



Mercabo pledges still needed

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SUBMITTED BY THE GICIA – The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association (GICIA) is extremely pleased to announce that we have reached the \$20 million mark in pledges toward the purchase of the Mercabo site.

This is exceedingly good news, but it is important to stay focused on the goal of \$22M, which will not only purchase the property (\$20.6 million purchase price) but also provide the necessary funds to begin the restoration of the site, which we hope to begin in the first quarter of 2016. GICIA is estimating that \$1.4M will be needed to demolish the buildings and begin the restoration process that will return the site to a natural state.

The GICIA's vision for this property, if we are successful in the acquisition, is to create a 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.

“Working with certified arborist Rick Joyce on the restoration plans is exciting,” said GICIA President Bayne Stevenson. There are so many possibilities to provide critical habitat for native birds, wildlife and even marine life at this 30 acre site.

Nancy Douglass of Florida Fish and Wildlife has been providing information on potential for endangered shore bird habitat as well as the possibility of enhancing the marine environment to better suit the critically endangered juvenile sawfish.

“Marine biology has long been a passion of mine, so the idea of possibly working to create habitat for the juvenile sawfish is absolutely exhilarating,” said GICIA Executive Director Misty Nichols. “There is so much promise for this site from an ecological standpoint, but we need residents to continue supporting this effort to see it reach its full potential,” said Stevenson.

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 the 18th of January to formalize its decision,” said Nichols. “This extension gives us what we need most, time to complete the fundraising efforts and reach our \$22M goal.”

Nichols continues to urge everyone who loves Boca Grande and wants to help preserve our quiet island atmosphere to contribute. Everyone can be a part of this success story, and over 800 contributors have already acknowledged the importance of this effort.

There have been donations from \$25 up, Nichols reported. The GICIA Board of Directors continues to reiterate that no gift is too small. We want all of our residents to feel like they are part of something great. This has been a project that has brought our wonderful community together, and what better way to begin the New Year than to have unity.

To make a pledge, please call the GICIA office, 964-2667 or stop by for a pledge form. You may also visit our website at thegicia.org to print a pledge form. Donors will be asked to honor their pledges on or before January 11, 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 the Board wish to thank the Boca Grande Community for their tremendous support of this very important acquisition.



POSTED BY **MARCY SHORTUSE**

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.

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