



Merritt Island - aka the Double Decker Bus Tour

Community Advocacy for Merritt Island (CAMI), started informally about a year ago and today CAMI is an official 501c3, not for profit and non-partisan. In keeping with CAMI's mission to educate and "Connect and Unify" residents from all parts of the Island, a bus tour was envisioned and designed to be open to the general public. Ticket costs were set to cover the expenses of the event including the rental of the Double Decker Bus.

CAMI Board members spent hours researching websites, calling business owners and walking in to businesses to obtain the information presented to our riders.

CAMI chose on our first tour of the Island to focus on the recently opened businesses to provide exposure and assist in their success and to focus on areas of blight that need redevelopment attention and major retail vacancies as opportunities for new businesses. We also provided housing cost information throughout the central Merritt Island area focusing especially on seniors.

This information is now being made available to the public through our website with the intent that educating Merritt Island residents on the things they see every day will be beneficial to interest citizens in becoming involved in solutions. We didn't get all of the answers we wanted, but CAMI will continue to research and ask important questions and relay the information to the entire community via our website and public forums.

Speakers on the tour included Darleen Hunt, a long time resident of North MI.

- Larry Lallo, the Executive Director of MIRA, the Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency
- Stefani Maduskuie, the Community Redevelopment Manager for MIRA
- Susan Aroyan provided an East MI perspective, but unfortunately, was unable to speak that evening.
- Cynthia Wall, CAMI Board Member and President; Kristi Sanders CAMI Board Member and Vice-President, Kara Boyd CAMI Board Member and Arts and Culture Chair.

CAMI intentionally does not function as a Community Social Page, where lack of kindness and rumors abound. If you have a question pertinent to the health of Merritt Island, send it to us via our website, email, or Facebook messenger and we can add it to our future investigations. We make every effort to fact check our information, but if we get something wrong, or if you feel that there's more to the story, let us know! CAMI also encourages you as MI residents to do your own investigation and work with County agencies to address concerns. It will take all Merritt Island residents together to encourage improvements on the Island.

If you aren't familiar with MIRA, please get to know them. As Merritt Island is not a City, the County created a Community Redevelopment Agency in 1988. It is comprised of a volunteer 7 member Board of Directors and 2 full time, 1 part-time staff members which are responsible for most of the improvements you have seen on our Island. The grant money brought to our Island from MIRA staff is staggering. Check out the link to the [MIRA website](#) to learn more of their accomplishments.

BUS TOUR Start at Merritt Park Place Head towards N. Courtenay Parkway

- Roberto Roman, former owner of El Tucan, will be opening a fine dining establishment in the MI Park Place historical neighborhood.
- MILA Elementary School was established in 1953 and originally called MI Elementary. Later renamed to MILA to differentiate from MIHS. MILA originally stood for “Merritt Island Launch Area” but in the late 1990’s was reinterpreted as “Motivated Independent Lifelong Achievers” Last year there were 428 students enrolled.
- MILA’s athletic fields include softball, t-ball & baseball fields, 2 batting cages and restroom/concession buildings. The fields are owned by the School Board and maintained by Parks and Recreation.
- Status of former Pizza Hut lot 185 N Courtenay Pkwy - Waffle House purchased the property but a call to their Corporate Office in Brunswick, GA, discovered that there is currently no construction project scheduled at this time.
- Congratulations to Firehouse Graphics for purchasing and expanding into former bank on the corner.
- The Gentile Family, owners of recently closed Dairy Queen, plan on reopening a family ice cream shop in February 2024 at the former DQ Location.
- New Whisk & Grind opened in former Victoria’s Restaurant location.
- Field Court Housing - 16 units owned by Housing Authority of Brevard County - 411 N Courtenay across street from MedFast Clinic & Taco Bell. This housing complex is designed to provide low income housing on MI. County government owning housing is one way to provide low income housing in a community. An alternative is encouraging new development or redevelopment to mix affordable housing units with higher rent properties. The upside is that those units would collect property tax for the community while Brevard Housing developments pay no property tax.
- Car Place lot across the Street from the Donut Shop - 485 N Courtenay Zoned Mix Use - Commercial. Zoning requires in a used car lot that all cars are in running condition and that the grass lot is maintained. This property is owned by a Merritt Island resident with a wonderful success story of immigrating from Vietnam and becoming an engineer. The property is leased to a Vietnam Veteran who runs the car lot. It’s a sensitive situation of the owner wanting to improve the property but concerned about the future of the current lessor.
- Lura Lane behind the Car Place Lot is primarily a street of older, manufactured homes.
- Shore Lanes Bowling Alley - Existed as a bowling alley for 50 years. Also site of Mariachi Loco, a Mexican restaurant. How many Mexican Restaurants are on MI? Including Taco Bell, we count 7! Shore lane has supported and held MIHS’s Project Graduation for numerous years.
- Unfortunately, Cherokee Golf Carts on MI has recently closed.
- Family Owned Adventure Cycles - On MI for 47 years! Current owner Carol Horner.
- Old Utility Poles - Remain and a negative visual impact to our Courtenay Business Corridor.

850 N. Courtenay & Skylark - Empty Gas Station

- We are parked on the site of a Brownfield Location, there are two gas tanks that formerly serviced the pumps still in the ground. Formerly used as OM Food Mart, Kleen Express, Superfast, Sunset Auto and Kanoknat Covid Testing site.
- The same owners of the current site where we are parked also own South Courtenay Palms Apartments and Country Club Apartments further North on Merritt Island. The owners are from Cocoa Beach.

- South Courtenay Palms Apartments - Fence is in disrepair to the West. Management reports that there is a plan to repair the fence but could not provide a start date. A 2/2 will be available next week renting at \$1,350.
- New Restaurant open - 875 N Courtenay Pkwy - The OK-Dog & Egg Toast, handmade Korean soul food, multiple locations nationwide. Owners also own Thrifty Produce & Meats.
- Former Benjamin Moore & Island Paint & Decorating - Liquor Store & Lucky's Arcade. Lucky's Arcade is a gaming arcade classified as "Adult" due to 21 and over age restriction. It does have a business tax license. Games of "chance" are illegal in the State of Florida and "pop up" gambling arcades are frequently shut down and move locations to avoid detection. As long as Lucky's is not paying out cash and only offering games that require skill, not chance, it is legal.
[Florida Gaming Control Commission](#)

Pull out of 850 N Courtenay and head north on Courtenay Drive North to Academy of Cosmetology Parking lot

- Car Wash across from Arbys same side of street. Originally branded as "Clean Machine" the developer went bankrupt before the car wash was completed & the property was purchased by an out of state investor, sight unseen. The fence was down and the site in disrepair. Although not a part of their responsibility, MIRA took the time to reach out to the investor to inquire on the state of the property. The investor quickly secured the site. The property is now for sale. The county is not allowed by State Law to proactively ticket or research site code violations. If a citizen sees a property in disrepair and may be a health or safety concern, please contact the [Brevard County Code Enforcement](#).
- Merritt Island High School - Opened in 1965, Home of the Mustangs **GO MUSTANGS!** Current Principal, since 2018, is James Rehmer. This past Spring, MI graduated 370 seniors – many of them with AP, Honors and Merit scholar designations. MIHS leads Brevard County Public Schools with the most ROTC Scholarships awarded.
- MIHS Sports programs have recently excelled in 5A Volleyball and 2 seasons ago played for the State Football Championship. From the 70's to the mid 80's, Merritt Island High School was THE FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS gathering spot for MI.
- An estimated 43% of our total residential property taxes go to fund Schools in Brevard County. There is a separate tax for Schools - Capital Outlay on our property tax bills. As our school facilities age and new development in other areas of the County require new facilities, it is important to make sure our facilities on the Island are maintained and updated. Property taxes directed for capital improvements are NOT spent specific to the number of students in a district. In other words, there's a County pot of money for capital improvements and no designation on how much goes back into existing schools vs areas experiencing higher development. [Brevard County Public Schools](#)
- [Merritt Island Public Library](#) - Recent Beautification project and Community Day held by CAMI. There are 2 lines on your property tax bill that fund the library. The general library fund established in 1972 that funds the total operating costs of the Brevard Library District up to 1 mil and a special district for Merritt Island created in 1965.
- An opportunity for clean up - The old Space Coast Area Transit benches (SCAT) that are minimally maintained and no longer required next to newer bus stops. Usually piled with trash.
- Aldi is now closed making the Publix in the Center of Merritt Plaza the closest grocery store for North MI residents. Shutting down this rumor that continues to resurface, WE ARE NOT GETTING A TRADER JOE'S in this location.
- Unfortunately, the Topper's Ice Cream store is closing due to lack of business according to the owners.
- Diana Shores one of the oldest neighborhoods on MI - Diana Shores neighborhood is a mix of homes built between 1970 and 1999 and older homes from 1940 and 1969. The

median real estate price is \$565,161, which is more expensive than 80.5% of the neighborhoods in Florida. The average rental price in Diana Shores is currently \$3,619, which is higher than 80.5% of the neighborhoods in Florida. It is popular for families with Lewis Carroll Elementary nestled right in the middle of the neighborhood.

- The Meadows and Carlton Groves walls in disrepair, needing paint, maintenance and repair.
 - No HOA -The visual impact of large communities with no maintenance plan or budget can negatively impact the business corridor and surrounding areas of the Island.
- Dunkin' Donuts opens new location next to Divine Mercy.
- The building that housed Divine Mercy's former school is vacant. Great and attractive facility. Could be a beautiful business campus or a charter school.

Academy of Cosmetology Parking lot across from Synovus Bank

- 242 Crane View Lane- Owned by Crane View LLC in Cocoa, Florida - The building referred to in the community as "Beirut" is an abandoned project on 3.95 Acres formerly approved for a 48 unit apartment complex that halted in the recession of 2007-2008. Attracting a new developer at the current listing price has proven difficult. There have been 2 recent interested investors in the property. One would have been a 90 unit apartment building requiring a zoning density change from the County Commission. Investors pulled out due to rising interest rates and construction costs. The second potential project for the site was very exciting. 30, one level town homes with an environmentally friendly design and use of the acreage. However, the interested developer withdrew from the project due to the challenges of this site.
 - Several new Building codes and storm water regulations have come into play since the towers were originally constructed creating challenges for potential investors/developers.
 - a. Removal and replacement of utility infrastructure, which is approaching 15 years ago. Would have to be rebuilt and re-certified to today's standards and operating condition.
 - b. All existing slabs and infrastructure would need to be demolished and removed.
 - c. Site/Structures will need to be elevated, including the storm water pond itself, to approved base flood elevation.
 - d. This will require enormous amount of fill and re-engineered infrastructure and storm water pond & system.
 - All of the above is now a liability, rather than an asset, creating a challenge as presently priced. Spiraling inflationary construction costs for labor and materials, interest rates, and investment return rates contribute to the problem. As Merritt Island current rent and housing prices beginning to level off, the ROI (Return on Investment) is far from where it needs to be.
- Island Village Condos 55+ - Example of senior living cost on MI, nicely maintained, built around a pond and walking area. Recent sales averaged \$200k 2/2, Average monthly rent \$1,600 which included \$465 monthly HOA.
- 2056 N Courtenay Pkwy in the Cosmetology Plaza is Buck's Tobaccoria. If you are an adult, amazing pinball collection in the front of the shop.
- Former convenience store at 2110 N. Courtenay Pkwy, now Adult Arcade with shoe polish advertising on the windows and a button at the front door. An attempt to enter the premise was not granted although interior sign said "Open". Another person that tried to enter at the same time remarked that they have great "payouts" just like the Victory Casino Boat. CAMI was not able to get through to the Tax Collector Office to verify if this business is submitting monthly tax receipts. [Florida Gaming Control Commission](#)

Continue North on Courtenay to Sea Ray Drive Stop

- New Rich Island Burgers on west side of parkway.
- The new Twins Car Wash obtained its Certificate of Occupancy Tuesday and will have a soft opening next Wednesday, July 5th! Manager Bill Elkhart giving CAMI a shout out!
- Hampton Manor Of MI on the east side of the parkway - Opened 6 weeks ago - Assisted care facility offering memory care, assisted and independent living options. Accommodates 118 residents with 91 apartments. Average monthly rate is \$4,450 all inclusive.
- RaceTrac's convenience store and other convenience stores are frequently locked at night, not allowing entrance to the interior due to company policy requiring the front doors be locked for safety when only one employee is on premise. RaceTrac confirms that they are having a difficult time retaining employees.
- Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency, MIRA's office is on the west side of the parkway. Home of our new "Welcome to the Island" sign.
- 2625 N Courtenay - Vacant Building 4,539 sq. ft. former restaurant - Listed at \$1.2 million. There was an interested investor, unfortunately the project for 7 Brews Coffee was withdrawn.

Right onto Sea Ray Drive

- Arnott Suspension Products - Corporate Office Campus 100 Sea Ray Drive - Started in the family garage out of Punta Gorda, FL, Adam Arnott discovered his passion for working on and building cars with his father. They began traveling throughout Florida with the goal of repairing air suspension problems. In 1989, this dedication laid the foundation for Arnott Industries which is now the most successful, advanced and innovative automotive air suspension manufacturer in the world. They offer over 450 products that cover more than 800 applications. Arnott's US operations is headquartered in Merritt Island. It houses a nearly 300,000 sq. ft. manufacturing plant and an impressive 60,000 Research & Development Center. Arnott employs more than 200 employees in this location.

Left into Brunswick parking lot Sea Ray Drive

- Brunswick Integrated Manufacturing is a global leader in marine recreation investing in consumer-focused technology and home to more than 60 industry-leading brands. Headquartered in Illinois, and producing \$6.8 Billion in global revenue last year, the manufacturing center on MI is associated with Sea Ray. Brunswick developed the business model for boat clubs and builds the boats for the clubs. Used boats are then sold through BOATEKA.
- History of Sea Ray Bridge over Sykes Creek - Water blows from the south causing scouring (*when water flows forcefully over something and removes soil or rock*) around the pilings of the bridge. In 2014, the County was notified by the State that the bridge was in danger because of scouring. The County could have immediately started repairs but instead decided to apply and wait for FEMA (*Federal Emergency Management Agency*) funds for repairs. The bridge went on to the County's list of projects during this time. Additional hurricanes occurred and the bridge was closed in 2015. Because the County had officially recognized the need for repairs, FEMA denied funding 2 years after the prior application. Brevard County began the process to redesign a new bridge and the current website status list that the replacement is in the design phase expected to complete in 12/31/22. CAMI has been informed the design is complete but no start date has been posted. Cocoa Water had waterlines attached to the bridge and these must be removed prior to construction starting. In 2019, District 2 Representative, Lober

committed 25% of MIRA's budget towards bridge reconstruction for 10 years. MIRA has contributed \$275K each year for the last two years. This is money that was designated for MI Business Corridor improvements. [Brevard County Public Works](#)

North Merritt Island to Crisafulli Farmers Market

North Merritt Island History and Facts

- The Barge Bridge experiences 26,850 bi-directional trips daily from Central to North Merritt Island.
- Over 4000 residential addresses
- One road in and out to rest of Merritt Island over double bascule bridge
- Still has many rural and agricultural properties, horse farms, small citrus, growing mango crops
- Recreation and county parks
- No schools
- No fire station
- Low elevation ½ foot to 7 feet
- Drainage outlets to Indian River and Barge Canal

Turn left on Grant Rd, right on North Tropical Trail

- “Walk on Water” horse farm for special needs children
- Tropical Trail Village (*low cost housing*)
- Indian Bay development on Indian River
- Bethel African Episcopal Church cemetery - Established 1892

Right on Church Road

- The Life Recaptured Resale Boutique & Market - One of the sources of funding for a safe home program. Part of a 3 phase program to renew and transform victims of Human Trafficking. Brandy Crisafulli is the President of Life Recaptured.

South on Courtney, Drive past

- Former Crisafulli Groves packing houses
- Nelson Engineering and Northrup Grumman office buildings
- Construction site of 48 town houses
- Egrets Landing subdivision
- Island Lakes, low cost housing
- Sewage Treatment Plant - Services all of Merritt Island
- Mitchell Ellington Park -Maintenance issues, fields flood easily, poor drainage lack of Community Center. Fence was recently repaired.
- The Savannahs Golf Club - Established 1989. Only golf course on Merritt Island
- Cape Crossing Marina & Dolphins Restaurant
- Brightline Boat Excursions with dinner, brunch and coffee shop options
- Indianola Pioneer Cemetery aka Williams Cemetery -Established 1898 -Oldest Cemetery on Merritt Island
- Property along the canal is owned by the Port Authority

Turn onto E. 528 towards East Merritt Island

- Harbortown Marina – New Restaurant Dixie Bell - Country style cooking open breakfast through dinner. Closed Monday's and hiring cooks and dishwashers.
- Aviara Boat Expansion - luxury boat company – just expanded with another luxury boat addition. Aviara's luxury boats are sold all over the US with a limited number produced each year.

Exit onto Banana River Road/Sykes Creek Parkway

East Merritt Island Fun Facts

- Kelly Park East - Paddle board water access, new lights from money allocated by District 2 County Commissioner, Tom Goodson
- Kelly Park West- New boardwalk expansion just south of the tennis courts and towards Martin Blvd.
- New Sidewalks towards Carrie's Produce
- Carrie's Produce
- Triangle Auto – Business Partner
- Ulumay Sanctuary - Birding, trails and structures to climb for better views
 - Bird watching brings in tourists and revenue to the Island. CAMI could not find a recent revenue figure attributed to MI but U.S. Fish and Wildlife in 2004 estimated an annual \$477 million in retail sales was associated with “birding” in Florida - Second nationwide only to California.
 - Water access for kayaks and SUPs
 - Fishing from the pier
 - The Trail is an underutilized resource.
 - Opportunity for better access would be to increase parking and potentially offer kayak storage.
 - Designated as EEL's land. Owned by the County but managed by Brevard County Parks and Recreation as an Environmentally Endangered Land [The Environmentally Endangered lands \(EEL\) Program](#) was established in 1990 to protect the natural habitats of Brevard County by acquiring environmentally sensitive lands for conservation, passive recreation, and environmental education. The citizens of Brevard County voted to tax themselves for the acquisition and maintenance of Brevard's natural areas and in 2004 under a second referendum voted to protect the natural habitats by acquiring environmentally sensitive lands through a willing seller program for the purpose of conservation, passive recreation, and environmental education. EEL sanctuaries are managed to preserve native habitats and the plants and animals that live there.
 - Opportunity to connect one day to a trail along the Barge Canal for longest waterfront walking path in Florida

Turn right from N Sykes Creek parkway at the light going west onto E Merritt Ave

- Originally, Health First envisioned and has approval to build a hospital, doctors' offices, a wellness center including a gym, retail shops and restaurants. Due to the economy, the project has been scaled back to include only the hospital and doctors' offices.
- Health First may entertain private development opportunities for the remainder of the property.
- The hospital will be 120 beds (*30 less than Cape Canaveral*) and built to hurricane standards including a Central Energy Plant to prevent evacuations through Category 4 storms. Sadly, there will be no maternity ward at this facility so no babies will be born at this Merritt Island location.
- The revitalization of this area is positive and will hopefully encourage other developers/ investors to consider revitalizing the area.
- Officially, Health First has given 2025 as the completion target for the doctors' office building and 2026 as the target to complete the hospital.

Turn left into BJ's parking lot and left toward tire shop

- MIRA has made efforts to add to BJ's a deceleration lane and exchange stormwater ponds and clean the big pond on the EAST side of BJ's before water runs off to Lagoon and protect the bird sanctuary.

Continue to drive around the back of BJ's and take a left onto Plumosa

Several vacancies/opportunities for new retailers. The rental rates do challenge new business owners that do not have large capital backing. Also, mall ownership is advertising its outer parcels for sale.

Vacant Retail Locations in the Mall Area include:

- Former Outback Steakhouse Building - Listed at \$3,869,000
- Chick-fil-A- Listed at \$3,750,000 (*Owner would assume control of the lease*)
- Former AppleBees Building - Leasing at \$18,000 month (*One of few waterfront locations on MI*)
- Former Hooters Building - Leasing at \$9,000 a month
- Bonefish closed last year-Undisclosed rate

Try out the new business:

- Ardella's Sandwiches and Such behind Longhorns has made a nice improvement to the area.

Due to Time Constraints this portion was skipped from Bus Tour

Continue east on 520 and Turn left into Kiwanis Park - drive to the back of the park and return to entrance exiting right

- MIRA - Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency is responsible for the beautification of the medians with the Palm Trees and landscaping to create an attractive entrance into the Island.
- Kiwanis - Summer camps are going on now 7 am -6 pm. Youth basketball 6 pm -8:00 pm They have just hired someone who is training now and will be working next week with basketball.
- Open gym 2 days a week: all day Tuesday & Wednesday, and Saturday 10 am -2:00 pm. Jazzercise on Saturday mornings 9-10
- Kayak Dock/ launch available. Parks & Recreations contracts with 4 kayak touring groups that use their facility. You can launch your own Kayak or rent through a touring group.
- Three pavilions are available to rent. Due to the dredging project, only 2 are currently available.
- Two fields are available for public use, occasionally a little league team will use them. No one uses them all summer - too hot! Wouldn't this be a fantastic location for an Olympic Size Swimming Pool
- Eight tennis courts, two are reserved for Parks & Recreations instructor. The leagues will start back in August. They are lighted until 9pm Pickle Ball can be played on some of the tennis courts.
- The dredging project (started a year ago) is due to be done in August.
- Kiwanis Parks and Recreations' biggest challenge is staffing where they are competing with the Space Center administrative positions that offer more pay and benefits.

S. Sykes Creek Parkway driving past the Brevard Veterans Center and the back of the Mall

- Opportunity for Veterans Park to become our "Main Street" central location, currently hub for high school ROTC meets and many community events.

- Future amphitheater site. There is a Community Amphitheater task force working on the development and the implementation of the Amphitheater. We are excited to announce that this project breaks ground in October of 2023 with the intention to bring community events, music and entertainment to Merritt Island.
- Potential walking expansion of Plumosa Fortenberry Road - Improved entrance into the mall area
- Cone Road and water treatment of the area made possible through the Veteran Stormwater Ponds
- Development area for Woodfield Apartments in old skatepark area will bring upscale residences and increased interest in the redevelopment of the mall area.

Right onto Fortenberry; right onto Plumosa

- Potential new development by Matthew Development with Wawa, Chipotle, and additional businesses on old Mike Erdman property. MIRA obtained a \$500,000 grant to assist in the assessment of brownfield solution sites. Developers then bear the cost of cleaning the site. Matthew Development removed the old LIFT station at the former Mike Erdman Cadillac site.

Due to Time Constraints this portion was skipped from Bus Tour left onto 520 and head west towards Griffis Landing

- *Griffis Landing, plans including opportunity for Restore our Shores Volunteer Location with Brevard Zoo at Sutton Pools location with new State Funding if the property assessment is favorable*
- *Owned by the County, leased to businesses (Doc's Bait House/Miss Applies)*
- *Grant to rebuild the County Building leased to Miss Apples into an attractive waterfront establishment has been secured. Parking will be a challenge*

Back to Balibar

- If our effort to provide community information for Merritt Island is of value to you visit our website www.ca4mi.com and follow us on [Facebook @CA4MI](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Look for our public forum in September on the Indian River Lagoon projects specifically scheduled for Merritt Island
- CAMI is working on a Christmas Community Celebration in December
- Become a member and join us in our commitment to making Merritt Island residents and businesses achieve their best Island Life. www.ca4mi.com