

Orlando Sentinel

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

What kinds of jobs?

By JEFF KUNERTH and DAN TRACY
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

Most experts think Central Florida tourism is a mature industry. That means the 1980s and '90s boom of carving new theme parks out of scrubland is unlikely to be repeated.

But because one in four jobs today is in the hospitality industry, tourism will remain dominant, even if — as expected — the region sees faster growth in smaller sectors such as high-tech, warehousing and light manufacturing.

Because those occupations typically pay better than tourism, wages should rise, increasing the community's affluence. "Twisting the mix" is the description offered by David Scott, an economist at the University of Central Florida.

The twist, in some ways, has begun. In 2000, the 85-year-old Akerman Senterfitt law firm created an "intellectual-property" practice to handle the patents being produced by Central Florida's high-tech companies and research facilities.

"When I think about our future, it lies in our education: the University of Central Florida, the simulation and high-tech industry we have here," said Akerman Chairman Tom Cardwell.

In Metro Orlando, high-tech jobs have risen by 8.1 percent since 2001 and are expected to increase by an additional 11.6 percent by 2010, according to the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. There are about 52,000 high-tech workers making an average salary of \$82,000 in Orange, Seminole, Osceola and Lake

PLEASE SEE **ORLANDO, A15**

counties.

Those high-tech jobs represent about 5 percent of the total work force, which places Metro Orlando in line with Los Angeles County, San Diego and Silicon Valley, said John Fremsted, the development commission's vice president of technology development.

But for every high-wage tech job the region and state gains, two low-wage service jobs are added.

The hospitality sector is growing so rapidly that even when you do well in another sector, it looks small by comparison," said Peter Panousis, head of the Institute for Economic Competitiveness at UCF.

The tug between tourism and nontourism employment reflects the split personality that has been part of Orlando since the arrival of Walt Disney World in 1971. It's two cities in one, often at odds with each other about the future of Central Florida.

(An excerpt from a more lengthily article.)