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Quarterly Newsletter of Port St. Historical Society

PSL News


Thomas J. White



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St. Lucie West: The Community That Changed Port St. Lucie

Few developments have had a greater impact on the growth and identity of Port St. Lucie than St. Lucie West. What began as a bold vision in the 1980s became a model for planned development and transformed the city's western landscape into a thriving center of residential, educational, recreational, and commercial activity.

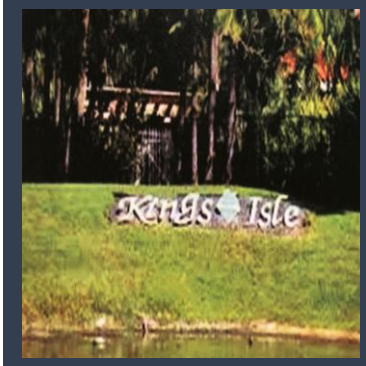
Prior to the development of St. Lucie West, much of Port St. Lucie followed the pattern established by General Development Corporation (GDC). Large areas of land were subdivided into individual residential lots, with development occurring gradually over time. While this approach helped establish the city, it often left residents dependent on distant shopping, employment centers, and community services.

The late 1980s brought a new approach. Developer Thomas J. White and his company, Core Communities, envisioned something different—a master-planned community designed to provide not only homes, but also jobs, education, recreation, and commerce. Rather than simply selling lots, the goal was to create a complete community where residents could live, work, learn, and play.

The location proved ideal. Positioned along Interstate 95 at Exit 121, St. Lucie West offered easy access for residents and businesses alike. The completion of Interstate 95 through St. Lucie County in 1987 opened new opportunities for development, and White recognized the potential of the vast acreage west of the city's established neighborhoods.

One of the most significant milestones came in 1988 when the New York Mets selected St. Lucie West as the site of their new spring training facility. The construction of what is now known as Clover Park brought national attention to the area and established Port St. Lucie as a destination for baseball fans from across the country.

Written, Edited, Researched and Designed by Donnita Graben, Curator PSL History Museum & Education Center.



Construction of Kings Isle starts in 1993

St. Lucie West Development Timeline

1988 – St. Lucie West Country Club Estates

1993 – Kings Isle begins construction

1996 – Lake Charles begins development

2000 – Cascades and Belmont begin construction

2003 – Magnolia Lakes begins development

2005 – Lake Forest completed

1999 – MotorCoach Resort St. Lucie West opens





St. Lucie Trails

Established in 1996, St. Lucie Trails was designed by renowned architect Tom Fazio.

St. Lucie West

Education also played a central role in the vision for St. Lucie West. Land was secured for the expansion of Indian River State College and for a campus of Florida Atlantic University, creating opportunities for higher education and workforce development close to home. These institutions helped attract students, educators, and businesses while strengthening the region's economic future.

As development continued throughout the 1990s, St. Lucie West became a hub of activity. Shopping centers, professional offices, restaurants, medical facilities, and residential neighborhoods were carefully integrated into the overall plan. The area offered amenities that had previously required a trip across town, making it increasingly attractive to both new and existing residents.

The success of St. Lucie West also influenced future development throughout Port St. Lucie. It demonstrated the value of master-planned communities and encouraged a more comprehensive approach to growth. Parks, schools, commercial centers, and residential areas could be designed together rather than added later as the need arose.

Today, St. Lucie West stands as one of the most recognizable and successful planned communities on Florida's Treasure Coast. Its tree-lined boulevards, educational institutions, sports facilities, businesses, and neighborhoods reflect the vision first imagined by Thomas J. White and Core Communities more than three decades ago.

More than a collection of homes and businesses, St. Lucie West represented a turning point in the history of Port St. Lucie. It shifted the city's center of growth westward, diversified its economy, and helped shape the modern Port St. Lucie we know today.

As the community continues to evolve, St. Lucie West remains a testament to the power of thoughtful planning and long-range vision—a development that forever changed the course of Port St. Lucie's history.



In the early 1980s St. Lucie West begins; with land from the Peacock Ranch



Clover Park: Home of the New York Mets in Port St. Lucie

One of the most important milestones in the development of St. Lucie West occurred in 1988 when the New York Mets selected Port St. Lucie as their new spring training home.

The stadium, originally known as Thomas J. White Stadium, opened in 1988 as part of the vision for the newly developing St. Lucie West community. Developer Thomas J. White worked closely with local leaders and the Mets organization to bring Major League Baseball to Port St. Lucie, helping place the city on the national stage.

The Mets had previously trained in St. Petersburg but were looking for a modern facility to support both spring training and player development. Port St. Lucie offered ample land, room for expansion, and a strategic location along Florida's growing Treasure Coast.

The first spring training game was played in 1988, beginning a relationship between the city and the Mets that has now spanned nearly four decades. In addition to spring training, the facility became home to the Mets' minor league affiliates, bringing year-round baseball to the community.

Over the years, the stadium has undergone several renovations and name changes. It has been known as Thomas J. White Stadium, Tradition Field, First Data Field, and today as Clover Park. Despite the changes its importance to Port St. Lucie Has remained constant.

The presence of the Mets helped stimulate economic growth throughout St. Lucie West by attracting visitors, businesses, restaurants, hotels, and new residents. For many people across the country, Port St. Lucie first became familiar through Mets spring training broadcasts and baseball coverage.

Today, Clover Park remains one of the city's most recognizable landmarks and a lasting symbol of the vision that helped transform St. Lucie West from undeveloped land into a thriving community. Every spring, thousands of baseball fans continue the tradition that began in 1988, gathering to watch the Mets prepare for another season and reinforcing Port St. Lucie's place in America's pastime.

Thomas J. White: The Visionary Behind St. Lucie West.

Few individuals have had a greater impact on the development of modern Port St. Lucie than Thomas J. White. As the founder of Core Communities. White envisioned a new approach to growth that would transform thousands of acres west of Interstate 95 into a thriving master-planned community.

In the 1980s, much of western Port St. Lucie remained undeveloped. White recognized the area's potential and proposed a community that would be more than just homes. His vision included schools, colleges, businesses, recreation, healthcare, and employment opportunities – all integrated into a carefully planned environment.

Under White's leadership, St. Lucie West became one of Florida's most successful master-planned communities, among his most notable achievements was helping bring the New York Mets spring training facility to Port St. Lucie in 1988, a move that placed the city on the national sports map and continues to attract visitors each year.

White also understood the importance of education. Land was secured for the expansion of Indian River State College and Florida Atlantic University campus, helping create educational opportunities that continue to benefit the region today.

Perhaps Thomas White's greatest contribution was changing the way Port St. Lucie grew. Rather than relying solely on scattered residential development, he promoted the concept of complete communities where residents could live, work, learn, shop, and play close to home.

Today, the lasting legacy of Mr. White can be seen throughout St. Lucie West – in its neighborhoods, schools, businesses, sports facilities, and community amenities. His vision helped shape the PSL we know today and influenced the city's growth for generations to come.

The Communities of St. Lucie West: Building a New Vison for Port St. Lucie



St. Lucie West Country Club Estates (1988)

One of the earliest residential communities in St. Lucie West was Country Club Estates, developed around the golf course that originally opened in 1988 as the Port St. Lucie West Country Club. The golf course was designed by renowned golf architect Jim Fazio and became a focal point for the new community. The Wingfield family (Caraway Land and Cattle Corp.) bought the land from the Peacock Ranch.



Kings Isle (1993-1999)

Developed by Lennar Homes, Kings Isle was among the first age-restricted communities established in St. Lucie West. Construction began in 1993 and continued through 1999.

Designed as an active-adult community for residents age 55 and older, Kings Isle quickly became on the area's most desirable retirement communities. Its success demonstrated the growing demand for age-restricted developments on the Treasure Coast and helped establish St. Lucie West as a destination for retirees.



Lake Charles (1996-2005)

One of the largest gated communities in St. Lucie West, Lake Charles was developed between 1996 and 2005 by Pulte Homes and Hanover Homes.

The community encompasses approximately 500 acres and contains more than 1,100 homes, including both single-family residences and townhomes. Lake Charles is known for its extensive network of lakes, preserves, and recreational amenities, offering residents opportunities to enjoy Florida's natural environment while living within a master-planned. Community.



Cascades at St. Lucie West (2000-2006)

Built by Levitt & Sons, Cascades became on the premier active-adult communities in St. Luce West. Construction began in 2000 and continued through 2006. The gated community consists of approximately 1,158 single-story homes designed specifically for residents age 55 and older. With its clubhouse, fitness facilities, swimming pools, and numerous social activities, Cascades exemplified the growing popularity of resort-style retirement living in Port St. Lucie.



Belmont at St. Lucie West (2000-2005)

Belmont introduced a different housing option to St. Lucie West through its condominium-style residences. Located along Peacock Boulevard, the community consists of 36 residential buildings constructed between 2000 -2005. Offering two and three-bedroom condominium units, Belmont helped diversify housing choices within the master-planned community and provided an attractive option for seasonal and year-round residents.



Magnolia Lakes (2003-2006)

Developed by Levitt & Sons, Magnolia Lakes brought a distinctive Key West architectural style to St. Lucie West. Construction began in 2003 and was completed by 2006.

The gated community contains approximately 478 single-family homes featuring front porches, tropical design elements, and a wide variety of floor plans. Magnolia Lakes also introduced extensive recreational amenities, including a clubhouse, fitness center, tennis courts, swimming pool, and playground facilities.



Lake Forest (Completed 2005)

Lake Forest was developed by Kennedy Homes and completed in 2005. Built on nearly 249 acres, the community includes 689 single-family homes situated among lakes, preserves, and walking trails.

The neighborhood's emphasis on natural landscapes and open space reflected the growing trend toward incorporating environmental features into residential developments throughout Florida.



MotorCoach Resort St. Lucie West (1999)

MotorCoach Resort is a luxury gated resort designed exclusively for Class A motorcoaches.

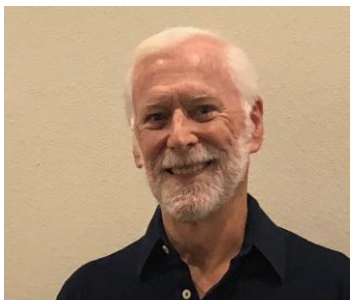
Opened in 1999, the resort represents a modern evolution of the area's hospitality and residential offerings. Featuring oversized motorcoach sites, golf facilities, swimming pools, fitness, swimming pools, fitness amenities, pickleball and tennis courts, and luxury accommodations, the development caters to a growing segment of recreational vehicle enthusiasts seeking resort-style living.



A Lasting Legacy Together, these communities tell the story of St. Lucie West's transformation from undeveloped land into one of Florida's most successful master-planned developments. Each neighborhood contributed its own character and amenities while supporting the boarder vision established by Thomas J. White and Core Communities.

Today, St. Lucie West stands as a model of planned growth, combining residential neighborhoods, educational institutions, recreational facilities, shopping centers, and businesses into a thriving community that continues to shape the future of Port St. Lucie.

What began as a bold experiment in community planning has become one of the defining success stories in the history of Port St. Lucie.



Dr. Robert Deery the 1st Dentist in Port St. Lucie

Did you know – Clint Westberry pulled the first residential building permit in St. Lucie West on Country Club Drive for a 3,000 square foot model home.



The Missing Link: How Interstate 95 Finally Reached St. Lucie County

Today it is difficult to imagine Florida without Interstate 95. The highway serves as one of the nation's most important transportation corridors, connecting communities from Maine to Miami and carrying millions of travelers each year. Yet for many years, a significant gap existed in Florida's section of I-95, and St. Lucie County found itself at the center of what became known as "The Missing Link."

Interstate 95 was authorized under President Dwight D. Eisenhower's National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956. Construction began in Florida during the late 1950s, and sections of the highway steadily opened throughout the state. By 1980, motorists could travel on Interstate 95 from the Canadian border all the way south into Florida. However, there was one major exception.

The interstate ended at the St. Lucie County line near Indian River County and did not resume until Palm Beach Gardens in Palm Beach County. Travelers heading south through the Treasure Coast were forced to leave the interstate and continue on U.S. Highway 1 or the Florida Turnpike before reconnecting with I-95 farther south.

The reason for this gap was largely political and environmental. Officials in Martin County opposed the proposed route through their county, expressing concerns about unwanted growth, environmental impacts, and changes to the county's rural character. As a result, construction of the highway through Martin and southern St. Lucie counties stalled for more than a decade. The unfinished section became known throughout Florida as "The Missing Link." While the rest of the interstate system expanded, this gap remained one of the most notable interruptions in the entire I-95 corridor. In 1980, Governor Bob Graham stepped in to help resolve the dispute. Several alternative routes were developed and presented to Martin County officials. The governor made it clear that a route would ultimately be selected so the interstate could finally be completed. After years of debate and negotiation, construction moved forward. The final segment of Interstate 95 through Martin and St. Lucie counties opened to traffic on December 19, 1987, ending nearly fifteen years of controversy and completing the continuous interstate route along Florida's east coast. The completion of I-95 transformed the Treasure Coast. Improved transportation encouraged residential development, commercial growth, tourism, and new business opportunities throughout St. Lucie County. Communities that had once been relatively isolated became more accessible to visitors and new residents from throughout Florida and beyond. For St. Lucie County, the arrival of Interstate 95 marked the beginning of a new era. Areas such as St. Lucie West and other western portions of the county experienced significant growth in the decades that followed. While opinions differed on the effects of that growth, few would dispute that the completion of I-95 permanently changed the economic and physical landscape of the Treasure Coast.

Today, thousands of vehicles travel through St. Lucie County on Interstate 95 every day. Most drivers are unaware that the highway was once interrupted by a controversial gap known as "The Missing Link." Yet the story serves as a reminder that major transportation projects often shape the future of communities for generations to come. The completion of Interstate 95 not only connected Florida's east coast—it connected St. Lucie County to a broader future.

The Reserve: From Ranchland to a Premier Golf Community

The history of **The Reserve** reflects the vision and determination that helped shape western Port St. Lucie into one of Florida's most distinctive residential and golf destinations.

In **1981**, **The Callaway Land and Cattle Company, Inc.**, owned by the Wingfield family, purchased approximately **2,300 acres** from the historic Peacock Ranch. The property was renamed **The Reserve**, with a development philosophy unlike many Florida communities of the era. Rather than clear the landscape, the developers sought to create a residential community that would coexist with its natural surroundings, preserving native vegetation, wetlands, and wildlife.

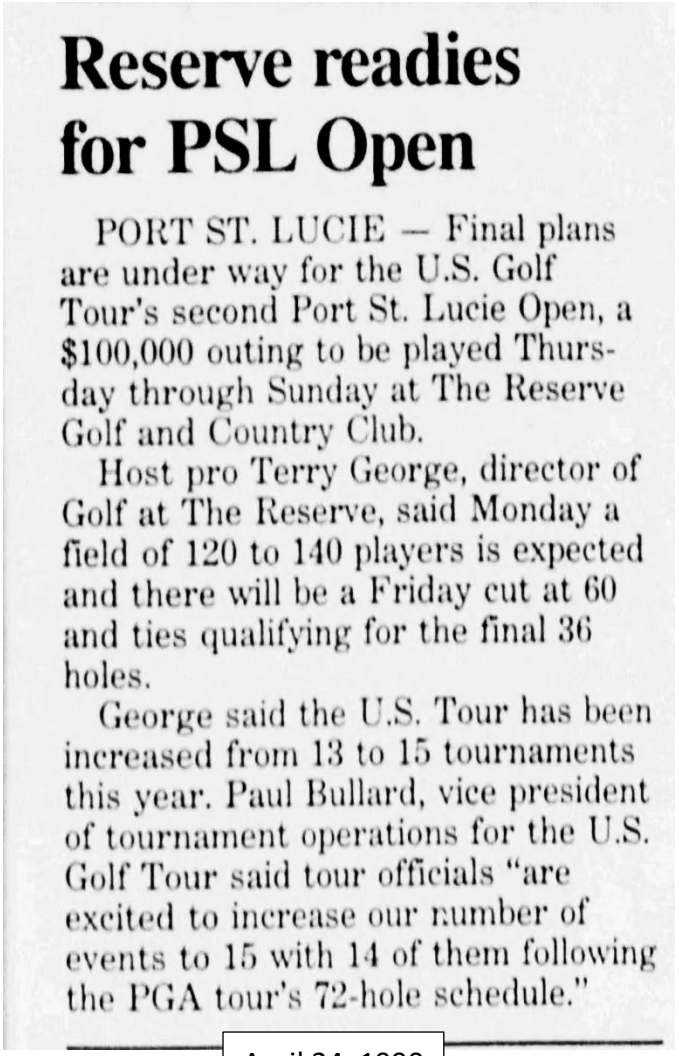
The first neighborhood, **Sabal Creek**, officially opened on **July 12, 1984**. It featured estate-sized homesites of up to **2.5 acres**, with equestrian trails winding throughout the community. The spacious lots and emphasis on nature distinguished Sabal Creek from more conventional suburban developments and established The Reserve's reputation for luxury living in a natural setting.

Following the success of Sabal Creek, development continued with the creation of the **Reserve Golf and Tennis Club**, which was later sold to the **Piatt family**. The addition of recreational amenities strengthened The Reserve's appeal and laid the groundwork for its future as a premier golf destination.

In **1988**, work began on **The Enclave**, along with the construction of a new **18-hole golf course**. The Enclave was carefully designed so that every home overlooked a scenic lagoon, combining waterfront views with the community's commitment to preserving the natural landscape.



The Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) tracks in St. Lucie County are part of the historic regional freight and passenger rail corridor originally pushed down Florida's Atlantic coast by industrialist Henry Flagler in the 1890s. It was purposefully routed through SLC to link northern markets to the booming agricultural, citrus, & shipping economies of the developing east coast. **PGA Village/Reserve was built near these pre-established freight corridors.**



Reserve readies for PSL Open

PORT ST. LUCIE — Final plans are under way for the U.S. Golf Tour's second Port St. Lucie Open, a $100,000 outing to be played Thursday through Sunday at The Reserve Golf and Country Club.

Host pro Terry George, director of Golf at The Reserve, said Monday a field of 120 to 140 players is expected and there will be a Friday cut at 60 and ties qualifying for the final 36 holes.

George said the U.S. Tour has been increased from 13 to 15 tournaments this year. Paul Bullard, vice president of tournament operations for the U.S. Golf Tour said tour officials "are excited to increase our number of events to 15 with 14 of them following the PGA tour's 72-hole schedule."

April 24, 1990





One of the most significant milestones in the area's development was the construction of the **St. Lucie West/The Reserve Interstate 95 interchange**. Remarkably, the interchange was financed entirely through **private funds**, with the cost shared by **St. Lucie West** and **The Reserve**. Its completion provided a direct entrance into The Reserve, creating what many described as the community's "front door" while dramatically improving access for residents and visitors alike.

The Reserve's national profile grew even further in **1992**, when the **PGA of America** selected the community as the site of its new golf destination. Construction of **PGA Village** began that year, with the complex opening in **1996**. The arrival of PGA Village established Port St. Lucie as an internationally recognized golf destination, attracting tournaments, golf enthusiasts, and visitors from around the world.



Building on the success of PGA Village, development continued with the creation of **PGA Verano**, expanding the area's residential offerings and further transforming the former ranchland into one of Port St. Lucie's most prominent master-planned communities.



Today, the story of The Reserve illustrates how thoughtful planning, private investment, and a respect for Florida's natural environment combined to create a community that has played a significant role in the growth and identity of western Port St. Lucie. From its beginnings as part of the Peacock Ranch to its evolution into the home of PGA Village and PGA Verano, The Reserve remains an important chapter in the city's history.





July's Activities



St. Lucie River Chapter of the DAR decorate the inside & outside of the museum



2 Days of Summer Camp





250th U.S.A. anniversary celebration at PGA Village





Legacy In Brick ribbon cutting with Mayor Martin



Music Bingo at the 19th Hole



The Peace Makers Savannah Club



Singles' Club Del Web



Visitor from UK



9-11 Remembrance

At PGA Village



City University 2 nights 6 sections





Treasure Coast Vintage Car Club

Membership Committee Update

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society is pleased to announce the formation of a new Membership Committee. Committee members will be reaching out to both our current and past members in the coming weeks to update our membership records and encourage continued involvement with the Society.

If you have any questions about your membership or would like more information, please contact John Greenfield at **membership@pslhistory.org**

We appreciate your continued support of the Port St. Lucie Historical Society!

Upcoming Events





Mark Your Calendar for the Port St. Lucie Historical Society's October's Gathering!

Wednesday, October 21, 2026
Social Begins at 5:30 PM
Membership Update at 6:00 PM

Dinner Starts at 6:20 PM
Santa Lucia River Club at Ballantrae
3325 Ballantrae Blvd, Port St. Lucie

$30.00 per person
Please RSVP for your name to be on the list at the entrance gate.
For your convenience you may reserve and pay online at www.pslhistory.org/gatherings.
Payment at the door is acceptable with cash, check or credit/debit card.
We will also have our raffle and 50/50 (Cash Only).

Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center

Join us for an entertaining evening celebrating local history, colorful characters, and the stories that bring the past to life with Mike Adams, President of Adams Ranch in Fort Pierce. Our program will also feature a continuation of the Ghost Tour with our Ghost visiting each table to sit with our guests and share their story. We encourage all guests to attend in their favorite costume, favorite cowboy or as an historical figure.



Must RSVP to info@pslhistory.org by October 16, 2026
Bring a friend and be part of history at the same time.

AMERICA 250

Stitch-in-time Quilters Celebrating America's 250th

AMERICA 250 FLORIDA

The Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center is hosting the first annual Historical Quilting Exhibit.

For More Information, please call L. M. "Butch" Post at (772) 380.2300.
Additionally, please email "Butch" at butchpost@msn.com
if you are planning on entering a wall-hanging.

Port St. Lucie Museum and Education Center
2456 SE Westmoreland Blvd., Port St. Lucie, FL 34952
www.pslhistory.org

How to Make *Your* Quilt Block

Follow these simple steps:

1. **CHOOSE YOUR INSPIRATION**
The Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center is hosting the first annual Historical Quilting Exhibit.
What makes you think of 250 Years of America? Turn your idea into a colorful quilt square.

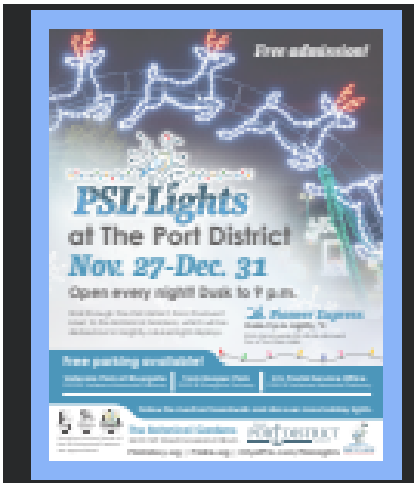
2. **CREATE YOUR BLOCK**
- Quilt wall hanging will be between 10"-13". Each entry must be a finished Block not exceeding 13" square.
- All entries must include red, white, and blue, colors of the US Flag.
- Entries may not have any flag in their design.

3. **SEND IT IN**
This exhibit is open to ALL LOCAL QUILTERS. 13" stands for our 13 colonies. Please bring to the PSL Museum before or at the Reception, in your honor, October 25th, 2026. They will be hung for everyone to see from Nov. 2nd until Nov 16th. Nov. 17th is pickup day. All St. Lucie County Quilters Guilds and St. Lucie County residents are invited to participate.



Visit www.pslhistory.org/special-events for more information

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) Public Charity. All donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law and 100% of all proceeds go to the Museum



Come see Santa at the Port St. Lucie History Museum December 18-20

Become part of our community and help preserve, celebrate, and share the rich history of Port St. Lucie—join the Port St. Lucie Historical Society today! PSLHISTORY.ORG