

Summit

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Speakers included Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier and Paul Nakasone, a retired Army general who now leads Vanderbilt's Institute of National Security. Nakasone previously served as the commander of the United States Cyber Command and the National Security Agency.

Nashville-based Vanderbilt cosponsored the event with West Palm Beach real estate giant Related Ross and Amazon Web Services, which provides cloud data services for the U.S. military.

In addition to showcasing the nation's defense technology, the summit also drew attention to Vanderbilt, which gave away plenty of merchandise, including tote bags and quarter-zip sweaters.

The private university plans to build a graduate business school campus in West Palm Beach, where degrees in finance and engineering will be offered.

It was standing-room-only at times for the more than 400 attendees who listened to 17 panels discuss global threats and advances in drone technology and artificial intelligence. Speakers also discussed business opportunities to help the United States maintain global military dominance.

AI software firm Palantir moves to South Florida

Attendees clapped when a top Palantir official acknowledged the big news that day: The AI software firm had moved its headquarters to Miami from Denver.

Palantir works with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other countries' militaries. Its former headquarters in Denver has been the site of protests over Palantir's contracts with ICE and the Israeli military.

Shon Manasco, Palantir's international defense leader, told summit attendees in West Palm Beach that the company "was super excited" to have its headquarters in South Florida. "We are anxious to be part of the community," Manasco said.

In an exclusive interview after his presentation, Manasco said local municipalities created a welcoming environment for Palantir.

He added that Palantir's presence in South Florida sends a message to other



Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier, center, talks with Stephen Ross, right, at a media event at the Related Ross Experience Center in downtown West Palm Beach on Jan. 12, 2026. Diermeier officially announced plans to extend the university's campus to the city. The school will focus on business and engineering tightly integrated with new technologies and artificial intelligence at the new schools, said school representatives. THOMAS CORDY/PALM BEACH POST

defense-related companies: "This signals this is a place where we can create an ecosystem."

Manusco said Palantir is in temporary office space in Miami right now, but he didn't yet have information on the location for a long-term lease. He also indicated the firm could employ up to a couple hundred people.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he said of the employment projection.

Vanderbilt is tilting toward defense tech for its West Palm campus

Vanderbilt recently announced it had secured enough private donations to build a \$300 million campus on land donated by the city of West Palm Beach and Palm Beach County.

In 2024, Vanderbilt said it would provide graduate degrees geared to the finance, data and technology industries and enroll roughly 1,000 students.

But in January, Diermeier said graduate programs will include engineering space technology as well as defense technology and manufacturing.

Diermeier told attendees that Vanderbilt is eager to explore "the possibilities of developing defense technology right here in West Palm Beach."

In a subsequent interview, Diermeier said rapid technology changes prompted Vanderbilt to tweak its planned curriculum for West Palm Beach. This campus now will have a "significant" focus on

space and defense, he said.

The pivot to what Diermeier called the intersection of technology and defense is a natural fit for a university that can devote money and time to research, he said.

Diermeier also said Vanderbilt can provide needed young talent skilled in AI and engineering to work in defense tech and space companies.

Related Ross wants to help bring more defense companies to Palm Beach County

The defense tech summit was part of an effort by billionaire real estate developer Stephen Ross, chairman of Related Ross, to draw greater attention to the favorable business environment of South Florida.

Ross recently joined with Palm Beach investor and Miami resident Ken Griffin, the billionaire hedge fund manager, to create a \$10 million marketing plan to highlight the Miami-to-West Palm Beach corridor.

In Palm Beach County, Related Ross is building offices, luxury condominiums and more.

In the past, Ross has dubbed West Palm Beach "a model city." Now he's pitching South Florida as "the next Silicon Valley," with a particular emphasis on Palm Beach County.

In an interview at the summit, Related Ross Vice Chairman Eric Silagy acknowledged the longtime presence of major de-

fense contractors such as Pratt & Whitney and Sikorsky.

In fact, the aerospace, aviation and engineering industries employ 21,000 people in nearly 2,000 firms, according to the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County, the county's business recruitment arm.

But Silagy said the next generation of tech defense firms is creating fresh demand in Palm Beach County for both office and manufacturing space.

"A lot of folks have expressed interest in this area," he said, adding that Related Ross will help companies find land or build buildings.

Some prospects were in attendance at the summit, he said.

Drone maker Ondas moved to West Palm Beach

In January, Ondas moved its headquarters to the Phillips Point complex in West Palm Beach from Boston.

The diversified drone and robotics company made the move to attract new talent and tap investors, said Ondas Chief Executive Eric Brock.

Brock said he also made the move because Florida is business-friendly, and the state is an important center for defense-related companies and military installations.

Brock praised the summit and its roster of leading defense industry officials, and he said he already had made several new connections.

Threats, opportunities, and space

Speaker after speaker touted artificial intelligence, commonly known as AI, as a formidable new weapon against so-called "bad actors," even as they noted the speed with which these actors are using AI to ramp up cyberattacks on the United States. But the summit wasn't all doom and gloom.

Dave Limp, chief executive of the Blue Origin space technology company, talked at length about the company's mission to colonize and dominate the moon, and even move some heavy manufacturing there.

Limp, a Vanderbilt graduate, said the company's rocket engineering and manufacturing facilities already employ thousands of people in and around Cape Canaveral.

And more hires are planned. "So if anybody needs a gig, let me know," Limp said. "I'm taking resumes."

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'Why we chose Wellington Bay': Active resort-style living in a close-knit community

Fred and Mary Louise Perry have always lived an active lifestyle.

The couple — who have been married for more than 60 years and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren — moved to Palm Beach County in 1976 when Fred, a longtime executive with IBM, came to work at the company's then-headquarters in Boca Raton.

And now in "retirement," one could make the case that the Perrys are busier than ever — such are the myriad benefits of residing in the one-of-a-kind luxury senior rental community of Wellington Bay.

Exercise ... travel ... fine dining ... on-site clubs and activities galore — the plethora of options is why the Perrys say their primary challenge these days is fitting in everything they want to do.

"After I retired from IBM, sometimes I'd work on cruise ships helping run their IT," says Fred. "We loved being on cruise ships because there was always something going on. Now I tell people that living at Wellington Bay is like living on a cruise ship."

The Perrys discovered Wellington Bay in the fall of 2022 (just prior to the community's official opening in October 2022) at a "Wine Wednesday" event that the community hosts so that prospective residents can learn more in an informal setting.

"We fell in love with everything about Wellington Bay and knew we wanted to be here," recalls Mary Louise.

They moved into Wellington Bay in November 2022 — and the community officially considers them among its Founding Residents.

Wellington Bay Campus Director Jay Mikosch notes that among the many things that the Perrys and their fellow residents find so appealing are the picturesque 46-acre location (close to shopping, restaurants, equestrian activities, golf, tennis, etc.) and myriad amenities.

"We have on-site both an indoor and outdoor pool, as well as pickleball,



Officially considered Founding Residents, Fred and Mary Louise Perry moved into Wellington Bay in November 2022.

boce, a putting green, shuffleboard and three gourmet restaurants — Chukkers Café, Legends Lounge, and The Polo Room — all of which cook their fare to order," says Mikosch, who adds that all residents receive free memberships to the nearby Wellington National Golf Club and equally close-by Wellington Tennis Center.

Another aspect of Wellington Bay that Mikosch says residents really appreciate is the range of floor-plan options — starting at 854 square feet and going up to more than 2,100 square feet.

The Apartment Homes come in one- or two-bedroom layouts while the adjacent Garden Flats building offers a bit more privacy and larger units — including expansive two bedroom/two-bath and three-bedroom/two-bath spaces.

And for those who want even more space and a free-standing building, the Villas offer the feel of a single-family home, right down to the two-car garage.

Both the Perrys and Mikosch say that what truly makes Wellington Bay such a special and enjoyable place to live are the residents and the staff.

"We have so many resident-led clubs — including ones in wine, technology, travel, pickleball, knitting, billiards, movies and more," says Mikosch.

"From day one, the staff and management have been incredibly receptive to our feedback and suggestions," says Mary Louise.

"And I can't say enough about how wonderful our neighbors and fellow residents are," adds Fred. "Wellington Bay embodies everything

that makes for a truly close, tight-knit community."

In fact, so pleased are the Perrys about their decision to live at Wellington Bay that Fred says he tells their friends and acquaintances who are considering doing likewise that the biggest mistake anyone can make is simply waiting too long to make the move.

"I always say, 'Don't wait until you have to move,'" explains Fred. "If you're considering it, then do it while you're still able to really enjoy all that this lifestyle has to offer."

WELLINGTON BAY

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