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Tampa Chamber Delegation Returns from Historic Trip to Cuba

Trip reconnects historic US gateway to Cuba

Tampa, Fla. – A delegation of members of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce took a historic experiential learning trip to Cuba from May 29 – June 2. The delegation returned with a renewed perspective on living and economic conditions in Cuba with their sights on continuing the discussion on how best to pursue the goal of re-instituting economic ties with the nation.

“Tampa is the historic US gateway to Cuba and we have over 90,000 Cuban Americans living in our region. This trip was a first step in rebuilding those ties. It’s the culmination of a decision the Chamber made 18 months ago to visit the nation. It also ties directly to years of hard work with Congresswoman Kathy Castor’s office and Tampa International Airport to reestablish flights to Cuba,” said Bob Rohrlack, president and CEO of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber delegation of 38 civic and business leaders travelled to Cuba on a People-to-People license which is issued for the goal of enhancing cross-cultural relations between Americans and Cubans. The group visited Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Cuban Institute of Music, Santo Angel Neighborhood, the Cuban Chamber of Commerce and U.S Interest Section, among other cultural and historic sites. The group also had the opportunity to interact with many locals that shared fond stories of relatives travelling to/from Tampa prior to the embargo as well as their general knowledge about Tampa and its historical significance to Cuba.

Tampa’s relationship with Cuba dates back to 1539 when Hernando de Soto sailed from Cuba to Tampa Bay. As early as the 17th century, Cuban fisherman would frequent the Tampa Bay area on a seasonal basis, and, over time, the maritime connection became well established. In the 1850s Captain James McKay established regular commercial shipping service from Florida to Cuba through Tampa. In the 1880s Cuban immigrants established Tampa’s Ybor City neighborhood as the cigar capital of the United States. On November 26, 1891 Jose Marti delivered his famous “Con Todos y Para el Bien de Todos” speech in Tampa.

The Chamber is planning to debrief with members of the delegation to discuss actions as it relates to future trips and the Chamber’s overall strategy as it relates to Cuba. The Chamber will continue to support the Airport’s efforts to make Tampa the U.S. hub for travel to Cuba and encourages those with questions about visiting Cuba to visit their recently-launched website, www.gotocuba.org. For continued updates about the Chamber and its position on Cuba, please visit www.tampachamber.com/cuba.

About the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce

The Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce is committed to serving our members and enhancing our community by building business success. The Chamber provides a greater return on investment and involvement by providing innovative leadership, inside access, influential advocacy and increased opportunities.

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