



Bringing history to *life*

*Patience and ingenuity key to converting century-old
former cannery site into picturesque recreational area.*

By Kate Bouphe

Daniel Salmon, director of building maintenance for Nassau County, Florida, saw something on July 22, 2009, he'd waited 20 years to see: Goffinsville Park was finally opening to the public. It took two decades to turn what once was a more than century-old cannery and small community into a recreational site that protects and preserves the area's natural beauty and historic charm.

In 1893, a Russian immigrant named Saul Goffin bought a small cannery. The plant processed oysters, shrimp, crab, and even grapefruit. As Goffin's business began to grow, so did the community around it, which became known locally as Goffinsville. The community included homes, a post office, a commissary, and a small church.

After the factory closed, residents continued to use the property around it for fishing, boating, and recreation. Salmon and other Nassau County officials recognized the property's value to the community, not only in its natural beauty and recreational opportunities, but also its mark on history in northeast Florida that was worth preserving.

County officials had been trying to acquire funding to purchase the property since the 1990s. Because of the difficulty they had in finding grants and other funding and negotiating with adjoining property owners, the County turned to several agencies for assistance, including the



Trust for Public Land, Florida Communities Trust, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

The agencies assisted the County in purchasing the land from Saul Goffin's granddaughter, Doris Mellion, according to a 2002 story in The Florida Times Union. Though she had many offers from private developers, she chose to honor the memory of her grandfather by allowing Nassau County to use the property as a park.

The County used some of the funding to begin the design process. “The County developed a conceptual plan of what they envisioned for the site,” said Daryl Myers, Ayres Associates’ project manager. Ayres Associates used that drawing to design engineering plans that would turn the vision into reality.

“The challenge for developing a plan for the park was to provide as many amenities as possible in the 19 available acres while also maintaining the natural beauty and habitat, as well as meeting the requirements of the grant,” Myers said.

The new park offers many recreational amenities, including picnic pavilions, a boat launch with a floating pier, a fishing pier, a pedestrian trail, historic landmarks, and the highlight – in Salmon’s opinion: a playground designed with conservation, safety, and fun in mind.

“We used poured-in-place surfacing material made of pieces of recycled tires, which creates a cushioned floor. It’s one of the safest materials available,” Salmon said. The playground includes separate play areas for toddlers/preschoolers and older children.

For fishing and boating enthusiasts, the boat ramp is 118 feet long over 6 feet of water during low tide. Kayaks can be launched from the floating dock adjacent to the ramp. The nearly 160-foot fishing pier provides access to the mouth of the Santa Juana Creek. The pier has built-in benches and lighting, so the waterfront scenery can be enjoyed by anyone.

No project is without its challenges, and the Goffinsville Park development found its challenges during the permitting process. The Nassau River is a designated Florida Outstanding Water, which means stormwater management facilities are designed to treat stormwater runoff to a higher standard to protect the river. The project also required permitting with the FDEP, the St. Johns River Water Management District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The 18-month permitting process required extensive coordination with multiple agencies, while being responsive to the





County’s concerns. “Once Daryl Myers was brought in as the lead engineer, everything went pretty smoothly,” Salmon said.

Other solutions that helped meet the high water quality standards included not stirring up sediment during construction of the structures and designing a dry retention facility to provide stormwater treatment and attenuation for runoff.

In addition to the stormwater and environmental permitting, permits were also obtained from the FDEP for the potable water well and from the Nassau County Department of Health for the septic system.

“Preservation was key in everything we did with this project,” said David Kemp, Ayres Associates’ principal-in-charge of the project. “This means not only preserving what’s left of the original site, but also taking steps to make sure the land would be protected into the future.”

Approximately 15 feet of shoreline had eroded after hurricanes in 2004-05. To protect the shoreline from further erosion, Ayres Associates included a seawall as a shoreline stabilization component. “We only cleared what we needed to clear to fit the park amenities into the land,” Myers said.

Trees were purposely avoided when the pedestrian/recreational trail was designed. The trail turns and swerves for about 4,000 feet, connecting the two historic building foundations still standing at the park: the church and the remnants of the commissary. Both sites have decorative plaques explaining the history of each landmark.

The project has been well-received in the community. Many people have family ties and a personal interest in Goffinsville. Others just appreciate the waterfront access and a place to enjoy the Nassau River’s natural beauty. “The area has always been important to the local residents,” Salmon said. “They have organized cleanup and other activities to maintain the site on their own.”

The County also has more plans for the future of the park, like adding a bait shop, more security features, and expanding the trail system. Provisions for utilities for these structures have already been included and constructed. But the important work is done. The natural beauty, the recreation, and the history will be here for the next generation to enjoy. “I’m very pleased with what we have accomplished,” Salmon said. ■