



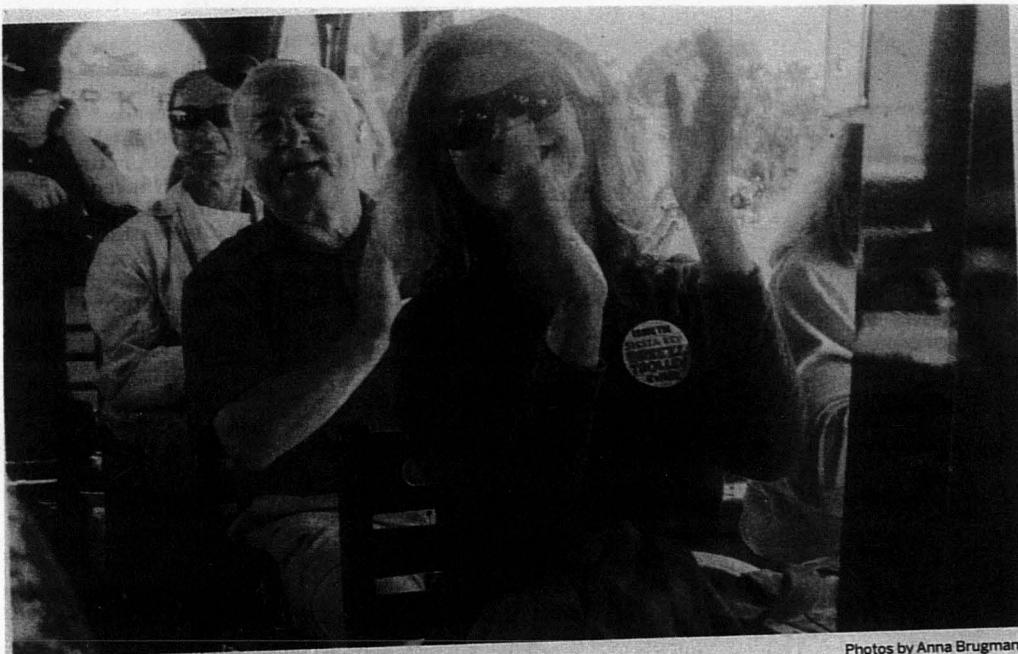
Anna Brugmann

The open-air trolley is a free service, and runs every 20 minutes along Siesta Key during high season.

Need a ride? Trolley is free

Transportation service rolls into action with hopes of becoming a Siesta staple.

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Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Ann Frescura celebrate the trolley's initial ride March 22 after the ribbon cutting.

Photos by Anna Brugmann

Trolley service Breezes into Siesta

Leaders push for ridership with an eye toward keeping service running past August grant expiration.

ANNA BRUGMANN
STAFF WRITER

Mark Smith has a simple hope for the Siesta Key Breeze trolley service.

"That it be here forever and ever on end," the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce chairman said at Monday's ribbon-cutting ceremony for Siesta Key's new open-air circulator service.

County staff and island lead-

ers gathered near the Siesta Key Village gazebo March 21 to commemorate not only the new transportation option but also Siesta Key Beach's recent Trip Advisor ranking as America's top beach.

The trolley service was made possible with a partial grant from the Florida Department of Transportation. The grant is due to expire in August, making the future of the service uncertain.

"This is a pilot project," Sara-



Sarasota County Area Transit Director Rocky Burke and Assistant County Administrator Mark Cunningham watch as County Commissioner Alan Maio cuts a ribbon in front of the Siesta Key Breeze.

sota County Area Transit Director Rocky Burke said at the event. "We don't know where it's going or how it's going to turn out."

The free circulator was billed by proponents as a solution to traffic congestion on the key. It runs every 20 minutes from Siesta Key Village to Turtle Beach between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Off season, it will run every 30 minutes from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.

"Three trolleys are going to be circulating," Burke said. "People want frequency more than anything else."

Although the future of the project is unknown, Smith already has ideas on how to improve the service including extending the route along Higley Avenue. He would also like to pursue the possibility of adding supplemental parking for those coming from the mainland south of the Crescent Beach.

"We can fine tune it," he said.

Siesta Key and county leaders hope maintaining high ridership

numbers will increase the likelihood of the trolley's longevity on the island.

"You get as many people as possible in the next few months to ride this thing," County Commissioner Alan Maio told island stakeholders during his address at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "So when it comes time to extend it, we have bonafide numbers on the use and the need."

Island interests are continuing to campaign for the trolley service. Many wore stickers that read "I rode the Siesta Key Breeze Trolley. It's free" as they boarded the vehicle for its inaugural ride.

Siesta Key leaders have long lobbied for a public transit trolley. Although some believe there is still more to be done, for now, they are enjoying the Breeze.

"This has been going on for a decade and it has been culminating into today," Smith said. "It's been a long ride."