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SGI Businessmen Helped Originate “Forgotten Coast”

It was 1992 and most St. George Island and mainland business folks were struggling to make ends meet. The understaffed and financially strapped Apalachicola Bay Area Chamber (which included St. George) was doing the best it could to draw visitors to the area. It was an uphill climb for an area that was virtually unheard of and at the very end of the road. No matter which direction you were coming from.

Good news, a state tourism promotion organization was mounting a major campaign. Only problem was that the area on the state tourism map between Panama City and Tallahassee was completely blank.

The publisher (Chuck Spicer) of a local monthly tourism publication was at wit's end. He encouraged chamber and business leaders along this coastal region to gather together in a promotional effort to literally and figuratively put the area on the map.

Representatives of the St. George Island Business Association were on hand for those meetings and even hosted one of the gatherings.

All generally agreed that something had to be done. But two things had to be accomplished first. Give the area a “catchy” nickname and figure out how to raise a little promotional money.

At a meeting in Mexico Beach (eastern Bay County) it was decided that if the state had “forgot to put us on the state tourism promotion map then we should become The Forgotten Coast.”

Each of the some seven groups, including the island businessmen, agreed to chip in \$500.

So Cindy Clark, owner of Bay Media Services, and Spicer, set about on the unenviable task of promoting this remote, rural region on a total budget of \$3,500.

With Clark doing the graphics and production work and Spicer doing the writing (and with some magnificent artwork donated by artist Keith Johns) the first ever “Florida’s Forgotten Coast” brochure was created. It included a most attractive four-color, hand drawn map by Jim Green. It was distributed by the \$500 donors from Wakulla County on the east to Mexico Beach on the west. Businesses were encouraged to include “Florida’s Forgotten Coast” on letterheads, posters and advertisements. Spicer changed the name of his publication to “Forgotten Coastline.”

Environmentally aware and nostalgia seeking tourists were encouraged to “Come back in Time to Florida’s Forgotten Coast.”

The rest is history. Through a lot of additional work over the years by individual businesses and Chamber offices the area became known, by folks from both near and far, as the “Forgotten Coast.”

And because area counties adhered to pretty strict, state-approved “Comprehensive Plans”, the landscape and attributes of the region remain pretty much the same as they were back in 1992. Only more people now know about the all-natural attributes of St. George Island and the area and it has evolved into one of the leading laidback ecotourism destinations in Florida.

Not bad for a bunch of determined “rural” folks with a \$3,500 budget!