



SIESTA KEY: OUR SLICE OF PARADISE

I will be the first to admit that I hate to "write." For some, it comes easily, but for me it's a chore that I would gladly pass to someone else. As current President of the Siesta Key Association (SKA), I can no longer procrastinate.

I was trying to relax over Thanksgiving weekend and, re-reading what then-President Catherine Luckner wrote for last year's newsletter, hoping for divine inspiration. While it didn't come, one sentence stood out "...Siesta Key, for many, became a family vacation spot until retirement permitted full-time residency." That sentence hit home and described my wife and me to a "T." Couple that with the popular saying that I have heard many times, "one door closes, and another one opens," and here we are, lucky enough to have gotten to Siesta Key *before* retirement, to enjoy its beauty, to witness its evolution, and to live in a little slice of Paradise.

When you are part of something this beautiful and pristine, you realize that it takes a LOT of work to keep it as such. ALL organizations have an agenda, a purpose for their existence, and at times they are on opposite ends of the spectrum from each other. SKA's agenda, born 66 years ago, was, and still is, to protect our natural and scenic beauty, and in essence, to protect our way of life. It is NOT easy and encompasses a lot of time from a lot of dedicated and community-focused people. These individuals are volunteers who give of their time and energy unselfishly, and sometimes with little or no recognition. Make no bones about it: we live on a beautiful island with only two entrances and exits! Overdevelopment is not an option; maintaining and protecting what we have is a necessity!

Any issue that affects Siesta Key, its residents, and/or its environment is an issue that SKA weighs in on. And not all issues that we get involved in and advocate for get media coverage. Members and non-members alike contact us via email and phone on a daily basis to ask questions, voice complaints, and look for assistance. In all cases, SKA personally responds to these issues/queries. We are here to serve you, our loyal members, and our Siesta Key community.

2015 should prove to be a busy year here on the Key, much like all the years before. We welcome with open arms a

new County Commissioner, Alan Maio, as we say "Ciao for now" to Nora Patterson, the Champion of Siesta Key. We will most likely see final decision/plans for the Big Pass Dredge Project, as well as for the Siesta Promenade and the traffic assessment at the intersection of Beach Road and Midnight Pass Road. And let's not forget that in 2015 the Siesta Key Beach upgrades are scheduled for completion. Through all these issues and projects, rest assured that the SKA Board of Directors will ALWAYS keep the best interests of its members, its community, and its core value in the forefront.

The Siesta Key Association is proud of its rich tradition of service to our island community. With our members' continued support, we will continue our service to you in 2015 and beyond.

Michael T. Shay, President

SKA Annual Breakfast Meeting

Saturday, March 7, 2015

**Open at 8:00 A.M. for Coffee, Tea, Juice
Breakfast Buffet opens at 8:30 A.M.**

Annual Meeting from 9:30 - 11:00 A.M.

St. Boniface Episcopal Church, Community Room

TWO FREE admission tickets with your 2015 SKA
Membership AND advance reservation.

\$20 for Visitors (\$15 for Members' additional guests)
(You may become a member of SKA at our Breakfast Meeting)

Reservations: by email: info@siestakeyassociation.com
by phone: 941-364-4880

Speaking at our Breakfast

The Honorable Alan Maio

Commissioner, Sarasota County
and

Tom Harmer

County Administrator, Sarasota County

**** SKA contributed more than 3,000 volunteer hours
for our community, January-December 2014****

THANK YOU SKA MEMBERS!

SKA Working for You!

Throughout 2014, SKA Directors and members worked on projects which support our quality of life on Siesta Key. **The volunteer hour totals of Directors and members exceeded 3,000 hours.**

These hours represent many areas of effort including research and writing on zoning, environmental and safety issues, direct stewardship of our beach, neighborhoods and wildlife, advocacy with our Board of County Commissioners, and shared community projects with Siesta Key Village and the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce.

ADOPT-A-ROAD

The **Adopt-A-Road** efforts in collaboration with Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) continue to increase in numbers and success. We appreciate the delicious “start-up” given by Kay and Tom, owners of the Village Café. **The Great American Cleanup** and **International Coastal Cleanup** dodged serious rain and continued into a second day. Efforts by Parks and Recreation, County staff, and our team of volunteers reduced the trash volume at the curb and on the beaches, both before and after July 4 weekend. With help from our Sarasota County Sheriff’s Deputies, a project for 2015 to eliminate illegal fireworks will help keep our beaches safe and debris free.

BEACH NESTING BIRDS

Our continued efforts on behalf of protected **Beach Nesting Birds (BNB)** were challenged this year by repeated vandalism to protected nesting areas. As a shared project with Sarasota Audubon Society (SAS), we found that vandalism became increasingly reckless and endangered people as well. On several occasions, motor vehicles and motorcycles entered the beach and ran through large nesting sites, destroying eggs of three protected species. The nesting was unique this year, not only with increased Snowy Plovers but also Black Skimmers and Least Terns. With the use of illegal fireworks and illegal driving of motor vehicles on the beach, the Black Skimmers fled their nests. More than 25 nests were lost. With diligence by FWC officers and our Sheriff’s Deputies, identification was made of tire tracks belonging to a specific type of golf cart and a person of interest was identified. On other occasions, vandals tore down buffers protecting the ground nests, resulting in further nest loss.

However, along with the vandalism came kind help from news media, visitors, and volunteer nest watchers. With statewide focus on our area of concern and Siesta Key Association, partnering with Sarasota Audubon, funds were provided for strategic nighttime surveillance. This reduced the frequency and number of attacks. We also thank owners of several beach front condominiums who shared their observations, protection

and some recreational areas to allow nesting. We’ll be ready next year! SKA members extraordinaire on duty throughout the nesting season, Dr. Bob Lucker, Dr. Alan Worms, and Dick Miles, thank you. Along with SAS volunteers, our SKA members also provided beach steward education for visitors.

The good news: 21 Least Tern chicks and 6 Snowy Plover chicks survived to adulthood. The Black Skimmers apparently tried again on Lido with great success. We noted with the extended shoreline and ponds for food, our bird community increased to include species not previously seen together on Siesta Key.

PADDLEBOARDS

With safety a priority, SKA advocated with EMT lifeguard staff, paddleboard business owners, and Parks and Recreation to evaluate a petition asking the BOCC to allow paddleboard rentals at the concession of Siesta Beach Park. A petition to change rules governing the swim zone at Siesta Beach Park was brought before the County Commissioners by a paddleboard vendor. SKA supported the lifeguard and EMT staff, making a recommendation to deny this petition. Adding this activity within the designated swim zone (monitored by lifeguards) increased risk of injury to swimmers. With only 4 miles of lifeguard protected swim zone in Sarasota County, our recommendation was to deny any change of use. Access to paddleboard recreation is abundant in our coastal community where other watercraft, such as kayaks and canoes, are prevalent. The Board of County Commissioners agreed and denied the petition.

MIDNIGHT PASS/BEACH ROAD INTERSECTION

SKA has a history of productive advocacy with FDOT on projects impacting Siesta Key. Our initiative on past projects, including the North Bridge rehabilitation and Midnight Pass crosswalks, has resulted in useful information about a safety project being considered for Midnight Pass and Beach Road. Representatives of FDOT provided an overview of the process required, including the current Safety and Environmental Assessment of the intersection. While rumors of a plan for “roundabouts” were abundant, the engineering staff stated one outcome of their assessment could be “do nothing” if there is no merit to the project. For a project to be considered, issues of pedestrian injury, near miss, collision, or road hazard are considered. FDOT projects planning occurs regionally, reviewed through federally established MPO’s (Metropolitan Planning Organizations). SKA will review current transportation and best practices safety improvements in readiness for a community-wide meeting on the project. The project is not yet funded and, at best, has a two year wait before any FDOT initiative.

BEACH UPDATE

During our October SKA meeting, the Siesta Beach Park Project Manager, Brad Gaubatz, brought encouraging news: an increased number of parking spaces: 143 vs. 130 and additional RV parking spots. The new east parking lot is completed, tennis courts relocated, and temporary restrooms installed. Although some problem with tennis court surfaces was reported, the problem is soon to be remedied. The “bubbling” effect may have been caused by ground moisture permeating the asphalt mixture. The new lot is pervious pavement, which enhances drainage into the ground. With the added pervious pavement the drainage pond could be reduced in size, providing added parking. It has been noted that despite intense rainstorms, no flooding was observed on Beach Road. The new concession area will be elevated 16 feet with a spectacular public viewing area. While people will be able to eat and enjoy the view, there are no plans for any type of restaurant or increased nighttime hours at the beach concession. Both Sheriff’s Deputies and lifeguard staff will have offices in the building. The parking lot portion was completed prior to the Crystal Classic sand sculpture event. There will be some RV parking spots. The remaining portion should be completed by February 2015.

BIG PASS/LIDO KEY EROSION COE PROJECT

On Dec. 4, 2013, SKA hosted the first community-wide meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers (COE). Since that time we’ve seen increased community support with new partners, community advocates, and professionals joining us in support of a comprehensive risk assessment of this project. During the initial meeting, SKA requested a public input process, an independent peer review, and exclusion of dredging within the Pass based on existing data provided by the COE as of that date. Since that time, you, our members, have made a significant difference in shifting the focus for the scope of the COE project. Your efforts kept dialogue alive, your questions provided guidance for a broader comprehensive review of our natural Sarasota Big Pass. Members expressed concerns about risk of increased wave action, subsequent beach and shoreline erosion, property damage, and reduction of use for existing shoreline. The added uncertain environmental and wildlife impacts were also noted and include adverse impact to the Big Pass sea grass bed restoration, disruption of protected bird and turtle species nesting, water quality deterioration, and endangerment of manatees traveling the natural Pass for food and breeding.

**Visit our SKA website, www.siestakeyassociation.com
Look for Siesta Key Association on Facebook and “Like” us!**

What areas are designated for sand dredging? Within the scope of the current COE project design report, engineers state they cannot safely obtain all needed sand from the outer ebb shoal. They suggest also dredging sand from two Big Pass navigation channels; one along the south shoreline of Lido Key, the other along the northern seaward (Sunset Point) end of Siesta Key. The COE state the only sand site available containing sufficient quantities of sand for this project is the ebb shoal and channels of Big Pass. The truest statement is that while other “borrow sites” further away are available, they are economically out of range for established funding. This cost factor is likely to worsen throughout the State of Florida, a risk factor for future renourishment needs of our barrier islands.

Shoreline hardening on Lido? Yes, COE recommends placement of three groins along the southwestern end (closest to a commercial hotel/condo property) and along the public lands of Lido County Park within Big Pass. This involves shoreline hardening and placement of deeply placed stone substrate along Lido Beach in three areas. Their stated goal is to reduce the rate of erosion and, therefore, the frequency and cost of renourishment. Sarasota County Natural Resources staff recently identified that the COE groin placement will partially occur on county owned park property. This fact becomes highly relevant for several reasons. Lido Public Park and Otter Key property were purchased under federal grant funds for “open spaces and public use, including the mangrove bay bottom”, in 1973 after a voter referendum provided a 1/2 Mill tax increase. This supplemented grants and funded the purchase of Lido Key and what is now Caspersen Public Beach. The federal stipulation is that these lands are to be forever maintained in their natural state for public use and recreation.

The City of Sarasota will request leasing of this county owned land to stage equipment for dredging should the project be approved. The staging of such equipment itself is significant and could have potentially enduring impact on water quality, mangrove root systems, recreational use, and shoreline stability. The county is not required to provide such a lease to the city.

Water quality changes by dredging. The EPA recently stipulated municipalities must comply to project management criteria affecting all “waters of the US.” If an area is classified as “waters of the US”, it is under federal jurisdiction within the context of the Clean Water Act (CWA) ...this means the owner or operator of a “waters of the US” site will have to obtain federal permits before doing routine maintenance, upgrades, mitigation or improvements. The new definitions will impact all CWA programs, including Section 404, the Corps Dredge and

SKA Working for You!

BIG PASS/LIDO KEY EROSION COE PROJECT (continued)

Fill permit program, Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program, and Section 303, the Water Quality Standards and Total Maximum Daily Load programs. While the federal government oversees “waters of the US” projects, they do not provide money for complying with the federal requirement. This would potentially provide a serious burden of remediation should water quality standards be adversely impacted by dredging. **As of this date, the COE has not conducted an EIA on water quality** regarding stream or river impacts from such a dredging and groin project. In fact, there is no normative data on existing water quality (cited by SOSS2).

On August 20, 2014, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved funding to support an independent peer review of the most recent Army Corps of Engineers proposal. The independent peer review will be chosen from a library of existing approved coastal resource engineers who are not dependent on Army Corps of Engineers funding. The focus and method will be a review and interpretation of the project scope, methods and professional opinion, not a “repeat” of the Army Corps’s specific studies. During this County Budget Meeting, SKA also recommended that the City of Sarasota and Sarasota County staff fully remedy the existing damage on Lido Key from Tropical Storm Debby in 2012. The shoreline damage has worsened since the original permit was approved and the work is not yet initiated. The original approved FEMA project didn’t have sufficient funds or sand volume allocated to account for the now needed renourishment. SKA, in supporting this modification (to be initiated after turtle nesting season ends in 2014) anticipates easing of the critical urgency for Lido Key. The City of Sarasota did request and received approval by the Board of County Commissioners to receive “up to” \$1 Million in funds from the Tourism Development Tax (TDT), which is allocated

for storm erosion damage. With a more complete remedy of existing erosion, a reassessment of required sand required for the larger Lido COE study is suggested.

On December 10, 2014, the Board of County Commissioners will approve a contract for an independent review by a coastal engineering firm. The scope of work has been developed through input by members of SKA, SOSS2, private citizens, and County Natural Resources staff. This project for a comprehensive littoral risk assessment of Big Pass and its waters, bay bottom, and coastline provides the opportunity to protect our natural Siesta Beach Park, coastline, water quality, as well as the Lido Key Ted Sperling County Park.

SKA ILLEGAL RENTALS

SKA has been working closely with John Lally, a code enforcement officer for Sarasota County, to bring an end to the illegal rentals taking place in RSF residential areas. County code only allows one rental in each 30 day period in this zone, whether it be a day, a week, or a whole month. Condominiums are exempt from this rule. These illegal rentals can result in the lowering of property values as well as being a noise issue with excessive partying taking place beyond our noise ordinance rules and the number of non-related people residing in a home. The fine can be \$250/day to the homeowner.

US 41/STICKNEY POINT RD. SIESTA PROMENADE PROJECT

Benderson Development is in the process of submitting plans for Siesta Promenade, a 250,000 sq. ft. mall at the northwest corner of US 41 and Stickney Point Road. While this project is NOT on the Key, SKA is concerned about the traffic flow in and out of the mall and its possible affect on traffic entering and exiting the Key from the South Bridge. We have participated in all community meetings to date on this project, as well as private meetings with the Benderson group to air our concerns.

The 2015 membership drive is underway and we want you to encourage your friends to join. We can’t emphasize enough the importance of SKA representing a large group of residents on Siesta Key when it comes to issues.

Please go online and sign up for 2015. The cost is \$30 and you receive 2 free tickets to our annual membership breakfast.

SKA Board of Directors

Beverly Arias	Joyce Kouba	Michael Shay
Helen Clifford	Catherine Luckner	Robert Stein
Deet Jonker	Troy Roberts	Joe Volpe
		Paul Wilkinson

Join the Board of Directors

We are looking for additional Board members to share this good work on behalf of our Siesta Key residents.

Your application may be sent to Joyce Kouba, Nominating Committee Chair at info@siestakeyassociation.com or call for information at 941-364-4880

SKA continues to work for YOU. THANKS to all of you, our members and friends, for your care and continued support of our mission to protect and maintain the natural beauty of Siesta Key.