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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:

I came across an article by Neal Pierce of the Washington Post Writers Group. It was copied into a Johannesburg, South Africa news paper. Neal Peirce (of the Washington Post Writers Group) shows where the United States is moving and Neil Fraser opines that South Africa may well follow given the clout of the advertising industry - so in the words of Neil Fraser the Johannesburg columnist 'read *All signs point to billboard blight* and weep'

Due to space limitations we left an article out that might interest those of you involved with spending advertising dollars to attract tourist. Lee County has decided to reduce spending on billboards in [this article](#). Is this an acknowledgement that billboards do not work?

Interesting observation. The Longboat Key, highlighted as a scenic spot in this Scenic Watch, Chamber of Commerce proudly points out that there are no billboards as an attraction feature. Virtually all scenic spots limit billboards. Why do other Chamber of Commerce organizations not get the message and work to enhance their scenic values by restricting billboards?

Billboards

All signs point to billboard blight

"There's lots of talk about the "greening" of America in this time of climate change and soaring energy costs. But don't count the billboard industry in.

"Indeed, its latest and biggest moneymakers are the big, brash, brilliant signs - LED (light-emitting diode) digital billboards - being sited rapidly on high-volume highways coast to coast.

"The flashy mega-signs are called energy efficient, but they're powerful enough to be seen a half-mile away and consume about 4 800 watts of electric power per square yard [about 0,84m²] per hour. Each costs about \$450 000 [about R3,8-million]. Over 500 are up already; one industry analyst predicts there'll be 75 000 by 2010.

"Driving on congested, stop-and-go urban freeways, it's increasingly tough to ignore these monsters, each flashing a new commercial every six or eight seconds.

"'We have the ultimate ability to withstand the whole challenge of consumer avoidance,' Paul Meyer, the chief executive of Clear Channel Outdoor, one of the media titans now dominating the billboard industry, told *The Washington Post*. 'We're there 24-7. There's no mute button, no on-off switch, no changing the station.'

"What's more, because each digital board can have multiple sponsors with constantly updated

messages, advertisers are proving easy to recruit. The industry is reportedly enjoying close-to-astronomic profit margins.

"Critics charge that the new signs, like the 500 000-plus old-style billboards dotting US highways coast to coast, not only blight the landscape but represent private exploitation of roadways that the public paid for.

"And increasingly, charges Kevin Fry, the president of Scenic America, tasteless outdoor advertising is endangering Americans' public realm. Drive into San Francisco and a forest of signs looms ahead, obscuring one of our most beautiful and renowned skylines. New York's great neighbourhoods are being - in Fry's words - 'draped like a giant burrito in enormous vinyl signs'.

"There's no doubt the billboard industry, which sues to invalidate local communities' sign ordinances and targets decision-makers from local towns to state legislatures to Congress, represents one of the nation's most potent lobbies. It's effectively emasculated the 42-year-old Highway Beautification Act, passed with Lady Bird Johnson's inspiration.

"And its hunger shows no bounds. Think trees, for example. This January, the Spartanburg, SC, Men's Garden Club planted dozens of dogwoods, maples and other trees along a five-mile stretch of interstate roadway, some of it blighted by decaying and partly collapsed billboards. But the South Carolina department of transportation ordered the removal of 45 trees because they were inside the 300-foot [about 91m] highway 'view window' the billboard lobby had urged the state to mandate.

"Indeed, at least 28 states have laws that can force cutting trees owned by the public on public land if they obscure drivers' clear view of billboards. Florida even insists on a 500- to- 1 000-foot 'view zone'. How 'ungreen', one wonders, can government policy get?

"Are all signs then to be condemned? No, says Fry; reasonably sized informational signs are fine. Even big electronic displays are okay where they spell the very character of a place, such as Times Square or the Las Vegas strip. The problem is the sign and billboard lobby trying to force inappropriate signs down Americans' throats, from city to country, wherever it sees a buck to be made.

"Los Angeles, for example, has been trying to get a handle on the 10 000-plus billboards, many illegally placed or sized, lining its roadways. The city council ordered an inspection and enforcement programme, plus a moratorium on new boards. Clear Channel Outdoor Inc and CBS Outdoor Inc sued to invalidate the ordinance. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the city was winning successive court rounds when city attorney Rocky Delgadillo suddenly stepped in to settle with the billboard giants. He agreed to legalise scores of illegally operating billboards if the industry would agree to inspection and modest fees.

"Billboard opponents were enraged, noting Delgadillo had received \$424 000 worth of billboard space to support his election, and that the firms had continued to contribute thousands more to him and some of the city council members who eventually approved the settlement.

"Fighting the billboard lobby looks like a classic David and Goliath struggle - huge resources against largely unpaid volunteers. But those volunteers say that if we're to hope for a clean, green, uncluttered America, this is one battle we can't avoid."

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Stuart sued, alleging breach of billboard agreement

By [Jim Mayfield](#)

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

STUART — Lamar Advertising has filed a federal lawsuit against the city of Stuart in connection with a two-year-old settlement agreement that allows the outdoor advertising company to place two electronic, single-pole billboards within the city.

Stuart Assistant City Attorney Robert Kilbride, handling the litigation, confirmed Monday that a

breach of settlement agreement suit was filed in July. The city responded with a motion requesting the federal court to dismiss Lamar's action without prejudice to allow a state court decide the matter.

Kilbride said the city believes the suit, which deals with a variety of state and local land use and regulatory issues, could and should be heard by a Florida court.

Lamar and the city reached an agreement in June 2006 after Lamar attempted to repair hurricane-damaged billboards in the city without proper permits. The agreement called for Lamar to remove its existing signs in the city in exchange for two electronic signs — one north of the Roosevelt Bridge and after two years another south of Indian Street.

Seven of the company's 13 traditional signs were to come down within 90 days of the completion of the new billboard, with the remainder to follow after the second sign went up.

However, the two sides have been dickering for months over the location of the northern billboard.

Lamar has insisted on placing its north billboard at the new Hampton Inn on the west side of U. S. 1. However, fearing adverse impacts on neighboring residential areas, commissioners and city staff have been attempting to persuade the company to lease city-owned property south of Baker Road on U. S. 1.

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Cell Towers

Residents:Cell tower is an eyesore

One says commissioners fell for the old bait and switch in approving it.

By CHRISTINA ABEL, Shorelines

Now that construction of a long-debated cell phone tower near Florida A1A in Ponte Vedra Beach is complete, some people are surprised by its appearance.

Resident Clara Cowan told St. Johns County commissioners this week that she and others expected it to look like a "flag-less flagpole," as had been discussed earlier. Instead, she said, it's a "two-tone eyesore."

Cowan complained at the commission meeting Tuesday that the commissioners fell for a "bait and switch," in which the cell phone tower company showed them one cell phone tower while seeking permission, then built another.

"The tower, instead of being the white pole we were promised, is galvanized aluminum; it's two-tone, it's white at the top," Cowan said. "Didn't the planning [department] have a responsibility when they heard homeowner after homeowner complain about this being an eyesore on a scenic byway?"

The tower is in the Mickler Road shopping center near A1A. There was a lot of debate among residents before the commission approved the tower in April 2007. Some residents wanted better cell phone coverage, while others were concerned about how the tower would look.

William Rand, owner of Verticality, a communications tower construction company in Ponte Vedra Beach, assured residents that the tower wouldn't be noticeable.

"This is the Rolls Royce of tower design in terms of limiting visual impact," Rand said at an earlier Municipal Service District meeting, noting that all the equipment would be hidden inside the pole.

Rand said Wednesday the pole is finished and that there are no plans to paint the entire pole white. "That was what we were approved for. We weren't allowed to paint the whole pole white," Rand said.

Rand said that even though the pole is gray, it looks white in the sunlight.

"I actually think it looks better as is," Rand said.

Rand said that this month his company will also start construction on another cell phone tower on Roscoe Boulevard. In 2006, the commission voted against that tower being constructed because they said it didn't fit in with the character of the area. In December 2006, Verticality sued the county for not allowing them to build the tower. In March, the county agreed to settle with Verticality and allow them to build the tower.

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Scenic Highways & Trails

New plans for Heritage Highway

By [Cindy Swirko](#)
Sun staff writer

Published: Thursday, September 25, 2008 at 11:43 p.m.

Last Modified: Thursday, September 25, 2008 at 11:46 p.m.

A section of Alachua County with a deep history from the age of Timucua Indians to the families written in the pages of "Cross Creek" and other Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings books may get a higher profile under a plan for the Old Florida Heritage Highway.



BRANDON KRUSE/The Gainesville Sun

Shelia Barnes, a park ranger at the Rawlings State Park, does annual painting on the Rawlings House in Cross Creek on Thursday morning. Historic scenes like this are the backbone of a newly approved plan for the Old Florida Heritage Highway, which consists of the network of roads south of Gainesville with U.S. 441 as its spine.

The highway is actually several roads south of Gainesville with U.S. 441 as the spine. The plan for gateways, information kiosks, signage and preservation is designed to lure tourists.

"Essentially the main purpose of the plan is to help preserve and enhance this corridor as a destination for heritage and nature tourism," said David Sacks of the national consulting firm EDAW Inc. "We were struck by how it is a very rich blend of a natural landscape that's been shaped by several hundred years of human habitation. It's a really distinct community. It's a working landscape. It's a living landscape."

The Old Florida Heritage Highway system is composed of county roads 234, 325, 346, 225 and 2082 along with U.S. 441.

The scenic roads take drivers and bike riders by historic spots such as Rawlings' house in Cross Creek, which is a state park and national historic landmark.

Also along the roads are towns and communities that still look much as they did before cars were common, such as Micanopy and Evinston.

Old Florida Heritage Highway signs already mark the roads. But part of the branding portion of the plan will include a new design — a sandhill crane in flight against a backdrop of a coreopsis flower.

Eventually signs with the logo will be placed along roads to guide visitors to spots of interest. The plan also calls for gateways at several locations — a small wooden structure with information about the highway system.

Potential sites for gateways include plots of rights of way at Williston Road and U.S. 441 and on U.S. 441 and Cholokka Boulevard in Micanopy.

Information kiosks would be placed at several spots including Wacahoota Road, at Oak Ridge Cemetery and Camp Canal on CR 234 and other locations.

Also included in the plan are off-road paths along CR 234 and on U.S. 441 across Paynes Prairie.

If everything were to be done, the estimated cost is \$36 million.

Kathleen Pagan, a senior planner with Alachua County's Growth Management Department, said work will be done as money becomes available.

Pagan said grants from state and federal agencies will be the targeted funding sources. Projects will be prioritized and work done as money becomes available.

"We know it's a very high cost, but we think that with the positive effect on tourism and on health benefits of walking on the trails and riding bikes over time it will pay for itself," Pagan said. "We'll have to look for grant money."

The Florida Department of Transportation operates the Florida Scenic Highway system that features 16 road networks throughout the state.

To qualify, the road or network must have "intrinsic resources" such as distinctive scenery or historical sites.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Transportation Department operates the National Scenic Byways program that aims to "create a distinctive collection of American roads, their stories and treasured places."

The program has 126 byways in 44 states, the first of which was designated in 1996.

Only a few of Florida's scenic road networks are in the national program, but Pagan said the plan for the Old Florida Heritage Highway could lead to a federal designation.

Roland Loog, director of the Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau, said scenic roads do draw tourists.

"These are such great historic Florida towns that these roads go through. The potential is there for the heritage tourist to drive these routes and see these sites, because they are really cool," Loog said.

"There are tourists who specifically seek this out. A high percentage are seniors. You get some people who go on Web sites to find out where these heritage highways are and then purposely take them."

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Other Scenic News

LONGBOAT KEY, Florida (CNN) -- Like any sun-drenched beach paradise, Longboat Key offers water sports, biking and tennis, but the best way to enjoy the island may be by doing nothing at all.



Low season on Longboat Key, Florida, generally starts in May and runs until late fall.


This thin sliver of land off Sarasota on Florida's west coast is home to 8,000 people year-round, but come winter, the population swells dramatically.

Thousands of visitors from colder climates flock to LBK -- its shorthand moniker -- from January to April to enjoy

its balmy temperatures and the sparkling turquoise waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Off season, however, the only crowds are the sea gulls grooming their feathers on the warm white sand, and Longboat Key feels like the closest thing to having a private beach.

On a recent late-September visit, the temperatures hovered in the mid-80s, palm trees swayed gently in the wind, hibiscus flowers bloomed and the sun's rays were on par with their intensity in July.

The only signs of fall were the pumpkins on display at the local grocery store, along with regular fare, like mango Key lime pie.  [See photos of Longboat Key's beaches, birds and sunsets »](#)

Tell people you are heading to Longboat Key, and many will think it's part of the Florida Keys off the southern tip of the state, but LBK is about 200 miles to the north-northwest of -- and in some ways worlds away from -- Key West and its neighbors.

Key Facts

- Longboat Key is an offshore barrier island about 60 miles south of Tampa, Florida.
- The nearest airport is Sarasota/Bradenton International.
- The island is home to 8,000 permanent residents, but the population swells to 22,000 during peak months.
- Average daily high temperature in January: 72°.
- Average daily high temperature in July: 90°.
- Longboat Key incorporated as a town in 1955.
- There are no schools on the island.

Source: Longboat Key Chamber of Commerce

Nightlife on the island is likely to mean a moonlit walk on the beach rather than a drink at the bar, and the odds are good the locals will sport gray hair.

Elegant setting

Buffered by Sarasota Bay on one side and facing the Gulf of Mexico on the other, the Key is sheltered from the tourist hustle and bustle of mainland Florida.

At less than 11 miles in length and no more than a mile across in its widest places, LBK also feels like a secluded community with an elegant flavor of its own.

The surroundings are lush, upscale and serene. A trip down Gulf of Mexico Drive, the island's main artery, reveals golf courses, condominiums and homes ranging from newly constructed mansions to older, one-story houses.

The traffic is light, life moves at a slower pace and the mood is relaxed.

"You won't find mini-malls, towering billboards, or glaring neon signs," the local Chamber of Commerce promises.

Nonhuman island visitors also contribute to the mellow atmosphere. Dolphins regularly swim just offshore. Great egrets and great blue herons fish along the beach, while pelicans dive into the water in search of a meal. Birds of all sizes regularly patrol the palm-lined parking lot of the local supermarket looking for scraps of food from the lunch crowd.

Wingless creatures also pop up in unexpected places. Visitors walking into one establishment are greeted by a stern voice exclaiming, "Bear, no!" Bear, it turns out, is a curious 5-month old Chesapeake Bay retriever who insists on checking out all the customers entering the store despite his owner's orders to stay put.

Lodging and shopping

There are few hotels on Longboat Key, but rental homes and condos abound, so it's best to make lodging arrangements in advance, especially for visitors who plan to stay a while. Low season generally starts in May and runs until November.

Tourists yearning to make the island a permanent home should bring along a big wallet. The average sale price for a condominium was more than \$1 million last year, and it topped \$1.5 million for a single-family home, according to the local Chamber of Commerce.

Spenders on a smaller scale can get their fix in neighboring St. Armands Key and its unique shopping circle lined with boutiques and restaurants. (The official motto urges visitors to "get out of the box, get into the circle.")

Shoppers can find anything from jewelry to knock-out shoes to sea shells of all shapes and sizes. Depending on your budget and appetite, a lunch break can range from a latte to a smoked salmon and brie grilled cheese.

St. Armands Circle is a great place to people watch, but it's good to know the tranquil beach back on Longboat Key is just a short drive away.

Shopping can be exhausting when sunny, lazy days in a blissful place are filled with doing nothing at all.

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor