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Hello [fname]:

Scenic Watch is a free bi-monthly publication of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc., dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of Florida's scenic heritage. Individuals, organizations and government agencies are welcome as members. [Join Scenic Florida now](#) to protect our scenic qualities.

#### National News:

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has joined the State of Montana in banning digital billboards. [Get the story at this link.](#)

Increasingly states and local governments throughout the country are recognizing the safety and aesthetic issues associated with TV billboards by either banning or setting limits on them. Common sense is prevailing that these billboards are a major distraction to drivers. Oddly enough, the billboard industry readily points out that their purpose is to distract drivers. The industry wants driver eyes to be taken off the road to see multiple advertising messages.

The risk to governments could be that safety studies and actual experiences with these signs could validate the safety risks and lead to legal challenges from citizens damaged by them.

**Interested in protecting your scenic values? Check out the Scenic America page on Scenic Easements.**

#### What is a Scenic Easement?

##### FEATURED PUBLICATION

*Scenic Easements:  
An Action Guide*



For more information and to purchase this publication [click here](#)

When a conservation easement includes the goal of preserving desirable views of an area, it is said to have a scenic conservation purpose. If preservation of scenic resources is the sole purpose of the conservation easement, it may be referred to as a scenic conservation easement or simply a scenic easement. [Easement link.](#)

## Billboards

### Café Risque Interstate signs coming down, sort of

By [Titus Ledbetter III](#) ([Contact](#))  
Wednesday, August 6, 2008

LAVONIA — The billboards advertising Cafe Risque in Lavonia came down after the business was closed July 29, but at least two billboards in South Carolina will remain.

Truck drivers had been known to exit Interstate 85 and eat at Cafe Risque while the topless

waitresses working there served them. Many residents did not believe the provocative strip club belonged in the area.

The city purchased the strip club for \$995,000 on July 29. Jerry Sullivan, the owner of numerous strip clubs along Interstate 85 and Interstate 75 in Florida and Georgia, opened the strip club in 2001 off exit 173 of I-85.

A cluster of six billboards in Georgia, located between Carnesville and Lavonia on I-85 were removed last week, said Gary Fesperman, the city manager.

Two other billboards in Georgia, owned by Sunshine Outdoors, will be removed soon, Fesperman said. They must come down within 30 days after the strip club closed, he said.

However, at least two billboards advertising the strip club in South Carolina will stay and eventually advertise other Cafe Risque locations in Georgia farther south on I-85, Fesperman said. He did not know when exit 173 would be removed from those billboards to advertise other locations.

Jeff Schnake of Lavonia said that he was happy to see the strip club close and the six billboards come down because they will no longer discourage quality businesses from coming to the area.

"It think is better for the community," he said. "I thought it was good."

Sullivan paid \$650,000 to acquire the property in 2001, according to the deed.

The club stayed open after Sullivan died in 2006 in his sleep in 2006 in Alachua, Fla., at the age of 47. City officials never found out who continued to run the club after that. A third party, who did not want to be identified, bought the property so the city could acquire it, officials said.

Fesperman said that 95 percent of the feedback he has received since the strip club was shut down has been positive. The other 5 percent represented concerns over how much money was spent to acquire the property.

He said the closing of the strip club would be good for the local businesses in Lavonia because more people will be stopping by the area.

"We are blessed to have a community that supports us," Fesperman said. "We are blessed to have the leadership to do things like this."

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## Cell Towers

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## Farmland Protection

### Natural wonder: Robinson Preserve a valuable asset

One week from a grand grand opening, the Robinson Preserve stands out as one more pristine gem for Manatee County.

Just east and across the Manatee River sits another, Emerson Point Park on Snead Island. Leffis Keys on the southeastern corner of Anna Maria Island is a third with boardwalks, trails and an observation tower.

But the Robinson Preserve dwarfs those other two waterfront and natural wonders with 487 acres stretching along Tampa Bay and Perico Bayou at the northwestern corner of Bradenton.

After decades as farmland, the acreage has been restored to a coastal wetland.

Robinson's wow factor includes 2.5 miles of kayaking and canoeing waterways and 12 acres of open

water; 100 species of birds and 75 species of fish, mollusks and invertebrates; 56 acres of marshland and 10 acres of uplands; and 10 miles of trails.

The pathways through mangrove forests, the six bridges, the boardwalk and the 53-foot observation tower give preserve patrons those views that become cherished images of nature.

Critics lament the county spending on the park, but the lion's share of the cost came from other sources. Robinson Farms donated \$6.4 million worth of land, the Florida Communities Trust kicked in a \$6 million grant, and Manatee County property taxes covered the remaining \$3.9 million in the land price.

The \$6 million restoration project, launched two years ago, was funded mostly by grants from federal and state environmental agencies, with the Southwest Florida Water Management District kicking in \$3.3 million and the federal Environmental Protection Agency paying \$600,000. Various other agencies contributed a total of some \$700,000.

Manatee County paid only a fraction of the land acquisition and restoration costs.

Taxpayers will get a break from any more such expenditures in the near future, what with brutal budget cuts over the past two years and a financial straightjacket on spending for land expected over the next few years.

The value of the preserve cannot be measured in dollars alone. Not only will today's residents and visitors enjoy a jewel of nature, but generations to come will, too.

And the preserve gives county economic development officials another big attraction to show off to company executives looking for a place to call home.

Our hearty congratulations to all those involved with this spectacular project, starting with Charlie Hunsicker, the county's conservation lands management director. He was instrumental in the land acquisition.

This would not have been possible without the incredible contribution from the Robinson family, with patriarch Bill Robinson leading the way. The family attended last weekend's ribbon-cutting ceremony, and all must be very proud. We're certainly very grateful.

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## Land Use & Smart Growth

### Congratulations to Citizens for a Scenic Florida Advisory Board member Richard RuBino.

Lessons Learned



Richard, along with co-author Earl M. Starnes, just published ***Lessons Learned: The History of Planning in Florida***.

The book provides a complete history of planning in Florida, and in lesser detail, planning in the U.S. The book contributes to understanding the politics and economics of planning in Florida and reveals whether planning reforms in Florida actually solved the problems that led to their adoption. The book bears witness to the daunting challenges many planners have labored to overcome and sheds light on

differences between theory and practice in America's continuing challenge to accommodate growth while enhancing the quality of life.

The book is available for purchase from amazon.com, or by contacting the co-authors at the addresses below:

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## **Scenic Highways & Trails**

### **County to vote on Scenic Highway code**

A housing density of two residential units per acre could be possible along the Scenic Highway, if county commissioners approve a proposal that will reach their desks later this fall.

About 40 residents of the Ridge area attended a special public meeting outlining an updated land development code text for the State Road 17 corridor, which runs almost 39 miles from south of Frostproof to Haines City. The plan relies heavily on providing a number of different escalating incentives to developers for clustering housing units away from the highway right-of-way, helping to create a multi-use bike path and trail, and creating scenic overlooks.

"It gives people a very enticing reason to do the better thing," said Tom Woodrich, representing the county's Long Range Planning office. He has spearheaded the highway's planning effort over the past two years, and estimated the county has held two dozen public meetings on crafting a vision for the roadway. "This is one of those roads you experience and enjoy."

The sailing wasn't always smooth, he noted, especially early in the process.

"It was tender at times," he said of trying to get large landowners and other stakeholders to agree on a final plan. "The county has facilitated a community effort. It's not going to be perfect, but it puts a plan in place."

The Polk County Planning Commission is expected to review the plan and make a recommendation on it at its meeting of Aug. 12. The county board of commissioners is expected to give the measure a first reading on Sept. 24, and a final reading with a commission vote on Oct. 8. The changes do not have to be submitted to the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

Only about 12 miles of the highway actually fall under the county's control. Woodrich has been meeting with representatives from municipalities throughout the corridor, including Frostproof and Lake Wales officials, in hopes that each might use the county plan as a guide to adopt similar guidelines and incentives.

"Ultimately, it's up to them," he said.

The code changes make development standards more strict for things like landscaping, lighting and signage.

The hope, however, is developers will embrace a four tiered incentive system that will increase the housing density allowed. That is a major enticement since more units per acre helps make a residential housing project more economically feasible.

Most of the county land through the corridor is zoned for just one unit per five acres. Developers who take advantage of the first incentive tier, however, can increase that to one unit per acre as long as they set aside 30 percent of their parcel as open space, and insure that 70 percent of it is along the highway right away.

For example, on a 100 acre tract, 30 acres would be kept as open space, and at least 21 acres of that must be adjacent to the highway. Tier one also calls for utilization of centralized potable water.

The second tier would require construction of the multi-modal trail along the highway's frontage, which would increase the density ratio allowed by 10 percent, on up through full participation in tier four which would allow a net two units per acre.

"We've been working pretty hard for two years," said Ellis Hunt Jr., a county planning commissioner and member of one of the two community groups that have regularly been meeting on crafting the final plan. He pointed out that the incentive of leaving greenspace nearer the highway was important because normally it is more efficient to put houses closer to existing roadways to help save on blacktop and concrete costs, and that the green space is often put towards the pack of the property.

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor

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