

Punta Gorda's new revolutionaries

In the 1770s, a group of men, ordinary in many ways, accomplished something amazing. They, along with others, led a movement so extraordinary that we still celebrate it every year on the Fourth of July more than 230 years later. These men, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Samuel Adams and John Adams, to name a few, risked their family, their livelihood and without a doubt their life to make dynamic changes for them, those around them, and most importantly, their community. The risks they faced were real and severe. In the British-ruled colonies, treason against the crown was punishable by death. Yet, even facing the possibility of death, they helped transform an oppressed society into the great nation that we all know today.

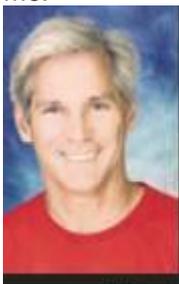
As we fast forward to 2009, our little community on the south shore of Charlotte Harbor is also experiencing a revolution. This time, however, the enemy is not the crown and its repressive hold on our founders. The enemy we face dates back to August 2004, when a hurricane churned through our beloved Punta Gorda and ravaged our community. This modern-day enemy took no prisoners, accepted no pleas for forgiveness, and offered no reparations. It's oppression over our citizens was complete.

But out of the rubble caused by that hurricane's rage came greatness. As it was with our forefathers, who did not cower in the face of despair, we once again have individuals who are willing to rise above despair and fear to take great risks in rebuilding our community.

These men are Punta Gorda's new revolutionaries. These individuals each have the gift of looking past the gaping holes in our community and seeing a new vision for Punta Gorda.

The new revolutionaries include Jack Wise with the Wyvern, José Suriol with the Four Points by Sheraton Punta Gorda Harborside Resort, Bruce Laishley, Chris McMillan, Rick Treworgy, Ron and Chris Evans with numerous projects, including the Laishley Crab House, the Muscle Car Museum and the planned Henry Street mixed-use development, and Franz Hartl with the Sunloft Center. The ambitious projects spearheaded by these visionaries may seem today an enigma in the uncertain economic times our entire nation faces. But remember that many colonists shook their heads in colonial America at the outlandish writings of Thomas Paine and the political ranting of Samuel Adams. These new revolutionaries are unique and noteworthy because they each have the gift of seeing Punta Gorda as it can be. Thank you Jack Wise, José Suriol, Bruce Laishley, Chris McMillan, Rick Treworgy, Ron and Chris Evans and Franz Hartl. Your brave and fearless actions have made our community an extraordinary one.

On a personal note, many of you responded to me by e-mail, phone and in person about my recent column about my mom. The day after I wrote that column I was with her as she died peacefully at the Woodside Hospice House in Pinellas Park. I sat at her bedside reading my column to her when she took her last breath. Many of you who contacted me shared your stories about your parents and what they meant to you. Thank you for sharing with me that very personal part of your life. It meant a lot to me.



Punta Gorda Business Ron Thomas