

CITY OF STUART

Quarterly Newsletter



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RIVER RELIEF A LITTLE MORE WITHIN REACH

MAYOR PRAISES PUBLIC FOR WRDA PASSAGE

Stuart Mayor Kelli Glass Leighton marked President Trump's signing of the landmark legislation Water Resources Development Act 2018, aka WRDA, with gratitude and caution.

The occasion followed decades of efforts and a persistent push by the public. Recently, Stuart city commissioners unanimously supported Glass Leighton sending a letter to Senator Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, urging him to allow the long-delayed WRDA a vote. Once held, the bill passed the U.S. Senate 99 to 1.

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Mayor Kelli Glass Leighton

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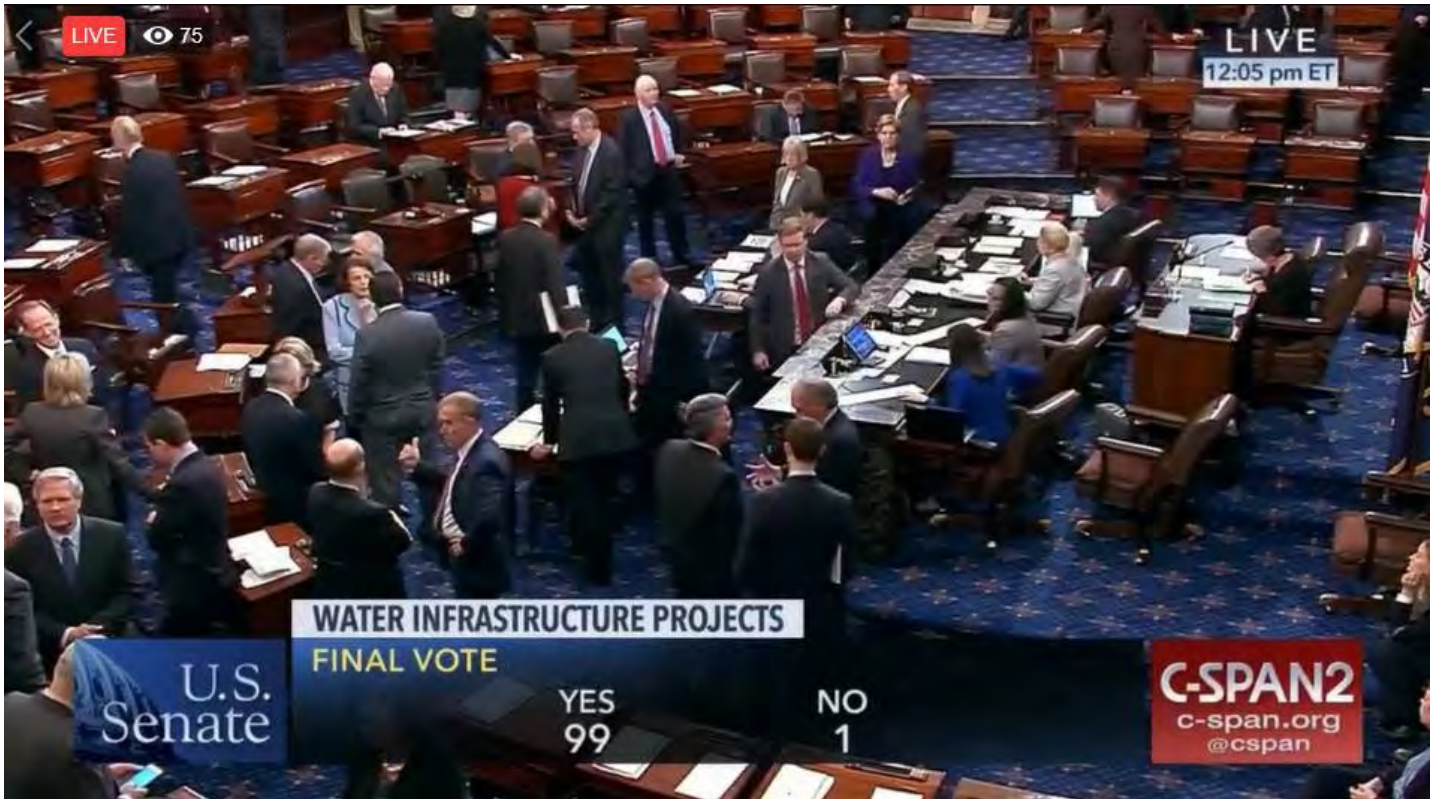
LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR NEW COMMISSIONERS



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WRDA PASSAGE

While the list of those Leighton thanked—including the president, former Sen. Joe Negron for advancing a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee at the state level, bipartisan efforts by Congressman Brian Mast and Senators Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson to include the reservoir in the federal legislation, and fellow city commissioners—proved extensive, Stuart residents deserved the most appreciation, she said.

“The biggest thank you goes to Stuart residents,” she stated. “This achievement is a direct result of your love of our community and your refusal to give up on restoring our St. Lucie River.”

Since the legislation still requires federal appropriations, creation of the southern reservoir—which including its stormwater treatment area eclipses the size of Stuart and Palm City combined—is projected to reduce the majority of discharges bound for the St. Lucie River. Negron says if operating today, the reservoir would have diminished the discharges inflicted over the summer by as much as 63 percent.

“The alarming findings on cyanobacteria and its dangers to pets and possibly people—as well as the arrival of red tide off our shores—remind us of the serious challenges ahead and the work that remains,” Glass Leighton stated. “But today, we have something significant to celebrate. And the concerned citizens of Stuart, and across Martin County and the Treasure Coast, made it possible.”

The fight to restore the St. Lucie River is more than political for city commissioners, it’s personal, says Leighton. In September she penned a guest editorial on TCPalm.com asking Stuart resident to join the city in calling on McConnell to allow the WRDA vote. She cited the longtime roots and activism of fellow commissioners—specifically newly elected members Mike Meier and Merritt Matheson—as well as her own history.

“As a multigenerational native of Stuart, I’m excited to be joined on the Stuart City Commission by Martin County natives Mike Meier and Merritt Matheson, whose families have extensive histories in the area. Together with Vice Mayor Becky Bruner, who brings a long history of local activism for the river, and longtime resident and vocal advocate Commissioner Eula Clarke, the city commission is well positioned to see fight through fruition,” she wrote.



CUTTING THE RIBBON ON NEW DOWNTOWN STREETScape

by Staff

The Downtown Stuart Streetscape Improvement Project is a four-month, \$500,000 project that is updating Downtown Stuart's historic streets for the first time in nearly 30 years.

It was in 2009 when the city contacted a certified arborist and local tree service for expert opinions on the conditions of the Laurel Oak trees downtown. Their report stated that the trees were at the end of their life expectancy (20-25 years) and in need of replacing. Of 39 trees originally planted by the city, only 29 remained (the city had removed 10 that had died).

Although the existing Laurel Oaks reached their life expectancy, the city has introduced a mix of Queen Crepe Myrtle and Palm Trees in each existing spot. Often referred to as the "Pride of India," Queen Crepe Myrtle trees grow up to 19 feet within 5 years. They are easily identified by their pink or purplish blossoms.

Developed by the City of Stuart Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) with community input from area businesses and local residents, the project was originally designed to correct problems with drainage and damaged pavement caused by tree roots. The project later expanded to include other street enhancements: replacing damaged and dying trees with fresh landscaping, adding parking along Flagler Avenue with a raised crosswalk and seating area on Osceola Street, and resurfacing and restriping of the two streets.

The city chose to initiate construction during the quiet, summer season as a means of mitigating impacts to businesses.

STUART COMMISSIONER MERRITT MATHESON

by Staff



Commissioner Merritt Matheson

Even as an optical condition steadily diminished his vision, Merritt Matheson began to see his future more clearly than ever before.

The multigenerational Martin County native and newly elected Stuart city commissioner grew up on local waterways, boating, scuba diving and surfing. Getting his captain's license in 2003, his only spells landlocked were semesters attending the University of Colorado earning a degree in environmental biology.

Summers he returned home to fish for marlin, tuna wahoo, and dolphin. Soon he moved to Hawaii and pursued his dream of captaining deep-water sports fishing ventures. Then he was diagnosed with a rare condition called LHON, damaging his nerve cells in one eye. By 2007, it impacted his other eye with full onset—meaning blurred or loss vision.

"I try to look at the best in life, but I was certainly in a down time, especially when it began to affect my second eye," Matheson recalls.

Moving back home and staying with his parents, Matheson's spirits sunk. That changed in 2007 when he met Chelsey Wacha, also a long-time local and granddaughter of Frank Wacha Sr., a Martin County commissioner and namesake of the Jensen Beach Causeway.

"She was a big part of pulling me out of that depression I was going through," Matheson says.

Since married, the couple have two daughters—the youngest born three days after his August election win. Considering the future of his first daughter motivated his political run.

"My second daughter really reinforces that," he says.

Although Matheson still does some freelance fishing instruction, his hampered vision—which leaves him able to see up-close but slower to recognize approaching people and unable to see distances—prompted him to give up his captain's license. He also gave up driving.

Now he gets around—including to Stuart City Hall for meetings—by bicycle. This sharpens his awareness of the need for more bike-friendly conditions, which he plans to prioritize as the city's representative on the Metropolitan Planning Organization. His chief focus, however, is the protection of the St. Lucie River, says Matheson.

"I want to be as aggressive as possible," he said, "in making sure the City of Stuart is doing literally everything possible to assist in our water situation."

"(Chelsey) was a big part of pulling me out of that depression I was going through." - **Commissioner Merritt Matheson**

STUART COMMISSIONER MIKE MEIER

by Staff

Stuart City Commissioner Mike Meier wanted to bloom—literally—where he'd originally been planted.

The Stuart native graduated from New York University and forged a successful career in a tech company. Along the way he discovered a love of urban farming. He got involved with the National Young Farmers Coalition in New York and New Jersey, picking up techniques and advocating on farmer issues. But as the rising trend blossomed throughout select boroughs, Meier knew he needed to find fresh fields in which to cultivate his newfound passion. And there was no place like home.

“I wasn't able to be as impactful as I could if I were back home, where I could bring back some of the principles of food culture to Stuart,” says Meier. “I also missed my family. I realized, if I don't start thinking about coming home now, I might never come home. And then, what sort of important milestones might I miss?”

“I wasn't able to be as impactful as I could if I were back home, where I could bring back some of the principles of food culture to Stuart.” - Commissioner Mike Meier

Returning in 2013, he cofounded Ground Floor Farm—Stuart's first urban farm, market and restaurant—with fellow Stuart natives and high-school friends Micah Hartman and Jackie Vitale.

His political awareness sparked during the Great Recession. Meier paid close attention to local issues but initially never imagined running for office.

“When I would attend city meetings, I never saw myself up there,” Meier says. “But I saw how the city was developing and how the priorities were being shaped. Over time, I started to see how my ideas for how I envisioned Stuart, and my friends' ideas, others' ideas, we didn't have much of a seat at the table. Our ideas weren't really being articulated or pursued. Who better to envision that future and fight for it than someone who's living it?”

Key concerns Meier plans to prioritize on the city commission include water-quality issues, lack of affordable housing, storm-and-flood threats, infrastructure needs, and strengthening the city's tax base to better withstand swings in seasonal tourism. A strong supporter of community redevelopment areas, Meier says an even “bolder vision” is needed to expand mixed-use development that would allow for more housing—including rental—options.

Inspired by governmental cooperation, Meier says he admires agreements reached among municipalities to create better resiliency and response to such challenges as sea-level rise and strengthening storms.

“We can't let the real challenges of the future take us by surprise down the road,” Meier says. “We need to build Stuart now for the next five, 50, and 100 years, for our residents, our children and our great-grandchildren.”



Commissioner Mike Meier

DAVID DYESS APPOINTED CITY MANAGER

by Staff

When the offer of city manager was made official to David Dyess, the Stuart native experienced something of a second career homecoming at the city.

“It’s truly a pleasure to be in this position,” says Dyess, “especially having grown up in the city and having a chance to lead our police department.”

Growing up on Manor Drive in Stuart, Dyess graduated from Martin County High School. He earned an associate's degree in criminal justice from Indian River State College, a bachelor's in professional management from Nova University and a master's degree in public administration from Barry University. Dyess also served 28 years in the Stuart Police Department, including attaining the role of chief in 2012. He was named city manager Sept. 24 after serving in the interim position since May 29.

A big believer in the power of community-oriented policing, Dyess built a broad base of supporters for an approach that sought partnership with the public in the process of conducting patrols.

This same approach—prioritizing community concerns and resident needs in city services—translates naturally thanks to the mindset of staff, he says.

“We have a great support staff and group of directors who are in many aspects already orientated this way,” he says. “I hope to continue cultivating an environment where staff really enjoys coming to work and serving the residents.”

Right now, he’s identifying areas where integration of key technology upgrades will “make specific jobs more productive and efficient.”

With the city hosting or supporting several special events that attract attendees from around the Treasure Coast, Dyess says he looks forward to working with the city commission on maintaining and enhancing downtown Stuart’s role as a regional destination of choice.

As the commission continues its advocacy for restoring the St. Lucie River and enhancing the waterfront community’s overall resiliency, he says he looks forward to pursuing various initiatives that invite investors to partner in key environmentally sustainable improvements.

“It was a great honor in law enforcement to uphold the twin commitments of protecting and serving the citizens,” says Dyess. “Although clearly the scale and details are different, the city manager position provides me the same core privilege and responsibility—and it’s my intent to always approach it from that perspective.”



City Manager David Dyess

“I hope to continue cultivating an environment where staff really enjoys coming to work and serving the residents.” - David Dyess, city manager

GENESIS OF THE ARTS MOMENT

by Staff

Upon coming into office, Stuart Commissioner Eula Clarke mentioned her desire to set a unique tone at the beginning of each city meeting by showcasing the active arts community within Stuart and hosting performances by varied local artists.

Since 2012, the Arts Moment has distinguished Stuart meetings around the county and even the Treasure Coast.

“The arts help us to maintain harmony of mind, body and spirit and is truly an integral part of our development as human beings,” Clarke says.

“The monthly Arts Moment showcases our local talents and enables them to bless us with their unique gifts, giving everyone in attendance, including my fellow city commissioners, an enhanced sense of appreciation, openness and creativity,” Clarke continued. “That’s especially welcome at council meeting when we’re doing the people’s business.”

Area artists appreciate the format for giving them a venue for greater exposure, says Nancy Turrell, executive director of The Arts Council of Martin County. By utilizing city meetings to showcase local talent, Clarke is helping bring arts to the citizens in an unexpected and unlikely forum.

“There’s a lot of appreciation among the local arts community for Commissioner Clarke’s efforts creating the Arts Moment—which is a bold initiative even today, much less when she first suggested it nearly seven years ago,” Turrell says. “She applied her position well in creating a showcase for local artists. It was excellent arts advocacy, actually. Thanks to Commissioner Clarke, our local talent has the chance to reach a broader audience as well as brighten up an official government setting in a fashion that’s uniquely Stuart.”



Arts Moment: A.C.T. Studio Theatre presented a scene from their summer production of Shakespeare’s Macbeth.



Commissioner Eula Clarke



EXTENDING THE NUTRIENT RESPITE

by Staff

In August, the Stuart City Commission—among the first municipalities on the Treasure Coast to enact a fertilizer ordinance—extended its ban to six months.

From June 30 to Nov. 30—when the region receives two-thirds of the more than 50 inches of rain it absorbs annually—no fertilizing is permitted.

The measure, initiated by Vice Mayor Becky Bruner, aims to prevent unnecessary nutrients from further damaging St. Lucie River—already reeling from recent rounds of Lake Okeechobee discharges.

“We can do what we can do. And one thing I’ve always believed we can do better is keep fertilizer runoff out of our river during the entire rainy season.” -

Commissioner Becky Bruner



Commissioner Becky Bruner

“I was raised on common sense and simple wisdoms—including taking care of your own and owning your responsibilities,” said Bruner. “There’s a lot that goes on around and into our river that unfortunately falls well outside our direct influence, so we have to be smart and vigilant in how we work to influence those situations. But in the meantime, we can do what we can do. And one thing I’ve always believed we can do better is keep fertilizer runoff out of our river during the entire rainy season.”

Sewall’s Point is the only other municipality on the Treasure Coast to uphold a six-month ban on fertilizer.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: MONICA SANDS

by Staff



Monica Sands, right, with daughter Jameria

The 10th Street Community Center has been around long enough that people who grew up in the community are now either working here directly or helping with the program. Monica Sands is the current afterschool program leader at 10th Street Community Center. Born in St. Lucie County in 1994, she has been working for the city for five years now.

The Community Services Department, Recreation Division sponsors a collaborative initiative called the East Stuart Youth Initiative that's funded in part by the Children's Services Council of Martin County. The partnership includes three organizations: The Stuart Community Services Recreation Division, the Stuart Police Department Youth Intervention program, and Tykes & Teens, Inc. Each organization shares its particular expertise, including education enrichment, counseling, and recreational programming for the benefit of the youth.

Sands was born in St. Lucie County, but attended Jensen Beach Elementary, and then Stuart Middle School. While attending middle school, Sands became pregnant and had a daughter.

Afterward, Monica moved over to Spectrum Junior/Senior High School, which had a teen parenting program. Later, she enrolled in Stuart Community School and graduated in 2012.

"After I graduated I had the hardest time finding a job," she said. "I thought it was going to be easy, I thought, I got my diploma, this is all I need."

Through Workforce Solutions, Monica was provided an opportunity to work for the city and performed so well she was offered a permanent full time position in the recreation division. Working that summer helping to support the afterschool program, she was hesitant at first.

"It always takes me a while to adjust to change," she said. "But seeing the good, seeing the kids being silly and problem solving on their own, I fell in love with it."

Now an afterschool program leader, she says observing how the other program leaders commanded the room helped her to build respect and rapport with the kids.

"Here is where it all makes sense to me," she said. Her daughter Jameria is now 10 years-old and goes to school at J.D. Parker.

"I'm trying to be like a role model to her, you shouldn't take this path, but at the same time it can be done," she said. "It doesn't have to stop just because you have a child. That's one thing that I am proud of, I was so young, but I'm in a position now where it came out successful and I am so blessed and thankful for that."

In her position now, Monica says that she gets to interact with the K-5th kids and the teenagers. She credits 10th Street Center with helping her discover how much she enjoys helping people.

"That's been my passion to encourage and uplift others," she said. "Wherever it takes me, just as long as I'm helping people it doesn't matter."