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Man has ties to county founders

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MARTIN COUNTY — Rick Hartman has a direct connection to much of Martin County's history.

Two of his great grandfathers were instrumental in establishing the county, and served as the first mayors of two of its cities.

This month, the Stuart Heritage group, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving details about the area's history and its founding families, paid tribute to Mr. Hartman's ancestry and featured him at a special presentation.

"(This was) an opportunity to have our town's rich history spring to life through the telling of one family's own stories passed down through the generations," said Stuart Heritage President Mary Walton-Jones.

Among the notable trivia in Mr. Hartman's history is a

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connection to area landmarks.

Ricou Street in Jensen Beach is named for his ancestor, as is the building with the same name across the street from the railroad track. His great grandfather, Ransom Ricou, promised Henry Flagler he'd erect a building made of brick, not board, at the station, if the railroad tycoon would create a stop in Jensen Beach.

Mr. Ricou was a businessman who owned 11 fish houses from Cape Canaveral to Key West, according to the Stuart Heritage Group.

He and Mr. Flagler were close friends, and they partnered to restore the town's commerce after the Jensen Beach fire of 1908.

"My family goes back in Florida to before the Civil War," said Mr. Hartman. "This wasn't Martin County yet when they moved here."

His history dates back to 1893, when the Ricou family, his mother's ancestors, moved to the area.

His paternal ancestors, the McDonalds, came in 1912. A relative from that group, JB McDonald, was Stuart's first mayor. He was also a former Methodist minister and the superintendent of schools when Stuart was originally part of Palm Beach County, according to Stuart Heritage.

A few years later, in 1925, Mr. McDonald's daughter, Mary Elizabeth, married Mr. Hartman's son, Ralph Sr., Stuart's long-time postmaster. The couple would eventually become Rick's grandparents, and their family would also yield two more mayors of Stuart.

"We've been here a long time," said Mr. Hartman. "If you picked up (local historian) Sandy Thurlow's book on Martin County and looked up Ricou, McDonald or Hartman, there are a lot of pages."