

## Telemarketer who sold Port St. Lucie lots comes full circle by joining VGTI

By Joe Crankshaw

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TRADITION — As a teenager in Cleveland, Penny Sugar worked in a phone room where she thought her job was selling "underwater land to unsuspecting school teachers and letter carriers, in a place called Port St. Lucie."

Now, the 64-year-old is the director of institutional advancement for VGTI, a biomedical research company in Tradition helping shape Port St. Lucie's future.

She said now that she knows better she is proud of what she did to help Port St. Lucie grow back in the 1960s.

But, it was not always so.

"I blame it all on a 78 rpm recording titled 'Show Biz' narrated by George Jessel," Sugar said. "It was the history of vaudeville with music as well as words. I played it over and over. I wanted vaudeville to come back and I fell in love with George Jessel."

Sugar's father had an attorney friend, who represented the land sales operation for General Development Corporation. She was offered a job in the phone room and was going to turn it down until her father told her Jessel, who was a former vaudevillian, actor, singer and Academy Award winning movie director from the 1920s to the 1960s, was the spokesman for the firm. He said she might get a chance to meet her idol.

So she took the job.

"We worked from list of school teachers and letter carriers. A study had shown many of them wanted to live in Florida but thought they couldn't afford it," Sugar explained. "But General Development Corporation was offering lots at \$10 down and \$10 a month for 10 years, and they would even build you a nice house."

The lure brought in hundreds of purchasers.

"I was ashamed. Their life savings and dreams were involved. I worked from a script which talked about their dreams and how they could achieve them in Port St. Lucie," Sugar said. "I thought I was selling them underwater land which might be drained when they wanted to build.

"But they were excited at the prospect, and that would get me excited too. I sold a lot of lots."

Her sales volume earned her a place at a banquet where Jessel was the featured speaker and entertainment.

"For some reason he came in a World War I uniform that was much too tight," she said.

She got to meet him, realizing one of her dreams.

But she was still ashamed. Her scripts described Port St. Lucie as a "booming" city.

"It wasn't booming," she said. "My parents lived on Biscayne Point in Miami, and I drove through here. I knew it wasn't booming. Still people bought the lots and some began building homes."

Sugar moved to Broward County in 1990 and to Delray Beach in 2005. She was offered a job in Port St. Lucie at VGTI. She drives from Delray Beach every day.

"I took it and I will be here until I retire, helping all those people and me to fulfill our dreams of a great city," she said. "We are making Port St. Lucie a world-class biomedical research center."

Although Port St. Lucie wasn't underwater, and a lot of people's dreams have come true, Sugar said she doesn't think one of her dreams will materialize.

"I don't think vaudeville will come back," she said, "and I wish it would."

