

PARTNERSHIP

St. Augustine and St. Johns County — *A Case Study for Shared Success*

By the time the British settled the Virginia colony of Jamestown, St. Augustine, was already 55 years old and going through its first redevelopment period. The seat of St. Johns County government was founded in 1565 but now St. Augustine and St. Johns County are rediscovered everyday as a place of quality, beauty and bounty. Most of all, they are being rediscovered not only as a great place to visit or live but also as a great place for doing business. Much as it was 400 years ago, St. Johns County is entering a new phase of its evolution with a buzz of optimism and excitement about its future. There are new opportunities emerging and new partnerships to help turn entrepreneurial visions into reality.

Take for instance, Vilano Beach, located on the county's north shores across the Intracoastal Waterway from historic St. Augustine. The pedestrian-friendly town center is surrounded by water, with the Intracoastal Waterway on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the south and east. Land planners have compared Vilano to Cape Cod because of its unique geographical location and waterfront character. Vilano Beach became a beachside stopping place for tourists during the 1950s with old Florida motels and restaurants within walking distance of the beach. In 1995 a new Vilano Bridge relocated Florida Highway A1A, bypassing the community's commercial



Vilano Beach Pier



center. Only a few businesses were left, and they struggled with the drop in traffic.

A formal partnership joined St. Johns County and the North Shores Improvement Association, creating a unique citizen/government cooperative which resulted in Vilano becoming part of the Waterfronts Florida Program and the Florida Main Street Program opening opportunities for grants and state funding. The Board of County Commissioners showed long-term commitment by establishing Vilano Beach as a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) with Tax Increment Financing, allowing the CRA to use growth in real property tax revenues to reinvest within its boundaries. The County also worked with the community to establish a new overlay zoning district, which incorporates Florida Vernacular and Art Deco architecture into the design of the Vilano Beach Town Center.

A Walk-able Environment with Ocean Sunrises and Intracoastal Sunsets

Thanks to an impressive effort by the St. Johns County Industrial Development Authority (IDA), \$6 million in new construction financing, underwritten partially with up to \$5.5 million of tax-exempt recovery zone facility bonds, will

More than a decade ago, the then-new Usina Bridge connecting historic St. Augustine with the barrier islands redirected highway A-1-A away from the Vilano Beach business district. A unique citizen/government partnership between the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners, the North Shores Improvement Association, the County's Industrial Development Authority and others has launched the beachfront community back on the road to prosperity.

serve as a catalyst for future development. The IDA successfully identified the project in Vilano Beach and played a large role in coordinating the expeditious process of issuing the tax exempt recovery zone bonds prior to the 2010 expiration date. The cooperation and successful outcome in this situation are a testament to the work of the IDA and the renewed focus on economic development in St. Johns County.

The St. Johns County Industrial Development Authority is a public agency formed in 1980 by Florida Statute to stimulate industrial development for profit and not-for-profit entities through the use of public financing in the form of bonds. The St. Johns County IDA offers Industrial