



**Manatee County**

**R.B. "Chips" Shore**

**Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller**

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Dear Cortez Residents,

I am writing you to inform you of a situation we have at the Florida Maritime Museum, which you know of as the Cortez Schoolhouse, regarding the Australian Pine trees around the Schoolhouse.

We are particularly concerned about the health of the trees on the South of the building which I know are significant to the community because they were planted by some of you when you went to school there. That makes them nearly 60 years old; almost as old as me. Australian Pines have a life expectancy of 45 years and now a number of the trees have developed conditions which make them dangerous.

For liability purposes we had a tree expert look at them. One of the conditions that were found was basal rot which is softening and rotting of the wood. When this happens at ground level it increases the risk of falling down. Several of the trees have basal rot at the ground level. Several trees have visible conks that indicate fungal growth (a type of rot) inside the trunk. When these conks are seen at or near ground level, the risk of failure increases. Several trees have a large wound where the bark has died. Often the wound goes up the tree into the canopy. Several trees had bark that is peeling back in places from the trunk and slowly falling off. All of these conditions reveal that these trees have become a potential risk to life.

Dave Palmer of the University of Florida IFAS Extension Office who evaluated the trees told us his concern at this point is public safety. If there are large areas of rot hidden in the trunks of these trees then they pose a hazard.

Palmer has recommended to us that the safest course of action is to remove the Australian Pines and replace them with a native species. It looks like we will need to heed his advice.

Since it appears we have little choice, we will have to remove these Pines. I know they are important to the Cortez Community so I would like to invite you to help us choose a tree native to Cortez and to boat building, and then take part in planting them, much as you all did years ago. Please stop by the Museum and School and provide us your feedback on replacements. We are currently looking at live oaks, which were used in boat making, and/or cedar, which was also used. We are open to your ideas so please see Karen, Amara or John and let us know.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

R.B. "Chips" Shore

**"Pride in Service with a Vision to the Future"**

Clerk of Circuit and County Court - Clerk of Board of County Commissioners - County Comptroller, Auditor and Recorder