

# THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

# IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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## Government Calls for Change Governor DeSantis: A New Day in Tallahassee

Governor Ron DeSantis has made broad, sweeping changes in the environment since taking office in January. One of the most impactful so far was the call for the controversial board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to resign two days after taking office. This after the board approved a land lease to a subsidiary of sugar giant Florida Crystals on the site of the planned Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, designed to curb lake Okeechobee discharges into the St. Lucie River.

In February, The Governor unveiled his environmental budget which recommends more than \$625 million for Everglades restoration and protection of water resources.

Then in April, the Governor named Dr. Tom Frazer as the new “Chief Science Officer” for Florida. Dr. Frazer says he’ll study Florida’s algae bloom problem, along with climate change and rising sea levels. These opening moves have many environmentalists expressing optimism and hope. ■



## CRA Legislation

The Martin County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) has embarked on an effort to make the rules and regulations which govern growth and development in the designated Community Redevelopment Areas (CRAs) clear and consistent.

The CRAs were created in seven Martin County communities to encourage sustainable growth in these urban centers. They were the result of individual community groups working together from 1994 through 2010 to create a 2020 Vision Plan of how they would like to see their communities grow. The seven include Jensen Beach, Rio, Old Palm City, Hobe Sound, Port Salerno, Golden Gate and Indiantown (before it was incorporated).

While some communities have seen improvement, there has been a general consensus that development and investments have been stifled by the unclear and inconsistent regulations governing their CRA. The BOCC has hired the "Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council" to update these plans by conducting local workshops and by suggesting ways to improve the rules and regulations. The goal is to have owners, developers, existing residents and even the county staff better understand how CRAs work, as well as to strengthen the objectives and policies that will encourage infill development and redevelopment in the CRAs. Infill development is the process of developing vacant or under-used parcels within existing urban areas that are already largely developed.

It is clear that many county-wide

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## Agri-Tourism – Why the Guardians support it

Tours to see (and taste) fresh-grown shrimp in Indiantown, a winery on the Treasure Coast, and farm-to-table fare right here in Martin County. These are local examples of the emerging market of agricultural tourism.

The adopted definition is that "agri-tourism is any agricultural-related activity consistent with a bona fide farm, livestock operation, ranch or in a working forest, which allows members of the public (for recreational, entertainment, or educational purposes) to view or enjoy activities including farming, ranching, historical, cultural, civic, ceremonial, training and exhibition, or harvest-your-own activities

and attractions".

Locally, this initiative is sponsored by Martin County's partnership with the University of Florida's Agricultural Extension Office, Martin County's Tourist Development Council and the agricultural businesses who voluntarily participate. (They operate in an environmentally sustainable and nonpolluting manner.) The Guardians support it for the way in which it helps existing agricultural businesses. The initiative adds a new revenue stream to their bottom line, which in turn, helps them keep their properties green, instead of being converted to the manufactured crop – houses and urban sprawl.

There are four existing agri-tourism sites on the Treasure Coast:

### **Ground Floor Farm, Stuart:**

An urban farm, market, and cafe located on Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. in Stuart. Their aim is to help grow a more dynamic town through food, art, and fun.

<http://www.groundfloorfarm.com/>

### **Kai-Kai Farm, Indiantown:**

Kai-Kai Farm is a 40-acre vegetable operation that produces organic crops year-round. They stress their environmental sensitivity (no run-off to other surface waters) and open their facility for tours, weddings, and farm-to-table fare.

[www.kaikaifarm.com](http://www.kaikaifarm.com)

### **Fresh Shrimp USA, Indiantown:**

Fresh Shrimp USA is an innovative aquaculture company that focuses on growing high-quality fresh shrimp. They withdraw salty water from the Floridan aquifer, and raise shrimp to harvestable size in approximately 12 weeks on their 40-acre site.

<https://www.facebook.com/FreshShrimpUSA/>

### **Summer Crush Winery and Winery, Fort Pierce:**

In a Florida version of the well-known vineyard tours in California and abroad, this site offers visitors opportunities to tour the vineyard, participate in wine tastings and get involved in a variety of out-door activities.

<https://www.summcrushwine.com/>

## VIRGIN TRAINS

# Despite Safety Concerns, Logistical Challenges and Poor Financial Performance, It Still Chugs On

After years of persistent opposition, legal challenges, three different names and at least 18 deaths since operations commenced in 2018, Brightline, now Virgin Trains, still consumes popular attention, especially due to its lack of general accountability and disclosure to the public it intends to serve, and much weaker than predicted ridership.

Martin County and Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida (CARE FL) decided late last year to settle with Brightline in exchange for certain safety concessions. Indian River County, however, continues its challenge while the trains will soon be rebranded with the Virgin Trains logo, after UK billionaire Richard Branson concluded a \$10 million-dollar marketing arrangement.

Despite safety concerns, logistical challenges and poor financial performance, the federal and FL-state governments continue to support Virgin. The Florida Development Finance Corporation has now approved the total sale of \$2.7 billion of private activity

(tax exempt) bonds, refinancing a previously issued \$600 million offering, and providing funding for the planned 170 mile West Palm Beach to Orlando International Airport run. Meanwhile, Virgin continues to dangle the prospect of a Treasure Coast station, either in Stuart or Fort Pierce, and actively advertises the consequential creation of 10,000 construction jobs and \$650 million in federal, state and local revenue, all without substantiation.

The anticipated simultaneous operations of high-speed passenger and freight trains on two tracks, however, will require a significant number of lengthy sidings, enabling trains to pass one another. These will be expensive to build, operate and maintain, and such operations inevitably will slow the trains down, whereas successful railroads run on time. Furthermore, passage on antiquated, single-track bridges will delay and complicate travel further, causing confusion and congestion to maritime

traffic due to frequent bridge closings.

Virgin lost \$117 million during 2018; actual ridership continues well below forecast and passengers report virtually empty cars on trains even during rush hour. Currently, Virgin shows few signs of potential success. We surmise Virgin ultimately will fail to be a viable, independent enterprise.

Representative Brian Mast opposes the trains in Congress and a new grassroots group called Florida Alliance for Safe Trains (FAST) has been formed in Indian River County. FAST will continue the multi-year efforts of Citizens Against The Train Fund (CATT)/The Guardians of Martin County, which helped raise public awareness from the beginning about the safety, environmental and financial concerns this high-speed train poses to our communities.

Until more specific plans are revealed, The Guardians of Martin County remain vigilant and poised to react at any moment. For more information: <https://www.citizensagainststhe-train.com> ■

## CRA Legislation

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regulations do not work in urban centers, and that a more "Form Based Zoning" could be adopted to address these concerns within the CRAs.

This is a process that started in August 2018 and is scheduled to be completed in August 2020. During this period the BOCC will be discussing the

various proposed regulations and how best to apply them to each individual CRA. For more information, go to: <https://www.martin.fl.us/CRA>. ■

# Meet Our New Board Members

The Guardians of Martin County is pleased to welcome three new directors to the board: Barbara Birdsey, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch and Jay M. Wilson. We are so pleased to have the new directors and we asked them to share some information about their love of land, water and the environment.



**Barbara Birdsey** is the founder of the Pegasus Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to animal protection, environmental

preservation and public education in various parts of the United States, Africa and the Caribbean. Previously she founded the Orenda Wildlife Land Trust in Massachusetts and helped co-found the Cape Cod Stranding Network. Prior to that, she was a licensed Social Worker for the Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She graduated from Boston University with a BA in psychology and from Bridgewater State College with a Masters of Education in counseling. She has been visiting the Treasure Coast for many years and is now a resident. Barbara says, "I have followed the Guardians since its inception and have been increasingly pleased with the role it is playing in Martin County."

**Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch** has lived in Martin County since she was eleven months old. She considers herself a



"native" although born at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California. Jacqui holds undergraduate degrees from the University of Florida and a Master's Degree from the University of West Florida. Jacqui has taught, sold real estate, served as a Town of Sewall's Point Commissioner and Mayor and is a well-known and respected environmentalist. Her blog, "Indian River Lagoon", focuses on the health, politics, and history of the river, educates thousands of readers.

Jacqui served on the 2017-2018 Florida Constitution Revision Commission, where she chaired the General Provisions Committee. Jacqui lives in Sewall's Point with her husband, Dr. Ed Lippisch.



**CONGRATULATIONS to Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch on her appointment to the new SFWMD board by Gov. DeSantis in February.**

The couple is often seen above Stuart in the "River Warrior" plane photographing destructive discharges from Lake Okeechobee and area canals flowing into the St Lucie River/Indian River Lagoon. Since 2013, these photographs have been widely shared on many platforms inspiring both awareness and improvement of Florida's waterbodies. Follow her blog here: <https://jacquithurlowlippisch.com>



**Jay M. Wilson**, originally from Baltimore, Maryland, is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Business School. In 1975 he

acquired control of packaging manufacturer Steeltin Can Corporation and served as C.E.O. until it was sold to U.S. Can Corporation in 1994. Since then he has been active in banking and private equity, serving as Vice-Chairman of Mercantile Bankshares Corporation and founding private equity firm Spring Capital Partners. Jay has served on many corporate and non-profit boards and has been active in land preservation efforts in Maryland's Green Spring Valley and Nantucket, Massachusetts. He joined the Advisory Board of the Guardians in 2017 based upon his interest in preserving natural beauty and preventing irresponsible development in Martin County and became a board member in the fall of 2018. He and his wife Stephanie are Florida residents and have owned a home on Jupiter Island since 2003. ■

## Our Mission

The Guardians of Martin County is a 501(c)3 organization committed to helping shape a positive future for Martin County, by educating residents about the value of balancing natural and man-made resources to enrich the quality of life in our communities.

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