

COMMENTARY

'Gator Alley's Good Ol' Boys



rogerWILLIAMS

rwilliams@floridaweekly.com

78-mile strip of Collier and Broward counties ultimately worth billions. One top Department of Transportation GOB named Bill Thorp recently estimated that the Alley could be producing \$976 million — that's almost a billion — in net revenue just after mid-century, with a \$10 toll. And that's just for one year, alone.

All the foreigners have to do is patch the potholes and collect the dollars. (I know, I know, it's a little more complicated than that. And heck, folks, we'd be part of the annual revenue stream — the part way up the creek without a paddle.)

So by giving us a few percentage points of what we're ultimately worth now — a few hundred million or so, which is awfully tempting compared to the paltry \$23.5 million the Alley produced last year — these happy foreigners can provide their grandkids with castles overlooking the Mediterranean for the next 25 generations.

Let's look at who will be coming to town to chat with the Florida GOBs about getting this gig, shall we?

It's a diverse, multi-cultural crowd, and widely experienced. We have the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, the Italians, the Brazilians, and the Goldman Sachsons.

Apparently, the Goldman Sachsons come not only from another continent and another nation, but from another planet. Their CEO, Lloyd Blankfein, received a \$67.9 million bonus last December for shaving his head and looking crisp in the boardroom — let me repeat, ala Joe Biden, that's a \$67.9 million bonus on top of his salary, which

was \$18 trillion-billion-gazillion, as my 6-year-old would say.

The Goldman Sachsons, by the way, are in it with a Spanish company. Together, they call themselves Everglades Parkway Partners, and Goldman Sachs is represented in that brotherhood by its new infrastructure investment arm, G.S. Global Infrastructure Partners. (J.P. Morgan and a couple of other American financiers are in it with some other foreign competitors, too).

You remember the Spanish: They gave us the Inquisition, which they wrapped up neatly by burning the last few thousand heretics and then sailing into the New World and wiping out a few civilizations (the Maya and the Calusa come to mind). After that tidy bit of overseas management, they went back to the laboratory and created their 20th century model of sweetness and light, Franco, a.k.a. Frankensteino, a dictator who paled in comparison to his contemporaries, Hitler and Stalin. But not by much.

We have the French — and if they built the Maginot Line and maintained it for a month or so in 1940 against the Germans, we don't have to worry about them maintaining Alligator Alley for 50 years.

We have the Portuguese, of course. Good traders, and their national dish is bacalhau, or dried salted cod. So if we give the Alley to them, either we have to leave the Seminoles in charge of food at the one restaurant to be allowed, or we have to suspend the no-drinking-and-driving rule for that 78-mile stretch. Officials at the toll booth could then issue drivers with gallon jugs of the fruity Portuguese wine, Mateus, so they could wash down the bacalhau without having to stop on the pavement to exercise the nausea reflex, after eating dried salted cod.

The Italians. Well, their trains ran on time, but will their highways? I'd be in favor of a move by Gov. Crist to let them manage the food concession, and to send the Seminoles back to the casinos.

And finally we have the Brazilians, of course, who manage their own roadways by building them right to the edge of the rainforest and then destroying it.

They would be my choice, because as beautiful as the French and the Italians are, they aren't as beautiful as the Brazilians — some of the Brazilians. The ones who cut down the rainforest are not beautiful and they don't bathe much, from what I hear. But the ones who live in the wealthier parts of Rio or go to the beach there are very, very beautiful, especially in swim suits. And I assume the Brazilian company could be required contractually by the Florida GOBs to hire only the most beautiful toll collectors. They, in turn, could be required contractually to smile at you when they collect your \$10 toll, no matter what they think of you or any American. Then the toll would be mostly painless.

But that brings to mind this question: If gasoline is \$3.75 a gallon now, how much will it be by the year 2060? And have the GOBs at the Department of Transportation figured that into their estimates of revenue and royalties?

Because I've done my own estimate — just to help them out, since they have so much on their plates — and I figure that gasoline will average \$58 a gallon.

Which means nobody will be driving across Alligator Alley in 50 years, and our children can just give it back to the alligators.

Then, the kids can chalk it all up as yet another "really really" (roll your eyes) smart move by their parents. ■

**"We don't
discard tradition.
We reinvent it."**

— Robbie Roepstorff, President

Like Thomas Edison, we believe there is always a *better way*. We take the foundations of good banking — personalized services, meaningful relationships, and a smile with each handshake — and we build upon them to create innovative banking solutions for modern users. That's reinventing tradition.

Our customers enjoy the cost savings of **Free Checking**, **Free Online Banking** and **Free Bill Pay**, the convenience of an **expanded ATM Network**, and the unique value of **Health Savings Accounts**. These are a few examples of our innovative services.

Recognizing that convenience, innovation and value are also a priority for our **business clients**, we offer:

- ◆ Courier Services
- ◆ Cash Management Services
- ◆ Remote Deposit Banking
- ◆ Merchant Services

Experience the benefits of joining Edison National Bank and Bank of the Islands. We make banking about you.

An Equal Housing Lender • Member FDIC



13000 S. Cleveland Ave.
Fort Myers, FL 33907
239.466.1800

2105 First St.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
239.334.4668

1699 Periwinkle Way
Sanibel Island, FL 33957
239.472.7211