

Newsletter of the A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway

Did you know that in 2002, a 72-mile stretch of A1A was designated a National Scenic Byway? The A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway includes Florida State Road A1A from Ponte Vedra Beach south through Vilano Beach, St. Augustine, Crescent Beach, Marineland, the Hammock, Beverly Beach and Flagler Beach, and terminates at the southern Flagler county line.

What exactly is a scenic byway?

A scenic byway is a public road, street, or highway that has been recognized through official declaration as a unique area worth preserving because of its outstanding resources.

Designation as a National Scenic Byway means that A1A is considered one of America's treasured places, part of a distinctive collection of 125 American Roads that includes routes like the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Pacific Coast Highway, and the Great River Road.

A group of community leaders (with assistance from local government) sought scenic byway designation for A1A because of the outstanding scenic, historic, natural, and recreational resources of the corridor. This committed group of volunteers is called the Friends of the A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway (Friends of A1A), and they have worked tirelessly to preserve, protect, and enhance the resources of the corridor.

So what are they trying to protect, and why does it need protecting?

Pristine beaches, estuaries, archeological sites, and habitat for rare and endangered species are at the top of the list -- not to mention a six-mile stretch of unobstructed views of the Atlantic Ocean, the world's first "oceanarium" at Marineland, and St. Augustine, our nation's oldest, continuously occupied city.

These resources are irreplaceable and need protection because it is estimated that as many as 1,000 people per day are moving into the State of Florida. We have all seen how the resulting pressure from development is changing the face of Florida communities and destroying resources that can never be replaced.

Friends of A1A Board Member Anne Wilson recalls, "When I first came to the area 30 years ago, I fell in love with the stately old oak trees draped in Spanish moss, and as development came to the area, I was alarmed at the possibility that we would lose those trees."

The mission of the Friends of the A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway is to protect and enhance the byway's resources. Their ultimate goal is to preserve this unique place where residents and visitors alike can step back to the unhurried lifestyle and ambiance of "Old Florida."

We intend to include in these newsletters periodic first person views of how designation came about. Memories being what they are, emphasis, interpretation and even remembered facts may differ from person to person. We feel that the real value comes from the impression each person has carried with them of a long and involved process, and that is what we want to share. Our first contribution comes from Jim Darby, Chairman of the Flagler County Board of County Commissioners. At the time of this essay he was Mayor of Flagler Beach.

Scenic A1A: One Small Sign
By Mayor Jim Darby

It seemed at the time a small thing to do. Simply say we would designate A1A as a "scenic highway," put up a sign and so it would be done.

Garry Balogh set me straight on that one. With the Florida Department of Transportation in tow, it's scenic A1A employee Garry set out the order of things to be done; videos, committees, strategic planning, months (years) to bring it all together. I can remember him saying to this day "and you can't do this just to keep A1A from being widened."

That was about 1990 and you know something, it didn't stir up a lot of people. I guess they liked the idea. No one complained. My putting it on the City of Flagler Beach agenda proved to be the easiest part and the next easiest was getting the Flagler Beach Commission to agree, and unanimously, it did. I expected people to come to the meeting saying how good it would be for our little City, but only two turned up, Brynn Newton, an environmentalist and attorney, and Dennis Bayer, a young attorney and local surfer who spent more time in the surf than he did doing legal things. No one opposed. Those were the days. Good days.

After becoming a county commissioner in late 1992, I thought maybe Flagler County would be blessed with like kind, that it would be neat to do the same from county line to county line. My putting it on the county agenda proved to be the easiest part. The next easiest was getting the Flagler County Commission to agree, and unanimously, it did. No one came to speak for it, but then no one came to speak against it. The surf was "up" so Dennis was out riding the waves.

In 2006, it is now a National Scenic Byway extending into St. John's County with hundreds of volunteers and supporters managing its 72 mile length under the name Scenic A1A Pride, which is a part of the expanded Corridor Management Entity (CME)