

Town of Ponce Inlet

Mayor's State of the Town Address

January 19, 2012

2011 may be remembered in our history as the most interesting year as far as the elected officials' turnover rate. Our Town experienced three resignations and three Council appointments. Even with this atmosphere of constant change, the Town Staff, being very adept at *adjusting their sails*, worked with the Council in place throughout the year on a number of accomplishments.

First and foremost is the financial health of our Town. Our goal is to maintain 2 to 9 months of operating expenses in the General Reserve Fund. The unrestricted balance of this fund is currently estimated for September 30th, 2012 to be \$2.2 million which is 6.6 months of operating expenses and positions us toward the top end of our goal.

A true gem of Volusia County was completed and the grand opening was held in January for the beautiful Ponce Preserve, a 40 acre park which spans from the beach to the river with scenic boardwalks, shell trails through the woods, pavilions, kayak launches, and playgrounds. The Town Council has also fully funded a similar project in Timucuan Oaks, so you can look forward to even more outdoor recreation options in the next couple years.

Later in the spring, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservations presented our Town with the 2011 Annual Statewide Preservation Award for Restoration/Rehabilitation in recognition of our work in restoring the Meyer-Davis House and Hasty Cottage located at 143 Beach Street. This project had been completed in the prior year and the facility which serves as a small museum is now open regularly for visitors.

Many Council meetings during 2011 were dedicated to the land use and development code rewrite. This activity is well underway and the responsibility of completing it was returned to the Planning Board in December.

The Town's sign ordinance was completed as a collaborative effort with the newly formed Ponce Inlet Business Association and other interested parties. This ordinance re-write began in 2007 due to a number of issues with the prior ordinance and we are pleased to now have it completed.

Another project which was several years in the making is the beautification of the historic north and south turn beach approaches. This project really got off the ground in 2011 with the doubling of the funding contribution from Volusia County as a partner in this project. This project will enhance the appearance of this area and will provide a historic commemoration of the time in our Town's history when beach racing was at its peak. The grand opening of these sites will occur on February 18th, during Race Week.

The Town's noise ordinance was updated to find a balance between the needs of the residents and the needs of the businesses. Though it was off to a highly publicized start, the complaints about noise issues in the Town have dropped dramatically.

The Town Council passed a couple of other ordinances, for your safety and well-being, on issues that were becoming problematic for our neighboring municipalities. We could foresee that these could become our problems in the future if we didn't take action to protect the community. These ordinances provided safeguards from what are now commonly referred to as "pill mills" and also from establishments which would offer computer gambling.

One of the most exciting things coming up in the Town is the project that Greenacres has initiated to convert the old *Pacetti Boarding House* into an interactive educational facility for children to learn about marine life in the area. Greenacres recently obtained the property from the Nippert family that had intended to use it for this purpose. We are pleased to see the first steps toward that goal now occurring and look forward to seeing it completed for the use and enjoyment of many. Greenacres has stated that they will provide opportunities for public access on occasion as well.

The Town's budget was completed while remaining at the rolled-back rate to ensure your Town tax did not increase unless your property value did. In these tough economic times, this has been a primary goal of the Council and our staff has worked to ensure that goal is met each year. The Town is utilizing some of the reserve fund which has accumulated over the years, but only for non-reoccurring capital expenses. The Town is back to its pre-economic boom budget of 2002 and continues to maintain reserves in excess of our minimum goal.

Several of the Town's special events have continued but are now self-supporting and no longer rely on funding from your taxes. For 2011, these included both spring and fall 5K races, which raised funds for SPARC and Operation Changing Lives - both very worthy causes for misfortunate children. The Ponce Inlet Children's Activity Committee sponsored fantastic Easter and Halloween events for the children, as usual. The Town also enjoyed its annual *Mardi Claws Parade* of dogs dressed for the Mardi Gras season, which is again scheduled for February 25th. The *Vettes at the Light* corvette show came back to the Town in 2011 and is planned again here for May 12th. Rounding out the year, we hope you enjoyed the Town's 3rd Annual Christmas Parade last month. All of these events are funded by their respective organizations but they are available for all of you to enjoy.

If you have called police dispatch in the last three months, you may have noticed a change. County Council made a decision in 2011 to consolidate dispatch services countywide. All of the calls in our area which require police or medical response are sent to the County for dispatch. The Town's police department still keeps its office open seven days per week for your convenience but only from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Sadly, on September 26, 2011, our police chief, Wayne Lurcock, died. This was a shock to all of us but particularly heartfelt by those who worked closest with him: the police department, other town departments, our Council, and some of our citizens who regularly volunteer in related areas. Our town manager initiated a selection process to find a highly qualified individual to assume this role going forward. We can expect this new member to our team in the first quarter of 2012.

Certainly the toughest issue in 2011 has been the lawsuit that Pacetta LLC has brought against the Town. After numerous attempts at negotiations, both with and without a professional mediator, we are now in the trial stage that started on January 4, 2012 and is scheduled to reconvene on February 16th.

One of the brightest spots of 2011 occurred on Veterans' Day, November 11, 2011. At 11:00 a.m., the Town citizens enjoyed their first ceremony at the new Veteran's Memorial which came about due to the hard work of a group of Ponce Inlet Veterans who found a way to fund and build it without the use of tax dollars. The Town co-sponsored this project by donating the use of a portion of the Kay & Ayers Davies Lighthouse Park and then built an attractive pavilion nearby to compliment the entire area. Restroom improvements have been funded in the current year to further enhance the park for your use and enjoyment.

Respectively submitted,

Gary L. Smith, Mayor