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UF Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute names director of strategic operations

GAINESVILLE, FL — The University of Florida Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute, a new on-campus institute housed in the College of Health and Human Performance, has hired a well-known figure in the tourism industry to serve as director of strategic operations.

Elaine McLaughlin of Fort Myers, FL, will bring her numerous years of tourism experience to lead the institute as it begins to research local, national and global crises and their impact on tourism, including travel behavior. The Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute also will work with clients from the travel industry to produce crisis response plans in the event that normal business is interrupted by extraordinary circumstances.

“I am delighted to have the opportunity to join the University of Florida faculty,” McLaughlin said. “Planning and managing crises recovery is critical to the protection of tourism economies. I look forward to helping the institute find solutions that can help communities struggling with these issues.”

As director of strategic operations, McLaughlin will help write the strategic plan for the Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute, as well as work with industry partners to develop products. McLaughlin will initiate the Florida Airport Visitors Project for UF’s Center of Tourism Research and Development. CTRD acquired funds to establish the Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute earlier this year.

“Elaine McLaughlin has deep roots embedded in the tourism industry of Florida,” said Lori Pennington-Gray, director of the Center for Tourism Research and Development and an associate professor of tourism, recreation and sport management. “She is very accomplished and brings numerous years of managing, networking and strategic visioning experience.”

McLaughlin spent 11 years with the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau as the executive director where she served as spokeswoman for Lee County tourism. McLaughlin was responsible for developing new parks and nature preserves and focusing the county’s marketing effort on ecotourism, competitive customer service and new international markets. She also developed a strategic plan to position Lee County as the first region in the nation with a comprehensive crisis recovery plan for the resort and tourism industry.

McLaughlin, a 1980 graduate of West Virginia University, has a proven track record of accomplishments in tourism, community relations, local government finance and higher
education. McLaughlin’s strong background in local government finance and management has enabled her to work with cities and counties in helping them determine the value of their tourism products and markets.

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