

December 28, 2012

THE SARASOTA

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



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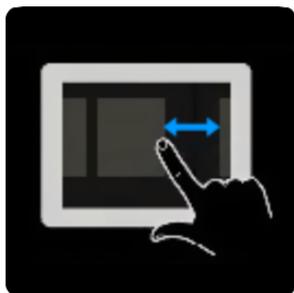
THE YEAR

IN REVIEW

Inside

Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.

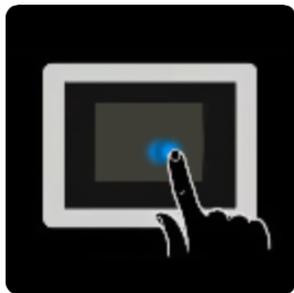
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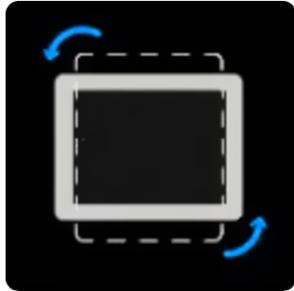
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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

This week, we are delighted to formally add a new member to our staff.

Long-time readers of the *Pelican Press* — from the days before it was sold in 2011 — are well acquainted with our political cartoonist, John Riley. I cannot begin to tell you how many awards John has racked up in Florida Press Association contests over the years for his extraordinary talent.

When we were preparing to launch our weekly digital publication, we asked whether he would be willing to come back to work. Having been retired for more than a year, he said he needed to give it a little thought. Fortunately, it did not take him long to say, “Yes.”

However, his caveat was that if he found the routine too demanding, he could give us his notice at any time. We said, “Yes,” and kept our fingers crossed.

Therefore, it was with great delight we received a Christmas present from John in the form of an email saying he wished to continue creating cartoons for us as a regular staff member going into the New Year.

As for our stories this week: We are taking another page from the old days of the *Pelican Press*: We put together a Year in Review, choosing highlights from each month to remind you how 2012 progressed. It amazed me how early some topics popped up during the year and remained among our top headlines.

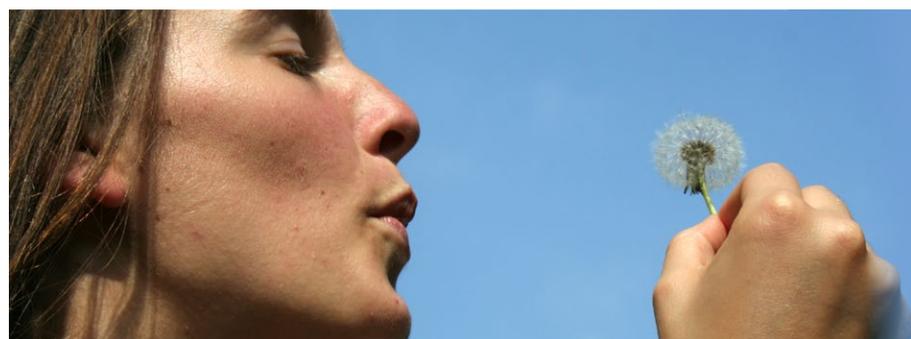
Finally, we most certainly want to take an opportunity to wish all of you a prosperous and Happy New Year!

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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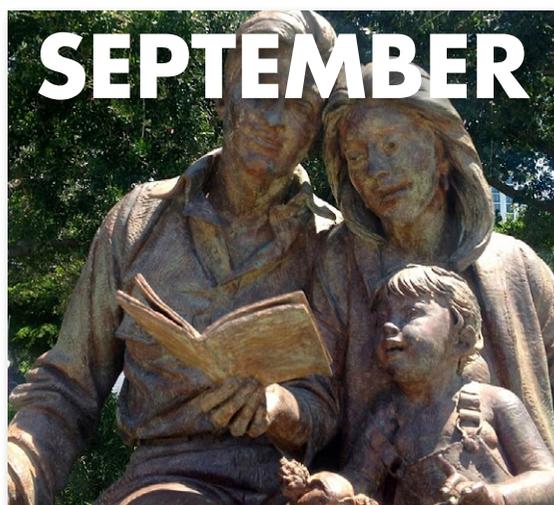


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THE YEAR

IN REVIEW



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YEAR IN REVIEW: JANUARY

Siesta Village business owners say the crosswalk between the Daiquiri Deck and Gilligan's Island Bar and Grill is especially difficult to see at night. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JAN. 3

During the first 2012 meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association — on Jan. 3 — Siesta Key Association Vice President Peter van Roekens says Sarasota County should install some sort of lighting to illuminate the crosswalks in Siesta Village.

“There’s old people like me driving at night,” he said, “[and] the lighting in the Village isn’t that bright.”

SKVA President Russell Matthes and van Roekens agree to explore the idea with county representatives.

JAN. 6

During a special meeting of the Sarasota City Commission, John Jorgenson, president of

The Sylint Group of Sarasota, reports that City Manager Robert Bartolotta has deleted more than 11,000 city emails, and Jorgenson has been unable to recover about 100 of them. Bartolotta and Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown both are under suspicion for allegedly reviewing emails that were part of an ongoing audit investigation — material to which they should not have had access. The City Commission votes unanimously to refer the findings to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the FBI, at the request of City Attorney Robert Fournier. However, three of the commissioners — Mayor Suzanne Atwell, Vice Mayor Terry Turner and Commissioner Willie Shaw say they do not intend to fire or suspend Bartolotta or Brown.

JAN. 7

Siesta runner Donna Chen, 53, is struck and killed about 1:10 p.m. by an allegedly drunken driver on Siesta Key.

The suspect, a 22-year-old Bradenton resident, Blake C. Talman, and his passenger in the crash, 24-year-old David J. Brewer of Sarasota, were observed drinking alcohol at Siesta Public Beach prior to the incident which killed Chen.

Sarasota County Sheriff's Office deputies arrested a companion of the men, Michael E. Blakey, 26, of North Port, on a charge of Disorderly Intoxication. However, a Sheriff's Office review and subsequent interviews conducted with the deputies by Sheriff's Office personnel find that neither Talman nor Brewer displayed disorderly behavior or was rude. Therefore, deputies had no cause to arrest them.

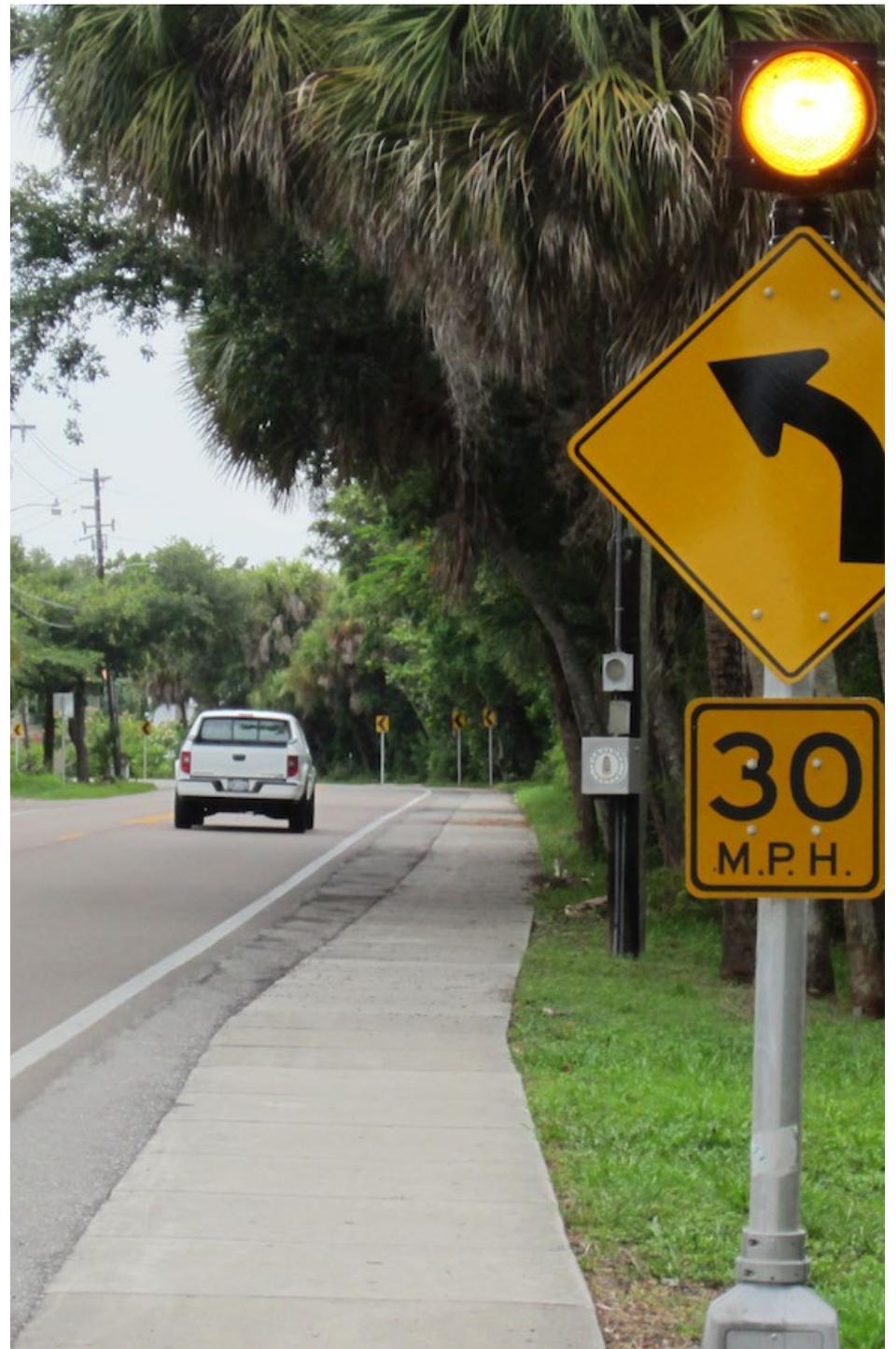
The last time deputies saw Talman and Brewer, the two young men were walking toward the beach, Community Affairs Manager Wendy Rose confirmed.

Talman was charged on multiple counts and placed in the Sarasota County Jail under bond of \$118,000.

Chen's death prompted a debate over whether alcohol sales and consumption should be allowed on the public beaches.

JAN. 11

The Sarasota County Commission agrees to move ahead on changes to the county's comprehensive plan to allow the development of an Economic Energy Zone Pilot Program encompassing 685 acres in South County. The



The curve along Midnight Pass Road near St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church always has been a dangerous one, residents say. Donna Chen was struck and killed in that curve Jan. 7 by an allegedly drunken driver. Photo by Rachel Hackney

goal of the program is to foster job creation in clean energy-related businesses.

During their Jan. 11 meeting, the commissioners also thank Interim County Administrator Terry Lewis for his service since June. Lewis was hired after County Administrator Jim Ley resigned in the wake of a scandal in the Procurement Department. The Jan. 11 session was scheduled to be Lewis' last with the county.



Then-City Manager Robert Bartolotta speaks during the dedication of the Palm Avenue parking garage in February 2010. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JAN. 16

Robert Bartolotta resigns as city manager after Mayor Suzanne Atwell calls for him to do so, amid an investigation into unlawful access to and deletion of city emails. Vice Mayor Terry Turner is the only member of the City Commission to oppose the move. Bartolotta had met with Atwell on Jan. 13 at City Hall to discuss the situation.

JAN. 18

With Siesta Key Public Beach having won the title in May as No. 1 Beach in the United States — a proclamation made by “Dr. Beach,” Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman of Florida International University in Miami — Sarasota County finally unveils a sign marking the recognition.



(From left) Lifeguard Scott Ruberg and County Commissioners Jon Thaxton, Nora Patterson, Carolyn Mason, Christine Robinson and Joe Barbetta pose with the new sign designating Siesta Beach's No. 1 status. Photo by Norman Schimmel

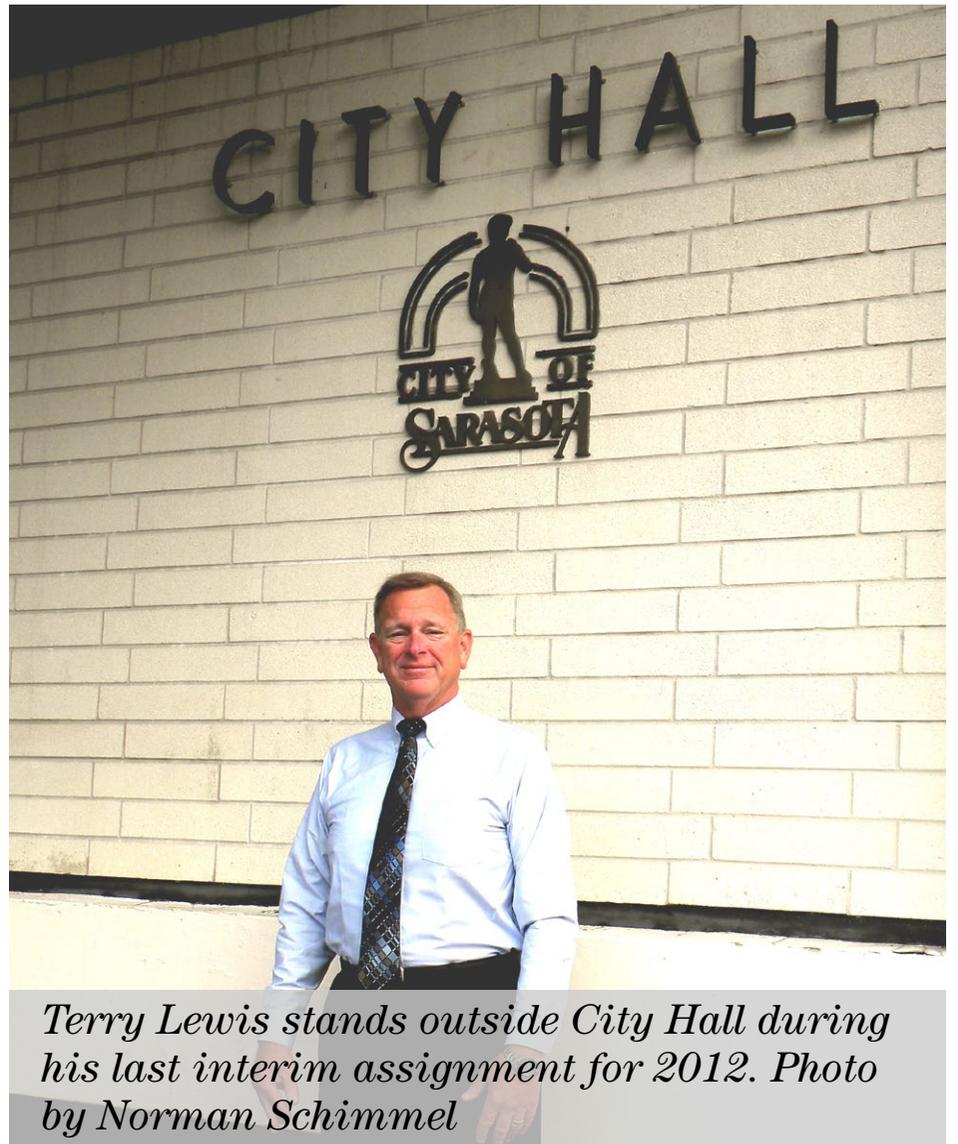
JAN. 23

New Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid reports to work. He was Alachua County manager for 12 years before being hired for the new position.

Terry Lewis reports to work as interim city manager for Sarasota, having been hired by the City Commission during a Jan. 20 meeting while the board seeks a permanent replacement for Robert Bartolotta.

JAN. 29

The City of Sarasota closes Ringling Boulevard from Orange Avenue to U.S. 41 for the construction of two roundabouts. Burns Square business owners fret about how they will be affected, with the closure scheduled to last into June. 



Terry Lewis stands outside City Hall during his last interim assignment for 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Randall Reid begins his tenure as Sarasota County administrator. Photo by Norman Schimmel



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FRIED COD SANDWICH	\$6.00
TUNA SALAD SANDWICH	\$6.00
CHICKEN SALAD SANDWICH	\$6.00
PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY SANDWICH	\$3.00
VEGGIE PLATE W/ HUMMUS & PITA CHIPS \$6.00	
JUMBO SOFT PRETZEL	\$3.00
FIELD GREEN SALAD \$5.75	
GRILLED CHICKEN ON FIELD GREENS	\$7.75
TUNA SALAD ON FIELD GREENS	\$7.75
CHICKEN SALAD ON FIELD GREENS	\$7.75
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BLUE CHEESE LIGHT ITALIAN, RANCH & RASPBERRY Vinaigrette	
ADDITIONAL DRESSING ADD 50¢	
GRILLED CHICKEN WRAP \$6.00	
TUNA SALAD WRAP	\$6.00
CHICKEN SALAD WRAP	\$6.00
VEGGIE HUMMUS WRAP	\$6.00
TURKEY CLUB WRAP	\$6.00
KIDS MEAL CHOICE OF PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY SANDWICH OR KIDS HOTDOG \$5.75	
WITH JUICE BOX AND FRUIT SNACK SERVED IN A PAIL WITH SHOVEL	
SIESTA SUNSET FROZEN SANGRIA	
SOFT DRINKS	\$2.00
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ICE TEA	\$2.00
SWEET UNSWEET RASPBERRY	\$2.75
COFFEE	\$2.00
ESPRESSO	\$2.50
CAPPUCCINO	\$2.75



SANDWICHES	
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ICE TEA	\$2.00
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COFFEE	\$2.00
ESPRESSO	\$2.50
CAPPUCCINO	\$2.75



YEAR IN REVIEW: FEBRUARY

The sign for beer is clearly visible at a concession window on Siesta Public Beach. File photo

FEB. 3

Residents of the Siesta Cove Association ask for the help of the Siesta Key Association in seeking state action to reduce speeding along a portion of Midnight Pass Road where Donna Chen was killed by an allegedly drunken driver on Jan. 7. At the minimum, Steven Grantham said, association members want to see radar signs installed on both approaches to the curve, to warn people when they are exceeding the posted 34 mph speed. Sara-

sota County Commissioner Nora Patterson, who was attending the SKA meeting, says the commission already has asked county staff to work with the Florida Department of Transportation on additional safety measures for that stretch of road.

Additionally, during the first full week of February, commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson is scheduled to meet with members of Chen's family, which is seeking a ban on sales and consumption of alcohol on county beaches.

FEB. 6

A Florida Department of Transportation official tells the Sarasota City Commission FDOT still supports roundabouts on U.S. 41 at 10th and 14th streets. The proposed roundabouts represent the first phase of a bayfront connectivity concept FDOT has endorsed. The project is designed to slow traffic, create wider avenues and medians and provide more space for bicyclists and pedestrians.

FEB. 16

Five of Sarasota County's department chiefs continue to hold interim titles. They are Joan-

ie Whitley in Human Resources, John McCarthy in Community Services, Crystal Pruitt in Communications, Steve Botelho in Financial Planning and Mike Tobias in Emergency Services. "I don't intend to make any internal appointments within the first 30 days," new County Administrator Randall Reid says.

FEB. 20

The City Commission approves a \$28,500 contract with Colin Baenziger & Associates of Wellington to begin the search for a new city manager. Mayor Suzanne Atwell says the consultant should not confine his search "to just experienced city managers, either."



City officials say the installation of roundabouts along U.S. 41 near downtown Sarasota will make it easier for pedestrians to access the bayfront safely. Photo by Norman Schimmel

FEB. 23

The Florida Supreme Court announces it will hear oral arguments on April 10 in county commission term limits cases from Sarasota and Broward counties. Sarasota attorney Andrea Mogensen, representing 16 plaintiffs who filed suit against Sarasota County over term limits in November 2011, and David Persson, the Longboat Key town attorney who is representing the county, both are preparing to appear before the court in Tallahassee. The fate of Commissioner Jon Thaxton's political career could be determined by the court's ruling. Thaxton, who is serving his third term on the board, is seeking a fourth one. If the high court rules term limits are constitutional in counties whose charters call for them, Thaxton would be prevented from seeking another term.

Two developers are working with City of Sarasota staff regarding separate proposals for a hotel on a downtown parcel next to the Palm Avenue parking garage: Jim Bridges of Jebco Ventures, based in Atlanta; and Angus Rogers of Floridays Development Co., based in Sarasota. 



Commissioner Jon Thaxton/Photo by Norman Schimmel

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YEAR IN REVIEW: MARCH

A banner on Main Street points to the location of the parking meter below it. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MARCH 5

The City Commission votes 3-2 to bag the downtown parking meter program, after a plethora of complaints from business owners and merchants about how they have been losing money because shoppers are avoiding downtown. Vice Mayor Terry Turner joins Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Shannon Snyder in casting the “Yes” votes. The commission also decides to allow free parking in the Palm Avenue garage.

In the meantime, Sarasota entrepreneur Jesse Biter is paying \$1.6 million for the 11,000-square-foot retail space in the Palm Avenue garage. A group of Palm Avenue merchants who offered the city \$2.2 million in 2011 to purchase that space, only to be rebuffed by the city, point to the fact that the first floor of the garage remains vacant. Biter says he is working on prospects that will inject new life into Palm Avenue after 5 p.m.



The Palm Avenue garage's first-level retail space remained the focus of neighboring businesses and merchants in early March. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MARCH 13

Commissioner Nora Patterson wins support from her fellow board members for a formal request to the Florida Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit on Midnight Pass Road from the Beach Road intersection through the curve where Donna Chen was struck and killed on Jan. 7. The commission also will ask FDOT to put raised reflectors on that curve. Finally, the commission agrees to ask the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office for suggestions on how the county should handle consumption of alcoholic beverages on public beaches.



The County Commission agrees to a staff recommendation regarding additional areas in parks that can be designated dog-friendly. "We are seeing a continued trend of people seeking to enjoy parks with their dogs," Kim Heuberger of the county's Parks and Recreation Department tells the board. The new areas will supplement four all-access dog parks the county has been offering.

Palmer Ranch residents tell the County Commission they do not want a proposed Interstate 75 interchange at Central Sarasota Parkway. Commissioner Jon Thaxton responds that the only way the interchange officially can come out of the comprehensive plan is by vote of the board following a public hearing. However, Commissioner Joe Barbetta says the commission had asked staff months earlier to start that process; he voiced frustration that the initiative had not been moving forward.

MARCH 14

Five members of the family of a Siesta Key runner who was killed in a January incident involving an allegedly drunken driver plead with the County Commission to ban alcoholic beverages on the beach. Former Sarasota County Commissioner David Mills joins them in their remarks to the board during the public comments of the commission meeting.

Later in the day, the County Commission unanimously approves changes designed to enhance the planned world-class rowing venue at Nathan Benderson Park. They reaffirm,



The number of emails to the County Commission early this year from county residents seeking to keep consumption of alcohol legal on the beaches far surpassed those asking for new controls. Photo by Norman Schimmel

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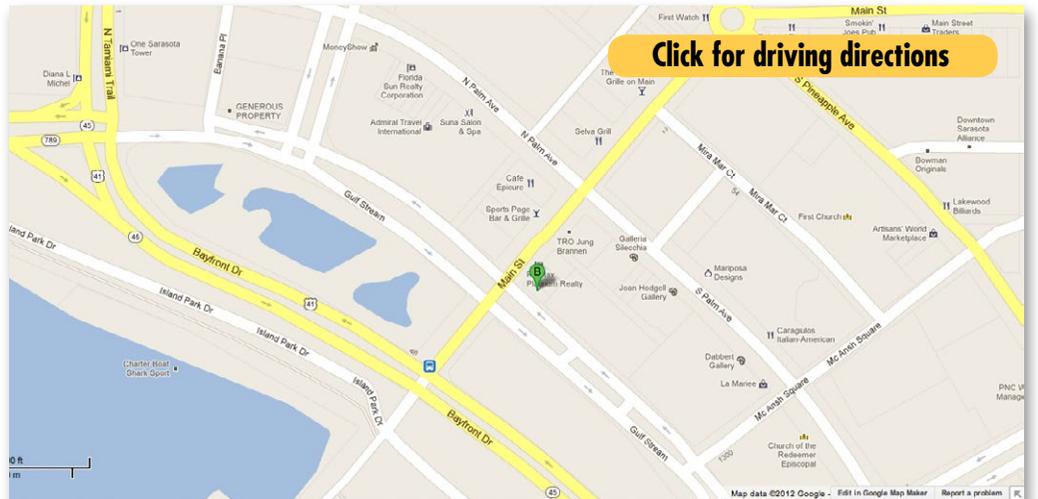
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YEAR IN REVIEW: APRIL

A permeable and adjustable groin stretches out into the Gulf of Mexico on Longboat Key. Photo by Norman Schimmel

APRIL 5

Because aspects of the inlet management plan approved by the Town of Longboat Key and the Manatee County Commission could adversely affect areas south of Longboat Key, members of the Siesta Key Association and the Boaters Coalition in Sarasota County are seeking support to block funding for aspects of the project. Siesta Key Association Vice President Peter van Roekens alerted Siesta residents to the potential problems during his organization's April 5 meeting. The inlet management plan calls for permeable groins on the southern part of Longboat Key, van Roekens pointed out. "Now that's a very dangerous thing for us [on Siesta]," he added. "When you mess with an inlet," he said, referring to Big Pass, "who knows what's going to happen. Hardened structures are a real serious problem."

APRIL 11

The Sarasota County Commission votes unanimously to simplify the appraisal process related to construction in flood-prone areas. Dubbed "Alternative 2," the amendment allows a property owner who wishes to improve or modify a structure to use the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's Office's assessed value of the improvement, plus 20%; an appraisal report prepared by a state-certified residential appraiser; or a state-certified general appraiser, to determine the market value of the affected property. The commission also requests County Administrator Randall Reid to undertake an investigation into the events that led up to their vote and identify any further problems that need resolution.

APRIL 16

With a Sarasota citizens group having won a Sunshine Law case in February that involved the Sarasota Civil Service Board, the Sarasota City Commission agrees unanimously to pay the group's attorney the \$90,173.18 in legal fees she was seeking for her work in the case. The City Commission in January had decided to forgo a settlement offer by the attorney, Andrea Mogensen, when the reimbursement would have totaled \$56,750. However, City Attorney Robert Fournier explains during the April 16 commission meeting that, with the case not closed in January, the city could have ended up paying even more than the \$90,173.18. "At the end of the day," he said, "it all worked out."

APRIL 19

From January through March, 251,800 visitors paid for lodging, a 10.7 percent increase over the 2011 figure of 227,400 for the same three-month period, members of the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council learn during their regular meeting April 19. That figure did not include snowbirds or anyone else who stayed more than 60 days, said Walter Klages, CEO of Research Data Services, based in St. Petersburg and Tampa. The increase in the economic impact for the county for the same period from 2011 to 2012 was 17 percent, Klages says, for a total figure of \$511,681,232. From January through March, Klages adds, visitor expenditures also increased 17 percent from 2011 to 2012, for a total of \$269,618,100.



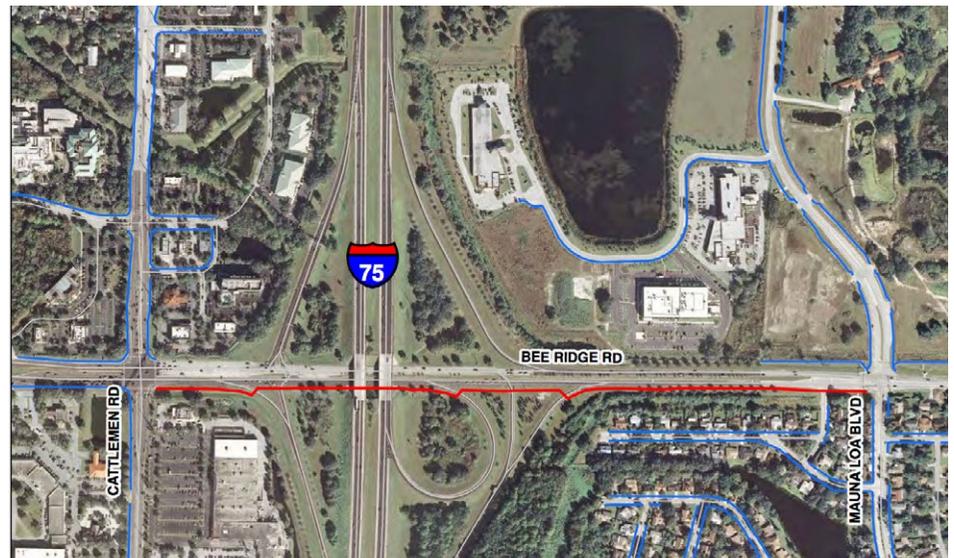
The No. 1 Beach status for Siesta helped Sarasota County surpass 2011 tourism lodging and spending figures in January through March of 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel

APRIL 23

Not one of the 100 candidates for city manager of Sarasota resides in Sarasota County, according to the list provided to *The Sarasota News Leader* by Kurt Hoverter, the city's director of human resources. However, one of the candidates — Susan Stanton — was a finalist for the position when the City Commission four-and-a-half years ago chose to hire Robert Bartolotta. Two of the other candidates were among the 49 who applied last fall to become the new Sarasota County administrator: James Chisholm, city manager of Daytona Beach; and Edward Mitchell, administrator of the City of West Palm Beach.

APRIL 24

Although the Sarasota County commissioners remain divided over how to pay for planned improvements at Siesta Key Public Beach, they vote unanimously April 24 to move up the timetable for widening Bee Ridge Road east of Interstate 75. The commissioners di-



A graphic illustration shows proposed improvements to Bee Ridge Road east

rect staff to pursue a borrowing option for the Bee Ridge project, so it can be completed as soon as possible. When the design work is finished, staff will come back to the board with a proposal on funding. "I think the time for the Bee Ridge Road (work) has come and passed," Commissioner Jon Thaxton said in making the motion. "I couldn't imagine that road in its present state of affairs in 2018, '19, '20," he added, referring to the schedule if the county were to pay for the work with revenue from a penny surtax voters approved in 2007. **SNL**



The Sarasota City Commission sits in session in the spring with Interim City Manager Terry Lewis (second from right). Photo by Norman Schimmel

A close-up photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top, holding a large sandwich. The sandwich is made with a crusty, golden-brown roll and is filled with lettuce, tomato, onion, and a dark meat patty. The woman's hands are visible on either side of the sandwich, holding it steady. The background is a plain, light color.

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YEAR IN REVIEW: MAY

Gov. Rick Scott signs a bill into law. Contributed photo

MAY 3

Add another entry to the list of controversial Rick Scott line item vetoes: \$100,000 for a fetal alcohol diagnostic and intervention clinic here in Sarasota. The Florida Legislature approved the funding for [The Florida Center for Early Childhood program](#) after tense negotiations between the House and Senate and strong advocacy by the Suncoast's legislative delegation. Florida Center President and CEO [Kathryn Shea](#) credits state Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, and Rep. Ray Pilon, R-Sarasota, for their work securing the additional \$100,000 for the program this year. But their efforts were for naught.

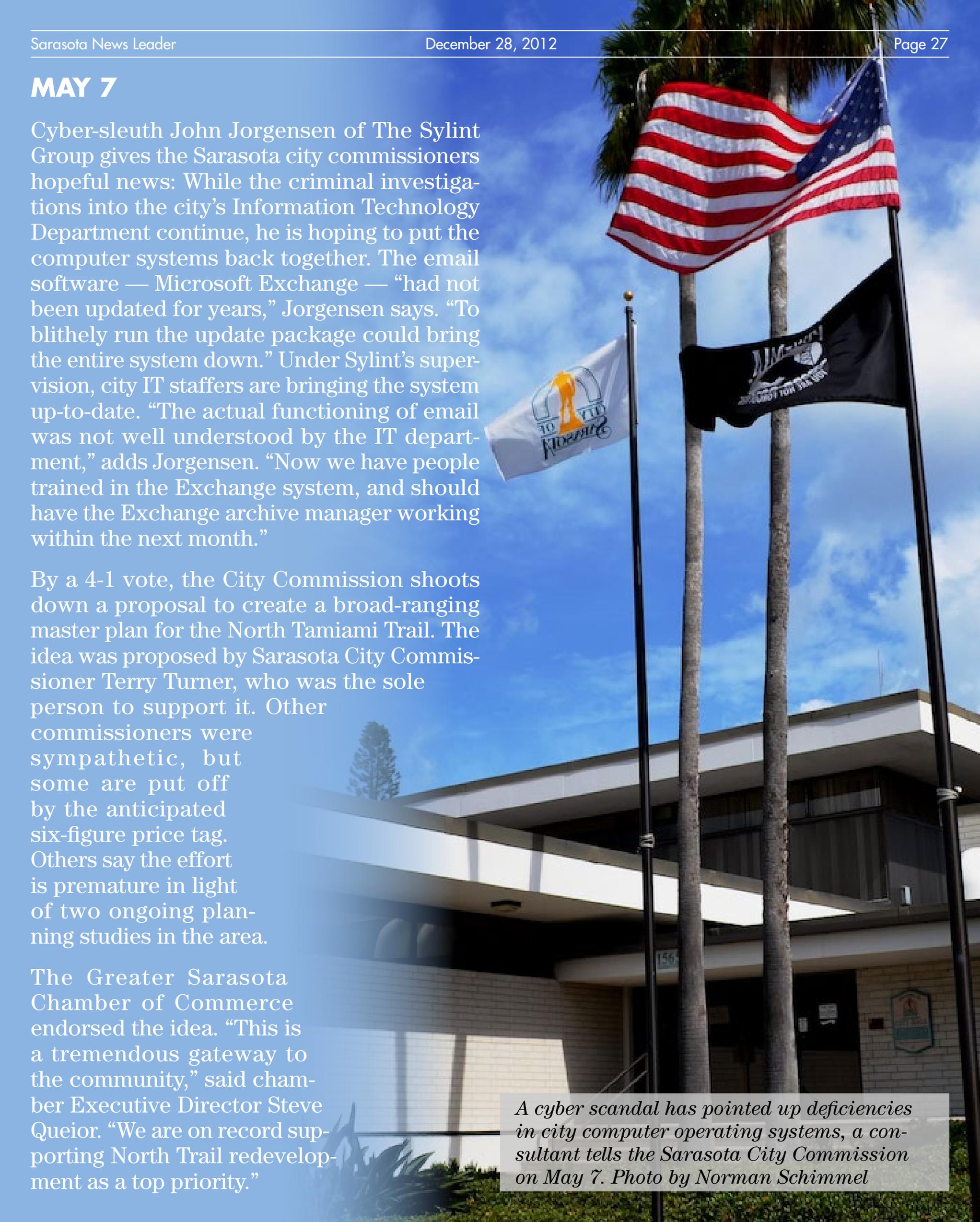
Working to dispel myths, representatives of Florida Power & Light Co. tell members of the Siesta Key Association May 3 that the new Smartmeters the company is installing throughout its territory do not transmit personal information. Steve Anderson, a manager of the project, says one of the common myths about the meters "is that we're going to know when you're home and when you cook toast," for example. "That is not true," he adds. He compares a Smartmeter to a scale which shows a person's weight, but not what the person consumed to get to that weight. A customer also will be able to calculate monthly bills with considerable reliability, Anderson says.

MAY 7

Cyber-sleuth John Jorgensen of The Sylint Group gives the Sarasota city commissioners hopeful news: While the criminal investigations into the city's Information Technology Department continue, he is hoping to put the computer systems back together. The email software — Microsoft Exchange — “had not been updated for years,” Jorgensen says. “To blithely run the update package could bring the entire system down.” Under Sylint's supervision, city IT staffers are bringing the system up-to-date. “The actual functioning of email was not well understood by the IT department,” adds Jorgensen. “Now we have people trained in the Exchange system, and should have the Exchange archive manager working within the next month.”

By a 4-1 vote, the City Commission shoots down a proposal to create a broad-ranging master plan for the North Tamiami Trail. The idea was proposed by Sarasota City Commissioner Terry Turner, who was the sole person to support it. Other commissioners were sympathetic, but some are put off by the anticipated six-figure price tag. Others say the effort is premature in light of two ongoing planning studies in the area.

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce endorsed the idea. “This is a tremendous gateway to the community,” said chamber Executive Director Steve Queior. “We are on record supporting North Trail redevelopment as a top priority.”



A cyber scandal has pointed up deficiencies in city computer operating systems, a consultant tells the Sarasota City Commission on May 7. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MAY 8

With split votes over funding concerns as well as the process, the Sarasota County commissioners direct staff to proceed with design work, permitting and construction for a new Emergency Operations/911 Center on the 1301 Cattlemen Road site they have been considering since February 2011. Those votes followed criticism of county staff over how the commissioners had learned that Jack Cox, president of Halfacre Construction Co., had withdrawn his property at 7060 Professional Parkway, in Lakewood Ranch, from consideration for the EOC location. The board also clarifies in a motion that the EOC will be built along the Porter Way side of the Cattlemen property the county owns.

MAY 14

Longboat Key Police Chief Al Hogle dies after a motorcycle accident in North Carolina. The news was released by Dave Bullock, Longboat Key town administrator. "We ask that everyone keep Chief Hogle's family in their prayers during this sad and difficult time," Bullock says in an email to town employees. Hogle was a veteran of the Sarasota Police Department, rising through the ranks to retire as a captain. He then was appointed to the Sarasota City Commission to fill the seat of Nora Patterson, who had been appointed to the County Commission. Hogle subsequently ran for and won the seat. He was elected mayor in the third year of his four-year term. However, he quit the City Commission to take the job of Bradenton Police Chief for two years. In 2002, he accepted the position of Longboat Key Police chief.



A Sarasota County graphic illustration shows a suggested design for the new Emergency Operations Center. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Both Anna's Deli and Total Tennis on Avenida Madera in Siesta Village are closing and moving on to other locations, *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned. "We absolutely hate it," says Dave Havill, co-owner of the deli, who is preparing to open a new store off University Parkway. Phil Perrella, one of the partners in Total Tennis, says his business is scheduled to reopen June 1 in its new location at 2300 Bee Ridge Road, the former home of Persnickity Cat. Total Tennis has been in Siesta Village for 35 years, Perrella noted. Havill says parking has been the biggest problem for Anna's since it relocated to Avenida Madera from Davidson Plaza almost four years ago.

MAY 15

The Sarasota County School Board gives staff immediate approval to implement a revised fee schedule for the rental of school property. The charges will mean minimal profit for individual schools, district Facilities Director Jody Dumas tells the board members during their May work session. A nonprofit group will

pay \$5 an hour to cover costs other than the expense of air conditioning, he says, such as the administrative expense for a school secretary to manage an event, as well as the cost of trash bags and the cleaning of restrooms. For-profit groups will pay \$15 per hour for the same services, he notes.



In 2011, serious crime in the city of Sarasota dropped 5.2 percent compared with the previous year. The number of so-called "index offenses" fell to 1,803 from 1,901. These are the serious crimes tracked by the FBI. Meanwhile, total arrests were up 10 percent. "If you arrest the bad guys and keep them in jail, you prevent the crimes they were going to commit," says City Police Captain Paul Sutton, noting that lower level economic crime, such as bicycle thefts and shoplifting, increased from 2010 to 2011. "It's up about 1.1 percent over last year," he says. Sarasota statistics overall mirror a drop in serious crime across the state, says Sutton.



The Total Tennis space sits vacant in Siesta Village in June, after the business moved to Bee Ridge Road. File photo

MAY 21

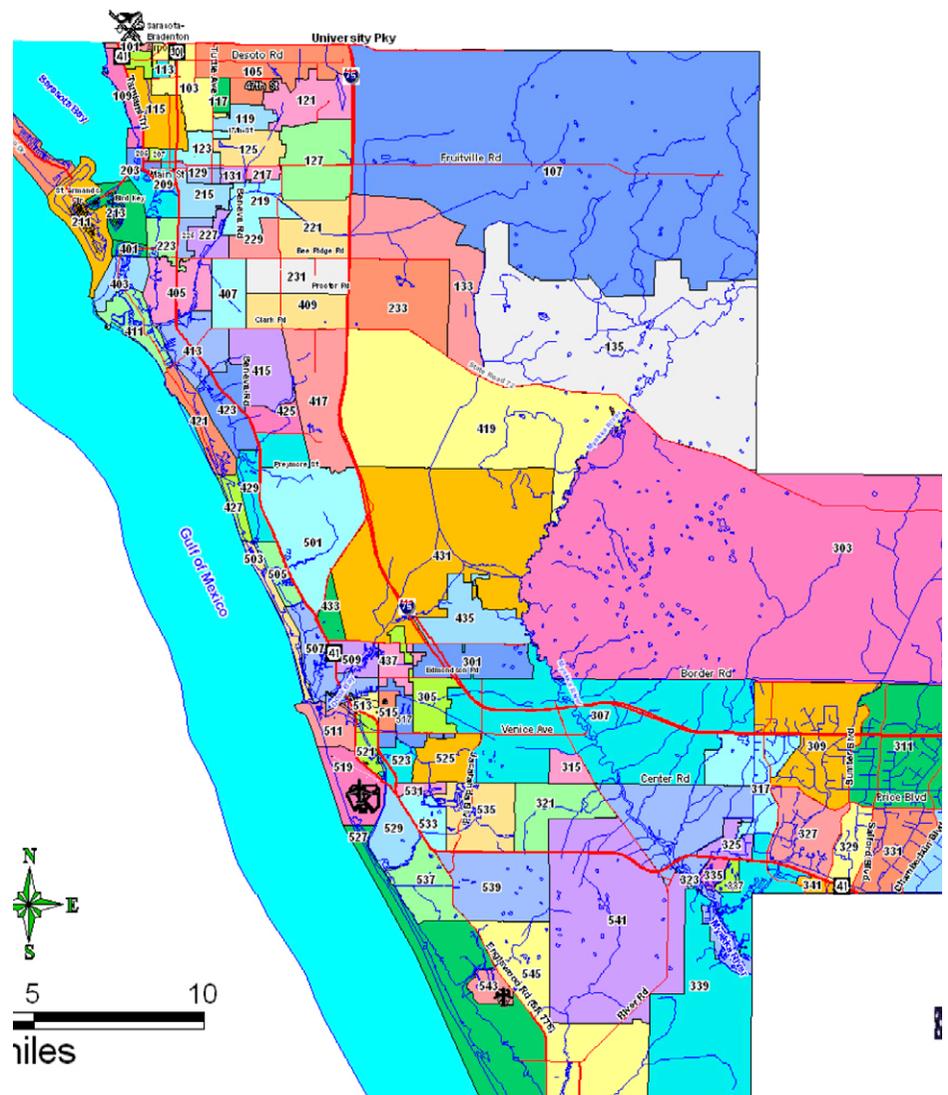
Sarasota's public property trespass ordinance comes up for review in light of a lawsuit against the city by the American Civil Liberties Union. City Attorney Robert Fournier introduces a new trespass ordinance for its first public hearing, and he briefs city commissioners on the status of the lawsuit. Trespass is rooted deeply in English common law. In American usage, it generally means that if a property owner asks someone to leave, the person must stay off the property for a year or face arrest and jail. "A trespass warning avoids judicial due process," says Michael Barfield, counsel for the Sarasota chapter of the ACLU. "To allege a crime but not provide an individual with their full rights is not correct." The city and the ACLU are in the midst of a 60-day hiatus over their dispute, to try and find common ground. "We've agreed to an informal and expedited system for the lawsuit, to keep the fees down," says Barfield. Fournier adds, "We're looking at the records. Before we answer the complaint, we'd like to take the 60 days to work on the factual details."

MAY 22

In spite of pleas from representatives of the African American and Hispanic communities in north Sarasota County, and some commissioner reservations about the lack of public awareness of the matter, the Sarasota County Commission votes 4-1 to allow the consolidation and renumbering of voter precincts throughout the county. Commissioner Carolyn Mason, the only African American on the board, casts the single "No" vote.

Prior to the board discussion of the new precincts, Ed James, representing the Coalition

of African American Leadership, tells the commissioners that Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent should have provided opportunities for citizens to look at the proposed plans before Dent brought them to the commission for action. "It is my hope and fervent prayer that you will not approve these changes," he tells the commissioners. "And please be mindful of [Section 5](#)," James said. James was referring to a portion of the U.S. Voting Rights Act that calls for freezes on new election practices in certain states, including Florida, until those changes have undergone a federal review to make certain they comply with the provisions of the 1965 act.



The Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections consolidates precincts prior to the 2012 General Election and releases a new map showing their boundaries. Image courtesy Supervisor of Elections

MAY 30

Three Siesta Key organizations have sent letters to the Sarasota County commissioners over the past week, urging them to proceed with plans to upgrade the Siesta Public Beach. The letter-writing initiative was spurred by a discussion during the May 21 Presidents Council meeting on Siesta Key regarding an effort by the president of the Sarasota County Coalition of Neighborhood Associations and the president of Sarasota Citizens for Responsible Government to seek the reallocation of funds designated for the Siesta beach to other beaches in the county. The Presidents Council is a group of representatives from various island organizations. Members meet regular-

ly to discuss issues of importance to all of them. The only Siesta organization expected to do so that has not weighed in thus far on the beach matter in a letter is the Chamber of Commerce. However, Mark Smith, the chamber president, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* the hold-up has been his architectural firm's office renovations and his inability to use his computer equipment. He anticipates sending the chamber letter this week, he says, as his board is concurred about the importance of the renovations at Siesta Public Beach. "Frankly," Smith says, "the facilities [at the Siesta beach] are an embarrassment ... and we got the No. 1 beach ranking in spite of the facilities." 



The historic pavilion at Siesta Key Public Beach is one of the buildings slated for rehabilitation as improvements begin at the park. Photo by Norman Schimmel



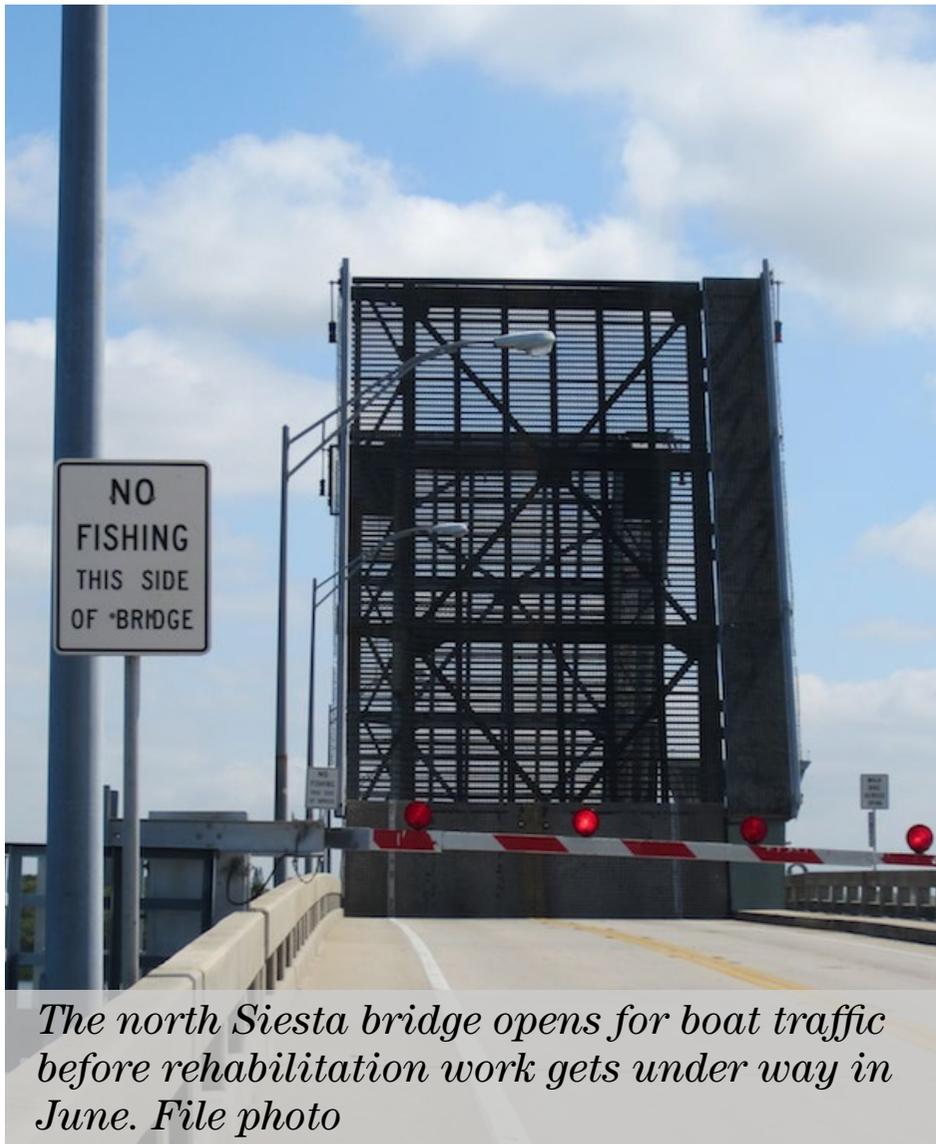
YEAR IN REVIEW: JUNE

Sarasota City Attorney Robert Fournier addresses the City Commission as City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini listens. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JUNE 1

The charter of the City of Sarasota is clear. The city manager, auditor and clerk and finance director must be bonded. But two of them are not. Neither Interim City Manager Terry Lewis nor Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini is bonded. The charter says, “The city manager, the city auditor and clerk ... and the finance director shall each give bond with authorized corporate sureties, conditioned upon their faithful performance of duty.” And the charter requires that the City Commission set the amount of that bond by resolution every year. On Nov. 7, 2011, the commission passed such a resolution and backdated it to Oct. 1, the start of the fiscal year. A Daytona Beach insurance firm specializing in public sector

work had been tasked with finding bonds for then-City Manager Bob Bartolotta, Finance Director Chris Lyons and Auditor and Clerk Nadalini. The firm was able to get policies for Bartolotta and Lyons, but unable to secure a bond for Nadalini. The *Sarasota News Leader* obtained a copy of correspondence between the Daytona Beach firm and a city employee. “Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in securing terms for the city clerk/auditor position,” the firm reported back by email on Sept. 28, 2011. “Our marketing efforts included accessing all standard and substandard bond writers including Travelers, Chubb, CAN, Suretec, Hartford and others. Underwriters are unwilling to extend surety without significant collateral for the city clerk/auditor position.”



The north Siesta bridge opens for boat traffic before rehabilitation work gets under way in June. File photo

JUNE 4

Because heavy rains on June 1 delayed completion of a guardrail project on the Stickney Point Bridge on the south end of Siesta Key, intermittent lane closures on that bridge might continue through Thursday, June 7, the District One spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Transportation tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. Those closures would be between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. only, said Lauren Hatchell, public information officer for the FDOT in Bartow. Erroneous information published early June 4 by another Sarasota publication had residents fretting that lane closures on the Stickney Point Bridge would overlap the coming lane closure on the north Siesta bridge as the rehabilitation of that bridge gets under way. The north bridge project starts June 5, but the contractor is not planning any

lane closure until Monday, June 11, Hatchell says. The contractor and crew for the Stickney Point Bridge project “know that they have to be done before those lane closures start on the north bridge,” Hatchell adds.



With the qualifying period officially having begun at noon June 4, an attorney in Venice vying for Jon Thaxton’s Sarasota County Commission seat and the two incumbent county commissioners are among a number of candidates for local office who already have “Qualified” notations at the ends of their names on the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections list. Republican Charles Hines is the only candidate for the District 5 County Commission seat to have qualified for that office by 5 p.m. Four other Republican challengers have filed for the race: Randy McLendon and Louis D. Rosenfield, both of Englewood, and Vanessa J. Carusone and William Brian Slider, both of Venice. Thaxton, who had planned to seek a fourth term on the county board, was prevented from doing so by a Florida Supreme Court ruling upholding commission term limits as outlined in county charters. Thaxton announced June 1 that he would be challenging incumbent Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent in the Republican primary.



The Sarasota city commissioners apply their own version of local preference, cutting the list of potential city managers to five from eight. The three who were dropped were all from out of state. It is the last you will hear of John Gabor of Michigan, Michael Hein of Arizona and Andrew Mair of New Jersey. The

list started with 104, and now those left are Ed Mitchell, city manager of West Palm Beach; James Chisholm, city manager of Daytona Beach; Barbara Lipscomb, city manager of Casselberry; Rich Chaffin of McKinney, TX; and Thomas Barwin of Oak Park, IL. If there is a dark horse in this race, it is Barwin. Until last March, he was village manager of Oak Park, a tony Chicago suburb of 53,000 people with a \$45 million general fund budget. To believe his eclectic resume, he just might walk on water.

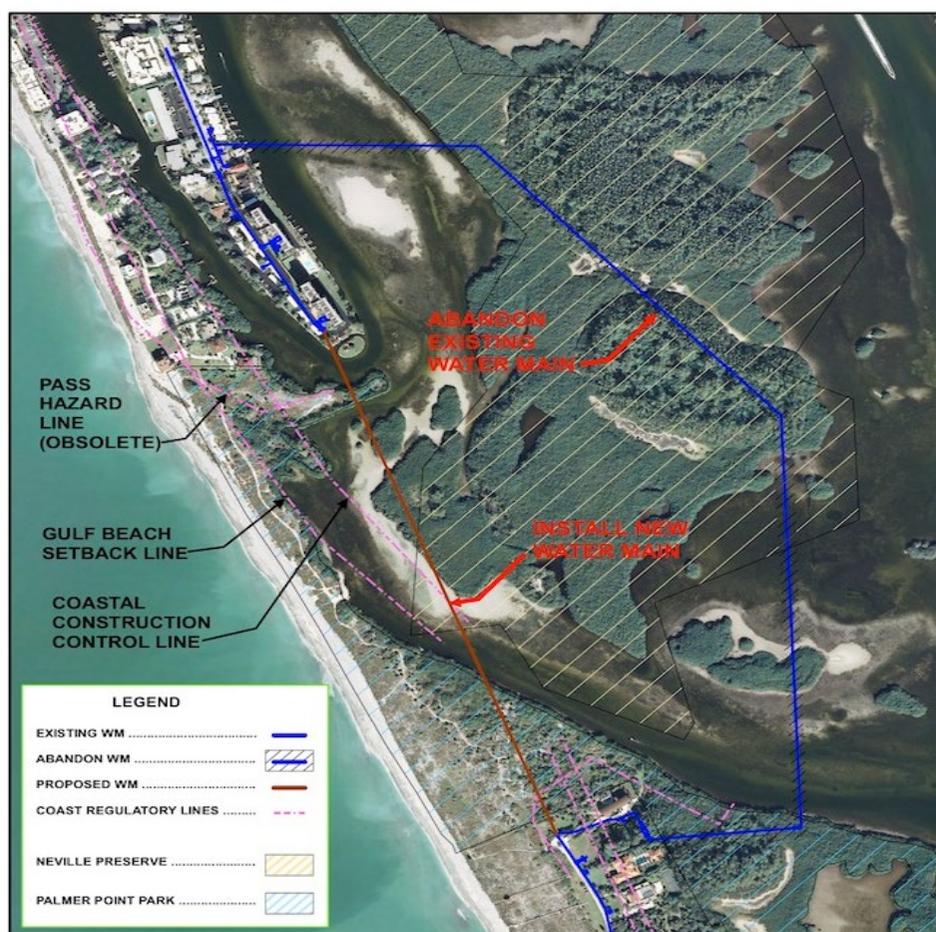
JUNE 5

On a unanimous vote, the Sarasota County Commission approves a \$1,133,622.95 contract for the construction of a new watermain pipeline linking Siesta and Casey keys. The cost is about \$467,000 less than the estimate by the project engineer, according to a county staff memo sent to the commission. "This

has been a long time coming, so thanks for your hard work," Commissioner Nora Patterson tells Public Works Department staff after making the motion. Construction is expected to begin this month and conclude in October, according to the memo. The existing watermain line, installed by the Siesta Key Utility Authority across Little Sarasota Bay in the early 1970s, "is failing and needs to be replaced," the staff memo says. "A leak was first detected in the line in 1996," the memo adds. That leak was repaired, the memo continues, but, since then, "new leaks have occurred with increasing frequency." In 2006, SKUA "conveyed and transferred its real estate holdings, easements, utility lines and other infrastructure" to Sarasota County.

JUNE 7

The rank and file of the Sarasota Police Department has unanimously rejected the city's contract proposal. All 142 eligible officers, sergeants and specialists cast their votes against the contract agreement. Michael "Mick" McHale, president of the Southwest Florida Chapter of the Police Benevolent Association, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*, "It was the first time in our history of 38 years with the city that we had a unanimous vote, in this case to reject the proposal." The primary sticking point is pensions. Sarasota police are totally dependent upon their city pensions for retirement, because they do not pay into the Social Security System. Underperforming investments, declining property values and a smaller workforce have put the city's pension plans under stress. Last month City Commissioner Paul Carragiulo said cost-of-living adjustments are already causing headaches: "The ratio of workers-to-retirees was four-to-one. Now it's close to one-to-one."



A graphic illustration shows the routes of the existing and planned watermain pipelines between south Siesta Key and Casey Key. Image courtesy Sarasota County

JUNE 12

A city review committee has selected a boutique hotel over a conventional Embassy Suites to be built adjacent to the Palm Avenue parking garage. Angus Rogers, the head of the winning Floridays Development Corp., briefs the Downtown Improvement District about the project, saying the 180-room “lifestyle hotel” will be dedicated to being accessible to the arts. It will feature a two-story-tall lobby along Cocoanut Avenue that he says will be a “performance and display space,” adding, “It will have a restaurant, and we will own it and it will be open for breakfast and lunch so we can control the guest experience.” Floridays beat a 200-room Embassy Suites proposal fielded by the Bridges-McKibbon team from Tampa and Gainesville, GA. The next step for Rogers is preparing a “term sheet” to present to the Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board on June 28. That board’s recommendation will then go to the City Commission, sitting as the Community Redevelopment Agency.



After years of declining property tax revenue and budget shortfalls, Sarasota County Administrator Randy Reid delivers some positive news about the county’s economic condition and brings up a rare-in-these-times proposal during a County Commission budget workshop: a lump sum boost to employees’ bottom lines. During his opening comments to the board, Reid floats the possibility of offering “non-bargaining unit” — i.e. non-union — employees a “lump sum-type payment” that would be paid out just after the 2013 fiscal year begins on Oct. 1. Reid says many of those employees had not seen a raise in five years.

“We have discussed a figure of \$1,000,” Reid said. “That has been done in both Manatee County and also Longboat in the past year.”



The Midnight Pass Society has re-filed a lawsuit in federal court, seeking judicial orders requiring the appropriate Sarasota County, State of Florida and U.S. officials to issue permits necessary for the reopening of Midnight Pass between Siesta and Casey keys. The case was filed in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida in Tampa. “We’re looking to get relief,” Jim Herbert, chairman of the 2,000-member Midnight Pass Society, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. “It’s been a long time now,” he adds, noting the pass was closed in 1983. The defendants are Sarasota County, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The lawsuit was filed under the citizen suit provisions of the federal Clean Water and Endangered species acts, it says.



A Sarasota County Geographic Information Systems map shows an aerial view of the location where Midnight Pass once flowed. Plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in June hope it will flow again. Image courtesy Sarasota County

JUNE 15

During a budget workshop, two Sarasota County commissioners reiterate support for funding the planned Siesta Public Beach improvements in a short time frame, as they discussed their Capital Improvement Plan for Fiscal Years 2013-2017. When Commissioner Nora Patterson questions James W. Harriott Jr., director of public works, about the \$9.5 million allocation for the beach improvements during that five-year time frame, Harriott responds that current planning spreads the funding beyond the period the board is reviewing. He reminds her that over the past couple of months, staff has talked with the commission about working on financing plans to complete the improvements by the end of 2014, instead of spreading them out through Fiscal Year 2024.



The Florida Department of Transportation turns down a Sarasota County Commission request for a reduction in the speed limit and installation of reflective pavement markers along a Midnight Pass Road curve that residents say has been the site of numerous accidents. However, District One Secretary Billy Hattaway writes to commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson that FDOT will add reflective sheeting to the supports of the signs warning motorists approaching the curve from both directions to reduce their speed. “That treatment will effectively supplement the chevrons along the curve,” Hattaway adds. Regarding the reflective pavement markers, Hattaway writes, “Similar treatment used at another location along Midnight Pass Road was criticized by residents in the vicinity due

to the noise generated by cars riding over the markers.” During an interview, Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*, “I’m disappointed [about Hattaway’s response], but I don’t think there’s a whole lot we can do at this point.”

JUNE 18

At the conclusion of a 20-minute hearing, 12th Judicial Circuit Court Judge Lee Haworth refuses to grant a motion by Sarasota County to dismiss a civil rights lawsuit Siesta Village property owner Chris Brown filed against Sarasota County in October 2011. Brown’s lawsuit claims that the county lowered the 2011 parking assessments for 74 other Siesta Village properties in the Parking Improvement District at the same time it raised the assessments on three of his properties. The lawsuit calls that action discriminatory and a violation of Brown’s civil rights.

However, Haworth does dismiss two of the original counts in the lawsuit: that the court direct the county to repeal those contested parking assessments for Brown’s parcels and that the court declare that the use of a “measuring wheel” to determine the patron area of Siesta Village restaurants violated Brown’s constitutional rights. “We’re very pleased that the judge has allowed us to go forward on our complaints, as this has been an ongoing problem,” Brown’s attorney, Morgan Bentley of Bentley & Bruning, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* after the hearing. “Having said that,” Bentley adds, “we’re hopeful that we can work this out with the county in some amicable way.”

JUNE 19

During their annual “State of the Utilities” workshop for the City of Sarasota, the city commissioners tentatively agree to a 4 percent rate increase in water and sewer rates in 2013 and 2014 to prevent long-term debt from increasing. These hikes will come on top of 4 percent increases in 2011 and 2012. The decision is not final until the public is notified, two public hearings are held and the commissioners vote. Public hearings are scheduled on July 16 and Aug. 20 for the proposed rate increases. But the discussion is a strong indicator the rates are headed up. It came after almost two hours of review by staffers and consultants on the physical and fiscal health of the utility system.



Sarasota County and state preservationists expect to find out any day now whether the Paul Rudolph addition to Sarasota High School will be listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#), *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned. Barbara Mattick, the deputy state historic preservation officer for survey and

registration, tells the News Leader she calculated the timing on the basis of when the materials were submitted. Mattick says the National Register publishes a weekly activities report with all the new buildings on its list; the update also is posted on the National Register’s website. Sarasota County officials told the *News Leader* the previous week that they anticipated notification by July 15. However, Mattick said her office sent the application by Federal Express on May 8. Once the National Register receives an application, she says, staff members have 45 days to log it in, “and they usually take 45 days, because they have things pouring in from all over the country.” Mattick says she was encouraged that the SHS addition, with the structures known as Building 4 and the West Gymnasium, would make it onto the list, because someone generally calls her office if National Register staff encounters a problem with an application. “If we haven’t heard anything by now,” she says, “it’s looking pretty good.” Caroline Zucker, chairwoman of the Sarasota County School Board, tells the *News Leader* she was unaware that Sarasota County History Center staff had pursued the National Register listing.



Building 4 at Sarasota High School, designed by internationally renowned architect Paul Rudolph, was expected to earn a place this year on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JUNE 20

The 23-year-old Bradenton man charged in connection with the January death of a Siesta Key runner has been released from the Sarasota County Jail, *The Sarasota News Leader* learns. Blake C. Talman had been in jail since Jan. 7, the day he allegedly was driving drunk when he struck Donna Chen, 53, as she ran along the sidewalk of Midnight Pass Road with her dog. Talman was charged with DUI manslaughter, vehicular homicide, four counts of DUI property damage and one count of leaving the scene of an accident. His bond totaled \$118,000. According to terms of the release, Talman must remain under house arrest with a GPS system allowing law enforcement officers to track his location at all times. He also was ordered not to consume alcohol or use drugs. Additionally, Talman was ordered

to wear a SCRAM device, which measures the amount of alcohol in a person's perspiration, according to law enforcement officials. The tamper-resistant equipment fits around a defendant's ankle.

JUNE 25

Sarasota News Leader contributor Fran Palmeri ventures to the Venice Jetty and Nokomis Beach to record the high surf — and at least one swimmer in the Gulf of Mexico — as Tropical Storm Debby continues to lash the area. At 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, the National Hurricane Center advised that a tropical storm warning remained in effect for the Florida Gulf Coast from Englewood to Destin, with reports of Debby having sustained wind of 45 mph. Her winds were extending outward up to 230 miles, the NHC reported. The storm was located at latitude 29.3 north and longi-



High surf along South County beaches is a product of Tropical Storm Debby in late June. Photo by Fran Palmeri

tude 85.1 west, about 30 miles south-southwest of Apalachicola. Debby was reported to be moving toward the northeast at nearly 5 mph, according to the NHC. Although Debby has weakened, the NHC adds, “the combination of a storm surge and the tide will cause normally dry areas near the coast to be flooded by rising waters.”

JUNE 26

Of all the comments Sarasota County staff had received on preliminary design features for the new Gulf Gate library, “Ninety-eight percent have been positive, overwhelmingly,” Project Manager Carolyn Eastwood tells the County Commission during its regular meeting. After she and her team show the board the latest design concepts for the facility planned to replace the existing library at 7112 Curtiss Ave., Eastwood asks for the commissioners’ “blessing going forward.” Commissioner Joe

Barbetta responds with a motion for “[the team] to go forward with what we’ve seen today and refining it.” Commissioner Nora Patterson seconds the motion.

“Third,” Commissioner Carolyn Mason adds, drawing chuckles. 



An architect's rendering shows the proposed exterior of the new Gulf Gate Library. Plans call for construction to begin in early 2013. Image courtesy Sarasota County



One swimmer braves the Gulf of Mexico as Tropical Storm Debby lashes the Sarasota County coast in late June. Photo by Fran Palmeri



YEAR IN REVIEW: JULY

The Sarasota City Commission, meeting in early July, failed to reach a consensus on the finalists for city manager and agreed to continue its search. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JULY 2

Failing to reach a consensus on the three remaining applicants for Sarasota city manager, the City Commission votes to continue its search for a person to replace Robert Bartolotta, who resigned as city manager in January. Commissioners agreed it would be unfair to hire one of the candidates without a unanimous vote. Interim City Manager Terry Lewis reported this morning that Rich Chaffin of McKinney, TX, had dropped out of contention. The three remaining candidates are Ed Mitchell, city manager of West Palm Beach; James Chisholm, city manager of Daytona Beach; and Thomas Barwin of Oak Park, Ill., who was village manager of that Chicago suburb until March.

The city is about to begin an amnesty program for parking ticket scofflaws. But after Oct. 1, unpaid tickets will mean profound implications for drivers. Mark Lyons, Sarasota's parking manager, says the city is owed more than \$700,000 in unpaid parking fines and is about to embark on a statewide search for those funds, backed with the power to stop the renewal of license tags and driver's licenses by those who have not paid up. Between now and the fall, Lyons will drop the late fees under a Parking Citation Amnesty Program. But after Oct. 1, watch out. "We're going to alert the [Florida] Department of Motor Vehicles to halt the renewal of tags and licenses," he tells the City Commission. "And we're going to full use of the vehicle immobilization policy."

JULY 3

Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson tells members of the Siesta Key Village Association she will find out when a recommendation on the new vendor for the Village maintenance contract can be expected to come before the County Commission for approval. The question arose after Mark Smith, chairman of the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp., provided an update during the monthly **SKVA** meeting on the search for a new vendor. The bids on the maintenance contract are scheduled to be opened at 2:30 p.m. July 11 in the county's Procurement Department at the Administration Building, 1660 Ringling Blvd. "I plan on being there," Smith says. When Patterson asks whether he knows when the bid will be awarded, Smith tells her, "I was going to ask you that."

JULY 6

City of Sarasota Finance Director Chris Lyons presents the \$178 million budget for the next fiscal year. Of that amount, less than one-third lies in the "general fund," with the other two-thirds sequestered away for debt service, utilities and other non-discretionary expenses. Since 2007, the city has cut one-quarter of its employee positions; it has reduced its overall budget by one-third since 2008. Despite the long-awaited stabilization in property values for tax purposes, overall revenue estimates are down again for 2013, led by a nearly \$1 million reduction in state funding and grants. Investment earnings in this poor financial climate dropped by one-third. Other revenues, such as gasoline and sales taxes, are off as well, as is the fraction of property tax revenue devoted to the city's Community Redevelopment Agency; property values for that purpose fell another 1.7 percent.



Tom Maroney (left), general manager of business operations in the Sarasota County Public Works Department, and Ryan Montague (third from left), of the county's Traffic/Mobility Office, meet with representatives of firms interested in bidding on the Siesta Village Maintenance contract. A mandatory pre-bid conference was held June 21. File photo

JULY 9

Laura Williams, director of Florida operations for the Baltimore Orioles, accepts a commemorative plaque from Sarasota resident Norman Schimmel and Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, recognizing the fact that the Orioles drew more than 100,000 fans to their 2012 spring training games in Sarasota. (Barbetta was acting in a private capacity for the presentation.) The official count for 2012 was 106,398 fans at 15 games, Williams told *The Sarasota News Leader* this spring. The Orioles surpassed the 100,000 mark in 2011 as well, following the renovations of Ed Smith Stadium. The Orioles were one of only six Major League Baseball teams, out the 15 based in Florida, to achieve an attendance level of 100,000 or higher this year.



(From left) Norman Schimmel, Laura Williams and Joe Barbetta. Contributed photo

JULY 10

With Commissioner Jon Thaxton casting the solitary “No” vote, the Sarasota County Commission votes 4-1 to allow a pilot program for



A photo shows damage to environmentally sensitive land caused by feral hogs — a factor that led to the County Commission agreeing to allow hunts of the animals on county property. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

hunting feral hogs to proceed in December and March 2013 on environmentally sensitive land in South County jointly owned and managed by the county and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Commissioner Carolyn Mason made the motion to allow the hunts to proceed, with Commissioner Joe Barbetta seconding it. Commissioners point out that both the county's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Oversight Committee and its Parks and Recreation Advisory Council have approved the proposal, which will allow hunters with dogs to use either guns or knives to kill an unlimited number of hogs. The cost of a permit for the hunt will be \$75.

Of the 11 speakers who address the commission during public comments, only one supports the hunt.

JULY 10

The Sarasota City commissioners pull a political U-turn, deciding they will pick a new city manager after all from among the four finalists presented to them by a headhunting firm. A week earlier, on July 2, they decided not to decide, failing to pick any candidate and saying they wanted to restart the entire months-long process. The non-decision stirred up significant reaction, very little of it positive. Then *The Sarasota News Leader* broke the story on July 6 that Interim City Manager Terry Lewis would not stick around for the next round of headhunting. He said he would bow out on Aug. 3.



Colin Baenziger (right), the consultant to the City of Sarasota in its search for a new manager, and Kurt Hoverter, the city's human resources manager (middle) discuss the search for candidates with the commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JULY 11

Jim Shirley still does not have all the documentation the Sarasota County Commission chairwoman requested, but the executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County comes away from the County Commission's regular meeting with all the \$1.3 million in grant awards a panel had approved for Fiscal Year 2013. Chairwoman Christine Robinson casts the lone "No" vote on the awards. Robinson, who represents South County interests on the commission, queried Alliance Executive Director Jim Shirley at length during the commission's June 26 meeting about his efforts to encourage more South County organizations to apply for funding. Because Shirley did not have all the information she asked for during that session, the board agreed to call Shirley back for a follow-up presentation. During his opening remarks on July 11, Shirley points out he and his staff had contacted 38 individuals representing 25 South County organizations during the current grant process, "and most of these were contacted on multiple occasions." In 2011, only one South County organization won a grant; this year, three organizations were recommended for funding, he points out. Those three were among six in South County that began the application process; five of those completed it, Shirley says.



With Chairwoman Christine Robinson and Commissioner Jon Thaxton voting "No," the Sarasota County Commission approves not-to-exceed millage rates for advertisement in advance of public hearings on the [2013 fiscal year budget](#). The biggest increase in the rates this year will be for mosquito control, with the rate climbing from 0.0277 mills in FY 2012 to

0.0805 mills in FY 2013, an increase of 290.61 percent. The other rates proposed for FY 2013 are 3.1530 mills for the general operating fund — an increase of 2.56 percent over FY 2012 — and the debt service rate, which was set tentatively at 0.1577, a decrease of 33.26 percent from FY 2012. The total proposed millage is 3.3912, up 1.58 percent from FY 2012.



Given the continuing fluctuations in the housing market, the Sarasota County commissioners agree it is too soon to put a price on any transfer of development rights from lands the county owns. Nonetheless, they also agree unanimously to authorize staff to develop a pilot program for the potential sale of publicly owned TDRs and to bring that back as soon as possible for their review. With a potential 10,000 TDR units that could be developed, commissioners say they want to get a program under way shortly. Commissioner Joe Barbetta points out, "In reality, we've been about this for six or seven or eight years." Moreover, by his calculations, with a 5 percent cost for a TDR, the county's property could bring in about \$50 million, he said. Barbetta also requests staff check out the best practices of pricing TDRs in programs throughout the United States and report back on their findings. Chairwoman Christine Robinson asks Tom Polk, general manager of planning services, to include in the report information staff already has obtained about pricing of successful TDR programs. The TDR policy applies to the county's 2050 Plan, which involves development east of Interstate 75. It would allow developers to increase density on parcels by paying a percentage of the cost of the extra dwelling units. The revenue would be used to preserve more environmentally sensitive lands in the county.



Circus Sarasota was among the recipients of the Arts and Cultural Alliance grants awarded by the Sarasota County Commission in July. Among its star performers are the Flying Wallendas, shown performing during the 2012 Cirque des Voix. Photo by Norman Schimmel

JULY 11

The return per dollar invested in Sarasota County tourism advertising rose from \$18.16 in 2009 to \$34.40 in 2011, about 47%, Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, tells the County Commission during a July 11 report. Television and online advertising have proven most effective, Haley adds during her presentation of the agency's business plan for the 2013 fiscal year. (Visit Sarasota County formerly was the Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau.)

JULY 16

When Sarasota City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo says he wants to introduce a strong-mayor proposal, nobody quite expects how strong the proposal will be. Basically, it calls for a rewrite of the entire city charter to incorporate all of the changes Caragiulo would like to see. The City Commission ends up tabling discussion of the amendment until Aug. 20. The delay will keep the proposal off the November ballot, but it could allow it to appear on the March 2013 ballot, when two city commissioners will be up for election. Right now the city enjoys what some call a "ceremonial" mayor, a commissioner elected by their fellow commissioners to preside over meetings and represent the city. Actual running of the city is done by an appointed city manager. Three commissioners represent districts, while two are elected citywide. Caragiulo would change all that, and more. All commissioners would be elected from districts, under his plan. Only the mayor would run at-large. The mayor would no longer be a commissioner and would not be able to vote on issues. Howev-

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Visit Sarasota County has focused more over the past year on marketing the county to potential visitors according to their interests, such as ecotourism. The move is part of the Colors campaign. Image courtesy Sarasota County

er, the elected mayor would have veto power over City Commission actions. The veto could be overridden with a four-vote supermajority.



As a result of a professional citizen petition drive, Sarasota city voters in November will consider changing their charter to strengthen the city manager at the expense of the auditor and clerk. "It took five weeks to gather 3,297 signatures," Donnie McDonouth tells

the Sarasota City commissioners. He is chairman of Citizens for a Better Sarasota. The petition-bearers focused on the parking lots of grocery stores and public buildings. Everyone with whom this reporter spoke said he or she was paid per signature, with three saying they were getting \$2 apiece. Political junkies take note: It takes \$6,600 to get a petition on the ballot in the city. McDonouth appears with Argus Foundation President Mike Quillen and Argus Executive Director Kerry Kirschner to ask the city commissioners formally to put the referendum on the Nov. 6 ballot. City Commissioner Terry Turner admits to having helped fund the petition drive. McDonouth says the measure “eliminates the conflict of interest inherent in the current structures combining audit and administrative functions. It also consolidates administrative functions under the city manager to facilitate accountability and efficient delivery of city services.”

The Sarasota City commissioners put the final ordinance in place to establish a legal bayfront mooring field downtown. This required only a decade of government activity. Commission approval follows approval by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on June 28. The city is one of five jurisdictions in the state experimenting with mooring regulation. Contractor Dock and Marine will begin staging equipment and pilings within several days on the south side of the 10th Street Boat Ramp. The 35-boat mooring area will be managed by Marina Jack Inc. Mooring will cost the smallest transient boat \$18 per day. For a vessel 50 feet or longer, the day rate will be \$25. Monthly mooring rentals will range from \$250 to \$345 per month. Marina Jack Inc.’s website does not show that a shuttle service will be offered to the shore, only dinghy dockage.



Boats rest at anchor in the mooring field off the Sarasota bayfront. New mooring field regulations were approved July 16 by the City Commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Tom Harmer became deputy Sarasota County administrator in mid-July. Contributed photo

Sarasota County Government has gained a new deputy administrator and seen the removal of “interim” from the titles of three department leaders. Staff also has been preparing for the departure of a long-time employee with expertise in a number of areas. County Administrator Randall Reid announces that Thomas Harmer has been named deputy Sarasota County administrator. The three county officials whom Reid formally appointed as department chiefs are Joanie Whitley, Human Resources director; Mike Tobias, Emergency Services director; and Steve Botelho, chief financial planning officer. John McCarthy, who has been with the county for 31 years, will be retiring July 20.

JULY 19

Trevor Harvey, the president of the Sarasota County branch of the NAACP, tells the organization at its monthly general membership meeting that the national NAACP is taking the lead in the fight against precinct consolidation, at the local level here in Sarasota and around the country. During the national NAACP convention held in Houston July 7-12, Harvey met with the group’s general counsel and the senior vice president of the D.C. branch to update them about Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent’s plan to [reduce the number of precincts from 156 to 98](#). The Sarasota NAACP [had been considering](#) requesting that the Department of Justice intervene because of concern that the consolidation will suppress the minority vote by increasing the distance voters will have to travel and increasing the possibility of long, discouraging lines. According to Harvey, the national NAACP has been hearing many similar stories and complaints — the “same issues all across the country,” he says. Given that, the Sarasota branch “pretty much turned everything over to the national level,” hoping that the larger organization could bring stronger legal resources to bear on the problem. “We need their influence to get us to the next level,” Harvey tells the *News Leader* after the meeting.

JULY 24

Because the Florida Legislature approved an extra \$100, or about 3 percent, in base funding per pupil statewide for the 2012-13 school year, the Sarasota County School Board has no choice but to raise its required local millage rate for the 2013 fiscal year, Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner tells the board.

Although the final FY 2013 millage rates will not be adopted until Sept. 11, the School Board votes unanimously to advertise a total of 7.816 mills in advance of a July 31 public hearing on the budget. Of that total, the local required millage rate is 4.568, up from 4.387 last year. The vote is 4-0, as board member Carol Todd is absent from the meeting. The increase of 0.181 mills over the total FY 2012 millage rate of 7.635 would mean the owner of a \$100,000 house would pay about \$18 more per year in property taxes, Weidner points out.

JULY 27

The man selected as Sarasota's new city manager has agreed to a \$175,000 salary. Tom Barwin's contract will be reviewed on Wednesday,

Aug. 1, by the Sarasota City Commission. Barwin has indicated he would like to start work on Sept. 1. Despite talk by the city's headhunter, Colin Baenziger of Wellington, that the City Commission might have to bump the salary range to attract qualified candidates, Barwin's starting salary will be slightly less than the \$176,000 paid to his predecessor, Bob Bartolotta. Barwin's employment agreement calls for an annual salary of \$175,000, plus a car allowance of \$600 per month.

One unusual part of the contract allows Barwin to stay on the job for two years if the city "changes its form of government to anything other than its current City Manager form of governing (such as a Strong Mayor form of government)" 



Sarasota County Schools Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner discusses budget matters with the School Board. Photo by Scott Proffitt

YEAR IN REVIEW: AUGUST

New Sarasota City Manager Tom Barwin shakes hands with Commissioner Terry Turner during Barwin's first commission meeting on Sept. 4. Photo by Norman Schimmel

AUG. 2

After some last-minute give-and-take, the Sarasota City commissioners offer a contract to Tom Barwin, their pick to be the next city manager. All of the terms are as previously reported: \$175,000 annual salary, \$600 per-month car allowance and \$15,000 for moving expenses. However, the commissioners took two days to digest a clause Barwin desired in the contract to protect him in case the city had a sudden change of government. A so-called “strong mayor” form of government eliminates the need for a professional city manager, so Barwin wanted some job security in case a referendum eliminated his position. He proposed a contract clause stopping the commission from discharging him immediately if such a referendum passed. That clause, however, runs afoul of the city charter, which allows the commission to fire a city manager by a

simple 3-2 majority at any time for any reason. City Attorney Bob Fournier says of the clause in Barwin’s contract, “It’s just intended as a guard against a premature termination if the form of government changes.”



Damage resulting from Tropical Storm Debby in the municipalities of Sarasota County and in the unincorporated parts of the county combined has been estimated at \$7 million, Ed McCrane, the county’s emergency management chief, tells members of the Siesta Key Association on Aug. 2. Total damage from Debby in the unincorporated part of the county was estimated at \$542,000, he says. That does not include damage on Lido or Longboat keys or in the city of Venice, he pointed out. Altogether, 256 Sarasota County residents have registered with the Federal



Tropical Storm Debby eroded much of the beach in the southern part of the county, including what had been a bluff on Casey Key. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

Emergency Management Agency by telephone because of property damage they suffered as a result of the storm's effects, McCrane reports to the County Commission on Aug. 6. Fifty-two structures in the county were damaged by wind or water, he tells SKA members during their regular meeting.

AUG. 8

As of Aug. 1 — the three-month mark — 33 homeless people have rotated through the City of Sarasota's Street Teams program and 11 of them have been able to find full-time employment, the program's supervisor reports during the Aug. 8 meeting of the [Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness](#). Tom Maxa, a Salvation Army employee in Sarasota, tells the approximately 30 people present that while the goal was to see about 65% of the participants gain regular employment, "I think we're headed in the right direction." Three of the 11 who were hired "were actually working on the Street Team at their jobs," he adds. In each of those cases, someone from a business came

out to tell the worker he or she was doing such a good job, the business wanted to hire the person, Maxa says. Fourteen people are working on the teams right now, Maxa adds, resulting in two teams of five people each and one team with four people. "There's a waiting list right now," he says.

AUG. 9

A long blue line of 96 men and two women have tossed their peaked caps into the race to be the next city police chief. Current Chief Mikel Hollaway will retire in October. The hiring decision will be one of the first in the administration of incoming City Manager Tom Barwin, and it will be scrutinized both inside the new police headquarters building



*Sarasota Police Chief Mikel Hollaway/
Contributed*

and throughout the city. The decision rests with Barwin alone; it requires no “confirmation” by the City Commission. The city’s Human Resources Division released a list of the 98 names without any affiliations or other information. Hands down, the man to bet on is Sarasota Police Capt. Paul Sutton. He has been Hollaway’s No. 2 for the past three years, and he is strongly endorsed by the outgoing chief. Barwin will need powerful arguments to offset Sutton’s local backing.

AUG. 10

For Nathan Benderson Park off University Parkway, this has been a landmark day. A 150-foot dredge owned by Dredge America of

Kansas City, Mo., has begun digging out the lake bottom to create the only Class A course in North America as certified by FISA, the international Federation of Rowing Associations. The chief facilities architect for FISA, the worldwide governing body of rowing, has been working with Benderson Development Co. to create the 2,000-meter course. “[FISA officials] actually designed this lake to meet all their specs,” Paul Blacketter, executive director of planning for Benderson, explains to Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson and members of the news media. Once the work is complete, the lake will be ready for a wide variety of international rowing competitions.



The dredge sits near the shoreline before work begins. Photo by Norman Schimmel

AUG. 14

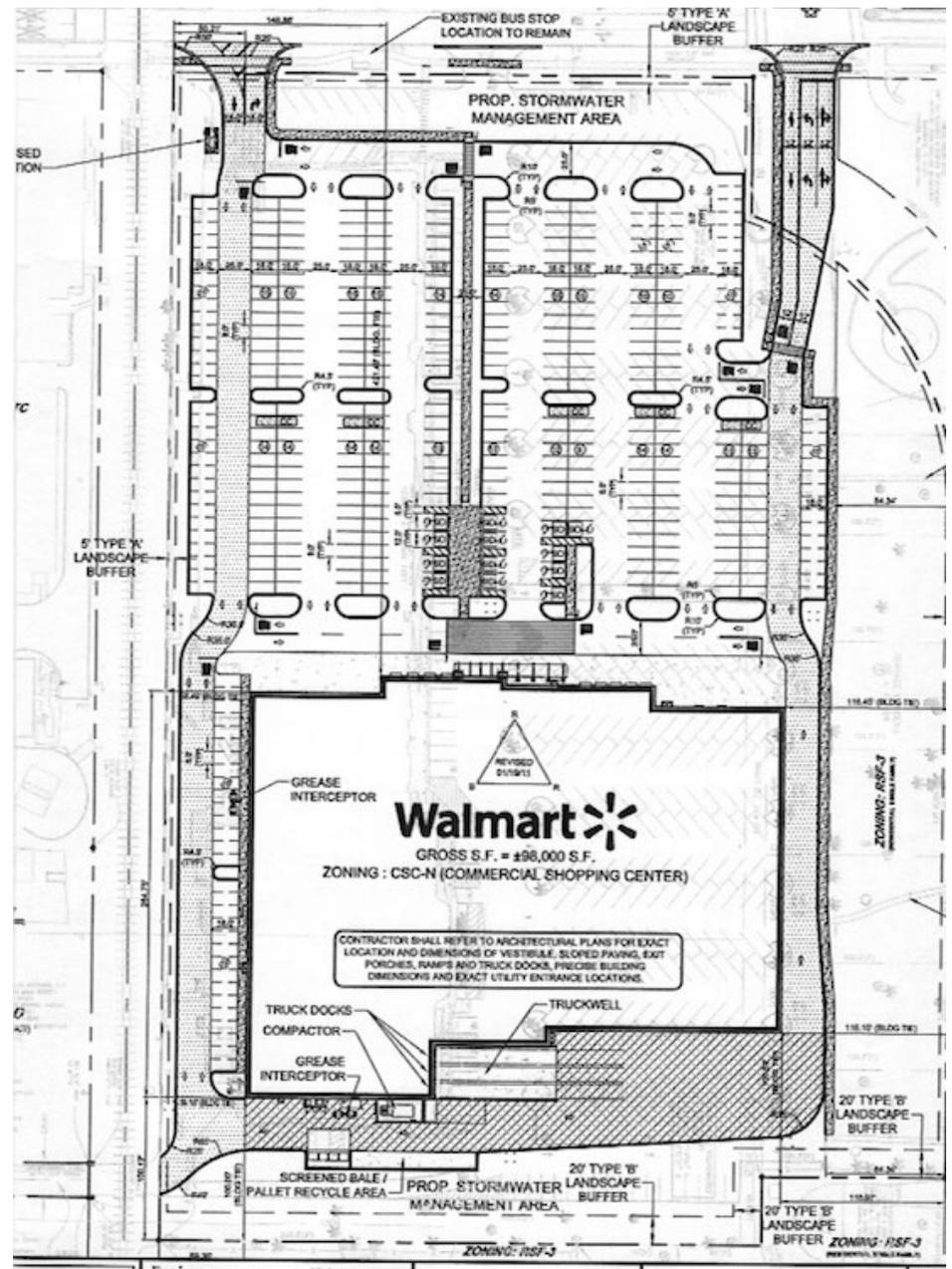
Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent handily defeats Republican challenger Jon Thaxton in the Republican primary, [winning 75 percent of the vote](#) after a brief, but hotly debated campaign.

Only 28,415 Sarasota County Republicans (24 percent of the party) voted in the election, and overall turnout for the primary was abysmal, with just 16 percent of county residents casting a vote. Thaxton, a 12-year county commissioner who is being term-limited out, waged an aggressive campaign. [During a series of July debates](#), Thaxton did not shy away from bringing up Dent's controversial record, most notably how she handled the 2006 election, when the county's voting machines recorded a massive undervote in the tight Vern Buchanan/Christine Jennings race. Before Election Day, Dent's office [was warned](#) by the company that made the county's touchscreen voting machines that the devices might not function correctly. She was advised to put up posters alerting voters to the potential for error, but chose not to.

Attorney Charles Hines defeats tea party challenger Randy McLendon in the Republican County Commission primary, [besting him with 59 percent of the vote](#).

AUG. 15

Roughly 50 people come to the Payne Park Auditorium to talk with Walmart representatives about a proposed new "supercenter" at the old Ringling Shopping Center. The "maestro" for the event is Michelle Belaire, a battle-hardened corporate PR woman from Miami who by turns welcomes, answers and deflects questions from the crowd. "We want to be good neighbors, and that's why we're



City of Sarasota staff released a preliminary site plan for the Walmart proposed for the Ringling Shopping Center, which used to house a Publix. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

here," she says at the outset. Walmart plans to scrape the site bare – razing the city's first shopping center anchored by its first Publix – and build a 98,000-square-foot general retail and grocery store. "We are not asking for any variances or zoning changes," says Belaire. "This parcel is appropriately zoned 'commercial,' and we need only administrative approval of the site plan. Construction will take about one year from the ground up." She says the doors should open in 2014. While a public hearing is required before the city Planning Board, approval should be a pro forma decision if the company's planners follow the city's rules.

Sarasota County beaches are continuing to show the effects of tidal activity with accumulations of seaweed on beaches, a county news release reports. Subsequent tides are removing sizable portions of the seaweed, the release adds. Sarasota County Parks and Recreation staff is continuing to monitor all the beaches on a daily basis, the release says; large amounts of seaweed left after two complete tidal cycles are scheduled for cleanup. Some beaches can be cleaned only by hand, depending on environmental conditions on a specific beach, the presence of threatened or endangered species, weather and crowds, the news release points out.

AUG. 20

In a 4-1 vote, the Sarasota County Commission approves a \$1,000 one-time pay boost to the county's non-union employees, a move

promoted strongly by Sarasota County Administrator Randy Reid. Warning that Sarasota County is in danger of having its most talented employees "recruited from us," Reid pushes for the payment again during a budget workshop, noting that some non-union workers have not seen a pay raise in five years. "I do want to point out that by giving a lump sum annual wage payment — which would be made likely right after the beginning of the fiscal year — when that is done, should the economy tank in future years, you've only given the amount of money for one year," Reid tells the commission. "It is not rolled into the salary. It doesn't become collectively added on each year automatically."

AUG. 21

Almost exactly a year and a week after Sarasota County took over maintenance of Siesta



Red drift algae lines the shore on Lido Beach in early August. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Village, the County Commission unanimously approves awarding a new contract for that work to Championship Landscape Maintenance Professionals of Fort Myers. The annual contract — with automatic renewal for two additional one-year terms — is for \$97,417.70. Tom Maroney, general manager of business operations in the county's Public Works Department, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* he is uncertain when Championship will begin work. Staff had proceeded with a requisition order, he says, and has asked the Procurement Department to schedule a "kick-off" meeting with Championship, county staff and Mark Smith, chairman of the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp.

AUG. 29

In an effort to improve workforce readiness in Sarasota and Manatee counties, the Sarasota County Commission votes unanimously to ask County Administrator Randall Reid to meet with the appropriate representatives of the Sarasota County School Board, the Bradenton-based organization [CareerEdge](#) and county economic development staff, among others, to bring back to the board a plan of action within 90 days. Commissioner Joe Barbetta objects to the timeframe, saying he feels it is too long, but Reid indicates he may be able to report to the board within 60 days. The vote comes at the end of an hour-long discussion that includes four of the five members of the Sarasota County School board in a joint meeting. 



The gazebo, located at the intersection of Canal Road and Ocean Boulevard in Siesta Village, is included in the maintenance responsibilities for the Village. Photo by Norman Schimmel

YEAR IN REVIEW: SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 4

The City of Sarasota's Public Art Committee is going under a political microscope to determine whether it lives or dies. The last item on the City Commission agenda is a settlement of a lawsuit brought by the current chairman of the committee. "Now we have advisory board members suing the city," says Commissioner Terry Turner. "We should decommission this standing committee and rely on ad hoc committees instead. How do we do

that?" Commissioner Shannon Snyder quickly backs Turner's idea. "I'd be receptive to studying it," he says. "The [public art] fund is less than \$150,000. For what it is, we're not seeing any great amount of money coming into the fund anytime soon." The city requires all major developments to apportion one-half of 1% of any project's costs to providing public art for the project. Such art is often a sculpture outside the resulting building, but the work can be located in a public space inside the building.



Sarasota County Project Manager Curtis Smith says the stormwater project at Siesta Beach should be able to get under way in the spring of 2013. Photo by Rachel Hackney

SEPT. 6

Sarasota County probably will put the Siesta stormwater project out for bid in November, with the bid award expected in February, the project manager tells members of the Siesta Key Association during their regular meeting. However, Curtis Smith says, the site work will not begin until April, after the primary tourist season has ended. Smith says the county just received the state permit it needs for the stormwater work, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally has acknowledged the county's modification of its permit application for the project is complete, clearing the way for the scheduling to begin. Moreover, Smith reports, if the schedule stays on track, the county should be able to keep the Southwest Florida Water Management District grant that is "a very important piece of the funding for that project." SWFWMD had committed a maximum of \$975,000 to the stormwater work, which has been estimated to cost \$1.5 million. Once the work is completed, Smith

has told *The Sarasota News Leader*, SWFWMD will reimburse the county for half its expenses, up to the \$975,000 mark. That grant was set to expire in March 2013, Smith tells the approximately 30 SKA audience members. However, he points out, "We've been in close communication with the water management district about the grant." The key is making sure the project stays on schedule, he says, "so they can have a comfort level about what we're doing."

SEPT. 8

Sarasota city voters will face seven charter amendments on their Nov. 6 ballot. Five have a single purpose, one would divide the City Auditor and Clerk's Office's duties and one is a so-called "housekeeping amendment." Within the "housekeeping amendment" are 17 changes to the city charter. One of those comes under scrutiny during the meeting of the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations. Should the city's top officials be bonded? Right now the charter is explicit. It requires the city manager, the city finance director and the city auditor and clerk to be bonded. But since Pamela Nadalini took the auditor and clerk's job two years ago, she has been unable to secure a bond. Instead, she has been covered by a city insurance policy, which City Attorney Bob Fournier says is "functionally equivalent" to a bond. Rob Wagner, an executive with Brown and Brown, a national insurance firm, says the difference between a bond and insurance is simple. "For insurance, the prime objective is risk transfer. It's a risk-pooling device," he says. "The policy holders are paying for the losses, because the carrier assumes there will be losses."

SEPT. 10

“A lot of this activity this evening seems to be somewhat scripted,” Sarasota County Commissioner Jon Thaxton says toward the end of the commission’s first public budget hearing.

Indeed, it was literally scripted. The [budget document](#) the commission was working from contained a “script” from which Commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson and county staffers read. And since there were zero public comments about the budget, which contains a 1.6 percent tax increase because of a raise in the mosquito control rate, the commission zips through the hearing, closing things down after just 36 minutes. But that does not mean there are no surprises: Robinson votes against the proposed millage rates, the only “No” vote on the five-member commission, while still thanking county staff for putting together the budget plan. When asked about her vote, Robinson cites the lump-sum money payment to county employees as one reason she could not support this year’s budget. “I greatly appreciate how hard our employees work,” she writes in an email. “I see the amazing things they do for our citizens everyday. But until we see our revenue stream stabilize, I could not support any type of lump sum payout or raise.”

SEPT. 11

Upon advice of County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh, the Sarasota County Commission this week votes unanimously to settle the lawsuit it filed against the state over efforts to collect disputed Medicaid payments. However, commissioners say they believe the counties need to continue to press the point that state billing methods have to improve. DeMarsh points out that the 57 counties that participated in the lawsuit with the Florida Association of Counties succeeded in their effort to force state officials to address inefficiencies in the process used to obtain the Medicaid payments. The collection effort was prompted by a Florida Legislature bill covering Medicaid bills from 2001 through April 2012. On Aug. 20, the commission voted to pay \$3,570,168 in Medicaid bills state officials said it had linked to county residents, a 44 percent reduction from the original total the county had faced.

SEPT. 12

The vote is split, but the Sarasota County Emergency Services staff receives the go-ahead to advertise a request for proposals for a consultant to help staff work out design specifications for a new public safety radio



Sarasota County commissioners head into fall with more big-ticket items on their agenda, including decisions about Siesta Public Beach and the replacement of the county’s emergency communications system. Photo by Norman Schimmel

system to replace 16-year-old equipment that could fail soon. Chairwoman Christine Robinson and Commissioner Joe Barbetta vote against the RFP. Both criticize staff for not checking with public safety personnel in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, to learn about their replacement of radio equipment before the Republican National Convention was held last month. Barbetta also argues it is unnecessary to hire a consultant. After Robert Stuckey, Sarasota County's general manager of public safety communications, tells the commissioners the consultant's services probably would cost between \$250,000 and \$300,000, Barbetta also criticizes the announcement of those figures. People responding to the RFP probably will offer quotes in that range, he points out, regardless of what their actual expense might be.



Voicing frustration that she never received documentation she had requested in June from the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County, the chairwoman of the County Commission this week proposes changes to the county's contract with the alliance for Fiscal Year 2013, to prevent a similar situation in the future. Jim Shirley, executive director of the alliance, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* he is "very supportive" of the changes the commission approves unanimously during its regular meeting in Sarasota. Commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson, who represents South County interests on the board, pointed out during the board's regular meeting in Venice a day earlier that language was added to the contract with the alliance in the current fiscal year to provide for increased outreach to South County arts and cultural groups.

Nonetheless, she said, "when I asked for the actual appointment efforts, I was told both in a public meeting and in a private meeting with the Arts Alliance they would be providing that information to us. To this day, I have not received those efforts."

SEPT. 13

A gap of almost \$131,000 exists between expenses Sarasota County has documented for its upkeep of Siesta Village over the past year and the total amount of special assessments the property owners in the Village Public Improvement District paid for this fiscal year, according to county records. However, Tom Maroney, general manager of business operations in the county's Public Works Department, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* that the expenses do not reflect the man-hours he and other county employees have put into overseeing the upkeep after the county took on that responsibility in mid-August 2011. "What was billed doesn't really cover a lot of the overhead," Maroney says.

SEPT. 22

With work under way on the construction of a new watermain line between south Siesta Key and north Casey Key, no more threats have been made by three Casey Key homeowners who voiced concerns in August about potential property damage from the project, Sarasota County's Utilities Department program manager told *The Sarasota News Leader* Sept. 25.

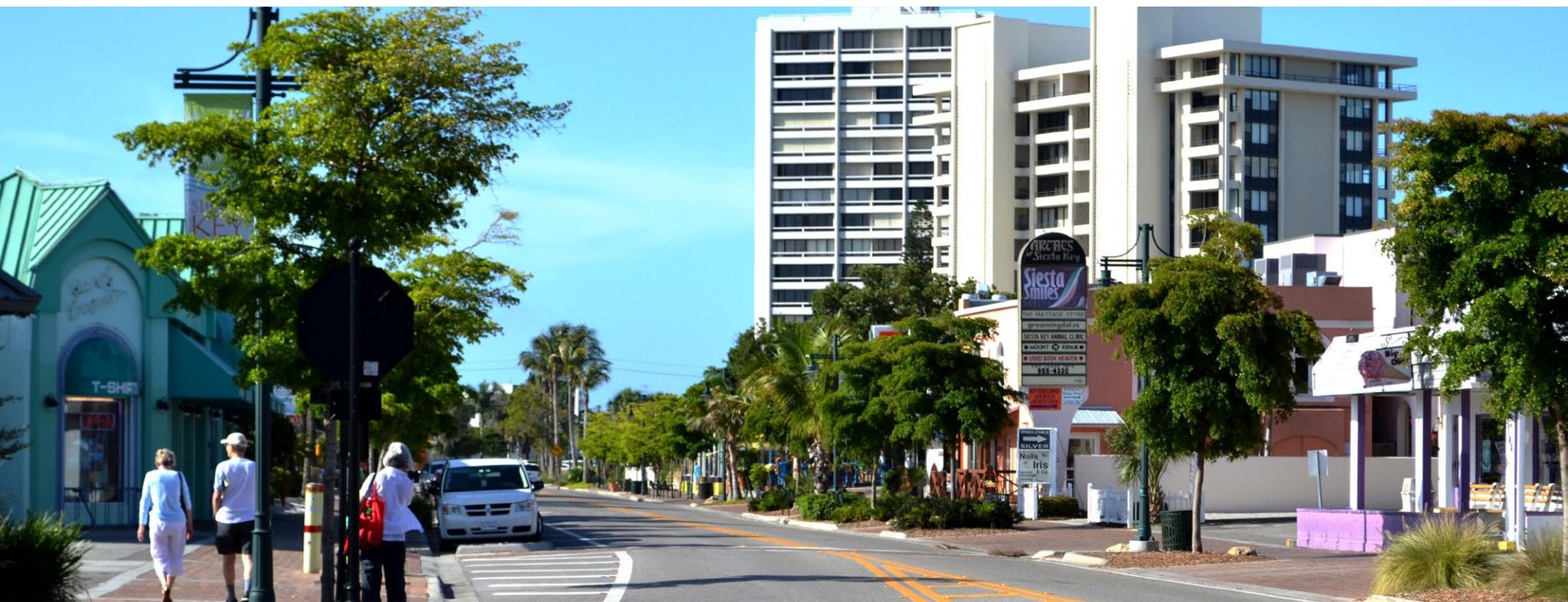
"We have not heard any more from them," Lori Ann Carroll says. In a Sept. 21 email to the County Commission, Carroll provided a project update, saying the drilling rig for the

directional bore is on-site at The Pointe Condominium complex on south Siesta Key that day, in preparation for the horizontal drilling under Little Sarasota Bay. The drilling is under way, she tells the *News Leader*. It is expected to continue for approximately two weeks, including weekends.



Less than three months after \$300,000 in state money became available for Sarasota County's Energy Economic Zone, county staff is already working on a rebrand. Economic Development Coordinator Lisa Damschroder says that beginning early next month, county staffers will come together to figure out a new name for the program, to reflect the new, less geographically specific direction it has taken. According to Damschroder, the 2009 state legislation that created the Energy Economic Zone Pilot Program (which was also taken up in Miami Beach) was originally a "land-use program" focused on fostering green businesses within two strictly defined geographic areas: the State Road 681 corridor in Nokomis and

the central county landfill. The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, which oversees the Pilot Program, [writes on its website](#) that *Sarasota County chose an undeveloped area of approximately 1,000 acres within the adopted Urban Service Area as one of the two designated Energy Economic zones. A compact site served by the Legacy Trail, which is more than 10 miles in length from just south of the City of Sarasota to Venice and proximate to a network of major roadways, the locale affords opportunities for a mixed-use land use design that integrates multi-modal and transit features. In addition, the county's program model includes the creation of clean technology and "green" jobs within this zone, thus promoting a balance of jobs to housing.* But the program has shifted, Damschroder says, to a more generic economic incentive plan that offers tax breaks to clean technology and green businesses in those original zones, as well as in several designated Major Employment Centers throughout the county. 



Documented Siesta Village maintenance costs handled by Sarasota County were shown to be more than \$100,000 less than the tax assessments property owners paid for the upkeep over the past year, county officials say. Photo by Norman Schimmel

YEAR IN REVIEW: OCTOBER

Members of CLUCK have not given up on an effort to win county approval for people to keep chickens in unincorporated areas. Photo by Bogdan Carstina/Dreamstime.com

OCT. 3

Members of CLUCK (Citizens Lobbying for Chicken Keeping) are not giving up on persuading the Sarasota County Commission to make chicken-keeping legal in the unincorporated parts of the county, Jono Miller, one of CLUCK's founders, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* this week. However, Miller says he and other members of the organization are frustrated that the commission on Sept. 25 did not provide direction to staff to assist CLUCK in preparing something to take to neighborhoods and homeowners. During their Sept. 25 regular meeting, the County Commission heard six members of the public — two of whom

had brought children with them — request the board to change the county's zoning code to make it legal for families to own chickens. In discussion later that day, the commissioners agreed by consensus to ask CLUCK to undertake community outreach before they decided their next step. "I just don't know how we would get that public input [otherwise]," Chairwoman Christine Robinson said.

Miller says CLUCK representatives will try again to seek commission support for some direction to staff before beginning the community outreach. However, he is not certain when that next contact with the commissioners will come.

OCT. 9

As the first decade of the St. Armands Business Improvement District draws to a close, property owners are increasingly concerned about parking. New restrictions have them shaking their heads during the BID meeting. What was supposed to be a uniform policy of parking enforcement has turned into a hot topic. Several months ago, the Sarasota City Commission decided parking enforcement for downtown and St. Armands Circle should be treated equally. “We’ve had a tsunami of complaints about parking tickets,” says Eric Seace with the St. Armands Circle Association. “If you move to another spot, you still get a ticket.” The “uniform policy” works not according to how long a motorist parks in one space, but how long the car is in “the zone.”

OCT. 10

The Sarasota County Schools is serving 15,497 free meals and 3,009 reduced-price lunches to students every day. The number reflects 47 percent of all lunches the district serves, Lisa Wood, resource manager in the Food and Nutrition Services Department, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* this week.

However, that number is changing daily, Wood says. “One hundred to 200 applications a day are still coming in,” Wood adds. This school year, Wood expects to see the district hit the 50 percent mark for the total number of students receiving free or reduced-price meals. That is about the same percentage district staff recorded last year, she says.



The Sarasota City Commission stipulated earlier this year that parking enforcement for St. Armands Circle be no different than it is for downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Could Sarasota County adopt a domestic partner registry identical to the one recently approved by the city? Perhaps, according to County Commissioner Carolyn Mason, who says she plans to formally introduce the idea after the November elections. The City Commission voted unanimously Oct. 1 to approve the registry, which would grant unmarried couples, including gays and lesbians, rights such as hospital visitation. Former City Commissioner Ken Shelin has been instrumental in moving that policy forward, and he is working behind the scenes now to convince the county to follow in the city's footsteps. Shelin tells *The Sarasota News Leader* he reached out to Mason first. "I had gone to her some time ago about the possibility of doing this and she was sympathetic," he says.

Mason had indicated in an Oct. 4 email to a constituent that she would bring up the issue this week, but she decided to hold off till the commission's makeup is clear — i.e., after the elections.

OCT. 16

When Tom Barwin took office as Sarasota city manager on Sept. 4, he had a list of 15 names as prospects for police chief, including three women. Barwin quickly slashed that list to seven, then five names. The three men and two women on paper looked equally qualified, some a little stronger in one area than others, but all solid professionals. After a public meet-and-greet on Oct. 5, however, a number of citizens quietly said, "It's the two women; it's got to be," as the final finalists. The following day, the five were grilled by panels of bureaucrats, citizen leaders and cops. The whispers were the same. All three men, while professionals, were wooden and stiff. The meet-and-greet was a test of their human and political skills, and they could not compare to the African-American female deputy chief of the Richmond, VA, Police Department or the female chief of the Ocean City, MD, Police Department. While the women were the youngest candidates, between them was a vast difference in one specific type of experience:



Mayor Suzanne Atwell (left) and City Manager Tom Barwin (second from left) join Sarasota Police Chief Mikel Hollaway (second from right) and City Commissioner Willie Shaw (right) in listening to remarks by newly appointed Police Chief Bernadette DiPino on Oct. 16. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Deputy Chief Tonya Vincent had no familiarity in collective bargaining with a police union. Chief Bernadette DiPino had spent 12 years struggling with a union. The decision was City Manager Barwin's alone. He had been in office seven weeks. On Oct. 16, he announced at a press conference that DiPino was his choice. DiPino will begin work on Jan. 1. Current Chief Mikel Hollaway agreed to extend his tenure to Dec. 31, from Oct. 31.



The Sarasota County School Board chambers has a standing-room-only audience as supporters of three charter schools up for approval await the board's decision. On a unanimous vote, Sarasota Academy of the Arts wins the board's approval. The other two applicants — The Classical Academy of Sarasota and the Florida Center for Early Childhood Starfish Academy — are voted down. "Being a charter school gives us the opportunity to expose more children to the arts and affords more students in the community a chance to participate in the arts in a small school setting,"

says Cecilia Blankenship, the new principal of Sarasota Academy of the Arts. Kathryn Shea, president of the Starfish Academy, says, "We respect the decision of the board. The last thing I want to have happen is to start this and fail."

Shea said she plans to make changes in the school plans, as recommended by Sarasota County district staff and the board, and apply again next year.

OCT. 17

After owning a house on Siesta Key for a couple of years, Anthony and Cheri Bonasto finally decided during the summer to make the island their full-time home. Instead of just puttering around as retirees, they also decided to build upon the experiences they gained as caterers in Houston to start a food-truck business in Siesta Village. "We've been watching this industry just kind of explode," Cheri Bonasto tells *The Sarasota New Leader*. "We're giving it a shot." The Bonastos have applied for a temporary use permit to open



It is standing room only in the audience for the Sarasota County School Board's vote on three new charter school applications. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Tony and Cheri Bonasto/Photo by Norman Schimmel

their new food-truck business, Gumbo Mojo, on public right of way on Canal Road at the intersection of Calle Menorca, across from the Siesta Market and Siesta Key Hardware plaza.



The noise ordinance is one of several “third rails” in Sarasota city politics. The people responsible for it are older, wealthier and far more likely to vote than the people who hate it — who are younger, less affluent and far less likely to vote in city elections. Voters with money versus youngsters with amplified guitars? For politicians, this is a no-brainer. Therefore, when city Commissioner Paul Caragiulo calls for a town-hall-style meeting to take testimony on the decade-old noise or-

dinance, more than one eyebrow is arched in the downtown condos. “My purpose is to have an open discussion on the noise ordinance,” says Caragiulo at the start of the meeting. “There is no information or any proposal on the table. I just want to hear from you.” He gets an earful for two hours. What he does with that earful is going to be anybody’s guess.

OCT. 23

A County Commission vote is unanimous regarding use of future revenue to manage environmentally sensitive lands, but it follows about 20 minutes of discussion over lack of codified policy relative to past use of funds for the same purpose.

Commissioners were surprised to learn about that lack of written policy. The vote authorizes county staff to proceed with processing a proposed comprehensive plan amendment to allow for a portion of revenue from the sale of transfers of development rights (TDRs) to be used for the management of property in the county’s Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP).



The Sarasota County commissioners ask County Administrator Randall Reid to provide them updates on measures he and other administrative staff take to resolve problems flagged in audits by the Sarasota County Clerk of Court’s Office. The commissioners want to avoid a repeat of situations that led to the Procurement Department scandal in 2011, they tell Reid. The discussion follows Clerk of Circuit Court Karen Rushing’s presentation

of her office's latest audit report during the commission's regular meeting in Sarasota. That audit examined the county's permit and impact fees. The report's synopsis says, "The permitting and impact fee assessment and collection process is complex and there are not written guidelines or procedures documenting this process. Undercharges and overcharges were noted during the audit ..."



Tony and Cheri Bonasto say they have "too many [locations in mind] to list them all" just moments after the Sarasota County Commission denies their request to operate a food truck business off Canal Road in Siesta Village. "We're just going to move on," Tony Bonasto tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. "This is just the beginning," Cheri Bonasto adds. They decline to offer any specifics about the other

sites. Cheri says they prefer to make sure they have plans firmed up before seeking board approval again. The County Commission denial is unanimous, with Commissioner Jon Thaxton making the motion and Commissioner Nora Patterson seconding it. Calling himself a "big fan of food trucks," Thaxton adds, "I think they're funky. I think they're cool." However, he says, the Bonastos' application was for a private business that would be operated on a public right of way. "This board has struggled for as long as I've been sitting here, and, frankly, much longer than my tenure here, at trying to maintain a balance in Siesta Key Village that keeps the harmony ... between residents and commercial [operations]," Thaxton says. "I'm not a big fan of imposing on that very delicate balance something that could disrupt [it]," he adds. "I sincerely hope that there is another location that the truck can find."



Pedestrians long have complained of the difficulty of reaching Bayfront Park from downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

OCT. 24

The City of Sarasota Firefighters Pension Board has complied with a city request to drop its estimated rate of return, but in a way unlike the two other boards overseeing city pensions. Facing millions in pension shortfalls, the City Commission recently requested all three boards cut their estimated rates of return on investments to 7 percent. Two did so – the Police Pension Board and the General Employees Pension Board. Each of the three boards is totally independent, a fact that manifests itself in various ways. For example, the Police and General Employees boards exclude management and operational fees from their expected rates of return. The firefighters pension fund includes a fee of one-half percent. Therefore, the Firefighters pension plan rate of return at 7 percent translates into an actual rate of return of 6.5 percent, once the management and operational fees are subtracted. The board recognizes that difference and votes to cut its estimated rate of return to 7.5 percent.



It has been a year of changes for the City of Sarasota, changes at the top of the bureaucracy. Two of those transitions already have been completed, with a new city manager and new police chief named. Three more are coming. Human Resources Director Kurt Hoverter confirms he is extending the search time for a new finance director and a new utilities

director. Meanwhile, Hoverter is drafting yet another advertisement for the opening of a city department head position — his own. He plans to retire soon as well.

OCT. 30

Sarasota's Downtown Improvement District gives support to a plan to study a pedestrian overpass across U.S. 41 at the bayfront. The idea goes back to 1959. Gil Waters was one of the original proponents of the overpass, and at 86, he is still pushing to complete the plan to bring downtown and the bayfront together as a walkable whole. He started a new organization – Sarasota Vision – to make his case. The group has offered \$200,000 as seed money for design and engineering work.

“It increases commercial vitality, it offers a complete shopping and pleasurable experience and it provides a safe and scenic bridge to walk over U.S. 41 to the bayfront and Island Park,” says Waters of his vision. “It’s not too late, but it certainly isn’t too soon.” Waters is a former city commissioner, news reporter and property developer.

Waters says he was asking for the district's support prior to going before the Sarasota City Commission and then to U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Longboat Key, in search of funding. The overpass is estimated to cost about \$3 million. 

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YEAR IN REVIEW: NOVEMBER

Sarasota City Hall/Photo by Norman Schimmel

NOV. 5

Sarasota Mayor Suzanne Atwell rails against The Sylint Group, the local cyber-sleuth firm that uncovered anecdotally a raft of problems in the city's Information Technology Department, including allegations of illegal actions by the former city manager and current deputy city manager. City Manager Bob Bartolotta resigned amid the furor. "I'm very frustrated and angry," Atwell says. "This has been about a year, us sitting here at the mercy of Mr. Jorgensen. The cancer isn't on the city, it is [on] the reckless accusations of our workers. ... It's time to exonerate those most egregiously affected by this. It is time to end this," Atwell adds. It turns out she received a letter on Nov. 2 from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, saying the investigation requested by the City Commission into the city's computer issues is "completed" and "FDLE believes that no probable cause exists to support a viable criminal charge and no further action is warranted."



The "Mess at Mound" is a molar-grinding problem for neighbors living south of Hudson Bayou. Time and again, sewage spills into the bayou and immediately into the bay from City of Sarasota utility stations. After the neighbors found out the stations were squatting on non-city land, and they counted up the environmental fines and penalties the city was incurring as a result of its failing system, the political stars suddenly seemed to align for a multi-million dollar, "state-of-the art" lift station and innovative tunnel to be built under the bayou to move the effluent. Under the plan, Osprey Avenue would be closed (and later partially closed) at Mound Street while engineers constructed the station and punched the tunnel directly under the bayou bridge. Four years after the engineering began, the project is a shambles. Construction law attorney Alan Tannenbaum, with the Sarasota and Clearwater firm Tannenbaum Scro Hanewich & Alpert, asks the city commissioners, "Is this a problem with design or construction or both? We found fault on both the contractor



*The sign marking work on a new city lift station near Mound Street continued to look good while the project deteriorated.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

and the engineering firm.” City Manager Tom Barwin says city staff has worked hard to get the engineering firm of AECOM Technology Corp. to produce a workable plan. But on Nov. 2, the company failed to produce such a plan and was found in default. Tannenbaum says, “We will terminate the contract and the city will search for a new engineering firm. The [construction] contractor is expected to submit a significant change order for the down time and another when the project gears back up with good engineering.”



While wrangling continues over the timeline for renovations of the Siesta Public Beach, one previously stalled part of the project is moving forward: the construction of the new stormwater system. Just as project engineer Curtis Smith had predicted for members of the Siesta Key Association on Sept. 6, the \$1.5 million project went out for bid this month, with all responses requested by 2:30 p.m. Nov. 28. “It’s a terrific milestone to reach,” he tells *The Sarasota News Leader*.

NOV. 6

Sarasota City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini hoped voters would eliminate problems caused by her inability to obtain a surety bond as required by the city charter. On Election Day, voters face a so-called “housekeeping amendment” to the city charter. It contains 17 different items, one of which is tailor-made to cure Nadalini’s no-bond problem. The charter change proposal would allow insurance to take the place of a bond. Bonds, of course, are different from insurance. However, under a legal fiction dubbed “functional equivalence” — created by City Attorney Bob Fournier — the city commissioners would have had a fig leaf to hide behind when questioned about why their auditor and clerk did not have a bond to protect the city as required by the charter. The fig leaf option is no longer. By the greatest margin of any amendment vote, city citizens reject the “housekeeping” proposal, with 62 percent voting against it.



Pam Nadalini/Photo by Norman Schimmel

Adding his frustrations to those voiced just a couple of hours earlier at the monthly Siesta Key Village Association meeting, Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta demands to know during his board's regular meeting why "everybody's frozen in place" on the Siesta Public Beach improvements project. Moreover, the county's chief engineer reports to the County Commission that an open-house meeting on the project scheduled for Nov. 13 on Siesta Key might have to be postponed. Barbetta points out that when the board last saw the plans for the improvements, in June, the board asked staff to move ahead expeditiously with completing the design work and proposing funding options, including use of

bond revenue, because construction costs and interest rates were low and jobs were needed.

■ ■ ■

The Sarasota News Leader learns City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini has secured one quote from a bonding company, although two sources say the rates are roughly 20 times the amount paid for the same coverage for the other city officials required to have bonds. City Human Resources Director Kurt Hovetter says he is "shopping" for a lower-cost bond with other vendors, and he said he might "save a few thousand dollars" over the first figure he received.



In 2011, staff presented to the County Commission a possible three-phase plan for accelerating the completion of the Siesta Public Beach improvements. Graphic courtesy Sarasota County

NOV. 8

The third annual Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition, which is sponsored jointly by Mote Marine Laboratory and the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, gets under way, with the proceeds going to the very important sea turtle research and conservation programs at Mote. Master sculptors have come from all over the world to compete for a first prize of \$5,000. In the space of four days, they will take their assigned spots, along with their sand allotments, and make magic. Using only sand, water and various tools, they are truly amazing to watch, these artists who craft something out of nothing. Twelve pairs are competing, from as far away as Singapore. Siesta's own local master sculptor, Brian Wigelsworth, is working with partner Andy Daily to add some fun, non-competitive art for holiday photos. Wigelsworth is the one who had the imagination and foresight to put this whole event together.



On Nov. 9, details of man's face already are clear in Fine Print. Among that 'fine print': 'Blows money on toys'; 'Loves his car'; and 'Procrastinator.' The sculpture won second-place honors. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Fossil Fuel picked up the first-place trophy this year in the Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition. Photo by Peter Acker/courtesy the Crystal Classic

NOV. 13

The Community Alliance of Sarasota County presents its 2012 legislative priorities to one incumbent state representative and staffers for other Florida lawmakers, with one message standing out: Stop fighting Obamacare. The Alliance, a coalition of nonprofit health and human services organizations, holds its Second Annual Legislative Breakfast to directly communicate its legislative goals to the Sarasota County delegation. Representatives from organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers, First Step of Sarasota and the Early Learning Coalition line up to lay out their hopes for the Florida Legislature's spring session, which convenes March 5.

NOV. 14

The surprise is not that the Walmart store proposed on Charles Ringling Boulevard is approved. The surprise is that two Sarasota Planning board members voice serious reasons to vote against it. By all appearances, this was an open-and-shut case. The growing-ever-emptier Ringling Shopping Center, at 97,000 square feet, would be replaced by a 98,000-square-foot Walmart Supercenter with a grocery. Every metric — zoning, city codes, parking requirements, traffic — had a green light from city staff. Even the associations for the two adjacent neighborhoods had not opposed the project. Those same two neighborhoods — Alta Vista and the Gardens of Ringling Park — fought Ron Burks' high-rise School Avenue project to a standstill several years ago, but this time they were muted.



Sarasota Planning Board member Jennifer Ahearn-Koch notes during the board's Nov. 14 discussion that the existing shopping center on Ringling is an assembly of small shops, and a Walmart does not belong there. Photo by Norman Schimmel

NOV. 16

Using two staging areas — Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota and Cranberry Elementary School in North Port — volunteers for the Mayors Feed the Hungry Program box up more than 44 tons of food for area residents who otherwise would not enjoy Thanksgiving dinner, Scott Biehler, vice chairman of the program, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. The food is scheduled to be delivered to 25 different food pantries in Sarasota and Manatee counties, he says, but the need for assistance continues to grow in the area. “We’ve seen a lot of people who have given to the food pantries in the past ... are coming to the food pantries themselves now,” he adds.

NOV. 19

If charter officials do not perform as expected, they can be removed by a simple majority of three commissioners. After her selection as city auditor and clerk on Feb. 25, 2010, Pam Nadalini fought a bureaucratic battle that led to the dismissal of her *bête noire*, City Manager Bob Bartolotta, enabling her to take control of the city’s Information Technology Department from the City Manager’s Office. For nearly three years, she stood in violation of a requirement in the city charter that she hold a surety bond; and for two years, she managed to keep that a secret from the City Commission. And she withstands a no-confidence motion at the City Commission meeting when nobody wants to second it. Kurt Hoverter, the city HR director, says the rates for the coming year for \$100,000 in bond coverage will be \$444 for City Manager Tom Barwin, \$507 for Finance Director Chris Lyons and \$9,350 for Nadalini. In other words, Nadalini’s bond is



Boxes of food donated for the Mayors Feed the Hungry Program are marked according to contents at Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota. Photos by Norman Schimmel

20 times more expensive than Barwin’s. The amount is too much for Commissioner Turner. “Now we have quantitative evidence her integrity is one-twentieth that of Mr. Barwin and Mr. Lyons. Her unknown personal activities clearly disqualify her from office,” he adds. His motion to terminate Nadalini “for cause” fails.



When the Sarasota City commissioners yanked the parking meters out of downtown last year, they created a uniform parking policy but did not bother to tell the merchants and residents of St. Armands about it. Suddenly, what was unfettered and free became timed and policed. When the tickets appeared last month and word began to circulate, a political storm started to brew. Seven weeks later, the city is making everything as it was before the “uniform policy” was adopted. City workers are un-stripping the new stripes, re-signing the new signs and un-enforcing the new rules — because the new rules no longer apply. After St. Armands merchants and property owners trooped to City Hall on Nov. 5, the commissioners ordered staffers to consult on the matter and find an agreeable solution. When the staffers return, the solution for the commission is to throw in the towel and return to the *status quo ante*.

NOV. 20

With a number of county and municipal leaders joining members of the public to witness the proceedings, the three Sarasota County commissioners formally elected on Nov. 6 raise their right hands and take the oath of office Nov. 20. Chief Judge Andrew D. Owens Jr. of the 12th Judicial Circuit Court does the honors, with Commissioners Charles Hines, Carolyn Mason and Christine Robinson repeating the oath after him. Hines won his seat in the August primary, while Mason was unchallenged for a second term on the board. Robinson beat her Democratic opponent in the General Election to win her first full term on the commission. Then-Gov. Charlie Crist appointed her to the board in late 2010 to serve out the unexpired term of Commissioner Shannon Staub. With Robinson and Hines both from the Venice area, murmurs of excitement could be heard among South County local government officials before the ceremony even began.



Commissioner Christine Robinson is joined by her husband, Eric, and their three children after the swearing-in ceremony on Nov. 20: (from left) Johnny, 7; Madi Grace, 4; and E.J., 8. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Newly elected Sarasota County Commissioner Charles Hines takes the oath of office surrounded by his family: (from left) son Griffin, mother-in-law Elsie Hamrick, wife Susan, daughter Bailey, son Preston and mother Avis Hines. Photo by Norman Schimmel

NOV. 26

The North Port City Commission slams the brakes on a process designed to solicit ideas to redevelop Warm Mineral Springs during an adversarial — and, at times, downright snide — public meeting. The commission gathered to consider going forward with an Invitation to Negotiate, which would allow private developers to put forward their ideas for how to redevelop Warm Mineral Springs, the 87-degree “Fountain of Youth” jointly purchased by North Port and Sarasota County in 2010. The Invitation to Negotiate process was set in motion in July during a joint city-county meeting, at which both commissions unanimously voted to begin soliciting long-term plans for the property. But that plan comes to a halt when the North Port commission — led by Mayor Linda Yates and two newly elected commissioners — shoots down a motion to approve the Invitation to Negotiate. Yates, who voted in favor of the Invitation to Negotiate in July, raises several concerns about the plan, from the makeup of the selection and negotiation teams that would evaluate the developers’ ideas to what she called a scarcity of scientific data.

NOV. 27

The local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida holds a City Hall lawn press conference with chapter Legal Chairman Michael Barfield blasting the Sarasota Police Department for what he calls “a culture of contempt and disrespect for the city’s homeless.” Barfield works from a 98-page compendium of police text messages sent between cruisers. He has filed suit in federal court over the city’s treatment of the homeless.

NOV. 28

It took only one crack in the dike to send a flood over the City Commission’s policy of uniform parking regulations for the entire city. That crack was created by St. Armands Key merchants. Their squeals of pain caused the commissioners to declare unconditional surrender on Nov. 19 and allow that shopping district to revert to age-old regulations. Now the city’s Parking Committee hears Parking Manager Mark Lyons say all eight of the city’s parking districts will soon be considered for individual regulations. The uniform policy is dead, dead, dead. 

“Never interrupt an enemy when he is making a mistake.” — *Napoleon*

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- Annual GYN exams
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YEAR IN REVIEW: DECEMBER

Workers continue to clean up the work site for Lift Station 87, near Mound Street and U.S. 301 just outside downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

DEC. 3

It will take about as long to build Lift Station 87 at Luke Wood Park as it did to build the Great Pyramid of Khufu near Cairo, Egypt. Work on the city's star-crossed sewage pumping facility began in 2008, after repeated failures at Lift Station 7 led to spills of hundreds of thousands of gallons of untreated sewage into Hudson Bayou and on into Sarasota Bay. The latest estimate for completion indicates the work will be complete in 2015. The micro-tunneling under the bayou required closure of the northbound lane of Osprey Avenue, causing annoyance in the neighborhoods south of Mound Street, such as Avondale.

Some of the disturbance — halted projects, snarled traffic, defaulted contractors, lawsuits — is remedied when the Sarasota City Commission approves a \$750,000 change order for

a contractor to reopen Osprey Avenue within 30 days and mothball its all-but-finished lift station.

DEC. 4

Call it the “slo-mo appeal.” So far it has come in fragments — an email one day, a payment another day and a written form on a third. The objective is to obtain a rehearing by the Sarasota City Commission of a Nov. 14 split decision by the Planning Board to approve the construction of a Walmart to replace the Ringling Shopping Center in downtown Sarasota. The actual appeal itself is finally filed. The required \$1,597 filing fee was paid on Dec. 3. City staff received an email on Nov. 26 suggesting an appeal would be filed. That was the last day, by law, that a notice of appeal could be filed following the Planning Board decision.

Sarasota County has recovered \$23,750,000, or about 70 percent of the \$34 million it lost in investments during what Karen Rushing, clerk of the 12th Judicial Circuit Court, refers to as the “world financial crisis” of 2008-09. In her routine report to the County Commission, Rushing says Wells Fargo agreed to settle a lawsuit the county filed in June 2010 against Wachovia — which Wells Fargo later acquired — for the loss of those millions through “an asset-backed security issue” involving Lehman Brothers Holdings and the county’s securities lending contract.



The School Board members consider business during their last meeting of the year. Photo by Scott Proffitt

The Sarasota County School District saw a 7 percent increase in its graduation rate from the 2010-11 school year to the 2011-12 school year, Steve Cantees, executive director of Sarasota County High Schools, tells the School Board members during their final meeting of the year. Since 1999, he says, the district and state rates have climbed almost 20 percent. School Board member Frank Kovach points out that the state graduation rate and the county’s rate are converging. State data shows a 74.5 percent high school graduation rate for students across the state in 2011-12, compared to the 77.96 percent rate in Sarasota County.

DEC. 6

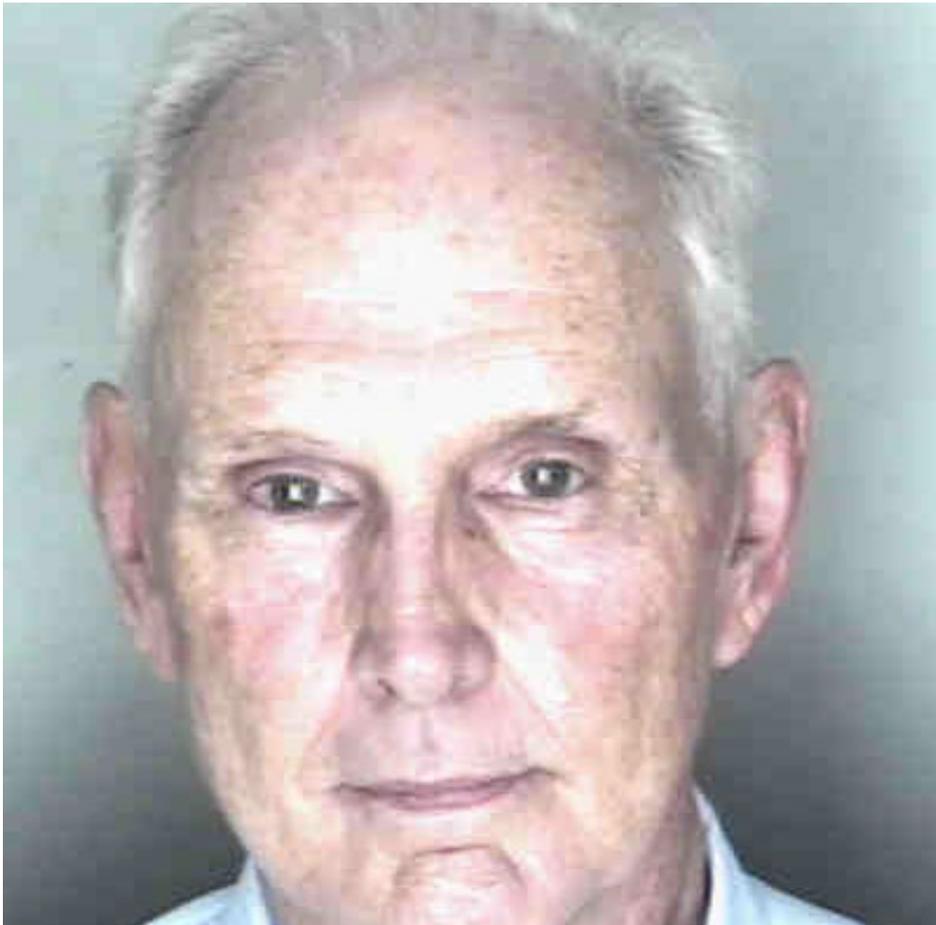
Residents of Terrace East and directors of the Siesta Key Association indicate they will oppose requests for two variances that will be addressed by the Sarasota County Commission on Jan. 9. Both petitions involve construction of new Beach Road homes with swimming pools and decks, paver driveways and landscape retaining walls about 200 feet seaward of the county’s Gulf Beach Setback Line. Peter van Roekens, vice president of the SKA, notes the two lots have been beneath the Gulf of Mexico in the past. He has photos as proof for the County Commission, he points out.



A Sarasota County Geographic Information Systems map shows the two lots that are the focus of the variance requests on Beach Road: 0080-24-0027 and 0080-24-0028, to the left of the Terrace building. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Sarasota County’s 2050 plan may not make it past 2013 intact.

On Sept. 18, the Sarasota County Commission instructed staff to meet with developers who have had firsthand experience dealing with Sarasota 2050, the ambitious and detailed document created to guide development in the county’s eastern portions. The idea: to generate ideas for how to update the



Robert Waechter/Contributed by Sheriff's Office

DEC. 17

Having served with Robert Waechter for years on the board of the Siesta Key Association, Lourdes Ramirez tells *The Sarasota News Leader* she was not surprised he had enough of her personal information to be able to use it in making a fraudulent campaign contribution in her name. "We've known each other for 10 years," she adds, though they have had little contact since she stepped down from the SKA board in 2011. Ramirez is now the president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA). She served on the SKA board from 2003 until 2011; Waechter remains on the board. Waechter, 70, a former chairman of the Sarasota County Republican Party and a member of the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority, was charged Dec. 14 with a third-degree felony in connection with a \$200 contribution made in Ramirez' name to the congressional campaign of New College professor Keith Fitzgerald.

DEC. 18

The North Port City Commission agenda simply calls for a discussion about how to proceed in managing Warm Mineral Springs, the 87-degree "Fountain of Youth" the city co-owns with the county, but one commissioner places a very different motion on the table. "My motion is to sell the Warm Mineral Springs in its entirety to a private entity," North Port Commissioner Cheryl Cook announces just minutes into the commission's meeting. In less than two hours, that motion has been approved by a 3-2 majority, sending the county a clear signal that North Port has no desire to continue its joint management of the property.



The Sarasota County Commission appears to be on its own in deciding how to plan for the future of Warm Mineral Springs. Photo by Rachel Levey-Baker

DEC. 19

What could have been a knock-'em-down disagreement over the city's noise ordinance takes on a kinder tone. Some people are strident, for certain. But if Santa is watching the streaming video, he adds more than a few fighters to his nice list. Even the ranting of ex-Judge Frank Brenner ("Does the city need more noise?") fails to provoke an aura of hostility.

When the meeting starts, the audience of around 100 people are in chairs, standing in the back, sitting on the floor and spilling over into an adjacent room of the City Hall Annex. A stereotypist would have no problem distinguishing between the players — it is youth versus age. Neither side walked in prepared to give an inch. Many people walk away feeling a little of the other's pain, and ready — just maybe — to consider some modification to the city's entertainment-smothering blanket ordinance. **SNL**

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The sawhorses blocking drivers' access to Osprey Avenue from Mound Street were still in place until a few days ago. Photo by Norman Schimmel

OSPREY AVENUE REOPENS TO TRAFFIC

Osprey Avenue south of Mound Street has reopened to two-way traffic, the City of Sarasota announced.

Construction activity will continue through Jan. 18 within this corridor to complete the final restoration work, a city news release says. Traffic will be maintained on Osprey Avenue through this timeframe, the release adds.

This portion of Osprey Avenue had been temporarily closed because of the construction of Lift Station No. 87 in nearby Luke Wood Park, the release points out.

[Click here to read an update regarding the project.](#)

SOUTHSIDE VILLAGE PARKING ENFORCEMENT CHANGES

Timed parking enforcement in Southside Village has gone into effect Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., the City of Sarasota has announced.

No timed enforcement is in effect on Saturdays and Sundays, a city news release says.

Parking signs are being changed to reflect the new hours, the release adds.

For parking updates follow the Sarasota Parking Department on Twitter — www.Twitter.com/SRQParking — or visit www.SarasotaPD.org and click “Parking.”

SIX OF EIGHT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS WIN A GRADES

Six of eight high schools in the Sarasota County School District received an A in the grade report released Dec. 21 by the Florida Department of Education, the district announced.

Four of the Schools — North Port, Riverview, Sarasota and Sarasota Military Academy — improved their grade from a B last year to an A this year.

Two high schools received a B. None of the district's comprehensive high schools was graded lower than a B, a district news release points out. Additionally, no district high school received a lower grade than it earned last year. The district continues to be graded an A district overall, the news release notes.

Grades for elementary and middle schools were released in July. High school grades were not reported at that time because the

Department of Education had added new accountability components to the high school grading process, the release notes.

Under the new system, 50 percent of a school's grade is based on 2012 state assessment scores, including the FCAT, and 50 percent is based on the school's graduation rate, the number of students who take advanced-placement courses, the number of students who pass advanced-placement examinations and indicators of student readiness for college.

Oak Park School, a district facility for students with severe or multiple exceptionalities from elementary grades through high school, received an F grade. It was included in the report because it serves high school students and is categorized as a combination school, the news release notes.

School Grade	2010-11	2011-12
District	A	A
Booker High School	B	B
North Port High School	B	A
Pine View School	A	A
Riverview High School	B	A
Sarasota High School	B	A
Sarasota Military Academy	B	A
Suncoast Polytechnical High	A	A
Venice High School	B	B

COUNTY ISSUES COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

Karen E. Rushing, clerk of the 12th Judicial Circuit Court and county comptroller, has published the Sarasota County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. The report may be found online at the clerk's website, www.SarasotaClerk.com, keyword search "CAFR," the county has announced.

The report can be downloaded in PDF format or read online in eBook reader format.

"The report provides a detailed analysis of the county's financial condition at the time," said Sarasota County Director of Finance Peter Ramsden in a news release. "What the report shows is that Sarasota County government is on solid financial ground with a good credit rating, while continuing to recover from the recession."

Chapter 218.32 of the Florida Statutes stipulates that each local government entity that is required to provide for an audit in accordance with Chapter 218.39 must submit an annual financial report with the audit report no later than nine months after the end of the fiscal year, the news release notes.

"In keeping with Sarasota County's established debt policy, the county took advantage of favorable conditions in the debt market by refunding

several of its outstanding debt issues at lower interest rates, resulting in net present value savings of \$6,115,837," the release points out. The bonds refunded were the Sales Tax Revenue Bonds, Capital Improvement Refunding Revenue Bonds and Utility System Revenue Bonds, the release says.

The county's investment portfolio has earned an average return of 2.63 percent over the past three fiscal years, the release adds. The investment policy was established by ordinance in 1989; it stresses the safety of capital as the top priority, the release says.

The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to Sarasota County for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2011, the 28th consecutive year

the county received this award, the release points out.

To be awarded that certificate, a government unit must publish an easily readable and efficiently organized Comprehensive Annual Financial Report whose contents conform to program standards, the news release notes.

"Such reports must satisfy both generally accepted accounting principles and applicable legal requirements," the release adds.



Karen Rushing/Contributed

SARASOTA COUNTY OFFICES TO CLOSE FOR NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAY

Sarasota County government offices and services will be closed Tuesday, Jan. 1, for the New Year's holiday, the county has announced.

Libraries and parks, including Payne Park Tennis Center and Arlington Park pool, will be closed, a county news release says.

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) and Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) service will not be offered and administrative offices will be closed, the release adds.

Residents who live in unincorporated areas of the county will not have any collection of yard waste, recyclables or garbage on Jan. 1, the release points out. Residents whose regular collection days are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday will have their collection day for yard waste, recyclables and garbage moved to the next day in the week. For ex-

ample, residents with a regular collection day on Tuesday will see materials collected on Wednesday, the release points out. Because collection times vary, residents should place refuse at the curb by 6 a.m. the day of pickup, the release adds.

Sarasota County's chemical collection centers at 8750 Bee Ridge Road, Sarasota, and 250 S. Jackson Road, Venice, will be closed.

The Citizen's Convenience Center at 4010 Knights Trail Road, Nokomis, and the landfill at 4000 Knights Trail Road, Sarasota, as well as the landfill administration offices, will be closed.

For more information, visit www.scgov.net, or contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000. 



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The contest concludes when The Sarasota News Leader achieves 1,000 "Likes" on Facebook. One winner will be selected at random from among subscribers. Only subscribers are eligible to win the iPad, regardless of having "Liked" our page on Facebook. Contest is open only to residents of Sarasota County. Selected winners must provide a valid Sarasota County street address to receive the iPad. Contest is void where prohibited by law.

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OPINION



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ART INVASION
ASK OTUS

Inside



ART INVASION

Various pieces on display in the Mike Weiss Gallery exhibition at Art Miami in Miami, Dec. 8: (foreground) Liao Yibai's 2011 stainless steel sculpture Chairman's Chair; (background) Jan De Vlieghe's Antique Porcelain Plate Series — multiple paintings with no dates listed. On tables further to the right are more pieces by Yibai. All photos by Arielle Scherr

STREETS FLOOD WITH PEOPLE FOR ART BASEL IN MIAMI BEACH

By Tyler Whitson
Staff Writer

A few consecutive days out of every year, the city of Miami is transformed by artists, art aficionados and art dealers into one of the largest celebrations of art appreciation in the world, all centered on the international exhibition Art Basel in Miami Beach.

This year, more than 50,000 visitors swarmed the massive Miami Beach Convention Center between the morning of Wednesday, Dec. 5, and the evening of Sunday, Dec. 9, to feast their eyes on or purchase some of the most famous and sought-after art pieces in the world.

The official Art Basel exhibition, however, was only one part of the weekend's festivities, which included numerous unaffiliated satellite fairs, private gallery exhibitions, musical

performances, parties and more, all spread throughout the city. Every genre, style and subculture of art was represented, from the classical to the contemporary, the structured to the experimental, the mainstream to the underground. For the right price, patrons had the opportunity to admire high-end gallery pieces, or, for no price at all, passersby could witness pieces of street art being brought to life in real time — and in open daylight.

In the words of first-time Art Basel patron Ricardo Maldonado, who spoke with *The Sarasota News Leader* inside the convention center on Dec. 7, “Art just takes over Miami for the weekend in every way possible, and everyone's involved in it.”

This sheer volume of activity made it virtually impossible for any one visitor to experience all that Miami had to offer the weekend of Art Basel. Shrewd attendees could find ways to maximize their experiences while spending little money by choosing the right events and submitting RSVPs ahead of time, but traffic congestion and a scarcity of available parking spaces made it difficult to traverse the city in a timely manner. In spite of this, there were a few essential activities that could not be missed.

ART BASEL

Art Basel officially opened to the public this year on Thursday, Dec. 6, after an invite-only pre-opening the day before. It consisted of more than 250 exhibitions, each organized by its respective gallery owner, who came from 31 different countries. The fair, which was arranged in a minimal, open fashion that allowed visitors to roam freely between galleries,

was the main attraction for many of Miami's international visitors, some of whom attended to purchase art for public or private institutions and galleries.

The majority of patrons, however, attended Art Basel for the experience of taking in the art pieces, both individually and in the context of the almost unfathomably extensive exhibition. Michael Kutno and Carol Anker, who have gone to Art Basel every year for the past several years and plan to continue the ritual, described the fair to the *News Leader* in glowing words.

“Art Basel is like a heavenly experience for art,” Kutno said. “It’s just such a wonderful space that’s filled up with all of this magic. You just feel great and you can’t stop smiling. Your cheeks hurt from smiling so much!”

Anker added that she appreciates the inspiration



Michael Kutno and Carol Anker with Jon Pylypchuk's 2012 installation I Won't Give up on You in the Fredric Snitzer Gallery at Art Basel in Miami on Dec. 7. Kutno and Anker told the News Leader that afternoon they had felt drawn to the piece, which caught their attention while they were viewing a nearby gallery.



*Yinka Shonibare's 2012 piece *Boy on Tightrope*, on display in the James Cohan Gallery exhibition at Art Basel. Construction materials consist of a mannequin, Dutch wax printed cotton, fiberglass, leather and rope.*

that Art Basel engenders in visitors. “You get a lot of great ideas just being here, just absorbing what people are saying to you and how they are representing themselves,” she said. “It’s just a surprise at every corner.”

Those attending the exhibition for the first time, however, needed more time to gain their bearings than the aforementioned Art Basel veterans. Arielle Clay, who had recently arrived at the convention center, described her initial impression to the *News Leader*. “It’s very overwhelming,” she said. “It’s so hard to understand it until you’re here, and nobody can really explain it to you.”

For the gallery owners exhibiting at Art Basel and the artists with whom they work on a regular basis, the show is more of an opportunity than an experience, and it is often the culmination of an extended period of tireless preparation and effort.

Fredric Snitzer, owner of the Fredric Snitzer Gallery, which specializes in contemporary art and happens to be located in Miami, explained to the *News Leader* just how the pieces that his gallery exhibits at Art Basel are chosen.

“We plan a year in advance,” he said. “Our artists usually produce work with the intention of being in the fair, and then we select the works that we think are the strongest.”



Simone Schmid with James Rosenquist’s painting Ladies of the Opera Terrace in the Wetterling Gallery exhibition at Art Miami in Miami on Dec. 8. Schmid told the News Leader that afternoon that she built her gallery’s exhibition around the piece, which was commissioned for a restaurant in Stockholm in 1986. It measures 7.5 feet in height by 21 feet in length.

The Fredric Snitzer Gallery is not alone in reserving material exclusively for Art Basel. Howard Greenberg, owner of the Howard Greenberg Gallery in New York City, which specializes in 20th century and contemporary photography, also used this year's exhibition to debut some pieces to the world.

"In this fair, we lean a little bit more towards contemporary, because we think it's the right thing to bring," he told the *News Leader*. "We're bringing some new work by some important photographers, things that haven't been seen before and some really great vintage photographs as well."

Among the new pieces to which Greenberg was referring were those by artists Ed Burtynsky and Joel Meyerowitz, while some of the vintage photographs were by William Klein.

Mary Davidson, vice president of the Max Davidson Gallery, also located in New York City, explained to *the News Leader* the rationale behind the selectivity of galleries exhibiting at Art Basel, which she described as "this wonderful creature that attracts everybody from all over the world."

The fair, she said, "demands [the best]. The collectors that come here demand [the best]. So we think all year about what we're going to bring here and some things we keep especially for it."



Pieces on display in the Haunch of Venison exhibition at Art Miami on Dec. 8: (foreground) Kevin Francis Gray's 2012 sculpture Temporal Sitter, constructed from polished bronze and Bardigilio marble; (background) Chiharu Shiota's 2012 piece State of Being (Wedding Kimono), constructed from metal, kimono and black thread.

ART MIAMI

Art Miami, the largest unaffiliated satellite exhibition of Art Basel, is set up in essentially the same format as the official fair, albeit at a reduced scale. In spite of the smaller scope, Art Miami attracts fine art exhibitors from around the world who display instantly recognizable pieces by iconic artists alongside provocative pieces by lesser-known, contemporary artists.

This year, Art Miami was extremely popular, as evidenced by the fact that the space was bustling with patrons up to the time when employees began to cordon off galleries and security guards started directing people to exit the building for the evening.

Simone Schmid, director of the Wetterling Gallery, located in Stockholm, Sweden, has been exhibiting at Art Miami for many years. She told the *News Leader* on Dec. 8 that the fair is well worth the long trip to Miami. "It's an important place for the contemporary art scene, internationally," she said. "It's one of the most important art weeks in the year, so we want to be on the spot when it happens."

Schmid, who has also exhibited much closer to home at one of the unaffiliated satellite fairs surrounding the original Art Basel in Basel, Switzerland, explained that she chooses to come to Miami because the city reacts to the art fair in a unique way that provides her gallery with a greater range of opportunities for exposure and sales. Despite the fact that in Basel — as in Miami — there are numerous satellite fairs, she said people go only to the main fair, which is much larger than its Miami counterpart.

"They won't come to the other ones," she explained. "Here in Miami, people go to the satellite fairs much more. I mean, it's crowded in here," she continued, gesturing at the commotion in the convention center. "People have more fun than they have in other cities. [The fair] is just the whole city kind of vibrating and partying and having a good time."

When asked the difference between Art Miami and Art Basel in Miami Beach, Schmid explained that Art Miami, aside from being smaller, is more accessible for exhibitors and artists. "Art Basel Miami is for really high-end pieces only, so it's hard to find upcoming artists there at all," she said. "Here at Art Miami you have quite the mixture of very established artists, but you can still find some younger artists that are not as high-end as the pieces that you find at Art Basel Miami Beach."

Caitlin Healy, a Miami local who chose Art Miami as the first stop in her Art Basel-related weekend, was very satisfied with the pieces she saw on display at the show. "There's such a diversity," she told the *News Leader*. "Any type of art you want to see, you can see it."

Asked if she had chosen a favorite piece, Healy suggested the most likely candidate was one of the controversial, transplanted Banksy pieces on display between galleries as part of an Art Miami offshoot fair called CONTEXT.

Some critics, however, have deemed the appropriation of the pieces purportedly by the anonymous artist — one of which was being watched over by a security guard during the fair — as hypocritical at best. Regardless, the bittersweet opportunity to see the pieces, which were in danger of being tagged or defaced in their natural habitats, was cherished by many fans.

WYNWOOD

Wynwood, also known as the Design District, features numerous smaller, private art galleries that operate throughout the year. What makes Wynwood unique, however, is the fact that the art spills out of the galleries and into the streets — literally — gracing not only the facades of gallery buildings but local businesses, sidewalks, bike racks and more.

During the weekend of Art Basel, Wynwood became a street art renaissance event: People crowded the sidewalks and flooded the streets as they walked from gallery to gallery; artists expertly wielded powerful arsenals of spray

paint throughout the afternoon and evening as they contributed to the vibrancy and color of the area; DJs and live bands set up and performed on street corners; and even professional hairdressers offered free haircuts on the sidewalks.

There was plenty to do inside as well. Many of Wynwood's galleries were open to the public until midnight, and a number of bars and clubs hosted free musical performances throughout the afternoon and evening. Tumblr Inc. even hosted a party on the night of Dec. 7 called "Moving the Still," which celebrated the resurgence of the "GIF" format in recent years.



One of many street artists works diligently to complete her piece in the Wynwood neighborhood of Miami on the afternoon of Dec. 8.

Those content to simply wander around the area, however, would likely have seen one or more artists working on a new piece on the side of a building every block or so. One of these artists, a first-time Art Basel visitor from Houston, TX, who has been producing graffiti art since the mid-1980s — and goes by the name Gonzo247 — took a short break to speak with the *News Leader* about his experience in Miami that weekend, the piece he was working on and whether he would be returning next year.

“I came out here with just an open mind and really no expectations because I figured if you have expectations you might get disappointed,” Gonzo247 explained.

“I think this is amazing,” he said. “I think that this definitely is something that at least the street art culture needs, as far as what’s happening here in Wynwood,” he continued. “I think it’s great for the city; it’s great for the art scene and for all genres of art. I’ve seen some super awesome fine art, some crazy street art and everything in between.”

Gonzo247 explained that one of his main goals for the festivities, other than to appreciate the art and have a good time, was to contribute some of his own work to the area before leaving.

“For the first part of the day, we just started talking to businesses that had been tagged and said, ‘Hey, look, you got tagged. Whatever. Can I put something over it and make it look better?’”

Gonzo247 added that although many of the business owners he spoke to were not interested, one of them finally gave him permission

after he apologized for whoever had tagged the building and explained that he wanted to cover up the unsightly marks. At that point, he said, it was time to get together as much spray paint as possible and start on the piece.

“I’m doing the best that I can with what I have and the time,” he said. “It’s a good challenge though,” he continued. “My goal is that the guy likes it enough that I can reserve this wall for next year and come back with a van full of paint, ladders and just rock this whole thing — spend a week on it versus a day.”

UNTIL NEXT YEAR

The day after the conclusion of Art Basel, the organization’s public relations team sent an email to members of the press who had attended the event, boasting that this year’s fair was “praised by critics, exhibitors and visitors as Art Basel’s most serious presentation in Miami Beach to date.” This bold statement leaves little room to suggest that the organizers of Art Basel have any plans for 2013 that do not involve bringing the fair back to Miami in full force.

For now, Miami has some time to recover from this year’s edition of Art Basel and its surrounding festivities. As the momentum builds, however, and artists and galleries begin preparing for Art Basel in Miami Beach 2013, it will become increasingly clear that the city will be taken over by art once again.

Like Gonzo247, who will be showing up in Wynwood with a van full of supplies and a head full of inspiration, many fans, other artists and entrepreneurs are awaiting the day when it all begins again. 



ASK OTUS

HOW MANY OF MY FELLOW FEATHERED FRIENDS DID YOU GUESS CORRECTLY FROM THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT QUIZ?

Dear Readers,

Many of you have written to ask for the answers to last week's Name-That-Bird Quiz. I am delighted that so many of you took the time to take it. Good for you! It was a bit tricky.

In the interest of a Happy New Year, I am giving the answers below, but I am including only new photos to the “tricky” bird identifications. I do not want you staying up late New Year's Eve, pouring over bird encyclopedias and missing out on a good night's sleep.

Let me offer a couple of explanations why several of these commonly seen birds may have been a bit difficult to identify.

First, we are more likely to identify an iconic representation of a bird than not. When you see a Great Blue Heron in profile, you recognize it immediately. A head-on shot makes one look different, even a bit whacky; same for the



Snowy Egret. File photos.

Snowy Egret, or Golden Slippers, as we like to call this bird down here. It is seldom that we see them head-on and all fluffed-up.

Second, birds hatch as babies (surprise!), and during their adolescent years, many members of species will not necessarily look as they will when they are grown-ups. I am sure you have noticed something similar to that at family and college reunions. Two quiz photos were

of the immature Ibis and Little Blue Heron. Tricky? No. Just downright wicked!

I will point out that the photo of the immature American Bald Eagle bathing at the pond exemplifies both explanations. A view of it on the ground, bathing in the pond, is not the typical image one has of an eagle. Its youthful overall dark feathering precluded its instant identification; no familiar white head and tail feathers for quick recognition.



Little Blue Heron



Great Blue Heron

The following are the answers to all the birds in the quiz:

1. **Palm Warbler.** Unless they are hopping amid the grasses in search of seeds and insects, we hear them more often than we see them. But most of you named this bird correctly.
2. **Downy Woodpecker (male — because of the red feathers on its head).** It is not a Hairy Woodpecker — and thank you, Rick Greenspun, for the confirmation! My readers did not seem to need any reassurance. You all knew what it was!
3. **Florida Mottled Ducks.** Most guesses were close enough.
4. **Cooper's Hawk, immature.** I usually close my eyes and hide when hawks are around, so that is my best guess! Let me know if you disagree and why. Many readers suggested, "Red-Shouldered Hawk."

Now to the quiz's "tricky" bird photos: This week they are pictured as you expect to see them, and you will recognize them immediately.

5. **Snowy Egret.** Now you know him!

6. **Little Blue Heron.** The transformation from the immature bird with its pure white feathering to its mottled shade of blue with white, and on into adult coloring, always amazes me.
7. **Great Blue Heron.**
8. **American Bald Eagle.**
9. **American White Ibis.** Yes, the splotchy brown-feathered adolescents do somewhat resemble Limpkins.
10. **Yellow-crowned Night Heron.** Who would have thought that white speckled, shy-looking adolescent would turn into this spectacular bird?
11. **Mangrove Raccoon-Masked Night Heron.** Debate is still raging over this one. We will just have to wait until ornithologists come in with a final pronouncement. Until then

I wish you a peaceful New Year's Eve. But do consider earplugs, because that is the night we night owls like to really hoot it up!

Otus



American White Ibis



Yellow-Crowned Night Heron



ABOUT OTUS

Otus Rufous, an Eastern Screech-Owl, was born on Siesta Key and is a full-time resident there. An avid hunter, accomplished vocalist and genuine night owl, Otus is a keen observer of our local wildlife and knows many of nature's secrets. Otus will answer your questions about our amazing wildlife, but only if you Ask Otus. So please send your questions and photos to askotus@sarasotanewsleader.com. Thank you.



I like to take my time.

Sure, it's a temptation to rush. Each issue of *The Sarasota News Leader* is brimfull of in-depth coverage of all the news and goings-on in Sarasota County. And it has delightful and informative feature stories. Thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota*, I always know what the most exciting happenings are each week. Plus, it is simply so beautiful, with photography that takes my breath away.

There is so much there, I don't know where to begin. So it is hard to resist the urge to read it all at once. But I know better. Take your time and indulge in all that it has to offer.

You have a whole week.

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Dusk by Jackie Battenfield/Contributed photo

GALLUP GALLERY TO PRESENT *TOWN AND COUNTRY*

Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art gallery will present the exhibition *Town and Country* Jan. 4 through Feb. 9.

The show will feature paintings by Brooklyn-based artists Jackie Battenfield and Deborah Brown. A reception with the artists is scheduled for 6 to 8 p.m. on Feb. 1. They will offer remarks about themselves and their works and take questions from the audience, a news release says.

In her series, *The Bushwick Paintings*, Brown explores the urban beauty of Bushwick, Brooklyn, the release says.

"This odd landscape possesses a simultaneous allure and menace that I take as the starting point for my paintings," says Brown in the release. "Based on what I see, I invent architec-

tural amalgams in which natural forms and manmade structures are woven together in a visual hodge-podge both comical and poignant."

Battenfield works with watery pigments to "coax pools of paint into translucent veils of color," she says in the release. "Anchoring these ephemeral elements are gestural marks, stripes and blocks of color," she continues. "For the last decade, I have focused on the fluidity of water and the natural gestures of plants and trees alongside abstract brush strokes and poured layers of paint."

For more information about the exhibit, call 366-2454 or visit www.allyngallup.com. The gallery is located at 1288 N. Palm Ave. in Sarasota.



Birds and Bag by Deborah Brown/Contributed photo

WILSON'S *JITNEY* TO OPEN JAN. 4 AT WBTT

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe (WBTT) has announced its second play for this season. August Wilson's *Jitney* will open on Friday, Jan. 4, and run until Sunday, Feb. 3.

All performances will take place in the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe Theater at 1646 10th Way, Sarasota.

"August Wilson is one of America's most well-known African-American playwrights," says Nate Jacobs, artistic director of West Coast Black Theatre Troupe, in a news release.

"Over the years, our Troupe has performed many of Mr. Wilson's plays. [They are] always powerful and poignant, [and] we look forward to bringing *Jitney* to our Sarasota audiences," he adds in the release.

Jitney was the first of 10 plays written by Wilson in what became known as the *Pittsburgh Cycle*. Each is set in a different decade of the 20th century, the release notes. *Jitney*, which takes place in the 1970s, is set inside a gypsy cab station

in Pittsburgh, the release says. Regular cabs would not travel to the Hill District of the 1970s, so the residents turned to each other. *Jitney* dramatizes the lives of men hustling to make a living as jitneys — unofficial, unlicensed taxi cab drivers, the release adds.

The cast of nine includes eight men and one woman. WBTT audiences will recognize Will Little and Dhakeria Cunningham, who have performed regularly with the Troupe for the past two years, including roles in last season's highly acclaimed *Raisin in the Sun*, accord-

ing to the release. The other cast members are seasoned actors from as far away as Tennessee, North Carolina and Atlanta; however, most are from the Tampa Bay area. They are Alfred H. Wilson, Ron Bobb-Semple, Andrew Drake, Don Johnson, Steven McKenzie, Horace Smith and Martin Taylor.

Tickets are priced at \$29.50. Reservations may be made online at www.wbttsrq.org or by calling the box office at 366-1505.



Members of the cast of *Jitney* are (front row) Dhakeria Cunningham, Don Johnson; (middle row, from left) Will Little, Steven McKenzie; (back row, from left) Rubin Alexander Jr. and Horace E. Smith. Contributed photo

DABBERT GALLERY TO PRESENT *LEGACY OF SARASOTA MASTERS*

Beginning Jan. 4, Dabbert Gallery, located at 76 S. Palm Ave. in Sarasota, will present, “A *Legacy of Sarasota Masters.*”

Renowned artists began making Florida’s Gulf Coast their paradise during the 1940s, a news release notes, and their work “continues in full bloom today.”

The show will feature past Sarasota masters Ben Stahl, Syd Solomon, Jerry Farnsworth, Helen Sawyer, Jon Corbino, Jack Cartlidge and Barbara McCann. Its featured current Sarasota masters will be Craig Rubadoux, Robert Baxter, Nat Krate, William Jerdon, Jeff Cornell, James Griffin, Susan Zukowsky and Thyra Wexler.

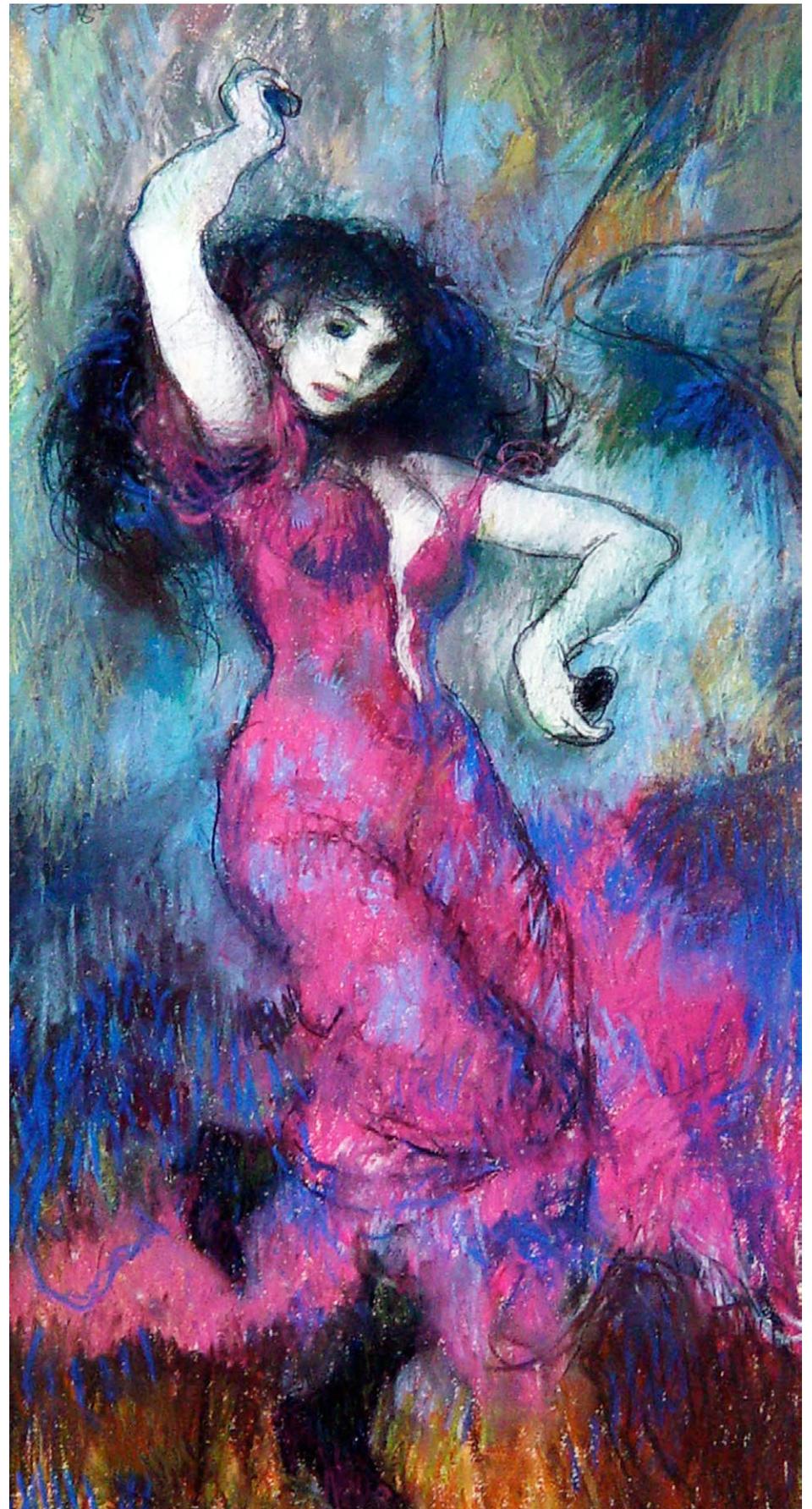
The exhibit will open Jan. 4 and continue through Jan. 28. A reception will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. on Jan. 4.

Gallery hours in season are Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.; Fridays, until 9 p.m.

For more information, visit www.dabbertgallery.com or call 955-1315.



Corniche by Syd Solomon/Contributed photo



Flamenco Dancer by Ben A. Stahl/Contributed photo

BAND BASH TO RETURN TO SELBY PUBLIC LIBRARY FEB. 2

Selby Public Library will make some noise Saturday, Feb. 2, when it tosses off its quiet reputation as a place to browse books or use free computers to make way for the second annual Band Bash, a Sarasota County news release says.

The popular teen concert will return to 1331 First St. from 5:30 to 11 p.m. “with some of the area’s hottest teen bands” — Let’s Rock, Sarasota; The Great Frame; Pure Organic Trio; When in Doubt; SNAPM; Void of Fortune; and Siege of Malakand, the release notes.

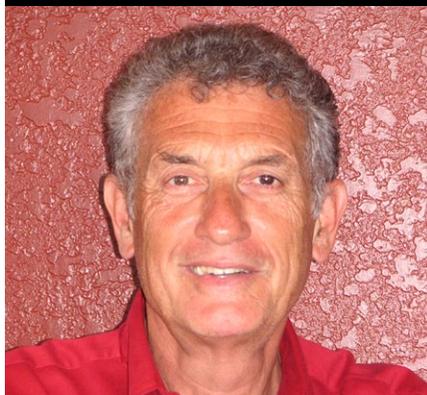
“Last year we didn’t know what to expect,” said Assistant Selby Library Manager Marilyn Nykiforuk in the news release. “But wow, the event was a rocking success with a large teen turnout. Afterwards, teens immediately began

asking when the next Band Bash would take place.”

In addition to hosting music all night, the library will be open and offering free gaming on Wii, Playstation 3 and Xbox 360 game systems, as well as a variety of craft activities for teens, the release points out. Several local sponsors, including The Friends of the Selby Public Library, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Jimmy John’s, Panera Bread, Tequila Cantina, The Studios on McIntosh, Clothesline Inc., and The Dark Side, will provide food, beverages and more, the release says.

For more information, visit www.scgov.net, or contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000. 

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

28
DEC

2012 Holiday Spectacular-The Polar Express

Dec. 28, 7 p.m.; Dec. 29-30, 2 and 7 p.m.

Circus Sarasota, 2075 Bahia Vista St, Sarasota. Admission: \$16 (\$12 for those 12 and under); 366-0156. Information: circussarasota.org

28
DEC

The Perlman Music Program Recitals

Dec. 28 through Jan. 5; times vary; USF-Sarasota/Manatee, 8350 N. Tamiami Trail. Free admission (first-come basis). Information: 955-4942 or PMPSuncoast.org

28
DEC

Smokey Joe's Cafe

Dec. 28 through Jan. 12; times vary. Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Admission: \$19 to \$42. Information: 366-9000 or floridastudiotheatre.org.

31
DEC

The Pineapple Drop

Dec. 31, New Year's Eve Street Party, Dec. 31, 2 p.m to 1:30 a.m., downtown Sarasota. Free admission. Information: PineappleDrop.com.

31
DEC

WSLR Down Home New Year's Eve Party

Dec. 31, 8 p.m. to 1 a.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Admission: \$10 advance, \$15 at door. Information: 587-6588 or WSLR.org.

04
JAN

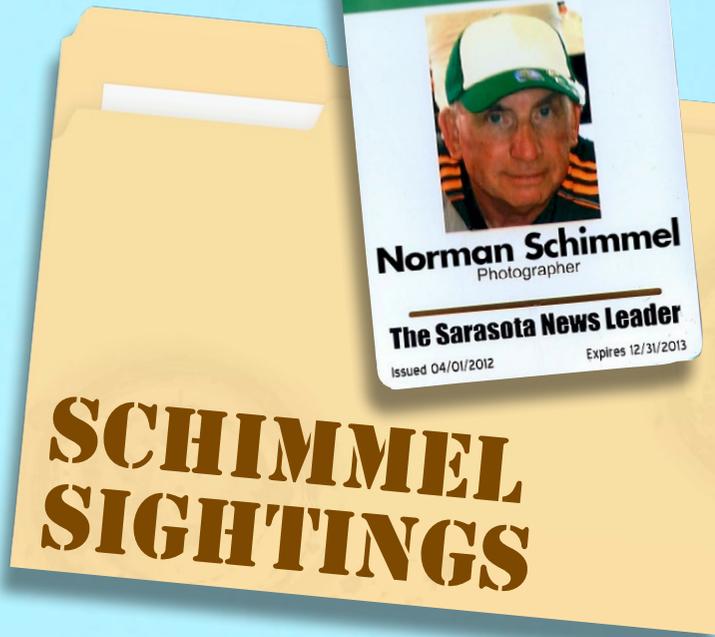
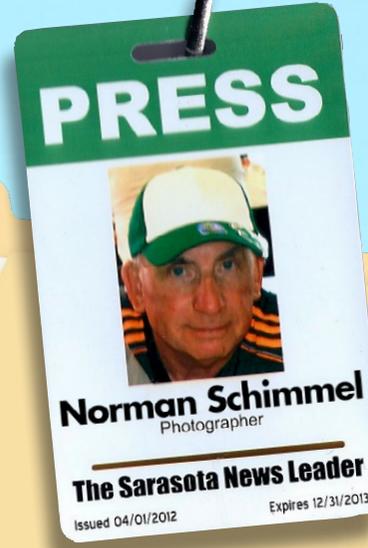
Dabbert Gallery presents A Legacy of Sarasota Masters

Jan. 4, 6 to 9 p.m., 76 S. Palm Avenue, Sarasota. Free admission; 955-1315 or dabbertgallery.com.

To get all the details on these and other great activities — food, nightlife, music, art, theater, children's events, learning opportunities and more — go to Sarasota's No. 1 source for local events, hot spots, fun activities and hidden gems:



thisweekin
SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR



WHICH WAY WAS OSPREY?

Each week, Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel searches Sarasota County for iconic shots that underscore why the community is a favorite with residents and tourists alike.