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Chiefland boosts local economy and increases traffic safety with road project completion



In this still shot and this video, Chiefland Mayor Betty Walker cuts the ribbon with City Manager Mary Ellzey by her side. City Commissioner Rollin Hudson and City Commissioner Donald Lawrence are also seen here, as are Vision Committee members Jason Kennedy and Michael Michaelis and others. Vice Mayor Chris Jones arrived soon after this moment, and he expressed his happiness with the completion of this project.

Story, Photo and Video By Jeff M. Hardison © May 4, 2017 at 4:37 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- Chiefland Mayor Betty Walker said on Tuesday afternoon (May 2) that the recently completed road project on Northwest 11th Drive was "a long time coming."

City Manager Mary Ellzey spoke next at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that opened a thoroughfare behind Barbecue Bill's at 19th Avenue that goes all the way to the stop sign near CVS Drug Store and leading into the Walmart parking lot.

The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) allowed for the expenditure of up to \$430,000 for the 2,000-foot stretch to be paved.

The most expensive part of the project was to cross a ditch that now has a culvert to provide for drainage under the new road.

Ellzey said this project has been sought for 20 years. A Vision Committee for Chiefland has existed in one form or another since 1997, she said.

Over the years, those committee members have proposed various ideas. One solid idea that has reached the point of reality now is this road.

Vice Mayor Chris Jones is the liaison for that current committee. He arrived soon after the ribbon was cut. Vision Committee members Jason Kennedy and Michael Michaelis were present.

Chiefland City Commission members joining Mayor Walker, and Vice Mayor Jones at the event were Rollin Hudson and Donald Lawrence. Only City Commissioner Teresa Barron was unable to attend the ribbon-cutting event on Tuesday afternoon.

This road provides parallel access running north and south, and it sits to the east of U.S.

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Highway 19.

Not only does this road now provide more access to Walmart, but other business interests between the barbecue eatery and that shopping center are better served as well.

Ellzey said that when Cindy Dunkle of the FDOT office in Chiefland told Ellzey in 2014 that the SCOP grant might be used to build this road, the city manager was overjoyed. And now that longtime dream of the Vision Committee has reached fruition.

Ellzey mentioned her appreciation for the work by Sam Agerton, who like Dunkle is of the Chiefland FDOT office; and the city manager said she is also thankful for the work by Kim Evans and David Cerlanek of the FDOT office in Lake City.

Walker Construction completed the project in 33 construction days, which was 46 calendar days, Ellzey said, and there was only one rain day. Ellzey said she enjoyed being able to see progress each day as the road construction moved along in a relatively short time.

Andrew Carswell and Lee Mills of Mills Engineering were thanked for their work in the project as well. Legacy Engineering was thanked by Ellzey for its construction engineering inspection service.

Chiefland Water and Facilities Manager Shane Keene and Wastewater Supervisor Randy Wilkerson were thanked by City Manager Ellzey for their contributions of work that made the whole project a success – all of the way through the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Seth Sache, the newest project and finance coordinator for the city, was at the event as well.

Vision Committee Michaelis said this road improvement promises to help business interests along this stretch. He mentioned his belief that Five Star Pizza, which took over the facility where Hungry Howie's used to be in Chiefland, would have remained there if people could have had the access to that business that they will have now thanks to this road.

Michaelis also mentioned that he sees how the FDOT could make the dangerous crossing on U.S. Highway 19, at the intersection where there is no traffic control light near Taco Bell on the east and Murphy Express on the west (Northwest and Northeast 21st Avenue), so that people must turn right from either side.

Currently motorists can cross U.S. 19 at that off-center 21st Avenue intersection and there are often crashes.

If drivers used the new extension from the Taco-Bell-Murphy Express intersection to the light at U.S. 19 at Northwest 19th Avenue, Michaelis said, then they could use the light at U.S. 19 there.

The idea of making the 21st Avenue North intersection with U.S. 19 into a right-turn only turn from the avenue onto the highway has not made much progress beyond people simply talking about the potential.