

Business leaders tout area to visiting Swedes

Erik Stenberg says he uses local tennis tourney as a trade mission

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[Dusty Ricketts](#) Daily News

OKALOOSA ISLAND — Native Swede Erik Stenberg has made a home and career in Northwest Florida. Now he's trying to bring more people from Sweden to the area.

Stenberg, the director of the Fort Walton Beach Tennis Center and a native of Kristinehamn, Sweden, hosted a Swedish-American business meeting Tuesday at the Holiday Inn along with the Okaloosa County Economic Development Council and Enterprise Florida.

He also is hosting the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors' \$25,000 Women's Challenger tennis tournament this week. Several Swedes have come to the area for the tournament.

Tuesday's meeting was a chance for Swedes to hear from local business leaders about the benefits working in Northwest Florida bring.

"I think we are just taking baby steps in using these tennis tournaments as trade missions," Stenberg said.

Two Swedish businesses have operations in Northwest Florida. Securitas, a security company headquartered in Stockholm, has offices in Mary Esther and Pensacola. Green Circle Bio Energy, a renewable energy company, has operations in Cottondale.

Andrea Moore, regional manager for international trade development for Enterprise Florida, said 1.3 million jobs in Florida depend on international business, and that more than 42,000 businesses in the state export products to other countries.

Moore said Sweden is a world leader in electronics, medical products, robotics and computer technologies, areas in which Northwest Florida is trying to expand.

Tony Michaelsen, CEO of Huvudkontoret AB in the Karlstad area of Sweden, agreed with Moore that there is a market for Swedish companies in the region.

"I believe there are an abundance of options for business between our two regions," Michaelsen said.

Michaelsen's wife, Elisabeth Michaelsen, owns a company that specializes in healthy pizzas and started distributing them in parts of the United States a few months ago. She said she was looking for a partner to help her expand her business in Northwest Florida because of its proximity to major markets in the Southeast.