

**GUEST OPINION BY COMMISSIONER RAY JUDAH**  
**CORKSCREW ROAD**

4-2-07

A recent decision by the majority of County Commissioners to reject a construction contract to widen Corkscrew Road from Ben Hill Griffin Parkway to the Belle Terra subdivision served to undermine a long standing agreement to improve an important road corridor in south Lee County.

In the early 1990's Lee County government was not prepared to provide urban level services along Corkscrew Road east of I-75.

In recognition of the need for the private sector to provide the infrastructure for potential development in an area of the County that was transitioning from rural to urban, eight major land holders voluntarily established the Corkscrew Road Service Area (CRSA) Special Improvement Taxing Unit to cover the costs of improvements such as roads, utilities, storm water management and fire protection to accommodate the eventual build out of residential and commercial development.

In fact, if not for the commitment of the CRSA, Stoneybrook, Grandezza, Bella Terra and the Miromar Outlet Mall would not have progressed to the point today where residents and visitors are currently living, working and enjoying the amenities of shopping and dining.

In 1994, the CRSA made a commitment to widen Corkscrew Road in two phases. In Phase I, the eight land owners paid a one-time assessment to fund the widening of Corkscrew Road from I-75 to Ben Hill Griffin Parkway.

Phase II was to extend the four-laning another 3 miles east of Ben Hill Griffin Parkway. Funding for the project was to include a separate assessment based on traffic projections and proportionate share of impacts that the CRSA developments would have on the road system in south Lee County, including but not limited to Corkscrew Road. The assessment was applied to the developers or successors in interest (i.e. residential owners and businesses).

It is important to note that the mining industry was not invited as a party to the CRSA, and therefore, not financially or legally obligated to participate in the widening of Corkscrew Road. Any effort to include the mining interests in the CRSA must consider the potential consequences of future rezoning requests to mine land along Corkscrew Road given the expectations of the mining industry to receive zoning approval if called upon to directly contribute to Phase II widening of Corkscrew Road.

Residents living in the CRSA understandably felt that non-CRSA developments in the surrounding area should participate in the funding of the Phase II Corkscrew Road widening project. Unfortunately, there is no legal basis for the County to involuntarily include developments that were not part of the original formation of the CRSA.

The County is unable to participate financially due to budgetary constraints in our road construction program. In fact, Lee County shifted \$60 million from General Fund Reserves during the last two years to our Capital Improvement Program to fund critical road projects such as the proposed Estero Parkway flyover. Furthermore, funding projections for the County's 2030 long range transportation program reveals a \$2 billion shortfall.

Property owners were initially assessed at time of construction of their homes for Corkscrew Road Phase II. However, due to a redesign as requested by the CRSA committee and increased construction costs, an additional assessment of approximately \$1,600 over 5 years is required. An annual principal payment of around \$320 per year would have been a reasonable investment to enhance the capacity and safety along a critical segment of the Corkscrew Road corridor.

Unfortunately, the majority of Board of County Commissioners did not support the recommendation of the CRSA committee to approve the Phase II Corkscrew Road widening construction contract and further delay will only make it increasingly more difficult to contain construction costs.