



America's Seaplane CitySM



*Tavares, Florida Transformation 2007—2010
BOLD, CIVIC ENTREPRENEURIALSHIP
“NICHE & WOW—THE LITTLE CITY THAT DID!”*

Land & See

Case Study Title: TAVARES – THE LITTLE CITY THAT DID!
Jurisdiction: City of Tavares, Florida
City Administrator: John H. Drury

PROJECT LEADER:

Bill Neron, Director of Economic Development/Grants
352-742-6402 ~ bneron@Tavares.org
201 East Main Street ~ Tavares, FL 32778

PRESENTING TEAM MEMBERS:

JOHN H. DRURY
City Administrator
352.742.6209
jdrury@Tavares.org

BILL NERON
Director of Economic
Development/Grants
352.742.6402
bneron@Tavares.org

JOYCE ROSS
Public Communications
352.742.6264
jross@Tavares.org

**FCCMA - TRANSFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - 2011 CONFERENCE
“MAKING MAGIC – HOW BOLD CAN GOVERNMENT BE?”**

TAVARES, FLORIDA TRANSFORMATION -- 2007 – 2010
“MAKING MAGIC – HOW BOLD CAN GOVERNMENT BE?”
THE LITTLE CITY THAT DID!

**VISION! DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN! BRANDING!
IMPLEMENTATION!**

For the last four years the Citizens of Tavares, City Council and Staff have been involved in a successful process transforming a moribund downtown and waterfront park into a vibrant community asset. A community Visioning process first defined the future direction of the City. This was followed by a lengthy process to prepare and approve an updated CRA Comprehensive Master Plan for the City’s downtown core area and a concerted effort to increase downtown waterfront major events from 4 to 16 per year. Simultaneously a Branding initiative was undertaken that resulted in the overwhelming approval for the designation of “*Tavares, America’s Seaplane City*”. During this same time the City Council has embraced the planning, design, permitting, funding and construction of an \$8.3 million Seaplane Base/Marina project. Following is a discussion of the major components of this transformation process.

VISION

Under the leadership of former Mayor Nancy Clutts the community entered into a two year conversation with many night meetings involving community stakeholders to define what did Tavares want to be. In early 2007 these meeting resulted in the following Vision Statement being approved by the City:

*TAVARES – The Capital Waterfront City of Lake County –
Building on a Historic Foundation – Creating an Authentic,
Accessible Community of Neighborhoods, Businesses and
Citizen Services – Distinguishing Itself as the Defining Vision
Of Where You Want to Be.*

But the City Council and staff realized that Vision without implementation is a hallucination.

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

In June 2007 the City hired the IBI Group to work with the Community Redevelopment Advisory Committee and staff to prepare an updated downtown Master Plan. After several months of data gathering and meeting with various interest groups, several public hearings were held on the proposed downtown plan. A new CRA Downtown Master Plan was adopted by the City Council in October, 2008. Unlike many master plans that have a pretty cover and collect dust sitting on the shelf, the City’s Downtown Master Plan has a very specific implementation schedule and specified capital improvement program.

BRANDING

In 2009 the City engaged the services of WilesSmith and Associates to assist in developing a Brand for the City based upon its Visioning process. After many month of work with focus groups and City stakeholders, the City Council approved the new Brand – *Tavares – America's Seaplane City – Land and Sea*. Not only did the brand complement the current ongoing construction of the Seaplane Base/Marina at Wooton Park on Lake Dora, it also recognizes the City's unique heritage with seaplanes. The first recorded seaplane operation was off the shore of Tavares on Lake Eustis in March 1914 in a Thomas Flying Boat, just a few years after the seaplane was invented. As outlined in the CRA Downtown Master Plan, the City is currently reviewing proposals for a new Wayfinding Program in coordination with the City's new Brand and has budgeted \$100,000 as the first phase of implementing this program.

IMPLEMENTATION

As an overlay transcending the above distinct efforts, the City Council, staff and citizens undertook several major improvement efforts beginning in April 2007. At this time the City Council conceptually approved the building of a Seaplane Base/Marina at Wooton Park in downtown Tavares.

Over the next 24 months, the planning, permitting, design; financing and bidding of the Seaplane Base/Marina project was accomplished. The estimated cost of the project is \$8.3 million of which \$1 million is State and Federal grants with the balance funded by infrastructure sales tax and other available City non-ad valorem revenues.

The project consists of the following components:

MARINA --The Marina includes an 88 slip, floating dock configuration with a Harbor Master/Ship Store. The Ship Store has been constructed to replicate the Woodlea House of Captain Melton Haynes which was destroyed by arsonists in September 2007. Haynes brought the citrus industry to Lake County which was the basis of the community's economy for many years. The Marina will also serve as a venue for boat rentals. A mooring area for seaplanes was constructed as part of the boat dock construction and a specialized fueling area for the sale of marine and aviation fuels has been built. The fueling area was built with the latest technology and environmental safeguards and meets DEP Clean Marina Program standards.

LOADING PLATFORM FOR RAIL PASSENGERS -- The construction of a loading platform for rail passengers at the location of the former Railroad Station has been built to serve passengers on the tourist train that operates in the Tavares area. The historic replica platform honors Tavares' rich history with railroads.

CHILDREN'S SPLASH PARK – Using a seaplane theme, the construction of a Children's Splash Park zero depth pool, with active water features was finished in August 2009 in the community area of the Park near the existing Wooton Wonderland playground.

PAVILION – EVENT CENTER -- A Pavilion – Event Center will be constructed over the water at the East end of Wooton Park. The Pavilion – Event Center will be constructed to replicate the former Tavares Pavilion that was built at the Park in 1912 and demolished in the early 1950's. The Pavilion – Event Center will serve as the “headquarters” building for numerous regional and community events.

While the City initially sought proposals from the private sector to operate the Seaplane Base/Marina, the City Council ultimately decided to have City staff operate the facility as an enterprise operation based on a Business Plan prepared by the Staff. The operations were opened on April 10, 2010 in conjunction with the annual Planes, Trains & Barbecue event.

The Ship's Store, officially named the Prop Shop at Woodlea, serves as the operational hub for the Seaplane Base/Marina operations. The operation offers annual boat slip rentals (44 out of 88 slips) with no live-aboards permitted. The sale of marine and aviation fuel sales is provided from fuel pumps on specifically designed docks for this purpose and on the boat ramp tarmac. A limited water taxi schedule is offered on specified weekends and special events. A variety of packaged food items, beverages and ice are offered for sale. Specialty clothing, limited fishing tackle and boating related supplies, seaplane memorabilia, along with souvenir and historical related items are sold at the Prop Shop.

In conjunction with outside vendors, bike rentals, canoe, kayak, jet skis and other boat rentals will be provided. Pontoon boat lake tours and excursions are offered from the Seaplane Base/Marina by a private contractor

Jones Brothers Aviation provides seaplane rides and seaplane pilot training and certification classes. Air Charter services are under consideration. The possibility of using the Seaplane Base/Marina as a site for seaplane sales and demonstrations will be pursued.

The Seaplane Base/Marina project directly punctuates the City's new brand as *“America's Seaplane City – Land and Sea”*.

OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES

A goal of the City was to become the waterfront event venue capital of Central Florida. Between 2007 and 2009, the City hosted events at Wooton Park increased from 4 to 16 events. These events include the Bass Pro Shop Crappie State Championship, several Bass/ESPN national tournaments, the annual Classic Raceboat Regatta, the Sunnyland Antique Wooden Boat Show (now believed to be the largest of its kind), Dragon Boat Races, the annual Planes,

Trains & Barbecue event, 5k races and a half Marathon events, and jet ski races to name just a few.

Additionally the City in 2008 implemented an impact fee waiver program for non-residential projects in the downtown CRA area. In 2009 the City Council expanded the City impact fee waiver program for all types of projects city-wide. In March 2010, County government implemented a Transportation Impact Fee waiver program for one year. It is now possible to build a commercial project in Tavares with no City or County impact fees. Between June 2008 and April 2010, the City waived impact fees on 26 permits with a total of \$1,386,465 of City impact fees waived that resulted in a building permit valuation of new construction totaling \$22,890,248. For every dollar of impact fee waived, \$16.51 of new construction value was generated.

The goal of these events and other activities was to bring people back downtown. Between 2008 and 2010, 22 new businesses opened in downtown Tavares including 7 new restaurants. Restaurants have in turn attracted retail with three new retail establishments opening in the past 6 months. During one of the worst recessions in modern times, we met our goals with resounding success.

The Seaplane Base/Marina project is substantially complete. The new Pavilion which is funded is currently under design. The project exemplifies the adage: "Build it and they will come."

In March 2010, Progressive Aerodyne, the maker of the Sea Rey aircraft, moved its entire operation to Tavares adjacent to Lake Idamere, building on our seaplane theme.

The efforts of the City of Tavares and its citizens represents Civic Entrepreneurship at its very best.

"TAVARES --- OPEN FOR BUSINESS"

"Tavares --- Open For Business" is not just a catchy slogan, it is an attitude that permeates the core of City Hall from the members of the City Council and the City Administrator to the customer service representative at our Utility Payment Center.

At City Hall, we recognize that time is money and unnecessary delays are not only burdensome but costly.

In Tavares, we offer "fast track" permitting as a matter of course and our Development Review Committee meets every Wednesday. All City Departments involved in any facet of development review have a seat at a single table and meet one on one with the applicant seeking development approvals.

In Tavares we believe true economic development is helping our existing businesses to grow and prosper and to help new businesses to be successful.

TAVARES, FLORIDA TRANSFORMATION -- 2007 – 2010
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PRESENTATION COMPONENTS

INNOVATION/CREATIVITY

In practicing Civic Entrepreneurship, the City combined a variety of time tested techniques and practices in a laser focused fashion to bring about true downtown revitalization in the toughest of economic times. While Visioning and Master Plan efforts often produce little or no results by themselves, the synergy of Vision, Plan, Brand and Implementation has produced dramatic positive results in a relatively short time frame for Tavares.

Using the “niche and wow” technique the City built on its historical heritage with seaplanes and decided to develop a Seaplane Base/Marina on its underutilized waterfront park area. Over the past 3 years Wooton Park has been transformed into a regional destination point with water related event venues.

Private consultants were used on a specific task basis for development of the CRA Downtown Master Plan and the Branding initiative. An engineering/architect design team was selected for the planning, design and permitting of the Seaplane Base/Marina project.

The consultants used in our efforts include:

CRA Master Plan: IBI Group
 2300 Maitland Center Parkway
 Suite 101
 Maitland, Florida 32751
 734-945-8754

Branding: WilesSmith and Associates
 319 Clematis Street
 Suite 710
 West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
 561-820-9196

Seaplane Base/Marina: Booth, Ern, Straughn and Hiott
 350 North Sinclair Avenue
 Tavares, Florida 32778
 352-343-8481

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Over the past three years, 22 new businesses have opened in downtown Tavares including 7 new restaurants with two more restaurants currently under construction. Three new retail establishments have opened within the past six months.

During the past six months, an estimated \$15 million in new building permits have been issued. Under Florida law, it will be 12 – 18 months before these investments translate into new taxable value on the property tax roll.

The City currently hosts 16 major events a year at Wooton Park which attracts thousands of visitors to the downtown area. The establishment of a Downtown Entertainment District along Main and Ruby streets has brought nightlife to the downtown area.

The Seaplane Base/Marina began operations on April 10, 2010 as a City enterprise operation. During the April – June quarter 340 seaplane landings were documented and 12,476 Splash Park tickets were sold. (See attached Quarterly report). July Splash Park attendance was just over 6,000.

Progressive Aerodyne (www.searey.com), the manufacturer of the Sea Rey light sport seaplane aircraft moved its operations to Tavares on Lake Idamere in May 2010. Other seaplane related industries are being actively recruited.

Tavares continues to polish its Brand as “America’s Seaplane City” and was recently featured as the cover page story in *Water Flying* magazine, the national publication of the Seaplane Pilots Association (copy attached).

Almost \$20 million in grants and loans have been awarded to completely revamp the City’s downtown aging water and sewer system. A Storm Water Master Plan has been approved and grant funding is being sought. The one-way pair development of Alfred Street, a major downtown connector street, is under design with right-of-way acquisition slated for the 2012 fiscal year.

Over the last three years Tavares has been true to its Vision and has focused on construction of needed infrastructure that has attracted new businesses to the community.

APPLICABLE RESULTS AND REAL WORLD PRACTICALITY

There are several practical applications that the City of Tavares could share with other local governments.

Throughout its efforts over the last three years, the City has been transparent in its activities and has gone to the extreme to involve the community and business leaders in its efforts. The City has encouraged and welcomed the active participation of the business community.

The establishment of a “business friendly culture” at City Hall that involves the entire City work force sets the City apart from many other local governments. In Tavares, we try to say “yes”.

Over the last year, Tavares has become well known in Central Florida and around the State as a business friendly community and an enjoyable place to visit and spend the day with your family. The City is fast becoming a destination.

The efforts and successes in the City of Tavares can be duplicated by other local governments. In the past six months contingents from Palatka, Titusville and New Smyrna Beach have visited Tavares to learn first hand about our accomplishments.

CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

The Case Study presentation would be multi-media in nature involving video, power-point, print handouts and a panel presentation. For the past two plus years the City has had a videographer under contract documenting the transformation of Tavares.

DATE: AUGUST 3, 2010

TO: JOHN DRURY, CITY ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: BILL NERON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT REPORT – LAND AND SEE TRADING COMPANY (APRIL – JUNE, 2010)

On March 3, 2010 City Council approved a Business Plan for the Land & See Trading Company, a City funded and City staff operation of the new Seaplane Base Marina and Splash Park at Wooton Park.

The purpose of this memorandum is to present a report of management information concerning the operations of the Seaplane Base Marina and Splash Park for the period April – June 2010.

Following are some highlights to be noted for the three month period – April to June:

A total of 304 seaplanes landed at the Seaplane Base Marina during business hours (See Chart 1).

A total of 12,476 individual Splash Park Admission bands were purchased (See Chart 2) which generated net revenues of \$ 23,309.00 (See Chart 3).

Ship Store net sales (the revenue generated after the cost of goods has been accounted for) totaled \$9,608.00 (See Chart 4).

Ship Store sales primarily consisted of Clothing (41%), Beverages (14%), Pavilion and Gazebo Rentals (13%), Accessories (12%), Food (11%), and Other Miscellaneous Items (9%) (See Chart 5).

Aviation and Marine fuel net sales amounted to \$9,865.00 for the three month period (See Chart 6).

Net revenues for the period totaled \$42,718 with corresponding expenses of \$71,784 with the difference of \$29,066 being covered by a loan from the TIF fund (See Chart 7).

The Business Plan approved by City Council on March 3, 2010 anticipated a projected TIF loan \$76,172 for the first quarter of operations. The actual loan needed was \$29,066 or \$47,106 less than projected for the first quarter in the Business Plan.

More detailed revenue and expense information is contained in Chart 8. It needs to be stressed that the revenues are net revenues.

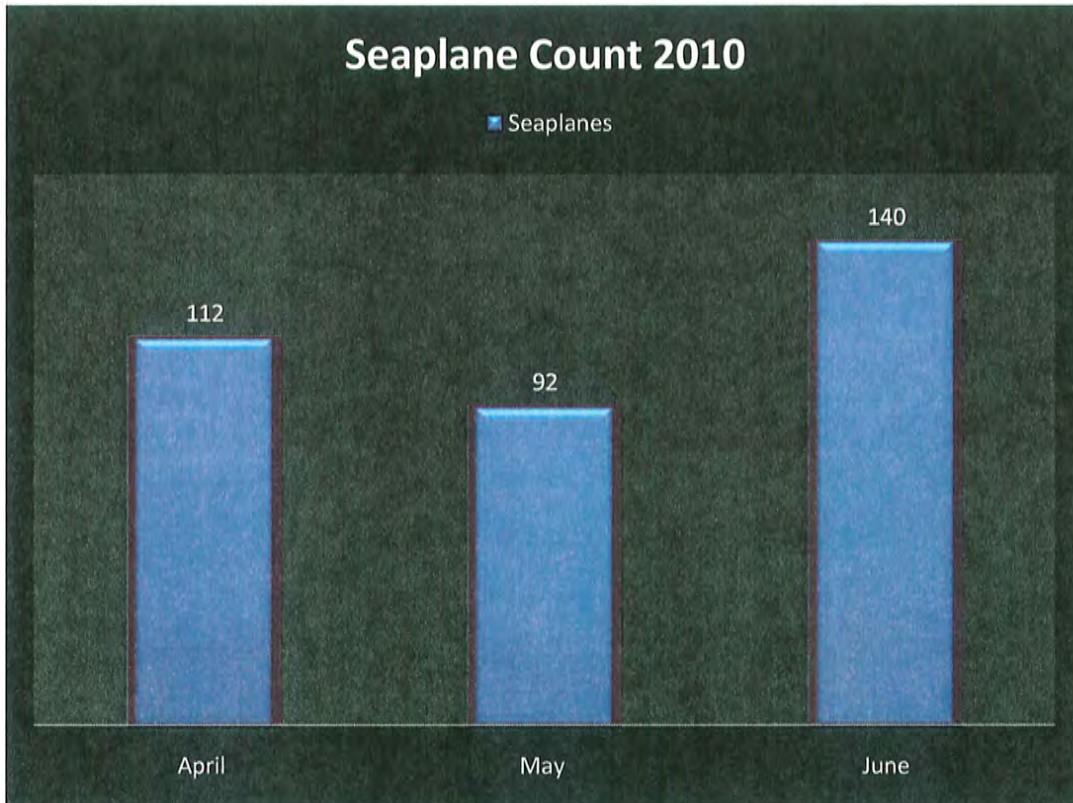
Some other observations to be noted would include:

A major portion of the monthly deficit was in April which month only included 20 days of revenue and operation of the Seaplane Base/Marina.

Revenues from slip rentals were minimal. Staff is working with Joyce Ross, Public Information Coordinator, to develop a specific marketing plan aimed towards additional slip rentals.

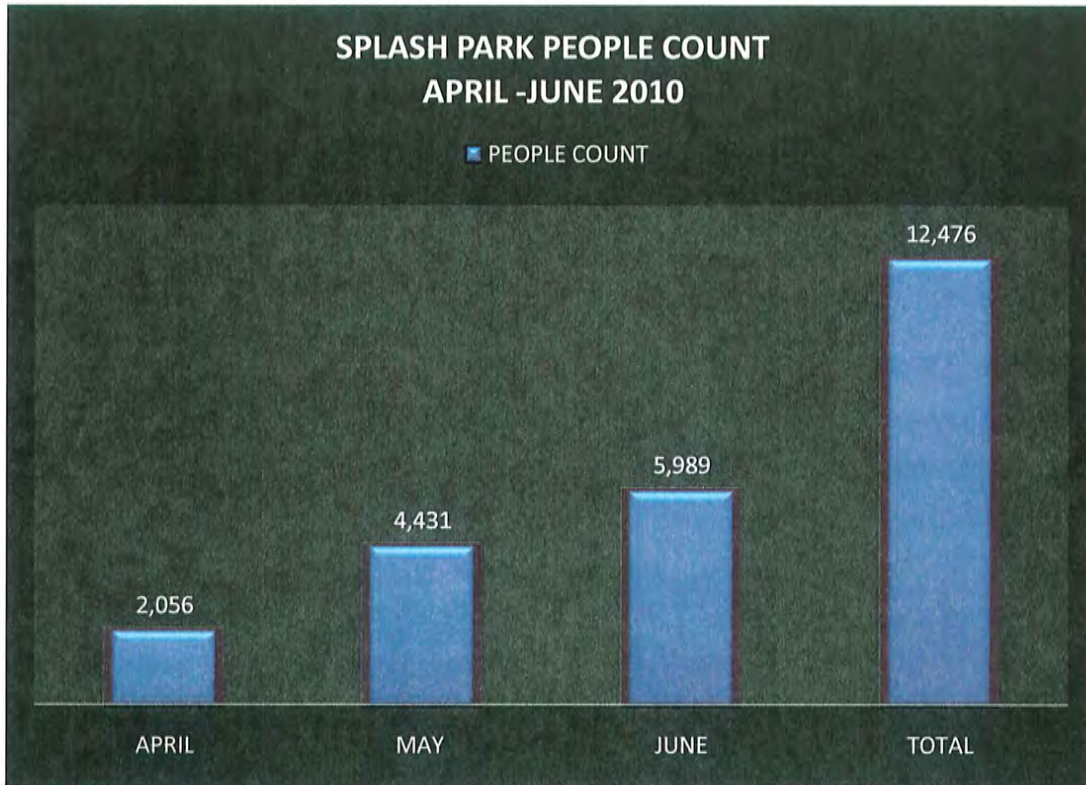
First quarter revenues for the Splash Park totaled \$23,309.00 with corresponding expenses of \$15,731.00.

CHART 1



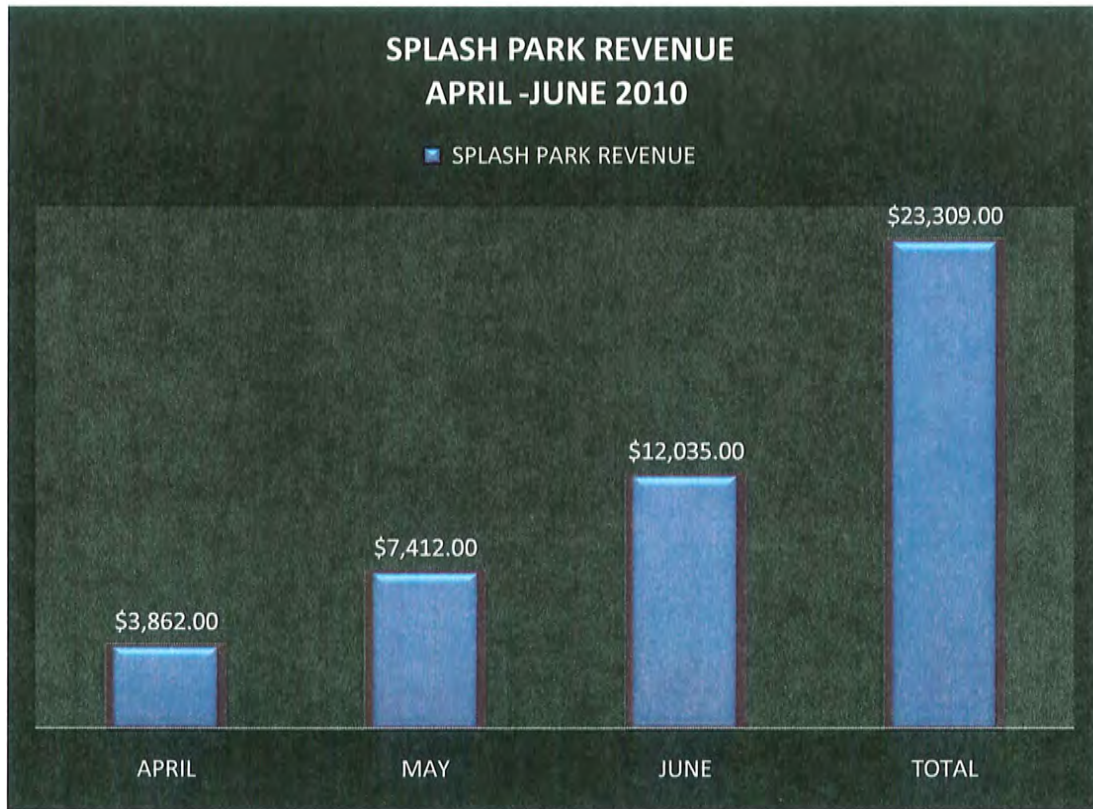
The chart above demonstrates that there was a total of 344 seaplanes that landed at the seaplane base in April, May and June 2010. April had a total of 112 seaplanes, May had 92, and June had 140 seaplanes land at the seaplane base during business hours.

CHART 2



The chart above shows that 12,476 people purchased splash park bands for admission monthly in the months of April –June 2010. As you can see 2,056 people purchased splash park bands for admission in the month of April. 4,431 people purchased bands in the month of May and 5,989 people purchased bands in June.

CHART 3



The chart above shows that the total revenue for the months of April – June 2010 was \$23,309.00. This was considerably higher than last year's revenues. As you can see the splash park generated \$3,862.00 in the month of April. \$7,412.00 was generated in the month of May and \$12,035.00 in June.

CHART 4

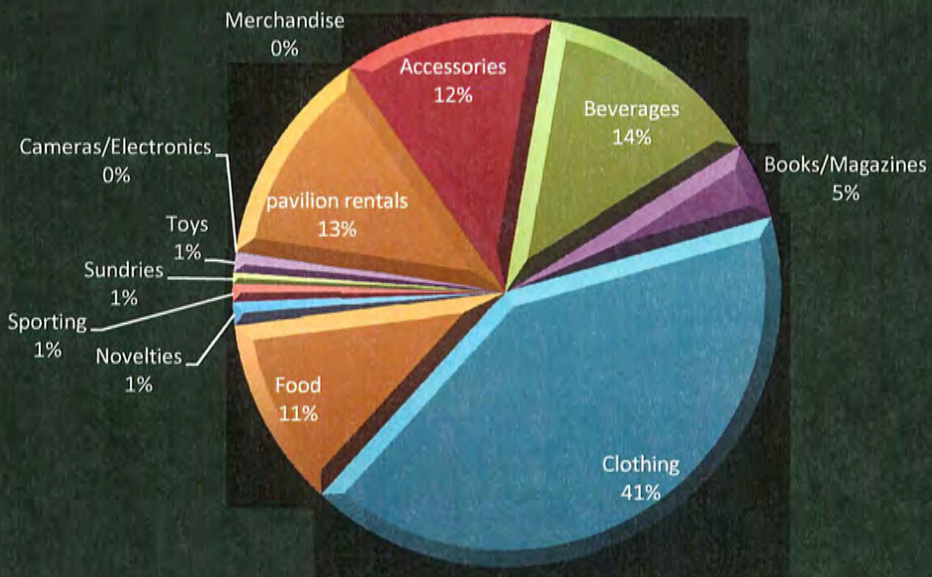


Ship store net sales of merchandise for April, May and June totaled \$9,608.49. April sales account for the grand opening on April 10th through the 30th. May net sales total \$1,401.99 and June net sales total \$3,344.80. April sales were significantly higher due to Planes Trains and BBQ event and the highly anticipated grand opening. Pavlion rentals were also included for both the month of May and June. Please refer to monthly ship store merchandise charts for details.

CHART 5

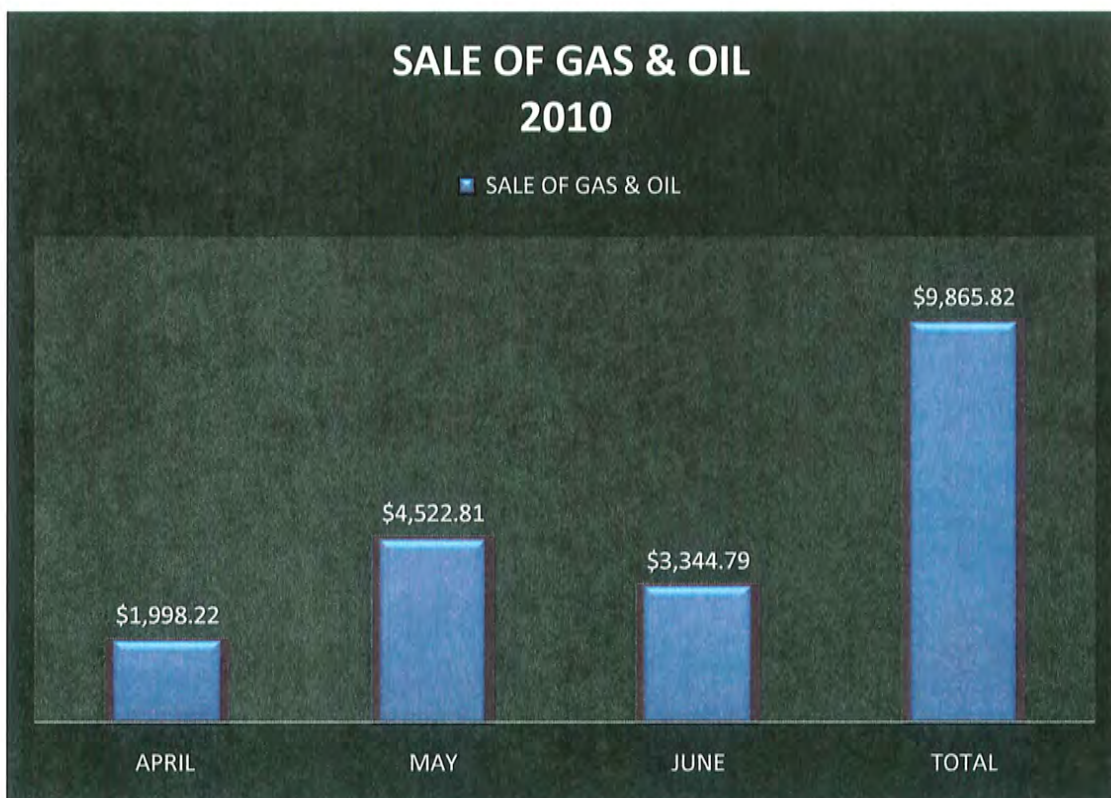


Merchandise Sales Percentage % April -June 2010



The chart shows percentage of each type of merchandise sold for April, May and June combined. Clothing was a constant top seller with 41%. This includes city logo polo shirts and city logo t-shirts. Other top sellers were beverages (14%), food items (11%) and accessories (12%). Pavilion rentals were also very successful (11%).

CHART 6



Sales of aviation and marina fuel for April, May and June totaled \$9,865.82. This accounts for only a few days of fuel sales operations in the month of April due to technical difficulties experienced through May. Despite the technical difficulties in April, fuel sales for both aviation and marina fuel totaled \$1,998.22. May fuel sales increased to \$4,522.81 due to a few events. June sales totaled \$3,344.79.

CHART 7



The chart shows net revenues versus expenses for the ship store from April to June 2010. Start up costs are included in April's expenses. Between April and June revenue increased gradually. There was a 30% increase in net revenues from April to May and a 32% increase in net sales from May to June. Net sales increase from April to June was about 55%. TIF contributions needed to balance revenues and expenses for April was \$20,689.00. This was necessary for start up costs. In May, TIF contributions were significantly less with \$5,329.00. Contributions from TIF were even lesser for June with only \$3,048.00.

2010 REPORT
FIRST QUARTER
APRIL - JUNE 2010

CHART 8



TOTAL REVENUE AND EXPENSES	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	TOTAL
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$29,303.54	\$19,204.62	\$23,275.44	\$71,783.60
REVENUE	\$8,614.19	\$13,876.46	\$20,227.95	\$42,718.60
CONTRIBUTION FROM TIF FOR 3 MONTHS	\$20,689.35	\$5,328.16	\$3,047.49	\$29,065.00
TOTAL REVENUE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

REVENUES

DEPARTMENT	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	REVENUE
RECREATION / SPLASH PARK FEES	\$3,862.44	\$7,411.78	\$12,034.84	\$23,309.06
SLIP RENTAL/DOCKAGE	\$0.00	\$74.74	\$154.00	\$228.74
JB SEAPLANES INC RENTAL AGREEMENT	\$0.00	\$373.83	\$0.00	\$373.83
REGENCY LEISURE SERV. RENTAL AGREEMENT	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$200.00	\$200.00
SBP MARINA RENTAL AGREEMENT	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$600.00	\$600.00
SALE OF GAS & OIL	\$1,998.22	\$4,522.81	\$3,344.79	\$9,865.82
PROP SHOP	\$2,088.53	\$1,321.99	\$3,196.43	\$6,606.95
RECREATION FACILITIES/OTHER RENTALS/PAVILION	\$0.00	\$171.31	\$697.89	\$869.20
WATER TAXIS	\$665.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$665.00
TOTAL REVENUE	\$8,614.19	\$13,876.46	\$20,227.95	\$42,718.60

EXPENSES

SEAPLANE BASE/MARINA/PROP SHOP	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	EXPENSES
REGULAR SALARIES	\$5,987.80	\$6,379.09	\$6,345.29	\$18,712.18
FICA	\$457.66	\$477.73	\$473.48	\$1,408.87
FL STATE RETIREMENT	\$544.05	\$576.58	\$556.33	\$1,676.96
HEALTH INSURANCE	\$55.57	\$257.82	\$404.52	\$717.91
DENTAL INSURANCE	\$0.00	\$7.45	\$11.71	\$19.16
LIFE INSURANCE	\$3.09	\$9.68	\$15.66	\$28.43
DEPENDENT HEALTH INSURANCE	\$0.00	\$111.32	\$111.32	\$222.64
DEPENDENT DENTAL INSURANCE	\$0.00	\$10.80	\$10.80	\$21.60
LONG TERM DISABILITY	\$2.84	\$8.94	\$14.46	\$26.24
WORKER'S COMP	\$272.46	\$290.29	\$293.67	\$856.42
TELEPHONE	\$341.60	\$145.15	\$397.08	\$883.83
POSTAGE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
ELECTRIC, WATER, GAS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,948.16	\$3,948.16
PRINTING & BINDING	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$27.20	\$27.20
ADVERTISING	\$2,750.00	\$596.00	\$0.00	\$3,346.00
OPERATING SUPPLIES	\$279.13	\$482.51	\$41.30	\$802.94
REPAIR & MAINTENANCE/FUELING SYSTEM	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
OPERATING SUPPLIES/FUEL COSTS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$16.81	\$16.81
OPERATING SUPPLIES / REC. FUEL INVENTORY	\$7,692.82	\$5,406.63	\$3,600.00	\$16,699.45
OPERATING SUPPLIES / AVIATION FUEL INVENTORY	\$6,637.28	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6,637.28
WATER TAXIS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$25,024.30	\$14,759.99	\$16,267.79	\$56,052.08

\$71,783.60

SPLASH PARK	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	EXPENSES
REGULAR SALARIES	\$3,682.60	\$3,625.86	\$4,791.36	\$12,099.82
OTHER SALARIES & WAGES	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
FICA	\$281.50	\$276.98	\$383.68	\$942.16
FL STATE RETIREMENT	\$99.46	\$96.96	\$96.96	\$293.38
HEALTH INSURANCE	\$55.57	\$111.14	\$111.14	\$277.85
DENTAL INSURANCE	\$3.23	\$3.23	\$3.23	\$9.69
LIFE INSURANCE	\$3.08	\$6.16	\$6.16	\$15.40
DEPENDENT HEALTH INSURANCE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
DEPENDENT DENTAL INSURANCE	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
LONG TERM DISABILITY	\$2.83	\$5.66	\$5.66	\$14.15
WORKER'S COMPENSATION	\$150.97	\$148.60	\$205.50	\$505.07
UTILITIES/ELECTRIC, WATER, GAS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
ADVERTISING	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
OPERATING SUPPLIES	\$0.00	\$170.04	\$1,403.96	\$1,574.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$4,279.24	\$4,444.63	\$7,007.65	\$15,731.52

PLEASE NOTE SIX MONTH CONTRIBUTION:
MISC. FEES/SPONSORSHIPS/ADVERTISING
CONTRIBUTIONS / FROM TIF FUND

\$12,500.00
\$152,345.00



WaterFlying

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MAY/JUNE 2010



**THE BIGGEST LITTLE
SEAPLANE
CITY IN
THE USA**

America's Biggest Little Seaplane City

By Mark Twombly

Seattle, watch out; Anchorage, check your six; Minneapolis-St. Paul, better take notice: There's an unlikely but feisty new contender for the title of America's seaplane city. In fact, little Tavares, Florida, which resides in appropriately named Lake County northwest of Orlando, has gone so far as to apply for a trademark for the slogan "America's Seaplane City" because it has identified seaplanes as the draw for its aggressive downtown revitalization effort.

Tavares, Florida,
puts seaplanes at the center
of its economic development effort

Photo by Bryan Glantz



New waterfront in Tavares includes 88-slip marina and three seaplane slips plus refueling dock, shallow-angle ramp leading to paved amphib parking, another gas pump near paved parking, and offshore docks protecting seaplane beaching area. Ship's store with flight planning area and supplies is steps from the docks.

Tavares, which sits on the northwest shore of Lake Dora, one of 1400 lakes in the central Florida county, has built a new 88-slip marina and seaplane base at the foot of the downtown area. The base serves an east-west sea lane on the lake and includes a floating fuel dock with 100LL and marine gas, three floating seaplane slips, a grassy beaching area protected by floating docks positioned offshore, a new shallow-angle concrete ramp leading to paved parking for amphibians, and a second set of avgas and mogas fuel pumps in the amphib parking area.

A new Ship's Store also is in place complete with a small flight planning and lounge area, supplies, snacks, and gifts. The handsome waterfront building is an authentic re-creation of the Woodlea House, built in 1871 by Captain Melton Haynes. Haynes is credited with introducing the "sweet orange" to central Florida, which led to the area's important citrus industry.

The Ship's Store houses the office of Jones Brothers & Co. Air & Seaplane Adventures (863-241-1442). Owners Eric Weaver and Richard "Ricci" Rowe

have contracted with Tavares to operate a flightseeing service at the new seaplane base using a Twin Seabee and two Cessna 180s on Edo straight floats. They also will conduct multiengine and advanced single-engine seaplane training, and in the future may offer seaplane charter service.

Along with constructing the new marina/seaplane base and Ship's Store, the city built a Children's Splash Park featuring a shallow wading pool with a big, colorful twin-engine seaplane that dispenses water out the tips of its spinning propellers.

Bearing fruit

The emphasis on seaplanes in the city's revitalization effort already is bearing economic fruit—Tavares can boast that it's now home to a seaplane manufacturer. Progressive Aerodyne, which produces the SeaRey amphibious kit aircraft and is developing the SeaRey LSX light sport amphib, relocated to Tavares from Orlando on May 1. The family-owned company said that the move to a large facility on Lake

Idamere near Tavares will result in "a dramatic improvement in efficiency" because, for the first time in 20 years, all SeaRey operations including kit manufacturing, research and development, sales, parts, administration, the showroom, and aircraft storage will be under one roof.

Progressive Aerodyne credits Tavares with being "very proactive" in facilitating the move, and convincing residents along Lake Idamere to approve a zoning change that opened the lake permanently to seaplane operations.

"You can't be Motown without music, and you can't be America's Seaplane City without a seaplane manufacturer," says Tavares City Manager John Drury, who has a background in airport management. Drury, who characterizes the revitalized waterfront's emphasis on seaplanes as "niche and wow!" has been "a visionary and great advocate for the project," Weaver says.

How is it that a sleepy central Florida town with a population of about 13,000 decides to spend more than \$8 million to develop its downtown lake frontage



Eric Weaver (left) and business partner Ricci Rowe will operate seaplane flightseeing and training service at Tavares using their Twin Seabee and two Cessna 180s on straight floats.

Photo by Bryan Glantz

into a seaplane-friendly attraction?

The effort began in 2006 when then-Mayor Nancy Clutts resolved to establish a "citizen-generated" vision for the city's future. A series of town hall meetings was held that led to a focus on "invigorating" the city's downtown by developing waterfront projects designed to spotlight and greatly enhance activities that have been a part of the town for decades—boating, trains (at one time there were five railroads converging on Tavares; today a waterfront track connects the city with downtown Orlando and other lake-region towns), and seaplanes.

Tavares has long been a lunch-stop destination for seaplanes because the

downtown area and its restaurants are within a few steps of the lakeshore. Margaret Jackson, SPA Field Director and a well-known seaplane enthusiast in Florida who organized weekly splash-ins around the state, often took groups to Tavares. "The first time I went to Tavares was with Margaret," says Weaver. "It had a great beach and a great restaurant, O'Keefe's Irish Pub, right across the street. I never would have dreamed then that Tavares would embrace seaplanes as they have," he adds. "Margaret deserves all the credit in the world for getting this started. Her vision has become a reality."

After agreeing on a vision statement the city updated its master plan



Photo by Bryan Glantz

Beach, Bed, and Breakfast

Seaplane pilots interested in taking a closer look at what Tavares has accomplished with its waterfront might consider spending a night or few in the city, and an interesting place to stay is the Duncan House Plantation.

Built in 1925 by Henry Holcomb Duncan, an important figure in the city's history, the stately lakefront home is just a few hundred yards east of the city's seaplane base, within easy walking distance. The Duncan House property also has a grassy beach suitable for seaplanes.

Duncan was a state legislator who in 1887 co-sponsored a bill to create Lake County from portions of adjacent Orange and Sumter counties. Duncan subsequently became Lake County's first county clerk, a position he held for 33 years. In the early 1920s he commissioned Katharine Cotheal Budd, the first woman to be granted membership in the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects, to design a home in the Colonial Revival style.

Today the house is owned by a partnership and operated as a B&B. Bryan Glantz, one of the partners who also is a professional photographer, manages the B&B. Each of the rooms is spacious and elegantly furnished, including the third-floor suite where, it is said, actor Buddy Ebsen and his father once taught ballroom dancing.

For more information about the Duncan House see www.theduncanhouse.com; telephone 407/760-1518. ■



Children's Splash Park features flying boat with water-dispensing propellers.

to include the waterfront projects, and adopted a new logo and the "America's Seaplane City" slogan with the tag line "Land and See." The logo appears on city vehicles including a pair of recently refurbished water taxis that ply Lake Dora.

The city borrowed \$7.3 million in bonds and obtained another \$1 million in federal and state grants to finance the waterfront projects—the seaplane base and marina, Ship's Store, Children's Splash Park, an old-style train platform, underground utilities to support the projects, and a replica of a 1912 pavilion on a pier east of the seaplane base that will serve as the city's events center. All of the projects have been completed except for the pavilion, which recently received state permitting and is now in the design phase.

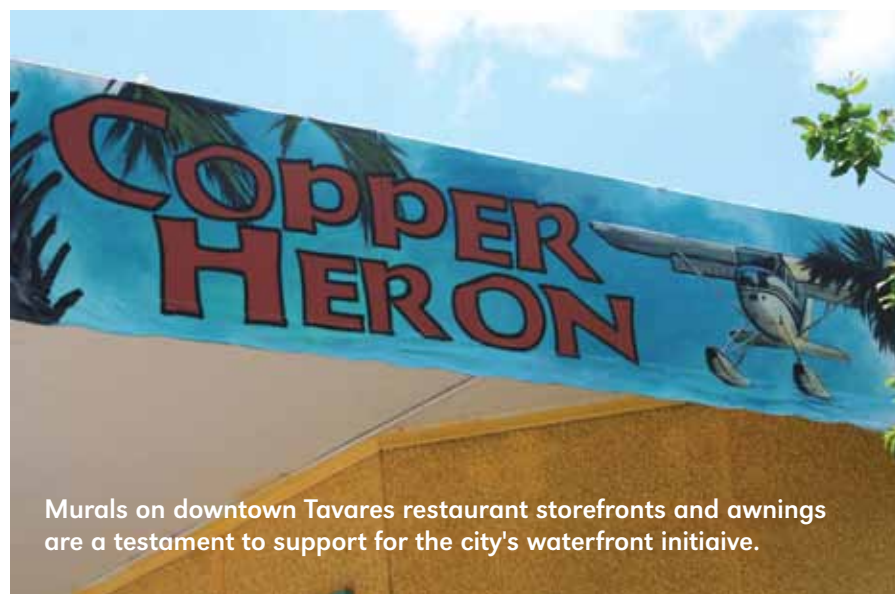
Both the State of Florida and the FAA have inspected and approved the seaplane base and sea lane, and at this writing the city was waiting to receive the official FAA identifier and assignment of a Unicom frequency.

John Ruggeri has been hired to manage the seaplane base and marina. He will work with the city and county's marine police to maintain safe operations for the mix of boats and seaplanes on the lake. (He can be reached at the Ship's Store at 352-742-6267.)

Along with investing in the waterfront, the city and county waived impact fees to encourage new business, and the results have been impressive. In the last two-and-a-half years 22 new businesses including five restaurants have opened downtown and in the surrounding area, according to Joyce Ross, the city's communications director.

City officials say the community has embraced the waterfront development, especially the seaplane base. Three downtown restaurants display murals on their buildings or signs depicting seaplanes, and at least one, the Ruby Street Grille, has "America's Seaplane City" printed at the top of its menu.

No doubt there will be plenty of seaplane and boat activity along the new waterfront. The city aims to leverage its development effort by making the waterfront a center of recreational events throughout the year. "We will have 16 major events a year," says



Murals on downtown Tavares restaurant storefronts and awnings are a testament to support for the city's waterfront initiative.

Bill Neron, Economic Development Director for the city. "If you want to do a water-related event, Tavares is the place to go."

Planes, Trains & BBQ

The calendar for the remainder of 2010 includes the Hydro-X Tour Jet Ski Racing Competition in June and the Junior Bass Masters State Championship in August. In January 2011 Tavares will host the Bass Pro Shops Crappie State Qualifying Tournament. Next March the prestigious Bassmasters 2011 Elite Series comes to town along with the Classic Race Boat Regatta, and in April the city holds its signature event: Planes, Trains & BBQ. (Neron is a master bar-

becue judge.) This year's Planes, Trains & BBQ drew some 9,500 visitors and featured the dedication of the seaplane base. Florida Governor Charlie Crist was on hand for the dedication, as was Seaplane Pilots Association Executive Director James McManus.

According to Neron, an estimated 35 to 50 seaplanes came and went during the day's festivities. The reaction of visitors confirmed the city's decision to make seaplanes the focus of the downtown revitalization effort "The minute you mention seaplanes people stop," Neron says. "They were lined up all along the shore to watch the seaplanes. There's a magic to them." ■

Mark Twombly is editor of Water Flying.

Find out what all the excitement's about in America's Seaplane City, Tavares, Florida. Our brand new Seaplane Base & Marina is OPEN FOR BUSINESS and welcomes you to Florida's newest destination!



City of Tavares, Florida
Docks, Fueling & Seaplane Store
Lake Dora—Wooton Park
100 E. Ruby Street
Downtown Tavares
www.Tavares.org
SeaplaneBase@Tavares.org
1-352-742-6267

FAA Call Letters: FA1
Unicom Frequency: 122.975
GPS Coordinates:
N 28°.48.043
W 81°.43.655

- Walk to downtown restaurants and shops
- Children's Splash Park
- Fishing Pier
- Eco Cruises
- Seaplane Rides
- Boat, Kayak & Bike Rentals
- Aviation Fuel Sales
- Marina Fuel Sales
- Floating seaplane docks
- Slip Rentals
- 2 Boat Ramps
- 84 Boat Slips
- Covered picnic areas



Woodlea House is a unique setting for the sale of food, boat related necessities and souvenir caps & shirts.

The Splash Park is next to a large playground and covered picnic areas.



TAVARES
America's Seaplane City™

Land & See