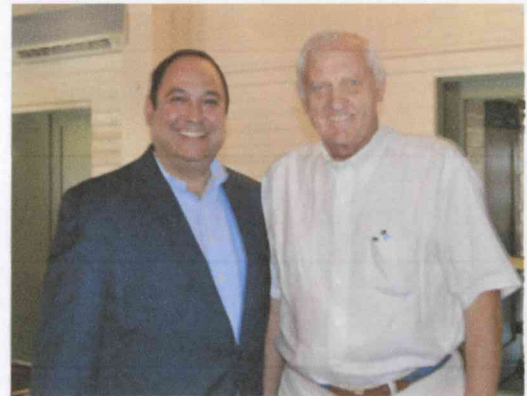


Rep. Rodrigues speaks to Boca Grande residents

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■ BY SUE ERWIN

Florida House Representative Ray Rodrigues spoke to Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association board members as well as a group of residents on Tuesday, January 17 in the Crowninshield Community House.



Some of the topics he addressed included environmental protection laws, amendments on special assessments and the reservoir issue at Lake Okeechobee.

Rodrigues said that last year the Florida Legacy Bill was passed, which dedicated 200 million dollars per year of Amendment 1 money to projects dealing specifically with water quality and waterways restoration. And the first projects that were funded included several to reduce discharges to the St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee rivers.

"I think everyone has the goal of reducing discharges as rapidly as possible. The fact that the Senate president has made that one of his priorities gives it light, and we'll see if his proposal is the one that gets selected. But I think everyone agrees, you can't just stand by and do nothing. We've got to find a solution that reduces the discharges, and in my opinion, it has to be a rapid solution. The quality of our water is not only an environmental concern but also an economic concern, and we will be working on getting these issues resolved," Rodrigues said.

One attendee asked what residents could do as a community to protect the Boca Grande Lighthouse and Gasparilla Island State Park, saying that there is a constant loss of beach surrounding the lighthouse.

Rodrigues encouraged community leaders to apply for beach preservation funds and beach renourishment programs.

“The first step would be to find out what government entities are available to help. I’ll have my staff reach out to you to get these concerns addressed,” he said.

Community members expressed a high level of satisfaction with the public services available on the island.

“I think people appreciate the fact that there is a low crime rate here, and we don’t necessarily see that throughout the rest of the county,” Rodrigues said.

As part of the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association’s continuing efforts to be as effective as possible in protecting the integrity of the Gasparilla Island Act, the organization sponsored the meet-and-greet with Representative Ray Rodrigues.

“We’re very happy to be able to bring Rep. Rodrigues here to speak to the community,” said Misty Nichols, GICIA’s executive director. GICIA, along with the assistance of Capitol Access, a full-service consulting firm specializing in state and local government affairs and public relations, invited island residents to stop by and discuss local community issues with Rep. Rodrigues.

He has represented the district for four years, first working alongside Senator Benaquisto on the seawall issue.

“We were able to get the funding to deal with the rapidly occurring degradation on it in 2013, and we were able to get it restored very quickly,” Rodrigues said.

He has since visited Boca Grande several times to help work on community matters.

This was the first time he has done a public forum on the island.

“I think it went well, and I look forward to coming back out and doing more of these,” Rodrigues said.

Rodrigues is a Republican member of the Florida House of Representatives, representing the 76th district, which since 2012 includes southern Lee County. He currently serves as majority leader through 2018 and serves on the appropriations subcommittee. Rodrigues has been active in the Lee County Republican party since 1995, serving in various capacities, including vice-chairman from 2010 to 2012. He was born in Pensacola and moved to Lee County in 1994. He represents Lee County from the Charlotte County line to the Collier County line, except for Cape Coral, which is part of the 77th district.



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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