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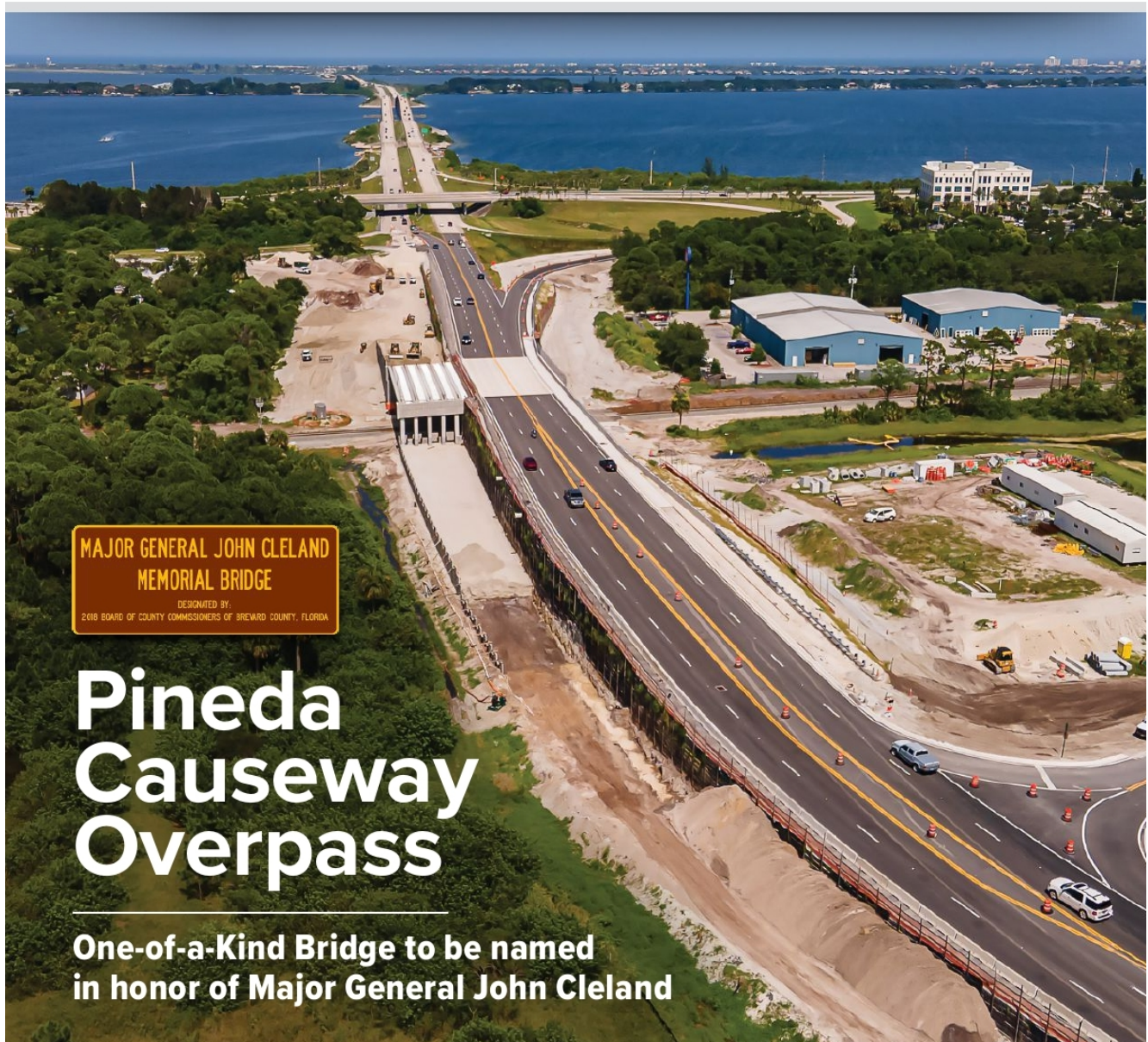
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Pineda Causeway Overpass

One-of-a-Kind Bridge to be named
in honor of Major General John Cleland

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By Maria Sonnenberg

If your travels do not often take you near the Pineda Causeway, you will not believe what you see the next time you are in the area.

"You would be quite surprised," said Craig Kupec, an engineer with Brevard County Public Works Engineering. Kupec is referring to the Major General John Cleland Bridge, which helps motorists zip along 24 feet above the Florida East Coast Railway tracks as they travel to or from U.S. Highway 1 and the Pineda Causeway.

Although the project is not expected to reach completion until well into the Fall, a September 26 ceremony will honor Major General John Cleland, in whose memory the bridge has been named. The Viera resident passed away in 2017 at age 92. He missed having a Fourth of July birth-

day by one day, but General Cleland, born July 5, 1925, in our Nation's Capital, was a natural-born patriot.

"John Cleland answered his country's call to duty and enlisted in the U.S. Army in World War II right after graduation from high school," said his oldest son, Dr. Bruce Cleland. General Cleland served for 37 years, engaging in combat in WWII, Korea and Vietnam, and earning the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Combat Infantryman Badges for all three wars and two Purple Hearts, among numerous other medals. He was inducted into the U.S. Army Infantry Hall of Fame.

After retiring from the military in 1983, Cleland spent more than three decades helping Brevard, Florida and his country through organizations ranging from hospital

boards to the Military Officers Association of America. In 2013, he was part of the inaugural class of the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame, whose focus is on the inductee's post-military contributions to the state. "He was passionate for the welfare of military veterans, active duty servicemen and women and the youth in Brevard enrolled in JROTC and ROTC," added Dr. Cleland.

"My dad applied hard work, integrity and his leadership skills to facilitate improvement." General Cleland raised his five children to follow the Golden Rule and to work hard with dedication and integrity. "We saw his passion for his profession and found our own passion," said Dr. Cleland. "I found my passion as a physician and my other siblings found theirs in law, the military and business."

Mrs. Cleland and her Cleland clan, who live in Louisiana, Utah, Virginia, South Carolina and Nevada, will convene, COVID-permitting, for the bridge dedication ceremony before heading to the Veterans Memorial Center and Museum for a reception that includes the late General's friends and colleagues. A bench at the Veterans' Plaza on the Museum grounds will be dedicated in the couple's

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WHEN YOU DRIVE BY...

- You will notice that both eastbound and westbound traffic lanes are now traveling over the railroad crossing, thanks to the completion of Phase 1 of the project.
- Watch for the Phase II bridge construction, now underway to finish the remaining 40% of the structure.
- You will see permanent walls installed adjacent to the railroad and wrapping around the north side of the overpass.
- You will encounter work on around the ramps leading to and from U.S. 1.
- Look out for the temporary traffic signal installed at the driveway of Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy. Driveways into the Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy campus, as well as into a County facility, are currently under construction.



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Major General John Cleland Memorial Bridge

Major General John Cleland retired from the United States Army in 1980 after 37 years of active service. He served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. His decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal; the Silver Star Medal; the Defense Superior Service Medal; the Legion of Merit, and the Purple Heart Medal. He was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge in all three wars and is a member of the US Army Infantry Hall of Fame and the Florida Veteran's Hall of Fame. Major General Cleland made tremendous post military contributions to the Brevard County and to the State of Florida by serving both in civic and military organizations. Major General Cleland died on October 25, 2017.



Left: This plaque honoring Major General John Cleland will be mounted adjacent to the overpass.

Right: Clara Cleland and Major General John Cleland

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honor. "We hope to see the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, along with his friends from MOAA," said Donn Weaver, the Center's special projects coordinator.

Like its namesake, the Major General John Cleland Bridge will make life better for residents of Brevard. "Based on the County's latest study, the traffic count for the Pineda roadway is approximately 33,000 vehicles a day," said Kupec.

When finished, S.R. 404 and its bridge will offer two lanes in each direction to keep traffic flowing. It comes at an opportune time, since Virgin Trains USA is going full steam ahead with its plans to connect Orlando with South Florida through a route that parallels the Florida East Coast Railway. The commuter rail, which will add ten more trains daily through the area, is expected to start service in 2022. Currently, an average of 14 freight trains pass through the area every day.

Back more than a decade ago, when the four-lane overpass was barely more than a gleam in Florida East Coast Railway officials and County Commissioners' eyes, there was already discussion of the commuter train's arrival. "Even in the planning stages, there had been a sense that the high-speed rail would eventually come through Brevard," said Kupec.

The \$24-million-dollar bridge, funded by the Florida Department of Transportation under the oversight of Brevard County, elevates motorists approximately 24 feet above the railroad tracks west of U.S. Hwy. 1 and near Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy. The overpass construction required reconfiguration of the U.S. 1 interchange as part of the project. "Motorists on S.R. 404 will not have to stop when the trains come by," added Kupec. Not only will the overpass alleviate traffic snarls, but it will also improve safety for motorists, since grade-separated railroad crossings boast a better safety record than at-grade crossings.

During storm season, keeping the traffic flowing in the area is particularly critical, since the Pineda Causeway serves as a major evacuation route for beachside communities.

The overpass unfortunately did not escape being affected by the pandemic, which has delayed its completion, originally scheduled for this past Spring. "Our contractors have been able to maintain the pace, but our sub-contractors have been slowed down because of the pandemic," said Kupec.

Like General Cleland, the bridge is one-of-a-kind. Most roads over railroad tracks in Brevard are too close to U.S. 1 or to businesses for an overpass to be considered. The Major General John Cleland Bridge will be the only railroad overpass in the county, and no others are being planned. ■

The current construction schedule indicates that the project will be completed in the upcoming Winter season.