

# Syd Kitson

KITSON & PARTNERS | CHAIRMAN & CEO | PUNTA GORDA

## The Hometown of Tomorrow, Today in Florida

In 2005, Syd Kitson had a crazy idea: To build a new community—a town—that would be mainstream sustainable, and at its heart, it would be powered by solar energy. This was before solar was fashionable or even economical, and he had some big hurdles to overcome. Pitching the CEO of Florida Power & Light Company opportunistically in an elevator in the Capitol, Kitson made a compelling argument. “He listened as I explained we were building a new city of just under 20,000 homes and six million square feet; we wanted it to be the most sustainable and environmentally responsible new town,” Kitson described. The following week, Kitson received a call from a group of individuals working for Florida Power & Light Company, and collaboration began.

Whether it’s solar, or the major conservation acquisition Kitson brokered in the creation of the town, or its emphasis on native plants and restored wetlands to attenuate flooding, protect from fire in droughts, and reduce and absorb algae bloom-fueling fertilizer use, Babcock Ranch’s sustainable design choices didn’t just make environmental sense, they made economic sense. An investment that has paid returns, these features distinguish Babcock from a field of communities competing for new residents. “From an economic perspective, Babcock Ranch is already ranked in the top 30 in the country in home sales, and we are breaking all of our records. I have other developers calling me—my peers—and asking ‘Do you mind if we take your playbook?’ and I say, it’d be the greatest compliment you could ever give me.”

Babcock Ranch is not a subdivision or a gated community, but a unique town that inspires a very special feeling for many people. “If you see the before and after pictures [of wetland restoration projects included in Babcock’s community design], it’s stunning. And what amazes me is how fast nature heals itself,” Kitson said. “That’s why I am so optimistic about the future — because I truly believe that it’s not too late for us to get this right.”

In addition to being a successful businessman, Kitson has been a thought leader in Florida for years, serving as Chairman of both the Board of Governors of Florida’s State University System as well as the Florida Council of 100. Kitson believes “people come here because of our incredible environment. But if we destroy that, we’ve taken away one of the greatest economic engines we have in the state. This is a point in time where people want to take action, and you’re going to see a lot of that from companies large and small.” In demonstrating sustainability’s economic viability, Kitson has set the stage for entrepreneurship to help Florida meet the challenge of climate change head on.



When people move to our community, solar goes from being a curiosity to a way of life.

