



## GICIA announces \$250K match challenge by island family

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SUBMITTED BY THE GICIA – The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association (GICIA) is extremely pleased and encouraged by the outpouring of support toward the purchase of the Mercabo site from residents of Gasparilla Island and the surrounding areas.

As of Wednesday, Jan. 6 the GICIA has received nearly \$20.2 million in pledges toward the \$22 million goal. 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 a natural state.

To assist in this final push to raise the necessary \$1.8 million, a generous Boca Bay family has issued a \$250,000 match challenge. If GICIA can raise \$250,000 between now and January 22, this generous island family will match it.

This is a great opportunity to make the most of your donation and push the GICIA to its goal.

The list of contributors is now more than 900. Support at all levels is welcome and encouraged. "At this point in the fundraising, every single gift will make a difference, especially with the \$250K match challenge," said President Bayne Stevenson.

The 30-acre Mercabo site is located at the entrance to the Boca Grande Causeway. With Charlotte County in the process of amending its Comprehensive Plan in a way that significantly weakens protections against high-density development within the Coastal High Hazard Area, it is vital that we are able to acquire the property to ensure its protection.

The GICIA's vision for this property 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.

"With the closing scheduled for the end of the month, it is imperative for those who want to give to do so now," said Executive Director Misty Nichols. "It is also important for those who have a pledge to send in your checks. 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, GICIA Bike Path and GICIA Land Conservancy property. Then think about the impacts that a high-density, high-rise project would bring to our community. This is all about preserving the quality of life we are blessed with on Boca Grande," said Stevenson.

To make a donation, please stop by or call the GICIA office, 964-2667. All donations will be tax-deductible in the year 2016. A custody account has been established to accommodate donations of appreciated stock. The GICIA Board and staff 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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