

HardisonInk.com



Chamber learns about future boat ramp



Withlacoochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce President Marilyn Ladner welcomes members and guests to the annual dinner meeting Tuesday night (Sept. 25)

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 28, 2018 at 4:08 p.m.

YANKEETOWN – The Annual Dinner Meeting of the Withlacoochee Gulf Area

HardisonInk.com

Chamber of Commerce, sponsored by Duke Energy, provided Yankeetown Mayor Jack Schofield and others with an opportunity to speak about the future \$650,000 worth of improvements to the county boat ramp at the end of Levy County Road 40 West.



Lynn Ladner, the husband of Chamber President Madilyn Ladner, works on the slow-boil dinner.



Inglis Mayor Drinda Merritt speaks with Levy County Visitors Bureau Director Tish Whitehurst during the socializing time before the dinner and meeting.

HardisonInk.com



Not captured on film before the corn was cut from the cob, this view of one plate of the low country boil dinner falls short of reflecting the true deliciousness of the dish. The huge shrimp were bought from none other than Art “The Shrimp Man” Aho. Aho is a local celebrity and is a renowned supplier of excellent shrimp. He drives a 1988 (front) and 1985 (back) Dodge Ram truck that has registered hundreds of thousands of miles on its odometer.

Chocolate cake and key lime pie are seen inviting diners to enjoy them for dessert.



HardisonInk.com



Levy County Visitors Bureau Director Tisha Whitehurst provides listeners with updates on the tourism industry in Levy County and on the progress with RESTORE Act Grant funding.



Some of the many people at the Chamber event are seen here.

HardisonInk.com



Chamber President Marilyn Ladner holds up an environmentally friendly shopping tote that the Chamber plans to use as part of its own marketing plan for the Chamber members.

Held Tuesday night (Sept. 25) in the Yankeetown-Inglis Woman's Club building, the Chamber event included a slow-cooker low country boil dinner of shrimp, sausage, potatoes and corn-on-the-cob.

The event is also known as a "Boil & Brew," therefore Coors, and another brand of beer, and various wines were available, as were water and tea, for the beverages of the evening.

Dessert was chocolate cake and key lime pie.

Everyone was invited to enjoy "seconds" as well as to take home dessert if they so desired.

Withlacochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce President Marilyn Ladner welcomed everyone to the meeting. Ladner, a retired provost of the College of Central Florida's Levy Center, was joined by her husband Lynn, who was among the cooks.

Other officers of the Withlacochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce, which is also known as the Chamber of Commerce of Inglis and Yankeetown, are President-Elect Lauren Winn, Secretary Cery Logeman and Treasurer Dr. Richard Streeter. Among the members of this Chamber's board are Inglis Mayor Drinda Merritt, Lisa (Hall) Levesque and Helen Ciallella.

It was mentioned that Lisa Levesque just recently married Scott Levesque.

At the 2017 event, the young woman who was then known as Lisa Hall accepted an award on behalf of Scott's Automotive Repair for the Best Scarecrow in the Chamber contest. Scott Levesque owns that business that had the scarecrow judged as best in the Chamber's Halloween competition of 2017.

As President Ladner opened the 2018 meeting, she mentioned that Community Relations Manager Dorothy Pernu of Duke Energy Florida was in the crowd, and Ladner personally thanked Pernu and the investor-owned utility for helping the Chamber with its annual banquet on behalf of the Withlacochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce.

President Ladner introduced guests who were present for the annual supper,

HardisonInk.com

including Levy County Commissioner Mike Joyner, Levy County Commissioner Matt Brooks, Yankeetown Mayor Schofield, Inglis Mayor Merritt and Jim Green, who is the chapter chair of SCORE of Citrus County, which has embraced Levy County in its coverage area to become SCORE of Citrus and Levy Counties.



Dr. Richard Streeter, a longtime leader in the local Chamber, enjoys dessert.

Ladner spoke about some of Chamber's success in the 2017-2018 Chamber Year.

The Chamber president started the year by putting together welcome kits in January.

These welcome kits included maps, and other material to help the new Chamber members know about the area, including material from other Chamber members.

Ladner invited Chamber members to donate for other future bags that will be given away to new home buyers in this part of the county.

There are about 60 Chamber members now, she said.

One accomplishment this year was the creation of maps that show 14 trails for kayakers in the Yankeetown area. That was thanks to help from participants in the Hidden Coast Paddling Adventure.

Ladner took the maps, which are water- and tear-resistant, to places where guests are inclined to use them to go kayaking. (The word here is "tear" as in a synonym for "rip" rather than tear being the type of water that falls from eyes.)

That Hidden Coast Paddling Adventure is in Cedar Key on Oct. 3-7 this year, but next fall it is scheduled to return to the coast off of Yankeetown.

This annual adventure is along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico of Taylor, Dixie and Levy counties and there are currently four coastal cities that take turns hosting it. For more information about this event, please click [HERE](#).

<https://hiddencoastpaddlingadventure.com/>

Ladner mentioned that she adopted Yankeetown City Manager Sherri MacDonald's

HardisonInk.com

idea to have Realtors who sell houses in the Inglis-Yankeetown market to give those homebuyers a card to send them to Yankeetown City Hall, where they will get a welcome bag from the Chamber.

President Ladner invited Chamber members to donate to make these welcome bags a treat for new property owners in the area. She suggested that many people like coupons.



Yankeetown Mayor Jack Schofield speaks about the future improvements to the Levy County Boat Ramp at the end of Levy County Road 40 West. Levy County has several boat ramps leading into the Gulf of Mexico and the Suwannee River. They are all under the care and direction of the Levy County Parks and Recreation Department. County Parks and Recreation Department Director Matt Weldon was present to help Mayor Schofield provide listeners with accurate information.

The Boat Ramp

One speaker during the evening meal was Inglis Mayor Drinda Merritt, but she spoke about progress in regard to a whitewater kayaking attraction in the possible future and she requested that announcement be held until after the official announcement, which happened the following morning.

The keynote speaker of the night was Yankeetown Mayor Jack Schofield. Levy County Commissioner John Meeks had been scheduled to join him to speak about the county boat ramp at the end of Levy County Road 40 West, which ends at the Gulf of Mexico.

Chairman Meeks was absent Tuesday night because his father Robert Meeks was dying. During the opening prayer of that night, people were asked to pray for John Meeks and his family, and for the people who suffered from being in the path of Hurricane Florence.

Robert Meeks went to Heaven early this morning (Friday, Sept. 28).

At last year's banquet, Chairman Meeks had talked about the \$650 Florida Boating

HardisonInk.com

Improvement Grant, which became awarded to improve that ramp.

To help Chamber members understand the history of those planned boat ramp improvements, Schofield mentioned that the Chamber approached the County Commission in 2016 seeking improvements at that ramp – and more.

Improved parking, a better boat ramp and possibly a separate fishing pier were sought, Schofield said. Schofield mentioned that the laymen who approached the County Commission estimated the cost for all of their desired improvements would be about \$1.3 million.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) was tasked with directing use of the \$650,000 for boat ramp improvements, Schofield said.

Just over a month ago, on Aug. 22, the FWC returned a signed contract to provide this service Levy County Parks and Recreation Department Director Matt Weldon said, as he helped Schofield deliver correct information.

Dewberry Engineering won the bid after the Levy County Commission sent requests for proposals. Dewberry has completed surveys for the boat ramp improvements, Schofield said.

This firm is working on obtaining permits for the project through the Southwest Water Management District (Swiftmud). Levy County is split between two water management districts – Swiftmud and the Suwannee River Water Management District.

The Levy County Commission recently adopted a resolution to show the Florida Legislature its desire to have the county included only in the SRWMD. This concept is being repeated, after at least last year's Levy County Legislative Delegation meeting where county leaders told state leaders about this request.

The idea was mentioned Wednesday morning during Mayor Merritt's conference about the whitewater kayaking attraction, and there was some alluding to a potential question in regard to the Withlacoochee River, which serves as a county line boundary between Citrus and Levy counties (including Lake Rousseau, which another point of interest).

As for the CR 40 West Levy County Boat Ramp improvements, in addition to Swiftmud, permits, there are probably permits required from the United States Corps of Engineers, Schofield said, due to dredging. And the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will need to review the project to reduce hazards to the environment during the construction project, the Yankeetown mayor added.

In October or November, the Levy County Board of County Commissioners probably will be seeing conceptual drawings from Dewberry, Schofield said.

Mayor Schofield said that during a County Commission meeting, Chairman Meeks had intimated that the Dewberry group may present the drawings to business and community interests at the Inglis Community Center for input.

Permits will be granted, Schofield said. Contractors will be selected by the County Commission through a competitive bid process and the project may begin as soon as March of 2019.

As Schofield started to speak about the county potentially seeking other grants for the ramp improvements, Levy County Commissioner Joyner excused himself from the room. He asked to be invited back in after that discussion.

The reason he needed to leave the room was to avoid the potential of discussion about a matter on which he and Levy County Commissioner Brooks could foreseeably vote. Commissioner Brooks made no comments about the existing grant or seeking more

HardisonInk.com

grants, and there was not really a discussion so much as Mayor Schofield speaking; however, Joyner took the action to preclude any appearance of meeting in the “shadows” rather than meeting at a publicly advertised, public meeting in the “open sunshine.”

After the boat ramp update for Chamber members, Commissioner Joyner rejoined the group.

Schofield reminded marina owners that they may see an influx of people using their boat ramps, and other interests need to be aware of boaters accessing other areas for launching in the south Levy County region, which will be impacted in this manner during this boat ramp renovation.

Levy County Visitors Bureau Director Tisha Whitehurst, who is also the county’s person for the RESTORE Act Grants, spoke about those aspects of progress in the county.

Whitehurst said the website for the Levy County Visitor’s Bureau has been updated. That website can be viewed at <http://visitnaturecoast.com/>.

Whitehurst said she would like people to send the department pictures of places to visit in Levy County so that there can be even more for people to see on that site.

In regard to the RESTORE Act, the Withlacoochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce has an accepted application, she said.

The grant application for \$34,175 has been accepted, she said.

This is scheduled to fund an unmanned 24-hour kiosk at the Chamber of Commerce office. That kiosk was also among the topics from the previous year’s Chamber banquet.

Included in that previous 2017 story is a video of the speech Chairman Meeks gave in regard to the future boat ramp improvement.

To see the 2017 story, photos and video from the Annual Withlacoochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce Dinner in 2017, click [HERE](#).