

TourismMarketing Today

The Official Newsletter of Destinations Florida | www.DestinationsFlorida.org | May 2026



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Visit Panama City Beach Welcomes New President & CEO



Rep. Griff Griffiths,
President & CEO
Visit Panama City Beach

Visit Panama City Beach recently welcomed state Rep. Philip "Griff" Griffiths as their new president and CEO. Griffiths is a third-generation resident of Bay

County who served as a county commissioner and chairman of the TDC before being elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2022. With more than four decades of experience in the hospitality industry, spanning operations, guest experience, and long-term business development, Griffiths has gained a deep understanding of what drives a successful tourism economy. His career began in the hotel

industry, where he spent 45 years building and managing hospitality businesses, including operating a Panama City Beach-based hotel.

Griffiths was quick to acknowledge the strong foundation laid by the tourism team at Visit Panama City Beach, saying, "My biggest goal in my first year as president and CEO is to support and build on the work this organization has been doing for decades. We have an incredible team here at Visit Panama City Beach. They all genuinely love this destination and are passionate about its success, which is exactly what you hope for when stepping into a leadership role."

One of Visit PCB's newest ways of sharing their story with their

PANAMA CITY BEACH CEO continues on pg. 3

Envy in Their Hearts

by Robert Skrob



The best tourism marketers in the world will be on one stage this month.

The 2026 Destination Marketing Summit will deliver practical strategies your team can put to work immediately. From data and AI to partnership models and storytelling, every session is built around one goal: attracting more visitors to your community and strengthening your local economy.

It may feel like training is more valuable when it requires you to travel across the country to access it. The

E.D.'s MESSAGE... continues on pg. 3

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HAPPY Birthday

Tamara Pigott
May 12

Adam Thomas
May 22

Elliott Falcione
May 25



community is their "For the Love of PCB" campaign.

"It's focused on helping the public better understand what we do and the impact tourism has on our economy," Griffiths explained, "from funding beach cleaning and renourishment projects to supporting large-scale community events and so much more. Together, it all ties back to ensuring Panama City Beach continues to thrive for both residents and visitors."

And like most residents and visitors, Griffiths says he takes any excuse to be outside to enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

"If I've got a free day, I'm usually heading out to Shell Island with my family. With seven miles of untouched beach, it's the perfect place to unplug

and relax," he said. "Other than that, I'm either playing a round of golf or stopping by one of my favorite local restaurants. There are so many great food options in PCB; there's something for every taste."

Promoting tourism to Panama City Beach comes naturally to Griffiths.

"I grew up exploring this beach, enjoying our local restaurants, and watching this community grow into the remarkable place visitors experience today," he said. "These days, not much has changed. I still love spending weekends out on water with my wife and our two daughters. Panama City Beach will always be home to me, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to represent and share it with others. This is my home, and I'm beyond excited to represent our beautiful community."

DESTINATIONS FLORIDA TourismMarketing Today

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On the Cover

Panama City Beach has 27 miles of beautiful beaches to choose from, and beach-goers find a different experience at each stop along the way. Like new Visit Panama City Beach President & CEO Griff Griffiths, visitors and residents alike enjoy beautiful beaches, water activities, and delicious food in the place Griffiths calls home. Read more on page one.

Photo: Emergent Media

Want to See Your DMO's News in *Tourism Marketing Today*?

We regularly publish brief news items from DMOs in *Tourism Marketing Today*. News about your staff will appear in our "In the News" section. We also publish "Quick Trips," and they are your opportunity to share your good news! Your story should be about *past* events, awards, or campaigns to serve as "best practices" for your fellow tourism professionals. Our deadlines typically fall on a Thursday around the middle of each month. If you aren't receiving an email reminder, reach out to Susan Trainor (editor.trainor@gmail.com), and she will add you to the mailing list.



E.D.'s MESSAGE... continued from pg. 1

truth is, our closed-door, Florida-only DMO training is better than anything offered anywhere in the world. And the best part, those competitors from around the world who try to lure our visitors to fly over Florida to visit their destinations are not invited, not allowed, shut outside, looking in at you with envy in their hearts.

We learn from each other. We test ideas. We share what works and what does not. And we leave with

strategies that can be applied the moment we return to our offices.

This is Florida's competitive advantage. Training that is not available anywhere else, designed for Florida DMOs so we can continue to grow our market share, support Florida families, and strengthen tourism as the state's leading economic driver.

I look forward to seeing you in Palmetto.

In Memoriam

Lawrence William White

1935–2026



Founding member Larry White, association chairman, 1994–1995 and 1998–2000, enjoys a video celebrating his career during the association's 2010 Destination Marketing Summit.

In the 1980s, White and a small group of tourism bureau leaders met informally to share best practices and to strategize ways to fund tourism marketing. In 1992, this informal group organized and formed what was to become the Florida Association of CVBs, later rebranded as Destinations Florida.

White retired in 2010, but not before celebrating his 75th birthday and National Travel & Tourism Week in his own inimitable style by performing a tandem skydive jump onto Coquina Beach. Dressed in his official "Travel Means Jobs" Tourism Week T-shirt, White jumped from an altitude of approximately 10,000 feet to land safely on the beach that he and his CVB staff promoted to the world.

Remembering Larry White

As news of Larry White's passing spread among the tourism marketing community, friends and colleagues shared memories and tributes. Here is a sampling:

"I wanted to take a moment to reflect on how truly honored I was to work alongside Larry White at the Bradenton Area CVB for over 19 remarkable years. Larry's vision and determination transformed our department, building it from the ground up and expanding our reach to international markets. What set Larry apart was his unwavering belief in himself and, more importantly, in the tourism industry and the communities throughout our beautiful state. Larry's dedication and passion uplifted our department, and I am convinced that our success would not have been possible without the foundation he laid and the energy he brought to his role in Manatee County. Larry will be deeply missed by me and by the entire industry. His legacy continues to inspire, and I carry a deep sense of gratitude for the years we shared under his leadership. May his spirit truly rest in peace." – Elliott Falcione, executive director, Bradenton Area CVB

The destination marketing industry and Destinations Florida have lost a legend. Founding member Lawrence William White ("Larry") passed away on Feb. 28, 2026, in Sarasota. He was 90 years old.

In the 1980s, White directed the Panama City Beach CVB, where he worked to pass the first county tourism tax and to form a TDC. He moved to Sarasota in 1991 to serve as the executive director of the Bradenton Area CVB. Throughout the 1980s and early



Larry White celebrates his 75th birthday and NTTW in 2010.

"In November 1999, I was selected to lead the Sarasota CVB. My first call was to Larry to seek his advice and counsel, and we continued those conversations over the years. Larry was fiercely protective of his destination's identity. It was a blast to fly home with him headed to the Sarasota Bradenton International Airport because as soon as the pilot announced our destination was the 'Sarasota airport,' Larry would use his best radio voice and correct the crew by reminding them the runway was in Bradenton. Larry's advocacy for Manatee County did not detract from his strong belief in regional collaboration. From joint international representation to shared research and beyond, Sarasota and Manatee counties' tourism organizations partnered closely during his tenure. Beyond our region, he was a visionary who understood the need for Florida's destination management organizations to coalesce for a greater voice in Tallahassee. Once Larry retired, Jack and I treasured our luncheon outings with Larry and his beloved Michelle. I miss you, Larry." — Virginia Haley, president (retired), Visit Sarasota County

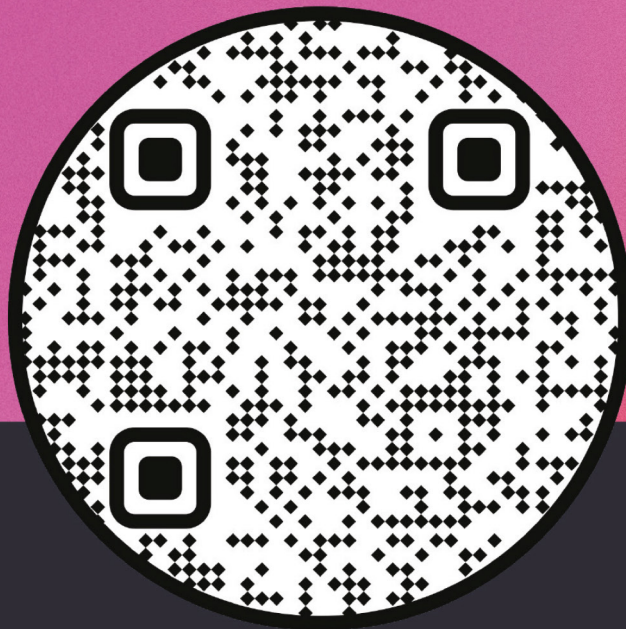
"Larry White was a one-of-a-kind tourism leader. He was the best. You could never say no to Larry. He was always there for the industry. A true leader. Supporting Destinations Florida, VISIT FLORIDA, and his 'brand.' He is missed. His tourism legacy lives on in all of us." – William D. Talbert III, president & CEO (retired), Greater Miami CVB

"Larry White was a true pioneer in the CVB/DMO profession. He started his career in radio, but found his true love in DMOs. He was instrumental in giving FACVB its start and unselfishly gave up his seat on the VISIT FLORIDA board for FACVB to have a dedicated seat. Larry was a true friend to all, and you never doubted where he stood on any issue. I had the privilege of traveling with Larry to trade shows in Europe and the UK and enjoyed his knowledge of the best restaurants and pubs. His passion was unmatched for his community and especially for the Crosley Museum. Although we will all miss you, Larry, I am sure you have already set up a radio station in Heaven to broadcast the Good News." – Jack Wert, CEO (retired), Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB



KARSH HAGAN

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Destination Marketing Summit

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Board of Directors Meeting and Working Lunch
2:00 PM – 2:45 PM	The Delicate Dance of Destination Stewardship: Where Residents and Tourism Can Thrive Together
2:45 PM – 3:30 PM	Evolution of the DMO: Advanced Destination Promotion and Sustainability
3:45 PM – 5:30 PM	Destination Marketing State of the State Report
5:30 PM – 6:30 PM	Welcome Reception
6:30 PM	Dinner on own

Thursday, May 14, 2026

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast	
9:00 AM – 9:45 AM	On Your Mark, Get Set...! Accessibility Is Like a Race Without a Finish Line, But There Are Many Starting Lines	Proof and Performance: Turning Attributed Visitation Into Economic Value and Strategic Advantage
10:00 AM – 10:45 AM	Data Sharing That Connects	Portrait of Family Travel: Autism, ADHD, and Neurodiversity
11:00 AM – 11:45 AM	Work Smarter: How AI Automations Are Transforming Workflows for Small Team	How to Attract the Luxury Traveler (Even If You're Not a Luxury Destination)
11:45 AM – 1:00 PM	Networking Luncheon Legislative Update With Mat Forrest	
1:00 PM – 1:45 PM	Soul of Surf 2.0: Catching the Next Wave	Brand Storytelling in the Experience Economy
2:00 PM – 2:45 PM	Evolving Partnership Models: Strengthening Community and Industry Success	Iron Chef: DMO Style: "Secret Ingredient Spotlight"
3:00 PM – 3:45 PM	From Home Town Takeover to Destination Transformation: How a Culture of Collaboration Rebuilt a Tourism Ecosystem	25 Irrefutable Truths About AI for Destination Marketing
5:30 PM – 8:30 PM	Connect Evening Event	

Connect

Friday, May 15, 2026

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Networking Breakfast	
9:00 AM – 9:45 AM	Building a Destination Research and Data Ecosystem: How Ocala/Marion County Turns Data Into Decisions	
9:45 AM – 10:30 AM	Florida's Air-Mobility Future: What DMOs Need to Know to Attract Tomorrow's Travelers	
10:30 AM – 11:30 AM	VISIT FLORIDA Marketing Update & "The Big Co-op Reveal"	VISIT FLORIDA
12:00 Noon	Adjourn	

Support from the following partners makes our meetings possible:

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Meeting Location:

The Bradenton Area Convention Center

1 Haben Blvd, Palmetto, FL 34221
(941) 722-3244

Register now at: DestinationsFlorida.org



DEI and SB 1134: What It Could Mean for TDT

by Steven M. Hogan

During the 2026 Legislative Session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1134, which creates new statutes that prohibit "official actions" of counties and municipalities related to "diversity, equity, and inclusion." As of the date this Legal Tips article is being submitted for publication, the governor has not yet signed SB 1134 into law, but it is widely expected the bill will be signed as written. A full copy of SB 1134 can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/sb1134>

This article is a short summary of what SB 1134 does and its potential impact on TDT spending.

Creation of New Statutes; DEI Defined



Senate Bill (SB) 1134 creates new statutes that prohibit "official actions" of counties and municipalities related to "diversity, equity, and inclusion."

SB 1134 creates two new statutes that mirror each other: section 125.595, which would apply to counties; and section 166.04971, which would apply to municipalities. It also creates another new statute, section 287.139, which would require recipients of "a county or municipal contract or grant" to certify that the recipient "does not and

will not use county or municipal funds in requiring its employees, contractors, volunteers, vendors, or agents to ascribe to, study, or be instructed using materials relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.]" SB 1134, lines 276-284.

The new statutes state that counties and municipalities "may not fund or promote, directly or indirectly, or take any official action, including, but not limited to, the adoption or enforcement of ordinances, resolutions, rules, regulations, programs, or policies, as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Any such existing ordinances, resolutions, rules, regulations, programs, or policies are void." SB 1134, lines 75-81, 195-201.

The term "diversity, equity, and inclusion" under the new statutes is defined as follows:

'Diversity, equity, and inclusion' means any effort to:

1. Manipulate or otherwise influence the composition of employees with reference to race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation other than to ensure that hiring is conducted in accordance with state and federal antidiscrimination laws;
2. Promote or provide preferential treatment or special benefits to a person or group based on that person's or group's race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation; or
3. Promote or adopt training, programming, or activities designed or implemented with reference to race, color, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

The term does not include the use of equal opportunity or equal employment opportunity materials designed to inform

a person about the prohibition against discrimination based on protected status under state or federal law.

SB 1134, lines 43-60, 163-180.

The effective date of the new law is Jan. 1, 2027.

SB 1134, line 293.



Steven M. Hogan

Application to TDT?

On its face, the main change that SB 1134 would make to public DMOs would be the required elimination of any currently existing DEI offices and DEI officer positions by the effective date. SB 1134, lines 82-86, 202-206. Contracted DMOs would be subject to the contracting provisions of the new section 287.139 relating to certifying that public funds will not go toward funding DEI training. SB 1134, lines 276-285.

Beyond that, SB 1134 does not mention TDT spending at all. It does not state that TDT cannot be used to advertise, promote, or sponsor events that would otherwise qualify as valid expenses under the TDT statute.

It is true that SB 1134 uses language that is broad and potentially vague in prohibiting the use of county or municipal monies to "fund or promote, directly or indirectly" any "programs" that "relate" to DEI. SB 1134, lines 75-81, 195-201.

It is also true that SB 1134 creates a private right of action for residents to sue to enforce the terms of the new statutes. SB 1134, lines 93-96, 214-217.

However, the broad language of SB 1134 is not automatically applicable to TDT-sponsored events that are not themselves squarely within the definition of prohibited "DEI" initiatives. There are a number of carve-outs in SB 1134 for various things, including efforts that are required to comply with federal or other state laws, recognizing or promoting federal holidays, and issuing permits "in a content-neutral manner and providing public safety services." SB 1134, lines 97-123, 218-244.

A potential challenge to a TDT expenditure as violative of SB 1134 would have to stretch the language of the new statutes to apply to expenditures of tax monies that are specifically authorized by the TDT statute. While no argument is impossible to make, it may be difficult for a litigant to get a judge to agree SB 1134 should prevent tax expenditures that are specifically authorized by the TDT statute.

Ultimately, it would be prudent for counties and DMOs to evaluate the application of SB 1134 to their operations.

As always, the touchstone for approval of TDT expenditures should be whether they are permissible under the TDT statute.

Steven M. Hogan is a shareholder with the Ausley McMullen law firm in Tallahassee. Destinations Florida has retained Mr. Hogan to consult with our members on the Tourist Development Tax and related legal issues. You can contact Mr. Hogan at shogan@ausley.com. Nothing in this article constitutes legal advice. Please seek counsel of your own choosing before making decisions that impact yourself or your organization.

BEST of SOUTHEAST FLORIDA!



- Discover The Palm Beaches
- Greater Miami CVB
- Visit Florida Keys
- Visit Lauderdale

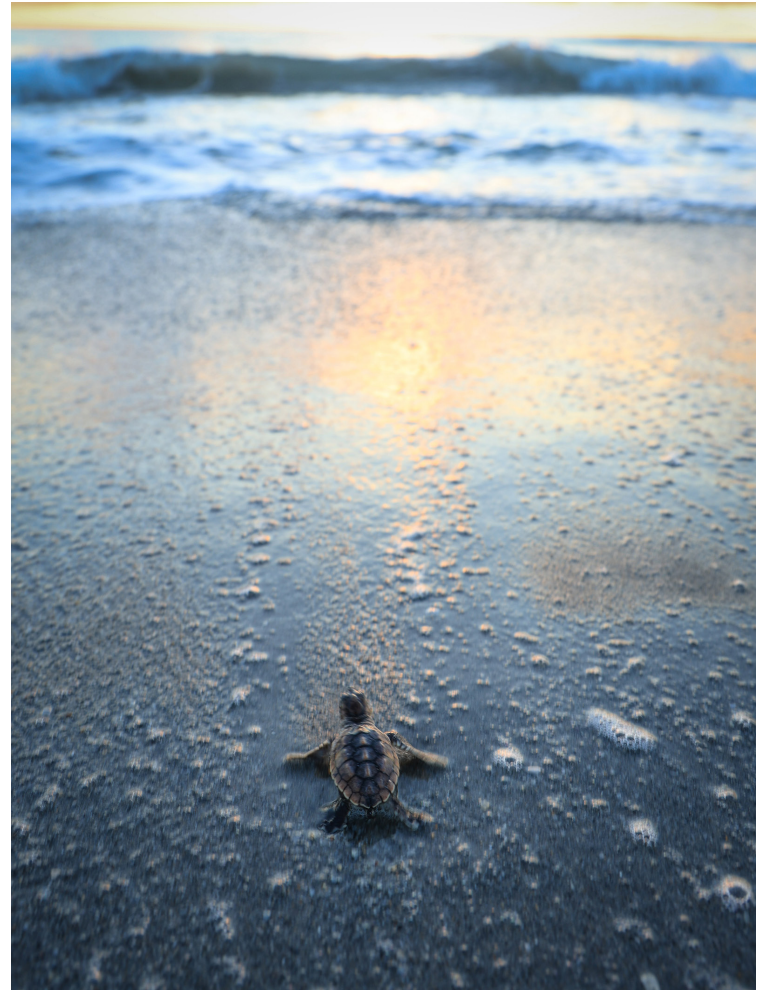
Where Turtles Rule the Shore: The Palm Beaches Crowned Sea Turtle Capital of Florida™

Discover The Palm Beaches announced the destination has been officially designated the Sea Turtle Capital of Florida™, recognizing its leadership in sea turtle nesting, conservation, and responsible coastal tourism. Each year from March through October, The Palm Beaches' 47-mile coastline becomes one of the most vital sea turtle nesting habitats in the world. With more loggerhead nests per mile than anywhere else in the U.S., local beaches support an estimated two million hatchlings annually.



The area's eastward-facing shoreline and proximity to the Gulf Stream create ideal nesting conditions for loggerhead, green, and leatherback turtles, many of which return year after year and spend much of their lives in nearby waters. This distinction reflects decades of collaboration among conservation organizations, local government, communities, and residents. These efforts are supported by extensive protections such as lighting regulations, beach patrols, and ongoing nest monitoring.

Visitors and residents are invited to experience the destination responsibly through educational attractions, guided turtle walks, and conservation-focused programs that help ensure these iconic marine species thrive for generations to come.



A sea turtle hatchling makes its way to the ocean.
Photo: @pbcern



Live Music Fuels Greater Miami and Miami Beach's Global Momentum

Greater Miami and Miami Beach continues to strengthen its position as a leading global music destination, with live events and festivals driving visitation and visibility.

Signature events—including Miami Music Week, the Winter Music Conference, and Ultra Music Festival—anchor a robust calendar alongside cultural celebrations such as Jazz in the Gardens and the Calle Ocho Music Festival, drawing global audiences



Miami Beach Bandshell

and industry attention. Major venues such as Hard Rock Stadium and Kaseya Center host top touring acts and large-scale productions, while iconic stages like the Miami Beach Bandshell, The Fillmore Miami Beach, and neighborhoods from Wynwood to Hialeah, Little Havana, and Downtown Miami contribute to a dynamic, year-round live music ecosystem with can't-miss performances for every type of music fan.



Jazz at The Betsy

“Music is one of the most powerful ways we connect with global audiences and showcase the diversity and energy of Greater Miami and Miami Beach,” said David Whitaker, president and CEO of the Greater Miami CVB. “From world-renowned festivals to intimate neighborhood venues, our music scene drives visitation, supports local businesses, and reinforces our position as a premier cultural destination.”

From global headliners to local talent, the destination's music scene drives economic impact, elevates brand visibility, and positions Miami and Miami Beach at the forefront of music and entertainment.

Visit Florida Keys Earmarks \$11M for Capital Projects

The Monroe County TDC, along with Visit Florida Keys, is making over \$11M in investments this fiscal year in tourism-related capital projects to enhance the visitor experience while benefiting residents on a daily basis.

“These projects directly support our mission to strengthen tourism infrastructure while also delivering meaningful benefits to our local community,” said Kara Franker, president and CEO of Visit Florida Keys. “This approach is part of a broader



Alligator Reef Lighthouse, one of the Florida Keys' most iconic maritime landmarks, is set to benefit from preservation funding through the Monroe County TDC's capital grant program. The investment underscores the TDC's commitment to protecting cultural heritage while enhancing the visitor experience across the Keys.

concept known as destination stewardship, and these investments by the TDC reinforce our long-term commitment to that vision.”

Funded through the TDC's annual capital grant program, these projects represent a strategic investment of Tourist Development Tax revenue collected from overnight visitors. While designed to deliver lasting benefits for travelers, enhancements to beaches, coral reefs, attractions, museums, and cultural centers, they also expand opportunities for education, enrichment, and family-friendly experiences for Florida Keys residents.



A Coral Restoration Foundation diver secures staghorn coral fragments to the reef with marine cement in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Supported by the Monroe County TDC, this hands-on work helps rebuild vital reef systems that sustain both marine life and the region's tourism economy.

Major projects for FY26 include repairs to Key West's Mallory Square Wharf seawall; coral restoration on Florida Keys reefs; preservation of Alligator Reef Lighthouse; Islamorada Founders Park pool resurfacing; Higgs Beach pavilion repairs in Key West; and upgrades to attractions including the History of Diving Museum, Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden, and Crane Point Museum & Nature Center.



Greater Fort Lauderdale Scores Big With First-of-Its-Kind Sports Tourism App Takeover

Greater Fort Lauderdale is redefining what a modern sports tourism partnership can look like through its innovative collaboration with Wolverhampton Wanderers F.C. In a first-of-its-kind activation, Visit Lauderdale executed a full takeover of the club's official app—bringing the destination directly to a global fan base in an immersive, digital-first way.



Visit Lauderdale brings Greater Fort Lauderdale to fans' fingertips through a strategic in-app partnership.

With the English Premier League recognized as the most-watched sports league in the world, the partnership taps into a massive international audience, positioning Greater Fort Lauderdale as a premier destination for global travelers. The activation goes beyond traditional sponsorship, blending content, storytelling, and seamless brand integration to engage fans where they already are.

"This international collaboration highlights Greater Fort Lauderdale's global appeal and underscores our commitment to bringing people from around the world to experience the vibrancy and diversity of our region," said Stacy Ritter, president and CEO of Visit Lauderdale.



Visit Lauderdale partners with a leading sports platform to deliver real-time, in-app "drop" notifications.

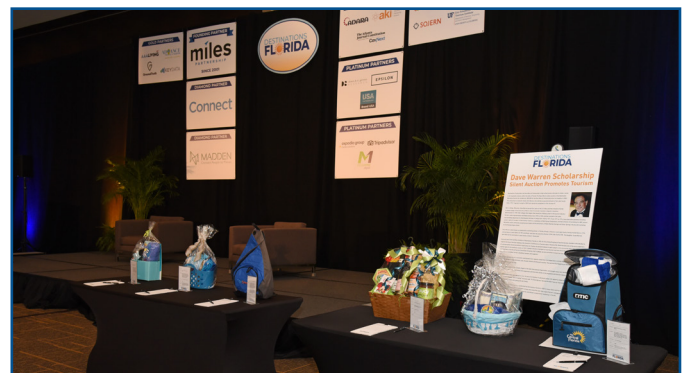
This momentum underscores a larger shift in how destinations can strategically align with global sports properties to drive awareness and visitation.

By meeting audiences at the intersection of sports, travel, and technology, Greater Fort Lauderdale is setting a new benchmark—demonstrating how forward-thinking partnerships can elevate destination marketing on a global stage.

Now Accepting Donations for the 2026 Dave Warren Silent Auction

The Dave Warren Scholarship Silent Auction is taking place at the Destination Marketing Summit May 13–15 at the Bradenton Area Convention Center. All proceeds from the silent auction support the Dave Warren Scholarship Fund, which awards a yearly scholarship to college juniors and seniors majoring in hospitality or marketing.

Donating to the silent auction is a great way to promote your destination, and a fun way for you to bid to win trips and gift baskets from other destinations. Contributions of all kinds are gladly accepted, such as weekend packages in your destination or gift baskets with items that showcase your unique location. Media agencies often contribute ad space in their publications for our DMOs to bid on. All Marketing Summit attendees are invited to bid to win exciting destination getaways, valuable ad space, and other great prizes.



Deadline: Thursday, May 7, 2026

Complete a donation form online by May 7 and either bring your donation to the Summit or ship it to Destinations Florida to arrive by May 7.

DestinationsFlorida.org/26SilentAuction

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Annual Tiger BBQ Kicks Off Spring Training for Visit Central Florida

Visit Central Florida hosted the 79th annual Tiger BBQ presented by Rodda Construction, Inc., on Feb. 19 at Publix Field at Joker Marchant Stadium, celebrating the return of Detroit Tigers Spring Training. More than 800 guests attended the ticketed event, including players across the Tigers system, coaches, front-office staff, VIPs, and fans. The event connected the Lakeland and Polk County communities ahead of the Tigers' 90th Spring Training season in Lakeland, continuing the beloved local tradition. VisitCentralFlorida.org



The annual Tiger BBQ brings together players, coaches, and fans in a fun-filled environment before the beginning of Spring Training. It is the only event like it in all of Major League Baseball. Players shown in the photo are Riley Greene, Parker Meadows, and Spencer Torkelson.

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater Showcases Culinary Scene at Taste America®

Visit St. Pete-Clearwater flexed the culinary muscles of America's Favorite Beaches in Philadelphia this March at the James Beard Foundation's Taste America® event at the beautiful Bellevue Hotel in the heart of Philly. Chef Justin from In Between Days showcased one special bite to the more than 400 attendees to define the VisitSPC emerging culinary scene and put the Philly faithful on notice that they can enjoy their Phillie's spring training, award-winning beaches, and delicious dining experiences when they visit St. Pete-Clearwater! VisitStPeteClearwater.com



Chef Justin from In Between Days features a special Lilikoi Ehu Musubi with cured Hawaiian red snapper, passionfruit nori mayo, sushi rice, Serrano, and sweet onion.

Discover Lake County Hosts National Professional Fishing League

On Mar. 19–21, Discover Lake County hosted the National Professional Fishing League on the Harris Chain of Lakes in Leesburg. This tournament marked the tournament's first return to Florida since 2022. The tournament was filled with three days of fishing on the Harris Chain of Lakes. With multiple lakes and canals, anglers had the opportunity to explore challenges while competing. DiscoverLakeCountyFL.com



The Discover Lake County logo is featured on a boat at the National Professional Fishing League.

Elevating Local Stories to National Spotlight

As a small destination, the St. Johns County VCB is finding great success collaborating with Florida-based journalists to secure earned national media coverage by leveraging their local expertise and storytelling credibility. The VCB works with writers like Carrie Honaker, who brought the Fort Mose story to national audiences in *Garden & Gun* and *Smithsonian Magazine*, and Skye Sherman, whose luxury travel features appear in *Travel & Leisure*. Additionally, Lauren Titus's work in *Edible* and *The Local Palate* showcases the region's exceptional culinary scene on a national stage. FloridasHistoricCoast.com



The Little-Known Story of the Enslaved Africans Who Found Freedom in the European Fight Over North America

Long before the famous Underground Railroad, those seeking freedom from slavery traveled on foot, by boat and under cover of darkness to Fort Mose in Spanish-controlled Florida

Carrie Honaker - Freelance writer
February 25, 2026

Facebook, X, Instagram, Email icons and 'Get our newsletter!' button



This *Smithsonian Magazine* feature on Fort Mose is an example of a collaborative with journalist Carrie Honaker to showcase the historic significance of America's first legally sanctioned free Black settlement.



Visit St. Lucie Supports 'Media Day' at Soft Opening of New All-Inclusive Resort

Visit St. Lucie deployed its Mobile Visitor's Center to support voco Sandpiper Resort's "Media Day," which hosted influencers and travel writers for a sneak peek at the reimagined resort. The resort, located in Port St. Lucie, is the first and only all-inclusive resort in the U.S. within the IHG Hotels & Resorts portfolio—and one of the few family-friendly all-inclusive experiences in the nation. Staff engaged with the media providing information on the destination that generated coverage of the area's local gems, newest attractions, and culinary scene. VisitStLucie.com



Sandpiper All-Inclusive Resort in Port St. Lucie

Rising Chefs' Challenge Cultivates Hospitality Talent in The Palm Beaches

Discover The Palm Beaches and the Palm Beach County Convention Center recently launched the inaugural Rising Chefs' Challenge, highlighting career pathways in tourism and hospitality. Four Palm Beach County high school culinary teams competed in a live showcase, with Palm Beach Gardens High School earning top honors. The event combined competition, industry engagement, and career immersion to help strengthen the pipeline of future hospitality talent. ThePalmBeaches.com



Palm Beach Gardens High School winners celebrate with Discover The Palm Beaches President & CEO Milton Segarra and a \$1,000 Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association prize.

Amelia Island's Restaurant Week Drives Engagement

Amelia Island's 18th annual Restaurant Week returned in January, highlighting the island's diverse culinary scene through signature dishes, creative cocktails, and standout dining experiences. Local TV segments, targeted PR outreach, and a romance-themed social media giveaway drove strong statewide coverage and engagement across key drive markets. Post-event surveys underscored the program's impact, with 100% of participating restaurants reporting increased business, high satisfaction, and positive experiences for both staff and guests. AmeliaIsland.com



Amelia Island enjoys a diverse culinary scene, highlighted by the annual Restaurant Week.

Jackie Robinson Ballpark Unveils New Renovations

Jackie Robinson Ballpark and the Daytona Tortugas showcased the latest renovations to the historic facility ahead of the season-opening game against the Jupiter Hammerheads, highlighted by a \$32M, multi-story player development facility featuring home and visiting clubhouses, indoor batting cages, team offices, and a retail store. Additional enhancements include upgraded dugouts with rest rooms, a multipurpose room, club seating area, and warming kitchen, as well as expanded parking and infrastructure upgrades. A museum dedicated to Jackie Robinson is also anticipated to open next year. DaytonaBeach.com



Officials open the new multi-story player development facility at Jackie Robinson Ballpark, part of a multi-year renovation project taking place at the historic ballpark where Jackie Robinson broke the "color barrier" and played in the first integrated Major League Baseball spring training game in 1946. Photo: Daytona Beach Area CVB



Florida's Adventure Coast Hosts Disc Golf Tournament

In February, Florida's Adventure Coast scored a major win with the 2026 Discraft Supreme Flight Open, drawing spectators from 41 states and several international markets. Hosted at Brooksville's Olympus Disc Golf Course, the event highlighted one of Florida's most impressive and challenging courses, with Olympus earning its highest course rating ever from a Pro Tour event survey. "The Supreme Flight Open showcased Brooksville as a premier disc golf destination and delivered meaningful visitor impact for our community," said Tammy Heon, manager of tourism. FloridasAdventureCoast.com



The Discraft Supreme Flight Open at Olympus Disc Golf Course in Brooksville

Experience Kissimmee Wins Silver Indigo Award at IPW

Experience Kissimmee is proud to announce that its 2025 IPW booth design received a Silver Indigo Award in Exhibition Stands for Graphic Design. Thoughtfully designed, the booth embodied the brand's joyful, welcoming, and recognizable personality while highlighting Florida's sunshine, natural textures, outdoor adventures, and connection to the headwaters of the Everglades. The award recognized the team's collaborative efforts and creativity in capturing the spirit of Kissimmee and elevating the destination on an international stage. ExperienceKissimmee.com



Experience Kissimmee's award-winning booth at 2025 IPW

DISCOVER bold ideas and award-winning strategy from America's leader in tourism and economic development.



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Visit Lauderdale's Brand Campaign Delivers Millions in PR, Advertising Value

Launched in January, Visit Lauderdale's "Never Lose Your Splash" campaign has already generated exceptional earned media results, delivering more than 523M PR impressions and \$4.85M in advertising value equivalency. The campaign's bold storytelling and strategic media outreach have significantly elevated awareness of Greater Fort Lauderdale across key markets, reinforcing its position as a vibrant, welcoming destination. These early results highlight the strength and impact of Visit Lauderdale's integrated PR efforts on a global scale. VisitLauderdale.com

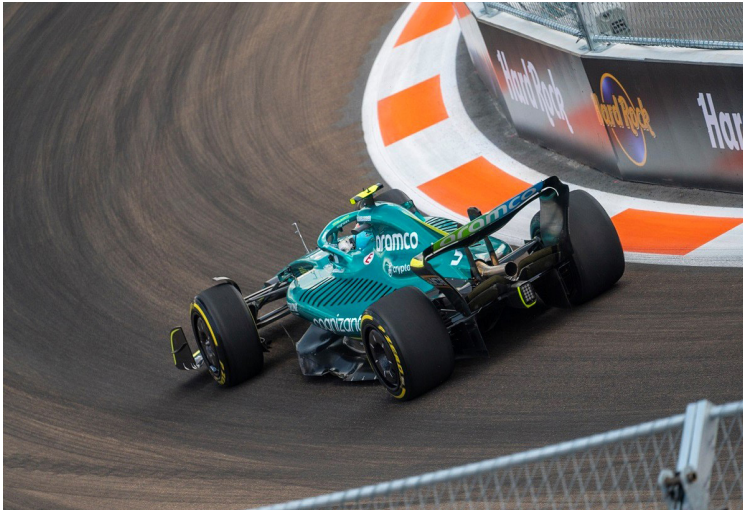


Visit Lauderdale's new brand campaign, "Never Lose Your Splash"



Media Spotlights Miami's Sports Rise

National media continue to elevate Greater Miami and Miami Beach as a premier sports destination. *Travel + Leisure* named Miami the "Hottest New Sports Town" while *Southern Living* highlights the year's marquee events. From the Miami Open, PGA Championship, and World Baseball Classic to Formula 1 and NASCAR, the lineup draws global audiences. Inter Miami's debut at Nu Stadium adds momentum, and with the FIFA World Cup™ ahead, Fox Business projects a \$3B economic impact—reinforcing sports tourism's role in driving visitation and demand. MiamiandMiamiBeach.com



Formula 1 Miami Grand Prix at Hard Rock Stadium

Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring Race Draws Record Crowds

The 74th Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring delivered on its reputation as a can't-miss tradition each third weekend in March, drawing a record-breaking 115,000+ attendees in 2026. The excitement extended worldwide, with the global broadcast attracting more than one million live viewers, alongside surging digital engagement across platforms. The event also looked ahead, unveiling a commemorative logo for the 75th anniversary in 2027 and announcing an extended Mobil 1 partnership, fueling Sebring's legacy and momentum. VisitSebring.com



Drivers for the No. 7 Porsche Penske Racing Team celebrate their victory in the Sebring International Raceway's iconic Winner's Circle.

Plein Air in Mexico Beach, Florida

The Forgotten Coast en Plein Air celebrated its 21st year along Northwest Florida in March. Spanning 10 days from Mexico Beach to Carrabelle, the event featured exhibits, demonstrations, and more. Mexico Beach hosted a special artist demo and reception, where attendees enjoyed freshly created works and met the artists behind them. Student Art Day, also hosted in Mexico Beach, paired the invited artists with local high school students for one-on-one instruction that inspired creativity and fostered artistic growth. MexicoBeach.com



Plein Air artists enjoy a day of fun and painting in Mexico Beach.

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Hosts Event in New York City

The Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida team brought a taste of adventure to NYC with a dynamic event at the iconic Explorers Club. Welcoming 40 top media, influencers, and notable members, the evening immersed guests in the destination's unique offerings, from the story of the SS United States to innovative programs like Little Adventures and Reel Time. Highlights included interactive storytelling with the destination's partners and a memorable lionfish tasting, sparking excitement and curiosity. The experience left a lasting impression, earning overwhelmingly positive feedback and igniting strong interest in future editorial coverage and collaboration opportunities. DestinFWB.com



Adventure comes to life in NYC as Destin-Fort Walton Beach transforms the Explorers Club into an immersive journey of storytelling, flavor, and discovery.



Discover Crystal River Showcases Manatee Capital of the World at ITB Berlin

Discover Crystal River recently showcased the destination at ITB Berlin, the world's largest travel trade show, drawing nearly 97,000 attendees from 166 countries. Representing the destination, J. Auvis Cole and Terry Natwick connected with tour operators, travel advisors, and airline partners to explore future opportunities and drive visitation to the Manatee Capital of the World. While global travel continues to evolve, these in-person meetings remain a critical way to build relationships, strengthen awareness, and generate long-term benefits for both visitors and the local community. DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com



Terry Natwick, CDME, and J. Auvis Cole at ITB Berlin

Visit Sarasota County's 'Business as Unusual' Meetings Campaign

Sarasota offers meeting planners experiences that are anything but ordinary with their unique event venues and unusual mix of charm and creativity. After hearing the comment "I never knew Sarasota had ..." so often, Visit Sarasota County created the "Business as Unusual" campaign to encourage planners to break away from the traditional meeting spaces and explore the unexpected. The marketing team had previously teamed up with a local artist to design a vibrant graphic for a separate campaign, but it was so striking and unconventional, the sales team decided to utilize it for their new meetings initiative with great success. VisitSarasota.com



The graphic created in partnership with local artist Alexis Fraser known professionally as "Lipstick Lex"

Visit Tampa Bay Reaches Historic 1,000-Partner Milestone

Visit Tampa Bay has achieved a historic first, surpassing 1,000 partners for the first time since the organization's founding. The milestone reflects Hillsborough County businesses' sustained confidence in Tampa Bay as a premier destination and the value of the DMO's partnership program, which connects partner businesses with co-op marketing campaigns, trade show representation, convention leads, media FAM tours, and more. Together, these partners help Visit Tampa Bay teach the world to love Tampa Bay. VisitTampaBay.com



The Visit Tampa Bay Partnership team and other members of the VTB staff pose as crayons while holding up Visit Tampa Bay's new coloring book during a National Coloring Day activation outside the Unlock Tampa Bay Visitors Center in September.

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Ocala/Marion County Expands Sports Tourism With New Synthetic Fields

Ocala/Marion County marked a major step forward in sports tourism with the ribbon cutting of two new synthetic turf fields at Ocala Rotary Sportsplex in April. The conversion from natural grass increases capacity, reduces weather disruptions, and enhances tournament readiness. With upgraded lighting and infrastructure, the complex is now better equipped to attract regional and national events—reinforcing the destination’s commitment to growing its competitive sports tourism portfolio. OcalaMarion.com



Ocala Rotary Sportsplex sports synthetic turf fields and upgraded infrastructure.

Florida's Sports Coast Connects With International Event Organizers

Florida's Sports Coast continued building global momentum at Sports & Events Europe in Seville, Spain, connecting with international event organizers and industry leaders. Through strategic meetings and networking, the team showcased Pasco County as a premier destination for sports, tourism, camps, and competitions. Engagement with professionals from more than 40 countries strengthened relationships, created future opportunities, and reinforced Florida's Sports Coast as a competitive player on the global stage. FLSportsCoast.com



Adam Thomas and Consuelo Sanchez at Sports & Events Europe in Seville Spain

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Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB Hosts Hilton Conference

The Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach VCB partnered with Sunseeker Resort, Curio Collection by Hilton, to host the Hilton Worldwide Sales Conference (HSC) in March 2026. Hilton selected the destination to give approximately 300 of its sales professionals firsthand experience with a new, large-scale Southwest Florida resort capable of accommodating major meetings and events. The program showcased Sunseeker Resort's extensive meeting and event facilities, highlighted the guest experience, and positioned both the resort and the greater Southwest Florida Gulf Coast as premier destinations for group, incentive, and convention business. [PureFlorida.com](#)



A drone show over the resort

Orlando North, Seminole County Hosts National Firefighter Event

Seminole County welcomed hundreds of visiting firefighters and spectators for the inaugural ALL American Challenge & Training Camp, generating strong tourism and economic impact. Known as "the toughest two minutes in sports," the high-energy event drew competitors nationwide to race through a grueling, real-world course in full gear. Hosted at Seminole State College, the free, family-friendly event showcased elite skill while driving visitation and highlighting Seminole County as a premier sports tourism destination. [DoOrlandoNorth.com](#)



Visiting firefighters compete in the All American Challenge.

Journalist Pauline Frommer Recommends Stuart, Jensen Beach on National TV Program

The Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing collaborated with award-winning travel journalist Pauline Frommer ahead of her recent appearance on *Live with Kelly & Mark*. During the episode, Pauline shared her top travel destination recommendations, which included Stuart and Jensen Beach. In the segment, she praised Martin County's convenient location and under-the-radar charm, highlighting the area's natural beauty, uncrowded beaches, and diverse wildlife—reaching more than 2.5M viewers across the U.S. [DiscoverMartin.com](#)



The Martin County Tourism team provided key talking points and b-roll video ahead of the segment.

Florida's Paradise Coast CVB Shines a Light on Tourism for Future Leaders

Florida's Paradise Coast CVB's Sandra Rios, public relations and communications manager, and Lisa Chamberlain, group sales manager, recently shared tourism industry insights with hospitality students at Golden Gate High School in Naples, Florida. Through an engaging Q&A session, they highlighted the destination's diverse offerings and the significant impact of tourism on the local community. The visit provided a valuable learning experience, encouraging students to explore internships and summer employment opportunities within the area's hospitality industry. [ParadiseCoast.com](#)



Florida's Paradise Coast CVB's Group Sales Manager Lisa Chamberlain and Public Relations & Communications Manager Sandra Rios present tourism opportunities and community impact to hospitality students at Golden Gate High School in Naples, Fla.



Florida's Space Coast Trains Texan Travel Advisors

Tom Bartosek, travel and trade coordinator with Florida's Space Coast Office of Tourism, attended the Peninsula Shows in Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston. He trained a total of 291 Texan travel advisors on all the Space Coast has to offer. According to Space Coast Office of Tourism research, the Dallas-Fort Worth area is the ninth highest source market for the destination. The travel advisors said Florida is a top requested drive market from clients. VisitSpaceCoast.com



Florida's Space Coast Office of Tourism celebrates the launch of Artemis II.

National Geographic Features Dry Tortugas National Park

The Florida Keys & Key West continues to earn global recognition with a new *National Geographic* travel feature highlighting Dry Tortugas National Park and the experiences available in this spectacular destination 70 miles from Key West. The article highlights snorkeling and diving in the park's crystal-clear waters, its vibrant coral reefs, historic Fort Jefferson, and exceptional bird watching. The story reached 6,562,041 unique monthly visitors on nationalgeographic.com and 8,142,233 on yahoo.com. VisitFloridaKeys.com



Dry Tortugas National Park is accessible by ferry, private boat, or seaplane from Key West.

Visit Orlando Honored by Boy Scouts of Central Florida

On Apr. 9, Visit Orlando was recognized as the corporate honoree at the 25th anniversary Golden Eagle Dinner benefiting the Central Florida Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The evening brought together more than 1,000 Central Florida community leaders to support programs that help young people lead with character, confidence, and responsibility—values that align closely with Visit Orlando's work. The award recognized Visit Orlando's leadership within the community including how Visit Orlando's Magical Dining, presented by Orlando Health has raised nearly \$3.3M for local charities. VisitOrlando.org



Visit Orlando's President & CEO Casandra Matej accepts Visit Orlando's corporate honoree award at the Golden Eagle Dinner.

NOTEWORTHY

Three Florida Destination Marketing Professionals Honored as DI's 30 Under 30

Destinations International (DI) has announced its 30 Under 30 and Rising Industry Professionals classes for 2026. Congratulations to the three Florida destination marketing professionals who made this year's prestigious list. We are proud to see talented young professionals from our Destinations Florida member organizations recognized on a global stage.



Anna-Grace Agnini
Environmental Resource & Ecotourism Program Manager
Martin County Office of Tourism and Marketing



Belen Alvarado-Roman
Sustainable Tourism Specialist
Greater Miami CVB



Julie Bicknell
Social Media Specialist
Discover The Palm Beaches

Enclosed is your copy of Tourism Marketing Today
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