

'COLaunch' program set to open; Greater Titusville Renaissance makes strides

By Ken Datzman

TITUSVILLE — In just four years since its creation, Greater Titusville Renaissance Inc. has had a wide and timely business-development impact on the North Brevard community.

Now the nonprofit organization is set to reach out to entrepreneurs, start-up businesses, and independent professionals in the area through "COLaunch," an innovative approach to "co-work space" in a shared office environment.

The project on South Washington Avenue seems to be coming at the right time. Small-business activity is on the rise in 49 of the 50 U.S. states, according to a new report from the Kauffman Foundation, which tracks entrepreneurship in America. Despite long-term declines in business creation and slow growth that have led to a "start-up deficit," the Kauffman Foundation is "optimistic" about the future of entrepreneurship and says America is "primed for a renewed era of growth."

The reasons for optimism include a coming surge of Millennials entering the labor market who will likely boost business formation as they approach their late 30s and early 40s — the "peak age" for start-up creation; entrepreneurs transforming and disrupting large portions of the U.S. economy, such as banking and health care; and existing companies supporting entrepreneurial employees to be "intra-preneurs," which can lead to more innovations.

With the opening of COLaunch, which is scheduled for April 1, Greater Titusville Renaissance, or GTR, will be positioned to help entrepreneurs in various ways. "GTR's focus is on business development," said Cathy Musselman, who as a longtime successful entrepreneur, worked with businessowners and start-ups before being named the first executive director of GTR.

"We play a key role in economic development in the community in regard to helping start-up businesses. And with COLaunch, we are introducing a new shared-office concept that we believe is going to be a dynamic setting for entrepreneurs and independent professionals as they work alongside one another."

COLaunch is a program of the North Brevard Economic Development Zone and is managed by GTR. Housed in a 2,800-square-foot facility at 2323 S. Washington Ave., its location shows off views of the Indian River Lagoon. GTR has its office there.

Unlike a business-incubation program, participants do not have to submit a business plan to be part of COLaunch, which is targeting a wide range of users. "Perhaps there are some professionals who are working from their homes and it's not really productive. We think the COLaunch environment would be a



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Cathy Musselman is executive director of Greater Titusville Renaissance Inc., whose mission includes economic development in North Brevard. Soon, GTR will open its 2,800-square-foot 'COLaunch' facility, a co-work space, on South Washington Avenue in Titusville, targeting business start-ups and independent professionals. There is no long-term lease. Businessman Bryan Scott is on the GTR board. He has built two wildly successful companies in the last eight years — Barn Light Electric and Playalinda Brewing Co., both in Titusville. Barn Light Electric has a global customer base. They are at GTR's office in Titusville.

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Greater Titusville Renaissance

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perfect setting for them, or for someone who is based out of Orlando and works the Brevard market and may need an office for a day once a month to meet with their clients in this area," said Musselman.

Participation in COLaunch runs quarter to quarter, so there is no long-term lease of office space required. "It's all by membership and there are different levels of membership," she said.

The COLaunch levels begin at "Basic," which is open seating at \$150 per quarter. A private office for a day is \$50, or \$35 for four hours. There are a host of other pricing options, too, including conference-room rental at \$75 a day, or \$15 per hour.

COLaunch services include 24/7 access for some membership levels, whiteboards and video monitors, mail service, file storage, printer, copier, fax and scanner machines, high-speed Wi-Fi, workshops and seminars, business mentors, and other resources.

"We will be assisting people who are starting businesses, through mentoring and workshops. The Small Business Administration, the Florida Small Business Development Center, and weVenture — formerly known as the Women's Business Center at Florida Tech — are going to have a presence at COLaunch."

Musselman oversees an organization whose mission is to help revitalize North Brevard through business development, arts and culture, and beautification, and it is active on all those fronts with multiple programs either underway or in planning stages.

Most recently, Musselman served as an "entrepreneur coach" and "Startup Quest" training facilitator at CareerSource Brevard. Musselman was also a businessowner for more than 20 years. She has started and sold a number of companies over her career, including one which had more than 500 employees in multiple states dealing with government contracts. "I have a passion for working with start-up ventures."

GTR has been at the center of uplifting and revitalizing this area of the county following the Great Recession and the shutdown of NASA's space-shuttle program years ago, which together left a deep crater in the North Brevard economy.

"Titusville and North Brevard in general were hit hard economically during the downturn, businesses were closing and houses were going into foreclosure," said Musselman, whose organization was founded by Titusville Mayor Jim Tulley and Brevard County District 1 Commissioner Robin Fisher. "The community was looking 'tired' at that time, so we decided to rally the community together. The one big initiative from the outset was to find someone to purchase the old Miracle City Mall and redevelop that property."

That's happening today. The proposed \$60 million Titus Landing retail and medical complex plans to begin phase-one construction this year, on the site of the former Miracle City Mall, off U.S. Highway 1/South Washington Avenue, south of downtown Titusville. There is a construction trailer on the property. Exxxcel Project Management LLC, an Ohio-based company, is developing the project. AG Development Group Inc. in

Tampa is working with Exxxcel.

The announced tenants at Titus Landing include Bealls Department Store, Hobby Lobby, Pet Smart, beauty-supply retailer and salon Utra Beauty, a 12-screen Epic movie theater, Rue 21, Dunkin Donuts, Firehouse Subs, Hair Cuttery, and a Parrish Medical Center/Mayo Clinic medical office facility that is being built by RUSH Construction Inc. of Titusville.

The spirit of collaboration among various community groups was the driving force that turned the tide and put North Brevard on the new path of economic growth that it is experiencing today. The coalition that was formed includes the North Brevard Economic Development Zone, the City of Titusville's Economic Development Office, the Space Coast Economic Development Council, the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast, and the Greater Titusville Chamber of Commerce.

"We all work together toward building the economy in North Brevard," said Musselman.

She has grown the GTR board of directors from eight to 15 businesspeople, "who are all community leaders." The board members include one of the most successful entrepreneurs in Brevard County and the state of Florida, Bryan Scott, who took "old barn lights" and brought them back into production in America.

He founded manufacturer "Barn Light Electric" in Titusville in 2008, during one of the worst economic times in U.S. history and grew it into an international company. It is now one of America's leading lighting manufacturers. He and his wife Donna started the business from their home. It manufactures vintage lighting fixtures and much more.

Today, Barn Light Electric employs more than 120 people, up from two, and its hundreds of residential and commercial products are sold worldwide through the company's website (www.BarnLightElectric.com). It sells a range of vintage, industrial, rustic, and barn-style lighting fixtures, and carries a full line of LED lighting. The company, which specializes in hand-crafted porcelain enamel lighting, has a loyal customer base that include homeowners, commercial businesses, architects, and interior designers.

Bryan Scott said he started his venture "out of boredom." He had worked for the federal government as an air marshal flying out of Orlando International Airport.

"I had a little lighting business on the side," he said. "I revamped and relaunched the business and named it Barn Light Electric. The business took off like crazy. We were able to leverage the power of the Internet. We now sell all over the world. It's a great niche that we have — a great product line."

Barn Light Electric has a new 60,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Titusville. "We are proud and happy to keep our products American-made. When we give tours of the manufacturing facility, people are often surprised to see the scope of work that we do in Titusville," said Bryan Scott, whose company hosted Gov. Rick Scott at its manufacturing facility and has been recognized by a number of business-development

organizations for creating jobs.

For every \$1 spent in manufacturing, another \$1.40 is added to the economy. That is the highest multiplier effect of any economic sector, according to the National Association of Manufacturers.

Barn Light Electric has the only porcelain enamel manufacturing plant in the U.S. dedicated to light fixtures. "We're also bringing back the old porcelain enamel cups, plates and bowls," he said.

Once a mainstay of the lighting industry, porcelain enamel lighting had not been manufactured in America for more than 50 years. At Barn Light Electric, metal artisans use a lathe to "spin" light shades by hand in the time-honored tradition of "metal spinning."

Barn Light Electric's light fixtures and products are made using high-quality materials and the kind of craftsmanship that American manufacturers were long ago known for around the world when the country led that business sector.

Three years ago, the Scotts expanded and opened Barn Light Australia. "We have a partner there who runs Barn Light Australia. We started out shipping products and now he's actually manufacturing in Australia," Bryan Scott said.

The Scotts seem to have a keen sense for business ventures that take off and grow into successes. In late 2014, they started Playalinda Brewing Co. in downtown Titusville.

"My wife and I and some friends had really gotten into craft beer, and we thought let's bring something fun and entertaining to Titusville," he said. "We first went out west to Portland and Bend, Ore., and started exploring the brewers there to see how they did things. We came back and opened Playalinda Brewing Co."

Titusville's first craft brewer quickly saw demand for its products grow and grow. "We were fortunate to have been able to bring aboard Ron Raika, who is our brewmaster," said Bryon Scott, who co-founded Playalinda Brewing Co. with Raika. "He was a former brewmaster at Shipyard Brewing Co. (based in Portland, Maine). Ron came in with 25 years experience. We have seen such high demand for the beer we sell that we can't manufacture it fast enough."

To ramp up production, Playalinda Brewing Co. plans to build "The Brix Project," a 16,000-square-foot brewery and distillery, tasting room, beer garden, and restaurant at 5520 S. Washington Ave. in Titusville. Construction and design efforts will be led by RUSH Construction and Eleven 18 Architecture. "We will be putting in a 30-barrel production system versus the three-barrel system we have currently. So we will be expanding our production tenfold." He added, "After we get The Brix Project open, we are going to work toward distribution of our products throughout Florida."

"This is an exciting time for Titusville and North Brevard County," said Muasselman. "We have a lot of momentum behind us and businesses like Barn Light Electric and Playalinda Brewing Co. are great examples. GTR started as a grassroots initiative with hundreds of volunteers. Everyone has a stake in what we're trying to accomplish. This is all about the community."