The Palm Coast Historian

Through the years in Palm Coast 1968-2014

By

Arthur E. Dycke*

In the belief that Palm Coast residents will enjoy knowing more about their local history, I will attempt to provide a factual and informative narrative of the history of our community. The story thus far may be short but I believe it to be unique and colorful. I will start by presenting a year by year account of the major constructions and events that shaped the growth of Palm Coast from its beginning to the present day. A later series of articles entitled, “Then and Now in Palm Coast” will provide more details and photos of the community’s history.

In the 1950s Flagler County land that was later to become Palm Coast consisted mostly of unpopulated swamp and pine forest, a few farms, a turpentine distillery, scattered beach houses and an opportunity for outstanding fishing and hunting for fee paying tourists. Most business activity was on state Route 100 from the County seat in Bunnell to the ocean related activities in Flagler Beach. Route A1A took tourists north to Marineland through sparsely populated sandy ocean barrier land. In the West US Route 1 brought northern visitors through endless woodlands to south Florida destinations and a railroad line ran north/south through Bunnell. Occupied land was used for farming, cattle raising, lumbering and turpentine distilling. A large Lehigh cement factory (on what is now Colbert Lane) which was opened in 1952 and closed in 1965 stood empty, its 300 former employees mostly dispersed to other areas.

And then came ITT!
1968 - Our Palm Coast community began when the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) bought Levitt and Sons and added it to their ITT conglomerate as a wholly owned subsidiary. The initial planning for our development by ITT/Levitt took place in the fall of that year when a deed for the purchase of the cement plant was recorded in Flagler County on December 23.

1969 - The first public announcement of the sale of the Lehigh property appeared in THE FLAGLER TRIBUNE on January 2, 1969. ITT formed 10 subsidiary companies expressly to purchase land and bought 68,000 acres in Flagler County from 35 landowners, including major owners ITT Rayonier Corporation, Wadsworth Land Company and Lehigh Cement Company. On June 16, the TRIBUNE reported on ITT’s announcement at Princess Place that it would build a 20,000 acre residential complex which would include thousands of waterfront lots, an oceanfront hotel, a golf course and a marina and that they would immediately start construction of the necessary roads, utilities and drainage systems to provide a 500 mile infrastructure. ITT/Levitt offices were established in the old cement plant. Levitt’s project manager Dr. Norman Young predicted a new city in Flagler County that would eventually be populated by 750,000 residents! The purchase included land deeded in 1816 to Gen. Joseph Hernandez who established the St. Joseph plantation and named St. Joe grade (presently Palm Coast Parkway) which, along with Old Kings Road provided entry to our development area. Swamp drainage, tree cutting and site leveling began and a welcome tent was set up near the beginning of construction of a few model homes.

1970 – Construction of the main canal from the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) began. A Land Sales Map dated April 7, 1970 is the first document that I could find showing that the ITT/Levitt development had been given the name Palm Coast. Home sites went on the market starting in June. At that time ITT purchased the former Animal Land attraction for use as a local sales office. It was located along highway A1A at the site of the present Board of Education adult education building north of the present Hammock Dunes Bridge. Work commenced on a welcome center surrounded by a model home area. The “first building constructed in Palm Coast” was a 64’ high observation tower which was the centerpiece of the Grand Opening of ITT’s Palm Coast development on October 29. Florida Gov. Claude Kirk was the guest speaker. Tours were conducted by air, water and land during the festive day and the date is recognized today as “Founders Day” for the Palm Coast community. The first issue of the Palm Coaster was published by ITT to keep people informed of the progress of the development. Atlantic Development Corporation was formed under ITT/Levitt to provide water and wastewater service to Palm Coast. Flagler County’s population was 4,454. Palm Coast’s was 0.
1971 - The first 9 holes of the Palm Coast (later Palm Harbor) golf course were constructed and could be seen from the Welcome Center tower in October 1970. The course officially opened to the public on September 14, 1971. The number of home site purchasers more than tripled from 2,500 to more than 8,000. Residential home construction began on the corner of Club House and Casper Drives (the Drive, the latter being the first road built in Palm Coast. The US Justice Department forced the ITT Corporation to divest itself of Levitt and Sons because of antitrust concerns. The ITT Community Development Corporation (ICDC) was formed to develop Palm Coast. Flagler County adopted its first subdivision regulations.

1972 - The first Palm Coast residents (“Pioneers”) moved into their home in the “C” section on January 21. ICDC opened the Palm Coast Yacht Club (present day Palm Coast Resort) featuring the Harbour Restaurant on December 15 to be the religious, civic and social center of the community. The facility included a marina, launching ramp, pool and tennis courts. ICDC created the Atlantic water management District to tax residents for drainage maintenance in Palm Coast. The district was nullified by a court following a lawsuit filed by bordering property owners. Residents formed a Civic Association and population in the developments numbered just over 200 by the end of the year.
1973 - The second nine holes of the golf course were completed. ICDC subdivided and recorded as much land as possible, perhaps without the proper markers before the July 1 implementation date of a new Development of Regional Impact law. Forty-eight platted sections of land containing about 80,000 lots were recorded for sale with the Interstate Land Sales division in the first six months of the year. The first store opened in Palm Coast was a small Handy Way convenience center with a Postal Service and it was followed by a beauty salon, a doctor's office and a realtor. A volunteer fire department was started, a 19th Hole golf clubhouse opened, fashion shows, religious services and all community activities were centered at the Yacht Club which added a dock with a small open air pavilion on the ICW. ICDC constructed 330 new houses, 26 miles of asphalt road, 20 miles of water lines and 17 miles of sewer lines.

1974 - ITT completed the Sheraton Palm Coast Inn on the ocean off State Road A1A. The developer signed an agreement with the State Division of Planning to set aside conservation land and restrict development on some of its acreage. ITT contributed land for the opening of the Flagler/Palm Coast high school. A new playground was opened near the golf course. Shangri-La condominiums opened. Miami and New York ICDC offices consolidated in Miami.

1975 - The County Commission established a building code and building department. ICDC filed civil lawsuits against their own chief engineer, accusing him of taking kickbacks from contractors who allegedly performed shoddy work. Alan Smolen succeeded Dr. Norman Young as president of ICDC in March. Palm Coast got its own zip code. Palm Coast condominiums opened. St. Mark by the Sea Lutheran Church held services and began construction on the community’s first house of worship. The Palm Coast Service District was formed as the first step toward local government. Palm Coast population was up to 1,000 people.
1976 – The Palm Coast Fire District was created by the state legislature providing fire protection and emergency services to “core area” residents. The first church service was held at St. Mark by the Sea. A large community bicentennial 4th of July celebration was hosted by the Civic Association and the Lions Club followed by fireworks in Flagler Beach. The Corps of Engineers allowed the 125 foot wide Clubhouse Waterway (main canal) to connect saltwater canals to the ICW. Palm Club condominium complex containing 152 units was completed. Palm Coast population is 2,004 by the end of the year.

1977 - ICDC and the State Department of Transportation signed an agreement for DOT to four lane the interchange at I–95 and Palm Coast Parkway. Decca Marine became the community’s first ITT industry. ICDC moved to temporary offices on route A1A (former Animal Land and present adult education site). The Woodlands neighborhood is opened. The Palm Coast Fire district is created by the County commission and the ITT donated Emergency Services building is opened. A Palm Coast medical clinic was opened at Faraday Lane on May 2 by Dr. John Canakaris. ICDC purchased security bonds totaling more than $434 million guaranteeing roads and drainage would be constructed by 1984.

1978 - ICDC completed the Palm Coast Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), which called for developing 42,000 acres of residential and commercial projects. It downsized the population projection to 224,000 residents. ICDC opened headquarters at 1 Corporate Dr. in
Palm Coast. Palm Harbor Tennis Club opened across from the Yacht Club. Work started on a Shopping Center with gas station and many stores open before Christmas. YMCA in operation at community center. LPGA golf champion Nancy Lopez becomes resident Palm Coast golf touring pro.

1979 - Palm Harbor Shopping Center opens with Publix, Eckerd Drugs, etc. Belle Terre Swim and Racquet Court opens. Tom Gullickson becomes Palm Coast tennis touring pro. Palm Coast Marina is newly expanded. Fairways condominiums open. Wittemann Company occupies their new world headquarters in Pine Lakes Industrial Park. Temple Beth shalom breaks ground. Pine Lakes golf course planned by Arnold Palmer and Ed say. Daytona Beach community college holds classes in Shopping Center. 750,000 gallon water storage tank installed.
1980 - Construction of I–95 interchange begins. ITT Corporation changes Palm Coast Utility from being a subsidiary of ICDC to being a direct subsidiary of ITT Corporation. Jurisdiction for Palm Coast Utility Corporation rate increases switches from Flagler County to Florida Public Service Commission. Palm Coast population is 4,500.

1981 – The I-95 interchange at Palm Coast Parkway opened with the $3.6 million construction cost 90% funded by ICDC. ITT Community Development Corporation president Alan Smolen and Florida Lieut. Gov. Wayne Mixson dedicated the interchange on May 1, 1981. Pine Lakes, our second golf course, open since 1980, was officially dedicated on August 21. The Coquina Lanes bowling center opened as did the $1.8 million Pine Lakes country club. Woodhaven condominiums, Palm Harbor Professional Park and Pine Lakes Village opened.

1982 - The Belle Terre middle school (now Buddy Taylor middle school) opened. The East Flagler Service District and Fire District were combined by the County Commission into the Palm Coast Service District covering the entire community. Old St. Augustine Ovens, Inc. became the first tenant in the new Palm Coast Industrial Park. The Humane Society animal shelter opened. ICDC gave the former YMCA property to the new Service District.

1983 - The Friends of the Library helped dedicate the new Flagler County public library just opened in the Shopping Center. Daytona Beach Community College built a beautiful campus
and a Performing Arts Pavilion (now named for Alan Smolen) with the help of ICDC land and financial contributions. McDonald's opened in Palm Coast near the I-95 intersection. ITT sponsored Festival Park presents community events.

1984 – Lago Vista patio homes open in Pine Lakes Village. Kings Colony homes open. Palm Coast Data comes to Pine Lakes Industrial Park. Sea Ray boats began production at the Intracoastal Industrial Park. Harbor Club vacation resort opened. Palm Coast undergoes a $3.3 million community beautification program. The County Commission approved the Matanzas Shores development. Palm Coast Sanitation Corporation, a former ITT subsidiary, pulls out of the garbage collection business in Palm Coast and the County assumes this responsibility. The County signs a road agreement with ICDC that spells out plans for four lanes on some Palm Coast roads during the following 20 years. The state approves Hammock Dunes Community Development District and ICDC plans to fund a water supply for the Hammock. A campaign was launched to make Palm Coast a city and some residents requested that a traffic light be placed at the inter-section of Palm Coast Parkway and Old Kings Road. Palm coast population reached 8,562.

1985 – On May 17, two separate fires cut Flagler County into 4 pieces. The fires started west of US Route 1 and raced to the ocean, pushed by a relentless 40 mile an hour wind. The “Palm Coast fire” ran between Palm Coast Parkway and Route 100. The area was evacuated and cordoned off by the National Guard. 200 of the 3,500 homes in Palm Coast were destroyed or damaged. Jim Gardner replaced Alan Smolen as ICDC president. Palm Coast was honored as a blue-chip community by the state of Florida. Cartoon cat Garfield became our advertising symbol.

The Palm Harbor shopping center expansion continued. Construction began on a major all-surface tennis complex and the Pine Lakes country club. Lake Forest courtyard homes opened. The Harbor Club vacation ownership resort opened. ICDC donated land for the community’s first elementary school (Wadsworth).

1986 - Arnold Palmer returned for the opening of Palm Coast’s third golf club, Matanzas Woods. The beautiful 16 court, all-surface Players Club complex opened with some grass courts and teenage up and comers like Andre Agassi practicing.
there. The ocean front Sea Colony community opened as did The Oaks, an estate home subdivision near the Palm Harbor golf club. Many new businesses occupied our shopping center and three industrial parks. The Palm Coast Yacht Club became the Sheraton and added 154 rooms near the marina. The I-95 interchange underwent beautification and a new ITT – CDC Welcome Center was built at the South East corner of Palm Coast Parkway and Old Kings Road (presently CVS pharmacy). A Federal Aviation Administration Management Training School was established on property at Palm Coast Parkway SouthEast

1987 - Construction began on a bridge over the ICW joining Palm Coast Parkway and the Hammock Dunes development. A re-modeled Sheraton resort replaced the former Yacht Club. Wadsworth elementary school and St. Joe’s Plaza opened. Sun Sport Beach Club opened with a swimming pool and direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. Construction began on a Memorial Hospital health center and a 21,000 square ft. US Post Office on a 7.6 acre site west of I-95 between Palm Coast Parkway North and South. Construction began on a Walmart.

1988 - Hammock Dunes Bridge opened with a huge celebration of fireworks and a parade over the bridge. ITT donates land and Flagler County develops oceanfront public parks and bike paths. Construction continues on the Hammock Dunes and Island Estates development and an ocean front golf course. St. Joe Plaza continues expansion including Palm Coast’s first movie theater. The shopping center library expands, a new main fire station is completed and the Post Office and Walmart open.
1989 - ITT’s Admiral Corporation starts sales in the Hammock Dunes development. ICDC signs a public lands dedication agreement to set aside land for future public facilities. The Freida Zamba Aquatic Pool and park complex opened. Carlson Park Estates, Fox Ridge, and Whisperwood were new neighborhoods. Winn Dixie opened in the Flagler Regional Plaza. Preliminary construction began on our fourth golf course in the Cyprus Knoll community.

1990 - Flagler County voters rejected a proposed Charter form of government. Old Kings Road elementary school opened. The Professional Office Park expanded as did the St. Joe Business Center and Kingswood Center commercial park. LakeSide by the Sea community held a grand opening. Deerwood and Lake Forest North communities began Cyprus Knoll golf course opened in December. Palm Coast population reached 18,556.

1991 - The Flagler Auditorium opened. ICDC’s transfer of the drainage and canal system to a newly created Community Services Corporation for maintenance and taxation was criticized by the County Commission and residents. Construction began for La Grande Provence, beachfront condominiums in Hammock Dunes private community and for Surf Club, an ocean front condominium at Matanzas Shores. There was a grand opening of the 32,000 square ft. Hammock Dunes Club and the USTA national Senior Woman’s Grass Court Championship was held at the Players Club. Cracker Barrel restaurant and Beall’s department store opened. The private Palm Coast Yacht Club broke ground for its clubhouse (not to be confused with the original ITT Yacht Club.)

1992 - The Community Service Corporation charges residents $24 a year for drainage and canal maintenance. ITT sells its cable company.

1993 - ICDC lays off 5% of its staff. ITT’s River Club (now Grand Haven) postponed for two years.

1994 – ITT’s CEO says the company is looking to sell off almost all of its Palm Coast assets. ICDC prepares to sell its four golf courses and River Club to private developers. ICDC settles a road takeover dispute with the County. Colbert Lane extension and a 302 slip marina were approved by the County.

1995 - I – 95 intersection gets four lanes. More ICDC employees laid off. Two ocean parcels north of Hammock Dunes were sold to new developers. ITT prepares to sell its homebuilding division, Palm Coast Utility Corporation and the Sheraton Hotel.

1996 - ICDC sells 13,000 acres of prime property to Palm Coast Holdings for $34 million and its headquarters on Corporate Drive for $1 million. County and ICDC dispute responsibility for utility and canal maintenance.

1997 – The Palm Coast Civic Association and the Flagler County Citizens League combined to foster incorporation of a city to fill the void left by the ITT pullout. ICDC halts utility payments in Palm Coast. County will not share in the cost of an incorporation feasibility study.

1998 - Flagler Beach considers the annexation of 2,000 acres of Palm Coast Service District land. Wildfires consume 40 homes in Palm Coast. The Palm Coast Home Rule Coalition writes a proposal and actively promotes the incorporation of Palm Coast. The County
authorizes $15,000 for a feasibility study of Palm Coast done by Daytona Beach Community College. Residents attend meetings and provide input at many meetings about incorporation. The County supports the report and sends it to the state legislative delegation. The state responds that the proposal will have to wait until the following year.

1999 - Local legislators sponsored a bill calling for the incorporation of Palm Coast as a city. The State Community Affairs Committee unanimously approved a referendum for County voters. Numerous meetings throughout the summer drew large crowds to hear the Palm Coast Home Rule Coalition speak in favor of incorporation and Not a Done Deal Association speaking against it. Hurricane Floyd delayed the referendum for a week. County residents voted approximately 60 % in favor of incorporation in a September 21 referendum. A transition team was formed to facilitate the sharing of power between county and city. 26 candidates sought five new Council seats. By December 16 Councilman James Holland, William Venne, Ralph Carter, Jerome Full and Mayor James Canfield were sworn in. At midnight on December 31 the community officially became the City of Palm Coast and we dubbed ourselves “a Millennium City.”

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The following "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 October 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.

* “How Palm Coast Became a City” is in the Special 10th Anniversary Issue of The Palm Coast Historian, Winter 2009/10. It outlines the way in which our community government evolved from being administered by a large corporate developer to being a ward of the County Commission and eventually to having voters elect it in an incorporation vote that would allow it to control its own destiny. The article ends on December 31, 1999 when Palm Coast officially became a city.
How Palm Coast Became a City

by

Arthur E. Dycke*

The belief 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. It was entitled, "An Approach to a New City: Palm Coast." In it 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 thousand acres and to 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 also 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 all of Flagler County and the only two traffic lights were on route 100, one at the intersections of route 1 in Bunnell, and 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 (behind thr microphone below.) 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 and 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 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.

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 analyses 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 the successful candidate to be 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 Hennion, 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 in the following January. A delegation of Association and Advisory Board members including Catherine Larson, Jack Nugent, Joe Werner, Hank Rahusen, 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 Tribune reported, "Incorporation of Palm Coast is a Dead Issue." The state legislature had rejected the proposals 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 1-95 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 being 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 the 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: AI 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 that the County Commission was not paying sufficient attention to the Palm Coast community and that 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 that 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 of 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 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 the questions of 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.

Events moved very rapidly thereafter. By Oct. 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, Bob Crocetta, Dick Eggers, John Eustace, Bill Jones, Jack Nugent and Dick Mulligan, Alternate.

In January 1999, before 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 the Flagler Auditorium on July 14th 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 Sept. 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.

Candidates for the 5 city council seats began lining up immediately and the final number of qualifiers for the race reached 26. Adjunct faculty in history, government and economics instructor Art Dycke served as moderator for an afternoon and an evening session in the amphitheater at (now) Daytona College where all the candidates had 10 minutes each to present themselves to large numbers of interested residents. Elections Commissioner Peggy Rae Border prepared ballots for a Primary election on Nov. 9 and thereafter for the final election on Dec. 14.

Art and Jim Holland
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 Dec. 14 general election. The group was sworn in on Dec. 16 and it began meeting immediately dubbing Palm Coast a "Millennium City" even though the city's official birthday was still 2 weeks away.

Full, Canfield,Venne, Carter and Holland (front)

Stan Denison recalls being asked to become interim city manager on the evening of the 17th 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 Years 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, the 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.
Through the Years in Palm Coast “Dynamic Decade” 2000-2009

By Art Dycke*

2000 - The mayor, city council and the city manager all seemed to agree that this first year should emphasize planning rather than forging ahead without giving sufficient thought to the complicated problems facing a new city. First they had to find a place where they could work. Mayor Jim Canfield said, “We don’t have desks, phones or offices. Right now my office is the K-Mart coffee shop.” At first city business was done in 2 ½ rooms of the present day Community Center. In March, newly chosen city manager Richard Kelton arranged to rent office space at the former ITT headquarters at 1 Corporate Drive. By May the Flagler County Commission turned over the former county library to be renovated and used by the city as our first “permanent” city hall. The community was invited to an elaborate party to celebrate its official opening on October 26. A large number of new commercial applications for the new city’s land use became the second problem that had to be dealt with immediately. The city Council passed a tree buffer ordinance and then proclaimed a 90 day moratorium on all commercial building along Palm Harbor Pkwy., East to the Hammock Dunes Bridge. There was an initial protest from a small segment of the business community, but by the end of the moratorium most of the applications were not pursued and the land became available for sale. And the city was able to purchase linear Park and St. Joe Trail land that became the basis for the popular Walkway access to the Intra Coastal Waterway that is so joyfully used by many residents today. In other year one highlights: Palm Coast signed interlocal agreements and approved its first annual budget independent of Flagler County to go into effect on October 1. The year ended with Mayor Canfield acting as grand marshal of a very popular holiday parade.
2001 – Providing residents with essential government services and promoting the community's economic growth were two major goals the City’s second year.

As a result of joint meetings of the Palm Coast Council and the Flagler Commissioners, the county turned over many parcels of land to the city benefiting fire, public works, recreation and parks and the location of new schools by the Board of Education. At the same time the city began studying the acquisition of its water sources. The city stimulated economic growth by approving plans for a $1 million expansion of its leading employer, Palm Coast Data, the Outback steak house, Albertsons food chain store and the residential development called Arbor Trace. In other highlights of the year: Jon Netts was elected to the City Council, a proposal was made for a 9/11 memorial, the African American Cultural Society constructed a building, the Council debated the start of a center for the arts, the mayor proposed a Flagler League of Cities and former ITT Community Development Corporation president, Alan Smolen, spoke out against building a Race Trak gas station and a Walgreens drug store on the site formerly occupied by a church on land provided by the Corporation.

2002 – Repairing and improving ITT’s original 500 miles of 32 year old infrastructure while encouraging continuing commercial and residential growth became major themes during the City’s third year. With potholed streets, overflowing swales, and broken drain pipes clearly in evidence, the public works department worked overtime and the citizens actually approved a special tax dedicated to improving their roads.
Street lighting and landscaping was added to the I-95 overpass. Palm Coast’s quest to obtain its own water company took an amazing turn when it was almost purchased by two panhandle Florida cities. Legal action was pending at the end of the year. The beautiful new three-story Flagler Hospital opened near the Route 100 and I-95 intersection. Permitting processes for The Home Depot and the European Village continued and the first plans for the Town Center were revealed. The construction of 500 condominium units was approved for the following year. Highly respected original Council member Jim Holland died on February 8. The city Council appointed Tom Lawrence to the position on March 9.
2003 – In this eventful year, Palm Coast purchased a water company, re-located their city hall, annexed additional land and completed a comprehensive plan for their future. The City completed its tortuous three year pursuit of a municipally owned water utility when the process culminated in its $82.3 million purchase from the Allete Corp. of Duluth MN. The city offered municipal bonds to finance the purchase and guaranteed their residents that there would be no increase in their water rates over the next five years. With city population and services expanding, there was no longer sufficient room to work in our first city hall. Government leaders approved the purchase of the Wittemann office/brewery building in the Pine Lakes Industrial Park at a cost of $2.5 million as a temporary city hall while they prepared for their expected eventual home in Town Center. It was hoped that the cost would be recouped by a later sale of the property to a commercial buyer. The City also annexed 5,800 acres of land in the northwest corner of Flagler County near the St. John’s border. A state mandated five and ten year Comprehensive Plan for the future of Palm Coast was submitted following 18 months of staff preparation. Other noteworthy events of the year included: the election of Mary DiStefano to the City Council after the resignation of Tom Lawrence, Council passage of a tax abatement plan to attract incoming businesses that prosper the local economy, the public works dept. surfacing of 70 miles of roads and Gov. Bush’s veto of Palm Coast’s request for $5-$7 million in funding for construction of a third lane on the I-95 overpass for the third year in a row. The city approved European Village and a 470 acre site for Town Center which would provide 1,000,000 sq. ft. of office space, 2,000,000 sq. ft. of retail/commercial space, 750,000 sq. ft. of institutional buildings, a 2,400 seat movie theater and 240 nursing-home beds. City Council passage started the process of seeking approval of a massive DRI by state agencies.

2004 – Palm coast residents are likely to remember this year mostly because of a continuing rapid population growth and for being bothered by three out of four hurricanes during an especially stressful storm season. In April, Mr. William Parnell became the City of Palm Coast’s 50,000th resident. City officials honored him at a public party and showered him with gifts. The expanding population brought problems such as increases in
traffic congestion but it also brought benefits with the magic number of 50,000 residents gaining the city recognition as a micropolitan city which in turn got it the recognition from large chain stores such as The Home Depot to consider locating here. Indeed by the end of the year Palm Coast population had almost doubled from its original number of 29,360 and Flagler County had become the nation's fastest growing county. A rash of hurricanes or winter storms atypically impacted Palm Coast. Charlie, Frances and Jeanne struck the area creating power outages and forcing evacuation orders that resulted in over 1,000 buildings sustaining some level of damage and more than $4 million in reported costs for cleaning up the debris. Other highlights of the year included: the annexation by the city of an additional 691 acres, the opening of the St. Joe Parkway on the ICW, a residential research study showing that "traffic congestion was seen as the city's largest problem," an election in which more than 83% of the city's registered voters actually did vote, the old Palm Harbor city hall being sold for $960,000, Outback steakhouse seeking a home in the new micro city and Mayor Jim Canfield and city manager Dick Kelton being finalists in the International City /County Management Association awards.
2005 – The City of Palm Coast started the year with a Birthday Bash celebration of its past five years. The council members pictured with the cake are: (from left to right) William Venne, Jon Netts, Ralph Carter, Jim Canfield (mayor) and Mary DiStefano. Palm Coast was officially designated as the "fastest growing micropolitan area in the United States" by the United States Census Bureau by the end of the year. The population of over 64,500 residents had more than doubled in the six years since incorporation. The Town Center was platted to start the infrastructure for phase 1 and 2 and a site plan was approved for construction of the Publix Shopping Center just off Belle Terre Parkway.

Other highlights of Palm coast life in 2005 included: Original city councilman Ralph Carter passing away, construction beginning on the Matanzas Woods I-95 overpass, city employees traveling to Mississippi to help Katrina victims, the European Village was opened, City Walk was under construction and the City boasted of a tax rate of 3.4 mills and holding.

2006 – The City saw an increase in the amount of commercial construction activity, especially in the Town Center. The first retail stores opened with Walgreen and Publix on the Belle Terre Pkwy west side of the site. With most of the infrastructure complete, additional residential and commercial developments
were fully in process. When completed, Town Center will cover approximately 1,500 acres. Cobblestone Village started construction as a new large scale retail project near the 289 SW I-95 exit that was anchored by Lowe’s home improvement and Belk department store. Palm Coast Park, a 4740 acre project located in the northwest portion of the City will provide commercial development along US 1. Dick Kelton, the highly experienced administrator from Daytona Beach who became Palm Coast’s first city manager, steadily guiding it through many achievements during the last 6 years, announced his retirement effective Jan. 31, 2007 From the outset he had worked with Mayor Canfield as a team whereby they received finalist awards from the Florida League of Cities as mayor and city manager of the year in 2004. Jim Landon, an experienced administrator from Lancaster, Texas was hired as city manager on November 7th. Palm coast was named "Tree City USA" by the National Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the US Forest Service and the National Association of State Forester’s. There were preparations and completions of civic, private and commercial projects: the city made a start on the acquisition of Palm Harbor as a public golf course, a room was provided on the side of city hall for the Palm Coast Historical Society, a state sponsored water services agreement amongst our neighboring communities was achieved, the city hired its first law enforcement coordinator, and more.

2007 – There was another major change in the government and administrative leadership of the City this year. Jim Canfield had been the leader of the action committee that had brought about the incorporation of Palm Coast and had easily won election as the city's first mayor. Both Mayor Canfield and original councilman William Venne announced their resignation in this year. Citizens elected long-time councilman Jon Netts as Palm Coast's second mayor. Brig. Gen. Holsey Moorman became district number one second council member and Frank Meeker was elected to serve district number two as Palm Coast also welcomed Jim Landon as their second city manager. Streets, signs, landscaping and infrastructure for the anticipated premiere of Towne Center were completed and this "heart of Palm Coast" on SR 100 was combining charming lifestyles, architecture and ambience with a planned urban center. The city's new "down town" would
have mixed land uses to include residential units, independent and assisted living development, a multiplex movie theater, restaurants, hotels and specialty shops. It was predicted that Town Center would provide a strong sense of neighborhood pride for the community. Presently unoccupied open space would allow our City to have a “Central Park” area for concerts, parades, festivals, holiday displays and more.

2008 – In the face of a local and national economy in recession, it seems that the City decided to continue to move ahead with its planned capital improvements and utilize some innovative economics in seeking a brighter future. The best example of this philosophy lay in the manner in which the City negotiated with a new industry dubbed “Project Continental” that was interested in locating within our City. The parent company of a local firm with over 700 employees was looking for a new headquarters to expand and centralize their business. The expansion promised to bring in 1,000 new jobs but if the firm did not come to Palm coast there was the danger of losing the original jobs to another community. Creatively, the City offered the firm a savings on the cost of a new building by offering them a “rent with possibility to buy deal” for the building that the City was using as a City Hall. This flexibility brought the firm into our community while our government offices moved into rental space in a newly constructed office/commercial area called City Walk economically benefiting all concerned. Likewise the city had previously bulldozed an old fire station in order to get a new one at little cost and at the same time providing space for
a productive new store, of the Target Superstore stimulus to the shops at community. The southern was 4-laned awaiting the Walmart (the company they were suspending their plans to build on the site.) The Palm Harbor municipal golf course opened on Nov. 7. A large crowd attended the long awaited opening of Target in Town Center off Route 100. A sign at the entry way showed the name Target and Pet Smart and left many blanks open for other stores names to be added in the future. City and county residents hoped that "this could be the start of something big".

2009 – The city continued to move ahead with its capital projects despite the recession. Old Kings Rd. South continued being 4-laned in preparation to accommodate Walmart that was to be constructed at the Route 100 intersection. All Towne Center related road and landscaping improvements continued unabated as more business flowed into the area. City public works crews added personnel in an attempt to improve the swales during an especially rainy summer. The long awaited Palm Harbor golf course was ready to play and had a grand opening on November 7. Palm Coast residents were encouraged to hear that the Epic Theater scheduled for Town Center would be there soon. A huge 10th Anniversary celebration of the city of Palm Coast’s “Dynamic Decade” was held on Dec. 12 in Town Center’s “Central Park.”

2010 – The Palm Coast City Council consisted of: (Left to right) Frank Meeker, Betty DiStefano, Mayor Jon Netts, Bill Lewis and Holsey Moorman. With a stalled economy like many cities across the nation, Palm Coast navigated through high unemployment, a stagnant business climate and an unsettling real estate market. To overcome these challenges the Mayor and City Council partnered with the County and School Board to reduce duplication of services and find new cost effective ways to do business. Opening Waterfront Park and the Graham Swamp Trail strengthened the environmentally-sensitive eco-theme for citizens. Stepping forward as a prominent green Florida City brought accolades to Palm Coast as a recipient of the Gold Level Designation for a Green Local Government, awarded by the Florida Green Building Coalition. The City also became a new home to several new businesses specializing in efficient energy usage. Expanding
our sports complex facilities in lacrosse, soccer, tennis and bicycling allowed us to emerge as a new youth sports destination whereby athletic special events introduced Palm Coast as a new player in the national arena of sports. The city added some spectacular new special events such as the Rock ‘N Rib Fest, Holiday Fest and Parade, Seafood Festival, Holiday Joy Ride and Palm Coast’s first ice skating rink brought residents to Central Park to celebrate life in Palm Coast. Launching the City's high performance FiberNET high speed open access internet to local businesses helped to lower the cost of telecommunications for existing businesses and to attract new jobs to Palm Coast. We received over $8 million in stimulus/grant money to extend Old Kings Road, construct multi-use bike paths and trails, resurface Palm Coast Parkway, reconstruct a bridge on Palm Harbor Parkway and purchase foreclosed homes to rehab and sell for a Neighborhood Stabilization Project.

There follow a few selected “Defining Achievements” of the various city government departments in 2010: Responded to 211 calls for fire assistance, 5,402 calls for EMS and Rescue and 1,414 miscellaneous emergencies. Rehabbed 25 miles of swales, resurfaced 50 miles of road and worked on Street Valley Gutter & Pipe Replacement Project, Harvested 650 acres of freshwater aquatic weeds, Sprayed 2,448 acres of freshwater canals with aquatic herbicide and constructed a turn lane at Belle Terre Parkway and US 1. Built Neighborhood & City Gateway Signs. Approved plans for: Palm Coast Landing in Town Center, AutoZone, CVS Pharmacy on Palm Coast Pkwy., Beach Village, Tuscany Village, Palm Coast Fibernet Co-location Facility, Epic Movie Theater in Town Center, Palm Harbor Golf Course, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Memorial Hospital Flagler – 2-story addition, Palm Coast Days Inn, ABC Fine Wine & Spirits, Dunkin Donuts / Pizza Hut in Retail Shopping Plaza, Olive Garden / Red Lobster Restaurants and the Belle Terre Parkway Multi-use Path. Palm Coast continued as the lead agency for the Coquina Coast Seawater Desalination Project to determine the most feasible, cost effective approach to converting ocean water to drinking water as an alternative future water supply.
2011 - Voters went to the polls to reelect Mayor John Netts for a five-year term and to select Bill McGuire from district number one and Jason DeLorenzo from district number three. The city had passed an ordinance to revise the boundaries of the city’s four Council districts in order to equalize the number of citizens residing in each district, an action mandated by the city charter to coincide with the national census that takes place every 10 years. Also, voters had approved a charter amendment to change city election years to align with federal and state elections.

The federal government Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) was implemented by the city to help Palm Coasters to purchase the home of their dreams. NSP helped to remove homes from local foreclosure lists, returned them to private ownership and increased home and neighborhood values. In the previous year, the city had purchased 23 foreclosed homes, 15 of which were resold to new homeowners. In addition, $538,000 was paid for local contractor/realtor/title agent services, putting people back to work. Community development staff managed the completion of several important projects. For full sized multipurpose sports fields were added to the existing for at the Indian trails sports complex. A new irrigation system and special sports turf were added to the 475,000 ft.² field area. New concrete walking/biking paths were built on the east side of Belle Terre Parkway (Prichard to Parkview, Pinegrove to Royal Palms and Pine Lakes to Cypress Point). These segments brought connectivity to the existing trails and provided access to schools and parks. Benches and trash/recycling receptacles were added to Central Park. Dollars from the federal stimulus package provided most all of the funding for these projects.

With over 100 dangerous fires raging across Flagler County and several of them threatening Palm Coast homes, city, county and state firefighters what ferociously on the fire lines, protecting structures and lives in June during a 30 day siege of blazes engulfing several thousand acres of property. In the end no lives were lost or homes damaged during this alarming spring crisis.
Palm Coast received the Outstanding Development Award from the Florida Planning and Zoning Association for the Florida water demonstration exhibit, the Tree City USA and the Tree City USA growth award, both from the National Arbor Day Foundation, designed the Country Club Cove neighborhood sign, completed Parkway beautification landscaping along the median on Belle Terre Parkway, hosted the fourth annual intracoastal waterway cleanup where 468 volunteers removed 2,772 pounds of debris along waterways and canals in the city and increased community recycling participation with 2,453 more tons of recycled material collected than in the previous year.

The recreation department facilitated hundreds of parents and children to enjoy a Snow Globe Live experience and take photos with Santa at the annual holiday parade event and initiated the city’s first free Friday night live concert at European Village.

The engineering and storm water department made significant progress in a year of surveying and designing intricate infrastructure replacement projects in Palm Coast’s massive drainage system. During the year 85 drainage pipe crossings were replaced throughout the city. Most of Palm Coast’s pipes are over 30 years old and have reached the end of their useful life one of our city councils top priorities has been to systematically replace all faulty pipes.
A FiberNet connection contract with the Flagler County schools brought 15 school sites online in July. With the addition of Florida Hospital Flagler’s affiliated doctor’s offices, the city added 50 individual revenue-generating sites connected to the fiber network, establishing a 300% increase in one year.

2012 - Palm Coast started to see positive economic trends for the first time following one of the nation’s worst economic downturns. Rising employment, taxable sales, median home values, capital investment, visitors spending and positive national stories about Palm Coast all pointed to a brighter future. While property values tended to lag, real estate market conditions improved. These positive economic trends allowed the city to invest in projects and programs to further City Council's long term goals. Palm Coast had the largest drop in unemployment rate in Florida during the year. Taxable sales had grown 21%, or $94 million, since 2007. $337 million had been invested in private construction in Palm Coast since 2009. Area median sales prices for single-family homes in Palm Coast began to rise for the first time since the economic downturn. Palm Coast was named one of the 15 best housing markets in the United States for the next five years. Also, the city was named one of the five great places to retire.

The new International Food and Wine Festival and completion of the first year of the Palm Coast running series rounded out a full array of special events year geared toward residents and visitors. The city was able to complete a number of major projects this past year – everything from constructing new multiuse pathways and landscaping more medians along Belle Terre Parkway to building a new Palm Coast sign on Palm Coast Parkway at the eastern gateway to the city to designing and adding a new reuse main to the Hidden Lakes development. Drainage improvements were made, new websites were launched, water quality was improved and the fire department offered a variety of community programs designed to keep residents safe.

The city greatly expanded its in-house maintenance program to rehabilitation of swales and ditches and playgrounds as areas that resulted in less costs to taxpayers. Palm Coast saved more than $2.2 million.
The city and its departments and employees won a number of awards for environmental stewardship outstanding development, water quality, safety practices, excellent financial practices and the Find your Florida marketing video. We even made the Guinness Book of World Records for participating in the world’s largest swimming lesson.

These indications of a promising future prompted the city government to claim in its 2012 annual report, “we think you’ll agree PALM COAST IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY.”

New Palm Coast Branch Flagler Hospital

PALM COAST also: hosted 12 athletic tournaments with an estimated $3 million in visitors spending, put on a starlight holiday event and parade with over 3000 in attendance. Held Eggstravaganza at central Park, with an estimated attendance of 4500 and hosted Friday Night Live concerts at European Village. The recreation department provided: Dive – in – Movie with attendance of 417, offered Boo Bash event for Halloween in partnership with Flagler schools with attendance of more than 4000, held the fifth annual Intracoastal Water way
cleanup event with an estimated 588 volunteers, set off fireworks to celebrate Independence Day, put on the inaugural bike rodeo with the Flagler County Sheriff’s office to highlight bicycle safety, hosted patriotic ceremonies for Memorial Day, Fourth of July, 9/11 and Veterans Day and held their annual tree lighting ceremony to kick off the holiday season.

2013 - The economy continued to improve in Palm Coast, with positive trends such as increased taxable sales and visitor spending, more jobs, and many new construction projects – both residential and commercial. While continuing to grow and strengthen, the city was able to keep property taxes at the same level and still accomplish many big projects.

The year was one of transition and setting foundations for the years ahead. Planning and design for a number of capital projects were started and some finished. They included: Palm Coast Pkwy. 6-laning from Cypress Point Parkway/Boulder Rock Drive to Florida Park Drive – to include pedestrian bike paths on both sides of Palm Coast Pkwy., Bulldog Drive improvements – including reconstruction, drainage and intersection with Palm Harbor Parkway and Old Kings Road extension – in preparation for new I – 95 interchange. Multi use pathways along Seminole Woods Boulevard and Matanzas Woods Parkway. M – 3 Surface Water Control Structure replacement (weir on Belleair Waterway). Zero Liquid Discharges water treatment plant at Water Plant 2. Long Creek Nature Preserve, phase 1. Renovation of James Holland Memorial Park, phase I. Rehabilitation of the College Waterway Bridge. Gateway improvements – to include signage and landscaping and phase 1 of a new City Hall at Town Center.

The City put its emergency preparations to the test in December 2013, when the Starlight Tornado brought a 1.5-mile trail of destruction to the B, C and F sections of Palm Coast. In all, seven homes were destroyed and another 234 homes were damaged, adding up to $7.27 million in damage. Thankfully, no one was injured or killed and the tornado stayed clear of Town Center, where the Starlight Holiday Parade wrapped up early due to the approaching storm. The City executed a quick and comprehensive response in the minutes, hours and days after the tornado. After ensuring residents’ safety, City teams helped our citizens recover by providing debris cleanup, damage assessment, street-sign replacement, and a streamlined permitting and inspections process for emergency repairs. City Customer Service representatives went door-to-door with the American Red Cross to assist residents in contacting their insurance companies and getting the help they needed. The City drew on the resources of Flagler Emergency Services, the Flagler County Sheriff’s Office and other state and local agencies, organizations and companies to keep residents safe and to aid in a speedy recovery.
Beautiful birds in nature, fishing fun, running the trails and calm waters at the end of a dock in Palm Coast’s town center were among the winning images in the Palm Coast Find Your Florida 2013 photography contest. The contest held in the spring was the first photo contest held by the City in several years.

2014 - Four major capital projects were in their early stages or just about to start construction. They were: the renovation of the Palm Harbor shopping center, the groundbreaking for a new city hall in Town Center, the six-laning of the I-95 interchange and the first phase of the James Holland Memorial Park renovation (which entailed the serious consequence of having no public access to the park and the City of Palm Coast Historical Society and Museum at the end of the park road that is being re-routed.)

2015 – (Authors Note*) Each of the aforementioned constructions will be updated in The Palm Coast Historian Issue 37 winter 2005.
THEN AND NOW IN PALM COAST
FIRST BUILDING CONSTRUCTED IN PALM COAST

By Art Dycke*

BACKGROUND - Our Palm Coast community began when the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) bought legendary post- WWII home-builder Levitt and Sons and added it to the ITT conglomerate as a wholly-owned subsidiary in 1968. The initial planning for our development took place in the fall of that year. The Flagler Tribune announced ITT’s purchase of the abandoned Lehigh cement factory for $4.5 million on January 2, 1969 adding to over 50,000 acres of land they had already leased or purchased through their Rayonier (forest products) subsidiary. On June 16, 1969 at Princess Place in northern Flagler County, ITT/Levitt announced their first plans for a massive land development project to a national audience. Levitt project director Dr. Norman Young commenced constructing drainage canals and a 500 mile infrastructure which he later predicted would eventually be home to 750,000 residents.

Announcement at Princess Place

June 16, 1969
Dr. Norman Young at map

In February 1970 Dr. Young, President of ITT Levitt Development Corporation (ICDC), made a progress report to the Flagler Chamber of Commerce in which he envisioned an observation tower overlooking the planned residential area, a tri-winged motel to be constructed on the oceanfront, a network of lighted highways including Kings Road and St. Joe Grade, a high span bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) and an access interchange at Interstate 95. The tower, golf course and model homes were to be completed by the end of the year. Levitt marketers in N.Y. had by now given the project the name of Palm Coast.

Do you see what I see rising on the horizon amid massive infrastructure construction in a “pine covered swamp” recently named Palm Coast?
ITT/Levitt officials may have said, “We can’t bring in potential buyers over these muddy rutted construction roads. Let’s bring them in by boat.” (Or maybe I just made that up).

The 1970 issue of ICDC’s publication entitled, *The Palm Coaster* proudly heralded the completion of the promised observation tower with the “information center architects’ rendering” pictured below:
The observation tower of the Palm Coast Information Center, located in the geographical and functional center core of the first model home area of Palm Coast was completed the second week of September.

The article continued, “The observation tower, over 64 feet high will be equipped with an elevator and provide visitors with an unobstructed view of the work now in progress; the nine model homes, each one linked by walkway with the information center, the golf course under construction, the nearby lakes, the inland waterway and the dredging operation currently in progress creating a new canal. Construction is also continuing on the model homes....The dredging of the canal has proceeded for a distance of 3,000 feet and completion of the main canal is anticipated by the end of 1971. Additional construction news and notes will be forthcoming in future issues of The Palm Coaster.”

THE WELCOME CENTER (AS IT BECAME KNOWN) WAS THE FIRST BUILDING BUILT IN NEWLY NAMED PALM COAST AND IT WAS THE FOCUS OF OUR COMMUNITY GRAND OPENING ON OCTOBER 29, 1970.

The earliest people who came to visit the new Palm Coast development in early 1970 probably saw signs like the one (below) on the Flagler Beach pier. In June 1970 ITT had opened a land sales office on route A1A north of the present-day bridge in a building they had acquired from a local attraction that had been named Animal Land. (See photo below) That building is now used as an adult education center.

Prospective buyers were driven to a small dock on the east side of the Intracoastal Waterway across from the present day Palm Coast Resort. They were taken by boat to the emerging Welcome Center. There, land and preconstruction homes were marketed starting at $13,000. Even before Palm Coast opened officially, sales were brisk.
When the pioneer prospective buyers arrived by boat at the new Welcome Center in 1970, they were taken to the top of the 64 foot high tower to view the area. The cleared land within the immediate view of the tower must have looked barren, even desolate, and beyond that stretched a seemingly endless pine forest. One of them commented “there’s nothing out there but sand and snakes.” Others listened to the Beatles, “Here Comes the Sun” playing continuously inside the Welcome Center, looked at the model homes and golf course under construction on the other side and visualized a snow free, easy-going retirement.

Much of the land was sold, sight unseen, from a platted, numbered map and the salesperson was likely to locate one’s property by pointing in some direction from the tower and saying, “It's out there somewhere.”
The following advertisement appealed to police, firemen, teachers and other early retirees in northern areas to buy the land as investment now for future development.

The words on the back of the ITT Postcard shown below proclaim, “The Welcome Center at Palm Coast, Florida. The 64 foot tower provides a panoramic view of surrounding woods, lakes and streams”. The building was physically and functionally at the center core of the first model area and was to serve as the hub of all sales activities. It was a dramatic looking building, with a variety of graphics and audio visual sales materials inside. Its 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, the nearby lakes and the Intracoastal Waterway with the Atlantic Ocean beyond it.
Because it was “the only building in town” Palm Coast Catholics attended mass in the Welcome Center and Jewish services were held in one of the model homes after January 1972, when the first residents moved in, until the end of that year when the Palm Coast Yacht Club was completed. Our second building soon became the religious, political, social and cultural center of the fledgling community.

Alan Smolen replaced Dr. Norman Young as ICDC president in 1975 and remained as the “father” of Palm Coast until 1985. There was an amazing growth in sales, population and the upgrading and expansion of amenities during his time in charge.
Welcome Center, golf course, first houses built on Casper Drive, condominiums on Club House Drive (now Country Club Cove section) and “C” section canal lots as they looked in 1975. (above and below)
This aerial photo showing part of the coastal route A1A corridor property acquired by ITT was taken just a few years (1973-4) after the start of the Palm Coast development project. The view is from north to south with the Atlantic Ocean barely visible in the upper left-hand corner. The building on the left side of the road in the north is the former Animal Land that had been converted into ITT’s first information center. Can you see the canal going to the right of the Intracoastal Waterway in the upper right-hand corner? The dock is not visible on the left bank but prospective buyers went by boat along the canal to the Welcome Center. Can you imagine the location of the Hammock Dunes Bridge and the other present oceanfront developments?
The picture below was taken in 1975 the year before the earth plug was pulled to allow water to flow into the residential canal lots.

In the following years facilities and amenities grew at a rapid pace. ITT developed an organization of sales personnel throughout the Northeast urban areas which spread toward the Midwest, Southeast and overseas. Most early purchasers came to the area in the following manner: They saw an advertisement in northern urban and media markets to call a local ITT “outside representative” to arrange a presentation showing the Palm Coast offering. Reasons given to consider purchase were listed (in 1986) as: “lowest interest rates in years, excellent growth and development in the community, no state income tax, outstanding rental market, and the finest amenities including golf, tennis, boating and fishing.” At the presentation they offered their clients a weekend with a fully guided tour including round-trip air transportation, two nights at the Sheraton, two breakfasts and two dinners for $129 per person.

Renovations and updating during the 1980’s
Here is what replaced the area where there was “nothing but sand and snakes.”
By 1987, ITT had built a Welcome Center II located just off I-95 at the intersection of Old Kings Road and Palm Coast Parkway S E. Now prospective buyers were brought to the tower in a motorized trolley.
WHERE DID IT ALL GO?

1995 - 2014

The ITT Corporation had made its decision to withdraw from further development in Palm Coast and proceeded to sell its remaining properties in 1994 including the site of the former welcome/model center which was torn down and removed in 1995.

The following story takes information and wording from two articles written by Toby Tobin appearing in GoToby.com on July 1 and September 4, 2014. These articles describe the first plan and re-zoning of the site for a new “Country Club Harbor” subsection. “It was purchased by La Jolla Cove LLC from Commonwealth Palm Coast Corporation in May 2003 for $3 million. La Jolla Cove resold it later that year to Old Hammock Cove LLC for 3 million 675 thousand dollars. Old Hammock Cove re-zoned the property in 2006 to create the Old Hammock Cove PUD”.... which was a “Master Planned Development allowing 133 townhomes/condominiums and three single-family residential units”... and, as I remember, a large number of covered boat slips. The unpopular project was not pursued and the area remained abandoned except for maintenance and some waterfront repair until 2014.

Then newly named Country Club Harbor developer D. R. Horton received a Single Family Residential zoning allowing for 55 single-family family residential units. An additional 7.35 acres known as Sesame Island will be rezoned from PUD to Parks and Greenways (P&G)
and donated to the city of Palm Coast. Neighborhood meetings reacted well to the plans and construction began in late June 2014.

I commend the developer on the P & G designation and I hope that we will be able to establish a publicly accessible historical marker to memorialize the site and significance of our community’s first building.

I wondered whether or not this dock would remain?
Will bicyclers and walkers be able to pause at a marker/memorial on public land to “The First Building Constructed in Palm Coast?

I took the following group of photos on April 20, 2015
The pictures above show the remaining site of the original bridge at the entrance to the Welcome and Model Center. Below, remaining original tree.
The Dock is Gone

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

*By Art Dycke, city historian and permanent member of the board of the Palm Coast Historical Society and Museum. He is the author of Images of America: Palm Coast, Arcadia
Publishers (copyright 2003) and Alan Smolen: Father of Palm Coast, 1975 – 85, self-published by LuLu (copyright 2007). He has written more than 37 articles and pamphlets for the Palm Coast Historical Society publication, The Palm Coast Historian. Art is presently working on his book, Palm Coast, A Personal History, continuing slide show presentations for the new museum and writing 2 new series of articles entitled, “Through the years in Palm Coast” and “Then and Now in Palm Coast” of which the foregoing article is the first.

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Toney’s Barbershop

by Art Dycke*

As the African American Culture Society celebrated its 20th anniversary in October 2011, The Palm Coast Historian Autumn 2011 issue began chronicling and recording the names of the people and events that represented a history of African American residents in Palm Coast.

My first article about pioneer Afro-American residents in the ITT development of Palm Coast highlighted the eventual organization of many of those residents into AACHO (African American Caribbean Heritage Organization) until about 1985. At the end of that article I previewed the names of subsequent leaders, meaning to bring brief story descriptions about them in the years thereafter and ending with a brief history of the African American cultural Society today. I will start this second article with the long-delayed recognition of Toney’s barbershop. Much of my information was taken from an article written by Geroline D. McCarthy in the November 7, 1996 edition of The Daytona Times.

Ernest “Toney” Robinson took his nickname from his beginnings on the island of Jamaica. “Toney” is an international name faring well with white sailors and the tourist trade docking into the island’s harbor,” said Toney. There were also local Indians, Chinese and mixed races on which Tony trained skillfully in the art of cutting different hair types. In the United States Toney owned a large haircutting establishment on Church Avenue in Brooklyn, New York for 10 years. He closed the shop in January 1991 to move to Palm Coast. Six months later he opened his present shop in St. Joe’s Plaza in December 1991.

At first people questioned whether Palm Coast would support the first licensed African American barber in Flagler County. They did not realize that Toney’s establishment was not limited to Blacks. Men,
women, and children of all races became a large part of Toney’s large clientele and “Toney” became virtually a household name in Palm Coast and the surrounding area from St. Augustine to Daytona Beach. It took perseverance and stamina, a workable plan, work ethic, a solid customer base, and Toney’s commitment to become the successful African-American entrepreneur that he is now in his 25th year in Palm Coast. Toney gives excellent service. He remains focused, energized, knowing and pleasing his customers – being particularly patient and taking all the time necessary to give great haircuts.

Former city councilman Bill Venne remains one of Toney’s long time best customers and has been awaiting the publication of this story which was started a year and a half ago. I got my haircut at Toney’s in the spring of 2014. As I was listening to his story and taking his picture, the popular former school board member “smoking Jim” (as in barbecue smoke) Guines and members of his family brought Jim in for his usual cut at the shop even though Toney makes frequent trips to all the local nursing and assisted living facilities to service his customers. He is also an active member at the African American Cultural Society.

My cut was short, sweet and professional, just the way I like it. I’m sorry I took so long to finish the story. If you remember and enjoy the old hometown barber experience, I recommend you go to St. Joe Plaza and check out Toney.
And finally a “feel good” story that my wife and I experienced that this “optimistic historian” would like to share with the community (it makes me hum the song, “A Stranger in Paradise.”)

**A Student From China Describes His Visit To Palm Coast**

By Art Dycke, City Historian

My wife Louise and I had the good fortune of being able to take a 13 day flight and bus tour to China in mid-September 2014. After arriving in Shanghai we were to take flights within the country to reach the boarding site for a cruise on the Yangtze River, followed by a flight to Xian, site of the Terra Cotta Warriors, and finally to Beijing, capital of the PRC (Peoples Republic of China). We were in the plane preparing for takeoff on a China Eastern Airlines flight to get to Xian and Louise was calmly leafing through the airline’s travel magazine, the September issue of Connections (written in Chinese of course.) Suddenly she started poking me excitedly. “Art, there is an article about Palm Coast in this magazine”. Now what are the chances of something like that happening? Sure enough on page 62 there was a five page article including pictures entitled, “Fairyland Palm Coast.”

I recognized the pictures of the European Village, the Palm Coast gateway sign, a bicycle path, the intra-coastal waterway and some tree-lined homes. Our tour guide gave us a brief translation revealing that the article was written by a young Chinese student studying aviation at the FAA facility in Palm Coast for a week who obviously liked the school, the surrounding area and the people he met very much. Upon returning home with three heavy copies of the magazine in our bags, I began to inquire about the possibility of getting a complete translation of this unique document. Fortunately, I told Lee Willman, one of my tai chi instructors about the experience and she said that she might be able to find someone who could help. She contacted Lennet and Amy Daigle whose son, Lennet Daigle III, donated his time and talent to give us a brilliant translation of this charming story of a sometimes lonely Chinese student named Zhu Yan and his one-week love affair with the city of Palm Coast. I hope somehow that all our residents will get a chance to read it.

[From *Airport Journal* 航空港 (2014 issue 6), CONNECTIONS Passenger Edition No. 263, a magazine published by the Shanghai Airport Group Co., Ltd. and distributed free at Shanghai airports. The magazine publishes articles about airports, travel/tourism, culture, arts, vacation destinations, etc.]

**Palm Coast**

**Paradise Beside the Sea**

[Fairyland PalmCoast]
By Zhu Yan

Translated by Lennet Daigle III

In *Peach Blossom Spring* Tao Yuanming (poet, b. CE 365) described a quiet, secluded place where people lived lives of ease, free from all hardship, and treated strangers with kindness and hospitality. Most people assume that this place existed only in his imagination; but I have found just such a paradise in Florida, America’s Sunshine State. Founded only 15 years ago, this city is known for its sunshine, blue skies, emerald ocean, and big palm trees. As you approach you see its name on signs along the highway — Palm Coast.

Founded in 1999, Palm Coast is part of the state of Florida and encompasses a total area of 133.9 square kilometers. It is a very young and fairly small city that lacks the trappings and name recognition of many larger cities; but its beautiful natural scenery attracts people and makes them want to stay.

The primary purpose of our visit was to study American commercial airline culture. We flew into San Francisco and then to Orlando, where we boarded a bus to Palm Coast. What struck me most about our time on the road was not the scenery so much as the people and things, and the practical, high efficiency American culture they reflect. Orlando’s airport is the largest and busiest international airport in Florida and when we arrived near midnight it was still bustling with activity; yet as we walked through the terminal it never felt crowded or noisy. The interior of the airport is fairly plain and not nearly as stylish as many Chinese airports, to the point that it felt like something that had been designed in the 80s or 90s. As we waited for the bus the old fashioned ceiling fans that whirled above our heads made me feel as if I had traveled back in time, and I felt even more strongly the deeply practical spirit of the American people. I once read an article that said: “In America, every philosophy, value system or school of thought takes ‘usefulness’ as its standard of judgment. The emphasis is on results and practicality. There is no place for idle talk. America’s entire development is based on this practical spirit.” There is no need for ornamentation or exaggeration: use the most useful object, take the most effective action. I suppose this is what a truly self confident culture looks like.

When the bus arrived at CMEL it was already 2 AM. CMEL is short for the FAA Center for Management and Executive Leadership, an organization established in 1971 and moved to Palm Coast in 1987. It is an FAA management training center whose primary mission is to provide FAA executives and upper level management with non-technical training to increase their interpersonal skills, management skills and leadership skills. CMEL also works with other governmental agencies and foreign aviation authorities to provide training in management and aviation culture to global airline executives and financial managers. Despite the time of night, when we arrived the security guards and front desk staff were waiting for us. After we picked up our room keys the friendly security guard John saw that we looked confused and kindly offered to escort us to our rooms. The next day we ran into him again in the hall and chatted for a while. It turns out that before he retired he was a pilot and he had flown for a number of well known American airlines. He had lived in some of America’s largest cities but once he retired he decided to leave the city and come work as a security guard at this school. When we asked him why, his answer was simple: fishing. It was a strange reason that left me puzzled. Perhaps this is a classic example of American values and lifestyle choices.
After class a few of us rented bicycles and rode around Palm Coast’s shaded bike paths. Brilliant blue skies, pure white clouds, bright but not blinding sunlight: everywhere we went, nature was using the simplest means to decorate this little city. Whenever we came across the local residents, their genuine greetings and smiles were as warm and pleasant as a gentle breeze. I started to understand John’s choice to “build a house among people, but without the sound of cart or horse” (these are lines from one of Tao Yuanming’s poems). How could city life compare to the peace and contentment to be found here? I was reminded of something Zhou Guoping once said: “Happiness lies in simplicity and spiritual riches.” The influence of one’s environment cannot be overlooked, and after bearing the burdens of big city life, this civilized but relaxed little city is the perfect place to escape the world. As we rode along the little paths I couldn’t help but hum John Denver’s song, “Country road take me home, to the place I belong...” Like a lively melody, Palm Coast refreshes the spirit and leaves you feeling free and easy.

Perhaps due to the lack of competitive pressure, people here are especially friendly. The woman who works at counter at school’s cafeteria is 80 years old, and every time I saw her she asked how my meal was, or complimented my brooch or earrings. One of the chefs was a cute black girl who happily cooked us some beef and scallions when we started feeling homesick. Once when we got lost riding our bikes we asked directions from a man who immediately stopped his bike and pulled out his mobile phone to show us a variety of routes to our destination and told us how long each one would take, what sights we would see along the way, and which way was safest.

After a week in Palm Coast I got in the habit of smiling and greeting people, because it’s what everyone does here, whether they know each other or not. This friendliness puts people in a good mood, and makes them want to pass it on. There are signs up all over to “Keep Palm Coast Beautiful.” The smiles and friendliness of the local residents quietly take effect on people who visit, and every ends up working together to preserve this unspoiled paradise and this simple, honest way of life.

The Palm Coast way of life was best demonstrated by our two teachers for the week Bob and Steve. Their achievements were impressive — they had worked in upper management in the automotive, aviation, security, transportation and finance industries, but they didn’t aspire after high office and great wealth; rather they saw every job as an opportunity to enrich people’s lives. During class they observed and analyzed the differences between Chinese and western students, and learned from their students in order to enrich themselves. They also took great pleasure in getting to know people and sharing experiences. Neither Bob nor Steve grew up in the area, but they both chose to leave the city for life here. I suspect they were attracted by the things and the people they found here, people who are relaxed, intelligent, and friendly; who work hard and enjoy life; who retain a genuine innocence; and who seem to have attained true happiness.

Lennet Daigle, III, (M.A., Shanghai International Studies University) lived for a decade in Taipei, Taiwan, and Shanghai, China, and works professionally as a Chinese to English translator
The “Student from China” took this picture at European Village in Palm Coast

Art and Louise in the great hall of the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xian, China
ART’S CORNER  Hello and welcome to members and friends of the Palm Coast Historical Society. We promise our members four issues of The Palm Coast Historian per year and they usually average 15 pages per issue. The present issue 36 is designated as a summer/fall Double Issue which at 60 pages would usually be more than enough for an entire year. The issue outlines Palm Coast history “Through the years” from 1969 until 2014 and then begins a new series entitled, “Then and Now in Palm Coast” which pictures and describes our communities original buildings and infrastructure and shows how they have changed over the years to the present day.

This issue 36 is accompanied by our Society’s eight page 2016 Membership Letter edited by Elaine Studnicki which invites our members and other interested parties to our Annual Membership Meeting at the Palm Coast community center on Monday, January 11, 2016 at 2 PM. It includes our “Presidents Message” and other of our society volunteer’s activities and events occurring while we all await the opening of our Museum upon the completion of the total renovation of Holland Park. Take special note of Elaine’s brain teasing crossword puzzle which will test how well you have remembered what you have learned in this issue.

On January 1, 2015 the Palm Coast Observer published a special edition entitled, “15th anniversary 1999 – 2014.” I had been asked by the editors to provide text and pictures for the issue much of which was used in three sections entitled, “Before we were a city”, “2000 to 2014” and “An optimist on Palm Coast’s past and future.” The full text of that condensed version appears in full as “Through the years in Palm Coast” which starts on the front page of this issue.

2015 has been a very unique year in the history of the city of Palm Coast and of its historical society. The city started the year in the early stages of capital projects for correcting problems of an aging infrastructure that required updating through necessary but lengthy and disruptive construction. Among them: 1-Six-laning and reconstructing the I-95 interchange 2- the renovation of our oldest shopping center 3- building the community’s final city hall and 4- completely reconstructing the city’s oldest park. The last project was in Holland Park where the Palm Coast Historical Society had just acquired the opportunity to develop a “permanent” office and Museum in a two room building located there.

Here is my plan for the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. Work is starting immediately on The Palm Coast Historian Issue 37 Winter 2015 “Double issue.” Each of the four projects just listed above will be the subject of a “Then and Now in Palm Coast” article. The Society expects to chronicle our long search for a
permanent home from our beginnings in a private garage through storage areas, a city hall, schools and one room in a city park. We will introduce you to the past and present talented and dedicated volunteers who have brought us to the point of opening our new Museum. We expect to share our plans for the future of the museum and to encourage new volunteers to train as docents when it opens. We also have a long list of people to whom we owe thanks, gratitude and memorials that have been too long neglected since Holland Park has been closed to the public since March of this year.

We hereby express our gratitude to the Palm Coast city and Flagler county governments and their economic agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, members, donors and others who contribute and help to sustain the work of the Palm Coast Historical Society.

Art Dycke, City Historian, Jim Canfield, President and the Volunteers of the Palm Coast Historical Society
wish you

A HEALTHY, HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON