

# Koreshan president defends proposed bridge plans

## Lighted walkway for evening visitors

Let's build a bridge.

There has been considerable misinformation bandied about regarding the bridge the Koreshan Unity Foundation plans to build across the Estero River from one side of our property to the other side of our property. We'd like to set the record straight.

Ellen Peterson, activist extraordinaire, has made a number of incorrect statements, and we feel the public is entitled to know the facts.

Peterson said that the Koreshan Unity (Foundation) has sold waterfront property on the Estero River to a developer. The fact is all the

acreage we sold to WCI is inland, none on water. The Koreshan Unity gave, at no cost, to the state of Florida 150 acres on Mound Key, 70 acres at the mouth of the Estero River, plus the original Koreshan settlement in 1961.

As to the accusation we are aborting the original mission of the founders of the Koreshan Unity by asking for a permit to build a bridge, records will show that the original Koreshans, under Dr. Cyrus Teed's direction, intended to build a large,

modern city on the banks of the Estero Bay, not a wilderness preserve.

Peterson says our planned bridge would "deface the ambiance of the beauty of the outstanding waterway." The state-designated Outstanding Florida Waterway's national canoe trail runs west from the Highway 41 bridge to the mouth of the river. Our property and the proposed bridge lie east of the highway bridge, and our attractive bridge would add greatly to the ambiance of this scenic area. It would be a pleasant walkway, lighted for evening activities, for the



PETERSON

enjoyment of the public.

The number of pilings in the water and on the steep banks, says Peterson, would pose a threat to the safety of the more than 10,000 paddlers who use the river each year and obstruct the river flow during high water. The fact is, there will be 14 feet between pilings for our bridge, hardly a threat to anyone or anything. As to 10,000 paddlers — that figure is highly questionable — using the river, they seldom go east. That portion of the river is shallow and narrow so that canoers must turn around and travel west in order to do any serious canoeing.

Peterson says all this could be avoided by building a suspension bridge which would reach from top of bank to top of bank. The fact is a suspension bridge would not reach

the height of the highway bridge, which is a requirement of DEP and county officials. A suspension bridge is flimsy and vulnerable in stormy or windy weather. Many of our patrons who park on the north side of our property and cross over to our beautiful Theater-in-the-Woods for concerts and other programs are older and would not use a swaying suspension bridge, nor could we move our lawn mowers from one side of our property to the other.

Peterson says the Unity needs to make money through its Civil War Re-enactments and Blue Grass Festivals and makes slighting remarks about the number of people attending these programs.

Then, Peterson's "Could it be that a commercialized corner that would

fit the needs of new developments is planned and this is just the first step in that direction?"

Well, as a private not-for-profit foundation, we have been advised by the IRS that even if we wanted to sell property we are using for our own operations, we could sell it only to another not-for-profit entity.

We ask that anyone with a genuine interest in this matter come to see us and get the facts, which, to date, has not been done by any of our environmentally inclined dissenters. They appear to enjoy abstract theorizing and unfounded speculation to printed fact, regulations and common sense.

— Jo Bigelow is president of The Koreshan Unity Foundation, Inc. in Estero.



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Guest opinion