

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA
COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

1000 CECIL G. COSTIN SR. BLVD., ROOM 302, PORT ST. JOE, FLORIDA 32456
PHONE (850)229-4700 • FAX (850) 229-1148 • EMAIL: JTNovak@novaklaw.us
DATE AND TIME OF MEETINGS • SECOND AND FOURTH TUESDAY AT 9:00 A.M. E.T.

2014 JAN - 8 PM 1:16
FILED IN RECORD
FEDERICA L. MORRIS
CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA

January 2, 2014

Via Hand Delivery & Electronic Mail

City of Port St. Joe Commission
c/o Tom Gibson, City Attorney
305 Cecil G. Costin, Sr. Blvd
Port St. Joe, Florida 32456

**Re: Gulf County Offer of Assistance and Cooperation with
Notice of Relocation and Award (Cape San Blas Lighthouse)
GSA Control Number: 4-D-FL-1265AA**

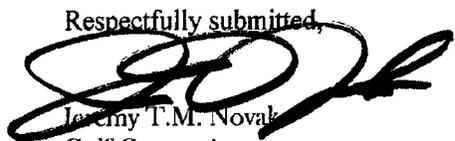
Honorable Commissioners:

Kindly accept this correspondence at the direction of the Gulf County Board of County Commissioners ("County Commission") at their December 17, 2013 meeting to acknowledge your ongoing efforts regarding the Cape San Blas Lighthouse and keeper's quarters relocation projects and renew their offer of cooperation and assistance.

Pursuant to the County Commission's prior correspondence of January 9, 2013 to Director Miller of the U.S. General Services Administration ("GSA") and Mr. Barrett of the National Park Service ("NPS") after their December 27, 2012 award to the City of Port St Joe ("City") of the surplus government real property (Cape San Blas Lighthouse and keeper's quarters), the County Commission remains steadfast and committed to the preservation of the long and proud history surrounding the iconic Cape San Blas Lighthouse for the entire Gulf County community. The County Commission wishes to continue its decades long successful partnership it held with the various federal agencies as the primary stewards of the lighthouse and renew its support and desire to be a contributing partner in the preservation and revitalization of the lighthouse and its future use as a public park or recreational use pursuant to 40 U.S.C. 550(e)(1).

As the City continues in its efforts to successfully preserve and revitalize the Cape San Blas Lighthouse, the County Commission renews its offer of assistance in meeting the various demands and obligations that it is very familiar with, due to the decades of maintenance and care it has provided. Lastly, to reiterate the offer extended last year to the collective parties and in the continued spirit of community support and cooperation, the County Commission remains committed and willing to assume and accept this award should the efforts and anticipated contributions of the City's partners prove insufficient to complete the relocation and preservation.

The County Commission thanks you for your ongoing efforts for all of Gulf County.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremy T.M. Novak
Gulf County Attorney

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Gulf County Enterprise Zone Development Agency regular meetings for 2014 are scheduled as follows:

- Thursday, January 23, 2014
- Thursday, April 17, 2014
- Thursday, July 18, 2014
- Thursday, October 17, 2014

These meetings will start at 12:00 noon, E.T. at 1000 Cecil G. Costin Sr., Blvd., of the Robert M. Moore Administration Building, Gulf County Courthouse Complex in Room 307.

Any changes to this schedule and additional special meetings will be noticed on the County website at www.gulfcounty-fl.gov as well as posted at the Courthouse.

The public is welcome to attend.

Date: January 16, 2014
 Publish: 1 time in the Legals
 Ad Number: 2014-02
 Bill: GCBOCC

2014 JAN -7 PM 1:23
 REBECCA L. HARRIS
 CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
 GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA



MEMORANDUM

To: Gulf County Commissioners, TDC Advisory Council, Don Butler
 From: Jennifer Jenkins, Gulf County TDC Team
 Date: January 8, 2014
 RE: GCTDC December Status Report

Please find below a recap/status of marketing and organizational activities accomplished by the GCTDC Team during the month of December 2013:

December Numbers

Since pushing a new site live in late March, we continue to track traffic to www.visitgulf.com. December 2013 stats are as follows:

- 60% increase in website traffic
- 5,967 clicks to partner sites
- \$0.52 CPC
- 6,444 Facebook fans
- 63,076 Visitor Guides distributed
- 10.79% increase Visitation to Welcome Center

* 53% total increase in web traffic calendar year 2013 vs. 2012

* 8.80% total increase in visitor traffic to Welcome Center calendar year 2013 vs. 2012

November Bed-Tax Revenue

Compared to November 2012, Tourist Development Tax collected in November 2013 was up 6.87%. With October 2013 revenues reportedly down 11.94%, total collections for fiscal year 2013 – 2014 are down 6.17%. Walton County reported a 5% decrease in November bed tax revenue and Bay County reported a 10.2% increase.

The Gulf County Tax Collector has notified all Gulf County bed-tax collectors that all tax revenue must be submitted monthly, not quarterly, beginning January 6, 2014 for bed-tax collectors garnering more than \$1,000 per year.

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 REBECCA L. MORRIS
 CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
 GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA

2014 JAN -8 PM 1:16

Celebrate Twice

The annual "Celebrate Twice" celebration on New Year's Eve was a huge success. Most shops, bars and restaurants have seen large increases in their business with one large business boasting a 17% increase over New Year's Eve in 2012. Working collectively with Mexico Beach, Gulf County and the City of Port St. Joe, 6 complimentary shuttles drove guests to a variety of pubs, bars and restaurants throughout the night and no serious incidents or injuries were reported.

The Gulf County Signature Drink (the GCFL) was debuted on New Year's Eve with Dockside winning the bar wars promotion. The GCFL will be served at all participating establishments throughout the year.

Public Relations

We have a very aggressive 90-day PR Plan that will develop into a long-term media relations push. In December, a media alert was issued to more than 2,000 journalists in our key feeder markets, main regional markets and New York City. Response to the alert was very favorable. Appointments are being set for the January 21 – 24, 2014 media push in New York, a travel writer from Houston will be staying in Gulf County in May 2014 to write a pet-friendly story, and a media FAM for September is being planned with 8 writers requesting participation.

Ongoing Projects

2014 Visitor Guide

On press 1/17

New www.visitgulf.com website

Live in March 2014

Beach Ambassador Program

Developing SOP

Winter Guest Events & Receptions

Reception Wednesday, January 15, 2014

Beach Cleaning/Grooming RFP

Out for bid



GULF COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR

SHIRLEY J. JENKINS, CFC
TAX COLLECTOR
sjjgulfcotxcoll@gulfcountry-fl.gov

Port St. Joe Office

1000 Cecil G. Costin Sr Blvd Rm 100
Port St. Joe, FL 32456
Telephone: (850) 229-6116 / 229-6652
Fax: (850) 229-9224

Wewahitchka Office

P.O. Box 681
Wewahitchka, FL 32465
Telephone: (850) 639-2655
Fax: (850) 639-6977

To: Property Managers/Owners
From: Shirley J. Jenkins CFC
Gulf County Tax Collector *Shirley*
Date: December 26, 2013
Subject: Tourist Development Quarterly Reporting

.....
Effective January 6, 2014 all quarterly reporting will have to be done on a monthly basis. If you have any questions please contact Betty Hardin at 850-229-6116.

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REBECCA L. JONES
CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA
2013 DEC 26 PM 3-27

Wednesday, January 8, 2014 8:44:06 AM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: Escape Winter

Date: Thursday, December 19, 2013 10:29:36 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Jennifer Jenkins

To: jennifer@visitgulf.com

Youve seen this map making the rounds
Looks like Florida has forgotten about winter. And thats just fine with us in GCFL!

The Gulf Coasts best kept secret is Gulf County, Florida. Especially this winter, when the snow and ice are pounding the rest of the country, our outdoor playground is teeming with nature and waiting to be explored.

Discover St. Joseph Bay where one visitor said, walking into the Bay is like stepping into an aquarium. Paddle out and meet stingrays, dolphins, sea urchins and starfish. Or, take in a beautiful westward facing sunset off of the white-sand beaches of legendary Cape San Blas. Learn why people call us the #championofsunsets.

We will be following up with you in January. In fact, we plan to be in your area from January 20-22 and would love to meet you. In the meantime, wed love to introduce ourselves. Take a look at what locals and loyalists have to say about their GCFL home away from home.

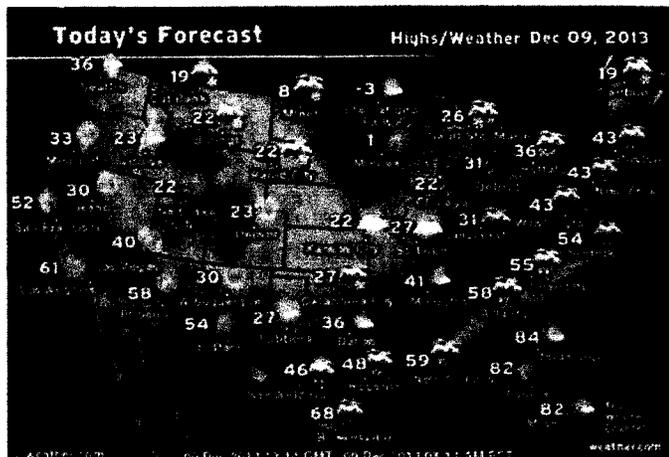
Happy Holidays! Stay warm.
Jennifer

Jennifer Jenkins, Executive Director
Gulf County Tourist Development Council
850-229-7800
jennifer@visitgulf.com



Visit Gulf County

Located in Northwest Florida, Gulf County boasts 43 miles of natural shoreline. Here, where water surrounds us, we dont have high-rises or busy highways and never will. We have white-sand beaches facing westward into spectacular sunsets on the Gulf of Mexico and St. Joseph Bay. We have beckoning bayous, unexpected wildlife encounters and the mysterious Dead Lakes. Weve got seaside bike trails, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and snorkeling. Its genuine places, like the historic Indian Pass Raw Bar and flavors like Tupelo Honey. Learn more about this no worry, no hurry destination at www.visitgulf.com and on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#).





This message was sent to Jennifer. If you no longer wish to receive email from us, please follow the link below or copy and paste the entire link into your browser. <http://www.xmr3.com/m/2072828-70081514-2-275-AV1-E87C/jennifer@visitgulf.com/HCS87CA>

Wednesday, January 8, 2014 8:44:14 AM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: Escape Winter

Date: Thursday, December 19, 2013 10:28:03 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Jennifer Jenkins

To: jennifer@visitgulf.com

Youve seen this map making the rounds
Looks like Florida has forgotten about winter. And thats just fine with us in GCFL!

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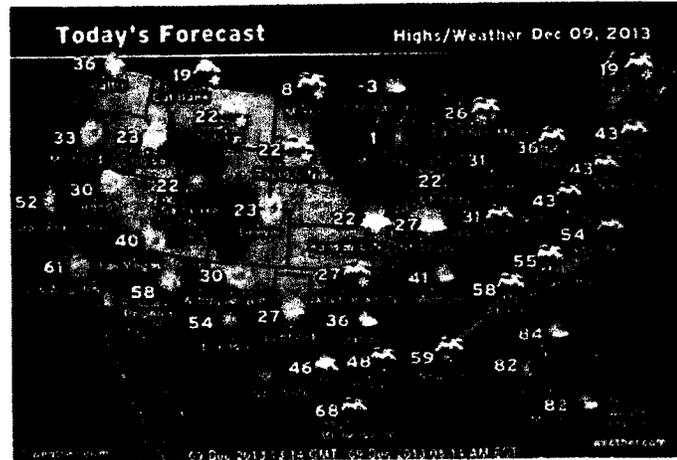
Happy Holidays! Stay warm.
Jennifer

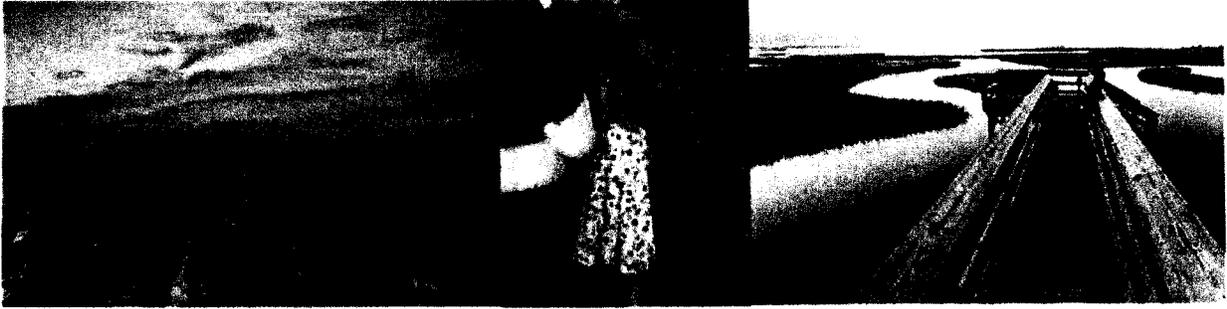
Jennifer Jenkins, Executive Director
Gulf County Tourist Development Council
850-229-7800
jennifer@visitgulf.com



Visit Gulf County

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This message was sent to Jennifer. If you no longer wish to receive email from us, please follow the link below or copy and paste the entire link into your browser. <http://www.xmr3.com/rm/2072828-70081166-2-386-AV1-9D11/jennifer@visitgulf.com/HCS87CA>

**NOTICE
TO RECEIVE SEALED BIDS
BID #1314-11**

The Gulf County Tourist Development Council (GCTDC) will receive bids from any person, company or corporation interested in providing the following:

2014 BEACH GROOMING/RAKING SERVICES

**Proposals due Friday, January 24, 2014 no later than 4:30 PM ET
Proposals will be opened Monday, January 27, 2013 at 10:00 AM ET**

Proposals must be delivered to the Gulf County Clerk of Court's Office at 1000 Cecil G. Costin, Sr. Blvd, Room 148, Port St. Joe, FL 32456.

Please indicate on the envelope **YOUR COMPANY NAME**, that this is a **SEALED BID** and include the **BID NUMBER**.

Complete bid specifications may be obtained from the Gulf County Tourist Development Council, 150 Captain Fred's Place, Port St. Joe, FL 32456, 850-229-7800, or from the Gulf County website at www.gulfcounty-fl.gov.



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA**

**BY: TYNALIN SMILEY
CHAIRMAN**

ATTEST:

REBECCA L. NORRIS, CLERK

**Ad #2014-01
Advertise: January 9 & 16, 2014
Ad Size: Legals
Invoice: Gulf County BOCC**

Rick Scott
GOVERNOR



Jesse Panuccio
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

GULF COUNTY
2013 DEC -9 PM 2: 20
BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS

December 6, 2013

The Honorable Tynalin Smiley
Chairman, Gulf County Board of County Commissioners
1000 Cecil G. Costin, Sr. Boulevard, Room 302
Port St. Joe, Florida 32456

Re: CDBG Agreement # 12DB-OH-02-33-01-H04
Conflict of Interest Waiver Granted

Dear Commissioner Smiley:

We have reviewed your letter, received October 21, 2013, requesting a conflict of interest waiver for Ida and Sammy Porter to participate in the housing rehabilitation program funded by this grant. They are the mother-in-law and father-in-law of County Commissioner Tynalin Smiley. The documentation submitted with the request reflects that appropriate disclosures were made by the individuals involved, that they did not participate in reviewing their own conflict, and that the County Commission, and the County's attorney recommended approval of the waiver.

Since all procedures were followed, Commissioner Smiley abstained from voting, and the individuals involved are otherwise eligible to participate in the program, a conflict of interest waiver for Ida and Sammy Porter is approved. Please include a copy of this letter in the Porters' housing rehabilitation project file for review during future monitoring visits or audit.

Additionally, we have reviewed the documentation accompanying your request for a conflict of interest waiver for Nancy Williams to participate in the housing rehabilitation program, funded by the above referenced grant. Our review determined that the relationship between Ms. Williams and her brother-in-law, County Commissioner Carmen McLemore, does not meet the definition of "relative" as outlined in Section 112.3143 Florida Statutes. As this relationship does not meet the definition outlined in State Statute, no conflicts exist and the County may proceed with assistance to Ms. Williams' home.

If you have any questions, please call Patrick Howard at (850) 717-8418 or e-mail him at Patrick.Howard@deo.myflorida.com.

Sincerely,

Bob Dennis
Community Program Manager

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CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA
2014 JAN -8 PM 1: 17

BD/ph

cc: Ms. Towan Kopinsky, Grant Coordinator, Gulf County
Mr. Ronald Vanzant, President, Jordan and Associates

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity | Caldwell Building | 107 E. Madison Street | Tallahassee, FL 32399
866.FLA.2345 | 850.245.7105 | 850.921.3223 Fax

www.floridajobs.org | www.floridadeo.com | www.facebook.com/FLDEO

1-14-14 LL



Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Gerald M. Bailey
Commissioner

**Business Support
Office of Criminal Justice Grants**
Post Office Box 1489
Tallahassee, FL 32302-1489
(850) 617-1250
www.fdle.state.fl.us

Rick Scott, Governor
Pam Bondi, Attorney General
Jeff Atwater, Chief Financial Officer
Adam Putnam, Commissioner of Agriculture

DEC 6 2013

The Honorable Tynalin Smiley
Chairman
Gulf County Board of Commissioners
1000 Cecil G. Costin Sr. Boulevard
Port St. Joe, FL 32456-1653

Re: Contract No. 2013-JAGC-GULF-1-D7-050

Dear Chairman Smiley:

This letter confirms our receipt and acceptance of all financial and programmatic reports applicable to the referenced project. While this concludes active administration of the subgrant agreement by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, you are reminded that all supporting records must be maintained for a period of not less than five years from termination date for audit and examination. An audit performed in accordance with OMB Circular No. A-133 must also be conducted and submitted to the Office of Criminal Justice Grants, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2331 Phillips Road, Tallahassee, Florida 32308.

All non-expendable property acquisitions must be accounted for and maintained for as long as the equipment is in service. The Department must be notified prior to any disposition of non-expendable property and must be advised immediately of any lost or stolen items.

Any further inquiries relative to this project should be directed to your grant manager at 850-617-1250.

Sincerely,

Petrina Tuttle Herring
Administrator

PTH/AW/AL

cc: The Honorable Michael A. Harrison

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CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA
2014 JAN -8 PM 1:16

1/14/13 LL



Florida Department of Transportation

RICK SCOTT
GOVERNOR

1074 Hwy 90
Chipley, Florida 32428

ANANTH PRASAD, P.E.
SECRETARY

December 30, 2013

The Honorable Tan Smiley, Chairman
Gulf County Board of County Commissioners
1000 Cecil G. Coslin, Sr. Blvd.
Port St. Joe, Florida 32456

Re: Rescheduled or Deleted Project(s) from the Adopted Fiscal 2015-2018 Work Program

Dear Chairman Smiley:

According to Florida Statute 339.135, the Department of Transportation must provide written justification to the planning organization of any project that is a part of the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and in the last four years of the previously adopted Work Program (Fiscal Years 2015-2018) that has been proposed to be rescheduled or deleted.

The enclosed list shows all projects that have been rescheduled or deleted in Gulf County. These changes were presented at the Work Program Public Hearing, and as a follow-up notification, the objections are due to the District by Wednesday, January 22, 2014.

Should you have any questions, please contact Regina Battles, P.E., Program Manager, toll free at 1-888-638-0250 extension 1270 or via e-mail at regina.battles@dot.state.fl.us.

Sincerely,

James T. Barfield, P.E.
District Secretary

attachment

cc: Regina Battles, FDOT

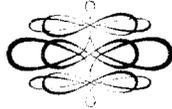
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GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA
2014 JAN -8 PM 1:16

GULF COUNTY
2013 DEC 31 AM 11:35
BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS

GULF COUNTY - SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Project ID #	Type	Description	Phase	Action
433034 1	BRIDGE REHABILITATION	SR 22 OVER WETAPPO CREEK BRIDGE NO 51002	CST	DELETE & ADVANCE
410981 3	CAPACITY	GULF COAST PARKWAY FROM SR 30 (US 98) TO GULF TO BAY HWY	RW,CST	DELETE
433353 1	SCOP	CR 30B INDIAN PASS FROM CR 30A TO INDIAN PASS BOAT RAMP	CST	ADVANCE

Foundation 2013 Update ¹⁵



As the year draws to a close, The Gulf Coast State College Foundation Board of Directors, Executive Director and Staff have much to celebrate.

Although turbulent economic times have been a challenge for our community, the Foundation is most appreciative of the generosity of our benefactors. With your support, the Foundation accomplished the following this year:

1. Provided the College \$2.1 million in scholarship and program support of which \$1 million was for the Advanced Technology Center.
2. Raised \$385,000 toward our \$500,000 goal in program and scholarship support of the Culinary Management Program.
3. Provided \$782,000 in scholarship support and over \$400,000 in other program support.
4. Served over 700 students with financial assistance to achieve their dream of obtaining a College education.
5. Raised over \$100,000 in net proceeds through various fundraising events:
 - a. Kenny Loggins Dinner and Concert (May)
 - b. Kirby Studio Fall and Holiday Showcase Event (October)
 - c. Shark's Tooth Golf Tournament (November)
 - d. Les Misérables Exclusive Premiere (November)
6. Hosted the first Annual High School Honors Awards Reception Event. The event was established to honor high school graduates who have high academic standards and are committed to attending Gulf Coast State College. For those students, the Foundation offers a chance to apply for and receive a high school honors scholarship. The scholarship is a two year scholarship that can be used at the College. This year, the Foundation honored 24 students.

We thank you for your support and invite you to help us continue our mission of making a difference in the lives of our students. Please consider making an end of year tax-deductible contribution to the GCSC Foundation that will support education programs and opportunities for students attending Gulf Coast State College. Donations can be made using the enclosed envelope or online. For more information, please call us at (850) 872-3815 or visit our website at www.gcscfoundation.org.

2013 Executive Committee

Mr. Les Brackett, President	Mr. Tom Gibson, Advisor
Dr. Jim Anderson, Vice President	Mr. H. Cranston Pope, Board Attorney
Ms. Mary Jo Myers, Secretary	Dr. Jim Kerley, GCSC President
Mr. Jerry Sowell, Jr., Treasurer	Mr. Charles Abbott, Director Emeritus (1910—2010)
Mr. Clint Mayo, Past President	Ms. Karen Hanes, Director Emeritus
Mr. David Warriner, Trustee Liaison	
Mr. William C. Cramer, Jr., Advisor	

Directors

Ms. Mary Sue Adams	Mr. Frank Hall	Ms. Ann Marie Sale
Mr. Tony Bennett	Ms. Rebecca Hall-Cary	Dr. Herb Salisbury
Mr. Hal Burselon	Mr. Joe Hamner	Dr. Amal Sidani-Tabbaa
Mr. Scott Clemo	The Hon. James Harris, Jr.	The Hon. Don Simons (Ret.)
Mr. Ken Cochran	Ms. Maureen Hess	Mr. Cameron Skinner
Ms. Kathy Crowley	Ms. Carolyn Husband	Col. D.W. Smith (Ret.)
Mr. Jeff Di Benedictis	Ms. Jeannie Millaway	Mr. Roy Smith
Ms. Donna Duncan	Rep. Jimmy Patronis Jr.	Mr. Charles Voorhis, III
Dr. Harry Futrell	Ms. Paulina Pendarvis	Mr. Charles W. Wetherby
Mr. Joey Ginn	Ms. Jeannie Retherford	Mr. John Whelock

Staff

Ms. Margie Mazur, Executive Director	Ms. Erica Lester, Donor Relations Manager
Mr. Dunkin McLane, Finance & Scholarship Program Manager	Ms. Barbara Carryl, Finance and Scholarship Assistant



Gulf Coast State College Foundation

5230 West Highway 98, Panama City, Florida 32401
800.311.3685 ext. 3815 | www.gcscfoundation.org

1-14-14-LL

December 5, 2013

2013 DEC -9 PM 2:20
BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS

GULF COUNTY

Tynalin Smiley, Bd. Chmn.
Gulf County Board of Commissioners
1000 Cecil G. Costin Sr. Blvd.
Port Saint Joe, Florida 32456-1653

Dear Mr. Smiley,

Recently published about January 17, 1999 in presumably many news-
papers was an article by Paul Dean of the Los Angeles Times entitled
"Crash course for adults accelerates safety on the roads." When you
read this article it is hard not to agree with all of its ideas, but
you also realize that only a very small percentage of the driving
public will actually take such a course. Furthermore, you realize
that if, by some magic, everyone would become a good driver; there
would still be driving errors (resulting in accidents) because of
many factors.

So we first have to admit there will always be accidents. The problem
is minimizing the fatalities and decreasing the severity of injuries
resulting from accidents. Let me focus on a small segment of particu-
lar kinds of accidents and show you how hard it is to correct the
basic cause. For instance, statistics compiled by the National High-
way Traffic Safety Administration indicate that in 2011 there were

1,354 fatalities,

49,000 injuries, and

113,000 property damage only accidents

in the United States resulting from vehicles hitting utility poles.

Overhead electric lines and roadways do not interface well because
since day 1 we have been leaving the road for one reason or another
and hitting power poles. I say power poles here and not telephone
poles because power poles are, for a number of reasons, the biggest
and the sturdiest. And a collision with a stout wood pole is a terri-
ble thing. True enough, you can hold your course and strike the stout
wood pole head-on. Thus you rely on the mass of the engine to break
the pole. But I venture to say you may live out your life as a vege-
table. On the other hand, your basic instinct tells you to turn the
car and you do this. But I venture to say the laws of physics will
probably win and will put you in a sideways slide straight into the
pole. When this happens the stout wood pole can nearly cut the car
in half and you have a very excellent chance of dying in about 20
milliseconds. This is about the time it takes for the stout wood pole
to deform the car door and everything in its path to about the center
of the car.

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CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA

2014 JAN -8 PM 1:14

-2-

You may want to ask why speeding vehicles that leave roadways hit poles that are 200 to 250 ft apart. The answer has been documented mathematically since about 1968 when Paul C. Skeels, Engineer-in-Charge of Safety Test Engineering at the General Motors Proving Ground, presented a paper dated Feb. 13, 1968 entitled "The Role Of The Highway In A Safe transportation System" at the 65th Annual Convention of the American Road Builders Association. The miracle is when you miss them.

Stout wood poles are everywhere and this is a very serious game we play on our roadways. Unlike a basketball game, I suggest you cannot take a charge and continue the game.

Having made the indictment, we now propose the solution. Either put the stout wood poles back from the roadway out of harms way or put the electric lines underground. Electric street light poles that remain would have to be breakaway poles or equivalent.

So here is what you can do. Ask your electric provider if this (the foregoing paragraph) can be done (not all at once but over a number of years). You may just find out how hard it is to correct the basic cause.

The question is: Who should pay for these fatalities, injuries, and property damage only accidents resulting from vehicle collisions with stout wood power poles.



Ken Sharp
9342 Oak Run Circle
Indianapolis, Indiana 46260

cc: Michael White, Gulf Coast Electric Coop Inc.

In the driver's seat

Crash course for adults accelerates safety on the roads

By Paul Dean
Los Angeles Times

Grim reapings: About 42,000 people die on our highways each year — an American tragedy that comes surprisingly close to matching the total number of soldiers killed in 10 years of fighting in Vietnam.

Gladder tidings: That annual toll has remained pretty even for a decade, despite choking freeways and a population of vehicles and citizens growing at a rate of 1 percent per annum. Drunk-driving deaths are down. Thirty years ago 5.5 people died for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled; today the figure has shriveled to 1.5.

And expect that statistic to hold, experts say, and even fade lower as tens of thousands of Americans take command of their lives through adult driver education courses and high-performance motoring schools. All with a single aim: to improve driving skills that probably haven't budged — except to embrace bad habits — since we first sat in dad's lap. You steered and shifted, and he worked brakes and the gas pedal.

"Over the past 30 years we have made tremendous strides in vehicle and highway engineering," says Lindsay Griffin III, a psychologist and traffic safety researcher with the

Texas Transportation Institute at College Station. Broader and smoother highways, he explains, guardrails and escape roads, seat belts and air bags and side-impact protection may all be credited for the leveling of crash figures.

"Now, to quote a paper by B.J. Campbell," he says, citing another highway safety expert, "the relative value of studying human behavior might be the important priority."

America seems to be ahead of the suggestion: Twenty years ago, there were only three performance driving schools in Canada and the United States. There are now more than 60, offering everything from half-day classes in accident avoidance in family sedans to three-day courses that include track competition in open-wheel race cars.

The California-born, Arizona-based pioneer Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving has been selling adult driver's education for 30 years (\$250 for a half-day class, \$3,950 for the three-day road racing school). Students train in factory-supplied Ford Mustangs; ages range from teens to septuagenarians. And this four-wheeled academy graduates 5,000 people a month.

"Five percent of our students want to become race drivers, 20 percent are Walter Mitty's seeking the high-speed

experience, but 75 percent are ordinary people who have realized they are not the drivers they thought they were and want to improve their skills," says marketing director Chan Martinez.

The American Association of Retired Persons' 55-Alive brush-up courses are alive and well nationally. Some local offices of The Automobile Club offer classroom retraining for mature drivers.

Benefits of such programs can include reduced insurance premiums for senior citizens.

To anyone who has ever been tailgated, cut off, flipped off or forced to back off by a Mustang GT sweeping three freeway lanes without signaling, we are a nation of 179 million drivers with death wishes.

Truth is, researchers say, 94 percent of fatal crashes — representing an annual financial loss of \$170 billion — are caused by driver error. Police officers no longer refer to "accidents" because that implies a twist of fate or the back hand of God. The new and official preference is "crashes and collisions."

Mike Smith of Washington, D.C., is a psychologist and researcher with the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. He says there are few denominators, certainly no easy explanation, for ditching common

sense and denying basic courtesies once we climb behind a steering wheel. Although much bad behavior, he believes, is created by a highway system designed around volunteerism and human faith.

"It is based on people volunteering to comply with rules and regulations, and when they comply, there's no problem," he says. "But because it is a very forgiving system, you are free to violate some of these rules and regulations ... and, generally speaking, nothing happens."

So we go a little faster. We roll through stop signs. One piece of deviant behavior tempts others to retaliate. Bam! A bounty of human errors, crashes and collisions.

Traffic safety, Smith continues, is a convoluted matter, with every question, answer and possible solution locked into enforcement merging with education and legislation. While expected to allow room for personal freedoms and all citizens' rights to the pursuit of mobility

"Joe and Joan Public have to accept that although the death rate is pretty stable, 42,000 fatalities a year is unacceptable," he says. "We have to address the problems of teen-age drivers who are risk takers and inexperienced at a complex task. Unfortunately, adult behavior is very difficult to change."