

FLORIDA SCENIC HIGHWAYS PROGRAM

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Real Places. Real Stories.

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Dean Stoddart, Program Coordinator

DEAN'S CORNER

Hello and welcome to all our byway organizations, district coordinators, and consultants who all combined are the soul of the Florida Scenic Highway Program. My name is Dean Stoddart and I'm the Florida Scenic Highway Program Coordinator.

Here is our new quarterly FSHP newsletter! I anticipate our newsletter will evolve over time into a way by which current events and news from the program can be shared more directly with everyone, and that topics of interest from our byways can be addressed and shared with our byways program wide. It is also a way to recognize and celebrate the successes of byway activities and events.

More than anything though, this newsletter will help to connect, to bring together, and provide a means of communication for our byways, coordinators, SHAC members, and program leadership. I look forward to hearing from you and suggestions you may have for our next quarterly newsletter.

Visit Us Online!



HEART & SOUL - MIKE PALOZZI

When offered the opportunity to write the guest column for the inaugural edition of the new Florida Scenic Highways Program newsletter by Dean Stoddart, both he and Claudia Calzaretta, the longtime District Scenic Highway Coordinator from FDOT in Deland suggested the column in some way recognize the hard work and dedication of our byway organizations. From those suggestions comes the following on what is truly the heart and soul of the scenic highway program - **our volunteers**.

FDOT has always defined the FSHP as a "grassroots" effort - administered by the Department but driven by community-based organizations, mostly volunteers, across the state.

By definition, a "volunteer" is someone who freely offers up personal time and service to help, while the term "volunteering" is loosely defined as a voluntary act of an individual or group freely giving time for community service. At its core, volunteering is a selfless gesture. Passionate volunteers have gotten our byway organizations to where they are today. People that are passionate about your cause will want to share your mission with everyone they know - encouraging others to get involved.

I've worked with over half of the state's byway organizations during my 20+ years of service to the FSHP. Those that I have worked with know I can talk about the importance of volunteers for hours, so instead of talking theory, let me offer real life of examples of some of the very passionate volunteers I've encountered in my days supporting the FSHP.

Bill Jonson had a vision while crossing the Courtney Campbell Causeway in Tampa many years ago. As he tells the story, he looked out over Tampa Bay and was stunned by its beauty and the Causeway's ability to showcase the bay's scenic vistas. From that day, Bill worked to get the Causeway designated as a scenic highway. Today, nearly 20 years later Bill is still volunteering, and the Causeway is a treasure to behold with its recently completed pedestrian bridge and trail - and soon to be completed visitor



Mike Palozzi, Consultant for Central Office, District 2, and District 5



Courtney Campbell Scenic Highway

center – serving as the corridor’s centerpieces, and while it took an army to get this far, Bill’s willingness to volunteer and serve in a leadership role made the difference for this part of Tampa Bay.

Every year the **A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal All-American Road** Organization has a full schedule of projects in their work plan - a plan driven entirely by volunteers. Their Kids Ocean Day event is perhaps the most meaningful, serving as a shining example of a grassroots effort intended to better their community. Working with individual Title One schools nearby, an entire grade level is invited to participate in an environmental education fair on the beach with supporting partners and agencies – at no cost to the school or students. It touches every volunteers heart to hear from children who have never seen the beach and the ocean, or who are trying fishing for the very first time, guided by volunteers who exhibit patience, caring and knowledge – and hopefully creating positive memories for each child while imparting a bit of wisdom that could impact the decisions they will make in the future as the next generation of environmental stewards.

What would a scenic highway program be if the Overseas Highway was not an active participant? Early on in it’s life the original byway organization was nonexistent for several years. **Judy Hull** identified a need and brought together representatives from along its 110-mile length to help revitalize the Florida Keys Scenic Highway. Their efforts quickly resulted in an engaged organization and receipt of the state’s first All-American Road designation. Over time, volunteers have come and gone, but Judy remains in a leadership role and is proud of the Alliance’s efforts, including making sure every segment of their corridor gets cleaned as part of



Volunteers from Daytona State College

International Coastal Cleanup effort every year. All of Flagler County is better for **Nancy Duke’s** efforts to ensure the byway story lives on. While working as a professor at Daytona State College, Nancy also serves as the Chair of the Heritage Crossroads Byway Organization. These two roles have allowed her to craft a partnership that includes her two passions (history and her students) through the concept of “service learning” designed to grow the next generation of volunteers and local decision-makers. Working with several other local volunteer organizations, Nancy is building a better future for the community’s history and heritage.

The William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway sits along the St. Johns River and the group’s Chair **Al Abbatiello, along with his wife Phyllis** and a small group of volunteers, have worked hard to insulate their byway from the impacts of growth in the region. Over and over they have faced off against powerful developers to preserve their little piece of natural beauty and history along the River. Realizing they couldn’t do it all alone anymore, Al worked tirelessly in the community to recruit nearly 50 volunteers over the last several months – allowing the organization to better advance their mission of preservation and education in the face of countless challenges.

While volunteerism is reported to be at an all-time low in this country, you’d never know it in Sumter County. When the Sumter Byway organization experienced firsthand the challenges of recruiting volunteers, **Dawn Cary** didn’t have to look further than around her dinner table. Today, three generations of the “Cary Clan”, including a grandbaby, are involved, sponsoring and volunteering at community events intended to educate the community on the significance of the region’s history and natural beauty.



Lookout Tower on Green Mountain Scenic Highway

While the list of volunteers with a passion for their communities could go on forever, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention **Greg Gensheimer** who worked for years to locate a scenic overlook on what could become one of the only pieces of public property adjacent to Lake Apopka. As Chair of the Green Mountain Scenic Highway, Greg and his team celebrated construction of their overlook in 2014 but soon realized that the trees surrounding this popular resource were growing and could soon impact the overlooks views of the lake and surrounding hills. Greg kicked back into gear and has worked tirelessly to identify funding and seek required approvals to add additional height to the tower, this time well above the trees.

While the IRS says there is a monetary value to volunteering, it's the warm feeling that volunteers get in their heart that matters most. Giving back! It's not surprising that several of these volunteers are past Garry Balogh award winners. Give back to your community - whether it's the FSHP or some other cause, be passionate about what you believe.

To learn more about these volunteers and their organizations, check their websites or give me a call and I'll get you in contact with them. 😊

UPCOMING EVENTS

Have an upcoming event you'd like to feature on the Florida Scenic Highways Programs social media channels?

Access our [Social Media Submission Form](#) to provide some basic information, graphics, and flyers and we will get your event posted and shared throughout our channels!

FLORIDA'S MAIN STREET

Have you ever driven through a charming, historic downtown in the Sunshine State? If so, you might have unknowingly passed through a Florida Main Street community.



The **Florida Main Street Program**, administered by the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources, was established in 1985 to revitalize downtowns and encourage economic development through historic preservation.

Participating Florida Main Street communities range from urban centers like St. Petersburg to small towns like Havana and Eatonville - all highlighting the diverse people, landscapes, and assets that call Florida home. So, whether you prefer the fast pace of city life or the relaxed nature of Florida's back roads, there is a Florida Main Street community for you to explore and enjoy!

The MainStreet Program's dedication to creating jobs, economic development, building a community's tax base, and most importantly, building community pride - is as focus that is similar in many ways to that of the Florida Scenic Highways Program. This similarity has resulted in unique partnering opportunities across the state including in

DeLand where the Director of the MainStreet program there serves as a Board member of the **River of Lakes National Byway** organization. Together these two programs have partnered on several successful projects including a byway promotion using the front windows of local business member

River of Lakes Heritage Corridor Brochure

Florida's Main Street (Cont'd)

to help educate the community on the presence of this national byway with window posts inviting customers to learn more. DeLand Mainstreet has also worked with the byway to manage and distribute the byway's highly popular byway map.

Along the Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway, the Coalition has partnered with the Mainstreet Program in Melbourne's Eau Gallie Arts District (EGAD). This award-winning Main Street Program worked with the Coalition to develop a centrally located information kiosk that tells the story of the byway while guiding visitors through EGAD's winding streets.

While these are only two examples, there are other Mainstreet programs located within the limits of our byways across the state including, Fernandina Beach Main Street (A1A Ocean Islands Trail), Lake Wales Main Street (The Ridge Scenic Highway), and Vilano Beach Main Street (A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway) all



Map of Melbourne's Eau Gallie Arts District, a partnership with Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway.

working towards a common cause – community betterment. If you're not working to learn more about your local MainStreet Program you should, their staff is bright, creative and working to better their community.

To learn more about the Florida Scenic Highway program and our 27 participating byways, visit www.FloridaScenicHighways.com or follow us at www.Twitter.com/FLScenicHighway.

BYWAY LEADER INTERVIEW

Each quarter, we will include an interview with a byway leader! This quarter, we reached out to Del Suggs, who currently serves as President for the Big Bend Scenic Byway.

Name: Del Suggs

Byway: Big Bend Scenic Byway

Position: President

Tell us about yourself. Most people know me as a singer/songwriter and recording artist—which I am—but I've been pretty deeply involved in community service projects and non-profits for many years. I actually turned down my first invitation to serve on the Leon County Corridor Advocacy Group because I was busy working on other projects. Once those projects were finished, I volunteered for the CAG.

How long have you been part of the Florida Scenic Highways Program? I was invited to serve on the Leon County Corridor Advocacy Group back around 2005 as I recall. The Wakulla and Franklin CAGs had started sooner, and their segments of the BBSB were approved in 2006. A few months later, I got to make the pitch to



Del Suggs, Big Bend Scenic Byway

the SHAC for the Leon County segment, and we were approved in 2007 as a Florida Scenic Highway. In 2009 the BBSB received federal designation at a National Scenic Byway. At that point I became a member of the Corridor Management Authority. Around 2014 I was elected president, and I've served in that position since then.

Tell us about your experience volunteering with the Florida Scenic Highways Program. It's been a great joy, but frustrating at times. Dealing with volunteer boards is always challenging, but I enjoy working to keep them motivated. We've got great leaders on our governing board, and we've been able to accomplish more than I imagined. We struggle to keep volunteers involved, and since we meet quarterly if someone misses a meeting then there is a six-month gap. Still, our members are tech savvy and we have been able to stay connected, even through the pandemic.

What initially attracted you to the Big Bend Scenic Byway? I've always loved the area covered by our byway. I'm a sixth-generation Floridian, so I love this state, but this part of the Panhandle is particularly unique and beautiful. I remember driving some friends from Gloucester, Massachusetts from Tallahassee to St. George Island, and they were just stunned by how gorgeous the vistas were. Sometimes we have to take a fresh look at the things we see every day to stop taking them for granted.

What are the intrinsic qualities of your byway that make it unique? Our byway celebrates the water, woods, wildlife and way of life of this area. That means it's the history, the ecology, the people, the flora and fauna. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to show off this example of "Old Florida," what attracted the original settlers but at the same time to display the contemporary elements.

What has been your favorite project to work on as part of the Big Bend Scenic Byway? I especially enjoyed working of the accessibility study. One of our long-term goals is to make the byway universally accessible to travelers. We've identified everywhere that there are accessible attractions, so our travelers know where to go if they are searching for those locations. Because of a typo, we ended up coining the term "Access-able" to describe our goal of universal accessibility. I love that term.

What is one piece of advice you would give to other Scenic Byway organizations based on your experience? Be patient but work steady. Nothing that involves government moves

quickly, so if you are from the private sector like me, it can be difficult to handle the snail's pace. But when it all comes together, there is a great feeling of accomplishment and teamwork.

What does the future look like for Big Bend Scenic Byway? The future looks bright. We're getting close to building the structures, kiosks, and exhibits that were designed in our Wayshowing and Interpretive Plan. We were funded by a National Scenic Byway grant back in 2012, and we've been working toward that goal for ten years now. After all the obstacles we've had to overcome, I'm hopeful we will finally get it built. Once that is finished, we can move on to more promotion and marketing of the route.

Which byway would you most like to visit (besides your own!) and why? I travel a lot, and when I can I drive the byways in other states. In addition to several of the Florida Scenic Highways, I've driven byways in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Hawaii. But none of them hold a candle to the Big Bend Scenic Byway!

Any final thoughts? Scenic byways are an underappreciated part of our tourism economy in Florida. Most people tend to think that tourists only come for the beaches or for Disney World. Every time I dine at the Wakulla Springs Lodge, I meet travelers who are there for the Eco-tourism. They want to see the natural Florida. We can meet that demand and develop the travel economy right here. I think that's an important engine for our tourist development.

Motorcyclists riding along US 98 in Franklin County, part of the Big Bend Scenic Byway.



9 WAYS TO PROMOTE INTEREST (AND POTENTIALLY ATTRACT VOLUNTEERS!) TO YOUR BYWAY ORGANIZATION

PROMOTION +
MARKETING

INTEREST

VOLUNTEERS

The Florida Scenic Highways Program rests firmly on the shoulders of our engaged and dedicated volunteers. As the program has matured, volunteer recruitment has become a hot topic. It may feel impossible to recruit new and reliable volunteers at times, but we've compiled some tips to make the recruitment process fun and engaging. While volunteer recruitment is a long-term endeavor, promoting and marketing your byway to gain interest can lead to new volunteers over time. Here are nine ways to promote interest in your byway to your byway organization:

- 1. Pursue a varied social media strategy to engage users on a variety of platforms.** The power of social media to attract different types of people to your byway cannot be overstated. Consider using a variety of platforms to reach different groups in addition to more traditional forms like Facebook. Other platforms include TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Regularly sharing compelling content that includes vibrant photos, videos, and attests to your byway's unique qualities can increase interest and traffic to your accounts. You can also allow users to share your posts on their own stories or pages, which will multiply how many people are seeing your posts.
- 2. Partner with youth groups, schools, and local universities.** Having trouble attracting younger volunteers? Partnering with groups and schools provides an opportunity to go directly to the source. Volunteers with a fresh perspective and a willingness to contribute positively to their communities can enhance a byway organization and the overall experience.

- 3. Offer simple services that might attract new members like networking or mentoring.** A few networking events or opportunities to mentor younger volunteers can be an attractive plus for people to consider contributing time to your organization. Do not underestimate how much you and your current volunteers have to offer young professionals and potential volunteers!

- 4. Stay consistent.** Consistency is the key to success! Maintain a consistent meeting schedule, keep organized agendas, and ensure that byway-related business is performed predictably and in accordance with any

established rules or bylaws. Consistency will help your volunteers build good habits and work towards long term success.

- 5. Make it easy.** Potential volunteers may be more inclined to participate if it is easy to do so. Options for providing this ease include virtual meetings, meeting regularly but not too often, and choosing locations that are central and easily accessible when meeting in person. "Making it easy" goes hand in hand with staying consistent.
- 6. Create a "Refer a Friend" program.** A "Refer a Friend" program can bolster volunteer numbers by gaining access to contacts via your existing network of volunteers. Great volunteers are likely to have friends with similar values who may be interested in supporting your byway organization!
- 7. Table at events.** Tabling at events allows byway organizations to get more facetime with the public and share the purpose and benefit of the program. At these events, you can provide sign-up sheets for a mailing list and actively engage with people. You may even try actively recruiting people who seem interested!
- 8. Solidify your message.** To recruit volunteers to support your organization, you should have a clear understanding of the purpose of your byway, the unique and intrinsic qualities, and what needs your organization has. Having a clear message will convey passion for your byway and solidifies your pitch!
- 9. Provide social opportunities.** Understand that potential volunteers may be looking for more than just a volunteer opportunity; they could be looking for social opportunities and new friends. Scheduling events with volunteers at destinations along the byway is a great way to get everyone engaged and allows an opportunity for people to connect outside of business.



Byway volunteers gather for a hike.