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ONLINE VERSION AT FLORIDABUSINESS.ORG

REALTOR.COM'S TOP 10 HOUSING MARKETS FOR 2018 – To predict the best real estate markets for 2018, Realtor.com's economic data team evaluated sales of existing homes and their prices, along with the amount of new home construction in the 100 largest markets. Deltona was ranked No. 3 behind Las Vegas and Dallas. The analysis included the local economies of each area, along with population trends, unemployment rates, median household incomes and other factors. Lakeland was the only other Florida city in the top 10. Visit www.realtor.com/news/trends/top-housing-markets-of-2018/ to review the complete list.

ENTERPRISE FLORIDA EXPORT SALES MISSION – Enterprise Florida will lead an export sales mission to San Jose, Costa Rica, from Feb. 26 to March 1, 2018. Costa Rica holds vast opportunities for Florida companies interested in increasing their footprint in the Central American market. Bilateral trade between the U.S. and Costa Rica totaled \$10.2 billion in 2016, when Florida was the leading state for two-way trade. Costa Rica ranks as Florida's 12th largest merchandise trading partner with nearly \$3.6 billion in total trade in 2016 and nearly \$2.5 billion in exports alone. Enterprise Florida will offer a limited number of Gold Key Matchmaking one-on-one appointments. Small and mid-sized Florida manufacturers, eligible high-tech companies, and professional service providers may qualify for a Gold Key Grant, which will offset 100 percent of the \$1,250 matchmaking registration fee for the first company representative. A separate application process is required for this grant. For more information, contact Virgil Kimball at 386-248-8048 or vkimball@volusia.org.

6 STEPS TO A GREAT WEBSITE – Starting or expanding a company in today's business climate requires a strong understanding and presence with social media. SCORE will present the free workshop "6 Steps to a Great Website – A Strategic Approach to Web Design" from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 11, at the Daytona State College campus, 1200 W. International Speedway Blvd., UCF Building 150, Room 100, Daytona Beach. This initial two-part workshop is the first in a 10-part series titled Social Technology for 2018. The presenter is Jason Johnson, founder of Marlin Consulting Solutions and SCORE's feature presenter for 2018. Registrants will be given a guide and information to assist with design and content. For more information and registration, contact Dorrie Myhre at 386-255-6889 or visit <https://volusiaflagler.score.org/content/take-workshop-285>.

PLAN YOUR SMALL BUSINESS GOALS NOW FOR 2018 – For small business owners, the end of the year is more than just a season: it's a reason to reflect, reassess, and reinvigorate business plans in preparation for the year ahead, according to summitfr.com in a recent article on small business goal planning. Hit the ground running the first week of January by reviewing your company's activity over the past year. Recommended items to consider include the following: get external feedback before deciding on what strategies or tactics to change; meet with your accountant to discuss revenue, tax planning and needed purchases; plan your hiring strategy; spend a few hours throwing away things you don't need; and reassess your online marketing strategy. For more details, go to <https://summitfr.com/plan-2018-small-business-goals-now/>.

FLORIDA PORTS REPORT RELEASED – The Florida Seaport Transportation and Economic Development Council has released its report on Statewide Economic Impacts of Florida Seaports. The total economic value of marine cargo and vessel activity at Florida seaports is estimated at nearly \$117.6 billion, or 13.3 percent of Florida's gross domestic product. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/ycv7rx7j> to access the full report.

THIRD QUARTER E-COMMERCE RETAIL SALES – Last month, the Census Bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced that national e-commerce retail sales amounted to \$115.3 billion for the third quarter of 2017. This seasonally adjusted total reflects an increase of 3.6 percent from the second quarter of 2017 and an increase of 15.5 percent from the third quarter of 2016. Third quarter e-commerce sales for 2017 accounted for 9.1 percent of total sales.

CHATBOT SOLUTIONS ARE CHANGING THE WORKPLACE – The automated software programs commonly known as Chatbots were initially implemented to help business enterprises with the odd customer care conversation. As reported earlier this year at forbes.com, given the advances in artificial intelligence, Chatbots are changing the way enterprises operate by significantly improving productivity, reducing expenses and handling increasingly complex business processes. Part of their appeal continues to be the ability to handle time-consuming, repetitive but essential tasks. Chatbots can act as personal assistants, offer 24/7 customer service, or provide in-depth product knowledge to customers by allowing them to ask questions. For more information, go to <https://tinyurl.com/yb5r9865>.

SBA NORTH FLORIDA DISTRICT LENDING TOTALS – The U.S. Small Business Administration North Florida district office guaranteed 1,148 loans valued at over \$600 million in fiscal year 2017 for its 43-county area. This reflects an overall increase of \$30 million from fiscal year 2016. The office helped to create 5,719 new jobs and retain 7,130 existing jobs through SBA lending.

NEWS ITEMS WANTED! – Please send your business news items to Joanne Magley, Volusia County Community Information director, at jmagley@volusia.org. If you wish to be removed from this weekly broadcast, please let us know.