

Port St. Lucie has interesting stories to tell about its early days

By staff report

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1ST COMMUNITY ISN'T PART OF CITY

As Port St. Lucie looks back on its first 50 years, it's ironic that the first part of the community to be developed isn't part of the city.

River Park, roughly bounded by U.S. 1 to the east, the North Fork of the St. Lucie River to the west, Prima Vista Boulevard to the south and Coconut Avenue to the north, was the first neighborhood to be developed in the Port St. Lucie area. However, its residents have steadfastly stayed outside the city limits.

According to "The Early Years of Port St. Lucie, Florida" by Strelsa Schreiber, Guy and Gladys Clark moved into a newly built house at 216 East Arbor on June 25, 1957, becoming the first family to live in the Port St. Lucie area, but not in Port St. Lucie proper.

When General Development Corp. incorporated Port St. Lucie on April 21, 1961, the developer intentionally left the River Park area out of the city because there were people already living there, and they would have to be allowed to vote on incorporation. Thus, Port St. Lucie became what was known at the time as a "paper city," an area where there were not yet residents but only a developer's big plans for some.

Years later, when the city proposed to annex River Park, residents there voted against it, unwilling to accept the higher taxes that would have come with being in the city.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Port St. Lucie's name isn't Port St. Lucie; it's Port St. Lucie, Florida.

At least that's the city's name on the document signed by then-Secretary of State Tom Adams recognizing House Bill 953 to "provide for the creation of a municipality to be known as Port St. Lucie, Florida."

City spokesman Ed Cunningham said local officials came across the document "back in 2003 or 2004. We were trying to determine if 'city of' is part of Port St. Lucie's name because we wanted to know if we should capitalize the 'c' on official documents."

Cunningham said City Attorney Roger Orr found the document and determined that, legally at least, Florida is part of the city's name.

"So if you were writing your entire address," Cunningham said, "it would include 'Port St. Lucie, Florida, FL.'"

Cunningham said city officials chose to ignore the extra Florida in the name. And they decided to capitalize the "c," too, even though it's not part of the city's name.

THIS CITY NEEDS A BOWLING ALLEY

In 1972, Bob Post, a member of the local men's club The Jaycees, conducted a community survey to see what Port St. Lucie residents needed and wanted.

He went door to door surveying the community, and even published the questionnaire in the local paper, so residents could mail in their answers.

Post said the findings of the survey painted an accurate, interesting picture of the time.

A hospital was first on the list for residents. The closest hospitals at that time were in Fort Pierce and Stuart.

Second, a grocery store.

"So, the ice cream wouldn't melt," Post said. "The closest grocery store was in Fort Pierce."

The third most desired need in 1972: a bowling alley.

"This was a conglomerate community of people who came from everywhere and there were a large number of bowlers," Post said. "Bowling gave us something to do."

LONG DISTANCE ACROSS TOWN

Prior to 1975, residents of northern Port St. Lucie would have to shell out a few extra dimes to call their neighbors in the southern portion of the city.

Phone numbers for northern residents of the city started with "878," while numbers for southern residents started with "335."

"One thing I just thought was unbelievable, if you lived in Sandpiper Bay, you had a Martin County phone number," said real estate agent L.M. "Butch" Post, who moved her family to the city in 1969. "We lived farther north so we had a Fort Pierce, St. Lucie County phone number. It was long distance for us to call each other."

Long-distance charges were no longer a problem when all of Port St. Lucie obtained the "878" exchange.

"We were thrilled," Post said. "That was a biggie."

