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Airport Road extension opens



Journal/MELANIE STAWICKI AZAM

Government officials and Venetian Bay developers celebrated the \$15 million extension of Airport Road, connecting Pioneer Trail to State Road 44.

By **MELANIE STAWICKI AZAM**
STAFF WRITER

NEW SMYRNA BEACH — Volusia County officials and Venetian Bay developers celebrated the \$15 million extension of Airport Road, calling it one of the most significant examples of local government and private business working together.

"I'd really like to thank (Venetian Bay developer) Jerry Johnson for his leadership in being so community-minded," Volusia County Chairman Frank Bruno said.

Bruno, along with a few dozen other county and city representatives, joined Johnson for a ribbon-cutting ceremony Monday at the intersection of Airport Road and State Road 44. Brief speeches were given beside a white tent with refreshments, and WNDB-AM 1150 broadcast live with the Marc Bernier Show from the event.

Venetian Bay developers received

\$10.5 million in impact fee credits from the county for the design and construction of the new 3.5-mile section of Airport Road, said Volusia County Engineer Jerry Brinton. Developers donated the right of way and stormwater retention ponds to the county, he said.

Although the ribbon-cutting was this week, the Airport Road extension linking Pioneer Trail to S.R. 44 actually opened to traffic three to four months ago, he said.

The stretch of road winds past Venetian Bay's new golf course under construction, condos going up in its town center and new homes being built on its various streets. The median is graced with tall palms, colorful flowers and other landscaping, while sidewalks run along either side of the road.

"It's just a great project. We're proud of it," New Smyrna Beach Mayor Jim Vandergriff said. "The town center is going to be like another part of New Smyrna."

In 2004, Johnson approached Volusia County with his idea to fund and build the extension of Airport Road. County spokesman Dave Byron said he wasn't aware of any other partnerships of this size elsewhere in Volusia County.

There are conceptual plans to extend Airport Road south of S.R. 44 about 5 miles to State Road 442 in Edgewater, Brinton said.

LandMar, which plans to develop 1,300 acres southwest of the Interstate 95 and S.R. 44 intersection, and Restoration, formerly known as Hammock Creek, both show plans to extend Airport Road through their communities. Restoration owns about 6,200 acres south of LandMar's property to S.R. 442, and plans to develop more than 9,000 homes on the land.

"They're doing their development layouts and planning (now) — we've been reviewing conceptual alignments," Brinton said.

No funding agreements with Land-

Mar or Restoration developers have been negotiated yet, he said, nor has a timeline been set for when the extension would be built. The county would not build the road itself, he said, since its money for such work is already stretched thin.

County officials said they are optimistic their partnership with Johnson can serve as a model for future arrangements throughout the county. Johnson said the success of the project shows public and private entities can work together toward mutual benefit.

"We always can work things out," Johnson said.

Meanwhile, he said construction continues at Venetian Bay. Its semi-private golf course is expected to be open by Thanksgiving. The town center's first condo residents are set to move in by June and its initial businesses are slated to open this fall.

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