

# Newsletter of the A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway

Welcome to the Fall issue of the A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway Corridor Management Entity's newsletter. The CME is a group of volunteers who work to manage and promote the section of Highway A1A through St. Johns and Flagler counties that has been designated a Scenic Highway. It has been a long and involved process to become designated, and for some of our first issues of this newsletter we thought it might be interesting to have different first person views on what was memorable about the effort. Memories being what they are, we expected everyone to look at it in a different way. We were not disappointed! Some people remembered more about the technical process; others were more impressed by the personal efforts made by various citizens. Last issue we featured Mayer Jim Darby's account from the 1990's.

Here are some more of the first person accounts from our St. Johns County and Hammock Friends:

## ***“SCENIC & HISTORIC A1A”***

***by Vickie Renna***

***(Project Manager, St. Johns Co. Planning Department)***

*Since 1997 the “Scenic and Historic A1A” Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG) has been working very hard, spending countless hours working to preserve, protect, enhance and maintain the natural scenic intrinsic resources (i.e., historical, archaeological, cultural, recreational and natural scenic qualities) through St. Johns County within and along the SR A1A corridor. Members of the “Scenic and Historic A1A” Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG) have spend countless hours, days and years following the Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT) Scenic Highway Program criteria in an effort to protect these intrinsic resources now and for future generations. The members of this board have completed the three-step State Scenic Highway process (the Letter of Intent, the Eligibility Application and the Corridor Management Plan (CMP)) to become designated as a Florida Scenic Highway. During the Florida Scenic Highway CMP phase the members of the scenic highway must go through a comprehensive planning process which requires Community Participation, Local Support, establishment of a Corridor Management Entity (CME), a Background Conditions Analysis (i.e. the existing zoning, future land uses, road right-of-way widths, utilities, existing signs, traffic safety issues, traffic volumes, user types, level of service, transportation planning and roadway improvements, identification of environmental improvements and identification of other protective techniques), identification of the Corridor Story, Protective Techniques (i.e., St. Johns County wide coastal visioning, various coastal over-lay districts, growth management goals, objectives and policies and various land development code regulations for St. Johns County’s, the City of St. Augustine, City of St. Augustine Beach and Town of Marineland), identification of Funding Sources, an Action Plan and a Conceptual Master Plan. Through the dedicated efforts of CAG/CME “Scenic & Historic A1A” staff liaison and the consultant, “Scenic and Historic A1A” became officially designated as a State of Florida Scenic Highway in early January 2002. This scenic highway begins at the Duval / St. Johns County boundary line and ends at the Flagler / St. Johns boundary line, a total of 52 miles.*

*Following the official State Scenic Highway designation, “Scenic and Historic AIA” - CAG/CME and the staff liaison prepared an application to be designated as a National Scenic Byway. During this same time period Flagler County’s Scenic Highway CAG/CME submitted a National Scenic Byway application. In April 2002 the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) asked both St. Johns and Flagler counties to combine their National Scenic Byway applications. In June 2002, both St. Johns and Flagler County’s Scenic Highways became designated as a National Scenic Byway and the official name became AIA Scenic and Historic Coastal Highway. This federally designated scenic byway boundary begins at the Duval/ St. Johns County boundary line and ends at the Flagler/ Volusia boundary line, a total of 72 miles.*

*The Florida Scenic Highway Program, as well as the National Scenic Byway Program, is a grass roots initiative created to heighten the public’s awareness about the region’s history and intrinsic resources (i.e., historical, archaeological, cultural, recreational and natural scenic qualities) valued by Florida residents and millions of tourists who visit the state each year. The mission of the Florida Scenic Highway Program and the National Scenic Byway Program is to protect, preserve, enhance and maintain the identified intrinsic resources within the corridor while allowing economic development. The scenic highway strives to educate the traveler by “telling a story” that represents Florida’s lifestyles, from the past to the present.*

*As its name implies “Scenic & Historic AIA” has many natural, historical/archaeological and cultural resources located along the scenic byway including, but not limited to, State Parks (Guana River State Park, Anastasia Island State Park and Frank Butler Beach Park (east and west)), St. Johns River Water Management District (District) Acquisitions (Stokes Landing and Moses Creek Conservation Area), an Aquatic Preserve (Guana River Marsh), National Monuments (Castillo de San Marcos and Ft. Matanzas), a Wildlife Management Area (Guana River Wildlife Management Area) and Local Parks and Cultural amenities (Mickler Landing, South Ponte Vedra, North Shores Park, Surf Side Park, Vilano Beach Fishing Pier, Vilano Boat Ramp, Fountain of Youth, AIA Amphitheater, Davenport Park, Lighthouse Park/Museum, St. Johns County Fishing Pier, Crescent Beach Park, Southeast Intracoastal Waterway Park, Matanzas Inlet Fishing Bridge and Rattlesnake Island Park).*

*Although the scenic highway interconnects all the federal, state and local parks and cultural resources, it is the desire of the “Scenic & Historic AIA” Corridor Management Council’s (CMC’s) to also interconnect all these resources through parallel open green space and to construct a continuous multi-purpose path from the Duval/St. Johns county boundary line to the St. Johns/Flagler County boundary line as identified in the CMP Action Plan Chapter. This request parallels the East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) vision to connect all the major East Coast Cities (i.e. New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.) and youth hostels along the Atlantic Ocean. Over time the East Coast Greenway Alliance multi-purpose path idea grew from connecting nine eastern states to connecting fifteen states from Maine to Key West, Florida.*

## ***MY FIRST VIEW***

***By Anne Wilson (Chair, Hammock Section)***

*I first saw the Hammock in 1970 as a newlywed visiting my in-laws and was immediately entranced with the overhanging oak trees draped in Spanish moss, the combination of ocean and river vistas, and the abundant wild life. At that time the city of Palm Coast was an empty no-man's land of raw, freshly-scraped earth. A ferry boat took potential buyers across the river to view model homes as there was no bridge access from the Hammock. In 1976 I moved permanently to the Hammock and continued to love everything about the rural atmosphere and sense of being close to nature. As development gradually came to the barrier island, I became more and more concerned about the potential loss of wildlife habitat and all of the natural resources that I held dear.*

*In 1997, the County planning staff decided that designating highway AIA a scenic highway might be good for the county and obtained an initial grant from the Florida Department of Agriculture to do a tree survey along the corridor. I volunteered along with a number of other like-minded residents from the community. We spent a hot, sweaty June day crawling through the bushes along the highway measuring and cataloging the magnificent hardwood trees that create the canopy. The information obtained formed the basis for the documentation required to apply for designation as a state scenic highway which was achieved in 2000 followed immediately by federal designation as a scenic byway. The goal of all the volunteers who worked on that effort was to protect and preserve this area which we believe to be one of nature's masterpieces. As we continue to manage our scenic byway, we continue to use this prestigious designation as a growth management tool whenever possible.*

## **SCENIC & HISTORIC AIA**

**By Michael J. Greenberg (member, St Johns CAG)**

*In the beginning there were the usual provocative events, and these were followed by months of preliminary discussion. But the first official step toward the designation of State Road AIA in St. Johns County as a National Scenic Byway was a resolution of support, passed by the County Commission on March 11, 1997, and then sent to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).*

*For a road and its corridor to achieve national designation, its special assets (called "intrinsic qualities") must be evaluated and then portrayed in compelling words and images. The six desirable intrinsic qualities – archeological, historical, cultural, recreational, natural, and scenic – are defined quite specifically by the National Scenic Byway Program, which is administered by the U.S. DOT. But the responsibility for quality assessment and story writing is assigned to a cadre of interested local citizens – the Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG). Moreover, these tasks are performed three times, since the CAG must prepare three successive documents, each more complex, detailed, and larger than the last: a Letter of Intent, an Eligibility Application, and a Corridor Management Plan.*

*On July 8, 1997, the St. Johns County Commission appointed nine citizens to a Scenic Highway Committee, which, in its dealings with the National Program, would constitute the CAG. Our group was quite diverse: a pair of retired scientists, a pair of archeologists, a realtor,*

*a distinguished educator, a successful local artist, the director of a National Park, an engineer from the St. Johns River Water Management District, and one person who had actually had experience on a similar committee in Jacksonville. The membership of the CAG changed, from time to time, but its diversity and enthusiasm – its greatest strengths – were somehow always retained. On September 8, 1997, we had our first meeting and received our charge from an official of the FDOT. We thought, then, that our task would be completed in a matter of months. In fact, nearly five years would pass before the designation was bestowed.*

*Scenic and Historic AIA (our name for the byway) runs straight along the eastern edge of St. Johns County – between Ponte Vedra Beach at its northern county line, and Marineland at the southern border. For most of its length, the 52-mile segment of highway passes through characteristic barrier island habitat. That is, the corridor is flanked on the east by the beaches and dunes of the Atlantic coast, and on the west by the marshes and waters of a tidal estuarine lagoon (or “river”), which receives the freshwater that drains the mainland. Fresh and oceanic waters are mixed at two inlets (Matanzas and St. Augustine), which interrupt the roadway.*

*The common barrier island habitat notwithstanding a first drive along the highway reveals markedly varied views. And although all of the defined intrinsic scenic qualities are readily evident within the highway corridor, the distribution of these resources along its length are also distinct and varied. Could the CAG explain the origin and development of this diversity?*

*To answer that question, we divided the highway into five relatively distinct segments: south Anastasia Island; north Anastasia Island (including the City of St. Augustine Beach); the City of St. Augustine; Villano Beach and the north beaches to Guana State Park; and Ponte Vedra Beach. And we then examined each segment separately and in detail, tabulating and mapping data, and capturing each area in photographs and video. With the additional observation and analysis came understanding, and a story emerged.*

*First, the barrier island habitat varies significantly along the corridor in, for example, the width of the island, the width of the river, proximity to an inlet, and its idiosyncratic location with respect to the trade winds. Second, these variations not only affect the viewshed, but have also affected the ways that man has adapted to the habitat, from prehistorical times to the present. And third, human beings – acting alone or together; at work or recreation; and as entrepreneurs, occupiers, colonizers, or developers – have profoundly affected and shaped both the environment and the culture of their own communities. Thus, if appropriate centers of information were laid on, Scenic & Historic AIA would become a large natural exhibition explaining the mechanisms underlying the evolution of the relationship between human beings and their environment.*

*The Letter of Intent – the first document produced by the CAG – set out the story in general and in brief. The document was to be illustrated, but only photographs were required, and we had plenty of good ones. In contrast, the Eligibility Application was meant to be detailed, and a video was required. Excellent videos have great advantages: they can enliven a story; the combination of pictures, voice, and music can tell a story most efficiently; and the very process of writing and illustrating, itself, brings enlightenment to the storytellers.*

*But excellent videos have one serious disadvantage – their expense. Fortunately, a fine videographer – James C. (“Jim”) Netherton, III (Mayor of Marineland, and a chemist at the Whitney Laboratory) – was available, and he had access to new equipment and facilities, and he would work as a volunteer. Jim took more than 30 hours of video – sometimes with his torso and camera projecting from the sunroof of a rapidly moving car, and once from the rear of a truck backing down a dirt road. And we frequently revisited places to get a better shot or to get footage illustrating a new or rewritten section of the script. After editing and dubbing in the description and music (provided by Professor Paul J. Linser of the Whitney Lab) we had a 20 minute tape of professional quality that was shown to many enthralled audiences. Many of us watched the video many times but, to our surprise, its appeal never diminished.*

*The final document, the Corridor Management Plan, was massive and written largely by professionals in consultation with the CAG – another tale for another time. During the five years that preceded the designation of Scenic & Historic AIA, the pace of change along the corridor continued and even accelerated. And now, at the time of this writing, some sites portrayed in the video are markedly altered, and a few – for better or worse – may be unrecognizable. In that regard, the video remains as a rather optimistic, fin de siècle snapshot of the corridor. But in this regard, it is still useful as a benchmark. Probably the National Byways should require that new videos be made every 10 years or so, revealing the effects of time and progress.*