

“Lets Make Our Vision A Reality”

In January of 1848, a California sawmill worker found a few tiny gold nuggets in the American River and thus created the largest human migration in American history. The town of Coloma would explode with growth by the end of that year as settlers moved from as far away as the British Isles. Fortune was the dream that brought miners in, but it would not be the fate of this town. Gold would eventually beset the shortsighted settlers of this once prosperous California town. Less than a quarter century after that first nugget was fished out of the water, the town was in a struggle to survive and destined to become a ghost town.

The people of Coloma, California were too focused on the present, that they overlooked sustaining their wealth once mining gold was no longer profitable. Fast forward 150 years and you reach another great American migration right here in the Sunshine State. The United States Census Bureau estimates that Florida’s population is growing by over 400,000 people each year. For decades, these additions have been supported by this State’s proverbial gold, sunshine and our booming tourism industry. As Florida continues to grow exponentially, it is vital to our local economies that new industries are given the opportunity to develop.

Fortunately for our area, we have been blessed with such an opportunity; as the Scripps Research Institute opted to expand in northern Palm Beach County. Scripps will launch the biotech miracle that can provide economic development and employment opportunities for years to come. The Treasure Coast can be a part of this developing prosperity, or it can remain on the sideline and wait to become a bedroom community for Palm Beach County commuters.

One of the country's largest, private, non-profit research organizations, the Scripps Research Institute has always stood at the forefront of basic biomedical science. As this La Jolla, California based institution branches to the Atlantic coast, hundreds of smaller biotech and research business ventures will follow. This will in turn create economic development, high wage opportunities for the local workforce and education opportunities for students of all ages.

The Treasure Coast has historically been dependent on agriculture, construction and tourism as its main economic engine. But as we venture into the 21st century we must embrace the biotechnological research movement to reverse the current trend of becoming a ‘bedroom community.’ Everyday, we as public servants aim to provide for the betterment of the communities of which we serve. I believe it is time we go the next step and create a true research and education region similar to the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina. If our area is to reap the benefits of having the biotech research giant right down the road, actions must be taken now.

On January 6, 2005, I proposed the creation of a St. Lucie County Research and Education Authority (REA) as a local bill to the county's legislative delegation. The measure passed unanimously and will head to the State Capitol for the 2005 legislative session. The creation of the REA will give the county a structured and financially backed effort to help lure the high paying jobs and educational opportunities that will follow Scripps to the area.

The key factor to bringing to the area is recruitment through incentive, which the REA will be able to provide. Through this Authority, St. Lucie County will be able to purchase large land parcels with planned infrastructure or construct and provide essential lab space. The REA will also be influential in coordinating public and private partnerships to develop educational and research facilities. Most importantly, the REA can help this community create a research and education sense of identity.

Through a 'Growth Management' surtax, this county can assure that future growth pays for itself; a necessity for one of the nation's fastest growing counties. Minor assessments on all residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural purchases will enable this area to generate the needed incentives to become a research and education region.

The residents of the Treasure Coast should have a say in the decision making of this county's growth. For this reason, the creation of the Research and Education Authority will only come to fruition if you as the electorate approve. When this measure makes its way through the Florida House, the Florida Senate and the Governor's office, its fate will then fall in the hands of the St. Lucie County citizens. The Research and Education Authority will be presented to the local electorate as a referendum in the 2006 general election.

"A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world." Our growing community can learn from this old proverb. With the Scripps miracle on the horizon, the biotech vision has been laid out for the Treasure Coast. The establishment of a Research and Education Authority will aide in instituting the proper plan to realize this vision. Research and Educational opportunities are this area's future. Someday, this area will be recognized as the Treasure Coast simply because of its noted history and location. The area's more notable identity lies with a future as a national leader in life sciences research and education.