

The Palm Coast Historian

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The Historic Core Area of Palm Coast: Then and Now The Facts and the Opinion by Art Dycke

The Facts

Since the City Council appointed me city co-historian along with Margaret Davie in 2000, I have interviewed or spoken with hundreds of Palm Coast residents, some of whom were among the first homeowners to move here in 1972. They have uniformly told me glowing stories about the "the good old days" when the ITT Community Development Corporation (ICDC) built its first amenities and dutifully tended to the growing communities needs with an eye toward customer satisfaction as being the key to future sales. There had been some early developer/county government friction and complaints of shoddy workmanship, questionable marketing practices and waterless canal lots but these had been largely cleared up by July 4, 1976. On that bicentennial day ICDC provided a massive free picnic and entertainment capped by evening fireworks that were open to all. Pioneer Palm Coast residents remembered it as a joyous community celebration of their newly adopted lifestyle. Thereafter, the county government began to provide some fire and lighting services, civilization came to the area with a Publix anchored comprehensive shopping center in 1979 and direct contact with the rest of the world arrived with the completion of the I-95 interchange in 1981. Most residents seemed to agree with the ITT slogan about Palm Coast being "the perfect place to live."

The historic beginning and earliest construction in Palm Coast is found in the "core area" that runs from the ocean to I-95, centered at the intersection of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) and the main canal and connecting to Old Kings Road via Club House Drive, Palm Harbor Parkway and Palm Coast Parkway. The earliest visitors came to Palm Coast on ocean hugging SR A1A and turned onto a small road that took them to a small boat dock on the ICW (site of the present Yacht Harbor Village). There prospective buyers and curious visitors boarded boats that ferried them across the ICW and up the main canal to the ITT Welcome Center. Later they could also enter the community from SR 100 by turning into unpaved Old Kings Road. The first homes in Palm Coast were built south of Club House Drive on Casper and Cooper Drives which also were the access to the ICDC created Palm Coast Golf Course. There were no private amenities in the

area until October, 1973 when a Handy Way convenience center also serving as a post office was constructed near the Club House/Palm Coast Parkway intersection. (See draft MAP, "The Historic "Core Area" of Palm Coast").

The following is a description of Palm Coast historic sites. Photographs will be in the next newsletter of Oct-Dec.

PALM COAST WELCOME CENTER. FIRST BUILDING CONSTRUCTED IN PALM COAST, OCTOBER, 1970. The 64 foot tower provided a panoramic view of the surrounding woods, lakes, streams and Intracoastal Waterway that was to become the "core area" of Palm Coast. The building was at the center of the first model area and was to serve as the hub of all sales activities for the new development. It was a dramatic structure with a variety of graphics and audiovisual sales materials inside. The main feature was an elevator accessed 64 foot high observation tower affording visitors unobstructed views of their surroundings including the golf course, the model houses and the inland waterways and canals. Earliest visitors often came from Route A1A to a small dock on the east side of the ICW proceeding by boat to the Welcome Center on the main canal. When the prospective buyers arrived they were taken to the top of the tower to view the area. The cleared land within immediate view of the tower must have looked desolate at first and beyond that stretched a seemingly endless pine forest. At first much of the land was sold sight unseen from a platted map for as low as \$3,500.00 for a home site. The sales person was likely to locate ones property by pointing in a direction away from the tower and telling the buyer, "It's out there somewhere".

THE MODEL CENTER. UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 1970. The picture was taken from the top of the observation tower. Preconstruction homes were marketed starting at \$15,000 before Palm Coast opened officially on October 29, 1970. The original Welcome/Model Center was continually modernized through the 1980's. This author estimates that about half the people living in Palm Coast today passed through the Welcome Center at some time. It and the Model Center were torn down starting in 1994 and a residential complex called Old Hammock Cove may begin construction there.

PALM COAST GOLF CLUB. FIRST NINE HOLES OPENED SEPTEMBER 4, 1971.

A postcard picture shows the sixth hole fairway of ITT Palm Coast's first golf course. It was adjacent to the first residential homes built in Palm Coast at Casper and Cooper Drives off Clubhouse Road. The Bill Amick designed course was completed a year later featuring a 19th hole restaurant that looked like a paddle wheel riverboat. Later renamed the Palm Harbor Golf Club, the course was purchased by private developers and closed in June, 2006 supposedly awaiting a complete renovation and the addition of condominium homes to the site. The future of the golf course was in doubt as of March, 2007.

PALM COAST YACHT CLUB. BUILT BY ITT TO BECOME THE SOCIAL HUB OF THE NEW COMMUNITY, OPENED ON DECEMBER 15, 1972. The original Yacht Club is depicted in this replica of a membership card given to Palm Coast residents. The club became the political, religious and social center of the community with civic associations and religious denominations holding their meetings and services there. Social gatherings included club activities, parties, dances, festivals, art shows and other entertainment for the community. The first tennis courts, outdoor pool, boat launching ramp and marina for the community were located here. The original ITT Palm Coast Yacht Club buildings were completely redone and expanded in 1987 to reopen as the Sheraton (our city's first hotel) with bar, dining room and meeting/ballroom facilities. This beautiful site at the junction of the Intracoastal Waterway and the main canal was subsequently renamed Harborside Inn, Palm Coast Golf Resort and Ocean Hammock Resort: Harborside Inn. All but the marina were demolished to be rebuilt as a condominium/convention center to be named the Palm Coast Resort. Exterior work on one of the projects two 8 story condominiums and a 50 foot high parking garage had been completed when the developer informed the city in February, 2007, that the application for completing the project was being withdrawn.

PALM COAST SHERATON INN. OPENED FEBRUARY, 1973. With the opening of a 132 room luxury motel on eight beautifully landscaped acres in a tropical paradise right on the Atlantic Ocean, another jewel was added to the original crown of promises made by ITT regarding development of the Palm Coast community. The motel was located at the end of a scenic drive to the ocean from a gated entrance on route A1A. Built in Spanish Mission architectural style, the Inn had a fine dining room that seated approximately 120 people and overlooked the reflecting pools, waterfalls, dunes, beach, and ocean. The design for easy living was meant to show off the Florida lifestyle and to impress prospective

buyers with the desirability of their buying a home site and settling in Palm Coast. Prospects attended presentations in their home communities and then signed up for a package consisting of a fully guided tour of the area, round trip air transportation and two nights with breakfasts and dinners at the Sheraton for as little as \$129. Many fell in love with Palm Coast and purchased property immediately. The original motel was completely demolished by 1987 and the site is presently occupied by the Hammock Dunes Club House.

PUBLIX IN PALM HARBOR SHOPPING CENTER. CIVILIZATION COMES TO PALM COAST IN THE SPRING OF 1979. With Publix's food store, Eckerd's (now CVC) drug store, dry cleaners, hairstylists, travel agents, realtors, banks, gift shops, apparel, sporting goods, plants, a real post office, and a restaurant open, the time for having to drive 11 miles to shop was finally over. Full service shopping had come to Palm Coast in the form of a beautiful new 2.5 million dollar shopping center. ICDC construction project manager Bob DeVore had combined coquina stone, colored walkways, textured sidewalks, fountains and imaginative landscaping to provide a beautiful setting for parking and shopping. It remains so today despite many additions and changes.

INTERSTATE I-95 INTERCHANGE. WAS OFFICIALLY DEDICATED ON MAY, 21, 1981. ICDC contributed more than 3.3 million dollars into a partnership with the state government in what has been called "an uncommon example of public convenience being constructed with private funds." Direct access to the world had finally come to Palm Coast. Originally designated exit 91C, it is now exit 289 of I-95 which is currently being reconstructed to accommodate a third lane of traffic in each direction.

HAMMOCK DUNES BRIDGE. LINKING OCEAN AND MAINLAND PALM COAST, THE BRIDGE ACROSS THE INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY WAS OFFICIALLY DEDICATED ON JULY 3, 1988. Over 20,000 people attended an elaborate party celebrating the opening of the 10.1 million dollar bridge with a long parade and night time fireworks in a huge outpouring of community spirit. The bridge includes two traffic lanes, two ten foot auxiliary lanes and a separate pedestrian/bicycle lane. The Dunes Community Development District was created by the state to build and operate the bridge. Revenue bonds were issued to be paid over the years with bridge toll income. Presently, transients pay \$2.00 driving eastbound with no toll charged when traveling west.

There was always a gleam in the eye of Palm Coast "Pioneers" as they described the hustle and bustle of their adventure in populating our new community that was commercially created from former swamp and pine forest.

They told of going by boat on a newly dredged canal through a by then treeless wasteland to a modern Welcome Center with a 64' high tower from which to see lakes, river and ocean and endless pine forest. They remember flying from the North to stay at the Sheraton Palm Coast Inn by the ocean and being seduced by the lure of a year round climate conducive to sport and healthy leisure activities. The early settlers moved in to find basic shopping to be 11 miles of dirt road distant and that there were no amenities other than their own homes in the immediate area. Social and cultural salvation came to them with ITT's opening of the Palm Coast Yacht Club in December of 1972. This first amenity immediately became the primary and indeed the only center of gathering and communicating in the pioneer community. Our first tennis courts, swimming pool and playground were located there. It is where the religious services, civic, club, business and organization meetings and social and cultural functions were held. The marina accommodated weary traveling boaters and the ramp gave local access to the ICW. There were walking, running and bicycling paths along the river among the old oaks and other vegetation reminiscent of old Florida. Originally the entire community came together to partake of the Free Friday Night Buffet provided by the ITT developer for 5 years to residents and prospective buyers. The original Palm Coast Yacht Club was the center and the symbol of the "good life" in early Palm Coast. It remained so as the Sheraton took it over expanding the number of rooms and enhancing lounge and restaurant facilities in creating the community's first hotel. The new owners continued accommodating residents with periodic one dollar beer and hot dog entertainments in their outdoor pavilion on the ICW. This was also the primary viewing area and judging station for the annual Christmas boat parade. New owners and new names followed with the facility being named The Palm Coast Golf Resort and Ocean Hammock Resort: Harborside Inn but the site remained, "the place to take mom on Mothers Day."

The Opinion

I turn now to my personal interpretation and opinion regarding the foregoing facts. Please look again at the map showing the historic "core area" of Palm Coast reaching from the ocean to the I-95 intersection. The original Palm Coast Yacht Club was and still is at the center of an area that is inextricably bound together in historic and economic interest to the City of Palm Coast, Flagler County. Note the location of the Players Club tennis complex and the European Village restaurant and shopping complex and then take special notice of the pedestrian, bicycle, nature beautiful access that the City of Palm Coast has developed to the entire area. In one of its first acts after incorporation our city council took the foresighted step of preserving the available land between the community center on Clubhouse Drive and Hammock

Dunes Bridge toll house. They have created a marvelous scenic and historic trail system in the Palm Coast Linear Park, the St. Joe Walkway and the public sidewalks that give comprehensive access to the entire Palm Coast historic "core area."

I commiserate with the "old timers" who miss the developer self interest benevolence of the Free Friday Buffet of the 1970's and sometimes when I am stuck in traffic trying to get from Grand Haven to the new Historical Center at City Hall I also long for my own "good old days" of 1993 when I first moved to Palm Coast. In a published letter, a few years ago, to the editor entitled, "Palm Coast Is Losing its History", I bemoaned the fact that the first three buildings constructed in Palm Coast (Welcome Center, Original Palm Coast Yacht Club and original Palm Coast Sheraton Inn) had been "obliterated". I have moderated considerably from such strong terminology and I am returning to my normal optimism for the future.

When the City Council held hearings about private development of the former Welcome Center site and later clearing the original PCYC site and replace it with a grandiose new condo/convention center resort, I spoke within the allotted 3 minute time limit. I believe my fairly neutral message was "Remember the History of the area that we are discussing." To me that could mean as little as placing historic markers in key locations open to the public view, or as much as cooperating in a combined government/private sector plan that might restore the area to the bustling economic community oriented city hub that had originally been created by ITT.

At the hearings, I was personally torn between the loss of trees and the ambiance of the old hotel but I also heard several speakers who I paraphrase as saying, "I would like to have a facility to accommodate a large wedding for my daughter within the city of which I am so proud." I knew our historical society needed larger facilities for their annual dinner to celebrate the city's birthday. I believe other religious, civic, cultural and business groups agree. I accepted the promise that a convention center/condo would enlarge and enhance the historic function of this key location for a tastefully growing city. I hoped for a stimulating interplay of the boats in Yacht Harbor Village, the Oceanside developments, European Village, Palm Harbor Golf Course, The Players Club and proposed old Welcome Center development. But the developer has torn down the previous resort and has put up the frame of condominiums that exceed our desirable height restrictions and now has announced discontinuing building the promised resort that is so vital to the economic and cultural life of our historic "core area".

Upon hearing the news I was angry. My first reaction was, "Wow have we been snookered (whatever that means)." The mayor, city council members and many people felt

betrayed. Residents are hotly debating the issue contrasting, "the right of eminent domain" with "the rights of free enterprise" and the many variations in between. Our new city manager advised that careful consideration might be more beneficial than anger and bravely held a meeting with the community and listened to the concerns of an overflow crowd of residents.

I will try to remain politically correct and deem the Centex developer's action "irresponsible". Understanding the essential needs for private sector profits, there are developers sensitive to public interest and historic preservation. I applaud Palm Coast Holdings for making restoration of a segment of Old Kings Road and Hewitts Mill an integral part of a proposed new development on Route 1 as a model of economic and historical responsibility.

Returning briefly to historical fact, Palm Coast has a long history of government/developer cooperation. The I-95 Interchange and the Hammock Dunes Bridge were paid for by the ITT developer in cooperation with the State of Florida. The City of Palm Coast is a public provider of utilities. The Palm Coast Resort was proposed as a Planned Unit Development that required exception to the city comprehensive plan. The developer is supposed to show that the benefit of its facility to the city exceeds the loss of benefit in changing its plan. Perhaps Centex is not large enough to handle the enormity of this project by itself. There is no doubt that Mr. "Bobby" Ginn is a major developer in Palm Coast/Flagler County. His companies have built world class facilities and attractions that I show off with pride to my visitors. Even as I enjoyed working as a volunteer at the historic golf tournament, I am personally not yet ready to paint over the Palm Coast water tower with Ginn advertisements. But perhaps he and other developers and city/county governments can work together to re-create a vital business and historic area for the benefit and enjoyment of all the area residents.

In summation, I believe: 1- That the ITT Community Development Corporation boldly created an ecologically and socially balanced planned community called Palm Coast in conjunction with county and state government officials. 2- That the historic "core area" that was built did contain the religious, civic, business, social, cultural and sports facilities essential to the "good life" in Palm Coast. 3- That there has always been a thriving center of Palm Coast community activity at the confluence of the main canal and the ICW and that this must continue in the future and 4-That it is the continuing duty of developers to keep their promises and government to fulfill their responsibilities to the people and 5- That speedy mutual cooperation would serve the community best in the ultimate goal of keeping Palm Coast as, "the best place to live". How's that for a "feel good" ending?. Can it be done? We need a nice place to hold large weddings and to take mom on Mothers Day"

I believe that I have used the "I" word enough that readers understand that the opinions expressed in the foregoing article are completely my own and that they do not necessarily represent either the City of Palm Coast for whom I am a volunteer historian or the City Of Palm Coast Historical Society for which I am a member of the Board of Directors. Art Dycke 3/24/07 for Historical Society newsletter. Not to be reproduced in whole or part without permission of the author.

THE PALM COAST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESENTS "A DAY OF HISTORY"

April 11, 2007

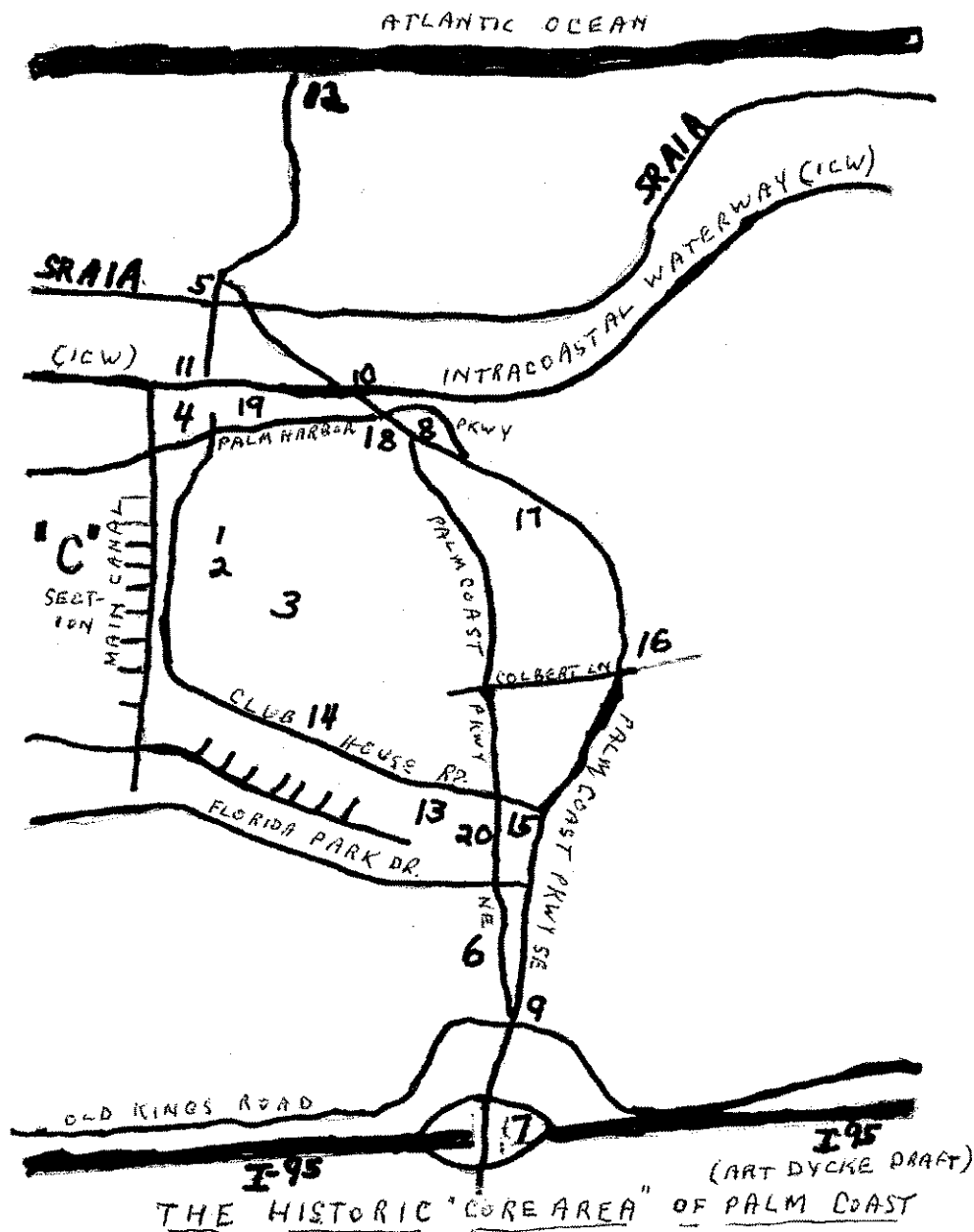
9:30 am - Celebrate the Grand Opening of the new Historical Society Center. Ribbon Cutting followed by refreshments. Location: City Hall, 2 Commerce Blvd.

11:00 am-12:00 pm - "The Historic Core Area of Palm Coast" slide presentation, at the Historical Center, by Art Dycke, City Historian.

1:30-3:30 pm - Historical Society Meeting in first floor conference room of City Hall, 2 Commerce Blvd. Speaker is our new City Manager Jim Landon.

3:30-4:45 pm - "History of Old Kings Road" presented by Bill Ryan, Director, in the Historical Center, 2 Commerce Blvd. 7:00-9:00 pm - "The Historic Core Area of Palm Coast" slide presentation by Art Dycke, City Historian. Community Center on Club House Drive.

7:00-9:00 pm - "The Historic Core Area of Palm Coast" slide presentation, at the Palm Coast Community Center on Club House Drive, by Art Dycke, City Historian.



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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome Center--PC's First Bldg. 2. Model Center 3. Original Palm Coast Golf Course 4. Original Palm Coast Yacht Club (Including Tennis & Swim Clubs) 5. Entrance to original Palm Coast Sheraton Palm Coast Inn. 6. First Shopping in Palm Coast--Publix 7. I-95 Interchange 8. Players Club 9. ITT Welcome Center II 10. Hammock Dunes Bridge 11. Original Welcome Center Boat Dock | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Original Palm Coast Sheraton Inn now Hammock Dunes Club House 13. Original Business--Handy Way etc. Each site has a story. 14. Casper Drive--First houses built. 15. Palm Coast Community Center 16. DBCC--Flagler/Palm Coast Campus and Amp Theater 17. FAA Training Center 18. European Village 19. Harbor Club, site of original business Handy Way. 20. St. Marks by the Sea |
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The City of Palm Coast Historical Society
P. O. Box 352613
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Officers - January 2007– December 2007

Debby Geyer, President (446-9031); Jack Pitman,
Vice President; Debby Geyer, Interim Treasurer;
Kay Stafford, Recording Secretary; Claire Sheekey,
Corresponding Secretary

Welcome to our New Members

Marlene Alderman, Arlene Burnett, Mary DiStefano

Directors – January 2007 – December 2007

Don DeVito, Webmaster; Art Dycke, City Historian;
Connie Horvath; Jon Netts; Betty Rhatigan; Bill
Ryan

Visit the Historical Society Center

April 12 thru May 2007—September thru December
20, 2007. Art Dycke, City Historian will be there.

Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 1:30-4:00pm

Check out the Center's Items for Sale

Images of America: Palm Coast by Art Dycke, City Historian—Donation of \$19.99

Palm Coast License Plate—Donation of \$10.00

Star Coale's, local artist, B&W Prints of Palm Coast's original buildings and golf courses.

Donation of \$10.00 for 1 or \$8.50 for 2

Visit our website for additional Palm Coast Historical Society information.

<http://community.webtv.net/pchistorical/TheCityofPalmCoast/>

Key in the website exactly as shown.