

“Our Town” by Tim Converse was written in the early 80's and subsequently published in “The Shores News,” which ended with the May 1989 issue. Fifteen years later, in 2004, a copy surfaced and additions and corrections were made for better clarification and continuity.

## **OUR TOWN**

*by C. Vaughn (Tim) Converse*

*Edited by Henry F. Simms*

It occurred to me that a review of the rather brief history of our community might be of interest to Indian River Shores residents, both new and old.

Therefore, to begin at the beginning, our town's natal day was June 11, 1953. Its growth along the way since that auspicious occasion can realistically be measured by the total assessed valuation for taxes which increased from \$423,410 in 1959 to \$526,229,924 in 1987.

We are now paying 12.95% of the total County taxes collected. For comparison purposes, the City of Vero Beach contributes 24.35% of the overall amount.

Our growth entailed endless hours of negotiations with both the City of Vero Beach and the County, involving innumerable topics. Principal among these was a knotty fire department problem, coupled with a hodge-podge of inefficient sewer systems which created constantly changing and seemingly endless challenges.

The major developments accompanying this growth over the past 30 to 35 years are truly remarkable and will be itemized in chronological order in subsequent columns by this writer.

For the moment, suffice it to say that the quality of life in Indian River Shores is exceptionally good. We have a debt-free community, a sizeable cash reserve and a smooth-running government. The five miles of ocean beaches, the recreational facilities and the Town's composite aesthetic appearance are beyond compare. Let's strive to keep it that way, not only for us, but also for those who come to live in our delightful community in the future.

Indian River Shores' first Mayor (1953-1961) was Fred Tuerk. He owned most of the land incorporated in the original charter. In those early days, A1A was a dirt road and Wabasso Road (510), had a wooden bridge across the Indian River, with a hand operated turnstile. In 1958, A1A was paved from Beachland Blvd. to just one-half mile north of Wabasso Road. Later, A1A was extended and the Sebastian Inlet Bridge was completed (1965), connecting Indian River County on the beach side with Brevard County. The present 510 Wabasso high-rise bridge was completed in 1970, which not only increased access to the barrier island but also provided for a hurricane exit.

The second Mayor of Indian River Shores (1961-1976) was Roland Miller. His ambition and political connections hastened the advanced completion dates for the above bridges.

In 1969, the development of John's Island was started by E. Llwyd Ecclestone Sr., after purchasing land from the Fred R. Tuerk estate. It is interesting to note that the estate Trustee turned

down a higher price for the land because it was felt Mr. Tuerk would have chosen the low density Ecclestone development plan.

A water and electric contract with the City of Vero Beach was signed December 8, 1968. The City agreed to furnish electric service and water at 40 PSI to the Town city limits for 25 years. These services were to be provided for 110% of the City of Vero Beach charges. Later, the City became unhappy with this contract and used every available means to renegotiate. They could not increase the Indian River Shores water rates without increasing their own. After years of hard-fought negotiations, a new contract was signed October 1986, replacing the one scheduled to expire in 1993.

With an improved highway system in place, a water and electric contract in hand and spearheaded by the rapid development of John's Island, other developers were attracted to the Town.

Indian River Shores was on the move and necessary civic services were initiated. A new \$130,000 Town Hall was dedicated December 1972, and by 1975 a \$155,000 fire station was completed. I wonder what they would cost if built today.

As our Town grew, additional services were required. The necessity for an adequate water supply, with sufficient pressure for fire protection, required a water tower which was erected in 1973. In addition, a million gallon storage tank located behind the Fire Station was completed in 1974. These capital improvements, including the Town Hall and Fire Station, were financed with 5% and 5 1/2% local bank loans. The final payment was made in May 1988.

Another service supplied for the convenience of our people was the Indian River Shores Post Office, which opened in 1973. Originally, the Town paid the entire cost of this facility, except for a token \$1 paid by the U.S. Government. Since 1980, that \$1 has gradually increased to \$17,773, with the balance of the cost underwritten by the Town.

In 1973, our Police Department was organized, with a one-man force located in the Town Hall. Over the years this service was expanded and moved to the Fire Station. All of our 20 Public Safety Department employees are trained as Firemen-Police and Emergency Medical Technicians, providing services 24 hours a day.

Along with the Town's rapid growth, controversy developed about the administration's handling of Town problems, principally sewerage problems. Details of these will follow, but after a Town referendum to build a Town-owned sewer plan was defeated, an all new Council was elected; three from John's Island and two from the southern half of the Town. The new Council selected Edward J. Nolan (1976-1983) as the third Mayor. This inexperienced Council was faced with binding contracts to build an 18" water line from the Town-City line to the Town Hall and an 85 foot aerial truck, without funds to pay for them.

One of the first official acts by the new Town Administration in 1977 was to appoint a five-man Planning and Zoning Board, implementing the Town's "Land Use Plan," and with Council cooperation, the Board, in only four years, reduced maximum population density from twelve family units per acre to the present limit of six.

Our Town records were moved from the Vero Beach office of our Accountant-Town Clerk, to our Town Hall. All resolutions relative to the Town were catalogued and printed in an easy reference binder. The Charter was amended in 1980 to spell out the boundaries of the Town. In order to retain continuity, election dates for Council members are staggered so that three members will be elected in 1989, two members in 1991, etc.

Problems in connection with the Town's rapid growth were ultimately solved, but only after lengthy discussion and over an extended period of time.

In the year 1977, the most pressing problem facing the new administration was sewage disposal. For development projects in which alternative service was not available, the Town issued franchises to the developers authorizing them to install and operate sewage systems of their own. The first one was issued to Westport Utilities for John's Island, and the second to Vista Del Mar. Later, problems arose in both systems, but the one at Vista Del Mar occurred after all the condominiums had been sold and the developer had pulled out. The solution for the Westport Utilities problem was simply to enlarge the plant, but no such recourse was available to Vista Del Mar.

Back in 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) had given a \$2.1 million grant to the City of Vero Beach for the expansion of its wastewater plant. This grant was subject to a signed agreement among the City of Vero Beach, Indian River County and the incorporated towns in the service area. The intention of the EPA was that the expanded plants' service area would include the barrier island from the north boundary of Indian River Shores to the south County line. Our Town opted not to claim its share of the expanded plants' gallonage. Instead, we entered into a separate agreement with Indian River County to build our own wastewater plant. Consequently, the capacity of the expanded Vero Beach treatment plant was allocated only to the City of Vero Beach and Indian River County. Subsequently, a referendum in our Town for permission to float a \$2.75 million dollar bond issue to finance an independent wastewater plant was defeated.

When the Vista Del Mar difficulties surfaced, the Town Council had neither a sewage plant of its own with which to solve the problem, nor access to the Vero Beach plant. The only possible plan of action at that point was to submit a request for service from the Vero Beach plant for at least the southern half of the Town. For some three years this request was denied. Finally, the County arranged to contribute some of its reserve gallonage to us, but this proved to be inadequate for our purposes and the City of Vero Beach claimed it did not have the required capacity to augment the County's contribution.

During these troubled years, Indian River County owned a wastewater plant located in the park area north of Eckerd Drug Store. Two County developments, Pebble Bay Estates and Vera Cruz, and two developments in our Town, Sea Watch and Pebble Beach Villas, were served by that plant. Finally, in the late 1970's, the State of Florida condemned the plant serving these four facilities, whereupon the City of Vero Beach and the County mutually agreed to provide service for the south half of Indian River Shores and a new sewer line was completed in 1980.

Ironically, in 1987, the City of Vero Beach discovered that it did have sufficient capacity to

serve the northern half of Indian River Shores as well.

In order for the new \$155,000 Fire Station, completed in 1975, to function, costly fire engines and equipment were needed. Only limited funds were available toward the purchase of a 1,000 gallon per minute pumper, a 1250 GPM pumper and an 85-foot hook-and-ladder truck, the cost of which in the aggregate would be \$207,764. An appeal to Indian River County for funds produced two agreements, one in 1975 and one in 1977, whereby the County paid \$110,000 toward the purchase of the above equipment.

A condition attached to these funds stipulated that for the consideration of \$1/year, the County would not allocate any additional funds to the Town for fire protection during the fiscal year beginning 10/1/77 and ending 9/30/78.

Under the above agreements, the Town was obliged to staff and operate the Fire Department with Town taxes. At the same time, the County was collecting across-the-board general fund taxes out of which large sums were paid for fire protection outside the limits of Indian River Shores. This constituted dual taxation. For example, in 1980, the assessed taxes for the County general fund in our Town amounted to \$560,623. Finally, under pressure, the County refunded to us \$50,000/annum for the year 1978-79 and 1979-80.

Around 1980, after many County-wide fire protection meetings, a plan was drawn up to establish three fire districts in the County to be supported by the respective taxpayers. This plan was subject to approval by referendum which excluded Indian River Shores. The plan was approved, and in September 1980, a new fire agreement between the County and the Town was executed, nullifying the former agreements and signaling a renewed spirit of cooperation. Under this new agreement, the Town delivered the 1,000 GPM pumper to the County, consented to provide fire protection from the north Town limit to the Sebastian Inlet on the barrier island for a period of 3 years, and further agreed to make the aerial ladder truck available for training purposes to both the north and south County fire districts at no charge. This agreement expired in 1983, so that now we own our fire department in its entirety.

By 1983, the fire agreement with the County relative to the joint use of Indian River Shores' 85-foot aerial truck had expired. Moreover, a new law restricting Town building heights to 3 stories reduced the aerial truck's use to zero. It was sold in 1955 (1985) at a substantial profit above the original cost.

A fire department expense that can be easily overlooked is the rental of fire hydrants. In December 1968 our Town had 193 hydrants, which obviously have increased in number with our continued development and annexation. The City of Vero Beach collects rent of \$150 per hydrant annually; the budget for this rental in 1989 is \$30,000. The existence and location of these hydrants are significant factors in our insurance coverage, and we ever pray that the one nearest to us will never be used.

By 1980, the sewage problems had been resolved, and with a new fire agreement in hand, the Council proceeded with other improvements on its agenda.

Among these, a new first-class Emergency Rescue vehicle was purchased by the Town and was then equipped through public donations. In the beginning, a fire truck was dispatched to the scene of an emergency in order that first aid might be administered without delay, but only an Indian River Ambulance Squad could transport a victim to the hospital. This policy continued for some time after the new Emergency Rescue vehicle was purchased. It seems that the County was reluctant to certify our vehicle for fear donations to the volunteer ambulance squads would decline. Over the succeeding years, however, that concern ceased to be an issue, and in 1988, a new more efficient diesel ambulance was purchased and certified, and the original vehicle was sold to the Fellsmere Volunteer Ambulance Squad.

At the present time, we have a fully-certified ambulance with no restrictions, which gives its crew resources equivalent to any ambulance squad in the County. All twenty members of our public safety staff are medical technicians and three are paramedics. Owing to the fact that a paramedic accompanies each service call, the current plan is, in time, to add six additional paramedics.

Regarding other improvements, a new 1.7 mile long bicycle path, designed especially for our southernmost residents, was constructed in 1981 and extends from the south gate of John's Island to the side of the 7-11 store. Detailed engineering specifications for the 6-foot wide path were prepared by our Town Engineer, and subsequently were approved by the State. Three contractors paid \$10 each for a copy of these specifications for the purpose of bidding on the project. The successful bidder, after State approval, built an 8-foot wide path, as this was the minimum for which his paving machine had been designed.

The cost of the path was \$57,076, of which the State paid \$53,358, and the Town paid the remaining \$3,718. Revenue derived from interest on the Town's surplus funds more than offset our share of the cost. Interestingly, in addition to its primary function as a bicycle path, it also provides a fine exercise route for walkers and joggers and is utilized daily in these pursuits.

In 1982, the Community Center was opened and has since provided a wide variety of services for our citizens. Its low cost and fascinating history were detailed in issue #2 of "The Shores News," and has been added, as follows, to this historical paper.

#### THE COMMUNITY CENTER - A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Virginia Gilbert, then Town Clerk and Treasurer (now our Town Manager), recalls that back in 1982, the Victoria Condominium complex was nearing completion and its sales model was no longer required. Getting wind of this, our Mayor, Fritz Gierhart, proposed to the Town Council that it consider acquiring the building for community use. After receiving a positive response, Mr. Gierhart explored the possibilities with the builder, Justice Builders, Inc. They in turn not only donated the building, but kicked in an additional \$12,500 toward having it moved. The eventual cost of relocating this \$200,000 building came to \$22,000, the difference, of course, being paid with Town funds.

Following the moving and final placement of the Community Center, Fritz was obliged to find additional funds for final structural and finishing work. Upon approaching Mr. Burton Salmon regarding the establishment of a committee to raise the necessary additional money, Mr. Salmon

asked Fritz how much more would be required. When told that at least another \$10,000 was needed, Mr. Salmon said to Fritz, "Why don't I just give you a check for that amount and save a lot of time and trouble?"

In commemoration of this handsome gesture, a plaque in memory of Mr. Salmon's late wife, Sally S. Salmon, adorns the wall just to the right of the building entrance.

The Community Center is readily available for use by Indian River Shores residents and presently enjoys almost daily use for a wide variety of functions, thus belying its original moniker, "Fritz's Folly."

The growth of Indian River Shores for the decade 1973-1983 can best be measured by the assessed valuation for taxes. This amount grew from \$57.5 million to \$367.65 million, and with it, steadily increased demands for service. By 1983, the Council members decided it was time to employ a Town Manager. They were successful in obtaining the services of Mr. Joseph Dorsky, who is deemed to have done an excellent job. At the direction of the Council, Mr. Dorsky has researched and analyzed innumerable projects and then clearly presented the resultant well organized facts for the Council's final decisions.

Baytree Condominium asked to be annexed into the Town in 1984. This extended the Town's northern boundary by approximately one mile. In 1987, Vera Cruz, Pebble Bay Estates, and Harbor Island Club were annexed into the Town. This made our Town contiguous on both sides of A1A and eliminated former County areas within our Town's borders. The year 1987 also witnessed a complete sewage system when the City of Vero Beach agreed to serve the northern half of our community.

A second water supply line originating on the mainland and connected to our system was completed in 1988. This will eliminate, or at least delay the need for a second high gravity tower in the north end of the Town to maintain the required water pressure for fire protection and for general use.

Before bringing this brief series regarding the Town's history to a close, a review of taxes might be in order. Over the years, there have been complaints about Indian River Shores taxes. Naturally, with Town growth, expenses increase. But except for increased assessed valuation, our Town taxes have actually declined. Our total millage per dollar of assessed valuation in 1982 was 2.0184 mills. This declined to 1.7999 mills in 1988. In other words, Town taxes on a \$100,000 assessed valuation declined from \$210.84 in 1982 to \$179.90 in 1988.

There are two means of increasing tax revenue, namely, increased millage and increased assessed valuation. And when it comes to the latter, one's reaction should be directed to the tax assessor, not the Town Council. The net assessed valuation of the writer's Indian River Shores residence occupied in 1973, was increased \$55,960 in 1987 over 1986. \$54,550 of the increase was the land valuation, in this case encompassing .57 of an acre, bringing total land assessment to \$250,960.

The total taxes levied against Indian River Shores in 1987 totaled \$8,588,340. This

compares to \$16,323,343 for the City of Vero Beach. (These are facts from which one may draw his own conclusion).

Finally, we salute the accomplishments of our Town Council and the Planning and Zoning Boards which have, without compensation, spent hour upon hour deliberating the demands for development and variances, and fielding complaints. The Council met some 21 times in 1988, including both regularly scheduled and specially-called sessions. One hesitates to even broach the question as to how many Planning and Zoning meetings were held during this same period.

God bless our Town and the delightful people who make it function!

Edited by C. Vaughn (Tim) Converse  
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