



\$3,000 raised in fishing trip auction GICIA granted extension to procure more funds

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The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association (GICIA) announced this week that they are nearing \$20 million in pledges toward the purchase of the Mercabo site, and they have been given an extension to find the additional funds necessary.

Although the GICIA considers the fundraising a huge success, President Bayne Stevenson reminds us that everyone will have to push hard to reach the \$22 million goal. That 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.

Adding to the fundraising effort was Capt. Jackie Bylaska, a fourth-generation local guide who specializes in fishing for snook, redfish and speckled trout. He donated a full day of fishing to be auctioned off to raise money for the Mercabo purchase. The GICIA held a silent-bid email auction for the full day of light tackle spinning gear or fly-fishing along the shallow grass flats and mangrove islands of Charlotte Harbor and Pine Island Sound.

“There was a lot of interest in the trip,” said Stevenson.

The GICIA office began receiving bids by email early Friday, and they announced this week that Billy Sasser submitted the winning bid of \$3,000.

“Not only is it fantastic that the trip brought in \$3,000 toward the effort, it is moving that a true local fisherman – who has seen the effects of overdevelopment of our coastlines – wanted to participate in the protection of this 30-acre parcel,” said Lance Isham, GICIA

Land Conservancy Chair.

“To see our community rally behind this effort gives me such a sense of pride,” said Misty Nichols, GICIA Executive Director.

The number of contributors is now almost 800 and still growing. While board members encouraged everyone to relax and enjoy the holidays with family and friends, they reminded everyone that they cannot afford to fall short of the goal.

“Any fundraiser will tell you the last 10 to 20 percent of any fundraising effort is the toughest,” said Stevenson. We still need everyone who feels strongly about this important project to send in their checks or pledges. We cannot stress enough that no gift is too small.”

The GICIA Board has been given a short extension to complete its due diligence on the property.

“At this point the Board plans to meet before January 18 to formalize its decision,” said Nichols.

This extension gives the GICIA what it needs most – time and more time – to complete the fundraising efforts and reach its \$22 million goal.

Nichols urges everyone who loves Boca Grande and wants to help preserve our quiet island atmosphere to contribute.

This is a project in which literally everyone can have a part in seeing it succeed.

The GICIA’s vision for this property, if it is successful in the acquisition, is to create a natural preserve by removing the buildings and creating and enhancing much-needed habitat for native birds, animals and marine life.

The goal for the property is to officially add it to the GICIA Land Conservancy holdings and protect it in perpetuity.

To make a pledge call the GICIA office, 964-2667, or stop by for a pledge form. You may also visit their website at thegicia.org to print a pledge form.

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

The GICIA staff and board wish to thank the Boca Grande Community for their tremendous support of this very important acquisition.



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