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Florida's Treasure Coast and Palm Beaches

## IRCC MAY HOST PLANNED REGIONAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL

By Robert Barba

Thursday, October 4, 2007

FORT PIERCE — Indian River Community College could soon become the backbone of an organization aimed at enhancing the economic viability of the Treasure Coast.

On Wednesday, IRCC President Ed Massey volunteered his school to serve as a neutral ground for a committee of government and business leaders that would create and oversee an innovative strategy to help the economies of Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee counties.

"We have what it takes to be successful ... we have done enough studying, folks," Massey said. "We need to start doing."

Massey's speech came during the Florida's Research Coast Economic Development Summit held at the Kight Center for Emerging Technologies on the Fort Pierce campus of IRCC.

The summit was designed to build on past plans for regionalism and create a framework for future achievements, said Greg Vaday, economic development coordinator for the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, which organized the event.

Massey said his proposition was unplanned, but inspired after hearing guest speaker Doug Henton, a national economic development expert, describe successes in California, such as those in San Diego, Silicon Valley and Sonoma County.

Henton's presentation emphasized the need for the local governments to act regionally and be innovative in their approaches to attracting and retaining businesses.

"You have to collaborate to compete globally," Henton said. "And if you don't have innovation, you will fall behind."

The idea of creating a regional council was at least conceptually embraced by the chairs of the boards of commissioners of Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. Chris Craft, chairman of the St. Lucie board, said he would "convince St. Lucie County to participate" in IRCC's offer.

"We need to make a commitment that our local governments would contribute," Craft said. "We are running in a circle and we now have a wonderful offer."

While the various Treasure Coast economic development agencies and the Workforce Board of the Treasure Coast already market the region to businesses under the Florida's Research Coast initiative, the plan proposed Wednesday would foster regionalism among the local governments and the private sector.

"I think it would be a nice complement to what we do," said Helene Caseltine, economic development director for the Indian River County Chamber of Commerce. "It would enhance what we are doing and maybe even give us a little more fuel to take it to the next level."