by Jay Walljasper

Anybody who's been has known Seaside is alive with historical charac- ter — even though it was built from scratch starting in the 1980s. Walkable streets, Old South architecture, con- gregational cafes, a public beach and the town square feel of its business district evoke what's best about the past.

But not everyone realizes Seaside has changed history, too. The creation of this cozy beach town set off a revolu- tion in urban design that continues to influence our thinking about commu- nities today. Its success proved we can build new places with the qualities we love about classic neighborhoods — a vision once considered an impossible dream, but now a driving force in the development of cities, suburbs and small towns.

**Fourteen Ways Seaside Made His- tory**

New York architect and design writ- er John Massengale recently noted Se- aide was the first place in America to showcase important innovations such as:

- Shared Space Streets — Where peo- ple on foot, on bike and in cars co-exist.
- Natural Sustainable Landscaping — Instead of planting yards with grass, instead using native plants that require minimal care.
- Mixed Use Developments — A fresh ap- proach to zoning that ensures safe, stable communities but also fosters the kind of “Miami Vice” television show).

- Compact Communities — The re- alization that living close to shopping, services, recreation and your neigh- bors fosters lively social connections as well as saving time, money and stress.

- Urban Village — Enhancing our sense of community and personal ease with a town center where people can meet most everyday needs and wants within a five- to 15-minute stroll. Also known as the Five-Minute Village.

- Traditional Affordable Housing — A revival of overworked practices that made houses income homes into residential neighborhoods, including small houses, apartments tucked above shops, and backyard “granny flats” or Accessory Dwelling Units.

- Public Space — Setting aside special natural or community amenities to be enjoyed together rather than hidden behind someone’s backyard fence — a trademark of 19th century designers like Frederick Law Olmstead, but larg- ely forgotten until recently. Indeed, the most important spots in town — like the main beach and central squares — are open to everyone rather than pri- vate.

- Form-Based Codes — A 21st-cen- tury approach to zoning that ensures safe, stable communities but also fosters the kind of vibrant places for pleasant places — flexibility and evolution — by pay- ing attention to the physical elements of what’s built, not just how it will be used.

- Incremental Development — Building a new community a few blocks at a time, rather than in one fell swoop, which opens opportunity to improve and refine plans based on real-world experience.

- A Town, Not Beachfront Condos — The Florida real estate industry was shocked when Seaside developer Rob- ert Davis gambled on creating an entire beachfront community, not just a strip of condos on the water. This marked the birth of 30A as we know it.

- Incremental Development joyful urbanism that overcame the early construction of Seaside, working in a shotgun shack moved to the site and living in a Quonset hut. "One ta- ble was a big wooden spool for cabling, " he remembered, "and the only shower was outside. "

- The former editor of Utne Reader said Christ, who went on to design 85 of the prizes, "You don't have to take someone on their front porch, " adds Christ, "you can try it out for your- self and make your own decision about how you'd like to live."