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Entertainment & Life

## **Vilano Beach awarded Trail Town designation**

**By The Record**

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Vilano Beach Town Center was designated a Florida Trail Town at a recent meeting of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Council.

The meeting, held Sept. 14, was in Titusville, Florida.

In Florida, a “Trail Town” is a community located along or in proximity to one or more long distance nonmotorized recreational trails. This includes cycling, paddling, equestrian or hiking trails where users can venture off the trail to enjoy the services and unique heritage of the nearby community.

The town is a safe place where both town residents and trail users can walk, bike or jog to find the goods and services they need, and easily access both the trail and the town.

Along with Vilano Beach Town Center, the City of Malabar and City of Clermont attained designations joining Titusville and Dunedin as the first five designated Trail Towns in the State of Florida.

The Vilano Town Center is fast becoming a destination for residents and visitors to enjoy its amenities, which include wide sidewalks, recreational pavilions, restaurants, camp grounds, a Publix grocery store, hotels, docks, boat ramps, shops and multiple parks with beach access on the Atlantic Ocean and river access at Matanzas Inlet.

Converging in this Florida designated Main Street community is the A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway with an emerging 10-foot wide A1A multi-use trail from Vilano to Ponte Vedra Beach.

Multiple trails in Ponte Vedra and Palm Valley remain in development and continue northward along A1A, which now has bike lanes to Fernandina Beach. The Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail runs from the ocean to the inlet, and the Vilano Town Center from ocean to river is a short 30-minute walk.

The GTM Research Reserve is home to numerous wide and hard surface cycling, hiking and equestrian trails. The A1A Byway links the main corridor with 5-foot bike lanes to downtown St. Augustine making the connection to the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop at the Bridge of Lions less than 2 miles away.

This circular 260-mile loop trail encompasses the five counties of Volusia, Putnam, St. Johns, Flagler and Brevard that when complete runs from Titusville to St. Augustine along the Atlantic Coast and St. Johns River corridor.

The A1A Byway is situated along the East Coast Greenway connecting Calais, Maine, to Key West, Florida, that when complete will compose 3,000 miles of connecting trails. The beach itself is a long-used corridor readily walkable from Ponte Vedra to the Vilano Town Center with no barriers. The A1A corridor is along the Great American Birding Trail as well the Guana Wildlife Management Area.

At the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Council meeting Vivian Browning, president of Vilano Beach Main Street, and Sallie O'Hara, executive director, presented the town center's application and answered questions on why this designation was sought.

The journey for community transformation began in in 1995 when the new A1A bridge bypassed the commercial district and changed the face of Vilano Beach.

"We knew we needed a revitalization that would create a commercial/residential district, which would bring local services and would be a sustainable, pedestrian-friendly Town Center that would also celebrate and protect our recreational and environmental assets, Browning said. "The designation is sure to energize foot traffic to the Town Center stimulating business investment and opportunities for further growth. All will greatly benefit from the alternative modes of transportation and enhanced services."

Doug Alderson, Assistant Bureau Chief and Trail Town Coordinator with the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails continues to encourage other communities to use the Trail Town designation process as a mechanism of growth.

“Vilano Beach earned this designation by providing great signage and safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians to its many downtown amenities,” Alderson said. “The town is also uniquely situated to offer camping and great food to long-distance paddlers on the 1,515-mile Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail, so this designation is indeed a win-win for both the town and trail users.”

For information, go to [vilanobeachfl.com](http://vilanobeachfl.com).

Photo below: Left to right: Paul Haydt, East Coast Greenway Coordinator for Florida; Sallie O’Hara, Executive Director of Vilano Beach Main St.; Samantha Browne, Bureau Chief, Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT); Becky Afonso, Executive Director of the Florida Bicycle Association; Doug Alderson, Assistant Bureau Chief and Trail Town Coordinator OGT; Vivian Browning, President of Vilano Beach Main Street; Katie Bernier, Regional Coordinator.

