

Scenic Watch

Citizens for a Scenic Florida



SPECIAL EDITION - January 2014



Photo: Daytona Beach News-Journal

FlagerLive Coverage: A Billboard Crashes Down on A1A and Flagler Makes a Little History as 'Goodliest Land'

" A little after 3:30 p.m. Monday, the billboard's geriatric skeleton—30 feet wide, 16 feet high, the belch and breadth of its visual pollution over the years immeasurable—crashed down.

It was sawed off at its roots. It was pulled down by ropes, by Flagler County commissioners, by members of the Scenic A1A Pride committee and Friends of A1A, and by an effort 20 years in the making.

An effort that culminated in June as the commission ratified a deal that by the end of 2016 will have removed up to 10 of 26 billboards along A1A.

No one said a prayer for the carcass.

The 50-odd people who'd gathered for the occasion cheered and applauded instead. Drivers up and down A1A, which got its Scenic Byway designation in 2002, may have gaped as the monstrosity came down: as common a sight as billboards are in Florida, it's not an exaggeration to say that for most Floridians, seeing one actually come down may be as rare as catching Halley's comet.

So Bill Brinton—the Jacksonville attorney, anti-billboard crusader, former board member and current attorney of Scenic America, the national organization that battles billboard and other visual blight—wasn't exaggerating when he told the crowd:

'I will forever remember this day, as again we all should remember this day. Mark it down in your calendars, tell your children and grandchildren about it. This is a great day for Flagler County, it's a great day for these county commissioners.'

Just four states have banned billboards altogether: Maine, Vermont, Hawaii and Alaska. Florida is a very long way from a ban. But local efforts have made occasional gains.

Brinton then presented the commissioners with an Excellence in Leadership award from Scenic America 'for everything you've done, everything you will do in the future,' he said. 'And I do believe we will see more and more awards in the years to come for what you've been working on for two decades and will continue to work on for the years ahead.'



Photo: FlaglerLive -
Bill Brinton speaking to the billboard-busting crowd of about 50 Monday afternoon along A1A in the Hammock, with Commission Chairman George Hanns nearby.

Standing to the side were the two deal-makers, who didn't speak: Craig Coffey, the county administrator, and Jim Cullis, who owns the billboards, and watched what would normally have been his roadside cash cow cash in for good. He was calm. He was even smiling at times. Cullis, a developer—he developed Grand Haven, for example—survived the Crash of 2008. It wasn't going to take much to survive this one. Besides, he's not exactly getting a bad end of the deal: The county commission agreed to pay him \$140,000 in public dollars for his billboards, and let him still use eight of them for three more years before they're eliminated.

'I get to keep them for three years and I get some of my money back, so everybody wins,' he said. 'And I live on A1A, so I don't mind seeing them go down.'



Photo: FlaglerLive -
A hard-hatted, and curiously color-coordinated, Commissioner Barbara Revels, moments before the tear-down of the billboard.

Even the massive billboard at the intersection of A1A and Camino del Mar, at the entrance of Hammock Dunes—the ugliest one of them all, given its size and prominence as a marker to one of Palm Coast's entrances—will be gone, but not for another three years. 'We've been after this for 30 years, another three years isn't going to kill us,' Coffey said.

In the deal Coffey and Cullis worked out, and that the county commission ratified, Cullis got \$12,500 for each of four large billboards along A1A and \$7,500 for four smaller ones. He got nothing for two additional billboards. And he got \$60,000 for a billboard along I-95, which the county will retain and use for its own advertising down the line, to promote either tourism or economic development. The \$80,000 that went toward the A1A billboards was public money, but not tax revenue: rather, the money came out of the close-out fund of the Hammock Dunes Development of Regional Impact—money paid by the developer. The \$60,000 for the I-95 billboard was a combination of general fund tax dollars (out of the economic

development pot) and tourism tax dollars (out of the bed surtax mostly paid by visitors).

It was a creative way to achieve what previously had been thought unachievable: the use of public dollars to remove billboards.

'Take notice, take notice state of Florida of Flagler County,' Brinton said. 'They're providing the leadership and the goals of what you should be, we should all be, up in Duval or wherever, maybe especially in Miami, should be looking to accomplish.'

Brinton had book-ended his remarks between the first words written in English from the New World and the last public words spoken by Charles Kuralt, the CBS correspondent and far-flung traveler of America's byways, which he happened to have spoken in an address to Scenic America less than two months before he died in 1997.

Those first words had been written by Phillip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe, envoys of Sir Walter Raleigh, in a 1584 dispatch to Queen Elizabeth from Roanoke Island, describing the place, with characteristic capital letters for every word, as 'the Goodliest Land Under the Cope of Heaven.'

Monday afternoon Brinton attached those words to Flagler County. Then he closed on Kuralt's optimism:

'We do need legislation. But the way it's going to have to be done place by place, and one place after another by the people who live there,' Kuralt had said. 'Ordinary Americans, I am persuaded of this with all my heart,' Kuralt had said, 'ordinary Americans want a beautiful country. We are proud of the amber waves of grain and the purple mountains majesties. And we are not powerless. We can have, we really can, the land Amadas and Barlowe had seen — the Goodliest Land Under the Cope of Heaven.'

Somewhere in the universe, Edward Abbey is smiling."

-- FlaglerLive

WATCH THE ACTION : Chainsaws, Commissioners AND Residents



Palm Coast Observer, Video by Jonathan Simmons

"... 'We have achieved a milestone here today, and it's over two decades in the making,' County Commission Chairman George Hanns said, standing in front of the billboard and a pile of hard hats. 'The A1A Coastal and Scenic Byway is such a treasure along our coastline. We need to do everything we can to restore the natural scenery of the area.' Beachside resident Steve Hart was one of about 50 people attending the ceremony. 'I'd like to see them pull them all down,' he said. 'This is just a good start.'...

-- Jonathan Simmons, Palm Coast Observer

LEGAL: The Detailed County Document Is Available From FlagerLive

[Click Here To Read Flagler County Board of County Commissioners Workshop/Special Agenda Item Document \(.pdf\)](#)

"Billboard Begone: Flagler Officials Pull Down Sign on A1A"

Heroic Effort to Save Our Trees and Scenic Biway

"...Flagler County spokesman Carl Laundrie said **'it is a fitting finale' to a 20-year effort by citizens and government officials 'to preserve the beauty of the area, which is a source of local pride.'**

The billboards are a holdover from early tourism days in Florida, Laundrie said.

'Billboards were the best means of grabbing the attention of passing motorists,' he said. 'Today the signs are used mostly by real estate companies to sell a piece of Florida lifestyle.'

Removing the large signs opens up the view of the 'rare coastal oak hammock that has disappeared through most of Florida,' Laundrie said, adding that residential construction has cleared trees in other areas.

'The scenery didn't just accidentally remain in place,' Laundrie said. 'Flagler County worked with state and federal agencies to create a coastal greenway in 1993 centered on State Road A1A, the beaches, the estuaries and the Intracoastal Waterway.'

Because of those efforts, 72 miles of historic highway hugs the coastline in Flagler County, he said.

'Large oaks and red cedar form a canopy and soften the light and provide a cool respite on a warm summer's day,' Laundrie said. 'A leisurely drive along this section of State Road A1A gives you a glimpse of old Florida, before theme parks and gated communities dotted the state.'

Flagler County officials, along with citizen volunteers, fought to keep surrounding development from widening the roadway to a four-lane swath that would destroy the canopy of trees, he said...

'The county also created a separate zoning for district for the community known as The Hammock, to preserve the scenic beauty,' Laundrie said. 'In 2002, the 72 miles of coastal highway from St. Augustine into Flagler County was designated a National Scenic Byway.'

Anne Wilson, a member of Friends of A1A, said before Monday's ceremony began that she appreciated the opportunity to speak and participate.

'This is a real tribute to Flagler County,' she said. 'This is a long dreamed-for moment.'

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-- Julie Murphy, Daytona Beach News-Journal

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