



# COUNTY SOLUTIONS

SUMMER 2016 ISSUE 1

## CLEANING WATER NATURALLY

Can local eco-waste help clean the **Indian River Lagoon**? One county is pioneering new ways to reduce pollution.

### MAKING FOOD DESERTS BLOOM

With community and faith

### A WIN WIN WIN

Better caring for our mentally ill strengthens community

### UNIQUE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM ADVANCING MANUFACTURING IN TAMPA BAY

### AN AMISH-MENNONITE COMMUNITY PUTS DOWN ROOTS WITH COUNTY HELP





# WELCOME LETTER



**L**et's get right to it: Florida's counties are amazing! It's not just because 100 million people visited the Sunshine State last year; it's because we're constantly seeking to improve local services while protecting local taxpayers; it's because we're getting better at our jobs every day. And since the Great Recession, every county official has become an expert at doing more with less—and that's the way it should be!

We are proud to introduce the inaugural edition of County Solutions, an annual publication of the Florida Association of Counties. This magazine is all about you. It's here to highlight innovative local solutions to big issues—solutions that make our counties a better place to live, work and raise a family. Most importantly, this publication will allow us to learn from each other and share what we've learned with our communities, from Pensacola to the Keys.

We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it.

Sincerely,

  
**Barbara Sharief**  
President  
Florida Association of Counties

  
**Kathy Bryant**  
President-Elect  
Florida Association of Counties

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# MAKING FOOD DESERTS BLOOM

## with community and faith

Cragin Mosteller

The growing problem of food deserts—areas with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables—afflicts counties of every size and description. While no solitary solution will single-handedly eliminate food deserts, Florida's counties are now pioneering unique and innovative approaches to addressing this serious health problem.

**W**ith just over 8,500 residents, Lafayette is one of Florida's least-populous counties. It also suffers from a high childhood poverty rate of 30 percent and very limited access to healthy whole foods. In response, the Lafayette County Extension Office UF/IFAS Family Nutrition Program created its first community garden to inform residents of the benefits of higher fruit-and-vegetable diets, encourage more physical activity, and promote the creation of personal family gardens. A large part of eating nutritional food is being able to access it, which is a major problem for the community we serve," said Maggie Evans, the Healthiest Weight Florida and Chronic Disease Prevention Coordinator for Suwannee and Lafayette Counties. We have limited resources and only one grocery store in the immediate area. The closest farmers market is only open two days a week [and is] almost thirty miles away. The community garden is intended to serve as a model, with the hope that Lafayette County residents will use the tools and techniques on display to plant their own cost-effective gardens at home. The UF/IFAS Family Nutrition program also provides onsite classes on good diets and healthy food-buying habits to help address the persistent problem of poor nutrition. Big counties are attempting to green-up food deserts, too.



"A large part of eating nutritional food is being able to access it..."





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Duval County Mayor Lenny Curry issued a community health challenge aimed at identifying the best ways to deliver healthy food options to citizens living in food deserts, particularly in northwest Jacksonville. This challenge produced the Farm to Faith initiative, an innovative partnership facilitated by Duval County, which brought the farmers market to the place of worship. This simple step made fresh, healthy produce available to parishioners after each church service and encouraged the integration of nutritional food choices into daily routines. The county also partnered with the UF/IFAS extension office to develop and distribute healthy recipes—an easy way to encourage more nutritional food choices. From Florida's smallest county to one of its largest, food deserts are a serious challenge that will require a wide array of solutions. Surely, one size will not fit all. However, Lafayette and Duval counties have shown that size does not matter when it comes to delivering fresh food options to residents all over the Sunshine State.

For more information please visit: [www.coj.net](http://www.coj.net)







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# A WIN WIN WIN

## Better caring for our mentally ill strengthens community

Rose Keirnan

"Today, one in 17 people living in America suffer from a serious mental illness."

**F**lagler County is growing—fast.

From 2010 to 2015, the county posted population growth over 10 percent, more than two points above the state average. While growth has delivered a bevy of economic benefits, it's also brought new challenges, not the least of which is a rising number of adult mental illness cases. Today, one in 17 people living in America suffer from a serious mental illness.

When such cases arose in Flagler County, the options were few and far from ideal. In the event of a mental health crisis, patients are first transported to a Baker Act Receiving Facility. Until recently, no such facility existed in Flagler County. Consequently, residents requiring immediate and involuntary mental healthcare were transported to Volusia County, if space was available. If not, they were sent to Duval or Orange counties. Between 2010 and 2012, the number of Baker Act cases initiated by the local Sheriff's Office soared by 42 percent. 2013 saw a single-year spike of 44 percent. Not only was it costing the equivalent of a full-time Sheriff's deputy simply to handle transportation for Baker Act cases, it was creating undue hardship for mental health patients who were stranded hours from home after being discharged.

That changed in 2014.

Flagler County implemented CTTU: Crisis Triage and Transport Unit, a program designed to improve services for adults in mental health crisis who require transportation to a Baker Act Receiving Facility, while also improving utilization of County law enforcement resources. The program is funded by a grant from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and matched by Flagler County.

Today, Flagler County partners with SMA Behavioral Health to offer crisis screening and a full-service transportation hub located within county limits. Credentialed staff provide 21st Century care and, when required, transportation to and from Baker Act facilities.

In its first 17 months of operation, CTTU served 570 people, including 78 who would have otherwise been transported to Baker Act facilities outside of Flagler County. Just as importantly, CTTU delivered treatment, instead of arrest records, to 82 patients. The early screening and triage provided by CTTU dramatically reduces the number of Baker Act cases required, but it does not eliminate them. As a result, treatment isn't the only vital service provided by CTTU.





## BROWARD EFFICIENCY Rewarding staff for saving tax dollars

Is it possible to improve public services while saving money at the same time? “You better believe it,” says Broward County. The challenge is a big one: Today’s modern office is typically awash in voicemails, emails and endless paper-work, making it difficult to see through the clutter and envision meaningful solutions to practical problems.

Enter, Broward County’s “Innovator Award.” This unique program rewards county employees who introduce new techniques that save money and improve service.

Broward County is building “a culture that encourages and rewards innovation,” says Robert Miracle, Director of the Broward County Finance and Administrative Services Department. The key, he says, “is to work together to be creative to solve problems for the public we serve.”

Already, the ideas are rolling in: Twenty-two submittals were received in the program’s first year. So far, innovations include new staffing measures to improve the process of filling vacant positions by 20 percent, allowing business to apply for new tax accounts entirely online, and updating liability investigations by integrating video captured on bus-transit cameras.

For more information please visit: [www.broward.org](http://www.broward.org)



“We have also logged over 45,000 miles annually, transporting clients in crisis,” says program director Sonny Donaldson. “That’s 45,000 miles of driving that a law enforcement officer no longer needs to be responsible for. Officers have shared with me that the hardest part about being on the road and away from the county was knowing, while they were gone, they left their fellow officers without backup.”

Most importantly, the CTTU is delivering results. The program offers targeted and ongoing case management services, which can include help securing voluntary residential or in/outpatient services and managed medication therapies. Within six months of program admission, 100 percent of eligible participants were linked to services that can help them. One year after admission, 89 percent of CTTU patients without a stable housing situation found one. 97 percent of CTTU patients report increased access to community based behavioral health services. And among program participants, there was a 78 percent reduction in arrests within a year of admission.

“Another critical component of our program at the CTTU is the intensity of training now

available within Flagler County,” notes Donaldson. “We’ve provided Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) to over 100 law enforcement personnel in our first year, and we’ll provide that week-long session to a larger group in our second year. We’ve also offered Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to over 100 citizens. This evidence based approach is designed to improve appropriate response to individuals with behavioral illnesses on the part of family, friends, and the general public.”

True “win-wins” are rare in the business of government—but Flagler County’s CTTU is proving that they’re possible. “Not only has [CTTU] increased and improved locally available behavioral services, it’s done double duty by freeing up our law enforcement officers and putting them back in their coverage areas of the County,” says County Administrator Craig Coffey. “This really is a wonderful example of best practices in resource utilization, and a model of the kind of creative solution that our Board of County Commissioners strongly supports.”

For more information please visit: [www.flaglercounty.org](http://www.flaglercounty.org)



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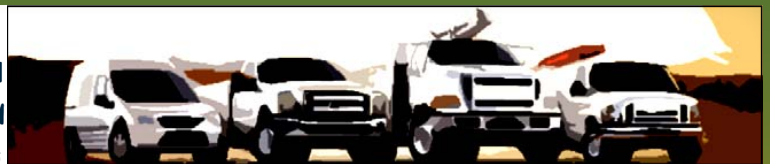


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# UNIQUE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM ADVANCING MANUFACTURING IN TAMPA BAY

## Pasco County imports a creative approach to workforce training

Tracy Kusmierz

**T**he loss of American manufacturing jobs: The media is talking about it, the candidates are debating it, and many Floridians are frustrated by it. Yet, one sobering statistic is largely absent from the discussion: Over the next decade, an estimated 2 million domestic manufacturing and technical jobs will go unfilled. Why? Not enough qualified workers.

Pasco County Commissioner Katheryn Starkey spent years trying to address the problem locally, traveling around the country and eventually to Germany in search of the best job-training programs available. Eventually, Starkey discovered the American Manufacturing Skills Initiative (AMSkills), a German-style apprenticeship program that is workforce-focused and industry-led. AMSkills is custom-designed to support manufacturing, offering goal-oriented training centers and contemporary curricula co-developed with industry leaders.

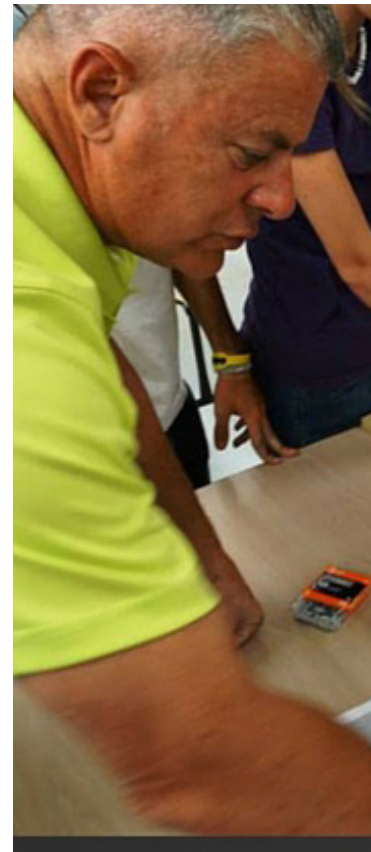
After learning of the program, Starkey secured funding from the

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and then helped to establish the interlocal agreement between Pasco, Pinellas and Hernando County that brought AMSkills to Florida's Gulf Coast. The local AMSkills Board of Directors is now a public-private partnership, comprised of at least one Commissioner from each County, each local school Superintendent, Presidents or High Level College and University officials, and local manufacturers. The robust involvement of local industry ensures the program's job-training prepares students to hit the ground running on day-one.

Now in the process of fully implementing its Pre-Apprenticeship Program with high school juniors and seniors, AMSkills is also developing a variety of programs to address the evolving needs of the manufacturing industry, including the creation of an Adult Apprenticeship program specifically geared toward veterans and unemployed workers. AMSkills is also working to make its model "importable," so other cities—

including low-income areas—can launch local AMSkills-style job-training programs that help reduce high school drop-out rates.

For Starkey, AMSkills began as a local solution to a national problem. For students, it begins with an after-school program in the junior year of high school. Once they reach their senior year, students join an On-the-Job-Training (OJT) program. Real-world "hands-on" training includes key skills such as blueprint reading, design, machining, and mechatronics, just to name a few. AMSkills partners with local manufacturers to provide industry-experienced instructors, funding, and student tours. After graduating high school, students enter the AMSkills Apprenticeship program and continue their training at a local Industry Training Center before transitioning to work with a local manufacturer.







Surprisingly, many manufacturers do not yet have a standardized apprenticeship program in place and are, therefore, reluctant to take on apprentices. That's another hole AMSkills is filling. The program works with manufacturers to create a company apprenticeship platform by helping to identify internal mentors, coordinate the interview and selection process for Pre-Apprentices and Apprentices, and establish a clear line of

supervision for each Apprentice. The result? A partnership between AMSkills and each individual manufacturer to develop a well-trained and high-employable workforce possessing key technical, soft, and life skills.

"Apprenticeships are a tried and true method of creating a skilled and experienced workforce." Said Commissioner Starkey, "This program provides people with a low

cost alternative to post-secondary education as well as training with certificates while filling the needs within the community for technically trained workers. This is a win-win situation for the people and the employers of Pasco, Pinellas and Hernando Counties."

For more information please visit: [www.amskills.org](http://www.amskills.org)





# ALL IS NOT LOST

Counties use GIS mapping technology to save money, improve lives

Tracy Kusmierz

Looking for a bus in Leon County? There's an app for that. Want to know where that penny sales tax was spent? We'll show you. How about the safest hurricane evacuation route?

No problem, we've got you covered. From emergency services to land development to parks and trails, counties are discovering new ways to use Geographic Information System (GIS)

technology to streamline services, enhance the user-experience, and furnish Floridians with the latest need-to-know information.

Lee County recently developed a mobile Hydrant Management System that runs on any smart phone or tablet and allows Fire Districts to add, remove, maintain, and flow test every hydrant in real time, from the field. Not long ago, hydrant maintenance consistent of

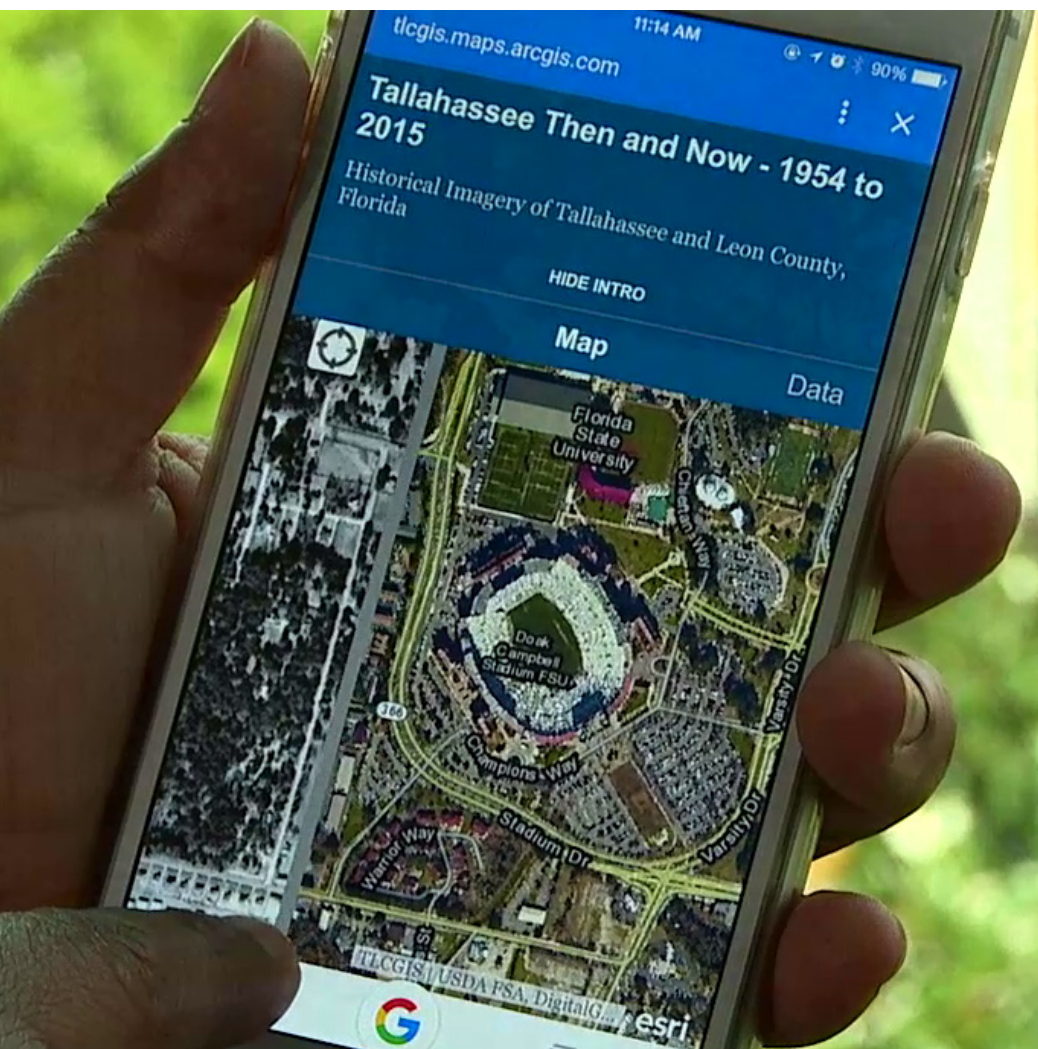
mostly printed lists and scribbled repair notes—far from cutting edge. It wasn't just a time-suck; it was prone to error. Hydrant address locations were often duplicated, incomplete, or just plain wrong.

That's all changed. With today's interactive mapping technology, maintenance crews park near a hydrant, tap the GPS button and watch as the nearest hydrant appears on a map. After the crew does its work, current maintenance information can be uploaded remotely and displayed in real time. It prevents duplication of work, lightens the administrative load, and enables maintenance to more efficiently and quickly deploy resources.

The applications for this technology seem almost endless. For example, Lee County mapped all 108 public and private golf courses in the county to make it safer and easier for first responders to reach people in the event of an emergency. The maps include tee, fairway, greens and emergency access points for EMS vehicles.

In 2015, Tallahassee-Leon County Geographic Information Systems (TLCGIS) unveiled a new website that significantly enhances the availability of spatial and mapping data to citizens, businesses, and

"Today, with online maps and GIS technology, you can have the right map in your pocket,"





public partners. Website users can view crime statistics, locate community gardens, identify areas for proposed development and review economic data throughout the country—and that's just for starters.

The Leon County Tourist Development Department pushed the technology further with the launch of [trilahassee.com](http://trilahassee.com). The website makes over 600 miles of local trailways accessible to the public. Interactive maps allow users to find trails in map view, list view, or based on various activities, such as walking, hiking, biking, motorcycling or kayaking, just to name a few. Users can even choose trails based on surface-type and skill level. Like Google Maps, Trailahassee allows users to view trailways at the street or satellite levels.

"Today, with online maps and GIS technology, you can have the right map in your pocket," said Leon County Commission Chairman Bill Proctor. "From maps for emergency situations to where to hike or ride your bike, Leon County and its residents use maps as yet another way to serve our citizens."

For more information please visit:  
[www.leoncountyfl.gov](http://www.leoncountyfl.gov) & [www.leegov.com](http://www.leegov.com)



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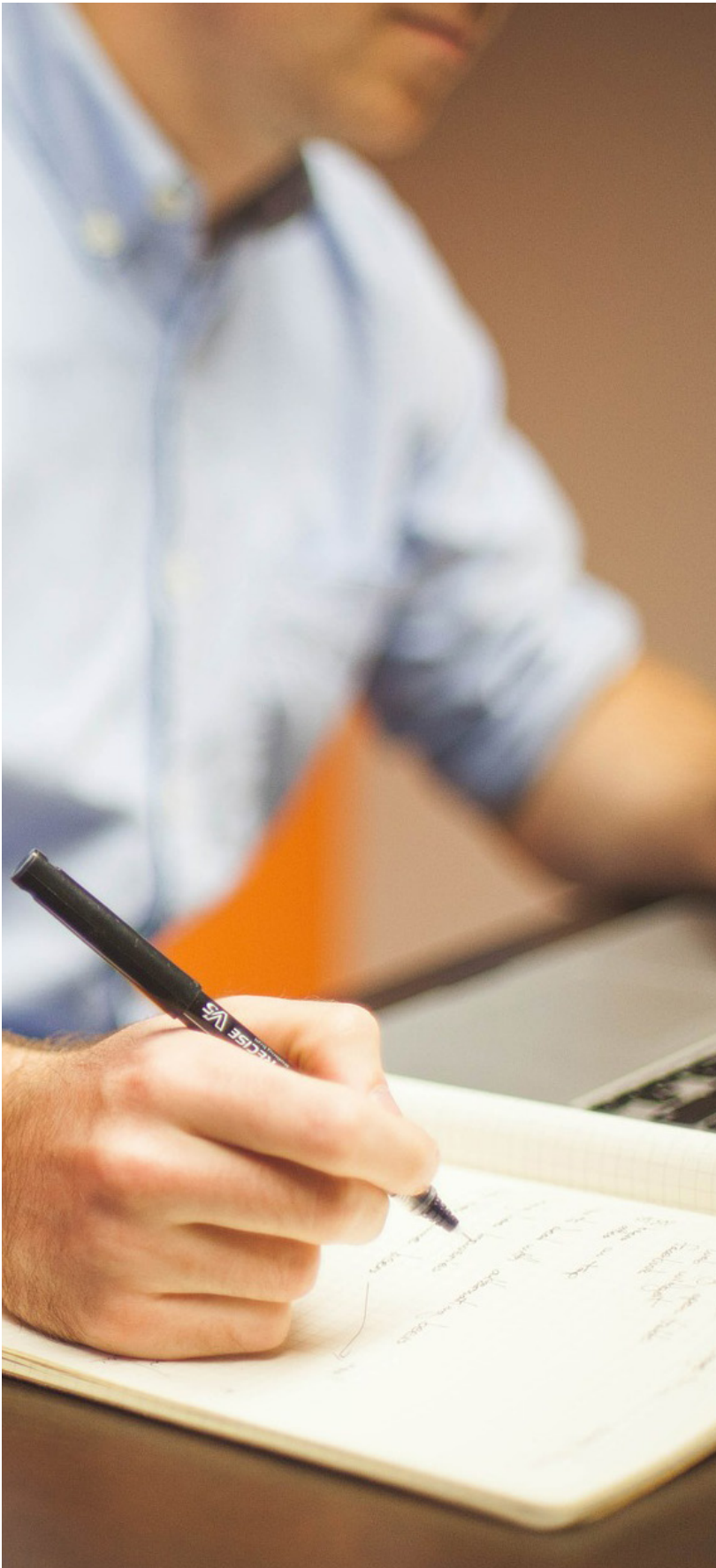


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\* Savings may vary by drug and by pharmacy. The Prescription Discount Card is operated by CVS/caremark™. The Discount Medical Organization for NACo Health and Dental Discounts is Alliance HealthCard of Florida, Inc.

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ST. LUCIE



## // St. Lucie creates a navigator for business growth

In many parts of Florida, memories of the Great Recession are still fresh. There is little doubt that the housing crash devastated many families and communities, which rely heavily on property tax revenue. Eager to encourage economic growth and business expansion, St. Lucie County created a new internal position called, “Business Navigator.” The job is simple: Guide local businesses of every size and description through the regulatory process, encouraging better customer service on the part of local government and quicker expansion and job creation on the part of local business. St. Lucie County has also deployed its Business Navigator as a liaison between local companies, county staff, outside agencies and other entities promoting local economic growth. Just as importantly, the Navigator functions as an advocate for business, ensuring that siting and planning are quickly and efficiently moved through the county review process. In practice, the Navigator works closely with a company’s application team to ensure speedy responses from local government while also standing by to intervene if the process hits a snag. To serve as its first Business Navigator, St. Lucie County selected an experienced professional with more than two decades of development experience in both the public and private sectors. This blended background ensures that St. Lucie’s Business Navigator has the experience to balance an applicant’s need for swift approval with local government’s need to protect the public and the proverbial “rules of the road.”

For more information please visit:  
[www.stlucieco.gov](http://www.stlucieco.gov)





HIGHLANDS



## // Tired of tires

Who hates used tires? Counties. When not taken to landfills, used tires become a breeding ground for mosquitos and an environmental hazard if left to decompose or catch fire. To combat this problem, Highlands County created a tire buyback program to clean up the county and limit the risks posed by illegal dumping. The program is simple: Shell out 2 bucks for every used tire. It worked. Already, the county has collected 17,695 tires at a cost of \$35,390—a significant savings over deploying county employees to find, collect and dispose of tens of thousands of tires.

For more information please visit:  
[www.hcbcc.net](http://www.hcbcc.net)



HENDRY



## // Full speed ahead in Hendry County

Be prepared: It isn't just the Boy Scouts' motto — it's a creed Hendry County has come to live by. As development in Palm Beach County continues its westward march, neighboring Hendry County is creating the housing, business and infrastructure support that will inevitably be needed. Partnering with the private sector, Hendry County created a master long-term plan, reduced permit fees, and shortened the application approval process—enabling the private sector to quickly respond to housing growth with new commercial services. The result? Hendry County has already enjoyed a 28 percent building permit increase over last year.

For more information please visit:  
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PINELLAS

## // Using Uber to Catch the Bus

### Solving the first mile / last mile

It's called the "first mile, last mile" problem—and the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority is among the first in the nation to tackle it with new technology. Transporting riders via bus or rail is easy, but getting them to-and-from a transit system is difficult. Earlier this year, Pinellas County partnered with United Taxi and Uber to pay half the cost—up to \$3—for a resident to travel to-and-from designated bus stops. Riders simply open their Uber or United Taxi app and call a ride, which makes Pinellas County's new "DirectConnect" program as simple as using a smartphone.

For more information please visit:  
[www.pinellascounty.org](http://www.pinellascounty.org)



CHARLOTTE

## // Know your zone

### A simple idea that's saving lives

There's a saying among first responders: "Simple" saves lives. Charlotte County designed its "Know your Zone" storm surge evacuation program with that idea firmly in mind. The county's simple system of placing color-coded markers atop its most visible road signs alerts local drivers to which evacuation zones they are passing through at any given time. High-risk zones are marked with a small red indicator, directing drivers to continue moving until they reach a safer zone. It's not complicated—and it's not supposed to be. After all, "simple" saves lives.

For more information please visit:  
[www.charlottecountyfl.gov](http://www.charlottecountyfl.gov)







# CLEANING WATER NATURALLY

Can local eco-waste  
help clean the Indian  
River Lagoon?  
One county is  
pioneering new ways  
to reduce pollution.

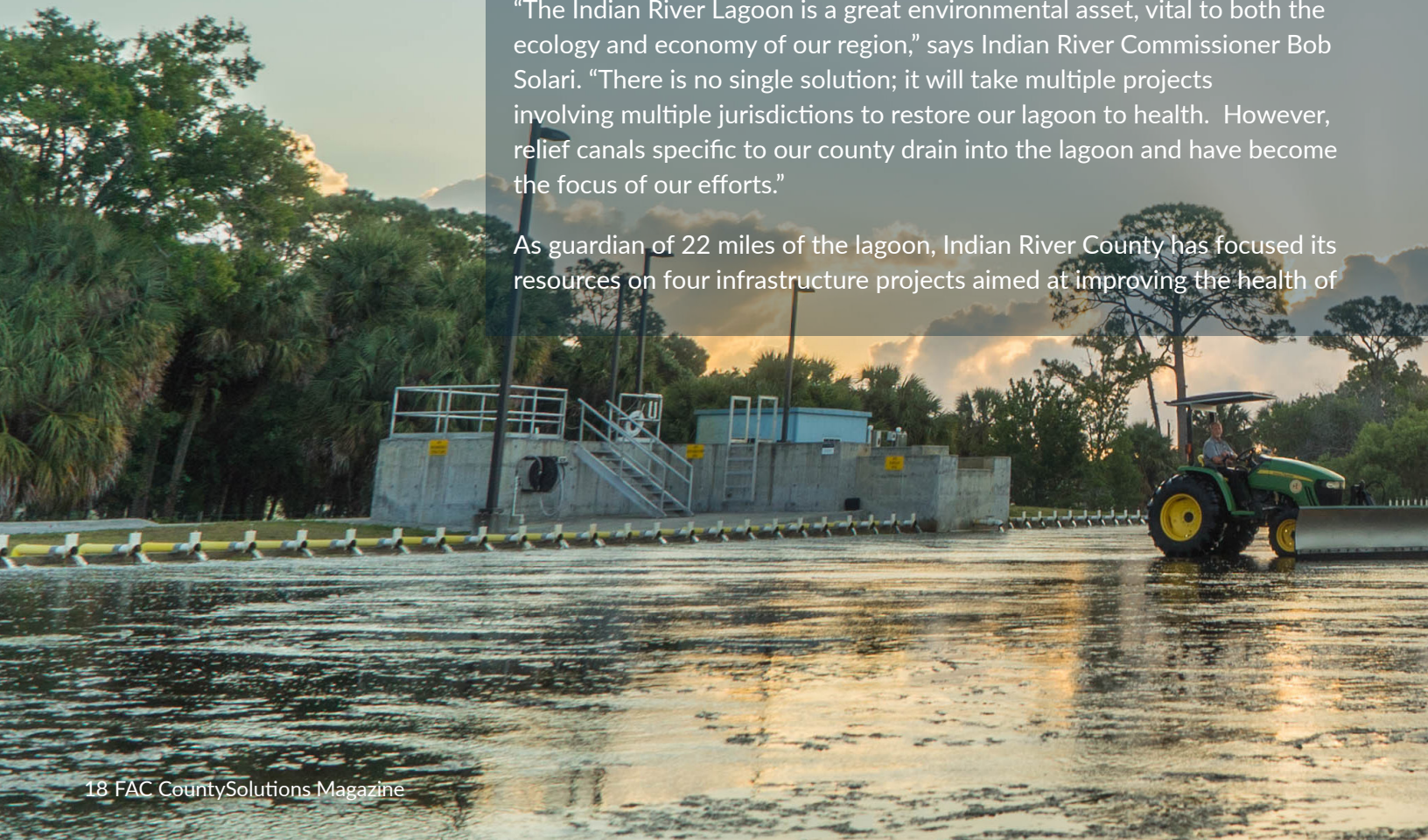
Keith McCully  
Eric Charest

**H**ome to over 3,500 different species, the 156-mile-long Indian River Lagoon is one of our nation's most diverse ecosystems and is designated an Estuary of National Significance.


A combination of factors—from residential waste and new development to invasive species and Lake Okeechobee discharges—threaten the beauty and viability of the lagoon, and much of Florida's 11,000 miles of rivers, streams and waterways. However, it's clear the most significant contributors to the current crisis are nitrogen and phosphorus—nutrients that can trigger unwanted algae explosions if left unchecked. While no single agency or local government can solve a regional crisis on its own, Indian River County is pioneering the development and deployment of new water quality technologies.

"The Indian River Lagoon is a great environmental asset, vital to both the ecology and economy of our region," says Indian River Commissioner Bob Solari. "There is no single solution; it will take multiple projects involving multiple jurisdictions to restore our lagoon to health. However, relief canals specific to our county drain into the lagoon and have become the focus of our efforts."

As guardian of 22 miles of the lagoon, Indian River County has focused its resources on four infrastructure projects aimed at improving the health of







the lagoon and its estuary. The first project is called PC Main. It's a pollution removal system that treats water from roughly 22,000 acres, using a series of self-cleaning bar screens to prevent solid pollutants from reaching the Lagoon. Four initial screens remove solids one inch and larger and six additional screens remove solids as small as 1/16th inch while two upstream sedimentation basins capture muck-creating sediment. The facility can process flows exceeding 300 million gallons a day while using less horsepower than your typical riding mower.

The vegetation and sediment collected by PC Main contain certain nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations. Floating aquatic plants are purposely detained in front of the screens by a floating boom system for long periods, and the plants absorb additional nutrients from the canal water. The boom is raised periodically, allowing the plants to enter the facility for harvesting. In this way, the mechanical system “farms” the canal’s aquatic plants, removing as many harmful nutrients from the water as possible. PC Main also protects the Lagoon by removing thousands of pounds of manmade trash and other debris from the water each year.

A second treatment facility, Egret Marsh, is a managed aquatic plant system that uses periphytic algae to remove dissolved nutrients from canal water. Think of it as good algae. The system, which cleans over 10 million gallons of water a day, also yields a useful algae byproduct.





**"We must constantly push ourselves to find new technologies and techniques because that's when the best solutions emerge."**

Here's how it works: Canal water is pumped to Egret Marsh for treatment, where it enters a 4.6 - acre sloped flowway. Algae—good algae, that is—grows atop the flowway. As canal water passes through the algae, dissolved nutrients are absorbed and sediment is trapped. Oxygen is added to the flowing water through a natural process called atmospheric transfer. The treated, heavily oxygenated water flows through a 15-acre polishing pond and marsh system for further cleaning and is returned to a canal. From there, it flows into the lagoon.

The algae crop, rich with nutrients removed from the water, is periodically harvested with specially-modified tractors. It is

then processed into high-grade compost and offered for sale as LagoonSaver Compost™—part of an innovative public-private partnership.

The two final projects are perhaps the most fascinating. Indian River County's Department of Utility Services (IRCDUS) discovered that the waste produced by reverse osmosis drinking water purification could actually reduce nutrient loads in the lagoon. Like many utilities, IRCDUS relies on the Floridan Aquifer to source water for its Reverse Osmosis (RO) Water Treatment Plants, producing clean drinking water for local residents. The process creates a by-product known as demineralization concentrate, a waste that can be difficult to dispose. While there are conventional disposal options available, Indian River County pursued two unique approaches in two different locations: Osprey Marsh and Spoonbill Marsh.

Built on the proven success of Egret

Marsh, Osprey Marsh is the county's second managed aquatic plant system. After working closely with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the county began carefully blending the demineralization concentrate with stormwater brought to the Osprey Marsh via a pumping station located on a drainage canal. This blended mixture pulses over the Osprey Marsh flowway where algal growth is accelerated by the concentration of certain beneficial compounds contained in the demineralization concentrate. The algae-coated flowway removes harmful nutrients and other pollutants from the mixture and also introduces beneficial levels of dissolved oxygen. At Egret Marsh and soon at Osprey, the treated water enters a polishing pond and wetland system for further cleaning. The cultivated algae is routinely harvested from the flowway, much like it is at Egret Marsh.

"The reverse osmosis purification process creates safe, clean drinking water for residents," explains Solari.



"And now, its treated byproduct is helping to clean waters heading to the Indian River Lagoon."

Since 2015, Osprey Marsh has received up to 10 million gallons of canal water and up to 1.5 million gallons of demineralization concentrate per day. The County is now designing a large offsite cleaning system, dubbed Osprey Acres, which will further reduce pollutants before the water enters the lagoon.

Spoonbill Marsh is a 67-acre manmade passive wetland treatment system and wildlife refuge constructed on the lagoon's shore. At Spoonbill Marsh, approximately 2 million gallons of water per day is pulled directly from

the Indian River Lagoon and blended at specific ratios with the demineralization concentrate produced from a second Indian River County water treatment plant. The blended water enters the marsh at the headworks and travels a network of runnels and ponds where aquatic vegetation and other organisms naturally reduce the water's nutrient content. The marsh also contains an expansive boardwalk where tour groups can view Spoonbill's vibrant, rehabilitated riverine marsh treatment system.

"We must restore the Indian River Lagoon to better health and we believe that new and as yet untried approaches will be part of the solution," says Solari. "We will continue to adapt the best available technologies and techniques to our

local circumstances—and we will not rest until the Lagoon is once again healthy and vibrant."

There is little doubt that water quality will remain a challenge for years to come, particularly as Florida's population continues to grow. However, proactive solutions that couple ecological experience with technical know-how are already making a difference. Indian River County's use of mechanical screens, marshland, and algae to remove nutrients and other pollutants while improving the environment is just one more example of how local communities are using big ideas to tackle today's toughest challenges.

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# AN AMISH-MENNONITE COMMUNITY PUTS DOWN ROOTS WITH COUNTY HELP

Jason Bartolone

Tucked away off a busy intersection in Sarasota County, Fla., is a neighborhood unlike any other: Pinecraft.

**P**rimarily a walking and bicycling community, Pinecraft has been home to Amish and Mennonite families for more than 70 years. The local population is comprised mostly of seasonal visitors who come by the busload each winter from Ohio and Indiana, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Although it's bordered by two major roadways and surrounded by a typical urban/residential environment, visiting Pinecraft can be a bit like stepping back in time. Quaint, modest homes closely line the streets. Residents, dressed in their characteristic plain clothing, can be seen transporting fresh produce in the baskets of their tricycles; gathering for lively shuffleboard tournaments at the local park or weekly services at the Tourist Mennonite Church; and crowding around

the colorful flyers and want ads posted outside the neighborhood post office, which functions like a community water cooler (or low-tech Reddit, for Millennial readers).

"I don't believe there's another community like it in the country where different sects of Mennonites and Amish have come here for vacation and for fellowship," said Todd Emrich, resident and owner of Yoder's Restaurant, a Pinecraft landmark loved by residents and tourists alike for its country cooking and handmade pies.

The neighborhood is only one-quarter of a square mile in size, but its population soars by as many as 3,000 residents each winter, leading to concerns about safety and land use. A few years ago, residents approached Sarasota County planning staff with their desires for crosswalks, bus stops and other neighborhood improvements. County staff also recognized that the short-term rental of houses, small businesses operating out of residential properties, and







non-conforming lots frequently found in Pinecraft would need to be reconciled with county zoning regulations.

"To have this unique area interwoven into the fabric of the community is not only an asset but a challenge," said Tom Polk, the Sarasota County's director of Planning and Development Services.

Polk and his team realized that creating a community plan respectful of Pinecraft's people would require consideration of design alternatives for roadway infrastructure and amenities and, more importantly, a true collaboration with the residents. A series of community meetings led to

a stronger partnership between the county and a population not typically involved in local government.

"The residents here are very encouraged by their dealing with the county," Emrich said. "They've established a high level of trust, and it's just been a great conversation." Because the issues were so specific to Pinecraft, the community also enlisted the help of Goshen College, a liberal arts college in northern Indiana known for its leadership in intercultural and international education. Three of the college's interns worked closely with residents to capture valuable data about their needs and desires, and the project evolved into a new cultural partnership that will preserve and enhance Pinecraft's

quality of life while addressing many of the neighborhood's planning and zoning issues—all with minimal budgetary impact.

In February, the Sarasota County Commission approved the community-led Pinecraft Neighborhood Plan, which features two main components. The first is a zoning overlay district that would address some of the land uses and building forms that are unique to Pinecraft. For instance, a resident might want to operate a bicycle rental business out of a home but without the typical requirements for vehicle parking, since so many Pinecraft residents don't drive during their stay in Sarasota County.

The second component approved by the county commission is a



neighborhood mobility plan to address vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety. One proposal would legalize golf carts on certain local streets within the community; another proposes construction of a pedestrian bridge across Philippi Creek to connect parts of the neighborhood. The mobility plan would take a comprehensive look at existing and needed signage on Pinecraft streets in an effort to prevent sign clutter and preserve the community's identity.

The innovative partnership also allows Pinecraft residents to be largely responsible for developing and funding implementation of the community plan while the county serves as a planning and technical resource. Polk says it could serve as a model for other neighborhood improvement projects.

"The key thing to this is it's been a collaboration," Polk said. "It's been a partnership between the county and community from the outset and will continue to be going forward." Residents like Orva Bontrager, who's been coming south to Pinecraft from Indiana for years, say they are excited about the new partnership with Sarasota County and what it will mean for the community's future.

"The county has done a lot for us," Bontrager said. "Together if we work with the county, and the county works with us, we can make it work."

For more information please visit:  
[www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net)



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Tracy Kusmierz

**D**evotees of HBO's off-color comedy *Silicon Valley* or regular readers of *Entrepreneur* may already be familiar with the term business incubator. For the uninitiated, the idea is simple: Business incubators accelerate the growth of startup companies by supplying access to expertise and capital. Counties already play an important role in economic development. Now, they're investing in local economies by hatching homegrown business incubators.

**Leon County.** In May 2014, Leon County partnered with Domi Ventures to create Domi Station, an incubator that offers access to business development services, funding, and a network of mentors, investors, and collaborators to support early-stage technology companies. Domi Station is now home to dozens of new companies that have already created high-quality jobs. Those jobs are helping Leon County

retain the college-educated talent emerging from FSU and FAMU.

**Hillsborough County.** Launched in late-2014, the Mark Sharpe Entrepreneur Collaborative Center (ECC) is a public-private collaboration providing entrepreneurs easy access to business service providers, resources, mentorship, and specialty training. Operated by the Hillsborough County Economic Development Department, the ECC facility near downtown Tampa provides state-of-the-art technology and collaborative space for local nonprofits and agencies to host no-cost and low-cost entrepreneurial support opportunities and events. The ECC has already hosted more than 475 programs and 6,600 participants since opening and is supported by more than 40 business and community partners.

**Manatee County.** While both Hillsborough and Leon counties have found success with dedicated centers, Manatee County has co-located its incubator within the halls of its Central Library. The Library offers entrepreneurs access to a unique resource: Reference USA—an immense database of national business and consumer research. A product of the data services company, Infogroup, ReferenceUSA provides historical information, marketing tools, and extensive access to the data many young consumer startups need to succeed. While different counties are taking different incubator approaches, it's clear that sparking and supporting entrepreneurship is the name of the game in today's increasingly-competitive, high-stakes economic climate.

For more information please visit:  
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For more information please visit: [www.osceola.org](http://www.osceola.org)





PINELLAS



# HEALTH CARE FOR OUR HOMELESS

Cragin Mosteller

How do we better care for the homeless while also reducing healthcare costs? Many Sunshine State counties are wrestling with that very question—and one county is leading the way. Pinellas County's Safe Harbor Shelter was already considered a model for addressing homelessness when the county launched its new Bayside Health Clinic in early 2016. The roughly 3000 square foot health clinic is projected to serve 1,200 homeless citizens annually, offering exams, counseling and dental care. Located next to the Safe Harbor Shelter, the facility is situated in the heart of Pinellas County's homeless population. By focusing on patient-centered preventative care, the facility will reduce emergency room visits and shrink healthcare costs.

For more information please visit: [www.pinellascounty.org](http://www.pinellascounty.org)








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# FINAL THOUGHTS



I've worked with local governments for more than 10 years and I'm constantly amazed by their creative, innovative and efficient approaches to increasing services while reducing costs. When I became Executive Director of FAC last year, I was eager to share these incredible county solutions so we can learn from each other and so others can see what we have always known: With the right tools and the right talent, local government can be just as innovative as any business.

This priority is fulfilled with the launch of *CountySolutions*, which spotlights unique and innovative ideas across Florida's 67 counties. I hope you will put this magazine in your offices, lobbies and satellite buildings so your community can see how county solutions are overcoming big challenges in their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Shalley', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Scott Shalley**

*Executive Director & Publisher*

# COUNTY SOLUTIONS

Summer 2016 | Issue 1

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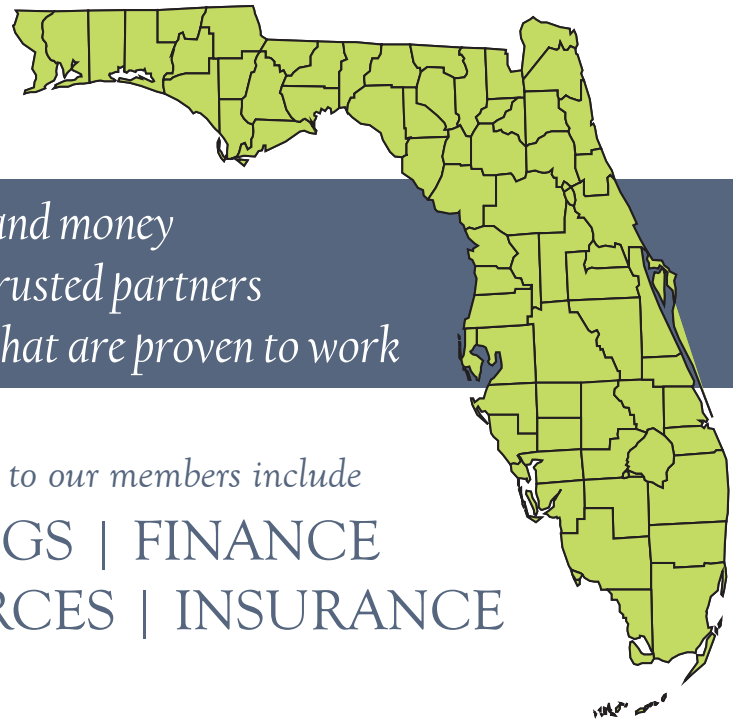
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