

The Palm Coast Historian

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How Palm Coast Became a City

by Arthur E. Dycke, City Historian

That Palm Coast would become a city was prophesied by the first president of The ITT Community Development Corporation in an article published in the spring of 1972. Entitled "An Approach to a New City: Palm Coast," Dr. Norman Young outlined, "... the needs for environmental protection while meeting the demands of a growing population in a finite Earth." Palm Coast was to become the community which married human needs with ecological concerns.

Young envisioned that within 30 years our community would become a city with a population of 750,000, which at the time was the size of Cleveland or Detroit. What an amazing prediction this was for many who saw the almost completely uninhabited 68,000 acres of land put together by ITT/Rayonier in 1969 as mostly "a big pine covered swamp." By 1979, ITT had agreed with the State of Florida on a Comprehensive Land Use Plan that limited their Palm Coast development to 42,000 acres and a population of approximately 225,000.

Palm Coasters were civic-minded right from the beginning of their community. Only 50 houses had been completed when 20 homeowners organized a committee to draw up a constitution and by-laws for the Palm Coast Civic Association, which became our first formal organization in July, 1972. The first officers were Bill Loeb, president; Cliff Parr, vice president; Charles Konopasek; treasurer; and Bernadette Collier, secretary. Their purpose was to provide a means for residents to gather and discuss ideas and programs for improving the community. Relations with the government and the developer were primary topics for the group as were social, cultural and recreational activities.

There was some inevitable friction when the ITT super corporation began a huge residential

development in the largely agricultural, rural county of Flagler. In the first years ITT Community Development Corporation (ICDC) had frequent disagreements with the Flagler County Commission regarding provision of services and especially about taxation. The corporation actually sued the commission four years in a row over the issue of alleged unfairly high property taxes. Alan Smolen became ICDC president in 1975. He recalls an incident whereby a county commissioner remarked to him, "We pay our taxes, when you pay your taxes, we'll take care of you."

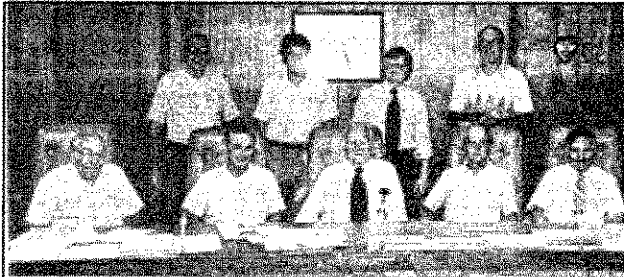
In 1973 there were no streetlights in Flagler County and the only two traffic lights were on Route 100, one at the intersection of Route 1 in Bunnell, the other at A1A in Flagler Beach. Pioneers in the Palm Coast development wanted street lights so ICDC put them in and paid for the electricity. At one point Smolen advised residents to form a service district to put some pressure on the county to provide necessary services. When residents dragged their feet, he stopped paying the electric bill and the utility turned the street lights off. Soon thereafter the East Flagler Service District was formed to bring Palm Coast service issues before the county commissioners. An official advisory board was not chosen by the county until 1979 when that group first met under the chairmanship of "Capt." William Donnelly. The county was now officially receiving "advice" from the fledgling Palm Coast community.

Palm Coast elected its first resident to the county commission in 1980. The late Merhl Shoemaker served as a commissioner until 1992; he was successful in bringing a public library into the community. In 1982, the fire district was added to the East Flagler Service District and the new Palm Coast Service District was born. The

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advisory board gathered information and made recommendations for service improvements in a growing "core area" around Clubhouse Drive. They reported to the county commission who could then accept or reject their advice.



Members of the newly appointed advisory board for the East Flagler Service District pose for their first photograph. From left, seated, are Morey Englander, Robert Engle, Raymond Cobb (vice chairman), William Donnelly (chairman) and Irving Young. Standing, from left, are Circuit Clerk Shelton Barber, Property Appraiser John Seay, Gary Walters (alternate for George Weeks (ICDC's representative) and John Finneran.

Two early city incorporation efforts took place in the mid-1980's. The first was a short study done in 1985 by the Palm Coast Civic Association. This author has not seen an original copy of this report and quotes here from a later Palm Coast Feasibility Study analysis that it "provided little more than unsubstantiated opinions on the subject." A professional study was done in 1987 for the Flagler County Commission by Kelton and Associates. The previously cited feasibility study stated, "While the Kelton study was well founded and well organized, it proposed to limit the incorporation boundaries to 15,000 acres, thus disenfranchising current and future residents living in the other 27,000 acres of the Palm Coast Service District." Authoring the study certainly provided invaluable background and information to Richard Kelton, who later became Palm Coast's first city manager.

A serious effort to formally create a city came in 1990 when the Flagler County Taxpayers Association, founded by Catherine Larson, produced a 44-page report entitled, "Palm Coast Incorporation: To Be or Not to Be?" A committee consisting of Catherine, Stan Denison, Don Hennon, Joe Werner and Larry Sheridan met weekly over a number of months, studying all aspects of what had to be done to bring the issue before the people for a vote. The group's report was enthusiastically received by the Taxpayers Association, reflecting their long-standing belief that the county and Palm Coast should be able to function more economically. Some in the community accused the group of fostering divisiveness and others feared the transformation of Palm Coast into an overdeveloped and unaffordable place like Palm Beach. In 1990, ICDC president James Gardner surprised some at the time when he said in a "State of Palm Coast" speech before the Civic Association, "... it is time for ITT to step aside and let the people now take over."

By March 1991, the Taxpayers Association had proposed a charter that would incorporate the Palm Coast Service District into a city the following January. A delegation of association and advisory board members including Catherine Larson, Jack Nugent, Joe Werner, Hank Rahunen, Bill Judy, Russ Megonegal, and Don Pierce went to Tallahassee to meet with their legislative delegation and relevant state committee members. Bill Donnelly, representing the opposing Citizens for a Better Government, went to represent the opinions of David Siegal, Bill Lawless, and others who favored a unified charter government for the county and disputed the facts being presented by the Taxpayers Association. Three major boundary problem areas were revealed. The proposed city fell short of the minimum 1.5 person per acre population requirement, city limits were too close to Bunnell and Flagler Beach, and the proposed charter was not specific enough regarding the boundaries for the city. Further meetings were held, but by December 25, 1991, The News

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Tribune reported, "Incorporation of Palm Coast is a Dead Issue." The state legislature had rejected the proposal's appearance on their agenda.

Talk of incorporating a city slowed for a while but Larson soon became chairperson of the Palm Coast Advisory Board and she was appointed by the governor to chair a committee consisting of Mike Chiumento, Kent Ryan, Hank Rahuzza, and Mike DesPartes to study and report on the issue of incorporation. The group reported favorably to the state legislative committee but the county commission would not act upon the recommendation.

From their start in 1969 until ITT withdrew in 1995, the corporation essentially provided most of the services and leadership in Palm Coast. They had planned, built, and maintained a model environmental community that many residents believed to be "... the perfect place to live." In a unique private/government relationship, ITT had financed Palm Coast's most necessary improvements. The interchange at I-95 and the Hammock Dunes Bridge were funded at relatively unnoticeable cost to local taxpayers and the state. As ITT withdrew from the Palm Coast community in the years from 1994 to 1996, the void left by its departure was increasingly felt in the community.

On May 29, 1997, News-Tribune columnist Pamela Hasterock headlined "Sugar Daddy is Gone" and continued "... Palm Coasters have lost their overseer, caretaker, and benefactor." We needed expanded services in an expanding community, and while competing groups sniped at each other, many others realized that Palm Coast had 70% of the county's population and elected only 20% of the county commissioners. In the previous month Dick Mulligan and Vince Ligouri had voiced some dire predictions regarding the future of Palm Coast. In October 1997, Palm Coast Civic Association President John Eustace announced the start of a monthly meeting schedule regarding incorporation designed to answer the question,

"Is Now the Time?" Dr. James Canfield, former school board member and Civic Association Vice President, had been named chairman of the Association's Home Rule Committee at a June membership meeting. Other members included Terry Neveras, secretary; Mary Wolfert, treasurer; and three vice presidents, Ralph Carter, Jack Pitman, and John Scripp III.

In a series of often contentious meetings Jim Canfield forged a coalition of leaders including Al Jones of the Flagler County Citizens League, Marty MacLean from the Grey Haired Legislators, former county commissioner Jack Nugent, Catherine Larson, and Stan Denison from the Palm Coast Advisory Board, and Citizen of the Year Jim Holland. Most agreed the county commission was not paying sufficient attention to the Palm Coast community and they would be better off determining their own affairs. In November 1997, the Palm Coast District Advisory Committee gave very limited support to incorporation proposals and the county commission would not assign a representative to the committee studying the path toward becoming a city.

By January of 1998, Dr. Canfield told Palm Coast Civic Association members that a proposed charter and operating budget had been submitted to the Flagler County legislative delegation. By the end of January the delegation informed residents they would have to wait at least one additional year before voting to become a city. They warned that the process would be a "nightmare" if all aspects of the project were not in impeccable order before presentation.

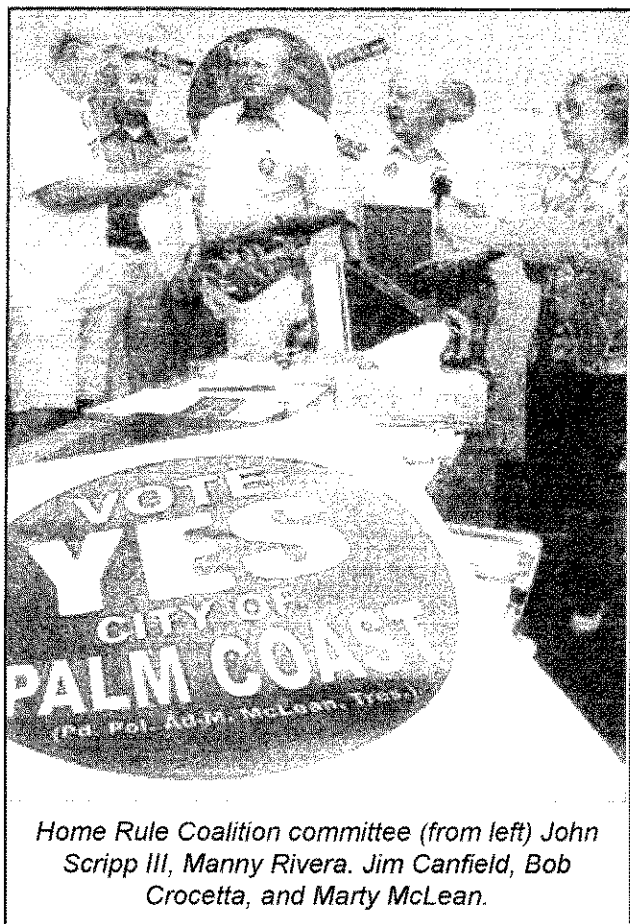
In February 1998, the Flagler Beach City Council frightened many Palm Coast residents by proposing the annexation of 2,000 acres of land within the boundaries of the Palm Coast Service District. In June the Flagler County Commission took a major step toward incorporation by awarding a contract in the amount of \$26,700 to Daytona Beach Community College to study the feasibility of a City of Palm Coast.

In July the destruction of 40 homes by wildfires

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and the county's evacuation order was paramount in the minds of most people. But soon thereafter residents began attending a series of meetings regarding all aspects of Palm Coast incorporation conducted by DBCC's Lois Wescott. At five major public meetings the consultant made presentations regarding state requirements for incorporation, boundaries, budget and tax projections, and a proposed city charter. She patiently explained complicated issues and answered questions from the numerous citizens who attended the meetings. Ultimately the consultant concluded that incorporation was indeed feasible. The county commission took the giant step of accepting her report and proposed city charter. They sent it to the state legislative delegation.



Home Rule Coalition committee (from left) John Scripp III, Manny Rivera, Jim Canfield, Bob Crocetta, and Marty McLean.

In January 1999, in a packed Flagler Auditorium, the legislative delegation agreed to sponsor the incorporation bill before the entire state legislature. In April, the Community Affairs Committee, which makes recommendations regarding local legislation, unanimously endorsed HB 1103 for Palm Coast incorporation. A thousand residents jammed into Flagler Auditorium on July 14 to hear the Palm Coast Home Rule Coalition (PCHRC) square off against the "Not a Done Deal Association" (NADDA). A number of often heated meetings raged on through the long, hot summer. Fears of rising taxes and unwanted services vied with the desires of many residents to make their own decisions about their community.

With interest at a fever pitch and a record voter turnout predicted for the day of decision scheduled for September 14, Hurricane Floyd stepped in to temporarily foil the march of destiny as Governor Jeb Bush ordered an emergency postponement of the vote. One week later the historic vote did take place and the newspaper headline proclaimed, "YES! PALM COAST VOTES FOR INCORPORATION." More than 60% of the nearly 12,000 voters who cast ballots in the referendum had opted to turn the unincorporated population center of Flagler County into a city.



YES! Palm Coast votes for incorporation

Events moved very rapidly thereafter. By October 1, the Flagler County Commission and the Palm Coast Service District Advisory Board chose an eight-member transition team chaired by County Manager David Haas. Other members of the Flagler County Transition Task Force were Gary Eckstine, Vice-Chairman, Jackie Browne,

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Bob Crocetta, Dick Eggers, John Eustace, Bill Jones, Jack Nugent, and Dick Mulligan, alternate.

Candidates for the five city council seats began lining up immediately and the final number of qualifiers for the race reached 26. Elections Commissioner Peggy Rae Border prepared ballots for a primary election on November 9 and the final election on December 14.

William Venne and James Holland won their seats by gaining majorities in the primary election and Jerry Full, Ralph Carter, and Mayor James Canfield completed the council by winning the December 14 general election. The group was sworn in on December 16 and began meeting immediately, dubbing Palm Coast a "Millennium City," even though the city's official birth date was still two weeks away.



Palm Coast's first city council, sworn in December 31, 1999, includes council member Jerry Full, Mayor Jim Canfield and council members Bill Venne, Ralph Carter and James Holland (front).

Stan Denison recalls being asked to become interim city manager on the evening of December 17 and going to the post office the very next morning to establish a mailing address for the city. The new "city hall" consisted of two-and-a-half office rooms in the Palm Coast Community Center. Continuing negotiations regarding city/

council responsibilities, employees, builders, and others were put on hold. Some matters needed immediate resolution. Denison had been asked by then County Sheriff Bob McCarthy what New Year's Eve closing times the new city wanted enforced. The council immediately adopted extended hours and Denison felt he had saved the celebration for the community.

On December 31, 1999, residents of Palm Coast celebrated the end of a century, a new year, and a new city. They must have wondered what changes the combination would bring to their lives.

Note – "How Palm Coast Became a City" is a draft chapter from an as yet unpublished manuscript tentatively entitled, "Palm Coast, Flagler County, Florida: A Personal History" by Arthur E. Dycke. It is copyrighted Oct. 2, 2006, with all rights reserved. It may not be reproduced in whole or in part nor copied or electronically transferred in any manner whatsoever without specific written permission from the author.

Handy with a scissors?

by Patricia Eldridge

Yes? That's all you need to help the Palm Coast Historical Society. We clip articles about our area from newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets and file them for future reference. If you're not comfortable with scissors and prefer the alphabet, then filing may be for you. Maybe you prefer putting together albums on specific subjects for our city?

Are you a computer or photo buff? If so, there is a place for you as we develop our history and learn about the place in which we live. No experience is necessary. We give you all the assistance you want if you elect to help your Historical Society so it can become a true research center.

Give us your support and help make history as well as preserve it for the City of Palm Coast. Contact Patricia Eldridge, 503-5481, or Art Dycke, artpchistory@bellsouth.net.

A Short History of the City of Palm Coast Historical Society

by Arthur Dycke, Debby Geyer, Collaborating

Palm Coast became a city in Flagler County on December 31, 1999. In April 2000, Mayor James Canfield asked Art Dycke, a history professor at the Flagler/Palm Coast campus of Daytona Beach Community College if he would be a volunteer city historian and take charge of boxes of historical materials generated during the campaign to incorporate the City of Palm Coast.

Dycke explained he would be glad to help but had only been in Palm Coast since 1993 and felt he had insufficient knowledge of the community planned by ITT after it initially purchased the land in 1969.

Local realtor Margaret Davie had been selling home sites in Palm Coast since before the first houses were constructed and had intimate knowledge of the community's history. As a "stringer" for the local newspaper, she had accumulated more than 100 photo albums of local citizens and organizations. When ITT closed its office at One Corporate Drive in the summer of 2000, leaving two file cabinets and boxes of corporate pictures, magazines, and papers to the new city, Margaret saw to it that they were safely stored until they and incorporation materials could be housed in Palm Coast's first official city hall.



Attending an early City of Palm Coast Historical Society meeting were (from left) Mary Ann Canfield, Connie Horvath, Sandra Rose Friedman, Margaret Davie, Art Dycke, Kay Stafford, Debby Geyer, Jean Sedlak and Bob Crocetta



Margaret Davie and Art Dycke were named volunteer city co-historians by Palm Coast City Council in October

Recording events surrounding the formation of this planned community were of prime importance, so Art, with the assistance of Margaret and others, began interviewing residents and sifting through accumulated materials in the spring of 2000. City council named Margaret and Art city co-historians in early October.

As more interested citizens became involved, it became obvious that an historical society was on Palm Coast's horizon. The group had a sizeable display about incorporation at the new city hall which opened to the public on October 26, 2000 in the Palm Harbor shopping center.

Their first recorded meeting was held November 4 with 13 attending. (Two meetings had been referenced in a September 14, 2000 letter from Margaret Davie, but no minutes are recorded.) First officers were Margaret, president; Art, vice president; Bob Crocetta, treasurer; Kay Stafford, recording secretary; and Debby Geyer, corresponding secretary. Mary Ann Canfield, Jack Holt, Connie Horvath, and Leonard Stan were the first executive board. By-laws were adopted on November 8, 2000, and the first constitution on January 10, 2001.

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A Short History of the City of Palm Coast Historical Society

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The historical society created its newsletter, later named The Palm Coast Historian, in 2002, edited by Mary Ann Canfield, later Debby Geyer, and currently Kay Stafford. The quarterly is mailed to all members and is made available in locations throughout the community. A predecessor publication, Pages From The Past, which contained reprints of articles from the March/April 1972 Palm Coaster, had been first published in fall 2001.

Margaret accepted the presidency for only one year and was succeeded in 2001 by Debby Geyer.



Debby Geyer

In its short life, the historical society has had many homes. Beginning with the aforementioned city hall, we later found quarters in the Teen Center in

Hargrove Grade, then a quick emergency evacuation left us homeless for a few years (historical records in storage facilities, meeting space at Daytona Beach Community College, office space wherever). The city then built us a "History Center" in their new city hall in Pine Lakes Industrial Park. Since the city's sale of that building and subsequent move to City Walk, the History Center moved to One Corporate Plaza (school district's Technical Center); we are now located in Building 10 at Matanzas High School.

The lifeblood of any service organization is its volunteers, and the historical society is no exception. In addition to officers and the board, there is a group of dedicated workers who can be found clipping, scanning, pasting, filing many afternoons at the center. If you would like to add your talents to theirs and meet some great people in the process, contact Patricia or Art.



The City of Historical Society

Membership Form – 2010 (please print)

First Name/s _____ Last Name _____

Street Address _____

Mailing Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-Mail Address _____

(you will be notified of meetings/Historical Society information via e-mail)

Single membership – \$10 Family – \$15 Renewal New Member

Payable to The City of Palm Coast Historical Society Mail to Debby Geyer (446-9031)
P.O. Box 352613
Palm Coast FL 32137

Contributions to The City of Palm Coast Historical Society are deductible for Federal Income Tax purposes.

All members receive **The PalmCoast Historian**

In its first newsletter printed in fall of 2001, the City of Palm Coast Historical Society dedicated itself to the mission of accumulating and preserving historically valuable materials relating to the City of Palm Coast for eventual presentation to the public. Initially, talks and slide programs were given at the library and community center, but the society ultimately envisioned a museum with permanent displays, an organized file of materials available for research, and an accessible site with sufficient parking to accommodate groups at public presentations.

From its inception, the society was outstanding in its ability to accumulate historical materials. The ITT developer of Palm Coast donated file cabinets and boxes of materials upon closing its offices and early residents were magnanimous in sharing memories and photographs of early days in the community. These materials became the basis of slide show presentations to the community and to the production of the book, Images of America: Palm Coast, a photo history of Palm Coast since its beginning in 1969.

Preservation of historical materials became a problem because the lack of a permanent home dictated their continuous movement from the library to temporary city halls to storage facilities, an industrial park site and finally to comfortable facilities in the school district. Great strides have been made recently in organizing and cataloging materials and in creating engaging displays and programs worthy of public attention. The City of Palm Coast Historical Society needs only a publicly accessible permanent home to complete its mission as originally stated.

Officers – 2009

Debby Geyer, President & Interim Treasurer;
Jack Pitman, Vice President; Kay Stafford,
Recording Secretary; Mary Ann Clark, Corresponding
Secretary

Board Members

Sisco Deen; Art Dycke, City Historian; Patricia Eldridge;
Connie Horvath (Honorary); Ed Moore; Jon Netts; Bill Ryan

In conclusion of the City of Palm Coast Historical Society Tenth Anniversary Edition: An Expression of Gratitude

We extend our gratitude to the Palm Coast City Council for grant money they provide to sustain us. We thank the city administration and staff for their continuing help in the movement and protection of our materials and for providing community center facilities for our presentations. Ample office space in which to work is generously provided us by the school district superintendent and staff. Thank you.

We hereby recognize officers, board, city historian, and volunteers who comprise the historical society organization for their voluntarily rendered efforts and dedication to the cause of preserving local history. We extend our gratitude to past and present members of the historical society and to those who have purchased city license plates and the Images of America: Palm Coast book. We hope those who have attended our presentations and viewed our exhibits at a variety of community functions have enjoyed them and we appeal and hope for your continuing attendance and support.

The City of Palm Coast Historical Society is proud of its progress toward its mission over the past ten years and now restates it: "To accumulate, preserve, catalog, and make available to the public historical materials pertinent to the history of Palm Coast." Our ultimate goal continues to be putting the materials on permanent display and making them available to the public for research. This will not come to pass until we have a larger facility that is accessible for visitation by all. Please support us in the attainment of that goal by joining the Palm Coast Historical Society

Members receive four issues of The Palm Coast Historian annually. The society continues in its celebration of 40 years of Palm Coast history, and members will receive a schedule and timely notification of all its events and presentations.

**Dedicated to Preserving
Palm Coast History**