to become a "Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability" is the overall commitment to and track record of accomplishment with respect to sustainability. Sarasota County has justly earned a statewide and national reputation over the past decade as one of the most sustainability-oriented counties in the U.S. Sarasota County's steps along the path of sustainability date back more than a decade, with important early actions including the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program, the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, and the Rebuild Sarasota County Partnership (with the U.S. Department of Energy) promoting energy efficient buildings powered by renewable energy.

On May 7, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners approved the Sustainability Resolution committing Sarasota County to a wide variety of substantive policies involving the use of renewable resources, promoting water conservation, energy efficiency, increased recycling and materials reuse, waste reduction, sustainable building practices, and other initiatives, including countywide sustainable stewardship education programs, and creation of an Office of Sustainability within the Sarasota County Government.

This landmark commitment was soon followed two months later by adoption of the 2050 Plan (a comprehensive plan amendment based on Smart Growth), in 2003 by passage of the innovative Environmentally Preferable Procurement Ordinance and requiring environmental standards for golf courses, in 2004 by the Ecological Footprint Reduction Educational Campaign and the EPA Energy Star Partnership, in 2005 by

approving the Green Building Resolution and the Plug-In Electric Hybrid Vehicle Resolution, in 2006 by passing the Green Development Resolution, the 2030 Challenge Resolution (Sarasota County was literally the first county in the U.S. committing all government buildings to become carbon neutral by 2030), and most importantly, the publication of the landmark *Roadmap to Sustainability*, which asserted that “Planning for a sustainable community is the overarching theme of the Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan.”

The 2006 *Roadmap to Sustainability* impressively summarizes Sarasota County’s progress up to that point in time. It was later supplemented by a much more detailed publication, updated every year, entitled *Sarasota County Sustainability Initiatives* (sometimes referred to as the “A to Z inventory” or the Annual Sustainability Report). Both of these documents and numerous others are available on the Sarasota County Government’s website, [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net). Sarasota County’s leadership role in fostering sustainability awareness and best practices has achieved substantial state, national, and global recognition over the past decade.

For example, Sarasota County became the first community in Florida to receive the Audubon International Green Community Award, and it has won a Sustainable Community Award from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, several Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties, an ICLEI-USA Milestone Award, the Florida Energy Achievement Award, the Florida Water Use Efficiency Award, the Florida Stormwater Association’s Excellence Award, and special recognition from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a top Energy Star Change the World pledge driver. The *Roadmap to Sustainability* won an award for Outstanding Achievement in Innovation from the Alliance for Innovation, and the Sarasota 2050 Plan received the Charter Award from the Congress for the New Urbanism.

Sarasota County was awarded the highest “Gold Level” Green Local Government Certification from the Florida Green Building Coalition, and also attained Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for the Twin Lakes Office Complex and the North Sarasota Library (two County Government buildings) and LEED Silver Certification for Urfer Family Park.

In 2008 Sarasota County’s Rothenbach Park (the County’s former Bee Ridge landfill) became the host site for the largest single solar power generation facility in Florida, 250 kilowatts of solar photovoltaic (PV) power produced by Florida Power & Light through its Sunshine Energy Program, winner of a Green Power Leadership Award from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the EPA.

***Step Two: Sustainability as Financial Savings, Employment Growth,  
and Business Value Creation***

As Sarasota County moved farther along the path of sustainability over the past decade, it increasingly began to highlight and emphasize the clear economic benefits for

businesses and households. First and foremost of these benefits is *Green Savings*. Innovation, efficiency, and conservation in the use and reuse of resources, especially energy and water, clearly saves people lots of money. For example, the California Energy Commission has documented that higher energy efficiency standards for new buildings, new appliances, and new motor vehicles between 1973 and 2006 actually reduced energy consumption per capita by more than 40 percent, thus saving businesses and households in California a total of \$56 billion.

Accordingly, Sarasota County started promoting cost savings through environmental sustainability. For example, the Energy Star Change a Light, Change the World campaign, in which more than 5,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs have been distributed since 2006, saves private citizens nearly \$1.7 million. Installation of energy efficient LED (light-emitting diode) lights at nine County Government facilities has cut energy costs at each location by between 35 and 60 percent. Centralized consolidation of County Government printing devices soon will be saving another \$300,000 per year in public expenses, and the County's Energy Management Action Plan has already saved nearly \$250,000, with far more substantial savings planned in the near future from an overall 20 percent reduction in energy use. Sarasota County has achieved significant cost savings by conserving millions of gallons of water in its various buildings, parks, recreation centers, athletic fields, and other facilities. Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) is saving approximately \$400,000 annually on fuel expenses by utilizing 20 hybrid diesel-electric buses.

One of the most ambitious efforts to realize *Green Savings*, the Get Energy Smart Retrofit Program, was launched in August 2010 with \$2.5 million in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funds from the U.S. Department of Energy. Sarasota County is working in partnership with the Cities of Sarasota, Venice, and North Port to provide a variety of financial incentives and technical assistance enabling thousands of homeowners to achieve major energy cost savings in their homes. In addition to the savings, this program, which already is reaching more than 400 homeowners, will serve as an economic engine generating local job growth, business expansion, and increased incomes for Sarasota County's entrepreneurs, workers, and residents. Key institutions such as the Suncoast Workforce Board, University of South Florida (USF), State College of Florida (SCF), and others will provide education and training to help develop the vital economic benefit for Sarasota County of *Green Talent*, enabling residents to obtain good jobs directly related to improving sustainability.

In 2006 Sarasota County established the Green Business Partnership to help bring sustainability savings to the private sector. Firms receive free advice and technical assistance on how to "get richer by becoming greener" in the same way that Wal-Mart, GE, IBM, DuPont, and many other large corporations are now doing. Probably the best example of this approach, which includes earning more money by using fewer resources and reusing more, is the Interface Corporation of Atlanta, as described by its CEO, Ray Anderson, in his 2009 book, *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist* (Ray Anderson delivered the keynote speech at Sarasota County's 2005 Efest).

Sarasota County's Green Business Partnership is now nationally recognized as one of the most extensive efforts of its kind by any local government in the U.S. Currently there are 128 certified Green Business Partners, and by substantially reducing waste, recycling materials, and increasing overall resource efficiency, they have saved a great deal of money in their daily operations. For example, the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is saving more than \$100,000 per year through efficiencies in electricity, natural gas, and water consumption, and Doctors Hospital is saving \$56,000 annually on energy and water utilization. The Venice Golf and Country Club, Carlson Studio Architecture, Mirasol FAFCO Solar, Children's World Uniform Supply, Jackson Hewitt Technology, Akuwa Solutions Group, Snelling Staffing Services, Longboat Key Club, Sarasota Coastal Credit Union, and numerous other Sarasota County companies have benefited from being certified as a Green Business Partner by cutting costs and improving their bottom line profitability through becoming more sustainable.

The Green Business Partnership also promotes another key economic benefit, *Green Opportunities*, by enabling companies to expand their revenues and market share through attracting and retaining new customers and clients. These market growth opportunities are now significantly enhanced by the availability of the Sarasota County Green Map, which was launched in February 2010 on the County Government's website. The Green Map is a comprehensive tool that visually lists and geographically maps a wide range of countywide sustainability venues, facilities, and resources, including all of the certified Green Business Partners.

The focus on enhancing sustainability in order to promote business and job growth was further expanded through the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County (EDC), which asserts on its website that Sarasota County is "A leader in innovative environmental management and sustainable living..." In its 2009 Strategic Plan, the EDC identified "Applied Environment Services and Sustainable Systems" as a major economic and employment growth opportunity, or "Strategic Platform," for Sarasota County. Subsequently the EDC established a Sustainable Systems Committee, co-chaired by Dr. Kumar Mahadevan, President of the Mote Marine Laboratory, and Dr. Arthur Guilford, President of the Sarasota-Manatee Campus of the University of South Florida. This committee has been meeting periodically for the past year, discussing ideas and methods of supporting the creation and expansion of sustainable businesses in a variety of fields.

Similarly, the Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau (SCVB) has been marketing Eco-tourism, including offering a separate Discover Natural Sarasota website in partnership with the Sarasota County Government, the Science and Environment Council of Sarasota County, and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. This website contains information about local wildlife habitats, nature trails, land and water-based outdoor sports and recreational activities, museums and educational venues, and historic sites. The clear purpose is to attract more visitors who want to experience the natural environment and quality of life in Sarasota County, and most importantly, who will spend money that directly contributes to growth of businesses, jobs, and incomes.

Finally, in September 2009 Sarasota County won a statewide competition, conducted by the State of Florida's Department of Community Affairs, to be officially selected as the site of an Energy Economic Zone (EEZ). According to Sarasota County, the EEZ initiative "is intended to serve as a sustainable economic development model by creating energy efficient land use patterns, developing alternative energy sources, and facilitating the development of a clean technology industry." The EEZ is designed to offer special financial, regulatory, and other valuable incentives in order to help the County attract and retain Clean Tech and Green businesses and jobs within the EEZ's boundaries.

### ***Step Three: Toward a Countywide Sustainable Economic Development Strategy***

Having clearly established the environmental, health, and quality of life advantages of sustainability, and the considerable economic benefits including *Green Savings, Green Opportunities, Green Talent, and Green Places*, Sarasota County is now poised to move farther along the path of sustainability, by designing and implementing a full-scale Sustainable Economic Development Strategy to grow businesses, jobs, and incomes for everyone and every place within Sarasota County. During 2010, the County Commission voted to use a portion of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to initiate a planning process intended for Sarasota County to become a "Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability." In other words, government, business, and civic leaders are increasingly viewing Sustainable Economic Development as the natural next step along Sarasota County's pathway to sustainability.

According to Sarasota County's 2010 *Annual Sustainability Program Update*: "With the tremendous impact of the recession on our local community, a focus on economic development is critical to any effort to move toward a sustainable community. In addition to the traditional economic stimulus efforts such as local and federal stimulus funding, ad valorem tax exemption and other existing programs that are already producing results, efforts over this coming year will focus on developing an economic development strategy to truly transform our local economy. As part of a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop Sarasota County as a Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability, an analysis of steps and strategies necessary to grow the local green economy and support job creation is underway. The initial results indicate a likely focus on three categories of growth: 1) clean tech companies – *producers* of sustainable products and services; 2) green businesses – *users* of sustainable products and services in the operation of their business; and 3) sustainability savings – wealth creation from more efficient use of resources that ultimately results in greater purchasing power in the economy."

### ***Step Four: Sustainability Communications -- Past, Present, and Future***

Sarasota County's public, private, academic, civic, and community institutions have engaged in extensive communications, education, and outreach to inform fellow citizens and visitors about the need for and benefits of greater sustainability. These efforts have included publications such as the *Roadmap to Sustainability* and the annual

reports on *Sarasota County Sustainability Initiatives*. It includes two specially produced videos, “Sustainability Choices” and “Footsteps to Sustainability” (still available on the Sarasota County Government website). It includes numerous Powerpoints including the *Sustainability Choices Presentation* and *Travel with Sarasota County along the Road to a Sustainable Community*, together with many speeches and community events such as the annual Sustainable Communities Workshops beginning in 2006. For example, during FY 2009 the Office of Sustainability participated in nearly 50 community sustainability educational events involving over 5,700 citizens. On Earth Day in April 2009, Sarasota County was the only place in Florida and one of only 10 places nationwide to host a “Community Conversation on Energy and Climate.”

In addition, these initiatives include Efest sustainability festivals, Sarasota County Green Map, Ecological Footprint Reduction Educational Campaign, Get Energy Smart Campaign, Energy Star Change a Light/Change the World Campaign, County Green Champions Training, Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Teams, “Natural Capitalism” workshops facilitated by the Rocky Mountain Institute, Sarasota County Sustainability Branding Initiative, International Design Summit at Ringling College of Art and Design, Florida House Learning Center, Science and Environment Council of Sarasota County, Green Drinks, Rethinking Sustainable Construction, Sustainability Month, Sustainable Floridians Program, Sustainable Sarasota Community Partnership Meetings, Sustainable Seafood Campaign, Community Health Improvement Partnership, and numerous others, all of which are described on the Sarasota County Government website.

It also includes the offerings of various educational institutions, ranging from the Sarasota County Cooperative Extension Service in partnership with the University of Florida, University of South Florida’s Master of Arts Program in Global Sustainability and the USF Lecture Series on Environmental Economics, State College of Florida’s Bachelor of Applied Science Program in Energy Technology Management, and much more. Most of these communications and educational activities are designed to reach people within Sarasota County, though the Eco-tourism marketing efforts of the SCVB, as well as other business attraction efforts by the County Government, the EDC, and various chambers of commerce and business associations, including the new publication, *Sarasota County Economic Development Incentives*, are designed to reach a statewide, national, and international audience.

The next steps to be taken by Sarasota County will be to enhance all of the current extensive communications and educational activities by transforming the message to include Sustainable Economic Development as a vital aspect both of traditional sustainability and traditional economic and business development. Currently the Sarasota County Government is leading a process of analysis and creative dialogue that will produce a unified and comprehensive brand. Once this brand is chosen, the bulk of the communications and marketing messages will be organized around these central themes. What follows are Global Urban Development’s suggested concepts for the unified brand, along with specific recommendations for what the stories should be and how best to tell these stories to local citizens and to the rest of the world.



## **II. Concept: A Sustainable Economy is a Prosperous Economy**

The fundamental concept for communications, branding, and marketing is as follows: Sarasota County is a beautiful place in terms of its attractive natural features, a vibrant place in terms of its abundant cultural amenities, and a desirable place in terms of its overall quality of life. It is a great place to visit, live, work, play, and locate a business. We characterize it as “*Prosperity in Paradise: Getting Richer by Becoming Greener.*”

In order for Sarasota County to maintain and enhance such an attractive, vibrant, and livable community, it is necessary to preserve and protect the natural and human environment. Sarasota County is committed to environmental and social sustainability to ensure long-term health, prosperity, and quality of life. Sustainability is a vital part of Sarasota County’s culture.

Sustainability in Sarasota County includes a major focus on Sustainable Economic Development. Encouraging and supporting Clean Tech companies, Green businesses, and Green Talent is essential for “Prosperity in Paradise” to thrive. By redesigning and strengthening its economic, business, and employment development infrastructure and incentives, Sarasota County is at the forefront of global economic productivity and competitiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where businesses, households, and communities earn more money by using fewer resources and reusing them more wisely and efficiently. Sarasota County’s creative and dynamic culture of sustainability will enable it to be on the cutting edge of growing businesses, jobs, and incomes by becoming a Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.

### ***Target Audiences and Markets***

There are essentially five broad audiences for Sarasota County’s communications, branding, and marketing:

- 1) *The current community.* Focus on reaching and involving both full-time and part-time residents in getting involved as Green Entrepreneurs, Green Investors, and Green Talent in a wide range of sustainable enterprises and business activities.
- 2) *The existing migratory pattern.* Focus on reaching and involving people through the current Sarasota County networks of owners of second homes and visitors from midwestern U.S. states and Canadian provinces who are especially interested in and drawn to sustainability and sustainable economic development.
- 3) *Neverretirees.* Focus on reaching and involving baby boomers and those more senior in age, from 50 to 80 years old, to start second (or third or fourth) careers in Sarasota County as sustainable entrepreneurs, professionals, and other paid and volunteer workers. This includes people already living in Sarasota County, as

well as people who will want to relocate to Sarasota County in order to participate in the culture and take advantage of the public and private support for Clean Tech companies, Green businesses, and Green Talent.

- 4) *The Young and the Restless*. Focus on retaining highly skilled young adults after they complete their studies at one of the many higher education and research institutions in Sarasota County, and on attracting youthful Green Talent from across the country and throughout the world.
- 5) *Clean Tech and Green Entrepreneurs and Investors*. Focus directly on encouraging private sector initiatives for people who currently reside in Sarasota County, as well as sustainability-oriented business and financial executives globally.

To summarize the overall message and unified branding themes, below is an accurate description of Sarasota County today, and a vision statement of what Sarasota County will become in the years ahead:

“Sarasota County is a beautiful place, with good weather, attractive natural features – especially beaches – and many other land-based and water-based recreational opportunities, with an abundance of cultural amenities and widespread availability of professional services. It has a high quality of life. The people who live, work, and play in Sarasota County believe in maintaining and enhancing its quality of life by protecting and preserving the environment. They are committed to the long-term health and sustainability of all of Sarasota County’s natural and human resources. The business owners and the workforce in Sarasota County believe in sustainability. This is why Sarasota County has such a high percentage of dynamic, fast-growing Clean Tech companies and very successful Green businesses. And it also is why Sarasota County has such a dynamic and highly skilled Green Talent workforce of all ages, including young adults newly graduated from college, and an especially large group of experienced professionals and entrepreneurial baby boomers and those even more senior, in the 50 to 80 year-old age range.”

“Sarasota County has a well-developed government, business, academic, civic, and community infrastructure in support of sustainability in general, and sustainable economic, business, employment, and community development in particular. Clean Tech companies, Green businesses, and sustainability-oriented investors, entrepreneurs, professionals, and tourists *of all ages* are most welcome in Sarasota County. Come and be part of growing businesses, jobs, and incomes through sustainability in Sarasota County, as this livable community becomes a global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.”

### III. Sarasota County Communications Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** *Develop a unified brand for image-making, consensus-building, and marketing Sarasota County as an attractive place and sustainable community to visit, live, work, play, and locate a business.*

- *The unified brand should be communicated by every organization and institution within the community -- in the public, private, and civic sectors -- not just in words and images, but more importantly, in real life.*
- *A vital component of the overall brand is that Sarasota County actively supports the dynamic success of Clean Tech companies and Green businesses, in word and deed.*
- *Another key component of the overall brand is that Sarasota County is at the forefront of Sustainable Economic Development and is on its way to becoming a global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.*
- *A further essential element of the overall brand is that Sarasota County is a magnet for professionally skilled and highly entrepreneurial Green Talent of all ages, including a large pool of active and experienced Green Talent in the 50 to 80 year-old age range.*

Sarasota County has an impressive story to tell the world, yet outside of Florida, this story is not yet well known. It needs to become much better known, in New York and Los Angeles, in Toronto and Vancouver, in London and Frankfurt, in Sao Paulo and Singapore. People across the U.S. and around the world should know the Sarasota County story – Prosperity in Paradise: Getting Richer by Becoming Greener. They need to know about Sarasota County’s strong commitment to and vibrant culture in support of sustainability, and why this community is at the forefront of Sustainable Economic Development and is on its way to becoming a global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability. Telling this story to Florida, America, Canada, Europe, and the entire world, is the best possible strategy for Sarasota County to attract and retain Clean Tech companies, Green businesses and investors, and Green Talent, including the Neverretirees.

In GUD’s final report, we will outline in detail all of the recommended initiatives that will create and strengthen the business and workforce support infrastructure that Sarasota County will need in order to attract and retain Clean Tech companies, Green businesses and investors, and Green Talent. These institutional and policy initiatives for the public, private, and civic sectors, and for community stakeholders, will only succeed in a large-scale and long-term way if Sarasota County’s unique competitive advantages are effectively and consistently communicated to a national and global audience. In other words, creating the unified brand, and then communicating and marketing that brand both within Sarasota County and throughout the world, is vital to the success of growing businesses, jobs, and incomes through an innovative and dynamic Sustainable Economy.

**Recommendation 2:** *Ensure that all County-related Internet websites and communications media reflect the spirit and content of the unified brand, and connect with social media to broaden the reach and appeal of the message.*

One of the most important communications vehicles is the Sarasota County Government website, [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net), which in design and content, should be telling the story, both in words and images, of the unified brand. This should also be true of directly related websites such as the EDC and SCVB. One special feature of the County's website that should be marketed and used more extensively is the Green Map.

In addition, the public sector should actively reach out to the various chambers of commerce, industry and trade associations, individual businesses, civic organizations, arts and cultural institutions, environmental and community groups, colleges and universities, hospitals and medical facilities, and others, to encourage them and collaborate with them to update the design and content of their websites. This will enable these websites to better reflect the unified brand and more effectively communicate and market Sarasota's sustainability and sustainable economy success stories.

Similarly, Sarasota County should make full use of its own cable television station, through programs such as *Sarasota Business Today*, *Sarasota County Weekly*, *County Talk with Jim Ley*, and other offerings, to broadcast stories and messages directly related to the unified brand. Probably there should even be one or more new programs that feature interesting, enlightening, entertaining, and inspiring stories of people in the community saving considerable amounts of money and earning a good livelihood by being more sustainable in business, at work, at play, at home, and while visiting.

Further, the Sarasota County Government should be working closely with the commercial, public, and community radio and television broadcast media, the newspaper and magazine print media, and other forms of communication and marketing, such as organizational newsletters and brochures, as well as Internet Blogs, to tell the Sarasota sustainability and sustainable economy success stories.

Finally, the use of social networking media, such as Facebook and Twitter, should be carefully considered, both in reaching youth and young adults, as well as exploring a new way to involve the Neverretirees. Particularly in an informal and personal way, people in Sarasota County who are genuinely enthusiastic about their sustainable and prosperous "Paradise" can share their stories with friends and colleagues around the U.S. and the world.

**Recommendation 3:** *Mobilize the current countywide public, private, and civic sustainability communications and education infrastructure to expand the message to include Sustainable Economic Development and the unified brand.*

On pages 7 and 8 we summarize at length and in detail the extensive public, private, and civic education, outreach, and marketing efforts on behalf of sustainability that currently exist in Sarasota County. Many institutions, organizations, and

communities are engaged in getting out the message, and a large segment of the local population is reached by these methods and regularly participates in such events and activities.

Once the unified brand is ready to be launched, it will become necessary for Sarasota County to infuse the new themes by expanding the traditional sustainability message to include sustainable economic and business development. The sustainability communications and education infrastructure within Sarasota County already is very highly developed and experienced, with an excellent track record of accomplishment. Now is the time to mobilize the extensive sustainability culture in support of growing businesses, jobs, and incomes through Clean Tech companies, Green businesses and investors, and Green Talent.

**Recommendation 4:** *Utilize the current advertising and marketing budgets of public, private, and civic organizations to incorporate messages from the unified brand.*

The Sarasota County Government, the EDC, and the SCVB collectively spend a significant amount of public funds annually on advertising and marketing. A cost-efficient strategy will be to adapt and retool such advertising and marketing to completely represent the unified brand. Creative new outlets should be considered, including purchasing display ads in major airline magazines in order to attract skilled professional and entrepreneurial Green Talent, particularly the Neverirees.

Also, various non-public entities including chambers of commerce, industry and trade associations, colleges and universities, hospitals and medical facilities, real estate developers and brokers, civic and community organizations, to the extent that they engage in paid advertising and marketing, should be strongly encouraged to infuse their overall message with key aspects of the unified brand, thereby helping to tell the Sarasota County sustainability and sustainable economic development success stories.

**Recommendation 5:** *Establish a Sustainability News Service to identify and communicate local news and feature stories, both within Sarasota County and worldwide through a wide range of media and venues. This should include a Sustainability Speaker's Bureau and a Sustainability Writer's Bureau, both intended to reach local, state, national, and global audiences, with a preference for involving local talent as much as possible.*

This recommendation combines two key elements. First, it actively involves and engages a broad and diverse range of local Green Talent in communicating the unified brand messages, both in writing for various print and electronic publications, and in speaking to a wide variety of audiences, locally and globally.

Second, the Sustainability News Service will actively recruit talented writers and respected speakers from outside of Sarasota County to help communicate the unified brand messages, thus greatly improving the prospects of reaching large groups of influential and resourceful people in many different places, cultures, and events. The

Sustainability Speaker's Bureau will enroll and manage the speakers, and it will aggressively identify many professional and recreational gatherings worldwide where the speakers can tell their Sarasota County sustainability and sustainable economic development success stories.

**Recommendation 6:** *Collaborate with the Ringling College of Art and Design, Sanborn Studios, and many other local sources of creative talent, to produce and communicate entertainment and educational media directly related to the unified brand.*

As Sarasota County works to build and expand its creative design and multi-media industries, it will increasingly be able to draw upon both locally based and visiting talent to produce high quality entertainment and educational media, from feature films and documentaries to prime-time television series, including "reality" shows.

On September 2010, Sarasota County announced that Sanborn Studios LLC will develop a 200,000 square foot movie and television production studio campus on more than 20 acres of land at Lakewood Ranch, starting with an initial studio of 30,000 square feet, plus additional facilities near Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. Sanborn Studios will benefit from \$1.5 million in state and local economic development incentives, including property tax breaks from Sarasota County.

Similarly, on December 8, 2010, Sarasota County provided a \$1.75 million grant to the Ringling College of Art and Design to help pay for construction and equipment costs of building a "state-of-the-art" movie and television post-production studio facility. Together, these two strategic economic development investments can serve as a catalyst for Sarasota County to grow a dynamic media industry that will attract and retain both local and global talent.

The best way for such investments to deliver significant value is for Sarasota County to collaborate with Ringling College and Sanborn Studios in developing movies, TV programs, and related media that tell the story of the unified brand to local, national, and international audiences.

For example, both a TV situation comedy and a full-length feature film called "The Old and the Restless" (perhaps starring Betty White and Ed Begley, Jr.), set in Sarasota County, can present fictionalized versions of some of the many interesting Clean Tech and Green entrepreneurs, and sustainable institutions, communities, and residents. This will be a powerful way to convey to a substantial national and international audience what "Prosperity in Paradise" and a sustainable culture and economy actually look and feel like. It will enable Sarasota County to become a much greater magnet for Green Talent, including tourists, residents, businesses, and investors.

**Recommendation 7:** *Encourage homeowner and condominium associations to save money through energy/water/resource efficiency and renewable energy, including becoming certified as Green Lodging. Organize a local cable television program*

*featuring Green Savings and Sustainable Economic Development success stories involving residential associations as well as many other local stakeholders.*

Working with homeowner and condominium associations in Sarasota County can follow the successful model of Turtle Rock on Palmer Ranch, where several cost-conscious leaders of the homeowners association helped save considerable annual operating costs by replacing their incandescent street lamps powered by natural gas with solar-powered LED lights, and switching the temperature controls on the subdivision's community swimming pool from natural gas to geothermal heating from a nearby pond. In addition to organizing and promoting such savings among Sarasota County residents, purchases of Clean Tech goods and services by local homeowner and condominium associations can help expand market demand for local Clean Tech companies and increase employment and incomes for local Green Talent.

Since many property owners seasonally rent out their houses and apartments to tourists, this recommendation can help enable such rental dwellings to be designated as Green Lodging by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and thus attract additional sustainability-oriented visitors whose discretionary spending produces highly desirable revenues for private businesses and residents, and to help pay for public infrastructure and services.

The ongoing actions of these homeowner and condominium associations should generate an abundance of fascinating and informative stories to be broadcast on a weekly Sarasota County cable television program, as well as becoming the source for many local stories to be communicated by many different media vehicles and outlets.

**Recommendation 8:** *Expand marketing of Eco-tourism to Sustainable Tourism, with a Sustainability Trail and a Wellness Trail that feature a wide range of sites and experiences, including aspects of the trip itself, such as Green Lodging and healthy and sustainable transportation.*

The Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau currently promotes Eco-tourism for local wildlife habitats, nature trails, land and water-based outdoor sports and recreational activities, museums and educational venues, and historic sites. In addition, the SCVB should consider promoting Sustainable Tourism. This could involve designing a "Sustainability Trail" throughout Sarasota County, including the EEZ, the solar energy facility in Rothenbach Park, Florida House Learning Center, the various public and private LEED buildings and related places, numerous Clean Tech companies and Green businesses, Clean Tech business incubators, renewable energy at Turtle Rock and other buildings and communities, and numerous other innovative activities and venues.

Similarly, Sustainable Tourism could involve a "Wellness Trail" highlighting the quality of life and the commitment to a healthy lifestyle in Sarasota County. This trail might include sites such as Nathan Benderson Park, Phillippi Farmhouse Market, Warm Mineral Springs, Sarasota County's beautiful beaches, community gardens, the

Community Health Improvement Partnership, and the many wellness institutions and services along U.S. Highway 41, Bee Ridge Corridor, and numerous other locations.

Sustainable Tourism also involves sustainability in the ways and means of traveling and visiting. Sarasota County already is home to 30 hotels that are currently designated as Green Lodging by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. These Green hotels represent more than 60 percent of Sarasota County's hotels, which most likely is the highest percentage of any county in Florida. Yet as County Administrator Jim Ley recently pointed out in his *Musings 2011*, Sarasota County has a smaller percentage of its guests staying in hotels than other Florida counties, because so many people rent condominiums. Upgrading the energy/water/resource efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainability of condominiums so they can be designated as Green Lodging could help expand the outreach of the unified brand and the attraction of Green Talent through Sustainable Tourism.

The same principle applies to promoting *Green Places* through sustainable transportation and land-use as part of Sustainable Tourism. Accordingly, EcoSmart-Development, Low Impact Development, solar-powered Low-Speed Electric Vehicles, electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy, resource efficiency, Smart Growth regional planning, New Urbanism community design, pedestrian-friendly paths and overall walkability, bicycle lanes, mixed-use development, greenways, parks and recreational opportunities, cultural amenities, educational and health care institutions, multi-modal public transit, vibrant commercial and entertainment areas, convenient retail stores and services, high-speed broadband telecommunications infrastructure, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), LEED buildings and other structures such as Sarasota County Area Transit's forthcoming LEED-certified bus transfer station at Bahia Vista Street, and many other vital aspects of "place-making" all will contribute significantly to Sarasota County increasingly becoming a magnet for Sustainable Tourism and for Clean Tech companies, Green businesses and investors, and Green Talent. Such a sustainability-oriented economic development strategy has worked very well for Curitiba, Brazil (where Bus Rapid Transit was invented), a prosperous and well-planned city that definitely got richer by becoming greener.

**Recommendation 9:** *Actively recruit sustainability and Sustainable Economic Development professional conventions, conferences, meetings, trade shows, exhibitions, retreats, and special events to be held in Sarasota County.*

The EDC and the SCVB should work closely with the colleges and universities, chambers of commerce, business and professional associations, civic and environmental organizations, medical and wellness professionals, and interested citizens to identify and recruit meetings, conferences, and events by sustainability-oriented groups. This will be one of the best ways to encourage sustainable and wellness tourism by Green Talent of all ages. The intention is that they will be inspired to move to Sarasota County and become a part-time or full-time resident. In promoting sustainable business and professional tourism through conventions, conferences, meetings, and events, a high priority will be to target the types of events that will attract people who might potentially



be interested in either relocating, starting, or investing in a sustainable business in Sarasota County, such as meetings sponsored by the American Council on Renewable Energy, Business for Social Responsibility, and Ceres.

**Recommendation 10:** *Organize meetings, conferences, festivals, exhibitions, and special events in Sarasota County that highlight and promote sustainability and Sustainable Economic Development.*

Sarasota County already has experience with organizing local celebratory and educational events. In 2005 the Sarasota County Government organized Efest, “Florida’s Green Living Music & Arts Festival.” Since 2006, Efest has been organized by a non-profit group. Efest 2008 was the largest environmental music and arts festival ever held in Florida, with 25,000 visitors, 70 sponsors, 200 exhibitors, 35 expert speakers, and 40 volunteer coordinators. Over the four annual Efests (2005-2008), more than 50,000 people attended. Hosting these types of festivals can become an excellent marketing and recruiting magnet for Green Talent.

Along the same lines, the public, private, and civic sectors in Sarasota County can organize more professionally oriented events, such as regional, national, and international conferences related to sustainability and sustainable economic development, including Clean Tech and Green businesses and investors, and Green Talent. For example, GUD is collaborating with several other organizations to build a Sustainable Economic Development Network that will bring together sustainability and economic development leaders, experts, and innovators, primarily from government and business. GUD and its partners are planning to hold a U.S. national conference in the fall of 2011 or the winter or spring of 2012. Sarasota County might want to consider hosting such an event, in order to showcase its efforts to become a cutting edge pioneer in Sustainable Economic Development, and a newly emerging global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability.

#### **IV. Communications Plan Implementation**

The first and most important step is for the Sarasota County Government, especially the County Commissioners and the County Administrator, to agree on the key elements of the unified brand.

Once this clear and detailed agreement is reached, the second step will be to obtain consensus and cooperation from other major organizations and institutions, particularly the EDC and SCVB, as well as the cities of Sarasota, Venice, and North Port, the various chambers of commerce and business associations, the colleges and universities, and numerous other entities.

The third step will be to create a comprehensive delivery system for communicating the unified brand – the Sarasota County Sustainability and Sustainable

Economic Development Success Story – within the County, around the State of Florida, across the U.S., and throughout the world.

Much of the education, information, and communications outreach infrastructure already exists within Sarasota County. The challenge will be to organize and mobilize it much more effectively to operate cooperatively and consistently for the rest of this decade. In other words, the financial and institutional resources needed are already available, if they are mobilized and coordinated to tell the story powerfully and repeatedly.

## **V. Conclusion**

In Northern European countries including Germany and the Netherlands, and in Scandinavian nations such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, support for sustainability cuts across the entire political spectrum. This is not true in the U.S., however. Of the leading sustainability counties in America, only Sarasota County combines its strong support for sustainability with a generally moderate to conservative voting pattern. This significant difference provides Sarasota County with an unprecedented competitive advantage in promoting sustainable economic development, namely its ability to appeal to and attract socially and economically mainstream Clean Tech and Green entrepreneurs and investors and Green Talent of all ages.

Most experts are surprised to learn of Sarasota County's extraordinary track record of sustainability commitments and initiatives over the past decade. They will be even more surprised to witness the coming emergence of a new global Center for Innovation in Energy and Sustainability. Sarasota County is already well on its way to getting richer by becoming greener through moving rapidly forward along the dynamic path of *Prosperity in Paradise*. One vital step down that path is for Sarasota County to create a unified brand and tell its Sustainability and Sustainable Economic Development Success Stories locally and globally. GUD's proposed Communications Plan will help turn this exciting vision into a long-term reality.