

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 17, 2010

Contacts: Nancy Hamilton, Lee Rose or Katie Meckley (239) 338-3500

**Lee County VCB, Greater Fort Myers Chamber
launch new Chrysalis awards program**
Nominations for honorees in six categories due March 12

LEE COUNTY, FL – The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) and the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce Inc. are seeking nominations for the first annual *Chrysalis Awards* to honor businesses and individuals who have positively impacted the local community.

Award nominations are due on March 12, and are open to any member of the local business community, regardless of whether or not they are directly a part of the tourism industry. Award recipients will be announced at a jointly hosted *Celebration of Business & Tourism Awards Luncheon and Trade Show* on May 20, from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Harborside Event Center in downtown Fort Myers.

The event, co-produced by the VCB and the Greater Fort Myers Chamber and held to commemorate National Travel and Tourism Week, celebrates the value of tourism and the community teamwork involved in maintaining and enhancing tourism as a major economic engine for the county. The event also is part of the VCB's year-round *Team Tourism* informational program to strengthen destination teamwork.

The new awards, designed to foster a stronger alliance between the tourism industry and the county's business community, will honor recipients in the categories: Business Development, Eco-Innovation, Cultural Achievement, Education, Sports and Sales & Marketing. A seventh award category is the VCB's long-standing Junonia Award, created to recognize those individuals who have positively impacted the local tourism community by demonstrating unique capabilities, leadership, commitment, and dedication.

-MORE-

Lee County VCB, Greater Fort Myers Chamber launch new Chrysalis awards/Page 2

A panel of local business community leaders will judge nominations and select one award recipient in each of the six categories; and, as in past years, the Junonia will only be awarded at the sole discretion of the VCB. Business and individual nominees for the six Chrysalis Awards will be judged on their innovation in their respective category, how they have distinguished themselves in the community, the results of their efforts to promote the destination, their contributions to business and tourism partnerships for the overall benefit of the county, and their work to foster growth and sustainability.

“Destination visitors often spark future leisure visits, conventions, relocations and other business opportunities. The Chrysalis Awards signify an ongoing partnership between the business and tourism communities to ensure that continues to happen,” said Tamara Pigott, interim VCB deputy director. “By partnering, we are working together to help the business community gain greater awareness of the tourism industry’s role in our economic livelihood, while helping tourism partners better understand the needs and role of the larger business community.”

Pigott said the awards committee chose the name Chrysalis for the new program because it signifies the final stage before a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, the metamorphosis in which its growth and differentiation occur. Committee members see it as an appropriate symbol of the desire to build and foster a stronger strategic partnership between tourism and the larger business community.

She added that the Junonia is a highly treasured shell, so it was selected as a symbol of the VCB’s ongoing annual award due to its rarity. Past recipients have included: Sally Tapager, owner of Tropic Star; D.T. Minich, C.D.M.E., former executive director of the VCB; Chris Pendleton, president and chief executive officer of the Edison & Ford Winter Estates; Roxie Smith of Pink Shell Development and a member of the Tourist Development Council; Steve Tutko, biologist and consultant to Babcock Ranch; Fran Myers, owner of Red Coconut RV Resort and a member of the Tourist Development Council; Elaine McLaughlin, former executive director of the VCB; Brian Holly, general manager of the Holiday Inn Gulf Coast Town Center; Tom Cronin, owner of the Shell Factory; Steve Greenstein, former

-MORE-

Lee County VCB, Greater Fort Myers Chamber launch new Chrysalis awards/Page 3

executive director of the Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce; and Jay Kinzer-Halcrow, former sales and marketing director of the West Wind Inn.

While the VCB has always pooled its resources with those of local chambers for the common good of the destination, this is the first such alliance between the VCB and a local chamber. In addition, all local chambers are involved with the new program.

“We’re celebrating our work together to create stronger relationships that encourage new visitors and ultimately new businesses for our area,” said Marietta B. Mudgett, executive director of the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce, whose organization initiated the joint program. “Tourism and business partnerships improve community growth, encourage vacationers to our destination, and create job opportunities for our citizens. Ultimately, pooling our resources for the good of the community and the destination is vital in this ever-changing economic climate.”

The *Celebration of Business & Tourism Awards Luncheon and Trade Show* where the awards will be announced will feature a trade show from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and the awards luncheon will take place from 11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Costs to attend the event are \$25 for a single admission and \$250 for a reserved table for eight attendees. Those who wish to exhibit in the trade show will pay \$120 for a booth, which includes two admission tickets. The event is projected to attract about 300 attendees.

Those who wish to nominate a business or individual to receive a Chrysalis Award can visit the Upcoming Events section of www.LeeVCB.com, where they also can register for event attendance and trade show participation through a link to the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce Web site at www.fortmyers.org.

For questions or further event details, contact either Christine Davlin at the VCB at cdavlin@leegov.com or (239) 338-3500, Glee Ann Agius at the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce at GleeAnn@fortmyers.org or (239) 332-2930, ext. 211, or Colleen DePasquale, event chairperson, at Colleen.DePasquale@hilton.com or (239) 790-3500.