



THE PUNTA GORDA HISTORY CENTER
Preserving our Past, Inspiring our Future

**Proposal: Punta Gorda History Center Archives
and Museum**

**Presented To: Charlotte County Government,
Florida**

November 11, 2013

Prepared By:

Gene Murtha – President Punta Gorda History Center

In late 2011 a group of dedicated citizens was formed based upon a request from one of the most widely recognized Florida historians in the world, Mr. Vernon Peeples. The request was to help him find an organization and location in Punta Gorda to house his massive collection of Punta Gorda and Charlotte Harbor historical items. He realized that some future day, his collection would pass from his caring hands, and safeguarding its future needed to be urgently addressed. With this request the Punta Gorda History Center was formed.

The group worked diligently incorporating and establishing itself as a Non-Profit 501 C 3. Many volunteers stepped forward to assist in seeing this critical need come to fruition. Countless hours have been dedicated by an impressive group of volunteer professionals and concerned citizens.

A Board of Directors was established. They are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Gene Murtha | 9. Frank Desquin |
| 2. Eddie Webb | 10. Linda Wilson |
| 3. Ed Wotitzky | 11. Ron Norsell |
| 4. Bucky McQueen | 12. Mary Ann Hughes |
| 5. Ed Uhland | 13. Theresa Murtha |
| 6. John Chalifoux | 14. Vernon Peeples |
| 7. Nancy Prafke | 15. Todd Katz |
| 8. Helen Wrobbel | |

Along with the development of Bylaws, a Case Statement and a formal Business Plan, a Mission Statement for the new organization was created. It is as follows:

Mission Statement

“The purposes for which this Corporation is formed are to conduct activities that are exclusively charitable, educational and/or scientific within the meaning of Section 501 (C) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Without limiting the foregoing, the purpose of this corporation shall be to promote and encourage historical research; to acquire by purchase, gift, devise or otherwise, the title to or custody and control of historic records, relics, and other things of historic interest and the preservation of same; to foster and promote public knowledge of and interest in local, state and national history.

As can be clearly seen, “to foster and promote public knowledge” of our history is what the Punta Gorda History Center will be doing as aggressively as possible. It is our intent to establish an archive in Punta Gorda for Mr. Peeples private collection, enabling us to insure that his collection is safely digitized, stored and accessible. Once safely addressed, we will begin an educational program that will introduce all those interested to the rich history of Punta Gorda and Charlotte Harbor. However, first, we need to secure the collection in a safe and secure location to begin the archival work.

As the organization matures other private historical collections are expected to be donated making the Punta Gorda History Center a prestigious research and educational facility that both Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda will be extremely proud of having.

Being a lifelong resident of Punta Gorda, Mr. Peeples has stipulated that the location of the Center must be in Punta Gorda, because his priceless collection is mainly focused on Punta Gorda and Charlotte Harbor. He does not want it leaving the City and Charlotte County. Therefore, the quest for a suitable location that can serve as an archive and museum site for his priceless collection in Punta Gorda was begun.

Several sites were considered such as the restored Court House, but it is now slated to be used for Juvenile Court in January, 2014 after sitting vacant for years. Other sites were discussed and reviewed, but would not work such as the IMPAC Facility on Marion Ave. in Punta Gorda. Multiple frame type houses were discussed, but due to the potential of fire and destruction by a hurricane, they were all ruled out. So, the Punta Gorda History Center is still searching for a home.

In the last month, by coincidence it was discovered that the prior Charlotte County Health and Human Services buildings (Exhibit A) in Punta Gorda on Cooper Street were vacant. There are two buildings. According to our understanding the

larger building is approximately 12,000 square feet (Exhibit B), and the smaller building is 2,400 square feet (Exhibit C). With much appreciation, Mr. David Milligan arranged a tour of the facilities for us. We were incredibly excited about how the smaller building might work perfectly for the Punta Gorda History Center, after it is renovated. The smaller building has clearly received far less maintenance attention, and would require it being stripped of all interior walls and fixtures then reconfigured with more usable space. However, the potential size appears to be ideal.

Although we are only interested in the smaller building, in thinking about the Charlotte County Historical Center on Bayshore in Charlotte Harbor and the situation with the deterioration of the support pilings and it carrying a \$600,000 price tag to fix them, as a suggestion the County might want to consider moving their operation into the larger 12,000 square feet building. If the Punta Gorda History Center was in the smaller building it would be a spectacular history campus, across the street from Charlotte High School and in walking distance to the Middle School. It would be a fantastic opportunity for both schools to take advantage of an enormous educational resource by having both History Centers side by side on their doorstep.

If the longer term strategic plan item of building a South County Library and Archive, as spelled out in the 2007 County Plan, was to be initiated, and theorizing it is at a site like Edison College, it would tie in perfectly with the History Centers on Cooper St. The Charlotte County Historical Center in the 12,000 square foot building would function as an Annex facility to the Edison Campus, South County Library and Archive. The Punta Gorda History Center housed in the 2,400 square foot building would augment both facilities as an informational and educational partner. It seems it would be a perfect scenario.

Focusing on the request by the Punta Gorda History Center to Mr. David Milligan, Director of Facilities, Construction & Maintenance, and the Charlotte County Government Board of Commissioners for the long term lease of the smaller building, following are our thoughts for your consideration.

- 1. The building would be offered to the Punta Gorda History Center on a long term lease for a nominal fee such as \$10 per year.**
- 2. The County would remove the existing interior walls and fixtures, and the Punta Gorda History Center would build it out to suit its needs.**
- 3. The County would continue to cover the property and casualty insurance on both buildings, and the Punta**

Gorda History Center would cover the liability insurance on the smaller building.

- 4. Considering the Punta Gorda History Center is a start-up, it will need two years of fund raising grace time to assume full coverage of any expenses it incurs. After the grace period, It would cover all its operating expenses such as electricity, water and sewage, etc. It would also cover all the costs of any interior renovations and build out after the removal of the interior walls and fixtures.**
- 5. We would coordinate historical educational events with Charlotte County Historical Center in the spirit of a working partnership, and to maximize the value of the two facilities for our citizens and students.**
- 6. In the future whenever the South County Library is built, the Punta Gorda History Center will tie in its archives for access by the Library to provide information to as broad a base of researchers and interested parties as possible.**

The above is a high level view of our request. We would be more than happy to sit down with anyone to discuss it further.

We thank everyone in advance for their time and their consideration for our request. Of course, we do hope that it is approved, and the Punta Gorda History Center and the Charlotte County Government moves hand-in-hand to provide

a world class center for regional historical research and education.

Gene Murtha

President – Punta Gorda History Center

941-258-2080

EXHIBIT "A"



TOTAL COMPLEX

EXHIBIT "B"



LARGER BUILDING

EXHIBIT "C"



SMALLER BUILDING