

# PANACEA

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## PANACEA

### Community Snapshot

**VISION:** “When we think about the community that we want to become, we see a waterfront community with the following features:

- A cleaner, more beautiful community that embraces and enhances its waterfronts
- A community that has maintained its heritage as a fishing and tourism center while adopting the newest technologies and strategies
- A community in which new development or redevelopment is compatible with the historic look of the community and protective of the natural environment
- A community that has maintained its tree canopy
- A community that provides family wage jobs
- A community that has recreational opportunities, medical services and shopping opportunities
- A community with an active civic life of fraternal organizations, social clubs and religious institutions
- A community of outstanding schools”

**DESIGNATION:** 2001

**APPLICANT:** Wakulla County

**STATUS:** Active; committee meets monthly; Partnership now established as a non-profit organization.

**KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** Boardwalk connecting the Welcome Center to Maritime Museum and Woolley Park beside Dickerson Bay; continue to work to recognize and rehabilitate the historic Mineral Springs area; local festivals; Vision 2020.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:** Finding a Program Manager; identifying project-related funding; investigating options for dedicated source of funding.

**FLORIDA ASSESSMENT OF COASTAL TRENDS DATA:**

<b>Number of Active Volunteers:</b>	25
<b>Volunteer Hours Contributed:</b>	2,000
<b>Public Dollars Contributed:</b>	\$4.5 million



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Panacea is known for fresh fish, blue crabs, and community spirit. Visitors to this unincorporated part of Wakulla County use U.S. 98, a two-lane Scenic Byway that defines Florida's Panhandle coast along the Gulf of Mexico. Dickerson Bay, just off the main road, is edged by a fishing pier, a public park, private homes, restaurants, a future maritime museum, and a hands-on locally owned aquarium catering to families and scientists alike. Most houses are one to two stories, rising occasionally to three stories to meet flood zone requirements; a mini-mall, restaurants, boat yards, and small businesses flank the highway. The community is located on a sand flat between St. Marks Wildlife Refuge to the east, the Apalachicola National Forest to the north, marshes to the west, and the bay at the south.

Panacea was a tourist town in the early 1900s, attracting visitors from across the country and around the world to its mineral springs and hotel. They came by train from Tallahassee to nearby Sopchoppy then by mule-powered tram to Panacea. The Panhandle coastal area was host to military activities and Camp Gordon Johnston during World War II. The fishing industry took off after the war with mullet the primary catch-of-the-day until technology changed in the 1950s, adding blue crabs to the commercial catch. The commercial fisheries

declined somewhat in the 1970s when sport and recreational fishing joined the constellation of economic opportunities in Panacea.

In 1994, the Florida electorate passed a Constitutional Amendment that banned the use of most nets for the commercial harvest of seafoods, putting a locally estimated one-third of some 300 to 400 local fishermen out of work. Some individuals retooled, using smaller legal-sized nets, others shifted effort to the already active blue crab and offshore fisheries, and some added the title of guide for sport/recreational fishers to the economic toolkit.

## HISTORY OF THE WATERFRONTS FLORIDA PARTNERSHIP

With the local economy weakened by the net ban, the County scrambled to find new options for Panacea. By 1999, they began looking to the newly created Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program as a way to get technical assistance and small grants, but applicants needed to have a community vision in hand before designation as a Waterfronts Community. The Waterfronts Program was intended to implement an existing vision, not to start from scratch. With an eye toward the next cycle of solicitations, the Partnership coordinators helped Wakulla County officials obtain a grant through the Coastal Partnership Initiative program to support a visioning process and establish a steering committee.





The County hired a consultant who held community meetings, conducted interviews, and visited at restaurants, coffee shops, and other local gathering places to capture the ideas of as many people as possible — including those individuals who do not normally attend or speak up at meetings. Panacea 2020 was adopted in April 2001; the group put together a winning application and became a Waterfronts Florida Partnership Community within months.

The Partnership created a board of directors and adopted a set of by-laws. At the first meeting, the Committee took out the vision, looked at the goals and objectives, set priorities, and developed a work plan for year one. The Partnership Committee continues to implement the vision, holding an annual meeting in December to review accomplishments and give themselves a pat on the back. They meet in January to revisit the vision and prioritize the goals and objectives for the coming year.

The new Committee focused on small, visual projects in 2001-2002: they wanted the community to see that things could get done. They took the idea of partnership seriously, reaching out to other community minded-groups in Panacea and the surrounding area to leverage funding. The Committee received a grant from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program that was used to spruce up waterfront Woolley Park and the Ladies of the Moose raised money to add the playground equipment. The Committee partnered with county-wide Keep Wakulla County Beautiful for cleanups; likewise, Keep Wakulla Beautiful received a grant from Learn-N-Serve, an educational organization, to beautify a roadside concrete block wall with mosaics of community scenes.

## THE VISION

Vision 2020 aimed to protect the community's culture, history, environment, and natural resources, with an eye toward leadership, the use of new technologies and awareness of the local carrying capacity. The document envisions three economic engines anchored in tradition and suitable for the future; the strategies are expected to guide actions to support:



- Sustainable fishing village for commercial, sport, and recreational fishing/tourism;
- Eco-friendly retirement/vacation community; and
- High value seafood.

Some goals have been incorporated into the Wakulla County Comprehensive Plan. The Future Land Use Element includes policies that encourage aquaculture, and the land development regulations provide a zoning district for commercial seafood processing. A proposed special overlay, intended to address public access, the historical integrity of Panacea and height restrictions, may be revisited in the near future if the County Commission — not the Committee — can guide the community to consensus.

## THE BUSINESS OF A WATERFRONTS FLORIDA PARTNERSHIP

Learning to be a Waterfronts Community came by way of on-the-job training and mentoring from other communities and the Waterfronts Florida support team. What the Panacea group gained was knowledge of how to bring people together and how to keep them involved. The 19-member Panacea Committee



had an elected chair, vice chair, and secretary/treasurer. Subcommittees focus on the Waterfronts priorities, recast in local terms as economic development, environmental and natural resources, historical resources, beautification, and events and promotions. The work takes place in the committees, which report back to the board; each of the committees is chaired by a member of the board.

Until recently, the Panacea Committee functioned largely from the office of the Wakulla County Grants Coordinator, who served as program manager at the direction of the County Commission. The group now has an official home co-located with other community groups at the waterfront Panacea Welcome Center, which is staffed by volunteers. The manager's everyday jobs include organizing meetings, arranging for speakers to educate the Partnership on special topics such as Community Redevelopment Areas, and acting as a liaison to the county and state agencies.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Panacea Partnership spearheaded plans to replace the Rock Landing Dock at Dickerson Bay, long considered to be an integral part of making a living from the Gulf. The Panacea group also



drew from its own experience and interviews to create a set of Best Practices for the development of a Waterfronts Florida; the booklet is distributed throughout the Waterfronts Florida network.

The greatest source of pride, and the greatest accomplishment to date, is "Christmas in Panacea." The event was started by the Waterfronts Committee after the Hurricane Dennis devastation in 2005, leaving property owners to clean up and out-of-town visitors to stay home. The economy sank and the Partnership stepped forward to create local fellowship. In the process they started a tradition: No admission fee and no vendors, U.S. 98 is closed off for the evening, snow is brought in. With the help of the Volunteer Fire Department, the Coastal Optimists Club, and others in the community, the Waterfronts group serves free hot dogs, hot chocolate, and candy. Volunteers set the tree, decorated with "Panacea Nikes" — the white boots worn by fishermen and crabbers — and use a crane to set a mermaid holding a star at the top.

"So many people lost so much...homes, boats, they needed to make a living. We said something needs to be done to make these people happy, even if it's just for one night," offered a board member by way of explanation. "Dennis was our tsunami."



## CHALLENGES

The Partnership faced a firestorm of objection in 2006 — some five years after designation — when the group opened a community conversation on the potential for adding a Panacea Waterfronts overlay district to the Wakulla County Comprehensive Plan. Word-of-mouth and rumors took over, assisted by the Internet, and property owners raised fears that an overlay could restrict options for development in years to come. Next came questions about the Partnership itself — who was it, when did they meet, and what authority did the members have to make such a proposal.



The steering committee refocused discussion on the Panacea Waterfronts Partnership and made sure that people knew how to get involved. Next the Partnership changed the time for some of the regular sessions from mornings to evenings to accommodate more people. While the overlay was shelved for the time-being, the Waterfronts Committee gained new members and a reputation for openness.

## SUCCESSION: THE FUTURE OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The founding Program Manager stepped down in 2007, taking on the same position with the newly designated St. Marks Waterfront Partnership. The Panacea group took the change in leadership in stride. They now have a 17-member board, meet monthly at a local restaurant, and continue the community cleanup campaign and the other reoccurring projects started by the Partnership. The current board initiated a “Yard of the Month” award. With less than six months of visibility, local residents now call in to be nominated.

The Partnership is also picking up junk to encourage people to get rid of old boats, refrigerators, and washing machines, collecting over a half-a-million pounds of junk in a recent bout of cleaning. The Board is in the process of bringing in new members, recruiting first from the pool of individuals who show up regularly to meetings. They are also asking for a new County-sponsored program manager who knows the system and can help them learn how to make deals and find funding.

The Partnership is looking toward restoration of the Mineral Springs area, which is already marked by signs, and they hope to continue the work to cover the concrete block with a mosaic mural, if funding can be found. From a safety perspective, the group will seek permission from the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge to use a high ridge road through the Refuge to provide an alternative route for evacuation when coastal highways flood.

The Partnership is also looking for funding to “re-vision” the community, taking into consideration the changes that have occurred since 2001, which reflects the community’s belief that Panacea is “a work in progress.”

