



BUILDING A REMOTE CYBERCOAST

BY DAKOTA PARKS

The pandemic has permanently shaped the workforce and set a precedent for employees and companies working remote from home. According to a recent Gallup survey, around 33 percent of Americans are working exclusively from home, which is down from 50 percent of the workforce polled in April. Remarkably, nearly two-thirds of U.S. workers who have been working remotely during the pandemic would like to continue to do so. Encouraging remote work is at the heart of the “Remote from Here” campaign launched by FloridaWest Economic Development Alliance to attract and retain talented remote cybersecurity workers.

FLWest is Escambia County’s economic development organization with the mission of building, growing and sustaining the economic potential and prosperity of Northwest Florida. Through economic development initiatives, programs to recruit new business, workforce training and managing the local small business incubator, Co:Lab, FLWest is focused on generating wealth and opportunities in the community. The “Remote from Here” campaign is part

of the FLWest cybersecurity strategy which unites the hub of military, government, educational and private sector cybersecurity assets in the area as a bustling CyberCoast.

As CEO Scott Luth explained, the cybersecurity strategy started around seven years ago when FLWest began researching companies as target industry sectors to encourage growth and facilitate a cluster strategy. “The strategy was created in

partnership with all of our cyber companies in the private sector, government contracting companies, military, especially on Cory Station, and significant input from the University of West Florida (UWF) and Pensacola State College (PSC). The first initiative was developing and supporting the educational infrastructure.”

The educational and training opportunities are abundant on the CyberCoast. In Escambia County K-12, there are career academies dedicated to cybersecurity. George Stone Technical College offers an applied cybersecurity program and is a Cisco Networking Academy and Microsoft IT Academy. PSC offers a Cybersecurity Bachelor of Applied Science Program, and UWF is home to the Center for Cybersecurity, a National Center for Academic Excellence designated by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security. The US

Navy’s Cyber Training Center in Pensacola also trains around 10,000 to 12,000 people every year for initial cybersecurity training for the Navy.

“Part of the strategy is to retain talent from those people coming out of schools here or departing from the military—to remind them that we have opportunities, a great quality of life and good synergy around their career sector,” Luth said. “We also want to recruit people into the local cybersecurity community that has over 2,000 local professionals. Whether they want to come here to train, remote work here, or bring their company here, that’s why we created the website.”

To help with recruitment, branding and showcasing the culture and opportunities in Pensacola, FLWest launched the website cybercoastflorida.com in November. The website is built on the pillars of “our people, our place and our possibilities”

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to not only make finding job opportunities easier with direct links to cyber companies with job listings in Pensacola but to also help build and welcome the cyber community to Pensacola.

“In 2017, we conducted a study to help with the cyber strategy and one thing that was really prominent to this career field and their employees is the quality of life, because they can live anywhere with their jobs,” Sena Maddison, director of communications explained. “We built the website catered and marketed to what employees in the cyber field are looking for. COVID has changed a lot of this at the moment, but these employees are still looking for places with people like themselves, networking opportunities like ITEN WIRED, fun meetups for craft beers, paddle boarding or baseball games and to be easily connected through the airport.”

As Maddison explained, the website creates a hub of Pensacola’s culture and attractions to help cyber employees make the leap to working remote in Pensacola. It features beautiful white sand beaches, bustling Downtown Pensacola, Gallery

Night, The Blue Wahoos and The Blue Angels while connecting them to average rent and housing



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costs, companies hiring and promoting local cybersecurity educational opportunities. While the campaign is geared toward building the CyberCoast, it

will also serve as an economic boost helping promote the city at the same time.

“We want to piggyback off the success of Pensacola,” Luth said. “If we can bring more people here with a disposable income and promote the incredible culture here, then certainly those people are going to support the local economy through shopping and going to restaurants. The cyber industry is also a younger demographic that is looking for that strong sense of community. This is also where the partnership with local tourism comes from, because no matter where you move, you’re always a tourist first.”

FLWest is currently working with local tourism officials, hoteliers and real estate companies to offer incentives to try out a remote-work week in the area. Beginning in January, FLWest will launch a series of ads aimed at cybersecurity professionals in other cities who are looking for a change. The ads will drive traffic to the website and promote the overall quality of life in Pensacola.

“Marketing is essential to this step in the cybersecurity strategy,”

Maddison explained. “We want cybersecurity employees in Chicago to see commercials for sunny beaches. We want people interested in going back to school or getting recertified to know they can do that here. So, each month will be a different focus. We’ll also be directly reaching out and targeting demographics on LinkedIn and partnering with Visit Pensacola. The biggest thing is that people can find jobs in one click, in one day on the website. If they have a security clearance, their applications can be fast tracked too because there are so many jobs available here.”

Through the website cybersecurity professionals can find job listings with local companies such as Booz Allen, General Dynamics, Raytheon Technologies, Northrop Grumman and Navy Federal Credit Union to name a few. As the “Remote from Here” campaign launches in January, Pensacola will continue to welcome and expand its cybersecurity workforce. To learn more about the opportunities and campaign, visit cybercoastflorida.com.

