

## **THE POLICYMAKER** *BY SUSAN BURGESS, January 26, 2011*

Doug Coward lights up the room with his passion for synergy, for making things work together in ways that many people never imagined.

“The triple bottom line is creating economic solutions for people and the environment,” he says. “I think it is time to build the new American landscape.”

Now 44, Coward began developing his vision of a green St. Lucie County in 1991, when he worked for the county as an environmental planner. He began setting policy on smart growth in 1998, when he was first elected to the County Commission. During his second term, he worked toward a green economy to dig the county out of recession.

After three terms on the commission, Coward took a job as a private consultant for a budding statewide environmental company. When he was an environmental planner, Coward saw pristine lands bulldozed into oblivion, trees snatched up by the roots, shaken and beaten by giant earth moving equipment and dropped into piles like so much trash to dry out until they could be torched.

Asked by the county to work on the \$20 million Environmentally Sensitive Lands bond issue, he ran with it, spearheading efforts to explain its importance. “This was a real turning point,” he says. “We had to go to voters, and it passed by 67 percent. We were very fortunate to set these lands aside before the housing boom.”

As a community planner for 1000 Friends of Florida from 1995 to 1998, Coward invited the public to charrettes to plan the design of the Oxbow Eco-Center – the county’s first public “green” building – and walking trails.

Charrettes became a hallmark of Coward’s collaborative style. He used the collaborative technique extensively when, as a commissioner, he spearheaded creation of the nationally showcased Towns, Villages and Countryside Element of the county’s land-use plan.

The TVC concept, adopted for northern St. Lucie County, calls for large untouched areas, with planned towns concentrating population to minimize sprawl and driving.

“TVC is now the law of the land, made by the people,” he says. “Developers wanted to double the number of homes here. So that was the pressure we were facing during the TVC project.”

Coward hit on the perfect synergy to bring St. Lucie County’s economy out of the recession and insulate it against future recessions: A green economy.

He drew community leaders together. From the mix emerged a public-private partnership to train workers in green technologies.

With that plan taking off, he worked out a way to create demand for workers skilled in green technologies – a low-interest loan fund administered by a new nonprofit agency that would enable consumers to buy solar hot water heaters and panels, weatherize homes and get energy-efficient appliances.

Bringing energy research businesses to the county and attracting the growth of small, clean energy-related businesses add to the synergy. “I want to know that I have done something positive and tangible,” he says.

Name: Doug Coward

Age: 44

Education: M.S. in Urban Planning, B.S. in Social Service – both from Florida State University

Occupation: Private consultant on energy-related issues for new firm Renewable Energy South; county commissioner 1998-2010

Family: wife, Tara, and 9-year-old son, Ty, in Port St. Lucie

Green awakening: Second grade when writing a paper on the Clean Air Act.  
Most effective way to conserve resources: Energy efficiency; smart growth; using proven green technology;  
promoting green economy and energy independence.

