

Panama City

LIVING

A Portrait of the People



OUR
AREA'S **BIG**
THINKERS



BIG THINKERS BIG IDEAS

What some of Bay County's biggest thinkers have on their minds.

by Carole Lapensohn

Imagine Rodin's "The Thinker" – that renowned bronze and marble sculpture of a sitting man in deep meditation, his head resting on his right hand. Then imagine the thinker might be male or female and lives in Bay County. You'll have captured what Panama City Living magazine intends to do in this article. Although the people represented here aren't the only "Big Thinkers" in our community, we believe they represent many of the big ideas that keep Bay County thriving.



Bill Cramer

*Vice Chairman
Airport Authority*

Integrity, commitment, and loyalty define Bill Cramer—even more than his impressive academic and professional credentials, including his career as a very successful automobile dealer. He is the ultimate public citizen—a long-term former Chair of the Gulf Coast Community College District Board of Trustees, a current member of the GCCC Foundation Board of Directors, and Vice Chairman of the Bay County Airport Authority. Cramer is known for his deliberative approach to major issues. Foremost in his mind at this point is completing the new 4,000-acre airport in the West Bay area—the world's first green airport—and a planned aerropolis. This is a new concept developed by Dr. John Kasarda who has worked with the local Airport Authority to develop a plan involving aviation-intensive businesses and related enterprises, or an Airport City. Cramer believes the new "Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport" will be an economic engine "unique in our area." As the first new airport built post-9/11, it will feature the latest security equipment and practices and serve as a test facility for both the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) and the Department of Homeland Security. He adds that the location of the new airport surrounded by military bases and educational institutions creates a "synergy that provides for training, maintenance, and validation of systems." He says it also provides for planned growth to substantially boost the local economy through bringing in not only tourists but high tech, high paying industries for local citizens and, at the same time, preserve the environment.



Steve Johnson

*President and CEO
Bay Medical Center*

Steve Johnson feels strongly Bay Medical Center's responsibility to Bay County is integral. "Our investment in Bay County and Panama City is a show of faith we have in where we live." As judged one of the top 50 hospitals in the nation, Bay Medical is the pre-eminent health care provider in the county, Johnson says. "We care for all the people who need care but don't have enough money." He points out that 50 percent of those the hospital treats are Medicare patients, 15 percent Medicaid, 25 percent private insurance or managed care, and 10 percent charity—that's more than \$32 million in charity care. "Everything we do is shaped by regulation," he says, claiming health care is the most highly regulated industry in the nation. Johnson adds that the airline and banking industries might disagree. Bay Medical Center was originally built in 1949. Despite new additions, many parts of the original building continue in use. The newest addition, scheduled to hold its grand opening October 10, 2010, is a five-story patient care expansion, featuring 144 private rooms mandated by law for patient safety. These will be bed replacements, not adding beds to the hospital's current 323 beds, Johnson says. The hospital will also increase the capacity of the Intensive Care Unit, bringing the total number of beds in excess of 60 with the ability of dual swing beds. "This is a tremendous addition, not only to our enterprise, but to Panama City," he adds. "Just the economics of the construction process for the new Patient Tower expansion employs many local workers."



Janet Watermeier

*Executive Director
Economic Development Alliance*

Janet Watermeier believes global trade will bring Florida out of its economic difficulties. "Brazil will be our China," she says. "It's our number one trading partner." She points out that Northwest Florida offers the closest deep water ports to South America. Despite the ports available, the stabilizing influence of the military, and "the incredible, beautiful beach," it's been difficult and expensive to get here. "In economics, transportation is connecting." She credits the visionaries who have planned the new international airport "that will carry us 100 years toward the future." With the assets and potential, she believes the community must plan it and organize it. While Bay County proper has approximately 170,000 citizens, Watermeier draws an imaginary circle with a radius of 50 miles around the airport, making the number served increase to 330,000. With the port's leadership taking a realistic approach to where the port needs to be, well-coordinated rail service, and the new airport, she says the community will get a significantly larger portion of the economy. Southwest's direct flights to major cities will, she expects, double the existing \$2 billion/2 million guests tourist economy. The Orlando flight will bring the before and after Disney travelers; the Houston flight will open up the western part of the nation; and the Baltimore flight will make travel more affordable for defense contractors and open up more countries. "With 2,000 seats a day times 365 days a year, it's a significant number of people travelling here you've never had before." Watermeier says Bay County has a quality labor force and strong educational programs, but collaboration is critical to success. "We need to come together in one direction." She believes that the community has the leadership and the desire to bring good quality growth and good economic growth. With this community emerging from rural on the way to urban, she says the decisions made today will shape the future.



Lisa Walters

*Partner
Blue, Hutchison, Walters & Smith*

Lisa Walters is a pragmatic woman—bright, energetic, and committed to Bay County. Besides being a practicing attorney, she has found the time to serve on numerous boards that support the development of the community—chairing the Bay County Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Alliance, the Military Affairs Committee, and the School Readiness Coalition. She currently serves on the Port Authority board. She's especially proud of the opportunities Bay County offers. "We have so much here we need to take advantage of. We have an opportunity that no one else in the country has." She's excited by the possibilities the new airport will provide in growing existing businesses and bringing in new ones. "We have a whole new opportunity to make a first impression on so many people who don't know about Tyndall Air Force Base and the Naval Support Activity in Panama City; they don't know that we have a campus of a first tier research university here or a wonderful community college." She believes Bay County has the key to growing and attracting business. But she stresses that "As we look to the future, it's important to look at the past and the way we got to here." She mentions specifically Don Crisp and Carol Atkinson. Although the focus has been on what the airport is going to do for the tourism industry, "there's no one segment that's going to benefit—it extends to all our community. At the end of the day we're only as good as our community. If the community is not healthy, our businesses are not healthy, if the community is not strong, business will not be strong. I choose to spend my time being positive about Bay County."



Julie Hilton

*Executive Vice President
Hilton, Inc.*

Acknowledging current economic circumstances and the challenges ahead, Julie Hilton says "Individual relationships are critical, since tourism is our Number One private industry." An attorney who also served on the Federal Reserve Board, she sees a thriving tourism industry in the long term, despite significant economic and overbuilding issues. Hilton believes the hospitality industry will flourish by "working together to bring fun attractions and landscape enhancements and by being the "friendliest resort area in the universe." She adds, "If we're known as the friendliest place in the universe, we'd have no competition." Excited by the work of the CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency), she expects high returns in a street-side boardwalk, sidewalks for walking and biking, and activities to complement "our spectacular beaches, including trolley services"—when funding is available. "We need to spend within our limits," she cautions. At the same time, she believes that it's important to give guests what they want, not what the industry wants to give them. "With a clean, well-managed facility as the basis, you want people who've come here to feel good and we need to serve them, touching their hearts." She also stresses the importance of acknowledging that the beach can serve different market segments at different times. "We can be the best family resort for part of the year and still be recognized as a center for Spring Breakers to have safe fun, treating them with respect and expecting they will act as adults." She believes in being hard on the problems, but respectful of the people.



Felicia Cook

*Director of Marketing and Business Development
Pier Park*

Felicia Cook thinks outside the box. Maintaining she's not necessarily a creative thinker but rather an imaginative one, Cook says: "I don't like boxes and I learned by being a mom and a wife to think outside the box"—like painting a wall in her house a shiny white so her kids could paint on it with chocolate pudding, or giving them baths in macaroni or dried pumpkin seeds. Working at Pier Park, she likes "to imagine things then go to a creative person to think through how things can happen." Cook is proud to work for Simon Property Group because of its belief in the importance of teamwork and its commitment to children through the Simon Youth Foundation. She believes in the importance of partnering with charities. "We're here to assist them to meet the needs of all they serve." Pier Park helps charities with different events—179 separate events in 2009. She mentions specifically the Walk for Autism there, developed with attention to the needs of those with autism, setting and staffing boundaries, following the rules these students have learned. She stresses the importance of "bringing people together, providing a sense of community." Optimistic about the economy, she acknowledges that it's slowly turning positive. And, she is proud of the way mall staff members work together: "We all play team." Cook says "when you care about your people, you succeed." She closes with this thought: "The best big ideas are all about people."



Paul Wohlford

*Vice President of Marketing and Sales
The Resort Collection*

Paul Wohlford says he's a "21-year hotel guy," living for 10 years in Bay County and working for 3 as the Vice President of Sales and Marketing at The Resort Collection. He sees "lots of positive changes in the near future, even considering the excess of condos that supply a challenge to the hospitality industry with 88,000 units between Pensacola and Apalachicola and 28,000 units just in Bay County. He says he's thoroughly convinced that the new airport will bring in more tourists and that "the hospitality industry must work hard to extend our calendar and our clock, bringing in more activities and attractions," like the Songwriters' Festival and other signature events. "We can't sit back and watch and think this will happen. We'll solve our problems. We just have to roll up our sleeves and work." A major concern in making certain the people providing ground transportation from the airport to the beach serve as "concierges" to explain the opportunities, restaurants, shopping, and attractions available. The Tourist Development Council, Gulf Coast Community College, and the Airport Authority are working together to develop a certification for taxi and shuttle drivers. He says we'll likely see tourists spending less time here, coming in only for weekends, "but we'll see an increased frequency of stay." What's important, he says, is taking good care of guests. "We need to sell what the customer wants to buy." Because thinking things through is important in his fast-paced business, he encourages his staff to spend 20 to 30 minutes a day "just thinking."



Kimberly Moskowitz, MD

Cosmetic Vein & Laser Surgery

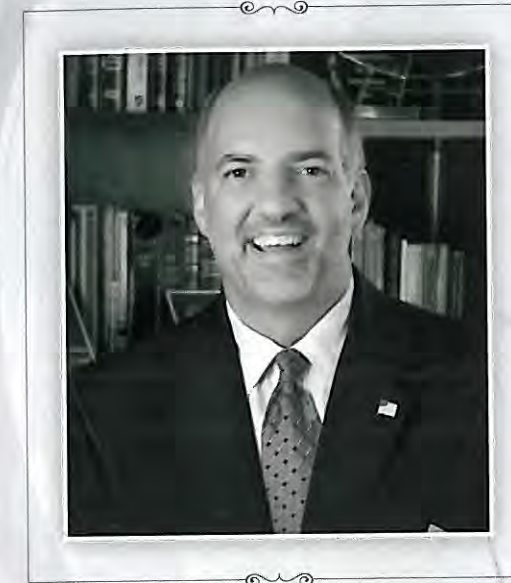
Kimberly Moskowitz focuses on fervor and compassion. She moved to Panama City five and a half years ago because it offered her a "wide open niche for someone with cutting edge credentials and experience." This Georgetown-educated physician hopes more and more people with "cosmopolitan backgrounds" will come here. "I think it's already happening," she says. "I also came here because I felt I could make a difference." She believes Bay County will eventually become medically "limitless and self-sufficient." What she means is that all of the sophisticated medical equipment that she now sends patients out of the community to use will be here—like the MRV, a multi-resonance venogram similar to the MRI that visualizes veins. Moskowitz is passionate about the nonsurgical procedure she uses on varicose veins. While some may consider treatment of varicose veins a "cosmetic" problem, she instead notes it is an unquestionable medical necessity because of the increased chance of blood clots and other serious medical problems. Moskowitz is also passionate about the way lasers have "revolutionized" medicine. And because she's board certified in skin and laser medicine, she's excited about Photo Dynamic Therapy (PDT) that can cure more than 80 percent of all pre-cancerous lesions without surgery as well as treat basal and squamous cell skin cancers. She believes the new airport "will allow everything to explode. I think we'll be on the map as a hub, a place you can get to easily." She's hoping for a whole new level of sophistication and advances in tourism and in medicine. "The airport will be one of the best things that will ever happen here," she adds. Bay County has what people in New York City, Washington, DC, and other large cities want to come to. "It's happening right before our eyes."



Jason Oakes

*Principal and Lead Commercial Broker
Counts Real Estate Group*

A native of Bay County, Jason Oakes grew up in the motel business, always knowing he'd end up in real estate. He's also ended up owning two motels, one on the beach and one in town. Although the real estate market has felt the impact of the recession, the real estate business he and Steve Counts have built leads the Bay County market on commercial sales, commercial leases, and a combination of all real estate sales and leases, according to the Market Penetration Data Report for 2009. Oakes credits the simplification of the beach development code for the building boom on the beach, believing that growth for Panama City will come with a simplified building code. He's always been "a producer, the guy who always makes it happen," he says. Although he expects "a rough year ahead" in real estate because of an approximate 30 percent vacancy rate at the beach and 25 percent in the city, he believes that Bay County is not as badly affected by a slow economy as larger metropolitan areas. Oakes thinks Southwest Airlines will add considerably to the economy in the next four to five years, especially the tourism economy, but believes new jobs are key to growing Bay County as a whole. He thinks the county is poised to grow with the military bracketing it, state parks surrounding it, plentiful fresh and salt water, beautiful beaches, and good schools. In short, Oakes expects his company to continue to grow, with both commercial and real estate sales and decisions made locally. "We see a lot of good things in the future," he says.



Steve Southerland II

*President
Southerland Family Funeral Homes*

Thinking conceptually is important to Steve Southerland, especially what he calls "integrated thinking." He believes Bay County will increasingly prosper as it blends the traditional ways of thinking with different thought processes brought to the county from across the nation and the world. He credits two books especially, *Blue Ocean* and *Trading Up*, for focusing his thoughts on creating new market space, "Blue Ocean," rather than competing in an existing industry, and also on the very real existence of those who are willing to pay for extraordinary products and services. He quotes a friend who once told him: "Best quality, best service, lowest price—pick any two." Southerland adds, "You can't have all three and still be profitable. We can't be all things to all people." That's why his family maintains "the high touch environment" for the traditional funeral home, but also offers less costly funeral services without the high touch. He says he's proud of the county's growth, believing there should be a conduit between the past and the future. The six values he says he lives by are respect, discipline, excellence, honesty, courage, and loyalty. He adds: "It's important to respect each other and to take the high road."