

## “Talent Lives Here” theme of coalition’s annual meeting

The 2021 FutureMakers Coalition Champions Meeting took place in person and virtually earlier this month. More than 70 people attended in person, while 111 participated via Zoom and 176 via Facebook.

The theme of this year’s meeting was “Talent Lives Here.”

The FutureMakers Coalition aims to transform Southwest Florida’s workforce by increasing the proportion of working age adults with college degrees, workforce certificates, industry certifications and other high-quality credentials to 55%. The coalition has grown to more than 140 cross-sector partner organizations and 250 FutureMakers representing business, education, government, nonprofits, philanthropy, residents and students across Glades, Hendry, Collier, Lee, and Charlotte counties.

Today, 41.5% of Southwest Floridians have the education and training that employers need, leaving good jobs unfilled every year.

The annual meeting was chaired by Michael Swindle, superintendent of Hendry County Schools, and attorney Indera DeMine of DeMine Immigration Law Firm.

Keynote speaker Gerri Moll, president of Bank of America Southwest Florida, announced a \$300,000 grant toward FutureMakers over the next three years that will allow the organization to build capacity and hire a manager and two college navigators.

Ms. Moll said the work that FutureMakers is doing is very personal for her.

“My mother’s education was interrupted when she gave birth to me in March of her junior year of high school. I vividly remember how hard it was for her working two jobs trying to take care of me as



COURTESY PHOTOS

The 2021 FutureMakers Coalition Champions Meeting took place at Collaboratory in Fort Myers.



Speakers at the meeting included Rob Shovlin of NeoGenomics, left, and keynote speaker Gerri Moll of Bank of America, right.

a baby, then toddler and later preschooler, while also trying to complete her degree,” she said. “I think often about how much it would have meant to our family to have the support and the resources that FutureMakers is offering.”

Rob Shovlin, advisor to the CEO of NeoGenomics, also made a call to action,



asking more Southwest Florida businesses to invest in FutureMakers Coalition’s work. Last year, NeoGenomics invested \$75,000 over three years to cultivate a partnership with the coalition.

FGCU President Mike Martin and FSW President Jeffery Allbritten discussed their “Return to the Nest” and

“Second Look” initiatives that offer personalized coaching, navigation and financial assistance for stop-out students to return to finish their degrees. According to data, Southwest Florida has 40,000 stop-outs, a captive audience who can finish what they started, fill in-demand jobs and become the qualified workforce we need.

Workforce Now, a research initiative that studies the regional workforce and education, gave an update to its Outcomes Report including where the region was before COVID-19 vs. now. Workforce Now is comprised of researchers from Florida Gulf Coast University, Hodges University and Florida SouthWestern State College, all FutureMakers Coalition partners. The full study can be downloaded at [www.fgcu.edu/wfn](http://www.fgcu.edu/wfn)

The Champions Team plays a pivotal role in the coalition’s success. Members include regional leaders who have the ability to create a stronger workforce and vibrant economy by improving cradle-to-career opportunities for students, offering job training and certifications, employee educational incentives and more.

FutureMakers Coalition has been designated a Talent Hub by Lumina Foundation in partnership with The Kresge Foundation to support local efforts to increase educational attainment. Formed in 2015 around existing regional collaborations, the coalition is committed to creating a cradle-to-career pathway to ensure success for traditional students and adult learners.

Learn more by visiting <https://www.futuremakerscoalition.com> or emailing Tessa LeSage at [tlesage@collaboratory.org](mailto:tlesage@collaboratory.org). ■