



GICIA: 'No donation too small' for funding Mercabo project

Breaking News, Featured News, The News, Uncategorized December 11, 2015



As of Tuesday, Dec. 8 the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association has received more \$18 million in pledges toward their \$22 million goal of purchasing the 30-acre Mercabo property at the mouth of the Boca Grande Causeway.

This goal includes the \$20.6 million purchase price and \$1.4 million to demolish the buildings and begin the restoration process that will return the site to its natural state.

GICIA members are, needless to say, pleased and encouraged by the outpouring of support. The list of contributors is now well over the 400 mark, and the GICIA encourages everyone to make their pledge before the end of the year.

"There is no donation too small," said GICIA President Bayne Stevenson. "Every gift is significant in the fact that it shows that residents support this important effort."

GICIA representatives have cited the fact that Charlotte County is in the process of amending their Comprehensive Plan in a way that significantly weakens protections

against high-density development within the Coastal High Hazard Area. They believe this purchase is vital to ensuring the property's safety against potential excessive development.

If they are successful in the acquisition of the Mercabo property, their plan is to create a preserve by removing the buildings and creating and enhancing much-needed habitat for native birds, animals and marine life. They ultimately hope to officially add it to the GICIA Land Conservancy holdings and protect it in perpetuity.

The GICIA Board of Directors will convene on Wednesday, Dec. 16 to decide whether to proceed to the closing on January 15, 2016.

Last week the GICIA had two anonymous donors who pledged to match the next \$1million in pledges received. As of press time the match had been met.

"We have made incredible progress, but this final push is going to be the most difficult in the fundraising process," said GICIA Executive Director Misty Nichols. "Time is extremely short, and we encourage everyone who is interested in protecting this important parcel of land to send in their pledge."

Stevenson added, "Every time you turn onto the causeway, look to the left and envision an almost continuous flow of protected property all the way to the village, which includes Mercabo, GIBA, the GICIA Bike Path and conservancy property. Then think about the impacts of a high-density, high-rise project that has become so common. This is all about preserving the quality of life we are blessed with on Boca Grande. The GICIA staff and board wish to thank the Boca Grande community for their tremendous support of this very important acquisition."

To make a pledge, please call the GICIA office at 964-2667 or stop by for a pledge form. Their website is thegicia.org, where you can print a pledge form.

Donors will be asked to honor their pledges in early January of 2016. All donations will be tax-deductible in the year 2016. A custody account has been established to accommodate donations of appreciated stock.



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Marcy Shortuse is the editor of the Boca Beacon, and has been with the paper since 2007. She is also editor of the Boca Beacon's sister publication, Gasparilla Magazine. She has more than 20 years of experience writing and editing local newspapers and is originally from the Chicago area.