

VERO BEACH

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Valentine's Day

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Action needed to slow Vero's 'crotch rockets'

If you've spent any time on our roadways recently - especially the northern and southern stretches of Indian River Boulevard, U.S. 1 north and south of Vero Beach, and the newly opened drag strip we call 66th Avenue - you've probably seen racing-style motorcycles whizzing past you, maybe even weaving in and out of traffic, at reckless rates of speed.

"Crotch rockets."

"We still call them that," said Sgt. Mark Wysocky, spokesman for Florida Highway Patrol Troop L, which serves Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach and Broward counties.

And for good reason.

"We've had them literally flying off bridges and over-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



A racing-style motorcycle whizzing by Grand Harbor.

PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN HAGER

Vero not in strong position to complain about FMPA

BY LISA ZAHNER Staff Writer

The Indian River Shores Town Council last week urged Vero Beach to hold the Florida Municipal Power Agency accountable for the tens of mil-

lions of dollars local ratepayers have been socked with annually for investments gone bad, and the County Commission was set to consider a similar declaration on Tuesday.

It would seem to make sense to follow the nearly half-

billion in losses passed down to Florida's electric customers back to its source, the FMPA. But there is one major problem: Vero Beach had a full, voting member on the FMPA Board when every single one

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

The immediate trigger for their anger was the three-day rental of a house on Dahlia Lane by a Miami group ranging in age from 17 to 25 who kept neighbors awake all night with car honking, screaming and door slamming, and broke into cars throughout Central Beach, stealing credit cards and phones. Police have identified five of the Miami members of the group, but have made no arrests.

"Short-term rentals are destroying our sense of neighborhood, decreasing property values and increasing crime,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Oculina's plan to build on lagoon is back from the dead

BY STEVEN M. THOMAS Staff Writer

Almost two years after an administrative law judge blocked Oculina Bank's plan to build homes on the mainland shore of the lagoon north of Barber Bridge, the bank is trying to revive the much-criticized project in a modified form.

The good news for the bank is that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which was ready to approve the earlier project even

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Old Oaks Lane project coming to life

BY STEVEN M. THOMAS Staff Writer

After several years of delay, new home construction is scheduled to begin in the next month or so at the Old Oaks Lane subdivision in Riomar - site of the former St. Edward's Lower School.

"We have sold one lot-home package to a local buyer and we are going to build

a spec house as well," says project developer George Heaton, developer of the Vero Beach Hotel and Spa.

"We expect to have permits for the home we are building in 10 days; construction will start a few weeks after that. We should have permits for the custom home within 30 days, with construction starting shortly afterward."

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Developers Lee and George Heaton at the site of the future Old Oaks in Riomar.

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Hibiscus Passport takes guests on culinary tour. P30

NEWS

Old Oaks Lane

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Indian River County Building Official Scott McAdam confirms his office has a permit application for the first home under review and expects to issue a permit shortly.

Heaton says there will 10 homes in the subdivision, priced from \$1.9 to \$2.9 million, including land. He plans to have an onsite sales agent and will be cooperating with island realtors, paying a standard commission to any agent who brings a buyer.

Lots are approximately one-half acre and homes will have between 3,500 and 4,000 square feet of air-conditioned living space, with as much as 5,500 square feet under roof.

"All the houses will have 3-car garages, pools and approximately 1,200 square feet of outdoor living space," Heaton says. "Local real estate agents are very excited about the floor plans."

One of the first two homes will be built in the popular Windsor style; the other will be modeled on Dutch West Indies architecture. Heaton says most other homes in the subdivision will be in one of those two styles, though some variation will be allowed.

"We have an architectural review committee and complete control over what gets built," he says. "We have already designed homes for five of the lots, but if someone wants to use their own architect and do something a little bit different, that is possible as long as we approve the design."

Heaton expects the first homes to be complete by fall 2015; going forward, when a buyer signs a contract, he says it will take 30 to 45 days to get a permit and another eight or nine months to build the house.

The 5.5-acre golf-course subdivision is located on Club Drive on the former site of St. Ed's. Built in 1929 as a the clubhouse for Riomar Country Club, the Mediterranean Revival buildings were converted to an elementary and middle school when St. Edward's was founded in the 1960s. Several generations of island kids were educated there before the campus fell victim to school budget problems and a bad economy and sat empty and bank-owned for two years.

Heaton acquired the property in 2012 and the Vero Beach City Council approved a preliminary site plan for the project in October of that year. Proctor construction demolished the old school buildings two years ago and completed site work, installing utilities and preparing the plated lots for construction, in the summer of 2013.

At that time, Heaton expected to sell lots to homeowners who would em-

ploy their own architects and builders for prices ranging from \$795,000 to \$1,295,000, with the lots furthest from Club Drive with the best golf course frontage going for the highest price.

The market was not quite ready for those lots at those prices, though, and the development sat empty for another year and a half.

"It has been a couple of years in the making," Heaton says. "We have been waiting for the market to get stronger, as it now has. We think now is the time."

Heaton has a second project underway on the island that is a little further along, a 38-home subdivision called

Tarpon Flats about 10 miles south of Vero in St. Lucie County.

He acquired that 70-acre property a year ago from an Atlanta developer who started the project and saw it falter during the real estate downturn. Most of the property is wetland but Heaton is developing 15 acres that stretches from A1A to an inlet on the Indian River Lagoon.

Seventeen of the 4-bedroom homes are waterfront and the subdivision has private beach access on the other side of A1A, according to Heaton. Homes will be priced from \$400,000 to \$650,000. Two model homes are complete and there was a grand opening at

the development on Feb. 5 attended by more than 300 people.

"We have already experienced high demand for the homes at Tarpon Flats," Heaton says. "It's exciting for us to be able to offer such affordable luxury on the barrier islands, and clearly folks share our enthusiasm. We already have four homes under contract, and we expect that will increase significantly in a very short amount of time."

Coldwell Banker Paradise is the onsite realtor for the project.

"We expect these to move quickly," says Steven Schlitt, co-owner of Coldwell Banker Paradise. ■

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PEOPLE

Indian River Community Foundation welcomes new CEO

BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

Local philanthropists, advisors and representatives of several nonprofit organizations took the long and winding road to the spectacular Gem Island home of Bob and Susan Morrison last Wednesday, hosts of the Indian River Community Foundation Founders and Fund Holders reception.

The couple had only just moved into their newly renovated home when they last hosted the event in 2013, so this time was certainly a little less stressful.

“We wanted to host it again because we really believe the Indian River Community Foundation is a very important organization in Vero Beach and Indian River County,” said Susan Morrison. “We wanted to do as much as we could to support it and this was an opportunity to do that.”

For most of the 110 guests the evening offered a first opportunity to meet Jeff Pickering, the Community Foundation’s newly hired CEO, who was kept busy greeting the roomful of well-wishers.

“My No. 1 priority is to listen and learn,” said Pickering. He succeeds Kerry Bartlett, who resigned last summer to accept a position with the philanthropic consulting firm Bob Carter Companies.

A Florida native raised in Winter Park, Pickering will relocate with wife Stephanie and their family in the spring from California, where his

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Susan and Bob Morrison.



Bob Puff addresses guests at the Indian River Community Foundation reception.



— VERO BEACH, FLORIDA —



— PALM BEACH GARDENS, FLORIDA —



— VERO BEACH, FLORIDA —



— VERO BEACH, FLORIDA —



— VERO BEACH, FLORIDA —



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