



# **JCCI *Forward***

**An Initiative of JCCI**

**FINAL REPORT**

**TO**

***FORWARD* MEMBERS  
FORUM FOR THE FUTURE DELEGATES  
CITIZENS OF JACKSONVILLE**

**December 12, 2000**

## **Sponsors**

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JCCI *Forward* was launched in July 2000 through a series of forums designed to explore priority issues identified at the 1999 Forum For The Future Conference at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Florida. *Forward's* mission is to provide emerging leaders (age 25-45) with the information, tools, and venue they need to effect positive change in the Northeast Florida community. Its core business is policy-level discussion. Leadership development is an inherent by-product of this business. The group's work will empower individuals for action, who will then work through established volunteer and advocacy groups and leadership positions. *Forward* is led by a Coordinating Committee, including a chair and a chair-elect, that guide the overall process.

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*Forward's* core program is comprised of two components. **Issue-Forum Discussion Groups** offer participants a venue to interact with respected community leaders and resource experts on issues of concern to Northeast Florida's citizens. Participants explore issues critical to the community's growth, seek understanding of related problems, and come to consensus on proposed action plans that can be implemented locally. **Educational seminars** offer a foundation for leadership development, an understanding of community trusteeship, and an appreciation for Jacksonville's history and governmental structure.

During the 2000 program year, issue-forum groups met with key individuals and devised group action plans consistent with their respective forum topics. In total, over 75 individuals participated in the issue-forum process, which lasted approximately four months. Additionally, over 40 individuals attended a half-day seminar on Jacksonville's history and government at the Ritz Theatre.

Below is a summary of each forum's key findings and action plan for issues advocacy.

### **Business Climate and Economic Trends**

This forum group explored the community's commitment to fostering an environment wherein emerging businesses can develop and prosper. They discussed issues related to the current business climate, the availability of capital, incentives for economic development, and the City's efforts to attract high-tech industries.

#### **Key findings:**

- The two key areas toward which the City of Jacksonville would like to focus its efforts are workforce preparation and regional cooperation.
- A great need exists to ensure that Jacksonville's workforce is adequately prepared to meet the technological challenges of the new millennium.
- Both capital and business assistance are available for small and emerging businesses in Jacksonville but are not adequately marketed. Therefore, many business owners are unaware of how to access these resources or what is involved to take advantage of them.

#### **Action plan—Increase Efforts for Workforce Preparation to Meet Future Needs:**

Although several opportunities for advocacy were possible, forum group members came to consensus about the important link and current disconnect between workforce preparation and the City's desire to attract high-tech industries to Jacksonville. They will target their advocacy efforts to a new City Council Technology Committee chaired by Council President Alberta Higgs. This will include a formal letter outlining their study findings as well as group participation at regular meetings of the new technology committee. Forum group members want to advocate for a more focused approach toward preparing the local workforce, including high school and college students, for technology jobs.

## **Community Growth and Development**

This forum group sought understanding of the current transportation system in Northeast Florida with the goal of advocating for a more comprehensive system to serve our region. They explored various interconnected issues such as the prioritization of roadway improvements, transportation policies, transit-oriented development, the Better Jacksonville Plan, and mass transit.

### **Key findings:**

- The existence of a tremendously complex transportation infrastructure involving local, county, regional, state, and federal regulatory agencies, public and private planning agencies, multimodal transportation systems (i.e., automobile, bus, rail, aviation, port), and 28 different short- and long-term transportation plans.
- A lack of priority by transportation agencies for encouraging higher-density and transit-oriented development that would help reduce traffic congestion.
- Florida's transportation concurrency laws are inefficient, often contributing to the difficulties and challenges of transportation planning and actual road construction and improvements. These laws encourage sprawl and generally work directly against comprehensive transportation planning.
- The need for improved coordination among public and private agencies that are involved in or are impacted by transportation projects, including land-use, zoning, and economic development agencies.

### **Action plan—Increase Development Density to Spur Mass Transit:**

Group members believe that public awareness about the value of higher-density and transit-oriented development is lacking. They will spend the next six months developing an educational presentation to increase awareness about these two important issues, calling on key transportation agencies, elected officials, and community groups to consider a viable mass transit system within an MPO and JTA approved right-of-way corridor. The group realizes that this may be a long-term goal but believes it is a viable one if appropriate seeds are planted now.

## **Enriching the Community**

Members of this forum group explored issues related to arts education in the public schools. Information was obtained regarding current arts standards in Florida, arts-education curricula in the public schools, and the relative importance of the arts to student performance and achievement.

### **Key findings:**

- Declining arts-education budgets, decreasing arts class enrollment, and a lack of qualified arts teachers over the last few years have resulted in fewer classes for arts in the public schools. A statewide and local district emphasis on the three R's (reading, writing, and math) has contributed to this trend.
- Because of funding shortages, arts teachers must find creative ways to fund their classes, including seeking support from local businesses or obtaining supplies at their own expense.
- Although the Florida Department of Education established arts-curriculum standards, these have not been fully implemented in the public schools, including in Duval County, because of an increased emphasis on core subjects (i.e., the 3R's) and related tests (i.e., FCAT).
- Despite the availability of research showing that exposure to the arts is correlated with higher scores on both verbal and math portions of the SAT, with improved self-esteem, and with the acquisition of important analytical and communication skills, many public-school administrations continue to reduce the amount of arts-related courses from their daily schedules. Some schools have eliminated them altogether.

**Action plan—Establish an ACE Coalition to Restore the Arts in the Public Schools:**

- Group members heard consistently and repeatedly from resource experts that a sound arts education benefits students academically and later in life. They also heard that parental and community pressure to incorporate arts courses in the public schools can result in successful outcomes. By consensus, group members decided to advocate for the creation of an ACE (Arts for a Complete Education) Coalition in Duval County. ACE of Florida is a grassroots organization with 32 coalitions in Florida, but none presently in Duval County. The purpose of ACE is to promote the arts by providing resources and technical assistance to local schools and interested groups. With assistance from the Cultural Council of Jacksonville, group members will identify key individuals and organizations to help establish the local Coalition.

## **Human Needs**

Members of the Human Needs forum sought information about the public school system's education plan and the extent to which it is being communicated to the public. They learned about magnet schools, truancy and at-risk students, working conditions in the public schools, graduation and dropout rates, and the Governor's school-grading initiative.

**Key findings:**

- Although the Duval County Public Schools is challenged to find qualified teachers and administrators, particularly for the elementary school grades, it has collaborated with the University of North Florida to develop the First Coast Education Leadership Center. The Center is designed to provide teachers and administrators with the training they need to improve their skills.
- Truancy is a major problem in the public-school system. Although the State Attorney's Office (SAO) has an effective anti-truancy program, it is limited in scope and focused at the elementary school level. Effective partnerships among the SAO, the school system, faith-based organizations, local businesses, and other community groups toward the prevention of truancy are needed.
- Stressful working conditions, school-grading requirements, student disciplinary problems, and high student-mobility and absentee rates continue to plague many local schools.
- Although the public school system has toughened its graduation requirements and is working to keep teachers and students accountable for their performance, many students continue to graduate with poor basic skills.
- The Duval County Public Schools has a long-term education improvement plan comprised of five key elements designed to improve student, teacher, and administrator performance, as well as to enhance the quality of the learning environment. However, the general public is unaware of this plan. Greater publicity of the plan may help improve public opinion about Duval County's public schools.

**Action plan— Publicize School Board's Education Plan and Encourage Media Involvement:**

Group members realize that school system improvements will require both immediate and systemic changes. Current improvement efforts by the Superintendent of Schools are positive and should be communicated more effectively to the general public. Specific timelines for improvement efforts should be set to ensure effective follow-up of goals and objectives. Accordingly, members of this forum will compose a letter that communicates support for the Duval County school system's current efforts. The letter will also contain other important findings from the group's interaction with resource experts. In addition, group members want to advocate to the media for increased coverage of positive education-related news, including the possibility of an Education section in local newspapers. Communication with *The Florida Times-Union* staff and with representatives from Channel 4 have already begun.

## **Political Leadership and Citizen Participation**

The primary focus of this forum group was to seek understanding about how to improve voter education and accessibility. They explored issues related to voter education in the public and private school system, ballot technology, efforts by political parties and local elected officials to reach young voters, and the efforts of community groups (e.g., League of Women Voters) to educate the general public about the voting process.

**Key findings:**

- There is no systematic effort by the local or state office of elections to educate students and the general public about the electoral process. This includes a lack of a defined education plan (e.g., one using widespread mock elections) and a clearly established financial budget.
- Ballot technology is outdated, inefficient, and needs to be improved.
- Although Sunshine State Standards are established for teaching civic-related curricula in the public schools, the extent of instruction provided to students varies considerably by teacher and school. Nationwide studies show that a significant percentage of students lack basic knowledge of the democratic and elections process.
- Although voter registration has increased over the years, actual voter turnout has continued to decrease substantially.
- Although information about candidates and issues is available through the Internet, members of the general public either are not interested in or lack the ability to access this information. In addition, local media coverage of local issues and candidates is very limited and oftentimes selective.

**Action plan—Improve Ballot Technology and Voter Education Now:**

The group will provide a report of its findings calling on the local Supervisor of Elections, City Council, the Duval County School Board, and other local leaders to take action including;

- updating the technology of ballot machinery;
- providing detailed and timely information regarding candidates and issues;
- improving the mechanics of the registration and voting process; and
- providing young adults in Northeast Florida with a more systematic and comprehensive approach to civic education and greater opportunities to be involved in the elections process.

Group members will also meet with city council members and other civic-minded organizations to advocate for the following actions:

- Holding town meetings to dialogue with youth about voting and their role as citizens; and
- Working with the local office of Junior Achievement of Florida's First Coast to develop a voter-education curriculum to educate students about the democratic process and citizen representation.

**Educational Seminar: Jacksonville's History & Government**

On October 12, 2000 *Forward* hosted its first educational workshop on Jacksonville's history and governmental structure at the Ritz Theatre. A distinguished panel of speakers presented facts and personal perspectives on the city's rich history, its heroes, and its consolidated form of government. A presentation and question/answer format provided information and insight on the fire of 1901, civil rights struggles, elected officials and community leaders that helped shape Jacksonville's development, economy and political structure, and the initial benefits and woes of a consolidated form of government. One of the more interesting aspects of the seminar was a joint story-like presentation about Jacksonville by historians Doug Milne and Carol Alexander. Future seminars will include *Leadership Development* and *Trusteeship*.

As this inaugural year of *Forward* has drawn to a close, the *Forward* Coordinating Committee is already planning its next series of issue forums and educational seminars, which are scheduled to begin in

February 2001. Potential issues related to the 2005 Super Bowl, Truancy, Downtown Development, undercounted votes in Duval County, ballot technology, and others are being explored as priority issues for study next year. Current *Forward* members and the general public are invited to participate in the 2001 *Forward* process. More information can be found on the *Forward* website at <http://www.jcci.org/forward>.

## **Community Leaders and Resource Experts**

Issue forum groups met with both community leaders and resource experts who provided valuable information for group discussions. We wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the *Forward* process.

### **Business Climate & Economic Trends**

Ron Baker, CIO/CFO, JEA  
Bob Baldwin, Vice President, Ch.A.S.E.  
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Paul Krutko, Director, Downtown Development  
Sam Perone, First Vice President, Merrill Lynch

Alan Rossiter, President, N. FL Venture Capital Net.  
Dr. Henry Thomas, Chair, Political Science, UNF  
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### **Community Growth and Development**

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Rick Mullaney, General Counsel, City of Jacksonville  
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Roger Sharp, Deputy Chief Engineer, JTA  
Lynn Westbrook, Chief, Div. of Streets and Drainage

### **Enriching the Community**

Jane Condon, Principal, La Villa School for the Arts  
Jennifer Coolidge, Director, ACE of Florida  
Diane Dawood, Director, Theater Works  
Jeff Dunn, Attorney At Law  
Joyce Fitzrandolph, Teacher, Episcopal High School

Marcus Haile, Ed. Director, The Cultural Council  
Anne Lasher, Art Teacher, Duval County Schools  
Janet Linke, Art Teacher, Duval County Schools  
Jack Matthews, Art Director, Duval County Schools

### **Human Needs**

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Lenelle Cruse, Volunteer, Duval County Schools

Mary Freeland, Director, Jacksonville Children's Com.  
John Fryer, Superintendent, Duval County Schools  
David Hertz, Attorney, Duval Teacher's Union  
Jon Heymann, Director, Communities in Schools  
Bill Hodges, State Attorney's Office  
Sylvia Johnson, Principal, W. Jacksonville Elem.  
Morgan Miller, Program Director, Youth Crisis Center  
Judy Poppell, Former Director, Magnet Programs

### **Political Leadership and Citizen Participation**

Bill Babcock, Social Studies Teacher, Bolles School  
Bruce Barcelo, Barcelo & Company  
Lori Bayler, Student, UNF  
Bill Brinton, Attorney, Allen, Brinton & McCarthy  
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Reggie Chever, HR Specialist, Federal Reserve  
Pete Cummings, Republican Party member

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Ivonne Diaz, League of Women Voters  
Mark Foss, Chair, Greater Arlington/Beaches CPAC

Paul Griego, Sales Mgr., Election Systems Software  
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### **Jacksonville History & Government Seminar**

#### **John Daigle, Seminar Coordinator**

Carol J. Alexander, La Villa Cultural & Heritage Asso.  
Bruce Barcelo, Barcelo & Company  
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Rodney Hurst, Civil Rights leader  
Emily Lisska, Director, Jacksonville Historical Society  
Douglas Milne, Attorney, Milne & Buckingham  
Charlotte Stewart, Jacksonville historian

### **Issue-Forum Participants**

Forum groups met biweekly for four months. They received information from knowledgeable resource people and additional written materials provided by *Forward* staff. Congratulations on your efforts and future civic involvement and advocacy.

### **Business Climate & Economic Trends**

**Valerie Williams**, Chair  
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