

 SARASOTA

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Consultant: North Port prime for major corporate headquarters



John Boyd of The Boyd Company, Inc.

By John Hielscher
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North Port's economic growth makes it a top candidate for attracting regional or national head office operations, a location consultant says.

NORTH PORT — This fast-growing city could be a prime candidate to land a major corporate employer.

The Boyd Co., a corporate site selection firm, says North Port has emerged as a center of economic activity in the region, strong enough to be ranked among the consultant's top 50 suburban office markets in the country.

"North Port town fathers have the reputation of being very open to new business," the new Boyd report stated. "Impact fees, for example, are among the lowest in Southwest Florida and land acquisition costs, while rising, are attractive by South Florida, Tampa and Orlando standards.

"While we have most recently looked at North Port as a candidate light manufacturing site, we see attractive opportunities for attracting new regional or national head office operations. The Hertz headquarters move from Bergen County, New Jersey, to Estero near Fort Myers is a case study of the type of project North Port is poised and well-equipped to attract. Corporate headquarters are more mobile today than ever before. Executive lifestyle amenities, including housing, healthcare and recreational amenities, show very well in Sarasota County."

The region also benefits from several key projects, including the Allegiant's Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor now underway in Punta Gorda, firm principal John Boyd said in an interview Thursday.

"The new resort will expose the region to a new travel market that we expect will lead to new corporate projects, folks buying second homes and eventually moving to Southwest Florida," he said.

CoolToday Park, the new spring training home of the Atlanta Braves, and the entire West Villages, a 12,000-acre master-planned community in south Sarasota County that will contain 33,000 homes, also are key elements that can draw regional or national corporate operations to the area, he said.

With a population now 20,000 larger than the city of Sarasota, North Port's median age of 43 years old is among the lowest in the state, Boyd said.

"That indicates in-migration of your workforce," Boyd said. "That is the type of labor market stat that developers look at and decide where to build new projects."

North Port Economic Development Manager Mel Thomas said "multiple developers" are showing interest in the city, spending money on engineering services to identify suitable sites.

"It's fair to say people are looking at places along major thoroughfares like Interstate 75 and U.S. 41, and connection points from one to the other," she said.

King Plastics, the city's largest private employer, recently doubled in size, Thomas said. The North Port workforce also feeds such nearby light industrial manufacturers as PGT Innovations and Tervis.

North Port reported the lowest estimated annual operating cost, at \$37.9 million, for a 500-worker corporate office in a 125,000-square-foot space, Boyd's study said.

Much of Florida has heated up for corporate and manufacturing sites, he said, boosted by its growing population, lack of personal income tax and overall pro-business environment. Places like Atlanta, Dallas and the Carolinas also successfully compete with the Sunshine State for that business.

The Boyd Co., based in Princeton, New Jersey, has provided location counsel services to such companies as JPMorgan Chase, Visa International and Dell, along with those with Florida operations like Royal Caribbean Cruises, Office Depot, Boeing and TD Bank.