



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Contacts:** Francesca Donlan or Lee Rose 239-338-3500

# **VCB breaks tax collection record for fourth consecutive year** *Lee County tourism continues to be lifeblood of local economy*

LEE COUNTY, FL – The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), representing The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel in southwest Florida, today reported record-breaking tax collections for the fourth year in a row, with \$33 million in tourist tax on paid accommodations for fiscal year 2013-2014, which ended Sept. 30.

The new record is a 16.5 percent increase over last year's record-breaking \$28.6 million in collections.

“This is the largest increase we’ve ever seen in any given year,” said VCB Executive Director Tamara Pigott. “The combination of savvy industry partners and additional marketing dollars are paying off.”

The VCB also reported positive results for other key tourism performance indicators for the destination. Visitation increased 3.4 percent from fiscal year 2013-2014 and average occupancy jumped by 3.5 percent. Similarly, the average daily room rate climbed 7.1 percent.

In addition to the record-breaking numbers for the VCB's fiscal year, the calendar year visitor statistics were favorable. From January through September 2014, visitation rose 3.2 percent, and average occupancy climbed 3 percent. Expenditures were up 2.4 percent, with visitors spending \$2.2 billion in Lee County so far this year.

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“Our bed tax numbers wouldn’t be so strong without the support of the Tourist Development Council, county commission and county administration that had the great foresight to approve reinvestment of last year’s revenue increase to sustain this growth,” Pigott said. “I’m also proud of the VCB team, which continues to push the envelope with innovative ideas and tremendous effort.”

In Lee County, tourism employs one out of every five people. Approximately 4.8 million visitors arrive every year and generate approximately \$2.8 billion in economic impact.

Pigott said the VCB remains committed to serving the broader interests of Lee County’s economy by acting as an industry leader to market the entire area globally, facilitate travel to the destination, and preserve and protect the area’s unique natural assets for the continual benefit of its residents and visitors.

Tourist tax revenue – also known as the bed tax – funds three countywide functions: destination marketing; beach and shoreline renourishment, maintenance and enhancement projects; and stadium debt service and major maintenance for Lee County’s spring training facilities. The countywide tax is authorized by Florida Statute 125.0104 to increase tourist-related business activities in Lee County.

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande and Outer islands, North Fort Myers, and Lehigh Acres.*

