

Lido and City of Sarasota fight Dredge and Fill ... a time capsule.

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In old newsprint, carefully archived at the History Center, a victory unfolds. Sarasota county and city residents saved the shoreline and natural coastal beauty of south Lido Key .

It was 1967 when Arvida Corporation sought permits for development of the southern tip of Lido Key. Arvida was a most influential community development corporation throughout Florida beginning in 1958. Their plan was not unlike that of Bird Key, taking dredged materials to create land for development. Their plan was to dredge and fill 160 acres on south Lido, create extended shoreline, a golf course, a hotel, canals, eliminate Brushy lagoon, from Otter Key bayside to the gulf front bulkhead of south Lido. The Big Pass shoreline was one aspect of the litigation between the City and Arvida. Property boundaries and ownership was questioned where accreted shoreline existed. On two occasions, despite well documented business plans, engineering designs and potential tax revenue, the Sarasota City Commission and Planning Board denied the Arvida permit requests.

Residents from Lido Key and Sarasota, including 50 local organizations, fought for conservation of the marine and estuary environment. The primary concern was the impact of dredging and filling on the shallow grassy flats, known for bird, fish and mammal habitat. The efforts gathered momentum and included Senators and then Governor, Claude Kirk, as they petitioned against the development.

This grassroots effort of private citizens, led by local businessman Ted Sperling, became the *Save Our Bays Association (SOBA)*. One news account reported more than 1500 residents attending a City Commission meeting to contest the Arvida proposal. In the City v. Arvida conflict, *"It's within...the powers of city government (re City owned property) to restrict the amount of dredging and filling if it's shown the public interest is served"*. (Gil waters, City of Sarasota Commissioner)

The Sarasota City Commission unanimously denied the Arvida permit application one last time in 1968.

Between 1968 and 1972, *SOBA* began the process of inquiry for land acquisition under a new Federal program from the Dept. of the Interior and Florida Dept. of Natural Resource to purchase environmentally sensitive lands for 'open space and recreation by the public'. Under the program guidelines, it was noted ... *" gulf and bay frontage is our greatest natural resource and fast disappearing"*.

Without likelihood of permitting, Arvida was soon interested in selling the south Lido and Otter Key properties. *SOBA* and Sarasota County initiated the quest for newly available Federal funding offered through the State of Florida. The "open spaces and recreation' grants were to be used for *permanent conservation protection and use by the public*.

The preservation of Otter Key (30 acres), its Mangrove bay bottom root system and South Lido property (130 acres) became one of the first opportunities for a Florida County to purchase and protect lands under new Federal Regulations. With an affordable price and funding, the momentum led

Sarasota County Commission to hold a Voter referendum to purchase the land with a property tax mill increase. Another parcel also became available, 20 acres offered by the Casperson Family.

We know this added purchase of land as our County Park of Casperson Beach.

Arvida agreed to sell the Lido and Otter Key properties for \$3,750,000. The total bond referendum approved was approximately \$ 7.7M with option for 10 percent increase if the appraisals varied.

In a County wide Referendum held on May 1, 1973 the voters of Sarasota County made a commitment to the land and its environmental protection. In a 9-1 county wide margin, voters approved an extra ½ mill on property taxes for 30 years or until funding was complete. The residents of Lido Key voted in a 10-1 margin to approve the purchase.

The Federal and State grants of \$943,000 were secured and set aside by Sarasota County for future purchases of environmentally sensitive land. This purchase and all the effort toward it, altered the course of development, the prioritization of natural resources and maintaining the natural beauty of Sarasota as the County continued to grow.

The South Lido County Park was established to be “forever maintained in its natural state for public use and recreation”. It was subsequently named in remembrance of Ted Sperling, the resident and visionary who galvanized the community in this direction.

What will newsprint in the History Center Archives tell us in the future?
Did we keep the natural beauty of old Florida?

Will we kayak through Mangrove tunnels, watch Manatee play, find nesting birds, clean water, go fishing and find it abundant?

Will we look across the blue water of Big Pass and find what we love?
Will they build groins and dredge the south shore of Lido Key?