

# FLORIDA SCENIC HIGHWAYS PROGRAM

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Real Places. Real Stories.

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

Fall 2023



## SCENIC, SPOOKY SPOTS TO VISIT THIS FALL

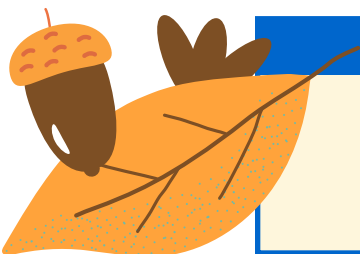
*Sometimes it's not the destination, but the pitstops along the way that make a trip worthwhile. Many of our byways are known for their historic, archaeological, and cultural intrinsic qualities. This October, we are highlighting some of the more unique (and sometimes spooky!) spots along our byways that reflect some of these qualities.*

### Town of Cassadaga

#### **Closest Byway: River of Lakes Heritage Corridor**

Located along the River of Lakes Heritage Corridor, the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp was originally settled in the late 19th century by New York native and spiritualist, George P. Colby, following a séance where he was told he would be “instrumental in founding a Spiritualist community in the South.” Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991, visitors can now take a guided historic walking tour, schedule readings with mediums or healers, or visit a variety of parks and meditation gardens.

For more information, visit: <https://www.cassadaga.org/>



Visit Us Online!



## Spook Hill in Lake Wales

### **Closest Byway: The Ridge Scenic Highway**

Located just off the Ridge Scenic Highway, Lake Wales's Spook Hill is the only known magnetic hill in the state of Florida. To view this optical illusion, visitors place their vehicle in neutral and watch in wonder as their car appears to roll uphill instead of downhill. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019, Spook Hill is sure to delight!

For more information, visit:

[visitcentralflorida.org/featured/spook-hill/](http://visitcentralflorida.org/featured/spook-hill/)



## Robert the Doll in Key West

### **Closest Byway: Florida Keys Scenic Highway**

Since 1994, Robert the Doll has called the Fort East Martello Museum in Key West home. Handmade by the Steiff Company of Germany, Robert was originally owned by Key West native and artist Robert Eugene "Gene" Otto. Following Gene's death in 1974, it has been reported that the doll exhibited strange behavior, such as moving across the room on his own and changing facial expression. Since his debut as an exhibit, Robert has become a much beloved part of Key West lore!

For more information, visit:

[www.kwahs.org/museums/fort-east-martello/visit](http://www.kwahs.org/museums/fort-east-martello/visit)

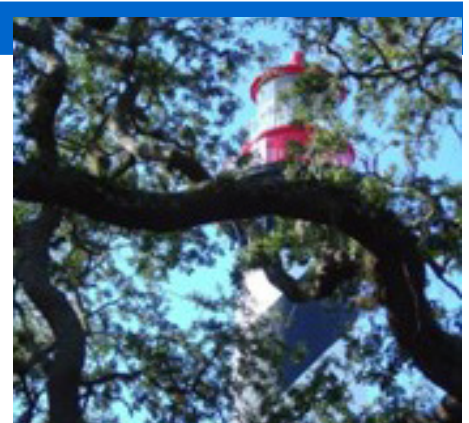
## St Augustine Lighthouse

### **Closest Byway: A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway**

During the construction of the St. Augustine Lighthouse in 1873, three young girls tragically passed in an accident and are said to now haunt the grounds. Reports of footsteps, giggling children, and fully formed apparitions have been reported throughout the years. If you dare, the St. Augustine Lighthouse and Maritime Museum now offers a variety of guided tours, including the Ghost Tales Tour.

For more information, visit:

[www.staugustinelighthouse.org/2020/03/02/ghost-stories-the-pittee-girls/](http://www.staugustinelighthouse.org/2020/03/02/ghost-stories-the-pittee-girls/)



## Uncle Charlie (bartender at Palace Saloon) in Fernandina Beach

### **Closest Byway: A1A Ocean Islands Trail**

Not only is the Palace Saloon in Fernandina Beach the oldest continuously operating bar in Florida, but it might also be home to the oldest bartender. Charlie Beresford, also known lovingly as Uncle Charlie, served as a bartender for more than 50 years until he ultimately passed away in his apartment above the bar. Since then, there have been reports of strange human shapes lingering around closing time.

For more information, visit: [www.visitflorida.com/travel-ideas/articles/palace-saloon-oldest-bar-in-amelia-island-florida/](http://www.visitflorida.com/travel-ideas/articles/palace-saloon-oldest-bar-in-amelia-island-florida/)

### **Other spooky spots you can explore?**

Casa Monica Resort in St. Augustine (A1A Scenic & Historic Coastal Byway); Historic Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola (Pensacola Scenic Bluffs); Old Mayfair Hotel in Sanford (River of Lakes Heritage Corridor)



# AL AND PHYLLIS ABBATIELLO RECEIVE THE FSHP'S INSPIRING EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Florida Scenic Highways Program is excited to announce that **Al and Phyllis Abbatiello** from the **William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway** have been selected as recipients of the **2023 Garry Balogh Inspiring Excellence Award** - the highest distinction that a member of the scenic highway community can receive. The award, established in 2015 is named for Garry Balogh - the past Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Five Scenic Highway Coordinator, is given each year to a member of the byway community who best exemplifies Garry's passion for Florida's Scenic Highway Program. Nominees are measured in a number of categories including leadership skills, innovation, and their passion for the program.

Dean Stoddart, the current Program Coordinator, made the announcement of the Abbatiello's award at the William Bartram Byway Organization meeting on September 22nd.

This husband & wife team have committed over 20 years of their lives working to preserve and protect the history and natural beauty of the St Johns River region of St Johns County. Organization records from the earliest byway planning meetings in 2001 include their names - reflecting a long-term dedication and commitment to their community that is hard to duplicate. Combined, Al and Phyllis have nearly 45 years of byway experience that they bring to their byway community.

**WE WANT YOU** to submit articles to the FSHP blog, the **Byway Buzz!** You can access submittal forms **here** to include information, graphics, and photos for a blog post to highlight everything your byway has to offer, from upcoming events to intrinsic qualities.



*Al and Phyllis Abbatiello*



*Al Abbatiello at the 2023 FSHP Annual Meeting*

*"For 20 years Al and Phyllis have sat in commission meetings monitoring agendas and speaking out for protection of the resources that when gone — are gone forever."*

*- St. Johns County Commission Candidate Kim Kendall*

With a byway organization that has been critically low on volunteers for several years Al and Phyllis led a rebuild strategy that over the past year has recruited nearly 100 new volunteers willing to engage - maintaining a website, managing social media channels, recruiting additional volunteers, looking for grants, donors, and more. Persevering through the lean times and then implementing strategy to return the organization

to relevance in the community was a point of emphasis in the Abbatiello nomination letter submitted by byway community members Lisa Powell and Angie McFarland.

***Congratulations Al and Phyllis !***



*Al and Phyllis with Dean Stoddart, receiving the FSHP Inspiring Excellence Award*

# FSHP PROGRAM COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

**Name:** Dean Stoddart

## **Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

A little bit about me; I've been a Landscape Architect in Florida since 2003 and have worked on all kinds of design projects from simple homes to complex theme parks. In my current role I am the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) State Transportation Landscape Architect based in Tallahassee, Florida. It's a tongue twister of a title. I have three responsibilities - overseeing the Landscape Architecture department, the Florida Scenic Highway Program (FSHP), and the Highway Beautification Program, including Highway Beautification Grants.

## **How long have you been part of the Florida Scenic Highways Program?**

Originally, I came to work for the State of Florida in 2008 as a Landscape Architect with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection - Division of Recreation and Parks in a position that included travel throughout Florida and our State Parks system. I have also worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission which also included travel throughout Florida. I've been with FDOT since May 2021 and now feel like I'm finally settled in.

## **Tell us about your experience working with the Florida Scenic Highways Program.**

My first year with the FSHP was an unending waterfall of information - coming to understand the purpose of the program, its history, and the dedication shown by our volunteer Byway Organizations. This first year of transition and understanding of the program was made possible by our patient District Coordinators and very capable consultants. These folks helped me by sharing their knowledge gained by decades of experience in our program, without which I could not have done my job. I still reach out to these folks for information and circumstances that helped make our program how it is today.

## **What initially attracted you to the organization?**

Truth be known, when I first began working with the FSHP I didn't entirely know what



*Dean Stoddart,  
FSHP Program Coordinator*

I was getting into. Reading a job description doesn't give a complete picture of what's coming your way. The more I learned about the FSHP, the more I realized that I've been seeking out the qualities of Scenic Byways most of my life. I've lived and traveled through many states and foreign Countries looking for their local culture, places where history was made, archeological remains, places to recreate, and scenic beauty. It really wasn't a big leap to connect these experiences to

the FSHP.

## **What are some of the intrinsic qualities throughout the byways in the state that have stood out to you?**

A byway must possess one or more of five intrinsic qualities to achieve designation as a Scenic Highway. These qualities are cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational, natural and/or scenic. Which one(s) stand out among the others? My wife and I have sought out the lesser traveled roads and localities wherever we have lived throughout our 30 some years in Florida. Most often these are day trips for which we may find any of the above qualities - each is important in its own light. If one quality were to stand out, it might be Archaeological as there are very few of these sites nationwide. There are many significant places in our State that could easily qualify as an archeological byway.

## **What has been your favorite part of leading the program?**

My favorite part of leading the FSHP is without a doubt meeting our byway organization volunteers. Our volunteers come in all personality types, strengths, abilities, experiences - I could go on. The one thing they all have in common is a drive to tell the story of their byway. In telling their story, one can see the passion and pride that comes from their selfless efforts to promote and protect the intrinsic quality of their byway for our Florida residents and visitors to our State.

**What is one piece of advice you would give to the Scenic Byway organizations based on your experience?**

As I have taken on this role of State Coordinator, I note a common headache endemic to any volunteer program, finding volunteers. My advice for our byways is to look hard and identify areas of need in your byway and look outside the box for volunteers who can bring skillsets and energy into your group. Find someone who can find the right folks. Students - both high school and college have mandatory volunteer hours to perform. There might be one-off projects in your work plan with a limited duration that would fit the lifestyle of a student. Seek out others in the community - business owners and governmental employees who have an economic interest in promoting a successful byway. Make it simple and easy for these folks to attend meetings or events. Try holding a meeting at a coffee shop or ice cream parlor or library and ask to place a meeting notice on their window or community board. Volunteer resources may be found in other groups like garden clubs, social clubs (like Kiwanis or Lions Clubs), Country clubs, car or motorcycle clubs, professional clubs... you get the idea. Find a way to make byway meetings fun and engaging for a variety of demographics. Maybe it's a potluck, or raffle, or family night, or board game night. Bring in someone who is an expert on a particular topic related to the byway to give a short presentation.

**Can you describe why volunteer support is so instrumental in the success of the FSHP?**

Volunteers are critical for a byway organization mission of telling the byway story and promoting / protecting their intrinsic values. The most valuable asset any byway organization has is their volunteer base without which the byway ceases to exist. The most successful byway organizations are those that can spread the effort of running a byway across willing and capable people without burning them out.

**What are your hopes for the program as it moves into its 28th year?**

Several of our byways are thriving and dynamic and others are doing well to maintain what they have. As our program moves into its 28th year my biggest hope is that each of our byways become equally strong potent advocates for their byway, recognized by their local businesses and communities as vital contributors to success.

**Any final thoughts?**

Byway leaders - take a deep dive into the mission and goals of your byway group and grow a base of volunteers who can accomplish those goals. Expect that your volunteers may be steady contributors or one timers - recognize each for their talent and contribution no matter how large or small as they are your greatest asset. Be aware of public meetings affecting your byway and use the power of your volunteers to promote your mission. Don't burn out your folks or yourselves by trying to do it all by yourself and intentionally make time to have some fun.



Dean Stoddart at the 2022 FSHP Annual Meeting

# BYWAY DOINGS

## Old Florida Heritage Highway:



In August, the byway organization bid a fond farewell to Kathleen Pagan as a technical liaison to their group. Kathleen recently retired from Alachua County Growth Management Department

after 25 years of service. In addition to her other duties with the County, she also served as technical support to the Old Florida Heritage Highway (OFHH) Byway organization for over 15 years. In this support role she assisted the byway organization with the development of organization planning documents, assisted in pulling meetings together and as the group struggled organizationally at times, she worked to keep the volunteers together and headed in the right direction. Kathleen was once quoted as saying: *“the Old Florida Heritage Highway designation has continually worked to find innovative ways to enhance, preserve, and promote the scenic roads, state parks, and preservation lands in southeast Alachua County.”*

Kathleen is dedicated to her community - serving as advisor and volunteer to several other local preservation organizations with similar missions as that of OFHH including the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Paynes Prairie and Micanopy Historic Preservation Trust. Since her retirement, Kathleen has continued to participate in OFHH meetings as a volunteer and the group is hopeful she'll remain engaged - just in a slightly different capacity. Clearly, Kathleen will be busy in retirement with passions that include animal welfare, arts and culture, children, social action, and the environment.



Kathleen Pagan, Old Florida Heritage Highway



River of Lakes  
HERITAGE CORRIDOR  
A National Scenic Byway

## River of Lakes Heritage Highway:

The River of Lakes Byway, one of the state's newest national scenic byways, is saying goodbye to their long time Chair, Cindy Sullivan, who is moving to Pennsylvania with her husband later this year. Cindy's last month as byway Chair will be October and shortly after that the Sullivan family will be headed to the Keystone state. Cindy has been with the Byway organization since the beginning, leading an organization that has developed a long list of significant accomplishments. During her tenure as Chair, the organization has developed a byway master plan, won National Scenic Byway grants, increased the length of the corridor through the approval of two byway extensions, hosted several Florida Scenic Highways Program Annual Workshops, become a national scenic byway, and supported the region's efforts to complete the St Johns River to Sea Loop Trail.

While passionate about the byway, she's equally passionate about the Enterprise Museum where she has served as Chair of Museum's Operating Committee since 2014. Her leaving the byway community creates leadership holes in two of the region's most successful community advocacy groups and the candidates that will replace her in each of these organizations will have large shoes to fill.



Cindy Sullivan (right), River of Lakes Byway

A sincere  
**THANK YOU**  
to both Kathleen  
and Cindy for their  
dedication to the  
Florida Scenic  
Highways Program!