

Our Story Begins

Early in 1981, when the Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority started the construction of a large new pipeline system, replacing the antiquated 14" pipeline, running down from Dade County, to Key West...The pipeline Company was trenching through, and destroying our beautiful native trees, in its path. Everyone living on the Keys, was in an uproar over the situation.

The president of the Upper Keys Garden Club, suggested to the members, that rather than to fight, and obstruct work, that we should try to meet with the Engineers of D.O.T. Aqueduct Authority and the pipeline management, and work out a solution.

An appointment was arranged with these men, and it was suggested that there would be about three months time, to root-prune the Memorial trees, in the median strip through Tavernier, (Mile Marker 93 to 91). Furthermore, they agreed to try to work around other existing trees.

This group of engineers, and the pipeline company, asked for a name of a nurseryman, who could handle the job, of root-pruning, and then later potting the trees and holding them, until they could be re-planted. Jerry Droney, was secured, and began work immediately.

The officers of the Upper Keys Garden Club, walked the two miles, listing and counting the trees, to be removed, and the Pipeline Co. took ~~Audio~~ video photos of the entire strip. It was further guaranteed, that the fine stand of southern grass in the median, would be replaced, through Tavernier.

In March of 1982, the pipeline company, Botunco and McPhail, called to say that their work was finished and they had video taped the finished landscaping. Also that they needed the approval of our Garden Club, to finalize the project. Could I call a meeting?

Board members of our Garden Club were invited, as well as several members of civic organizations in Tavernier. Also attending were Jerry Droney (the nurseryman) and Dale Baldwin, who owned a landscape architecture firm in Tavernier. The video tape was viewed and suggestions were made by the mixed group. See enclosed letter from Botunco-McPhail.

That is how the beautification project for the Upper Keys began, and has been in a continuing state, since that time.

Our Story continues

In late 1982, Mayor Ken Sorenson, the county commissioner representing the Upper Keys urged the commission to set aside \$10,000.00 for Phase I of Highway Beautification, and said that he would chair a committee to handle the project. So that as people enter the Keys from Mile Marker 106 on the north, we would begin a journey on a scenic highway, of not only the ocean on the east, and the Bay of Florida and Gulf of Mexico on the west, but we would have native, and exotic trees throughout the entire strip of the Overseas Highway.

Mayor Sorenson called a meeting, with representatives of D.O.T., FL. Keys Aqueduct Authority, Monroe County Roads Dept, and others, to clear all of the permits required for this large undertaking of thirteen (13) miles of scenic highway.

A member of our club, District FFQC XII, Roadside Development Chairman, was called about the project, and she suggested that we have the County Extension Agent, Janet Bunch, speak to the club, at the next meeting, and explain the plans. Also it would be a good idea, to include Dale Baldwins firm, and have them bring the new landscaping plans, for these first 13 miles of Phase I. Perhaps our Club could donate money to help on trees, and have them, beautify the median strip in front of our clubhouse, which we had been trying for years, to get D.O.T. permission to accomplish.

Immediately following the presentation, that day, our club, donated \$500.00 from its treasury (unanimously), plus there was \$205.00 donated by individual members of the club as memorial trees for loved ones.

This started the ball rolling, and many civic organizations joined in the cause. Bids went out to nurserymen on the Keys for the list of trees, over \$6,700. worth of healthy 12' stock. Other monies were spent for soil, and staking. Holes were augered, in the bed-rock, and everything was gountil D.O.T. engineers and planners found that they had been using an outdated set of plans, and when the 4-lane highway had been widened, it did not leave the 60' of median width required, for planting trees, with trunks that would grow over 4" in diameter, (safety factor).

So here we were with thousands of dollars of healthy trees in pots. County workmen and machinery already in action, and many pages of landscaping designs to be scrapped
(see letters from FFQC
and Governor Graham, and articles.)

Many political forces went into action at that point, and Chairman Sorenson was on an extended vacation.....but D.O.T. held fast to their rules. Finally an agreement was reached with D.O.T., Governor Graham, and Mayor Sorenson: that D.O.T. would replace the amount spent on the trees thus far, and as soon as a landscaping plan for low shrubbery could be approved, work could begin again. (See article)

Everyone complied and finally in August 1985, the shrubbery designs, approved, and planting began. Phase I is completed.

The Monroe County Beautification Committee, appointed by the county commissioners, was asked by D.O.T. to coordinate all landscaping plans along the Overseas Highway. Two members of this committee, are members of the Upper Keys Garden Club. Mary Evalyn Wulff, who has served on the Beautification committee for five years, and Betty Wilson District XII FFQC Roadside Development Chairman.

Work has been going on for years, on trying to get a moratorium on new billboards, and finally in 1985, did get the approval of the County Commissioners. In the meantime the members of the committee, did a survey of all of the sign boards on the Keys, and found all of them unlicensed for several years. Now a D.O.T. representative from Miami, is checking the illegal signs, once every two weeks, and posting notices to have the signs removed.

The \$6,734.00 that was given by the state to replace the trees already purchased, was spent for shrubbery, but the trees then, were given to the Monroe County Beautification Committee to distribute, along all of the Keys, in designated spots.

Care of the new plantings is being handled by the County Workmen, such as watering trucks, at each site.

The value of such a project is immeasurable.