



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF BONITA SPRINGS

Small Town Charm, Big Bright Future

Bonita Springs prospers through partnerships

by **Lora Taylor**
City of Bonita Springs

The City of Bonita Springs is going through an exciting time as it balances continued growth and revitalization with preserving the small town charm for which it is known. Partnerships have been a key component in making this possible.

When a new mayor and four newly elected councilmembers were installed in April 2016, the time was right for the City Council to develop its strategic priorities to lead the city into the future. The top priority was transportation, which included developing a quadrant plan for the US 41/Bonita Beach Road intersection, implementing a Bonita Beach Visioning Study and a Multi-modal Master Plan.

Early in the process, it was apparent that to be successful, the city needed to collaborate with, and gain cooperation and financial support from, the Florida Department of Transportation and surrounding jurisdictions including Lee and Collier counties.

The City of Bonita Springs is known for its focus on public-private partnerships and has a proven record of continuing partnerships with a variety of organizations. In 2012, the



BONITA SPRINGS
Lee County
Pop. 46,568

International City-County Management Association (ICMA) featured Bonita Springs at its annual conference as an example of how municipalities can do partnerships well.

In recent years, the City of Bonita Springs has implemented a new look in its downtown, increasing the potential for it to flourish as a destination for residents and tourists.

The city and the Lee County Board of County Commissioners joined together in 2013 to invest in economic development via a partnership to redevelop the downtown through a unique revenue sharing agreement. The \$18.6 million Downtown Improvements Project kicked off in August 2015. Project plans include creating a centralized storm water system, utility relocations, building roundabouts at Pennsylvania Avenue and Terry Street, and creating additional on-street parking and streetscape features. Decorative elements such as lamp posts with planter and banner sign capabilities, landscape planters and wide brick paver crosswalks are incorporated into the streetscape design.

"It is important for the county to assist where we can," said Lee County **Commissioner Larry Kiker**, whose district includes Bonita Springs. "The redevelopment of downtown Bonita is a benefit to citizens of Bonita Springs and Lee County. This is the perfect example of a partnership for the betterment of the future of Southwest Florida."

Bonita Springs **City Manager Carl Schwing** agrees. "This revenue sharing agreement recognizes the importance of our partnership with Lee County," he explains. "Both entities will benefit from the improved conditions and redevelopment that will result from the parking, drainage improvements and resulting private development that can now finally occur."

Another partnership with Lee County is bringing a state-of-the-art \$14 million library facility into the heart of downtown Bonita Springs, as well.

As part of its downtown core redevelopment, the city has implemented a new mural program made possible through public-private partnerships. Through the program, business property owners make available their exterior walls, artists prepare the sites and paint the renderings, and the city provides the budget to cover the work.

It doesn't stop there. A much-needed high school is coming to Bonita Springs. City officials partnered with the Lee County School Board to ensure that a site in Bonita Springs would be selected. The partnership to restart stalled negotiations included school board members, the school superintendent and the mayor, who spoke directly to the land owner of the proposed site.

"Our city and our students have been in need of a high school for a number of years," **Mayor Peter Simmons** said. "The time has finally come to make it a reality! Congratulations to our residents and all those who have worked diligently to accomplish this for our community."


Bonita Springs relies heavily on the input, time and expertise of volunteers who make up its various committees. They are the heartbeat of the city. Having residents directly involved ensures that Bonita Springs has a finger on the pulse of the community and knows its needs.

The city also partners with residents and advisory boards to preserve the history of Bonita Springs and host events that boast the city's small town charm and community character.

Bonita Springs plans and executes 11 special events per year. Most are held in the downtown area, which helps promote the redevelopment of the downtown corridor. All events are free for the public to attend, allowing residents to join together to celebrate in the heart of their city.

For Bonita Springs, partnerships provide results. The city's revitalized downtown, new library, inaugural high school and special events are clear examples of how partnerships among the city, county, school board, businesses and residents are leading to a bright future, while preserving the beloved small town charm of Bonita Springs.

It is a true community effort.

Lora Taylor is director of communications for the City of Bonita Springs. 

Dedicating its practice to
serving local governments



Garganese, Weiss & D'Agresta, P.A.
Attorneys At Law

For additional information visit the Firm's website at

www.orlandolaw.net

111 N. Orange Ave., Suite 2000

Orlando, Florida 32801

Phone (407) 425-9566

E-mail: agarganese@orlandolaw.net



St. Johns Public Safety Complex - St. Johns, Florida

Planning and Design
of Municipal Facilities

- Funding Strategies
- Spatial Needs Analysis
- Master Planning
- Architectural Design



Architects Design Group

www.adgusa.org • 407.647.1706

AAC001197