

DON CE SAR PROPERTY OWNERS CORPORATION

History of Consolidation

As July 9th is our city's 20th birthday we thought you would enjoy remembering with us the story of consolidation as I recall it and the many happenings that have contributed to make us a proud small city to-day.

Prior to 1956 Long Key Island that includes from the beginning of Passa Grille north to Blind Pass Bridge had by a legislative act and a referendum created the Long Key Sewer District. This provided for a island wide sewer collection system with pumping stations. Submerged land was purchased from the state in the bay off 80th Avenue and approximately seven acres was filled and the sewer plant was constructed. The island was divided into districts and the seven member board was elected by districts. A three million bond issue was sold plus a front foot property assessment to pay for the sewers.

In 1956 we had four towns, Passa Grille Beach from 1st to 31st St., Don Ce Sar from 32nd to 37th, Belle Vista 37th to 45th and former St. Petersburg Beach 67th through 77th. All the other areas were unincorporated. Duplication of services was high with a lack of many services as they were too costly for small towns and no political strength as we didn't have enough votes to be of any value politically.

Belle Vista had a small builder's construction office that they used as a town hall- it was crowded with twenty people, Don Ce Sar had no town office and met in residents homes.

The mayor of Belle Vista Mr. Leland Johnson and the mayor of Don Ce Sar Mr. William Miller with their commissioners were the leaders in the consolidation movement. The two towns invited the mayors and commissioners of Passa Grille and St. Petersburg Beach to dinner plus two or three people representing the unincorporated areas. After several meetings it was decided to employ an attorney to write a legislative bill for consolidation. No town would trust the other towns attorney to write the bill so an attorney from St. Petersburg was employed to write the legislative charter at a fee of \$4,500.00. Passa Grille and St. Pete Beach to pay \$1500.00 each and Don Ce Sar and Belle Vista each to pay \$750.00.

After great trials and tribulations the bill was written-each town had some items they wanted included and had to give on others. Then the first blow fell in that St. Petersburg Beach refused to pay the \$1500.00 attorney's fee they had agreed to pay. A member of St. Pete Beach Commission Mr. Al Furen gave his personal check for the \$1500.00 as he was a member of the commission that had agreed to pay this and felt he must keep his word.

A committee of sixteen was formed to work for consolidation. Before the bill could be presented to the legislature a name had to be agreed upon. Residents of the island were asked to vote and a great majority favored the name St. Petersburg Beach as St. Petersburg was an old city and had spent thousands in advertising the name so that the location of St. Petersburg Beach would be simple for people to locate.

There were five persons named in the consolidation bill (S.B.658) that were to primarily within 90 days arrange an election. These five were Mayor, Herman James, District 1 Albert Fleischmann, District 2 Harry Snider, District 3 Leland Johnson and District 4 - E. B. Toppins. During this interim period Arthur Radcliffe was town attorney, Noble Doss town judge, Mary Ella Doubek town clerk, Ivy Dubrotsky finance director.

Suit was filed protesting consolidation election and after a period of 4 or 5 months was dismissed.

The interim commission set September 17 - 1957 for election of a mayor and commissioners. The following were elected: William Miller, mayor, Herman James District 1, Ted Stambaugh District 2, Mary R. Tracy District 3, E. B. Toppin District 4, and they were sworn in as the first elected commission.

Mary Ella Doubek was appointed city clerk, Denny McGarry city attorney, and various other positions were filled. Late in 1957 or early 58 the 1st city manager E. C. Brandon was hired.

In the meantime the county was building and expanding a county water system. To this time we only had wells which as population increased were contaminated. Mr. Thomas Rowe owner and developer of Don CeSar subdivision and hotel had a water tower in the middle of Lazarilla Park. This stored water for the hotel and he sold water to Don CeSar residents. It was water but the odor and taste was really very bad - you just couldn't use it for tea or coffee or to cook and soap would not dissolve in it. Whatever we pay for county water it is really worth it remembering the days of horrible water. Also the Gulf Beach Sanitary District had been created by a Legislative Act and this was to collect fees and take care of garbage (entire beaches.)

The Long Key Sewer District had been created by a legislative act and passed by referendum. This Board was building sewers and a sewer plant for the entire Long Key area. This was financed by bonds and property assessments.

All the assets and liabilities of the four towns and the unincorporated areas now were acquired by the newly created City of St. Petersburg Beach. I can assure you the liability column was long.

Temporary city hall offices were rented in the former Gulf Beach Journal Building - corner Blind Pass Road and Corey Avenue. Then the Community Club vacated their building (where the library now stands) and this building was used as a town hall. The town should remember the co-operation of this club and particularly the president at that time Mrs. Julia Rettberg in that they returned the building deed to the new city and used Florida Power meeting rooms until a city hall was built. Eventually the north fire station deed was returned to the city.

Pressing problems were the Pass A Grille Beach bus system. The bus system was losing several thousand dollars a month and the buses were all 20 to 30 years old with no funds to replace.

It was decided to attempt to sell the bus franchise and the sale was accomplished.

Bonds were sold to build the present city hall.

1. Corey Causeway 1st span 1964, 2nd span 1976.

We have problems yet to solve and we will. People change their thinking an example is our present commission! The mayor was active in the forces against consolidation - commissioners Natzke and Aldhizer were not here. Ercius and Cidlowski were not active participants in city government at that time.

Through the years many persons have served on the commission and many citizens have contributed time, efforts and know how to help our city grow into what is now one of the best places in the world to live. We are very proud of its growth and development. The land, buildings and equipment owned by the city are worth millions of dollars. We really are some of the fortunate ones in the world to be residents of the City of St. Petersburg Beach, and may we accomplish for our city in the next 20 years as much as we have in the past 20.

In the cornerstone of City Hall Building are copies of newspaper, incorporation bill, committee for consolidation pictures etc. of 1957.

Perhaps we should note in closing that with the development and building in the past 20 years our taxes have been approximately 1/3 of what northern cities pay.

We should also remember that commercial and residential citizens must cooperate as each supports and helps the other.

The tourist is our main business source of income and the tourist industry must be nourished so that our commercial tax base will be stable. If commercial interests did not pay a great share of our taxes residential taxes would sky rocket.

Let us continue to work in harmony and build well for the future.

Mary R. Tracy

Mary R. Tracy
Chairman of the Consolidation
Committee 1957.