



MARY ELLEN UPTON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Mary Ellen Upton brings substantial experience to the field of international economic development, management consulting and event management. She is the founding Executive Director of the Visiting International Professionals Program (VIPP), the programmatic vehicle of the International Council of West Central Florida, Inc. VIPP is recognized by the US Department of State as the "council for international visitors" for the seven-county Tampa Bay region. VIPP organizes on-site corporate and local government visits and area tours, organizes seminars and assists international governmental and corporate visitors within the seven-county Tampa Bay area. Since the program's inception in 2000, the Tampa Bay area has hosted over 1,200 visitors from nearly 130 countries, with a direct regional economic impact in excess of \$1,000,000.

Mary Ellen Upton is also Senior Vice President of the Gulf of Mexico States Partnership, Inc., is responsible for Partnership event planning and event management, membership development and website management. Ms. Upton also serves as Executive Director of the *Gulf of Mexico States Accord General Secretariat*, and has organized and managed over 60 meetings and events for the Accord in six Mexican and five US states. She is a Director on the Partnership Board.

As President of International Events, Inc., a professional event management and consulting firm she founded in 1995, Ms. Upton's professional services include foreign corporate orientation visits in the United States, corporate on-site visits, in-bound trade and investment missions, and business-related seminars and events. From January 2000-September 2001, IEI helped to develop and manage the Pinellas County (Florida) Economic Development "Mexico Initiative." During the year 2000, the Initiative produced over \$23 million in new expected business for Pinellas County firms. From 2003 – 2007, IEI was awarded event management contracts with the United States Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration (MARAD), to manage their annual "Short Sea Shipping Conference" held in Sarasota, Florida and New York, New York. Each conference hosted more than 200 attendees from the United States, Canada, Mexico and the European Union. Ms Upton also managed the MARAD Short Sea Shipping workshops in New York and in Florida. Ms. Upton assisted in completing the international economic development strategy for the Florida Chamber Foundation's "New Cornerstone" project, a 10-year strategic planning tool for state business and government.

International Events, Inc. has been a *Florida certified, Minority Business Enterprise*, since 1997. In addition, in 1999, the *United States Small Business Administration* awarded Ms. Upton, the *Small Business Advocate of the Year - Women in Business Advocate of the Year - First Runner Up Award*, and in 2004, Ms. Upton was recognized for her "*Outstanding Service to the International Business Community*" by Tampa Bay Women in International Trade. In 2004, Ms. Upton was nominated as "International Business Person of the Year" by Tampa Bay Women in International Trade, and was a founding board member of the organization