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## **Letter: Stop demonizing the Bonitans**

By Banner

Wednesday, February 8, 2006

Editor, The Banner:

To my good friend Arnie Rosenthal: When things get controversial in Estero, the un-elected Estero leadership frequently resorts to "Bonita-bashing," rather than looking to find constructive solutions and area-wide consensus to address South Lee County problems. Arnie, your recent opinion piece is a prime example.

The Coconut Road/I-75 interchange will be needed sooner rather than later, but most certainly at some point in time rather than never, to reduce the traffic congestion that has come to plague South Lee County (both Estero and Bonita Springs) over the past few years. All of the experts agree that the interchange will reduce congestion on Three Oaks Parkway, Corkscrew Road, U.S. 41, Bonita Beach Road, and even modestly on Alico and Immokalee Roads to the north and south.

The opponents to the interchange claim that the interchange first mysteriously appeared out of thin air in late 2005. The documented fact is that the interchange has been planned for and relied on as a critical long-range part of the South Lee County road network for at least two decades. If you doubt that, look at an aerial photograph of the Brooks; Lee County required the developers of The Brooks to set aside the necessary right of way in the early 1990s to accommodate a future full interchange at the east end of Coconut Road.

Rosenthal then suggests that the interchange is the product of a "scheme" between the city of Bonita Springs and a landowner east of I-75 to give a windfall to that landowner at the expense of the rest of us. The simple but largely untold truth is the only sin that landowner committed is that he supported the election opponent of a certain county commissioner in 2004. That same commissioner now actively opposes the interchange and focuses his attacks on that same landowner.

The commissioner, who is a planner by education and pre-public service work experience, voted numerous times in favor of The Brooks development in the early 1990s, which plans prominently included the interchange land set aside that you can see so clearly from above. I can recall no objection or opposition from that commissioner in the early '90s, only praise that The Brooks developer not only

set aside substantial road rights of way for future roads (including the interchange) but actually built several miles of the roads Estero now enjoys. Was this county commissioner mistaken, confused, or simply tricked in the early '90s; is his current opposition (albeit absent a confession that he was mistaken in the early '90s) really a courageous act of political integrity and public spirit; or is his current opposition really just a cynical political payback at the expense of all of us who continue to sit in traffic?

Rosenthal next boldly predicts that all South Lee County needs for the next two or three decades is two more lanes each on Corkscrew, Terry Street and Bonita Beach Road to interconnect 951, I-75, Three Oaks/Imperial Street, Sandy Lane/Old 41, and U.S. 41. Common sense and all of the traffic experts suggest otherwise.

I call on the leaders of Estero (many of which I have worked with as recently as last summer to successfully push Lee County and the city of Bonita Springs to stop the continued delays in commencing construction of Three Oaks/Imperial Street between Estero and Bonita Springs) and on my friend, Arnie, to stop demonizing those of us who live, work and do community work in Bonita Springs; stop using inflammatory language and suggesting an absence of integrity about us Bonitans; and instead, lead your community in a positive and constructive way to plan an adequate road network so that the traffic congestion with which we now live both in Estero and Bonita Springs can someday be a distant bad memory.

And Arnie, you are still my good friend despite our disagreement about the interchange. But you cannot call someone a "bully" at the front end of a sentence and end that same sentence with a plea to be neighborly and work together.

— John D. Spear / Bonita Springs

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