

LOCAL & STATE

Orlando YIMBY making civic activism cool

Maxwell: Serious group with a funny name is primarily focused on housing and transit, making metro Orlando a livable community with more housing options. Page 3



SPORTS

UCF football wraps up spring camp

Coach Gus Malzahn says team is in a "super spot" heading into 2022 season as quarterbacks Mikey Keene and John Rhys Plumlee toss 7 touchdown passes. Page 1



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Looking at DeSantis' megadonors

Governor has hauled in \$102M for reelection bid

By Skyler Swisher Orlando Sentinel

Gov. Ron DeSantis is amassing a staggering amount of cash for his reelection

effort, making him a heavy favorite to win this year's race for governor and cementing his status as a top Republican presidential prospect for 2024.

DeSantis has topped \$100 million raised for the 2022 election, dwarfing the money raised by his three potential Democratic foes in Florida.

His campaign and political commit-

tee, both working for his reelection, have raised a combined \$102 million through March, according to an Orlando Sentinel analysis of campaign finance records.

That sum is unheard of at this point in a Florida governor's race, said Kevin Wagner, a political scientist at Florida Atlantic University.

"It is a staggeringly high amount," he

said. "Part of it has to do with his national profile. Part of it is he is very good at fundraising."

DeSantis' haul perhaps exceeds any other candidate running for governor in the United States, although such comparisons for state candidates are diffi-

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MOVING OUT



SunRail is one transportation option for DeBary residents and visitors to access Sanford, Lake Mary, Winter Park and Orlando. PATRICK CONNOLLY/ORLANDO SENTINEL PHOTOS

DeBary plans to create new downtown district

By Trevor Fraser and Patrick Connolly Orlando Sentinel

DEBARY — Terri Hoag was skeptical of DeBary when she moved there in the mid-2000s so her husband could take a job in Maitland. Coming from Philadelphia, the arts patron was taken aback about the lack of things to do.

"I said to [my husband], 'Where did you move us to?'"

Even before it was incorporated in 1993, the small city of 22,000 along the St. Johns River in Volusia County has been an unofficial retirement community, with residents mostly in spread-out subdivisions and sparse commercial development along U.S. Highway 17-92.

"The county allowed us to grow the way the market drove us," said Carmen Rosamonda, DeBary's city manager and former mayor. "DeBary doesn't have a downtown."

But now, a downtown is exactly what city



Terri Hoag is the executive director of the Gateway Center for the Arts in DeBary.

Turn to DeBary, Page 2

Can Central Florida be magical for tech too?

By Stephen Hudak Orlando Sentinel

Shannon Landin never doubted her tech savvy.

Before creating Codecraft Works, an educational technology and training company headquartered in Brevard County, the entrepreneurial mom volunteered at her kids' schools, helping teachers learn how to crack computer coding challenges.

But commercializing her smart ideas? That was trickier.

"I can't say that I'm this really savvy businessperson and that I knew I was going to do this thing and make money," said Landin, 48. "No, it was more like I thought there's a gap out here and I think I can fill it and maybe somebody will pay for it."

She hopes to get a boost for her company from Cenfluence, a job-growing strategy funded by Orange County to lift local tech companies, diversify the region's tourism-reliant economy and blunt financial

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Hurricane expert pitches end to category 'wind' scale

By Joe Mario Pedersen Orlando Sentinel

During this week's National Hurricane Conference in Orlando, a Colorado State University professor proposed a better way to predict the damages of a devastating hurricane — do away with the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale.

Hurricane specialist, Philip Klotzbach, spoke Tuesday at Orlando's Rosen Centre hotel about his crusade in doing away with the famous wind scale in favor of measuring surface pressure, the force exerted on the sea surface by the air above, as a better metric to predict hurricane damages.

"Wind hasn't worked recently," said Klotzbach, a CSU meteorology professor. "It's not bad but pressure actually does (predict) better."

Klotzbach spoke Tuesday to a standing room-only event during the four-day

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# Tech

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harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initiative took small but significant steps in its first year, foreshadowing good things to come, its leaders say.

About 70 technology companies have enlisted in the collaborative's mission to make Central Florida as magical for tech entrepreneurs as it is for tourists, said Paul Sohl, a former U.S. Navy pilot, retired rear admiral and head of Cenflucence's management team.

"We're leveraging magic that already exists here," he said, citing a cadre of local innovators and the University of Central Florida's research prowess.

"There are an amazing number of resources here — everything from big anchor industries to research universities to economic-development organizations — all hyperfocused on doing what's right for businesses to grow."

Cenflucence, which has office space at the National Entrepreneur Center at the Fashion Square Mall in Orlando, is structured to "leverage synergies" among all those assets, Sohl said.

Since its launch in 2021 Cenflucence's advisers and consultants have helped identify more than \$2 million in grants, loans and other funding opportunities for members, which operate in Orange or neighboring Brevard, Lake, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and Volusia counties.

About 30% are owned by women or minorities. The companies are catalogued in a Cenflucence guide.

Orange County provided \$630,000 in funding in February 2021 to get Cenflucence rolling and pledged \$550,000 for Year 2.

Eric Ushkowitz, Orange County's economic development chief, said the organization's solid debut suggests a promising future.

"The big push in Year 1 was identifying companies, getting them signed on and organized into clusters," he said. "Definitely we're seeing results and we're happy with the work they're

doing already, but I think it will continue to grow bigger and better from here on."

Ushkowitz said he expects more companies will sign on with one of Cenflucence's four clusters: energy and environmental sciences; gaming, entertainment and e-sports; learning sciences and human performance; and life sciences.

In Orange County alone 2,500 companies could fit in one of the groups.

Companies in the clusters, according to figures posted on Cenflucence's website, employ about 85,000 workers and pack a combined economic wallop over \$8.5 billion a year. Businesses can learn more and sign up for cluster membership at Cenflucence.com.

Membership is free. Ushkowitz said the payoff for the county hopefully will be in higher-wage jobs.

Landin and Codecraft Works, which creates online technology-education programs, were early recruits by Cenflucence staff, who discovered her company after it won a grant from the National Science Foundation for innovations in teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills.

Though always confident in her ideas, Landin said she often felt alone in business before joining Cenflucence's cluster initiative.

"Cenflucence is exactly what we needed to help create partnerships across the state," said Landin, whose firm fits in the learning sciences and human performance cluster. "They've made introductions for us and helped us build relationships, which hopefully will result in business and revenue."

She described the connection as "like having partners supporting us."

Cenflucence also helped link Codecraft Works with Michelle Taub, an assistant professor in learning sciences and educational research at the University of Central Florida.

Together, they pitched a proposal to help adults get work experience through hands-on performance in a virtual environment, an idea which has made them a finalist in a national compe-



Shannon Landin (standing center), founder and CEO of Codecraft Works, a Melbourne-based tech company, joined Cenflucence, a "cluster" collaborative Orange County created to diversify the local economy. LIZ COWIE

tion with a \$4 million prize pool.

## What is a cluster?

Clusters are regional concentrations of allied industries and research groups, said Andrea Wessler-Brawner, Orange County's chief innovation and emerging technology officer, who studied industry clustering in Europe, where the strategy has proved successful for 30 years.

Some clusters may grow naturally, like the county's tourism and hospitality industries, she said.

Sohl said others may need help to blossom into a potent force.

"I'll give you shining examples of what already exists here," Sohl said, explaining clusters to Orange County commissioners last fall.

"We're the world's leader in modeling simulation and training. Our tourism and hospitality cluster is the envy of the planet."

"And how about optics and photonics? Another key cluster with deep research at UCF and a vibrant, expanding set of businesses close by."

Modeling, simulation and training has evolved into a \$6 billion-a-year industry in Central Florida with government contracts flowing through the region — many commissioned by the Department of Defense for military simulation command centers, stationed in Orlando.

Meanwhile, UCF's College of Optics and Photonics, known by

the acronym CREOL, serves as the foundation for the region's ecosystem of photonics research and development, which includes companies Luminar, OptiGrate and Northrup Grumman.

"Optics and laser technologies have thousands of applications that are accelerating many industries, including aerospace, telecommunications and medicine," said David Hagan, dean of CREOL. "The technology is used in 3D facial recognition, smartphone sensors and by self-driving cars to scan their surroundings."

Clusters are a "striking feature of all modern economies, making regions uniquely competitive for jobs and private investment," according to The U.S. Cluster Mapping Project, a study initiative led by Harvard Business School's Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness.

## What does Cenflucence do?

Cenflucence aims to diversify the region's economy by helping homegrown tech companies build a global reputation to attract customers and investors like Walt Disney World and Universal Studios draw tourists from all over the world, Ushkowitz said.

"It's a place cluster members can find funding resources, research and development talent and collaboration partners," he said.

Members get weekly

newsletters by email, which include alerts for state and federal grant opportunities, business-pitch competitions and educational events. They can join private LinkedIn groups to share their company's needs and celebrate successes.

Members are granted access to monthly webinars about applying for innovation grants and finding international business.

Cenflucence has created a members-only resource guide with more than 100 vetted businesses resources in Central Florida.

The organization is building a job bank for its website where cluster members can publicize their employment opportunities.

Cenflucence also organizes meet-ups between cluster members and potential customers. This month, members of the energy and environment sciences cluster will sit down with representatives of the Orlando Utilities Commission to discuss what utilities look for in partners.

The organization arranged for TECHFIT Digital Surgery to participate as an exhibitor during the giant Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society global meeting last month at the Orange County Convention Center.

"We got some very interesting leads for potential customers," said Mauricio Toro, CEO and co-founder of the company, which makes 3D-printed, customized medical implants in Daytona Beach.

Though clever, innova-

tors often aren't sure where to turn for help or resources, said Cenflucence consultant Mark Spinoglio.

"If you're an entrepreneur who's created a small business, you're busy, head down and focused on revenue, focused on keeping that company afloat," said Spinoglio, who worked closely with clusters in Europe.

"You may not know all that's out there to help you. We can play a key role in helping individual companies navigate what's available to help them to prosper not only in the region, but globally."

Cenflucence has boosted hopes of young entrepreneurs like Kyle Morrand, founder and CEO of Orlando-based 302 Interactive, which started as a video game studio and has expanded into creating immersive experiences through augmented reality technology.

Augmented reality is an interactive experience that combines real-world environments enhanced by virtual features.

302 Interactive's customers have ranged from small startups to Universal Orlando.

"Working with other business leaders in the area has always been a really good practice for me," said Morrand, 28, whose company is part of the gaming, entertainment and e-sports cluster.

"I'm really excited about sharing my thoughts on how our tech community as a whole can advance and about Cenflucence having resources to execute some of those ideas."

Those kinds of ideas offer promise beyond theme parks, said Commissioner Nicole Wilson, whose district includes Disney.

"I think there's a misconception about Orange County being a one-trick pony," she said during a commission discussion of Cenflucence. "Whenever we discuss these other clusters and the types of innovative businesses we have here, it makes me feel like we're going to have more and more and more in the years to come for us to show off."

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