

# THE STATE OF TECH: PENSACOLA & THE CYBER COAST



**O**N APRIL 2, 2002 when Michael Murdoch and Joel Smith first opened AppRiver's doors, the two men could not have imagined they were on the forefront of a technology boom in Santa Rosa and Escambia counties.

Fast forward 15 years - what started in a tiny broom closet with just two guys and a spam filter has exploded into a worldwide corporation of more than 250 employees with offices in Austin, Texas; Atlanta; Switzerland and Barcelona.

Even as it is experiencing its own explosive growth, AppRiver is working alongside other local companies and organizations to expand the area's technology footprint.

*Contributed content: Teresa Zwierzchowski, Media Relations & Content Specialist for AppRiver and Tom St. Myer, Communications Director for the University of West Florida Center for Cybersecurity*

## WHERE WE ARE

Along with AppRiver, companies like Avalex, TechSoft, Hixardt, Navy Federal, Metova CyberCENTS, CSRA, Bit-Wizards, IRIS, Digital Boardwalk and other non-profit organizations such as IHMC, FloridaWest, The Studer Community Institute and IT Gulf Coast have helped establish a tech foothold in the region, but all agree there is still much to be done to continue developing that landscape.

"All of us realize we're stronger together," said Michael Murdoch, AppRiver president and CEO. "We have a compelling story to tell, as individual companies and as a region. That story gets better with each new technology degree awarded by our universities, each new job created in the technology field, each new innovation, and each new dollar invested by technology and knowledge-based companies in the area."

Scott Luth, executive director of FloridaWest, said, "I really see Pensacola as becoming the Cyber Coast, a tech hub where people want to live and work. FloridaWest has a mission of creating wealth for Escambia County and greater Pensacola, and our tech and cyber related industries are extremely important to that. We have witnessed significant growth over the past ten years in this sector, and moving forward Pensacola will be able to position itself to be a leader in tech, innovation and cyber."

Our region's burgeoning tech and cyber industry may be further enabled through projects potentially funded through Triumph Gulf Coast allocations of the \$1.5 billion BP 2010 oil settlement expected to spawn economic growth across eight Panhandle counties affected by the spill. Don Gaetz, Triumph board vice chair, and former Florida Senate president believes that economic diversification is vital for Triumph funding to be successful and a focus on innovative sectors such as advanced research, technology, mid-tech or high-tech manufacturing, as well as cybersecurity is needed.

"My idea in developing the legislation was to put a third leg under the stool of Florida's regional economy (beyond military related economy projects) so we control, to some extent, our own fate by supporting high-growth projects that provide a strong return on investment to our region." Gaetz said.

Toward that end, Escambia and Santa Rosa counties are moving to capitalize on progress and growth.

"Over the past 15 years, Santa Rosa County has continued to grow at a rapid pace, the county is experiencing growth like never before," said Shannon Ogle-

tree, director of economic development for Santa Rosa County. "In the past, less focus was put on start-ups and the infrastructure needed to support their needs. I want to continue to have a focus on those start-ups by hosting seminars/events that cater toward that crowd."

Ogletree also noted it is important for the area to offer environments in which businesses can grow and thrive.

"For tech companies – more so than any other sector, talent is the No. 1 driver. It is important for us not to only offer a suitable business environment for those companies to thrive, but also offer a vibrant, eclectic community where the employees feel like they belong to the area to become one with Santa Rosa," he said. "We are continuing to build the (quality of life) environment that employees/owners want to be in while working for 'hot' tech companies."

Escambia County Commissioner Doug Underhill also sees the opportunity our region has to grow the tech industry.

"We have the opportunity to be on the forefront and move our area more toward a tech world. With what our military is doing and what UWF's Center for Cybersecurity is doing and with what grassroots efforts are doing – we can make a difference," Underhill said. "We, the nerds, have to take charge and change the dialogue. We have to stand up and show that growing our cyber future is important."

With the future in mind, organizations such as Innovation Coast, FloridaWest and IT Gulf Coast are working to grow the technological landscape in this area and lure companies and bring jobs. They also are working to develop a pipeline of education to help fill those prospective jobs with local talent.

FloridaWest aims to maximize the potential of Northwest Florida through economic development, initiatives, programs and services aimed at attracting and recruiting new businesses, retaining and expanding existing businesses, developing and training our workforce, nurturing the global contributions of local entrepreneurs, and developing our community and assets to position our area as a rich and fertile location for growth- be it individual, community, or corporate.

IT Gulf Coast's primary focus also is to foster the growth of the tech industry and entrepreneurship in the area by creating educational and networking opportunities for its membership. One such company, Metova CyberCENTS has a long history of providing cyber research, design, engineering, exercise planning along with producing the state-of-the-art



cyber range environments used for training, experimentation, mission rehearsal, test and evaluation and exercises. Drawn to the Gulf Coast because of its rich history for cyber, innovation and training, Metova is focused on shaping the future of cyber professionals.

The two groups collaborate each year to sponsor ITEN WIRED.

The event, which takes place Oct. 9-11 on Pensacola Beach, aims to provide networking and learning opportunities for executives, entrepreneurs, technology and academia to foster local economic development efforts surrounding innovation, tech and entrepreneurship.

## CREATING CONNECTIONS FOR GROWTH

In April, Innovation Coast – a consortium of local technology and knowledge-based companies – hosted its second Innovation Awards business plan competition. More than 60 companies competed for over \$250,000 in cash and prizes in four categories: post-revenue, pre-revenue, veteran-owned, and student-owned companies.

The competition was part of the organization's commitment to showcase and grow the region's innovation economy, including its technology sector. Another goal was to attract investment capital to the area to help fledgling companies take the next step.

Notably, the 2014 Innovation Awards top prize winner – Intelligent Retinal Imaging Systems (IRIS) – just celebrated its first appearance on the 2017 Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing companies. The other local business featured on the list – AppRiver, a founding member of Innovation Coast – was honored for the 11th time.

Florida's existing technology infrastructure – 27,000 high-tech companies call Florida home – make it the #1 state



for high-tech employment in the Southeast.

"We have good reason to be optimistic about the technology outlook," says Andrea Moore, regional manager for international trade and ICT specialist for Enterprise Florida, the state's economic development agency. "Currently more than 237,000 employees in the state's tech industry and we're ranked #3 nationwide for high-tech employment growth, according to COMP-TIA. Of course, it's very competitive setting and it order to remain competitive, it is critical that we nurture our existing tech ecosystem and add to it with a steady pool of skilled technicians and STEM graduates."

## EDUCATION IS KEY TO FLORIDA'S TECH FUTURE

Education and creating a pipeline of talent from both counties is the key to continued growth and success of the cyber and technology industry from the university level down to secondary education.

Officials in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties are working with schools to help foster that growth.

“Santa Rosa County is working with the school district to develop IT/Cyber curriculum that will help develop a pipeline of talent as well as a feeder for post-secondary education units for current companies within the county as well as those to come,” Ogletree said.

In Escambia County, Underhill wants to invest more in reaching children in low-income areas and provide better access to technology as well as more technical skills.

“If we can push into these areas, we hopefully can educate these children and help pull them out of the cycle (of poverty). We could see them coming back to our area to help their families and give back to the community, that is when we would start to see a change the landscape,” he said.

The counties are not the only ones who see the importance of reaching the next generation.

Sena Maddison, director of communications for FloridaWest, says the organization is working with local educators to help build talent.

“We are working with the Escambia County School District, UWF, PSC and George Stone Technical Center to build in enrollment in our area IT and Cybersecurity Career Academies and to ensure that we have a robust workforce pipeline in those industries.” Maddison said. “FloridaWest is devoted to supporting the tech industry of today and building the tech workforce of tomorrow.”

IT Gulf Coast provides \$10,000 in support for our community STEM programs and provide computer science scholarships to the University of West Florida as well as offer events to help educate the IT community, according to IT Gulf Coast director Sean O’Brien.

“We are a co-sponsor of ITEN WIRED, and as such distribute all funds left after expenses to scholarships and STEM sponsorships/events,” he said. “We also host monthly ‘lunch and learns’ where we bring in speakers from around the country to present on various topics of interest to the local IT community.”

O’Brien also hosts a regional CIO Roundtable group that meets several times a year to share ideas, discuss the IT marketplace as well as trends in technology, challenges, successes and more.

“One topic that dominates our discussions is the shortage of talent in the region and the business and economic impact of that reality on the region,” he said. “That issue has sparked IT Gulf Coast to host periodic job fairs, encourage various partnerships to develop the local talent pipeline, and sponsor cyber competitions/IT events in the area that

draw IT professionals and students from outside the area.”

Additionally, for ITEN WIRED, New Horizons Computer Learning Center is giving away two scholarships for Network Security and Server Administrator. New Horizons specializes in a “fast track” to an IT Career.

“Everyone from High School graduates to people looking for a career change can gain certifications and a start to an IT profession,” said New Horizons Center Regional Director, Laura Campbell. “The fact is, that the barriers to entry fall away as you gain certifications, and companies are looking for those certifications on your resume, sometimes even before the four-year degree.”

### CYBER COAST

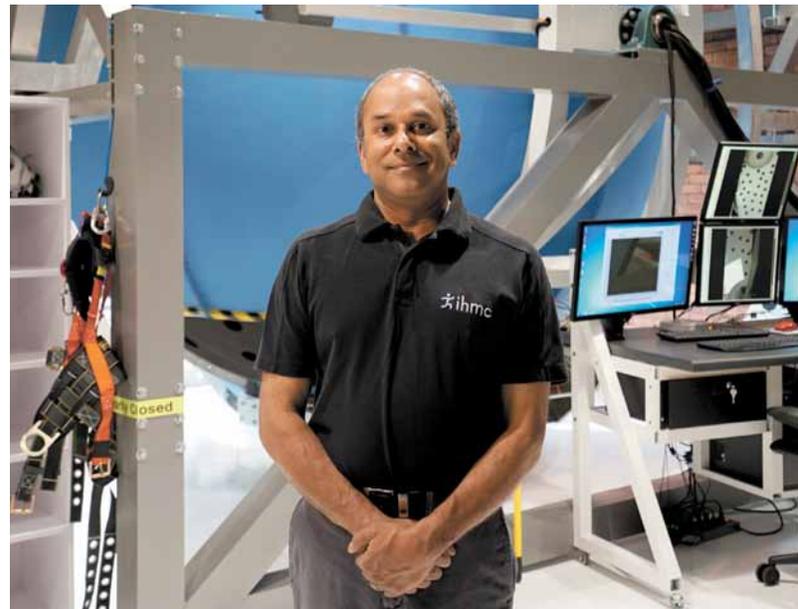
The University of West Florida has gone all in with a huge push to make the region the Cyber Coast. With the creation of its Center for Cybersecurity, multidisciplinary cybersecurity programs, cutting edge research and facilities, and prestigious designation as the National Security Agency / Department of Homeland Security National Center of Academic Excellence Regional Resource Center for the Southeast US, the University is leading efforts to expand cybersecurity education and industries in our region. One example is the teaming between UWF Center for Cybersecurity and Metova CyberCENTS to create the Florida Cyber Range and bolster cyber capabilities along the Gulf Coast and beyond.

In a recent guest column to local media, UWF President Martha Saunders said she is hoping to create an “economic cluster around cybersecurity.”

“Nationally and regionally, the demand for cybersecurity workers stays high. A national information security advocacy group, ISACA, estimates that in 2019 there will be a global shortage of 2 million cybersecurity professionals,” she wrote. “About 40,000 jobs for information security analysts go unfilled in the U.S. every year. In Florida, more than 15,000 cybersecurity positions go unfilled.”

And that need will continue to grow.

FloridaWest is currently working with area experts to produce a community strategic plan for growing the cybersecurity industry in Greater Pensacola – Escambia County. The strategy will identify best practices and a path forward for building the Cyber Coast. The overarching goal is to develop a shared regional cybersecurity vision and plan for Northwest Florida, identify and focus policy, planning, and program offerings, and



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develop appropriate and relevant recommendations that will enhance economic development and establish Northwest Florida as a leader in cybersecurity.

### NORTHWEST FLORIDA: THE NEXT CYBER AND TECH HUB

With all the initiatives and energy behind this movement, it’s easy to see why locals are invested in making it happen.

Jay Smith, Founder of Data Revolution, sees Pensacola becoming a place for tech innovation. “I picked this area because I love it,” Smith said. “I know that we are on the verge of becoming a technology area, and I want to be a part of Job growth and local talent pool development.”

Vickie Patterson, a tech industry veteran for over 20 years, IBM technology executive leader and native Pensacolian recently started Invictus Knowledge Institute (IKI). IKI is a non-profit advanced technology training, research and development organization, which provides individuals with access to high-tech, fast track training boot camps, hands-on technology project work. IKI was one of the 2017 Innovation Awards winners in the veteran’s category.

“After living and growing my tech career in Austin for the past 20+ years, I can state with confidence that tech growth in Pensacola is happening with very similar patterns of which I’ve witnessed in Austin. The current local tech talent and leadership, the support for tech growth, and tech education, are all exponentially better than where Pensacola was 10+ years ago. With that said, I strongly feel there is HUGE potential for “insourcing” tech talent needs from

individuals along the Gulf Coast. We just need to be smart, learn from other tech talent strong-hold cities and seek opportunities for educating, training and employing the regions’ intelligent, hardworking people who love the area as much as any of us die-hard native Pensacolians,” Patterson said.

ITEN WIRED Marketing Chair, Beth McClean said, “I love being an ambassador in promoting all the spark in tech, cyber and innovation in our local area. I grew up here and believe in giving back to a community and an industry that has been so vital to me and my family in growth, prosperity and job-security.”

It is very encouraging to see so many pockets of excellence, all of which are striving to connect the dots and leverage our existing tech prowess,” said Andrea Moore Regional Manager, International Trade & ICT Industry Specialist for Enterprise Florida

Is Northwest Florida poised to be the next tech and cyber mecca? Passionate about economic development and entrepreneurship in Pensacola, Bill Wein, CEO of IMS Expert Services serves on several boards, including Innovation Coast, Pensacola State Board of Governors, and Summit Bank believes so.

“All of our tech, knowledge and cyber ventures coming together is a perfect storm of opportunity especially when you bring the startup and entrepreneurial spirit into the spectrum,” Wein said. “When you consider the growth potential of our region, it’s easy to see how soon this could happen for us.”

# THE NEW R&D DEPARTMENT:

## VENTURE CAPITALISTS AND START UPS

By Tanner Yea

*Technology has been constantly evolving over the past few decades. Not just with the miniaturization of hardware, constant interconnectivity and virtual reality, but also on a level of how technology operates as a business. The development houses and research departments of major companies have taken a backseat, with tech startups and their venture capitalist benefactors taking center stage.*

Venture capitalists are any kind of person or company who is willing to invest money – or capital – in smaller companies who would not normally have access to bigger markets. They invest because these small companies can offer massive returns with only a small amount of risk. Companies like Facebook, Twitter, PayPal and Uber all started as tech startups and found their success through outside sources.

In recent years, Pensacola has seen extensive economic growth, and along with that, an increase in tech startups and consumer interest. Places like Appriver and Robotics Unlimited have seen success with the aid of local entrepreneurs and angel investors who see potential in our Gulf Coast tech sector.

Vernon Niven is a local entrepreneur, marking technologist, and one of the angel investors leading the forefront of this funding. Niven has spent his life in and around technology, starting off by using IT to improve large business processes in the late 90s, eventually transferring

to Silicon Valley in 1999 to join a company that was acquired in 2001 for \$9 billion dollars. He took his stock option and retired to Pensacola Beach in 2001 at the age of 37, where he now lives while he invests, advises and starts new online services and software businesses.

“I prefer investing in companies and teams that exhibit four traits,” said Niven. “First is a really big market; it has to be easy for me to see that the winner of the market they are chasing will eventually be worth \$1 billion or more. Second is proof of real, paying demand for their new product or service. Third is an experienced and gritty team. Finally, the business is an online service, SaaS business or a software/AI company—because that’s what I know best.”

Niven has helped launch adtech company Tumri in 2004, which developed an online display ad that follows users across pages and advertises based on personal preferences. In 2010, he invested in The Ellerdale Group, a data-mining startup which was eventually acquired

by Flipboard—the current most successful news aggregator app in the world.

“From an investor point of view, tech drives most economic growth today. You need to go where the growth is if you want to make any money,” said Niven. “From a personal point of view, tech companies exist to solve important problems for people in innovative ways. Maybe it’s the engineer in me, but I have always loved the challenge of solving a difficult problem for someone else.”

Steve Millaway is another angel investor out of Panama City, and the CEO of TechFarms – a tech incubator that offers equipment and office space to upcoming startups. Though Millaway grew up in Panama City, he had to move to Arizona to pursue a tech career. He eventually moved back in 2007 in hopes of creating a

military and tourism sectors,” said Millaway. “We are spending all this time educating people for other cities like Atlanta or Austin, and it’s a crime.”

Millaway is also developing TechFarms Capital, an angel investment fund focused on providing investments in startups in Florida, Alabama and Georgia. He said funding these startups will lure bigger companies to the Gulf Coast area, but we simply don’t have the workforce to support those larger corporations. Millaway said it is critical these start ups are funded to produce the needed workforce.

Innovation Coast takes a slightly different direction in terms of investment. Though they do focus on supporting startups and larger businesses, the Innovation Coast Awards are a yearly competition the group holds to provide up to



*Inside TechFarms, Steve Millaway (standing) gives a presentation to the Pensacola members of the Entrepreneurial Support Coalition, which is now part of the Northwest Florida Forward initiative.*

place where tech startups along the Gulf Coast can flourish.

“I’d say we are in year two of a 20 year period to fully develop a tech sector where it can rival our

\$100,000 in prizes for burgeoning companies. They recently held 2017’s ceremony and awarded 12 companies with various funds.

These companies include projects



*Hardware and software developed by IRIS helps detect early signs of diabetes-related vision loss, allowing effective treatment before it progresses.*

like NumNum, an emerging baby brand; NeuBev, which has developed an eco-friendly smart water cooler; and Mine Survival, Inc, a company that manufactures respiratory escape systems. The winner for the year was Pensacola Bay Oyster Co., which is using the funds to expand oyster hatcheries that not only provide oysters as food, but help regulate the environment.

Another recipient of this year's Innovation Coast Awards is Lloyd Reshard, CEO of local tech startup Cognitive Big Data Systems, a retired Air Force engineer who formed Cognitive Big Data Systems as a way to make artificial intelligence systems more available for general use. The company is currently working on a computer vision app that uses machine learning to monitor security cameras. This project netted them over \$25,000 in funding from the Innovation Coast Awards, and also served as the second award they've received.

"Most cities have a startup entrepreneurial ecosystem. They have programs to help and guide companies through the idea, launch and growth stage," said Reshard. "Pensacola has a program shortage in the idea stage, so they can't teach new start ups the best practices for running a business. Programs like the Innovation Coast Awards have been able to

address some of those issues."

Reshard believes that most cities across the country are using startups for economic development, and focusing their attention on these smaller companies to innovate more quickly and solve problems.

Larger corporations still do their own in-house research, but they network and expand their views with startups.

"Solutions are moving at such a high pace, that startups can do agile development," said Niels Andersen, the President & CEO of KontaktIntelligence, a medical software development company in Pensacola. "You can wake up with an idea on a Saturday, and a few months later you can have a business plan and a working prototype."

Andersen, along with Ryan Tilley—the COO of VetCV, Inc.—recently finalized a funding agreement from the Florida Institute in order to fully develop the VetCV application. Designed to serve as an online tool for veterans to track their records, assets, careers and more, the app was developed at the Florida Institute for Human Machine and Cognition—a tech incubator powered by public funds.

"A lot of young talent is staying here or coming back," said Tilley. "They find a community with a lot of acumen, access to capital and a desire to help. There are a lot of

us here that are older and willing to give time and energy to help out young people figure out the business side of things."

Jason Crawford is one such talent, forming Intelligent Retinal Imaging Systems, Inc. (or IRIS) in 2011 and recently securing further financing from investors such as Ballast Point Ventures from Tampa and CoxHealth from Springfield, Missouri. Their company has also been recognized in the Inc 5000 fastest growing companies in the country.

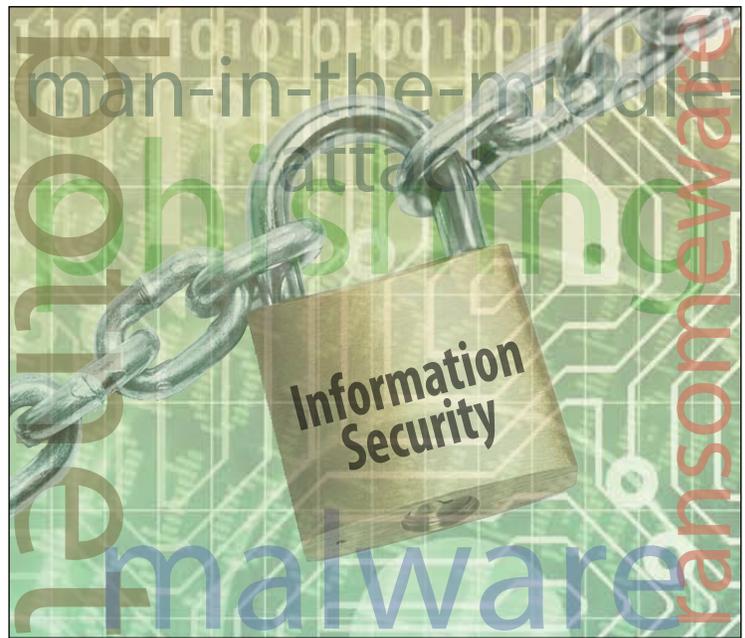
IRIS develops software and hardware meant to detect and diagnose diabetic retinopathy – the degradation of sight as a result of diabetes. In the last four years, their technology has examined over 200,000 patients – with one-out-of-seven of them having treatable eye disease they had no idea they had.

"I think entrepreneurship is up, and the ability to start a company has also become easier due to cloud computing. I started a company without a server, only using the Microsoft Cloud, and it

saved me time and money," said Crawford. "Innovation is able to happen much quicker with small companies, but the problem is these companies need capital to grow. Venture capital groups and angel investors are a good way to fund that."

Crawford said that there is a small but collaborative tech community burgeoning in Pensacola, as public institutions like Florida West and UWF contribute, and industrialist entrepreneurs like Bill Wein, Mike Murdoch and Quint Studer lend a hand.

Both venture capitalists and the startups they fund are looking towards a bright future where Pensacola and the Gulf Coast region stand out among places like Atlanta, Austin and San Francisco as a center of tech industry. They all have vision, drive and the experience to put Pensacola firmly on the cutting edge of what is new and innovative. ■



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# WHITE HELPS CREATE TECH CAUCUS TO EDUCATE STATE LAWMAKERS

By Duwayne  
Escobedo

*State Representative Frank White noticed that new innovations and technologies entered many of the most controversial debates in the Florida House during his freshman year as a state representative for District 2.*

**W**hite also had many conversations about technology with other state lawmakers in Tallahassee. How should Florida regulate Uber drivers? What about people who rent rooms in their house to people on vacation? How will 5G wireless technology affect cities?

Those are just a few technology challenges the Pensacola Republican said he and his colleagues had to confront during the past legislative session.

He decided state lawmakers would find an informal Florida Tech Caucus helpful in educating members, so they could craft legislation that makes sense in handling a flood of technology issues now and in the future.

“I saw a need in some debates where our membership really could have used a background and understanding of new technologies,” said the 38-year-old White. “A small handful of us have a passion for technology and public policy. I see it being a central place, a hub, when we face a bill related to technology.”

White said technology became a hobby for him. As an attorney he looked at document automation and read technologists focused on legal issues. Working with the Sandy Sansing car dealerships, he studied how machines affect almost everything car makers do.

“I got interested in seeing how technology was changing whatever role I was in,” said the curious-minded White. “Technology is having a positive impact.”

White said he envisions the fledgling caucus becoming critical to ensuring Florida remains a friendly place for innovation and technology businesses.

“We are the third largest state in the country and we are an influential state,” he said. “This is the place where all the debates tend to happen. It makes sense Florida steps out in front of it.”

Already, California, Texas and Massachusetts have active existing technology caucuses, said White, who has worked on technology issues as an attorney.

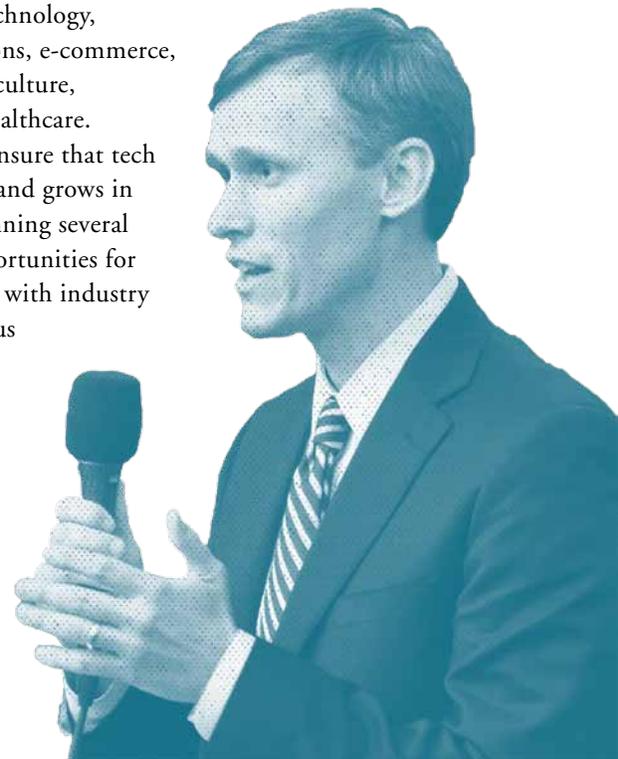
State Rep. Jamie Grant, R-Tampa Bay, one of the Tech Caucus founders, said the group has been formed just in time with issues like autonomous cars, artificial intelligence and electronic wills quickly advancing. He credited White for his leadership on the initiative.

“We are seeing the continued emergence of technology in every sector of every industry that we regulate,” Grant said. “If we don’t have an intelligent, strategic approach for this, I don’t know how we can continue to grow Florida’s economy.”

The technology industry in Florida is a key driver in the state’s economy, employing hundreds of thousands of Floridians. Florida companies are leaders in information technology, biotechnology, telecommunications, e-commerce, clean energy, agriculture, education, and healthcare.

White said to ensure that tech innovation starts and grows in Florida, he is planning several Tech Caucus opportunities for lawmakers to talk with industry leaders. The caucus

*“We can prepare ourselves to meet these policy challenges through **education and awareness** of emerging technologies...”*  
– Frank White



operates as a non-political, bipartisan group of lawmakers who that do not participate in any political campaign activity.

White, State Rep. Nicholas Duran, D-Miami, and Florida Sen. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, have worked together to develop the Tech Caucus and schedule future events.

Adam Thierer, a research fellow with the Technology Policy Program at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, is scheduled Oct. 11 in Tallahassee to make the case for permissionless innovation, which he wrote a book on. Permissionless innovation means innovators will not be forced to constantly seek the blessing of public officials before they develop and deploy new devices and services.

Thierer will raise questions, about whether innovators should have to obtain a permission slip from government before they create something. What if the product has the potential to cause harm in some unexpected way? What if it conflicts with cultural norms or traditions? Should policymakers follow permissionless innovation or the precautionary principle, where innovation is restricted because its effects are disputed or unknown?

White said it's imperative that legislators are prepared to answer these questions with sound, consistent policy.

"We can prepare ourselves to meet these policy challenges through education and awareness of emerging technologies," White said.

The Tech Caucus provides opportunities for education and open dialogue between industry leaders, educators, members, and staff on how we can advance innovation in the state.

In June, several lawmakers attended an eGov Summit in Miami as part of the Tech Caucus. The summit brought together government officials, urban planners, and others to discuss how to turn their urban communities into smart cities through innovative technologies.

White also foresees technology helping the state deliver services in criminal justice, education and health and human services. Large banks of data could identify families under severe stress and allow government services to step in and help.

"There's a fiscal case for it and a moral case for it," said White.

Grant is one of the founders of CareSync, which combines technology and exceptional services to help people better coordinate their healthcare.

He likes the direction the Tech Caucus is headed and envisions its numbers and influence growing in the near future.

"It's like anything else. You can't snap your fingers and have something," Grant said. "We have to stay diligent and recruit candidates (to the Tech Caucus) who understand the importance of technology. We need to get more people involved in the process and facilitate technology in positive ways." ■



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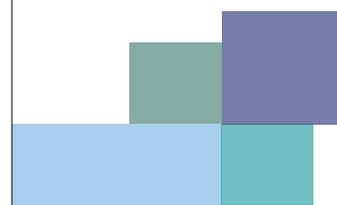
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# ITEN WIRED:

## *The Little Tech Conference That Could*

By Jim Rhodes,  
ITEN WIRED Planning  
Committee Director

Photos by Barrett McClean

*All the buzz heard on Pensacola Beach each fall revolves around the ITEN WIRED Summit that attracts hundreds of technology professionals, entrepreneurs, educators and students to the Hilton.*

*ITEN (Innovation Technology Entrepreneur Network) began nine*

*years ago as a Pensacola Chamber event. Walton, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Escambia, and Baldwin counties took turns hosting it each quarter. It was a happy coincidence that the venues lined the I-10 corridor, leading many people to think that's how the organization got its name. »*

## Why do you participate in ITEN WIRED?

We asked members of the ITEN WIRED Planning Committee why they support this innovation and technology champion for the Gulf Coast region. Read their candid responses below.

### JAY SMITH, DATA REVOLUTION

I participate in ITEN WIRED each year because I believe very strongly in its mission. This is the premier organization locally that merges what employers want with what our students learn. We continue to fulfill that mission better and better each year. ITEN WIRED is a huge part of getting everyone together on education awareness.

### KELLY REESER, FLORIDAWEST

As the ITEN Programming Committee chairwoman, I have the privilege of working with innovative tech companies. I assist them through our incubation program - Co:Lab Pensacola. I hear daily from entrepreneurs about their needs and get to work toward finding a solution of how our community can collaborate to meet their needs. Northwest Florida has lots of potential to grow its technology sector. ITEN WIRED brings all of our tech players together to share ideas, make connections, and provide space that allows even more growth to happen.

### BETH MCCLEAN, APPRIVER/ITEN WIRED MARKETING CHAIR

Being a West Pensacola native, I've been fortunate to work at two Inc 5000 companies locally - IMS Expert Services and AppRiver. I used what I learned as the volunteer marketing chair for ITEN WIRED because I truly believe in advocating for more innovation and tech in this region. More importantly, I get to "geek out" with other techies and digital marketers for three days in October.

### SEAN O' BRIEN, CSRA

I participate in ITEN WIRED because as a Pensacola resident and IT professional I have significant interest in promoting the IT/Cyber industry in our area. IT/Cyber industry growth represents both a win for me personally, as well as economically for our region. ITEN WIRED is a significant contributor to marketing this area to the rest of the country.

The original concept was to create a forum for learning and network opportunities. IT and entrepreneurial leaders could take advantage of the summit to identify common struggles and brainstorm solutions to propel the innovation and technology industry forward.

A few years later, the summit began to lose momentum when the chamber employees who oversaw the event left. IT Gulf Coast members saw the potential of the summit and offered to co-host it with the chamber and to handle the programming. When the chamber spun off its tourism and economic development arms a few years later, FloridaWest took over and that partnership continues today.

I became involved with the ITEN planning team when I moved back to Pensacola from Charlotte, N.C. At that time, I was skeptical about finding employment in the IT field. When I left Pensacola in 1997, those jobs were mostly with the federal government and required security clearances I didn't have. I was fully prepared to turn the U-Haul around and head back to Charlotte if things didn't pan out. The first few weeks of job hunting didn't ease my fears. If the tech jobs were here, they were well hidden. However, I landed a rewarding AppRiver job, ending all my thoughts of retreat.

It struck me that the average person had not heard of innovative companies like AppRiver, CSC (now CSRA), Hixardt, or Avalex Technologies. They didn't know that the Navy's Center for Information Warfare Training was located right off New Warrington Road or that the Department of Homeland Security had a major presence here. They seemed unaware of the programs developed in local schools, colleges, and universities to build a talent pipeline to fill those high-paying tech jobs.

The burgeoning startup scene also received little attention. Great stories existed like Intelligent Retinal Imaging Systems (IRIS), Robotics Unlimited, and Accountingfly. They started to spread their wings at the Gulf Coast Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (now CO:lab). How could all of these exciting developments be virtually invisible to the general public?

When I assumed the role of ITEN planning director in 2013, I challenged the team to evolve the summit into an event that would bring visibility to these hidden assets and give people the opportunity to learn and speak with great thought leaders about current trends and issues facing the industry. The goal was to

have attendees leave excited and inspired about what we have going on. We wanted to keep pushing the envelope to take our innovation and technology scene to the next level.

Going into my fifth year of leading the team, I could not be more proud of what they have accomplished. The summit has grown from one day full of keynote speakers and breakout sessions to a three-day event that now includes a job fair, CIO roundtable, cyber competition, and many opportunities to network with peers, speakers and sponsors. Being able to find enough speakers and sponsors has stopped being a concern. Finding enough room for what we have planned and the number of people that will attend is our new challenge.

ITEN WIRED has grown into the "premier tech conference" for our region and I could not be more proud of what the planning team has accomplished. As one team member phrased it, ITEN WIRED has become "the little tech conference that could."

## SIGNS ABOUND OF MORE GREAT THINGS TO COME:

- Navy Federal building a huge operations center in Beulah that is estimated to create thousands of jobs.
- The National Flight Academy opened its doors to offer a truly unique STEM experience to middle and high school students.
- The Cyberthon competition, created by our local AFCEA chapter, became a huge success and continues to grow in size each year.
- Innovation Coast created a business plan competition for startups called the Innovation Awards and the first two installments have seen almost \$400,000 in cash given to its winners.
- The Center for Cybersecurity at UWF was created as a state-of-the-art facility and the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security has designated it as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education and as the CAE Regional Resource Center for the Southeast.
- The emergence of co-work spaces like cowork@nnex, Pensacola Socialdesk, and Workbase are indicators that start-ups have a strong presence in our area and their numbers continue to rise.
- In 2015, Studer Institute introduced EntreCon, an annual conference for local entrepreneurs and professionals to learn how to become great leaders, create engaging cultures, and grow their business.

# GEEKS ON THE BEACH

*In their second year, the Geeks have become ambassadors of not only ITEN WIRED but our Tech and Innovation community. Drawn from that community, this year they represent AppRiver, FloridaWest, VetCV, the Greater Pensacola Chamber and Apex Systems.*



**Ali Sontag:** After obtaining her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Florida, Ali relocated to the Gulf Breeze area to start a career in Recruiting and Human Resources. Since 2016 she has enjoyed working for AppRiver in HR as a Recruiting Coordinator. Every day her focus in this role is to grow and advance AppRiver's talent-base through talking and connecting with local job seekers in the IT industry. Tech talent management, career growth, and opportunity for the local area is what recruiting for AppRiver is all about! It is a fun and rewarding way to meet people across the Gulf Coast, and to help them find opportunities in the growing local tech market. When she's not recruiting, Ali enjoys teaching yoga in the local community and spending time at the beach with family and friends.

has been living in Pensacola, Florida since 2013. Our Marketing Coordinator played for the University of West Florida Men's Soccer Team for three years. At UWF, Bruno received his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with an emphasis in Marketing. Bruno also served as the UWF American Marketing Association president and worked as the Marketing Assistant for the UWF College of Business.



**Lindsay Money** is a native of Richmond, Virginia and a graduate of Longwood University, where she received her bachelor's degree in Business Management. Lindsay and her husband, an IT instructor aboard Information Warfare Training Command Corry Station, relocated to the Pensacola area in May 2015. Prior to moving to Pensacola, she worked for the Richmond Technology Council. In this position she handled events and sponsorships for technology community members, was the primary contact at the council, and was the lead contact for the largest Women in Technology conference in the Southeast. She is currently the Vice President of Membership and Operations for the Greater Pensacola Chamber of Commerce.



**Jim Rhodes** is a native of Pensacola and is a graduate of Tate High School and the University of West Florida, where he received his degree in finance. He moved to Charlotte, NC in 1997 with a goal of furthering his career in banking. He later discovered he had a passion for information technology. Upon graduation from ECPI College of Technology he entered into the world of IT in 2001 and worked several years as a network engineer. He relocated back to Pensacola and has been employed by AppRiver since 2008 where he manages the mobile solutions team, which provides mobile device support for a global customer base of almost 300,000 users.

He is actively involved in the Gulf Coast tech community because he believes in the region's potential to become a major hub of technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. He is in his fifth year as serving as the director for ITEN WIRED. He is also a member of the boards for IT Gulf Coast and Innovation Coast. Jim has been married for 22 years and has two sons. He enjoys playing golf, road biking, and fishing.



**Katie Hogan** serves as the business development intern at FloridaWest Economic Development Alliance. Throughout her internship, Katie has worked on many projects, enhancing and assisting FloridaWest's professional team in furthering economic development initiatives for the greater Pensacola/Escambia County, Florida area. Prior to joining FloridaWest, Katie attended the University of Southern Mississippi where she obtained her Bachelors degree in International Studies and Spanish before completing her Masters degree in Economic Development this August.



**Josh Flanders** grew up in Birmingham, AL and moved back after graduating from the University of Southern Mississippi. After moving back to Birmingham Josh began working with Apex Systems Inc. He started his career with Apex as a recruiter in Birmingham. He is now an Account Manager with Apex and has been working on the coast for close to a year now. He has recently

re-located down to Pensacola to support this market full time. What he enjoys most about his job is connecting local tech talent with local businesses in the Pensacola area. In Josh's free time he likes to fish, hike, sports, and anything competitive. Josh is excited to continue to be an active member of the tech field in the Pensacola area!



**Erik Petersen** is a former U.S. Navy sailor and originally from Western Massachusetts. This now Panhandle diehard is one of the main friendly, helpful voices for AppRiver end-user support. In his spare time, Erik enjoys sailing competitively and volunteering in the community. He is a catalyst for positive change by serving in organizations such as Gulf Breeze Toastmasters and Pensacola Young Professionals. Erik is an Inweekly Rising Star 2017 and the original Geek on the Beach est. 2016.



**Bruno Estrella:** The marketing guru, the Brazilian soccer star, and VetCV's creative man. Bruno is originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, but he

# Insights for defending your business

90% of cyberattacks begin with email<sup>1</sup>

“

You see it in the news, and we're hearing from clients, that business email hacks are increasingly commonplace. So it's important that businesses on the Gulf Coast are taking steps to strengthen processes and shore up potential vulnerabilities.

”

**Mark Bennett**  
Market Executive  
Bank of America Merrill Lynch  
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**Michele DuMond**  
Vice President  
Bank of America Merrill Lynch  
michele.dumond@baml.com



## RECOGNIZING AN ATTACK

Business email scams frequently attempt to trick an employee into sending funds via wire or ACH to a foreign bank, or launch malicious software that attacks your computer systems.

### Be on the watch for these three types of email fraud:

- Fake email coming from a company executive
- Fake invoice from a supplier whose email address is being spoofed
- Fake email from an attorney requesting funds or information about a deal



## HOW DATA GETS HELD HOSTAGE

Businesses are especially vulnerable to “ransomware,” a malicious software that can harm or disable their computer systems until a payoff is received. Ransomware works by tricking your employee into opening a fake email, and then opening a bogus link or attachment that infects your entire system and locks you out until a ransom is paid. Backing up data is a key defense against ransomware.



## BOLSTER YOUR DEFENSES

The best protection against business email fraud is to employ multiple lines of defense. While upgrading software and backing up data is critical, training employees to spot warning signs is the most important step.

### Empower your employees to:

- Be aware of urgent requests
- Never reply to, or open links/files within, suspicious or unknown emails
- Get two “okays” for transactions
- Alert your bank to unusual requests

[bofaml.com/fraudandcybersecurity](http://bofaml.com/fraudandcybersecurity)

<sup>1</sup> Zettner, Kim. “Hacker Lexicon: What is Phishing?” *Wired*, April 7, 2015. <sup>2</sup>FBI, June 2016. <https://www.ic3.gov/media/2016/160614.aspx>

# WOMEN IN CYBER

by Kelly Oden

**BY NOW, YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD THAT THE CYBERSECURITY INDUSTRY IS A HOT JOB MARKET, BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT RECENT STUDIES PREDICT A CYBER WORKFORCE SHORTFALL OF 1.8 MILLION BY 2018?**

*This lack of talent creates big increases in wages, so one would think more young people would choose a security path in their education programs. Many are, but one demographic is conspicuously absent from the cybersecurity sector: women. A recent study by the Center for Cyber Safety and Education found that only 11 percent of cybersecurity professionals are women. In contrast, 52 percent of millennial women hold a degree in computer science, so it's not an absence from technology in general, just the security sector. Lucky for us, the Gulf Coast region is home to a number of female cybersecurity professionals—many of whom are CEO's, presidents, executives and directors. We spoke with five of these incredible women to get their views on the industry—both locally and nationally—and to find out how our community can prepare for the security needs of the future. »*



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**Dr. Eman El-Sheikh**  
 Director, Center for Cybersecurity,  
 University of West Florida

*Dr. Eman El-Sheikh is Director of the Center for Cybersecurity and Professor of Computer Science at the University of West Florida. Eman has extensive expertise in cybersecurity education and workforce development and has received several awards related to cybersecurity education and diversity. She leads UWF's efforts as the National Security Agency (NSA)/Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Center of Academic Excellence Regional Resource Center for the Southeast U.S. and has received several grants to enhance cybersecurity education and training for K12, college and non-traditional students that emphasize increasing the participation of women and underrepresented groups in cybersecurity. Eman received her MSc and Ph.D. in Computer Science from Michigan State University and her research expertise is in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.*

**How did you get involved in the cybersecurity industry and what is your focus?**

I've always been interested in solving problems and helping others. Cybersecurity attracted me because of the emerging needs at UWF and in our region. We are working on strengthening Pensacola's cybersecurity community by expanding interest and skills in cybersecurity, preparing students for successful careers and supporting our growing cybersecurity

industry. In addition to strengthening Pensacola's cybersecurity community, I am working to advance the field through research efforts. My current research focuses on how we can develop innovative cybersecurity defense tools using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning techniques. On a broader level, what motivated me to pursue higher education was the opportunity to help and inspire others. Having the opportunity to inspire students to find their passion and make a difference is very rewarding.

**From your perspective, describe the cybersecurity industry in the Northwest Florida region and tell me how you envision it changing over the next 10 years.**

The cybersecurity industry in Northwest Florida is booming. We have tremendous assets here. UWF was recently designated as a National Center of Academic Excellence (CAE) by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security. This year, UWF was named as one of six NSA/DHS Cybersecurity Regional Resource Centers across the nation with our goal being to advance cybersecurity education and workforce development. In addition, we have so many assets across the military, public and private sectors in our region that continue to grow. Pensacola is evolving into a strong cybersecurity community and the UWF Center for Cybersecurity has become the hub that helps bring it all together—to connect people and organizations, and develop innovative programs and pathways that advance the field and support the community. I think that the future is very bright for Florida's Cyber Coast.

**How much job demand is there locally for cybersecurity professionals? What factors will shape this demand in coming years?**

Cybersecurity impacts every person and organization, whether that involves keeping our mobile and Internet-connected devices secure or organizations that work to keep our financial and healthcare information secure. The job demand for cybersecurity professionals is huge across our region and national. Last year, there were over 200,000 unfilled jobs in the US according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Globally, we are looking at a shortage of approximately 2 million people by the year 2019 according to recent reports. That's how big of a deficit we have. Data released earlier this year from cyberseek.org showed over 1300 unfilled cybersecurity jobs right here in Northwest Florida and that our region's cybersecurity job growth rate is much higher than the national average. Northwest Florida is becoming a hotspot for cybersecurity and that is very promising for people considering careers in cybersecurity. There's job demand right here. They can find a rewarding job while helping to build our cyber community.

**What would you say to young women who are thinking about a career in cybersecurity or related fields? What's the best advice you could offer for success?**

Cybersecurity offers career pathways that cater to a

wide variety of interests, from coding and technology to communications and policy. Cybersecurity careers are very rewarding, with the potential to help others, make a difference in your community and ultimately help protect and defend our nation. Employers are looking for diverse professionals with communication, team work, time management and problem-solving skills. My advice to young women considering a career in cybersecurity is to try it. Get your feet wet. Try participating in a local cybersecurity competition, club or event. Be willing to learn and explore. Cybersecurity is a lot more fun than it may seem! My best advice for women to succeed in a cybersecurity career is to follow your passion and challenge yourself to reach higher. Don't be afraid to try new things or take risks. Learn from every experience and mentor. Take advantage of opportunities to step up and lead.

**Why do you believe diversity matters in the tech industry? Why is it important for more women and minorities to work in cybersecurity and related fields?**

Diversity is critical for so many reasons. We need innovation in cybersecurity. We need to stay ahead of the cyber attackers and hackers and maintain our national leadership in cybersecurity and cyber defense. True innovation requires diversity—diversity of thought, diversity of background, diversity of people. Diversity will help us continue to make advances in the field and grow the number of skilled professionals. We have to attract and recruit women, underrepresented groups and diverse students to increase the number of skilled cybersecurity professionals and keep up with the evolving needs. Some of our initiatives focus on increasing cybersecurity awareness and interest in our communities and schools—through community events and talks or camps for K12 students and teachers. We want to help women and underrepresented students, who may otherwise never consider cybersecurity, learn about proper cybersecurity practices and how rewarding cybersecurity careers can be.

**How important are mentors in the cybersecurity field?**

Mentors are vital for advancing and increasing expertise in the field. The technology, tools and methods used by cyber defenders and attackers continue to evolve. Mentors can share their expertise and insight to help students prepare for and succeed in a rapidly evolving field. Mentors are especially important for underrepresented groups such as women and minorities. We need more mentors to serve as role models and share their success stories as well as the challenges they faced and lessons they learned. The more we have mentors willing to share their stories and insight—from academia, industry and government—the more we are going to inspire and prepare future cybersecurity professionals and leaders.



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As the NSA-DHS CAE Regional Resource Center for the Southeast, UWF provides leadership to advance cyber defense education among colleges and universities in the Southeast.

Learn more at [uwf.edu/cybersecurity](http://uwf.edu/cybersecurity).



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