



## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Laura Di Bella Joins Florida Harbor Pilots Association as Executive Director**

**Tallahassee, Fla.** – The Florida Harbor Pilots Association (FHPA) today announced Laura Di Bella will serve as the first-ever executive director of the association.

“There is no one more qualified than Laura to fill the role of executive director, and we are elated she will be joining our ranks,” said Captain Sam Stephenson, president of FHPA. “Laura’s notable experience and educational background, paired with her expertise on Florida’s ports, made her a sure choice for our newly created role.”

“We look forward to the advancements our association will make with Laura at the helm, advocating for our best interest throughout the state,” said Capt. Stephenson. “Florida’s seaports are a massive economic engine, and Laura understands the important role Florida’s harbor pilots play to keep the numerous cruise and cargo ships coming in and out of our state’s ports, as well as ensuring the life and safety of Floridians and our state’s coastal environment.”

“It is an honor to be named the executive director of FHPA,” said Di Bella. “I have a tremendous amount of respect for Florida’s harbor pilots and look forward to advocating on behalf of the association, as well as promoting their important work, day in and day out.”

“Florida has been my one and only home,” said Di Bella. “I have lived in numerous coastal communities and understand firsthand the positive impacts Florida’s ports have on our state. Florida’s harbor pilots have the vital role of keeping our ports open for business and ensuring safe ship travel. I will work to take our mission to the next level, further articulating the importance and overwhelmingly positive impact harbor pilots have on not only local communities, but the State of Florida as a whole.”

Most recently, Di Bella served as port director for the Port of Fernandina, Ocean Highway and Port Authority. In that position, Di Bella collaborated with the Florida Legislature and Florida Department of Transportation on a \$2-million appropriation for the purchase of Liebherr mobile harbor crane and oversaw the preparations, inspections, delivery and commissioning of the crane; secured Florida Seaport

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Transportation and Economic Development grant funds in excess of \$2 million for port infrastructure enhancements; assisted in the drafting, submission and ultimately successful award of MARAD's America's Marine Highway M-95 Fernandina Beach to Charleston Barge Service designation; and supported all information needed to develop and ultimately close a \$27-million bond issue for future improvements at the port; among other notable achievements.

Additionally, Di Bella served as executive director for the Nassau County Economic Development Board, where she was charged to market and position the state-designated rural county to what has quickly become a competitive force in the economic development arena in Northeast Florida, successfully recruiting and retaining well beyond half a billion in capital investment in a variety of commercial recruitment and expansion projects throughout the county; increased the budget through private fundraising by \$100,000; revised the by-laws, policies and organizational structure to operate in the sunshine; and secured a \$5-million grant from the Florida Job Growth Grant Fund for the construction of water and wastewater infrastructure to the Crawford Diamond Industrial Park.

Prior to that, Di Bella was a director of sales and leasing for Florida Medical Space, the state's first and only statewide, full-service medical real estate company; a marketing consultant at Enviro Technologies, a manufacturer of high-volume separators predominantly used in the oil and gas industry; and the co-founder and chief operating officer of Image Marketing & Special Events, a full-service, statewide marketing and staffing company.

Di Bella holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Development and Management and a minor in Business Administration from the University of Florida, as well as a professional certification as a Maritime Port Executive from the International Association of Maritime and Port Executives.

Di Bella currently serves on the Florida State College at Jacksonville District Board of Trustees, Fernandina Beach Main Street Board of Directors, Nassau Education Foundation Board of Directors, McArthur Family YMCA Board of Directors, U.S. Constitution Scholarship Foundation Advisory Committee and volunteers as a student mentor for Take Stock in Children Nassau County.

Her current and past memberships include the Intermodal Association of North America, International Economic Development Council, Southern Economic Development Council, Florida Economic Development Council, JAXUSA Partnership, Nassau County Chamber of Commerce, American Society of Association Executives and the University of Florida Alumni Association.

The FHPA represents the interests of Florida's nearly 100 professional harbor pilots around the state, advocating on their behalf regarding various state and federal issues that impact the harbor pilots. The FHPA encourages its members to perform their function as pilots in a professional manner and promotes continued cooperation with all governmental authorities in the preservation of life, the environment and property.

For more information on FHPA, please visit [floridapilots.com](http://floridapilots.com), like [Florida Harbor Pilots Association](https://www.facebook.com/FloridaHarborPilotsAssociation) on Facebook, and follow [@FLHarborPilots](https://twitter.com/FLHarborPilots) on Twitter and [@FLHarborPilots](https://www.instagram.com/FLHarborPilots) on Instagram.

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