

IRNA

News Magazine Issue 17

**Indian River
Neighborhood
Association**

Winter 2025/6



Your Lawn and the IRL
By ORCA

Wrap Plastic Recycling
By Coastal Connections

Sebastian and IRC Team Up for S2S
...and more



Dedicated to Quality Growth and Environmental Protection in Indian River County

Welcome back, if you are just returning. As usual, it has been a busy summer with the State and Federal Governments trying to convince us that they know more about the governance of Indian River County than we who are its inhabitants.

The Live Local Act, passed by Tallahassee in 2023 as a solution to a lack of affordable housing, has now manifested itself as a proposed project at the Ft. Pierce Marina. Just a few of the highlights:

- The proposal includes 1,063 residential units in a mixed-use development at the marina. To qualify under the Live Local Act, 40% of the units must be reserved for income-eligible renters.
- The site is zoned C-5 Commercial and designated HIMU (High Intensity Mixed Use) in the city's land use map... this makes it eligible under the new state law.
- The Live Local Act allows the developer to build up to 200 feet in height because the highest structure within a mile of it is two abandoned grain silos, 200 feet tall.

Yes, you're right... this makes no sense at all.

Height and density restrictions are the main tools that we, as citizens, have to prevent being overrun by development. Recently, Indian River County reviewed the Comprehensive Plan as required by the State of Florida. One of the things that was presented for change to the public was the movement of the height restriction from the Comp Plan to the Local Development Regulations.

On the face of it, no big deal, right? Not so fast. LDRs can be changed by a 3-2 vote of the County Commissioners, whereas a change to the Comp Plan must undergo public scrutiny and be approved in Tallahassee. When quite a few of you showed up to protest this change, the height restriction was placed back into the Comprehensive Plan. Constant vigilance is required by all of us if we are to maintain our little section of paradise from becoming Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Boca Raton — and the list goes on.

One of our goals this year is to take a deep dive into the state of our water *quantity* here in Indian River County. We hear disturbing reports that the potentiometric pressure is decreasing in the aquifers. If true, this could lead to saltwater intrusion — not a good thing.

If you are reading this and are not a member, please consider joining... we need people who care.

Mike Johannsen, Board Chairman
Indian River Neighborhood Association



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Cover photo is a shot of the lagoon and Veteran's Memorial Island in Vero Beach by Matt Fulcher.

IRNA News Magazine

PO Box 643868
Vero Beach, FL 32964



**DON'T BE AN ASS!
DON'T BLOW GRASS
INTO OUR LAGOON!**



GRASS CLIPPINGS CAMPAIGN

**DON'T MUCK UP
THE LAGOON!**

**NO GRASS CLIPPINGS IN
ROADS, DRAINS,
SWALES, DITCHES,
CANALS**

**Be part of the solution,
not the problem!**



IRNA's 2025 Grass Clippings Campaign raises awareness about keeping yard waste out of waterways. When grass clippings enter storm drains and water bodies, they decompose, depleting oxygen and releasing nitrogen and phosphorus that fuel harmful algal blooms. This damages seagrass—crucial for manatees and fish—and creates muck on the lagoon bottom. Instead, homeowners should leave clippings on lawns as fertilizer, bag them for mulch, compost them, or use municipal collection. Residents should also instruct landscapers about these rules. The message: Be part of the solution by properly managing yard waste. Learn more on the next page with science from ORCA!



What Your Lawn Has to Do with the Lagoon



OCEAN RESEARCH & CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

On a sunny Saturday morning, the neighborhood hums with mowers. You finish your yard, sweep the driveway, and watch as the last clippings wash into the gutter with the afternoon rain. Out of sight, out of mind — right? Not quite. Those little blades of grass may seem harmless, but in the Indian River Lagoon, they're packing a surprising punch.

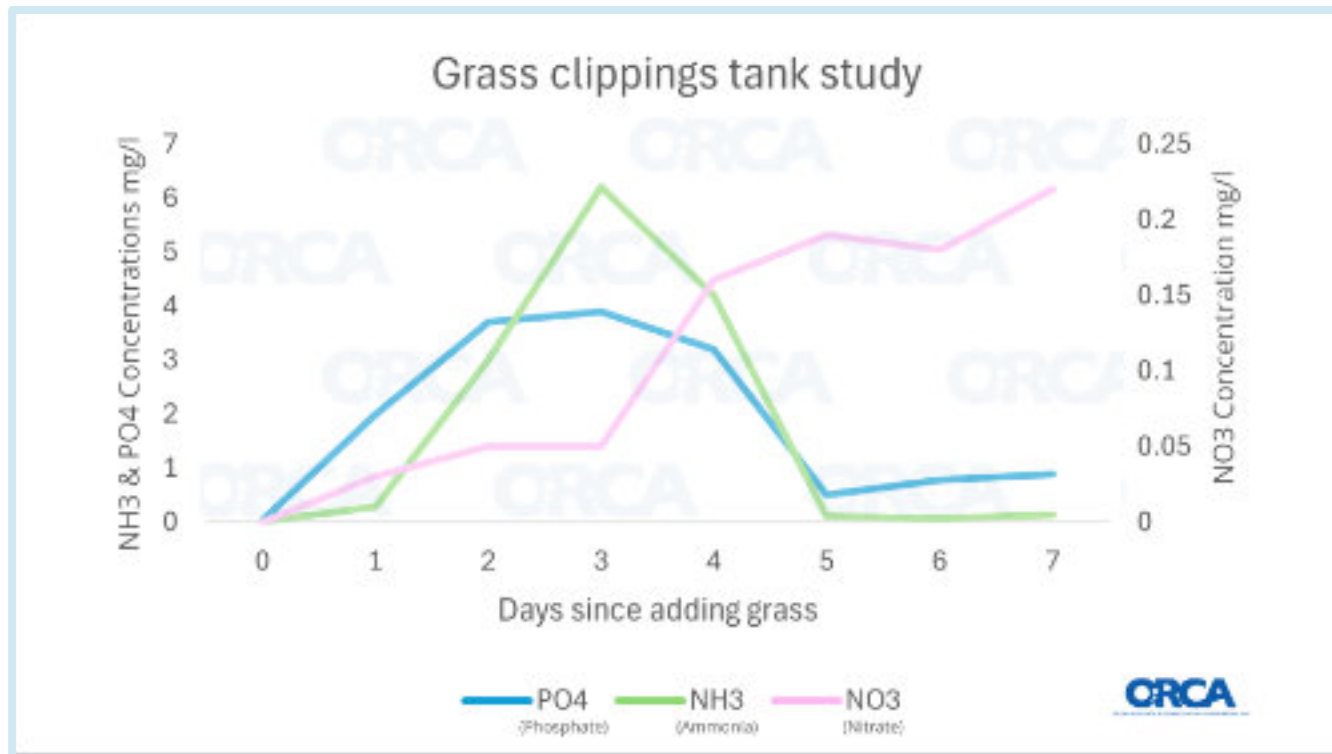
Here's a simple experiment you can try at home. Fill two clear containers with lagoon water. Add a handful of grass clippings to one, and leave the other alone. Set them both outside in the sun for a week. In just 24 hours, the difference is shocking. The container with grass turns into a chemical soup, with phosphate levels jumping nearly 5,000% overnight. Ammonia? That skyrockets even faster — up 2,700% the first day, nearly 30,000% by the second, and more than 60,000% by the third. Meanwhile, the container without grass hardly changes at all. These striking results come from a recent study by the Ocean Research & Conservation Association (ORCA), which has been documenting the impacts of everyday activities on lagoon health.

What's happening? As decomposing grass clippings break down, they release nitrogen and phosphorus into the water. Ammonia and phosphate concentrations rise first. Over time, phosphate sinks and its concentration in the water declines, while ammonia is converted into nitrate — the most persistent and bioavailable form of nitrogen. Translation: one little handful of clippings can turn a bucket of water into algae's favorite power shake.

Now imagine this not in a bucket, but across 156 miles of estuary. Every time rain carries clippings into storm drains, those nutrients rush into the lagoon. The result? Algal blooms that cloud the water, block sunlight, and choke out seagrass beds. Seagrass is the foundation of the lagoon's food web, supporting everything from tiny crabs to manatees. When the algae eventually die and decompose, oxygen levels crash, leading to fish kills and further unraveling the ecosystem.

Grass Clippings Tank Study: Day 6





It sounds dire — and it is — but the good news is that this is one of the simplest problems we can all help solve. Unlike agricultural runoff or failing wastewater treatment systems, grass clippings are something homeowners can control with just a little care. The solution is easy: don't let them reach the street. Leave clippings on your lawn, where they recycle nutrients back into the soil, or collect them for compost. Both options reduce the nutrient load that finds its way to the lagoon.

The Indian River Lagoon is one of the most biologically diverse estuaries in North America, home to more than 4,000 species. Protecting it doesn't always require massive infrastructure projects or complicated regulations. Sometimes, it comes down to small choices — like where you leave your clippings.

So the next time you mow, think of that simple bucket experiment. Those stray blades of grass might be small, but together, they have the power to tip the balance of an entire ecosystem. Keeping them out of the lagoon is one of the easiest, most meaningful steps you can take to protect the water we all love.

ORCA continues to study these connections between land and water to better inform restoration efforts. To learn more or get involved, visit www.teamorca.org.

Wait... Isn't Seagrass... Grass?

You may have heard of seagrass — and yes, it's the only grass you want in the lagoon. Despite the name, seagrass and your lawn grass are about as related as a dolphin and a goldfish. Sure, seagrass is technically a flowering plant (who knew?), but it evolved to live entirely underwater — with roots that anchor in sediment and leaves that sway with the current. It produces oxygen, filters water, and provides food and shelter for lagoon critters.

Your lawn clippings, on the other hand? They're terrestrial plants that have no business in saltwater. When they wash into the lagoon, they don't integrate gracefully into the ecosystem — they decompose into a toxic nutrient bomb that fuels algae blooms and suffocates the very seagrass beds the lagoon depends on.

So remember: seagrass in, lawn grass out. One builds a thriving underwater meadow — the other destroys it.



Sunset Paddles, Science, and a Shared Future

By Dr. Laura Wilson, Executive Director, Marine Resources Council



My first exposure to the Indian River Lagoon was a highlight reel of everything the area has to offer. Long before I had the courage to leave my tenured professorship and curatorship in Kansas — before I even considered applying for the executive director role at Marine Resources Council (MRC) — I found myself paddling the Banana River Lagoon on a family vacation.

My husband, son, and I had planned a quick Space Coast getaway before joining my parents and brother's family near Jacksonville. The boys picked a day at Kennedy Space Center; I picked a sunset kayak bioluminescence tour. We played in the ocean, caught our first rocket launch, ate at Long Doggers, and shopped at Ron Jon. As we paddled through mangrove tunnels and among dolphins, my son caught (and released) comb jellies and proclaimed, "This is the best day of my life."

Those experiences captured the Lagoon at its absolute best. Today, working at MRC, I witness the more complicated reality: algal blooms, habitat loss, and the uphill work of restoration. Being a "transplant" to Florida's

environmental conservation scene brings both advantages and disadvantages. I don't have memories of the Lagoon from childhood or stories of how it looked in my grandparents' day. That means I must be careful not to contribute to what scientists call "shifting baselines" — gradual changes in our accepted norms and expectations for the environment across generations. At the same time, I bring fresh eyes and no attachment to the mindset of "this is how we've always done it" — and maybe the practices that once seemed sufficient aren't keeping pace with today's many challenges.

As both a transplant and a scientist, I've also observed that while restoration work is essential, it needs to be guided by the best available information. We need to question assumptions, welcome new research, and embrace creative partnerships. Too often, we collect data as a byproduct of restoration work — and not as a driver. And too often, we focus on treating symptoms rather than tackling root causes. Science-based planning and rigorous monitoring must be at the heart of projects if we want to make a long-term difference.

"Real progress depends on collective action rooted in science."

Over the past months, I've worked to share the most important lesson I've learned: restoring the Indian River Lagoon will take all of us. Young and old. Lifelong Floridians and newcomers. Seasonal snowbirds and short-term visitors. Scientists, policymakers, anglers, business owners, and families who simply love to paddle at sunset. Real progress depends on collective action rooted in science. Whether that means advocating for stronger stormwater policies, planting living shorelines, or reducing runoff at home, each of us has a role to play. Together, we can ensure that future generations have thriving wildlife, healthy communities, and a restored, resilient Indian River Lagoon.



Sebastian and Indian River County Team Up for Lagoon Victory



From left to right: Commissioner Joe Earman, Commissioner Laura Moss, Commissioner Susan Adams, Sebastian Council Member Ed Dodd, Sebastian Mayor Bob McPartlan, Sebastian Vice Mayor Fred Jones, Commission Chairman Joe Flescher, Commission Vice-Chairman Daryl Loar. Photo Credit IRLNEP.



The above redevelopment area is in the green.

The City of Sebastian and Indian River County have partnered on a septic-to-sewer conversion project for 188 properties along the Indian River Lagoon in Sebastian's Community Redevelopment Area. These properties currently rely on septic systems that leak harmful nitrogen and phosphorus into the lagoon.

Sebastian provided funding and vision while the county contributed expertise and labor. Together, they secured a state grant to help property owners connect to the county sewer system. Once complete, the project will prevent over 10,000 pounds of nitrogen pollution annually—a critical improvement for properties located directly on the water.

This collaboration demonstrates how local governments working together can protect waterways and benefit the entire community.



THE WRAP PLASTIC



The above picture is of CCinc WRAP Coordinator, Anita, with a truckload of wrap plastic. Credit to Joe Rimkus. Below are program coordinators holding up a sample of the recycled Trex® product. Credit to Coastal Connections.



Coastal Connections, Inc. (CCinc) is a Vero Beach-based sea turtle conservation nonprofit with a mission to advance sea turtle survival by educating and connecting people to the environment. CCinc achieves its mission through sustainability programs, immersive sea turtle experiences, education and outreach, and sea turtle rescue and research. The organization's sustainability initiative, Vero Goes Zero, encompasses several sustainability programs — all aimed at reducing and eliminating single-use plastic waste.

In 2020, CCinc began collaborating with Indian River County and the Oceanfront Business Association to offer unique recycling opportunities to local businesses, churches, and community organizations through its WRAP Recycling Program.

CCinc's WRAP Recycling Program is an extension of a statewide initiative led by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to support Indian River County's recycling goals. CCinc provides educational resources and a complimentary recycling removal service for business partners that accumulate soft plastic films or wrapping — commonly associated with packaged goods.

Traditional recycling programs often do not accept plastic wrapping, bags, or film, so they cannot be placed in the blue recycling bins. These materials can clog expensive sorting machines, causing them to break or require expensive maintenance — posing challenges for recycling and sorting facilities.

Many local businesses have been part of this program! Anthony's Ladies Apparel has contributed over 5,000 lb of wrap plastic, and Audrey's Feed & Tack, Dyer Auto Group, Calvin Klein, Jockey, J.McLaughlin, and Tommy Bahama have each collected over 1,000 lb. Many more are participating — too many to list!



RECYCLING PROGRAM

However, CCinc's dedicated WRAP Recycling Program works directly with the local landfill, recycling center, and Trex® to ensure that after a company joins the program, the plastic their team collects and contributes is actually recycled into a durable outdoor planking material used to create boardwalks, fencing, playground equipment, and furniture — giving what were once harmful single-use plastics a new life and new purpose.

Since the program's inception, CCinc has successfully facilitated the recycling of over 15 tons of plastic wrap materials, diverting it from the local landfill and waterways. Over 50 local businesses and groups are regularly participating in the steadily growing program, and CCinc is actively adding new partners. By contributing to the Vero Goes Zero WRAP Recycling Program, partners have access to resources and support to implement plastic wrap recycling practices within their establishment.

From training for staff, to promoting partners' eco-friendly initiatives on their website, to recognizing contribution milestones, CCinc will be there every step of the way. **Join CCinc's Vero Goes Zero movement today** and become a WRAP Recycling Program partner to make a meaningful difference in our community.

For more information on how your business, nonprofit, church, club, or group can participate in this impactful program, contact CCinc's Coastal Cleanup Programs Specialist, Jeanna Kent, at Jeanna@coastal-connections.org



The above picture is of CCinc Coastal Cleanup Programs Specialist, Jeanna, and program volunteers recognizing Lane Bryant Outlet for collecting 1,000 lb of wrap plastic for recycling. The below picture shows program volunteers recognizing Columbia Sportswear Company for collecting 2,500 lb of wrap plastic for recycling. Credit to Coastal Connections.



Filtering 60 Million Gallons Daily:

How Treasure Coast Shellfish Is Helping Clean Our Lagoon



Just north of Pelican Island, nature's most efficient water filters are working around the clock. Treasure Coast Shellfish's floating oyster farm is filtering an astounding 60 million gallons of Indian River Lagoon water every single day, while producing some of the most delicious oysters you'll find anywhere in Florida.

"This year, we planted over 1.2 million oysters," explains Nicolette Mariano, founder of the Sebastian-based operation. "With an adult oyster filtering up to 50 gallons of water daily, that's 60 million gallons a day our farm is cleaning."

To put that in perspective, multiply those 60 million gallons by 365 days—that's nearly 22 billion gallons of lagoon water filtered annually by this single farm operation.

More Than Water Filtration

The environmental benefits extend far beyond water cleaning. Mariano's floating cage system has created what she calls a "vertical three-dimensional habitat" in areas where seagrass has disappeared. This artificial reef now hosts blue crabs, juvenile lobsters, snapper, and even bay scallops—species that had vanished from local waters.

"I've never seen a live bay scallop in the Indian River Lagoon in my entire life until a few years ago, when we were pulling bags," Mariano recalls. The farm has transformed what was once described as a "desert" of barren river bottom into a thriving ecosystem.

The operation uses both sterile and reproductive oysters, with the reproductive ones spawning to contribute new oysters to the wild population. "It was really important to me that our diploid oysters give back to the local environment," Mariano notes.

Year-Round Florida Oysters

While northern oyster seasons traditionally run Memorial Day to Labor Day, Florida's season operates opposite—perfect timing for our seasonal visitors! Unlike wild oysters exposed at low tide, Treasure Coast Shellfish's suspended cages keep oysters constantly submerged in the water.

"We're not back in the icebox days," Mariano explains, addressing concerns about eating oysters year-round.





"We have proper refrigeration and are highly regulated." From the farm to their certified processing facility, Treasure Coast Shellfish operates under strict temperature controls and food safety protocols.

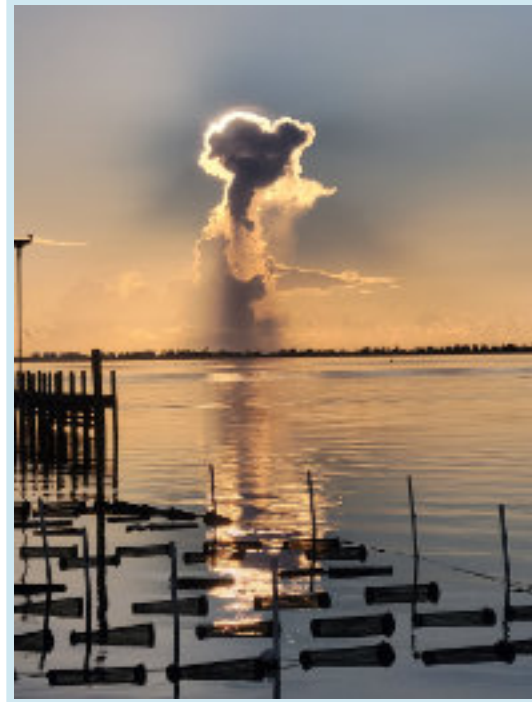
Currently staging their smaller "Petites" and signature "Sebastian Silvers," the farm expects to begin harvesting in mid-October, just as seasonal demand increases with returning snowbirds.

From Disaster to Success

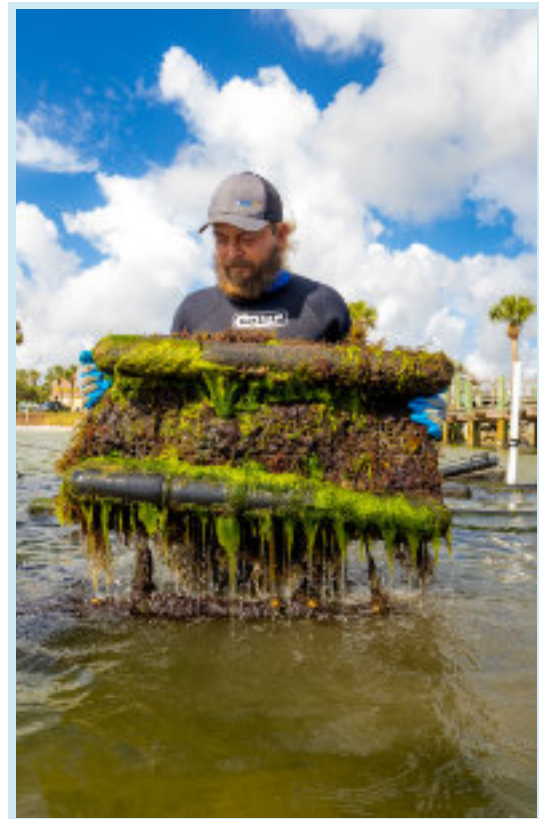
Mariano's journey began unexpectedly, as a 14-year-old volunteer cleaning hurricane debris from a destroyed shellfish hatchery in 2004. That experience sparked a passion for aquaculture that has grown into a six-and-a-half-year operation, now employing local residents and supplying restaurants and residents throughout the region.

The business model proves that environmental restoration and economic development can work hand in hand. While creating jobs and producing premium seafood, the farm simultaneously rebuilds the ecological services once provided by the lagoon's lost seagrass beds.

The timing couldn't be better. This year, Mariano has noticed seagrass returning to waters near her farm—something local residents say they haven't seen in decades.



Below Photography Credit to Dominic Agostini



All other Photography Credit to Nicolette Mariano

Ready to try Florida's finest oysters? Visit treasurecoastshellfish.com, email info@treasurecoastshellfish.com, or call (772) 918-8753 to place an order or learn more about this remarkable operation that's cleaning our lagoon one oyster at a time.



Piper Aircraft: Building Careers and Community



For more than 80 years, Piper Aircraft has been a cornerstone of innovation and excellence in general aviation. Founded in 1937, the company has delivered more than 130,000 aircraft worldwide, making flight accessible for generations of pilots around the world. With its global reputation for quality engineering and craftsmanship, Piper remains one of the most respected names in aviation.

But Piper's true strength lies not just in its aircraft—it lies in its people.

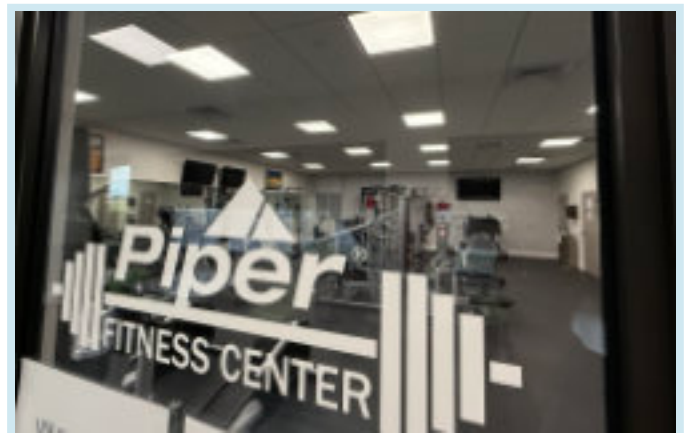
As one of the largest employers on Florida's Treasure Coast, Piper offers more than just jobs—it provides opportunities for long-term careers. Employees are empowered to grow through training, mentorship, and

professional development programs. Many have risen from entry-level roles to leadership positions, a testament to the company's commitment to its workforce. Piper also invests in education by offering tuition reimbursement, as well as college internships and externships in partnership with local schools, helping to build the next generation of talent.

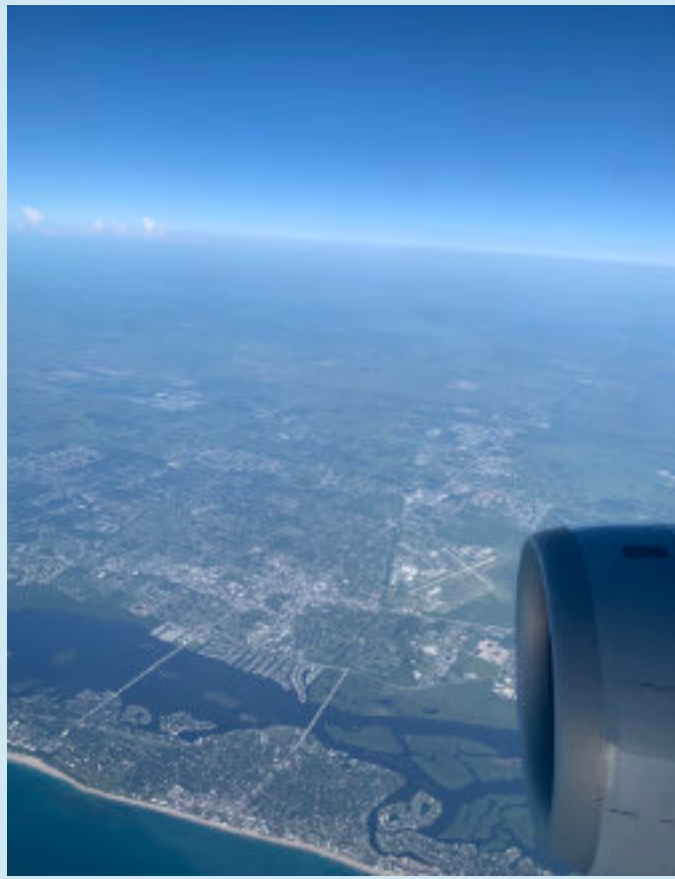
Piper also prioritizes the well-being of its employees. A free on-site health clinic provides convenient medical services, reducing the burden of healthcare costs while keeping employees and their families healthy. A complimentary on-site gym promotes physical wellness, reinforcing Piper's holistic approach to supporting its team both inside and outside the workplace.

Beyond individual benefits, Piper fosters a strong sense of community through employee-led committees. The Veterans Committee, Wellness Committee, Rewards and Recognition Committee, Outreach Committee, and Recreation Committee each operate under their own charters to guide meaningful contributions. These groups not only enhance employee engagement but also extend Piper's impact through community outreach, wellness initiatives, recognition programs, and recreational opportunities.

This people-first philosophy has created a workplace culture that blends history, innovation, and heart. Piper Aircraft is not just building airplanes—it is building futures. By combining a proud tradition of aviation excellence with meaningful benefits, community involvement, and career opportunities, Piper continues to attract talent and strengthen its impact on the Treasure Coast and beyond.



HEIGHT LIMITS AND YOU



When you fly over Florida's East Coast, Indian River County stands out. While neighboring communities have high-rises blocking ocean views, our county maintains a low profile. This distinctive skyline is the result of careful planning and community vigilance.

That planning faced a critical test on September 9, 2025, when the Board of County Commissioners reviewed changes to the county's Comprehensive Plan. At the heart of residents' concerns was moving specific building height limits from the Comprehensive Plan to Land Development Regulations.

The distinction is fundamental to protecting our community. The Comprehensive Plan requires state approval from Tallahassee for any changes — creating a high bar for modifications. Land Development Regulations can be amended by the County Commission through local public hearings, making them far more vulnerable to future changes. For residents concerned about developer pressure, this wasn't a minor technical adjustment — it was potentially removing a critical safeguard.

Advocates and neighborhood groups rallied residents to attend the meeting. Our message was clear: height restrictions are important to our community. The

commissioners listened. After hours of public testimony, the Board unanimously adopted language keeping specific height limits — 35 feet for residential buildings and 50 feet for nonresidential structures — firmly in the Comprehensive Plan.

Indian River County's height restrictions protect what makes this place special. Low-profile development preserves our small-town beach atmosphere and protects neighborhood character from the wall-to-wall high-rise development that has transformed other coastal communities. These limits reflect our values and ensure the community character that attracted residents in the first place.

The September 9 meeting demonstrated local government at its best. The Commission went element by element through the Comprehensive Plan updates, extended the meeting for hours, and ensured everyone who wanted to speak had their chance. The commissioners made clear there would be no wiggle room for future height changes, and all were in agreement on protecting these standards.

This victory sends an important message: Indian River County's character is not negotiable. While development will continue, it will happen within parameters that preserve what makes this community special. The outcome happened because residents showed up, spoke up, and made their priorities clear.

Your engagement matters. Stay involved, and together we can ensure Indian River County remains the special place we all treasure.



Do you want to stay up to date on issues like the ones mentioned above? Scan the QR Code to the left, and you can sign up for the IRNA Weekly Newsletter. We share important updates and news that are often not covered elsewhere. Join us!



News From Around the County

At the 2025 Florida Public Transportation Association conference in St. Petersburg, Indian River County's GoLine was named System of the Year. This recognition honors GoLine's remarkable ridership growth since 2020, its maintenance of the state's lowest cost per passenger trip, and exceptional service excellence. The fare-free system operates 14 routes, six days a week, and is on track to serve 1.5 million passengers this year.

The Indian River County MPO credits this achievement to the Senior Resource Association and the dedicated staff who ensure buses run smoothly and serve riders with excellence every day. Visit GoLineIRT.com to learn more and view routes and schedules.

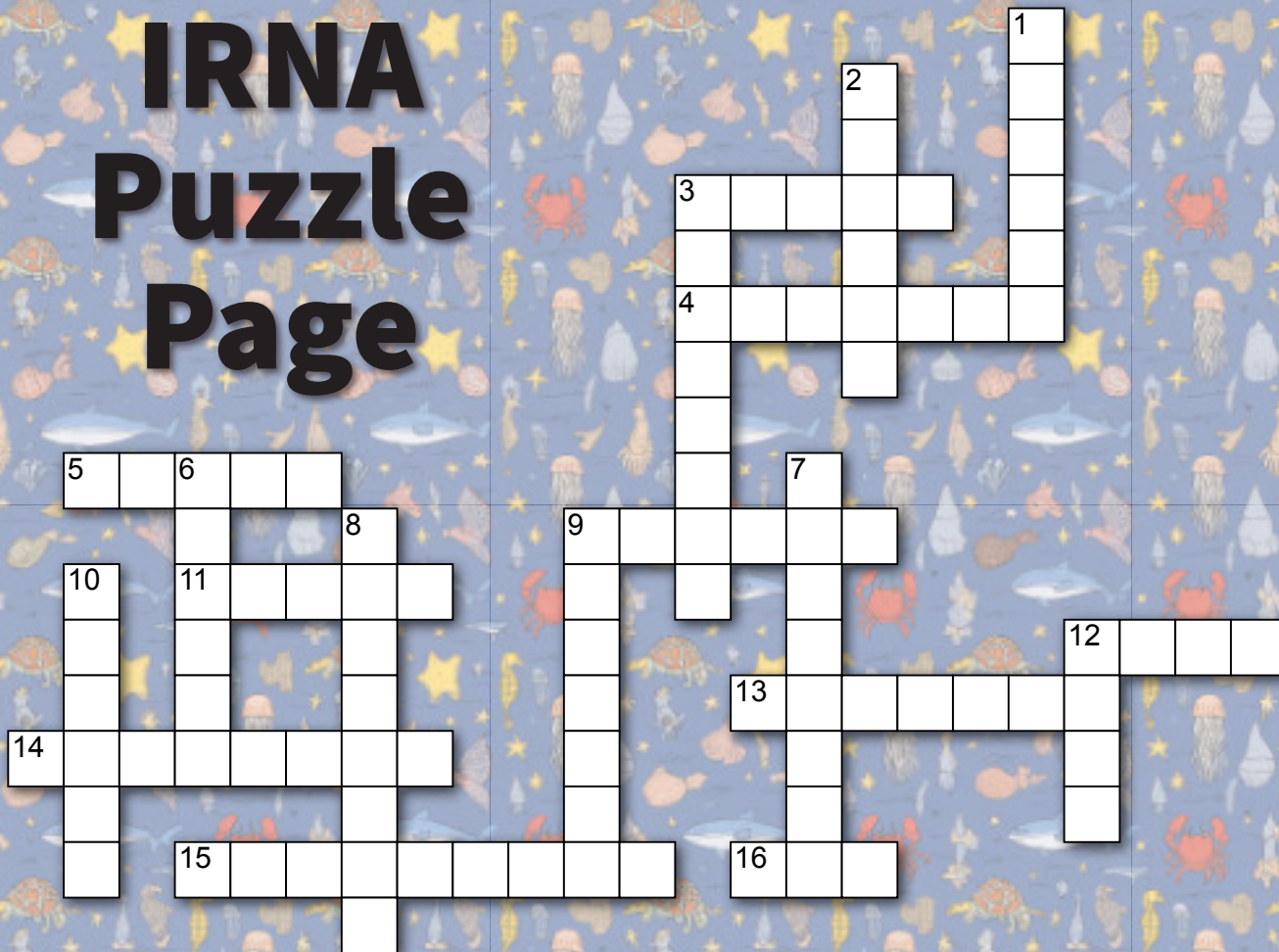


Melissa Meisenburg, senior environmental specialist with Indian River County's Natural Resources–Lagoon Division, received the Clean Water Coalition's Lagoon Champion Award on August 17. Since joining the county in 2022, Melissa has brought visionary leadership to protecting the Indian River Lagoon. She led the creation of the county's comprehensive Lagoon Management Plan in September 2023, addressing 17 key factors impacting lagoon health. Notable initiatives include Living Docks partnering with FIT volunteers, derelict vessel removal, and a 22.8-acre seagrass restoration project — one of the lagoon's largest. Her work combines scientific expertise with community engagement, ensuring the Indian River Lagoon thrives for future generations.

The Indian River Neighborhood Association (IRNA) extends heartfelt thanks to Dr. John Trefry and Terry Toth for their invaluable service on the IRNA board. Dr. Trefry, a retired Florida Institute of Technology professor, served as our science advisor, bringing scientific expertise to our work. Terry Toth proved to be a jack-of-all-trades, providing crucial assistance in producing and editing our magazines, drawing on his publishing experience. Both members made significant contributions that will be deeply missed. IRNA is always seeking to grow and welcomes new involvement. If you're interested in becoming more engaged with our community, we'd love to hear from you!



IRNA Puzzle Page



Across

3. A big predatory fish with sharp teeth and a fin on its back.
4. Looks like an ocean flower, and a famous clownfish lives in one!
5. A sea animal with eight arms and two longer tentacles that can squirt ink.
9. This shellfish can make a beautiful, shiny pearl inside its shell.
11. Tiny animals that build colorful underwater cities called reefs.
12. This animal lives inside two matching shells connected by a hinge.
13. This crustacean walks on the ocean floor and has two big claws.
14. A flat fish that glides through the ocean and has a long, stinging tail.
15. A wobbly, bell-shaped sea animal with stinging tentacles.
16. A long and slippery sea creature that looks like a snake.

Down

1. A sea animal with lots of pores that soaks up water, just like one you'd use in the bath!
2. A small crustacean with a long tail that is often pink when cooked.
3. A sea creature with five arms shaped like something you see in the night sky.
6. A spiky sea animal nicknamed the sea "hedgehog."
7. A tiny fish with a horse-like head and a curly tail.
8. A tiny crustacean that glues itself to boats, rocks, and whales.
9. A very smart ocean animal with eight long, flexible arms.
10. An ocean reptile that carries its home on its back.
12. This crustacean has powerful pincers and walks sideways on the sand.

Thank you for reading our news magazine!

We hope you found useful information to share within your community. For additional copies, please email us at info@indianriverna.com.

This magazine thrives without ads thanks to the generosity of people like you. Help sustain our mission by contributing to the Indian River Neighborhood Association. Your support covers design, printing, and delivery costs, keeping our neighborhood informed and connected. Thank you for making a difference!

ANSWER KEY:
1 Down: SPONGE | 2 Down: SHRIMP | 3 Across: SHARK | 3 Down: STARFISH | 4 Across: ANEMONE
5 Across: SQUID | 6 Down: URCHIN | 7 Down: SEAHORSE | 8 Down: BARNACLE | 9 Across: OYSTER | 9 Down:
OCTOPUS | 10 Down: TURTLE | 11 Across: CORAL | 12 Across: CLAM | 12 Down: CRAB | 13 Across: LOBSTER
14 Across: STINGRAY | 15 Across: JELLYFISH | 16 Across: EEL

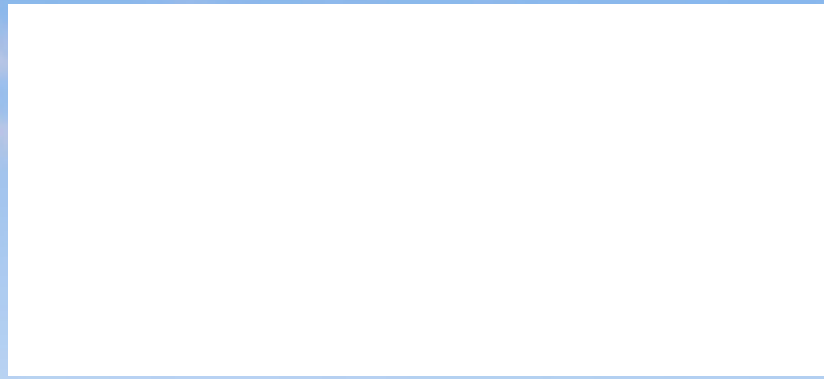




IRNA

PO Box 643868

Vero Beach, FL 32964



We represent non-partisan volunteer residents in neighborhoods throughout Indian River County with a common vision of pro-business and managed growth to preserve Indian River County's quality of life. We have no self-interest, no land ownership or profit motives. Our solitary purpose is to protect our community for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

www.IndianRiverNA.com - info@IndianRiverNA.com - www.facebook.com/IndianRiverNA