

## **Cheney Brothers impact goes beyond jobs**

By Lucienne Pears, Charlotte County Interim Economic Development Director

Much has been written and said about the impact of the recently opened Cheney Brothers distribution center in Charlotte County – and rightly so. The 380 good-paying jobs it has committed to create is projected to keep growing as the company expands in Southwest Florida, providing a jolt to the local economy. But the construction itself and the long-lasting effects of the center's operation is an underappreciated aspect of the project.

Construction of the more than \$40 million facility required a small army of contractors, subcontractors and support services that swelled the overall economic impact of the project. While much of the work went to local subcontractors, the sheer scope of the job required expertise, materials and manpower beyond what was available in the county. More than 30 subcontractors were tapped to construct the 350,000-square-foot distribution center on the 35-acre site. Twenty-eight of those providers were from the Southwest Florida region (Charlotte, Lee, Collier and Sarasota).

Those 28 subcontractors represent 150 people per day working on the project. That is the equivalent of a medium-sized company. That is 150 people eating meals, buying gas, patronizing our local businesses and purchasing supplies to complete their part of this massive project. Those supplies included 30,000 cubic yards of concrete, 250,000 cubic yards of fill dirt and 4,500 tons of asphalt, all purchased here in our community from our local businesses.

In addition, subcontractors occupied 300 hotel room nights at our local hotels. Speaking of hotel room nights, between the two out-of-state specialized trades that were hired, you can add an additional 500 hotel room nights, with three meals per day, fuel, services, etc. This list doesn't include the consultants hired for legal, environmental, geotechnical, construction management, site engineering, inspections and more.

In economic development this impact is called the indirect benefit. These benefits are the returns that cannot be directly observed but are nonetheless realized, attracting more jobs, more activity and more dollars into our community.

Company personnel, clients, suppliers and construction workers frequented Charlotte County airport via corporate jets. Nearly two dozen company executives and managers have already relocated to the county, some buying existing homes, some building new ones, but all generating business for Realtors, contractors, furniture and retail stores, engineers, architects and other housing-related businesses and services.

Cheney Brothers also generated buzz in the Punta Gorda Interstate Airport Park area. An executive for the project's general contractor said his phone is "ringing off the hook" with

inquiries from prospective development partners, business executives and media. Affordable, pre-permitted and shovel-ready land near Cheney Brothers creates a fertile environment for additional distribution and warehousing businesses and supporting industries.

Going forward, the operation of the distribution center will produce ongoing impacts. As many as 60 trucks a day will arrive at the facility to deliver goods. Their drivers will stoke recurring demand for hotels, restaurants and fueling stations. Operations and maintenance services will create opportunities for companies that perform landscaping, HVAC services and other work the company outsources. The presence of another major commercial food distributor will create a more competitive environment, helping to lower commercial food costs.

The story of Cheney Brothers in Charlotte County is two-fold: the economic development “win” it brings through construction and creation of a facility housing 380-plus employees and the community “win” that has brought tens of millions of dollars into our local economy. Economic development is far-reaching in its benefits to the community, local businesses, schools and our region, and in sustaining the overall quality of life we all enjoy. See for yourself, give Cheney a visit at their on-site cash-and-carry department, which is open to the public. Welcome to Charlotte County, Cheney Brothers. We are happy to have you.

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