

Research center dedicated to trillion-dollar industry

By Jessica Brennan | *Staff Writer*

Have you noticed yourself staring longingly out of your office window? Are your children becoming increasingly restless with their day-to-day activities?

These are only a couple signs that the need for a vacation is fast approaching. Whether you are looking to escape the intense summer temperatures or making use of the sun's tropical rays, you will be contributing to the almost \$6.5 trillion of economic activity projected worldwide for 2006 through travel and tourism. The tourism industry within the U.S. will make up one-fifth of this number, bring-

ing in \$1.3 trillion alone.

And who can think of the state of Florida without imagining theme parks, beaches, golf courses and parks? These are many of the attractions that drew 85.8 million visitors to Florida in 2005, making tourism the state's No. 1 industry.

Not only does this major industry supply much needed enjoyment to Florida's visitors, it greatly impacts Florida's residents as well. More than \$57 billion was made from taxable sales during 2004, deterring a state income tax and making Florida the sixth lowest taxed

state in the U.S. Additionally, about 1 million Floridians are employed through the tourism industry. This money generated from taxes also helps send children to school each day.

As Florida's No. 1 industry, research in the field is starting to grow. This is where the Center for Tourism Research and Development (CTRD) in the College of Health and Human Performance is taking the lead.

CTRD's mission is to provide research to assist both private firms and public agencies in effective tourism planning, promotion and management. In addition, it strives to advance the discipline of tourism and hospitality through high-quality, theory-driven research applicable at the local, national and global level.

"Research is important to the travel and tourism industry because as budgets continue to decrease, it becomes even more important to quantify everything that we do and demonstrate a return on investment," said Carolyn Feimster, president of CJF Marketing International and CTRD advisory board member.

"Secondly, research allows us to be much more targeted in our tourism marketing efforts by identifying the most lucrative feeder markets to target as well as the type of traveler that has the greatest propensity to stay longer and spend in a destination, resulting in the greatest



TROPICAL PARADISE The tourism industry in the United States will generate \$1.3 billion in 2006. The state of Florida had 85.8 million visitors in 2005, making tourism its No. 1 industry. *Photo courtesy of Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

return,” Feimster said.

Dr. Lori Pennington-Gray, associate professor in the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management, is the director of CTRD. It was her tourism research presentation that caught the attention of attendee Hal Herman, chairman of Worth International Media Group.

“I had never heard a research presentation that used such a practical, real-world approach,” Herman said.

That was all it took for Herman, a UF alumnus, to jump onboard, fully embodying the Center’s mission.

“Tourism is in my blood,” he said, “and that blood is colored orange and blue.”

With the leadership of Pennington-Gray and Herman, CTRD has established an Advisory Board for the Center. This board is made up of tourism business leaders throughout the country involved in everything from global marketing to resort management.

“We chose board members for a variety of reasons,” Herman said. “We wanted a cross-section of geographic areas and different industry roles represented, which will help the Center achieve its goals.”

These goals for the next five years are critical to CTRD’s development. Under the guidance of the advisory board, the Center will strive to secure both public and private sector projects, obtain \$1 million in research funding from outside sources and create three new scholarships to promote the education of students interested in tourism research.

CTRD Advisory Board

Jane Adams

Jane Adams is Vice President of University Relations for the University of Florida, where she is responsible for government relations, public relations, marketing and external relations at the national, state and local levels.

Prior to UF, Adams was a public affairs executive with The Walt Disney



Co. for more than 10 years. Her positions included Vice President of Government Relations and Manager of Media Relations for Walt Disney World and Director of Communications and Public Relations for Disney Cruise Line.

Prior to coming to Disney, Adams was a press secretary in the United States Senate from 1981-1990, where she worked for Sens. Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski of Alaska. Adams also was the Vice President of Media Relations in the Washington, D.C. office of Burson-Marsteller, a global public relations firm.

Gary Bitner

University of Florida graduate Gary Bitner is considered a leader in Florida’s public relations industry. As



president of Bitner Goodman, one of the state’s largest public relations firms, Bitner has worked with clients like Tri-

Rail, Winn-Dixie Stores and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Before Bitner reached success with his firm, he served as supervisor of public relations for the Marriott Corporation, a staff writer for the Sun-Sentinel and an account executive for Hank Meyer Association out of Miami.

He is a member of the Public Relations Society of America’s Counselors Academy, was awarded the national Gold Quill Award of Merit from the International Association of Business Communicators, and is a former president of PRSA Gulfstream Chapter.

Stuart Blumberg

Stuart Blumberg brings his expertise to the advisory board with more than 32 years of experience in the hotel and tourism industry. Blumberg is president and CEO of the Greater Miami and the Beaches Hotel Association, an organization now representing more than 190 hotels and 80,000 employees.

Blumberg graduated from the University of Florida and specializes in



strategic planning, production, advertising, marketing, sales, public relations and communications. Blumberg has used these

specializations and experiences in the past as president of the Miami Beach Resort Hotel Association and as vice president of The Muss Organization.

Some of Blumberg’s countless awards include the Miami Today Gold

Medal Award for Professional Achievement in 2003, induction into the Miami Beach Chamber of Tourism Hall of Fame, and Miami Beach Resort Association "Man of the Year." He also has served as Chairman for the Host Committee for the MPI Convention and the ASTA World Congress in 2003.

Wende Blumberg

As a distinguished employee of the Hilton Hotels Corporation, Wende Blumberg has been serving the hospitality industry since 1988. She has been the general manager of the Hilton University of Florida Conference Center since 1999.

Blumberg was chairman of the Tourist Development Council of Alachua



County and was president of the Global Board of Directors for the International Association of Conference Centers.

The UF alumna currently serves as president of the Gainesville Sports Organizing Committee and the University of Florida Performing Arts Advisory Board of Directors.

Carolyn J. Feimster

Carolyn J. Feimster has more than 27 years of retail, economic development, tourism development and shopping center experience.



As president and founder of C.J.F. Marketing International, Feimster has expertise in management, marketing

and tourism development.

Feimster's work experience includes Director of Corporate Marketing/Director of International Sales for Turnberry Associates, a national real estate development and management company out of Aventura, Fla. She was also Economic Development Specialist for the City of North Miami and Corporate Marketing Director for the Enterprise Development Company in Columbia, Md.

Feimster was awarded the 2003 Shopping Tourism Person of the Year from Shop America Alliance after being nominated by industry peers. She was also co-chair of the International Council of Shopping Centers' Tourism, Leisure and Lifestyle Conference in 2001.

Louis B. Fisher III

Louis Fisher III is the third generation of Fisher Auction Co. Inc., having joined the firm full time in 1979. He specializes in major corporate banking and government business development. His direct presentation and sales efforts to top officials throughout the country have resulted in more than \$1 billion of sales revenues.

His skills include contract negotiations, proposal writing, sales presentations, representing institutionally-owned real estate portfolios and public relations. He is a three-time champion auctioneer and has personally conducted more than 2,000 auctions with properties and assets in 46 states, Mexico, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.

Fisher graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1979 and since has obtained the C.A.I. designation from the Auction Marketing Institute. He is a recognized expert on the accelerated marketing process and has conducted many seminars to industry trade associations and federal govern-

ment Associations throughout the U.S.

Richard B. Goldman



Richard B. Goldman joined the Amelia Island Plantation Co. in 1998. As Vice President of Marketing, he is responsible for marketing all aspects of this 1,350-acre, 610-key resort including real estate, rooms, retail, food and beverage, golf, tennis, spa and recreation.

Goldman manages a 32 member staff divided into teams for conference sales, real estate, travel industry sales, electronic and on-line marketing, public relations, promotions, graphic/print shop and in-house advertising agency. He also serves on the executive and marketing committees of Visit Florida, and is a board member of the Amelia Island, Fernandina Beach, Yulee Chamber of Commerce.

Prior to joining the Amelia Island Plantation Co., Goldman was Vice President of Marketing and Research with Ryder & Schild Advertising in Miami, Fla. Goldman was with Ogilvy & Mather in New York City from 1978 to 1982 first as Assistant Media Planner and then Senior Media Planner.

Goldman has a B.S. in advertising from the University of Florida.

Hal Herman

Previous work with newspapers, broadcasting and public relations gave Hal Herman a solid start for launching his own media business in 1970. Worth International Media Group serves as a parent company for three of Herman's publications: Recommend Magazine,



Florida International Planner and Florida Official Meeting Planners Guide.

Keeping close ties with his alma mater, he now serves as a member of the board of advocates for the UF College of Journalism and Communications and has been inducted in the UF Hall of Fame. Herman is chairman of the advisory board for the Center for Tourism Research and Development.

Herman also has held chairman positions with the Florida Tourism Association, and the Florida Chapter of Travel and Tourism Research Association. He has been awarded the prestigious silver medal from the American Advertising Federation and was inducted into the Florida Tourism Hall of Fame in 2003.

Roland Loog

Roland Loog got his start in the hotel hospitality industry in New England. Now, more than 25 years later, Loog serves as the Director of the Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau. He also earned his Certified Meeting Professional designation from the Convention Industry Council.

Loog graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology. His previous jobs included director of sales and marketing and food and beverage director for several major hotel chains.

He currently serves as a member of the Florida Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau, Visit Florida's Downtowns and Small Towns, and the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council's Tourism Task Force.

Ronald C. Muzii

Ronald C. Muzii, President of Muzii & Associates Inc., a hotel marketing and consulting firm, has more than 35 years in the hotel industry. Throughout his career, Muzii has worked exclusively in sales and marketing of hotels in the Southeastern U.S., Caribbean region and Bahamas. Muzii founded and was Executive Vice President of the Nassau/Paradise Island Promotion Board, directing the consortium of all the hotels in Nassau/Paradise Island.

Muzii is a graduate of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration and is a member and past president of the Florida chapter of the Cornell Society of Hotelmen. He serves in numerous local, national and international travel and hospitality organizations, frequently speaks at industry conferences and has published many articles, as well.

Peter Ricci

As general manager at more than five hotels in the past 10 years, Peter Ricci knows the hospitality industry. He has worked with big name companies like Delta Air Lines, Marriott Hotels and Forbes Hamilton Management Company.

With a Master of Science from the University of Florida and a Doctorate of Education from the University of Central Florida, Ricci has been teaching students since 1988. He also has been published several times in the *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*.

Currently, Ricci serves on the Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education and is a member of the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association.

Gaines P. Sturdivant

Gaines P. Sturdivant joined the MMI Hotel Group to learn about the hospitality industry. After studying at Harvard's Business School Program for Management Development, he took over as president in 1988. With hotels in Georgia, Louisiana, Florida and Mississippi, MMI Hotel Group's success is due to making guests feel like the true boss of the company.

He is a former president of the International Association of Holiday Inns and has served on committees for the American Hotel and Lodging Association and the International Council of Hotel Management Companies.

Sturdivant also expresses interest in the arts, having served as a board member on the International Ballet Competition, New Stage Theater and the Mississippi Museum of Art.

Joni Newkirk

Seventeen years ago Joni Newkirk joined the Disney team. In 1989, she joined the company as a manager in the



Walt Disney World Attendance Forecasting group and has worked her way up to Senior Vice President Business Insight and Improvement

for Walt Disney World Parks and Resorts.

Before joining the company of one of the largest tourist destinations in the United States, Newkirk worked with Martin Marietta, now known as Lockheed Martin. She also worked for the Orlando Regional Healthcare System.

Newkirk received a B.S. in statistics from the University of Florida and a M.S. in industrial engineering from the University of Central Florida.