



# A 3-2-1 Moment

Along Florida's Space Coast, the numbers "3-2-1" have for decades conjured images of the Space Shuttle triumphantly soaring to the heavens. The Shuttle program's planned expiration in September 2010, however, has created an entirely new "3-2-1 moment" for the region and the thousands of aerospace workers who suddenly find themselves in a career-changing predicament. • Workforce development leaders in Brevard County and throughout the region have long been planning for this moment as the countdown to a new kind of launch ... a launch of new careers and new job creation opportunities ... recognizing that long term these talented aerospace workers are a potent economic development tool. They are unquestionably one of the world's greatest human resource assets.

In May 2008, officials at NASA and Brevard Workforce – whose mission is to facilitate workforce development aligned with the county's employment needs – signed the Space Act Agreement to officially launch the Aerospace Workforce Transition Program (AWT).

Designed to promote career preparation resources to aerospace workers affected by the retirement of the Space Shuttle program, AWT partners: continually monitor next-generation aerospace trends and issues affecting regional workforce development; identify emerging requirements for skill training; and, assist workers in obtaining the knowledge, skills and abilities required for transitioning to new aerospace programs.

Though led from Brevard, it was clear from the beginning that the effort must be regional in scope, and the Florida High Tech Corridor Council (FHTCC) has taken a leading role through partnership with Brevard Workforce, Workforce Central Florida and the Center for Business Excellence on one aspect of the AWT program known as the Regional Aerospace Workforce Initiative (RAWI).

"In the Shuttle program, the entire region is losing a national asset, and the rip-



ples of layoffs will be felt well beyond East Central Florida,” says FHTCC President Randy Berridge. “Brevard Workforce and its partners have taken action, creating a network of employers, workforce boards, economic development organizations and education entities that will link skilled workers with skill-hungry companies.”

Under the transition umbrella, the RAWI effort – funded in part by a Federal Regional Innovation Grant – seeks to retain, retrain and redirect dislocated aerospace workers into related or emerging industries within the East Central Florida region.

RAWI is fulfilling that mission through a focus on three key strategies:

- Creating a mechanism for a regional response to counteract a massive and possibly unexpected economic upheaval;
- Leveraging existing collaborative efforts that have successfully brought workforce, economic development and education-based entities together on common issues of regional significance; and,
- Employing a regional perspective to ensure that East Central Florida’s businesses and workforce will be well-prepared to compete and succeed in a global economy.

“Workforce development is a key element in the Corridor’s mission, but too often that is narrowly defined simply as workforce training,” says Berridge. “This effort is proof positive that strong workforce development programs involve much more than training, but also community partnerships, research, cluster identification, asset mapping and education.”

Much like the Corridor, RAWI is focused on a number of targeted industry clusters as potential landing points for displaced workers. Aviation/aerospace obviously heads the list, but the group is also evaluating opportunities in biosciences, digital media, energy alternatives, micro/nano technologies, photonics/optics/lasers and modeling, simulation and training.

The effort kicked off in July 2009, as more than 90 business and government leaders from Brevard, Flagler, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Volusia counties gathered in Orlando to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

(SWOT) analysis to determine gaps in how economic development, workforce, education and industry communicate with one another when faced with massive workforce layoff events. A Core Regional Leadership Group was established to provide insight into regional programs, initiatives and studies and to lead the SWOT analysis.

“We pulled together a wide variety of leaders and provided each with targeted objectives,” says Lisa Rice, Brevard Workforce president. “From workforce professionals, we seek definition of a regional rapid response system to assist dislocated workers. From economic development leaders, we seek collaboration on the definition of job opportunities and future skill sets. “We ask education leaders to evolve the talent pipeline with a focus on science, technology and math skills. And from industry, we ask for an integrated systems approach to guarantee that talent is available.”

The challenge these leaders face is daunting. Brevard Workforce estimates more than 9,200 workers are affected by the Space Shuttle program retirement, representing a combined income of \$600-million and a secondary contribution to the Florida economy of \$2.6 billion.

A third of affected technicians are expected to need transition assistance to new industries or occupations, and a third will need skills upgrades for transition to the Orion/Constellation program and other space-related employment.

Throughout the region, however, the challenge has been accepted, and together partners in the RAWI effort hope to capitalize on this 3-2-1 moment and create new employment opportunities for a highly trained, highly skilled class of workers. ■



► **Creative Thinkers** | Core Regional Leadership Group members (above) and Lisa Rice, Brevard Workforce president (below).