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Ribbon cut on \$34,000 kiosk



Standing next to the life-size Elvis, is Terri Harris, the staff member of the Withlacoochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce who helps people and the Chamber connect with each other. In addition to the 24-hour kiosk, Harris helps people know about Chamber members and activities. She is in the Chamber office located at 167 W. Levy County Road 40 on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. It is next door to the Central Florida Electric Cooperative office in Inglis.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 11, 2021 at 5:11 p.m.

INGLIS – Some members of the Withlacoochee Gulf Area Chamber of Commerce (WGACOC) and of the Levy County RESTORE Act Committee celebrated a \$34,000 kiosk project with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday morning (Aug. 11).

In this video, Chris Cowart cuts the ribbon and Dr. Richard Streeter says 'It worked.' Streeter was surprised that the big scissors are not just a novelty item. Some area Chambers of Commerce have these scissors just for this purpose – cutting ribbons. **CLICK ON THE PHOTO TO SEE THE [VIDEO](#).**



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Dr. Richard Streeter holds the scissors to be used in cutting the ribbon. On the left in the picture is Chris Cowart.



In the background on the left, wearing a mask and sunglasses is Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks. In the center of the picture is Tisha Whitehurst. Chris Cowart is the other person in the picture.

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(from left) Chris Cowart, a representation of Elvis, Lilly Rooks, Tisha Whitehurst and Richard Streeter.

The total cost for the project was about \$34,000 and the 24-hour-a-day touch-screen device cost about \$6,000, according to records.

Tisha Whitehurst, director of the Levy County Tourist Development Council and grant coordinator for the RESTORE Act funds allocated to Levy County, was at the event.

Other members of the Levy County RESTORE Act Committee who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony were Committee Chairman Chris Cowart, who is the superintendent of schools for Levy County and Dr. Richard Streeter, who is not only on the RESTORE Act Committee but also is the president of the WGACOC.

Also attending the event were Leah Gamble, the manager of instructional services at the Levy County campus of the College of Central Florida, also of the WGACOC, Helen Ciallella of Yankeetown and of the WGACOC, Lee Lord, manager of Eleanor Oaks RV Park and a member of the WGACOC, and Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks.

In addition to Cowart and Streeter, the other Levy County RESTORE Act Committee members are Committee Vice Chairman John Meeks (representing the County Commission); Holly McGlashan of the College of Central Florida (representing Higher Education Institution); Leslie Sturmer of UF/IFAS Levy County Extension (representing Aquaculture); fishing guide Dennis Voyles (Tourism Industry representative); Jolie Davis (Citizen representative); Richard Streeter (Citizen representative). Kim Wheeler (Citizen representative).

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The economic development representative, David Pieklik, resigned from his position as the executive director of Nature Coast Business Development Council months ago. He was the economic development representative for the committee, and therefore that aspect has a vacancy.

Dr. Streeter noted that small, rural Chambers of Commerce have a difficult time funding staff to assist visitors with their inquiries about the area.

Terri Harris the WGACOC staff member who is in the office on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Thanks to a RESTORE Grant from the United States Department of the Treasury, through Levy County, the WGACOC can provide visitors with information 24/7.

The grant provided funding for the outdoor electronic touch-screen information kiosk.

The touch-screen connects people to the Chamber's website.

The WGA Chamber of Commerce purchased the life-size statue of Elvis for visitor photo ops.

Part of Levy County Road 40 West is named "Follow That Dream Highway" to commemorate Presley's movie filmed in part in the Inglis-Yankeetown area.

This year heralds the 60th anniversary of "Follow That Dream," which is a 1962 musical film starring Presley made by Mirisch Productions. It was based on the 1959 novel, "Pioneer, Go Home!" Producer Walter Mirisch liked the song, "Follow That Dream" and retitled the picture.

As for the disaster money used to buy the kiosk, the RESTORE Act is a United States federal statute that was signed into law by President Barack Obama on July 6, 2012. It was enacted by the 112th United States Congress as an amendment to the "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century" bill, a far-reaching transportation bill that included many other provisions.

The act was in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that occurred on April 20, 2010, which caused significant environmental, ecological, and economic damage to the United States Gulf Coast. Levy County was among the recipients of funds from that compensation for that disaster.

In addition to the kiosk, among the other projects funded by the RESTORE Act in Levy County is the Cedar Key Aquarium at the Nature Coast Biological Station on Cedar Key, which is in the reimbursement process now and is near closeout, Whitehurst said. Levy County was awarded RESTORE Act funds in a consent decree on April 4, 2016, Whitehurst noted.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill occurred off of the Gulf Coast on April 20, 2010. Florida's 23 Gulf Coast counties were impacted to varying degrees, with 177 miles of coast receiving varying degrees of damage from the oil spill disaster. The Levy County Commission adopted Resolution 2013-25 on Feb. 19, 2013, to establish the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee.

To ensure that the Committee is comprised of members with diversified backgrounds, as well as the knowledge to meet the requirements described in the resolution, the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee includes the members listed earlier in the story. As noted, Whitehurst also serves as the executive director of the Levy County Visitors Bureau. That group is scheduled for meetings that are open to the public.

The Tourist Development Council meets at the Visitors Bureau office, 607 S.W. First Ave., in Williston. The TDC oversees the expenditure of funds the county obtains from tourists visiting and paying a "bed tax" for spending nights in Levy County.

The TDC meeting schedule for the rest of 2021 is Aug. 12, Oct. 14 and Dec. 9. All meetings start at 6 p.m. Again, those are open public meetings. As for the Levy County RESTORE Act Advisory Committee, there are no meetings scheduled currently, Whitehurst said, because its members have completed everything necessary so far. She is saving money by not paying mileage costs to members who would be meeting just to meet.

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In addition to the Chamber members and RESTORE Act Committee members, a couple of journalists from the daily newspaper in Crystal River, came to Levy County from Citrus County to cover the event.

Paxton Media Group (PMG) of Paducah, Kentucky, announced in May that it had completed the purchase of all Landmark Community Newspapers, a chain of daily and weekly newspapers based in Shelbyville, Kentucky.

The deal includes the purchase of all 46 newspapers in the Landmark chain, including the Citrus County Chronicle, which had been part of Landmark Community Newspapers for the past 40 years and is now part of PMG.

The weekly newspapers in Levy County are part of the Landmark deal with PMG, according to the announcement by the new owners.

There were no Gainesville or Ocala members of the print or broadcast media present.

The 11-year-old daily news website named HardisonInk.com is owned by sole proprietor Jeff M. Hardison, who is not connected with any corporate media group currently.