

KSC, Brevard gear up for what's next

Shuttle chapter's closing, but county's space offerings aren't

BY DAVE BERMAN
FLORIDA TODAY

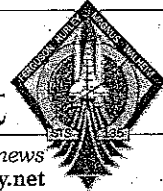
CAPE CANAVERAL — Local business, tourism and political leaders sent a clear message to the world on Wednesday: the space shuttle program is ending, but the Space Coast isn't going away.

The officials took advan-

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tage of a national media audience in town for today's scheduled final landing of shuttle Atlantis to hold a briefing at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex on the area's post-shuttle future.

While conceding that tough times are ahead, they said Brevard County will survive — and will thrive in the future.

Final Flight



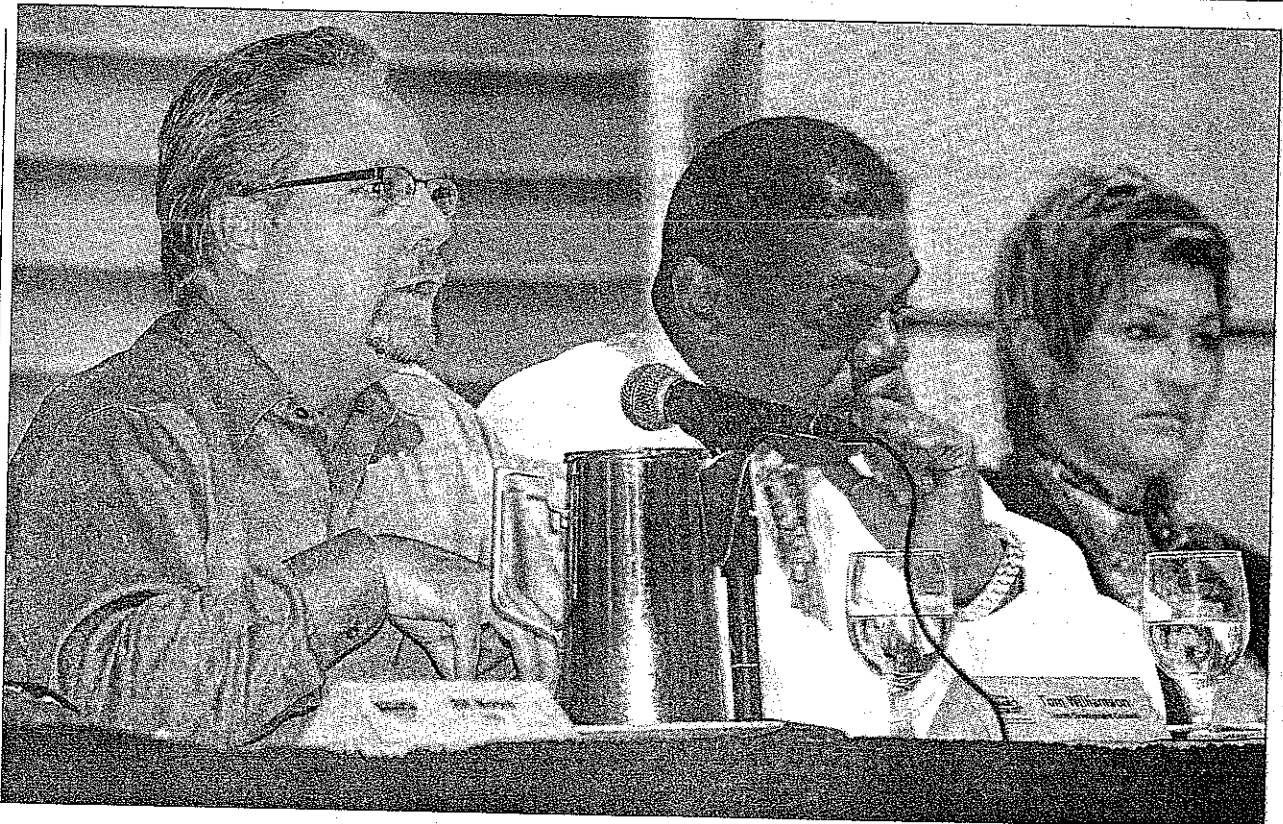
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Brevard County Commission Chairman Robin Fisher compared the situation to a hurricane.

"It's headed our way. The eye is kind of sitting in my
See **SPACE, 3A**

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2011 3A

SPACE SHUTTLE ERA ENDS



Forecasting the future. Tom Williamson of the Tourist Development Council, District 1 County Commissioner Robin Fisher and Lynda Weatherman, president and chief execu-

tive officer of the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast, talk to the media Wednesday about what's to come for the area in the post-space shuttle era.

Craig Rubadoux, FLORIDA TODAY

'We are not a one-rocket town'

SPACE, from IA

district right now — North Brevard," said Fisher, who has dealt with his share of hurricanes as a Titusville insurance agent. "But we will rebuild from this, and, at the end of the day, we will be stronger and bigger."

Lynda Weatherman, president and chief executive officer of the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast, touted the recent gains in aerospace jobs at AAR, Embraer and MidairUSA in Melbourne as signs that the local economy has bright spots, despite the thousands of shuttle-related layoffs.

About 7,000 shuttle worker jobs will have disappeared with the end of the program. Thousands of those positions are already gone. On Friday, some 1,510 workers for United Space Alliance, the main shuttle contractor, will be out of a job.

Weatherman emphasized that "there are business opportunities for this community" related to private launch companies setting up

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*Lynda Weatherman,
president and chief executive officer,
Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast*

operations in the area, expected growth in the satellite industry and increased spacecraft-related construction.

"NASA is just one leg in the stool of space," Weatherman said. "We can and will do more than launch."

Tom Williamson, president of the Cocoa Beach Area Hotel and Lodging Association, said the \$2.8 billion-a-year local tourism industry will continue to thrive, even without the big-ticket draws of shuttle launches.

Shuttle launch visitors account for just 5 percent of the local tourism market in an average year, according to Williamson, who is general manager of the 155-room Marriott Courtyard Cocoa Beach and the 150-room Hampton Inn Cocoa Beach.

In all, Williamson said,

about 6 million tourists visit Brevard County each year — about 2.5 million who stay one or more nights and about 3.5 million who come over just for the day. He said roughly 20,000 Brevard County residents work in the tourism industry.

He cited Brevard's beaches and related surfing opportunities, ecotourism attractions, cruises from Port Canaveral, amateur and youth sports tournaments and air shows as critical to drawing visitors to the area. Local tourism officials also hope to better promote opportunities to view unmanned launches, including planetary and lunar probes.

"We are not a one-rocket town," Williamson said. "We don't have just the shuttle."

By the summer of 2013, though, the shuttle will be a tourism draw again. That's

when a \$100 million exhibit centered on displaying retired orbiter Atlantis will open at the KSC Visitor Complex. Atlantis will be housed in a 66,000-square-foot building — the largest ever built at the visitor complex.

Bill Moore, the complex's chief operating officer, expects that exhibit to boost the annual attendance there by 15 percent, increasing by about 225,000 the current attendance of 1.5 million people a year. The visitor complex already is Brevard's most popular paid tourist attraction.

From the audience, Titusville Vice Mayor Walt Johnson said he felt compelled to say something before the briefing ended. He said he's often asked by out-of-towners — including as recently as a lunch he attended Wednesday — about when KSC was shutting down.

"Kennedy Space Center is not closing. Brevard County is not closing. The visitor complex is not closing. Titusville is not closing," Johnson said. ■

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