

Swedish Expo Aims to Link Business Ventures

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By THOMAS J. MONIGAN Northwest Florida Daily News

OKALOOSA ISLAND - Okaloosa County took the first official steps Tuesday to forge business links between Sweden and the Emerald Coast. About 100-people attended the inaugural Swedish-American Business Expo at the Emerald Coast Conference Center: About one-third of them were Swedish, said Kay Rasmussen from the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County.

"We want to be the funnel, the conduit, to make contacts between businesses, investors and consultants," Rasmussen said afterward.

Groups with booths at the event included ResortQuest, Northwest Florida Regional Airport and the Emerald Coast Association of Realtors.

"We realize international business is coming to the Panhandle," said Robbie Fenn from the Association of Realtors International Council. The council has grown to 50-plus members since starting four years ago. Fenn was joined by Association of Realtors teammate Kelly Klein.

"With the addition of the F-35 coming here, we are going to be a true center for international training," Klein said. "And we're going to have to learn to deal with people from all over the world."

One of the expo's visitors was Lill Hanson from the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce's regional office in Clearwater. Hanson is a commercial realtor and her chamber has about 2,500 members.

"Florida has such a diverse economy, and Sweden has similar things, and they range from defense electronics to sports medicine," Hanson said. "These things are looking for a foothold here. Some investors from Sweden want to come and live here and manage with hands on. Others are simply looking for investment opportunities in things like shopping centers, golf courses and marinas. "There's money out there and they believe in us," she said.

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