

THE SARASOTA

September 21, 2012

PREMIER  
EDITION

# News Leader

*The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida*

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# Welcome

Welcome to the first full, published edition of *The Sarasota News Leader*. This is a virtual (or electronic) news weekly. It is not published on paper. No trees died to produce it; no forests were wiped out. It represents the future of publishing in a world no less in need of information and news, but seeking to preserve the ecosphere on which we all depend.

*The Sarasota News Leader* will be published every Friday. It will be readable on iPad and Android tablets, iPhone and Android smartphones, and Kindle, Nook and other eReaders with a web-browsing capability, as well as on personal computers.

With a seasoned staff of award-winning journalists – our editors alone have more than eight decades of combined experience – we provide hard-hitting, in-depth reporting on local government action and the major issues affecting Sarasota County. The news will be combined with fascinating feature stories, arts & entertainment spotlights and the legendary community calendar of This Week In Sarasota, Sarasota's No. 1 source for events, hot spots, fun activities and hidden gems.

Many of you already are familiar with us from visiting our website, where we have been providing the same comprehensive coverage since April. Now our work is in an even more complete and captivating form.

Thank you for looking at our publication. We hope you will come to depend on *The Sarasota News Leader* for all of your Sarasota County news.

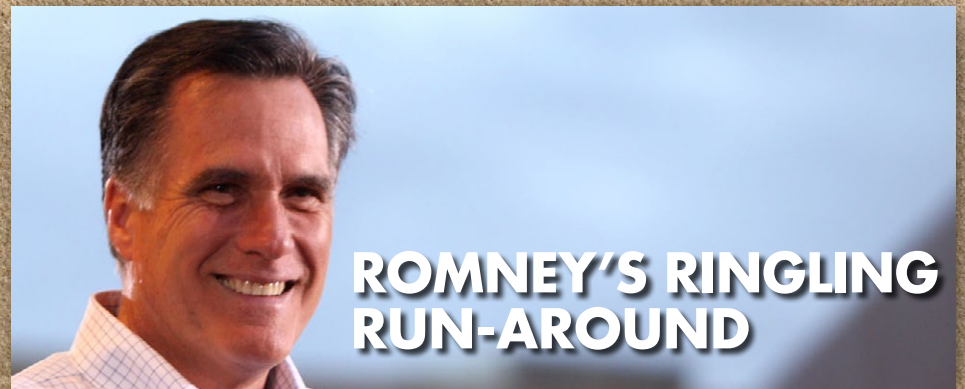
With warmest regards,

***Rachel Brown Hackney***  
*Editor and Publisher*





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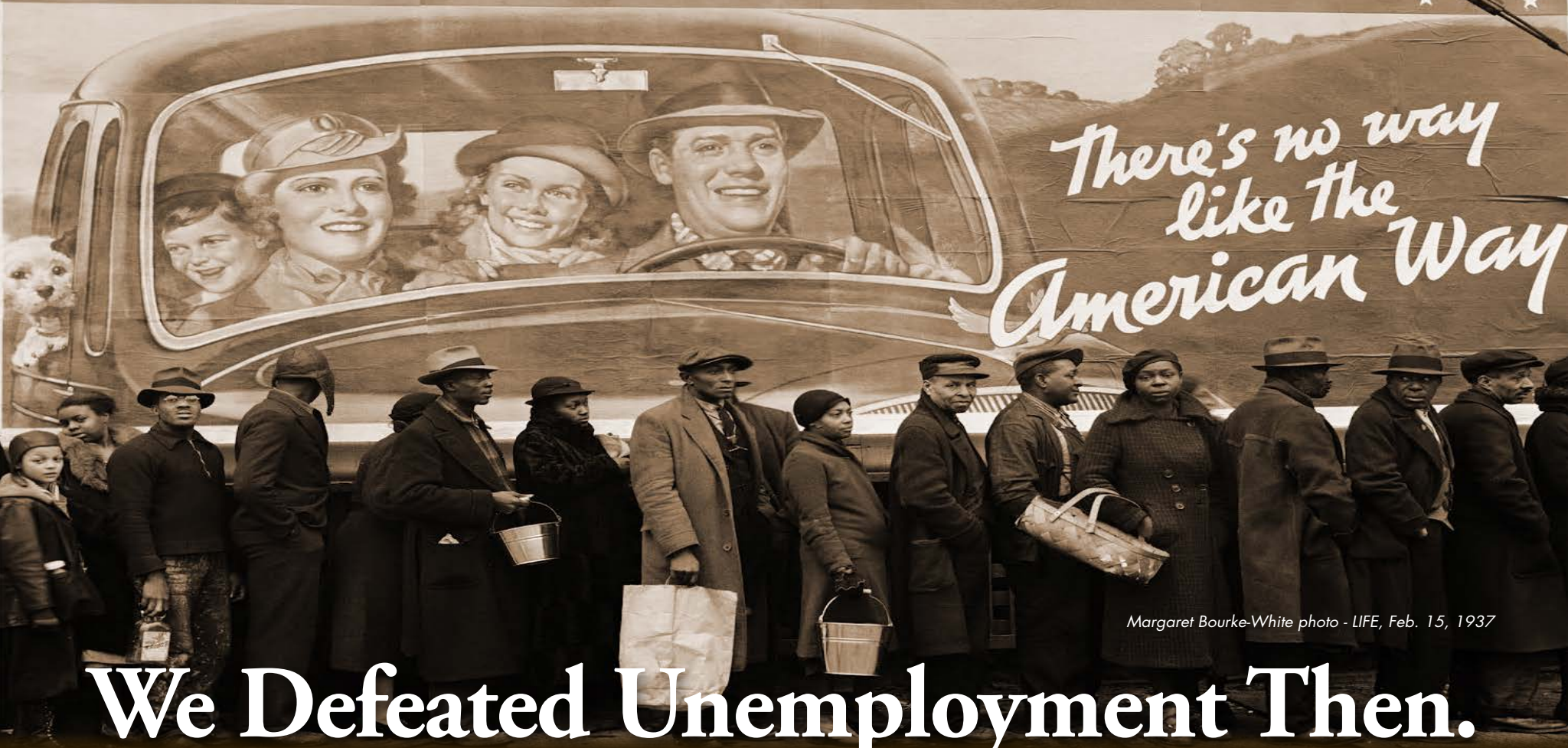


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*The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida*



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The Sarasota News Leader is a publication of:

New Sheriff Publishing, Inc. • Post Office Box 5099 • Sarasota, FL 34277-5099



# SUNSHINE 'WHACK-A-MOLE'



*Downtown Sarasota business owners and residents have continued to complain about groups of homeless people clustered around Selby Public Library and Five Points Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **A SARASOTA PARALEGAL IS REQUESTING DID EMAILS, LOOKING FOR IMPROPER DISCUSSIONS OF DOWNTOWN VAGRANCY ISSUES.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

Just as one Government in the Sunshine lawsuit is drawing to a close, another one is about to open concerning the Downtown Improvement District.

On Sept. 14, Sarasota paralegal Michael Barfield requested all the DID's emails since April 1.

At the Sept. 18 meeting of the district's governing board, a bevy of city officials descended on the proceedings to instruct the board members on proper email handling. City Clerk and Auditor Pam Nadalini, who is responsible for sunshine and public records issues, said, "We're going to hand out

instructions again on your workplace email policy. The burden of proof is on you."

Dr. Mark Kaufman admitted to having deleted some emails on his personal computer, saying it was standard procedure for him. "I may have deleted some," he said. "I delete and then go through the trash and delete them again."

City Attorney Bob Fournier interjected quickly, "Let's talk afterwards."

Barfield told *The Sarasota News Leader* the DID has been pressuring city officials to deal with homeless and vagrancy problems downtown. "They are the point organi-



zation on vagrancy and discuss it on email,” he said. “I’d like to read those.”

“This is a good illustration of why to use the city’s email account,” Fournier told the DID board. “The concern is, any communication between any two of you on official business has to be held in the sunshine. This is not a [government in the] sunshine issue. It is a public records issue.”

Both Fournier and Nadalini urged the five-member board to use only the city email accounts for correspondence.

Kaufman said he didn’t receive any initial paperwork or guidance from the city about compliance with sunshine and public records laws. “I didn’t get any instructions,” he said.

“I advise you to use your city account and co-copy your personal account,” she said.

For emails to and from city accounts, it is easy for Nadalini to make copies for any person who requests them. Under the law, however, she cannot ask why the documents are being requested.

Barfield is involved with the Sarasota chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and is protective of constitutional rights. Sarasota has a no-smoking ordinance in place for certain parks, including the Five Points Park downtown.

“The state attorney general has ruled five different times cities cannot regulate outdoor smoking,” said Barfield. “In Sarasota, it’s a \$358 fine for smoking in public, smoking on a public sidewalk.”

Later during the meeting, Sarasota Police Officer Randy Body gave the DID an update on the crackdown on vagrancy downtown. “We arrested 20 people and did a criminal background check,” he said. “Among them, they had 480 citations for non-violent crimes, and 162 citations for violent crime. They had 255 citations for drug- and alcohol-related violations. That’s just 20 people.”

The DID governing board is composed of downtown property owners, businessmen and developers.

While the specter of a DID public records lawsuit looms, a suit over violation of public meetings requirements appears to be settled.

An ad hoc committee appointed by Mayor Suzanne Atwell to explore a public art project met repeatedly without formal notice or minutes before urging the city to spend \$50,000 on the project.

The chairman of the Public Art Committee and the group Citizens for Sunshine sued the city over violations of the Government in the Sunshine Act. Fournier suggested the city settle immediately and pay \$5,000 for the plaintiff’s legal fees.

City commissioners grudgingly accepted the settlement, but Commissioner Terry Turner suggested Fournier explore ways to abolish the Public Art Committee and also take the \$5,000 from the city’s public art fund. The other four commissioners agreed.



The plaintiffs recoiled, called the action punitive and withdrew their offer to settle. When the news got back to the city commissioners, they withdrew their instructions to Fournier to hunt for ways to kill the Public Art Committee and decided to pay the attorney's fees from the city's general fund.

At press time, the plaintiff's lawyer, Andrea Mogensen, said she verbally had agreed to drop the suit, but she still was dealing with the paperwork.

Mogensen estimates the attorney's fees will run between \$6,000 and \$7,000



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## CHARTER SCHOOLS HIT HARDEST

*Sarasota County Public Schools Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner (left) and CFO Mitsi Corcoran (second from left) meet with the School Board and Superintendent Lori White during a Sept. 18 workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

### **304 OF THE 349 FEWER STUDENTS THAN PROJECTED IN SARASOTA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS THIS YEAR WERE EXPECTED AT CHARTER SCHOOLS**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

When he first examined the Sarasota County Public Schools' five-day enrollment count in late August, Al Weidner thought the district might be seeing a new trend — families moving from South County to North County.

The district's deputy chief financial officer based that on much higher enrollment than projected at Southside and Phillippi Shores elementary schools in Sarasota and the fact that some South County schools had reported considerably fewer students than expected.

As it turns out, Weidner told the School Board during a Sept. 18 workshop, his discussions with school principals had indicated, "It's basically been new people moving to Sarasota County."

Steven Dragon, the Southside principal, also had mentioned to him, Weidner said, that when families considering moving to the county asked about high-quality public schools, Realtors often mentioned Southside, which is west of the Tamiami Trail, on Webber Street.

Additionally, Weidner told *The Sarasota News Leader*, he had learned home prices



in those “west-of-the-Trail” neighborhoods had been coming down, especially compared to the high-dollar days before the Great Recession hit.

Board member Shirley Brown said during the workshop that she had learned from talking with Phillippi Shores teachers that some of the extra 86 students there had come from private schools and from the Imagine charter school at Palmer Ranch.

Brown added that she felt some of that growth was linked to parents no longer being able to afford the private schools and some of it was linked to disappointing Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores for some charter schools in the district.

Board member Carol Todd pointed out that two charter schools in the district — Imagine and Island Village Montessori — had “incredibly decreased enrollment” over what they had projected.

Imagine was down 171 students, she said, while Island Montessori was down 103 students.

Altogether, according to documents Weidner presented to the board, charter school enrollment was down 304 students compared to the projected enrollment for 2012-13.

Imagine had expected more middle school students than it has seen enroll this year, Weidner said.

Island Montessori took over the NewGate School, Weidner continued, but it apparently did not end up with as many former NewGate students as it had anticipated.

As a result, he said, Island Montessori was making staffing adjustments.

Because the charter schools’ contracts with the School Board require the schools to estimate their following year’s enrollment each spring, Weidner said, and they cannot get additional funding if they underestimate the final count, “They all do go a bit on the high side. They want to make sure they’re not penalized for funding purposes.”

Sarasota Military School was one of only three of the nine charter schools in the district with more students projected for the five-day count, according to the figures. However, all those students from SMA are dual-enrolled at Sarasota County Technical Institute, Weidner said, adding that that situation will prevent SMA from getting full funding for them.

The other charter schools with higher-than-expected enrollment were Suncoast Innovative Studies, with 32; and Sarasota Suncoast Academy, with one.

“Overall,” Weidner told the board, “we believe we’re going to be down 349 students” from the projected total for the 2012-13 school year.

The district had estimated a total student population of 41,984.

According to the figures Weidner presented to the School Board, the district has hired a total of seven new teachers to comply with the Florida Class Size Amendment, which dictates the maximum number of students allowed in a classroom according to the grade level.



Some schools lost staff, while others gained teachers. Phillippi Shores, for example, needed to add five teachers, while Lamarque Elementary School in North Port lost two classroom teachers, one special teaching position and one aide.

Lamarque had 68 fewer students than it was expecting at the five-day count.

In response to a question from Brown, Weidner said those staffing adjustments

were in the 2013 fiscal year budget the School Board adopted Sept. 11.

Weidner also pointed out that the enrollment count taken the second Friday in October would be the first of two state counts to determine final state funding for the district for the current school year.

The second official count is taken in February.



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A photograph of Mitt Romney, a Republican presidential candidate, smiling and wearing a light blue checkered button-down shirt. He is standing outdoors with a blurred background of trees and a building.

# ROMNEY'S RINGLING RUN-AROUND

*Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons*

## REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S RALLY AT THE SARASOTA ART MUSEUM MAY HAVE VIOLATED THE MUSEUM'S RENTAL POLICY.

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**  
*Associate Editor*

Word began spreading across social media late Wednesday, Sept. 19, that, by agreeing to host a Mitt Romney rally Thursday afternoon, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art might have violated its own rental policy, which specifically bans all “Fundraising, Political or Revenue Generating activities.”

True, according to Ringling Museum Executive Director Steven High. “There are conflicts with the policies of the museum,” he says.

The “[Ringling Museum of Art Rental Policies & Procedures](#),” posted on the museum

website, contains a provision that says, “No Fundraising, Political or Revenue Generating activities [are] allowed by parties other than the Ringling Museum of Art.”

According to High, the Romney campaign approached the museum Sunday evening. “It was a major, certainly a national, event,” he says, “and so we went to the leaders at Florida State University for guidance on this and their decision was to move forward.” (FSU [has overseen the Ringling Museum](#) since 2000.)

According to High, the rules laid out in the website document “are not governing pol-



icies,” but are instead “guidance policies,” which can be adjusted if a particular event is deemed important enough. As an example, he says particular art exhibitions sometimes don’t comply with museum regulations, but if a specific show is worthy, the museum will make exceptions for it.

Furthermore, he says, FSU lawyers felt the Romney campaign would not violate the university’s policies.

High calls the contract with the Romney campaign a “flat rental agreement” similar to all others the Ringling signs. Still, he says he wants to revisit the process that

led to the Romney contract once the rally has passed.

“These are precedents that I don’t think should be set,” High says, “so we will certainly have a discussion as an institution and as a component of Florida State University as well, and make sure that all aspects of the decision point are taken into account.”

*Editor’s note: Hat tip to Virginia Hoffman for first posting the museum’s rental policies.*



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## A BEMUSED BOARD

*Residents of the city of Sarasota have voiced frustration in the past over local government approval of high-rise buildings near single-family homes. File photo*

### **CONCEPT OF COMPATIBILITY VARIES AMONG THE PARTIES INVOLVED IN LAND USE.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

One of the 11 chapters in the City of Sarasota's comprehensive plan concerns neighborhoods. On Wednesday evening, Sept. 19, five members of the city's Planning Board reviewed that chapter. And like the proverbial blind men describing an elephant, they all had a slightly different tale to tell.

What they were trying to describe is the concept of "compatibility." The chapter sets as a city goal "maximizing compatibility between residential and non-residential uses."

Normally, the Planning Board hears petitions for land use. Sometimes petitioners want to change the zoning and sometimes even the comprehensive plan's future land-use map. Variances major and minor, special exceptions, clinical splitting of legislative hairs and blue-sky-crazy petitions are all in a day's work. It is an intricate, arcane business for the unpaid board members, with lawyers hovering on all sides. But Wednesday featured a free-ranging discussion liberated of lawyers, with not a petitioner in sight. It was the Planning Board's turn to be blue-sky-crazy.



## WHAT'S COMPATIBLE?

Morton Siegel, chairman of the Planning Board, is a land-use attorney with a national practice volunteering his time and expertise. "I've read this comprehensive plan many times, and we don't follow it," he said. "We do what's expedient. Developers want to do what they can do. Residents will oppose them."

In that capsule comment, he captured a half-century of Florida land-use controversy: Them versus us. Thus ensued a lot of blather. Siegel then opened the meeting to public comment.

Three neighborhood veterans from three different neighborhoods came forward. Fundamentally, they said – in different ways – one size doesn't fit all.

Barbara Campo lives downtown. Her issue was notification, because downtown condominium associations do not always notify their residents of pending development in their area. "There is a breakdown," she said. "Condominium associations may get the information, but residents may not. You should assure the neighborhoods will protect the concept of compatibility by allowing first-hand input from neighborhoods when new development is being considered."

Kate Lowman lives near downtown in Laurel Park, an enclave of 1920s bungalows and duplexes surrounded by later development. It's a historic district threatened by mega-development in the boom times. "People would like to know what's being built very near them," she said. "I hope you can

allow time for people to come and speak to these changes you are considering."

The bell-ringer was Pat Kology. She's a resident of the Alta Vista neighborhood, a long walk from downtown. "I feel it is important to talk about maximizing compatibility by respecting the very fabric of surrounding neighborhoods," she said. "Laurel Park is very different than my Alta Vista. What's compatible in one part of town may not be compatible in another. One more 10-story building downtown would not be incompatible, but it would be in my neighborhood."

Planning Board member Vlad Svekis asked how the matter would be applied. "The issue of compatibility is in everybody's thoughts," he said. "On Bayshore Road, I see a \$2.5 million house across the street from a \$250,000 house. Is it compatible? I do not know how to define it."

## AND PREDICTABILITY?

"Developers always want predictability," said Planning Board member Susan Chapman. "I'd like to see something in here about predictability for the neighborhoods, so both parties have predictable outcomes."

Board member Chris Gallagher said the two sides have different goals for predictability: "For developers, it's predictability on process. For the neighborhoods, it's predictability of the end result."

Chapman then spoke of a time several years ago. "The neighborhoods wanted predictability, but there were many people buying land with the assumption it would get up-zoned, have a comprehensive plan amendment [approved], that compatibility



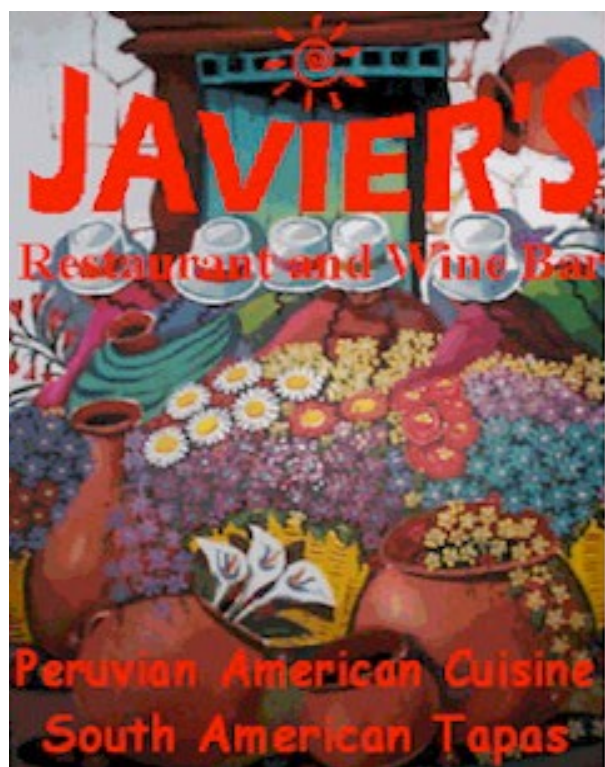
would be argued in a unique way where a five-story garage would be next to a single-family home," she said.

"My view is it deals with maximizing the opportunity of citizens to have meaningful input into the decisions that affect their neighborhood," said Siegel. "And each party should have equal weight in the process, and equal teeth too," added board member Jennifer Ahearn-Koch.

After three hours of freewheeling discussion, there were no motions or votes. In-

stead two city Planning Department staffers walked away with pages of notes to condense and refine, so they can bring back material to the second of what looks like many future meetings to refine three chapters in the city's comprehensive plan.

In the meantime for the Planning Board, it's back to evaluating petitions, juggling lawyers and listening to developers plead their plans, because development is picking back up.



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# FEELING THE IMPACT



*The Sarasota County Commission prepares for a meeting in the Think Tank in the Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **COUNTY COMMISSION AUTHORIZES NEW STUDY ON CALCULATING IMPACT FEES, USING THE MOST RECENT COST DATA AVAILABLE; SCHOOL BOARD APPROVES ANOTHER TWO-YEAR MORATORIUM**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Voicing frustration that Sarasota County has been using impact fee data that is as much as eight years old, the County Commission on Sept. 18 voted unanimously to authorize staff to update the methodology for calculating the impact fees, using the most recent cost data available.

The motion also calls for staff to work with construction trade organizations in undertaking that work.

The vote came just a few hours after members of the Sarasota County School Board agreed by consensus during their monthly

workshop to ask the County Commission to maintain the moratorium on the collection of education impact fees for two more years.

As a point of clarification, School Board member Carol Todd pointed out that while that board makes a recommendation on action regarding those fees, the County Commission is the local government body that decides on the action.

The moratorium on the school impact fees is set to expire Dec. 14, according to a staff presentation to the County Commission.



“With the lack of growth and the struggling economy, I don’t think it’s a very good time to reinstate the impact fee,” said School Board member Frank Kovach.

“I agree,” Todd said.

In response to a question from board member Jane Goodwin, the district’s deputy chief financial officer, Al Weidner, said the education impact fees can be used only for school-growth projects.

In concurring with Kovach and Todd, Goodwin said, “We’re not looking at growth in our classrooms in the near future. Anything we can do to help people buy homes” or afford to move to Sarasota County would be positive for the area’s economy, she added.

During the County Commission discussion, which came as part of that board’s workshop on growth issues, Clark Davis, general manager of Public Works planning, said the education impact fees last were updated in 2004. The county’s impact fee systems for the library, park, road, emergency medical services, fire and rescue, general government and justice facilities categories all dated to 2007, he said.

A temporary, 50-percent reduction in the county’s road impact fee, adopted in 2011, will end for permits accepted on or after Feb. 1, 2013, if the commission takes no action, Davis said.

Referring to the cost data used for the impact fees, Commissioner Joe Barbetta pointed out, “That was pre-recession. Prices were higher. ... How’s that fair to someone coming in today, when costs are lower?”

“It’s time to revisit that,” Davis said, “and make sure that we’ve got ... the latest and best available data.”

“We should be doing this annually,” Barbetta said of the updates, adding a suggestion that staff consult the appropriate state statute on the matter.

“There is no statute,” Davis said.

“We should be using the most available data,” Barbetta said. “To sit back and not have done anything for six years is a little bit disturbing.”

However, Commissioner Jon Thaxton pointed out that the board had tried to undertake an update about two years ago. At that time, Thaxton said, a lag with the data collection led to cost calculations showing the pre-recession levels.

“We’ve remained safely below an over-charge situation for the road impact fees,” Davis told the commissioners.

Staff does an annual report on all the impact fees, Davis added. “They’re at least thought about, even if they’re not brought to the board for discussion.”

Already, Davis said, staff was planning an impact fees presentation to the County Commission on Oct. 9.

In response to a question from Chairwoman Christine Robinson, Davis said the road impact fee study would take the longest. Generally, he said, staff needed about six months from the time a study began until the data was ready for the commission’s review.



Referring to the Oct. 9 presentation, Davis added, "We won't have the draft numbers, but we'll be working on them in the background, probably."

Nonetheless, he said, he felt the numbers would be ready for the board to act on the fees before the Feb. 1 deadline.

Davis did point out that if the commission chooses to go with higher impact fees, those could not go into effect until 90 days after they were approved, because of interlocal agreements requiring a public hearing in the City of Venice and notification to the City of Sarasota.

If the rates stayed the same or were lower, he said, they could go into effect immediately upon commission approval.

Commissioner Nora Patterson expressed concern about getting the study results in time to make the Feb. 1 deadline. "There are going to be requests to extend that reduction [in the road impact fee]," she said. "You don't want to reduce it twice and then pop it up."

Davis replied that he felt the data would be ready no later than early December, which would enable the commission to meet that February deadline.

"I'm going to be surprised if we get this done before [then]," Robinson said.

Davis told her that he would do as he had in the past in regard to the interlocal agreements: Once the commission approved the advertisement of a public hearing on new impact fees, he would put the information

in a letter to the cities, "to start the ... clock ..."

Barbetta made the motion to authorize the update of the methodology for the cost calculations on all the fees, with Thaxton seconding the motion.

Although Davis had suggested the hiring of a consultant to assist staff with the project, Barbetta opposed that, saying, "We know what our costs are, for road building, for county buildings ..."

## **SCHOOL BOARD IMPACT FEES DETAILED**

During the Sept. 18 School Board workshop, Deputy CFO Weidner pointed out that Ken Marsh, the district's long-range planning director, had provided an overview of the education impact fees.

The initial October 2002 study justified impact fees as follows:

- \$2,032 for a single-family home
- \$474 for a multi-family home
- \$138 for mobile homes
- A January 2004 update, requested by the County Commission, justified the following rates:
- \$2,675 for a single-family home
- \$690 for a multi-family home
- \$197 for a mobile home

The third study, in 2008, justified the following rates:

- \$6,341 for a single-family home



- \$1,742 for a multi-family home
- \$572 for a mobile home

“The School Board took no action on this [third] study,” the memo says.

For the current fiscal year, Weidner said, the district was using the approximately

\$5 million remaining in the impact fees fund to acquire land in North Port for future school sites and to construct a South County school bus depot.

The cost of the latter, he said, would be about \$1.3 million.



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## SWALLOWED WHOLE

*The Sarasota City Commission sits in regular session. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **CITY COMMISSION VOTES TO RAID THE CLEAN ENERGY FUND TO SUPPLEMENT THE GENERAL FUND.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

Sarasota City Commissioner Willie Shaw called them “gloomers,” the glass-half-empty people who don’t believe the future will be better. The “gloomers” won Monday Sept. 17, when they repealed a hard-wrought concession from Florida Power & Light.

The concession said any amount of FP&L’s 6% franchise fee (paid by all electricity users) beyond \$5 million per year would go into a fund to help city residents become more efficient energy users. Because consumption is down at present, there is no money in the Clean Energy Fund.

The “gloomers” believed the city needs every stitch of revenue possible in the future, and they wanted this money diverted back into the general fund. The proposal brought 13 people to the microphone, with varying levels of passion.

“We are in dire need to leadership that goes beyond swinging the budget ax,” said Johannes Werner. “This is a symbolic issue, a sign of hope the city is moving in the right direction.”

“This is penny-smart and dollar-stupid,” said Jennifer Ahern-Koch. “The deal was



negotiated and agreed upon. It should be respected.”

“I hate being Doctor Doom,” said City Finance Director Chris Lyons. “We project a \$7 million deficit at the end of Fiscal Year 2014. Changes coming from Tallahassee will only make this worse. Where will the revenue come from?”

The Clean Energy Fund by 2022 is projected to generate about \$1.5 million. “That’s almost 10% of the budget deficit [projected for that year],” said Commissioner Terry Turner. “The way we solve this problem

is with some tax increases, further cuts in pensions and health care benefits, and go after a myriad of small programs and start now. If we wait until 2022, it’s not solvable.”

Commissioner Paul Caragiulo, who had supported killing the fund in earlier budget deliberations, changed his vote Monday. “If we stop thinking like dinosaurs, perhaps we won’t go extinct. I won’t support this,” he said.

The measure passed 3-2, with Shaw and Caragiulo in the minority.



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## IN PUBLIC SERVICE

*Randall Reid Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **SARASOTA COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR RANDALL REID TALKS ABOUT HIS STEWARDSHIP OF A PREMIER COUNTY IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

When Randall Reid arrived at work early in the morning of Jan. 23 — his first day as the new Sarasota County administrator — he found a lot of empty offices, he told *The Sarasota News Leader* during an interview in late August.

People had retired or moved on to other jobs. Ten employees had left in the wake of the Procurement Department scandal that had erupted in the spring of 2011 — the upheaval that ultimately also cost former County Administrator Jim Ley his job.

“So when I got here,” Reid said, “it was Bill and I.”

“Bill” is Deputy County Administrator Bill Little, who will be retiring in February.

“What I was doing was kind of forensic,” Reid said: “Well, here’s an outline of a body on a floor. Who was here and what did he do and is anybody doing it?”

He added, “Some days, I was on 30-minute schedules. I know to some people it’s been more like a doctor’s office. You’ll be sitting here and the door will open and Dianne will stick her head in” to say the next person is waiting.

(Dianne is Dianne Robertson, Reid’s executive assistant. He calls her “a real blessing,”



as she has been in her position for the past 24 years.)

“So what I’m doing is replacing people,” Reid said, noting that he had been through five versions of the county organizational charts in his first seven months on the job.

And he has strived to be very transparent in the changes he has been making, Reid said, out of respect for the people who remained on staff.

“I have to try to be sure staff’s not dropped through the crack. ... We have good people [here].”

## THE ROAD TO SARASOTA

When he seated himself before the Sarasota County Commission in November as a finalist to be county administrator, Reid was able to reflect on more than 36 years of experience in public service — from his first position working for the city manager of Vandalia, Ohio, to the one he had held since 1999, county manager of Alachua County.

In fact, Reid told the five commissioners, he had sought the Sarasota job once before — only to lose out to Jim Ley.

When he moved to Florida in 1987, to take the job of city manager in Titusville, Reid said, he became very active in the League of Cities. That’s why one face

on the Sarasota County Commission was already quite familiar to him.

Reid met Commissioner Nora Patterson when she was serving on the Sarasota City Commission. As his local government career has matured in the state of Florida, he said, he’s seen many elected municipal officials move on to elected county positions.

“Nora’s an example of one of those,” he points out.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPERTISE

In his typically low-key manner, Reid explained, “I have a pretty good understanding not only of cities but also of counties.”

After leaving Titusville, Reid served as deputy/acting county administrator in Martin County from 1994 to 1999.

“I actually prefer counties,” he said. “I like that city managers have some more direct authority than county managers do, because I have constitutional officers [the sheriff and the clerk of court, for example], but it’s broader [authority at the county level]. I like the scale of county government.

It’s never boring. I can go from a human service issue to a public safety issue. I can experience a lot in one day.”

Asked about his tendency to characterize Sarasota County as “a premier county,” Reid explained that when he was working

**I like the scale of county government. It’s never boring. I can go from a human service issue to a public safety issue. I can experience a lot in one day.**

*Randall Reid,  
Sarasota County Administrator*



in Martin County, he learned that it and Sarasota County were considered mirrors of each other, on their respective coasts. Each has an urban service boundary and strong ethics regarding environmental and growth-management issues, for example, he said. Both also have had considerable resources to use in getting things done.

Additionally, he said, "If you look at [the] counties that have been innovative, using different technologies in different areas ... some in economic development, a lot in environment, a lot in resource protection," Sarasota has been among the leaders.

"So I was intimately aware of Sarasota County," Reid says. "I have always thought that this was one of the nicest places to live in the state."

Still, he said, it worked out for the best for him and his family that Jim Ley was hired all those years ago in Sarasota County and he won the Alachua County job.

He had three children getting ready to go to college, and Alachua has a strong university system. "My family stayed intact four years longer than most families do," he added. "[My children] went away to college, but I beat them there."

In fact, he said, the announcement about his hiring in Alachua County came one week before his daughter arrived in Gainesville for college.

Asked about his interest in applying for the Sarasota job again as the County Commission and Interim County Administra-



*Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson and County Administrator Randall Reid prepare for the start of a regular commission meeting this month. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



tor Terry Lewis were trying to repair the damage of the procurement scandal, Reid said, "I'm a public servant at heart. ... A doctor goes where there are sick people. ... This community was a premier community with a premier government that was suffering probably the worst time it's had in decades."

Reid also concedes that after 12 years in the same place, he was interested in new challenges — and he felt he would be leaving good staff behind in Alachua County, including Richard Drummond, who became manager after Reid left.

Reid hired Drummond away from Jim Ley in 2000, he pointed out.

Drummond had served as Sarasota County's manager of long-range planning in its Growth Management Business Center.

## A NEW ADVENTURE

While Reid's biggest challenge has been overcoming credibility and other issues related to the procurement scandal, Reid said he has had a couple of pleasant surprises in his new post.

For example: "The wealth and philanthropy in the community. ... I've had people approach me who are willing to contribute, to do things, which is nice."

Second, he was surprised by what he calls the county's "very robust systems," including its modern computer and accounting systems. "There's a lot of in-house capacity ... that's very positive," he said.

"But government is people," he pointed out. "You've got to have the right people in the right jobs."

## BEYOND THE DESK

Asked his favorite feature of Sarasota County, Reid smiled and talked of the beauty of the both the natural and urban settings. "I really enjoy the drive from Longboat Key across the [Ringling] causeway into downtown. It's a classic Florida feel."

For a different perspective, he said, he enjoys sitting at Snook Haven, "looking out at the Myakka River," where he experiences an "Old Florida" atmosphere.

Outside the office, Reid is a sports buff and a musician.

In high school, he was on the tennis team and played concert tuba. Having missed out football — after all, you can't do band and be on the football team at the same time, he pointed out — he opted for contact sports in college. Instead of football, though, he went out for rugby.

Through that experience, he said, "I met a lot of people who were international students."

It's not surprising, then, to have him confess that when he and his wife visit their daughter in Australia, he loves to attend rugby games. "My favorite team is the New Zealand All Blacks," he said.

On their most recent trip to Sydney, this summer, Reid also had the opportunity to check out the rowing facility used for the 2000 Olympics. That made him all the more eager to see the completion of the complex



at Nathan Benderson Park, he said, which already has been predicted to be among the top three in the world.

Reid also talks of the big economic impact sports tourism already is having in Sarasota County, adding, "My mission statement is, 'Creating respect for people and place.'" Sports tourism "teaches people about place," he said, and it encourages families to enjoy activities together.

## THE HEART OF THE MAN

As he continues to build his staff and build upon the county's strengths, Reid keeps a focus on the core values he has constructed for himself.

"I think a person's judged by what their employees say about them and what their children say about them," he said. "The best thing that I've always found is to let people get to know who you are. So when I'm

not in the room, people can say, 'No, I don't think he'd do that,'" for example.

He voices pride in winning approval from the County Commission for a one-time, lump-sum payment in the new fiscal year for staff members who have not had raises in several years.

"You've got to speak up for your employees," he pointed out.

Workers come "in all different shapes and flavors," he added, but he wants them to know he respects them "as humans and ... as public servants."

As the county administrator, he views his primary role as one of stewardship. "Everybody doesn't get this chance. ... It's a privilege to serve."

And that, he says, is why he signs all his correspondence, "in public service, Randall Reid."



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# TOURIST TAX TRIUMPH



The Baltimore Orioles star center fielder, Adam Jones, gets a hit against the Detroit Tigers at Ed Smith Stadium in March. Sarasota County tourism promotions in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area lure thousands of fans to Sarasota for spring training games. Photo by Norman Schimmel

## TOURISM REMAINS BRIGHTEST SPOT IN COUNTY'S ECONOMY, WITH TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX REVENUE 20% HIGHER THAN PROJECTED

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

Running 20.1% above what Sarasota County finance planning officials had projected for the year, the tourist development tax revenue remains the brightest line item in the latest county revenue report.

Just for the month of August, the tourist tax revenue was 39.8% above the level staff had projected.

After what she called the “red-hot summer” of 2011 — with the No. 1 Siesta Public Beach ranking bestowed by Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman of Florida International University — “our concern was that there was going to be a dip” this summer, Visit Sara-

sota County President Haley told *The Sarasota News Leader*.

“We really pushed everyone [in the office] to knock themselves out” in promoting the county, Haley added.

That work has been paying off.

In a Sept. 12 email to the County Commission, Haley pointed out that the July TDT revenue figure — the latest available — was “slightly more than we collected in July last year.”

She added, “This is tremendous news because last July was our best per penny col-



lection ever for the month of July,” coming on the heels of the late-May announcement by Leatherman, aka Dr. Beach.

For July, the TDT revenue totaled \$1,072,551, Haley reported, with late collection reports added in to the figure already released by the Sarasota County Tax Collector’s Office.

Not only did her staff include more TV advertising into its publicity mix for the summer, but it also used billboards, Haley told the Sarasota News Leader. “We had every media possible,” she said, including radio and print advertising.

The billboards promoting Sarasota County went up along Interstate 75 as far north as

Hillsborough and Pasco counties, she said, and as far south as Brandon.

Except for the gasoline tax figures, all the county’s revenue numbers in the August report were positive. All major revenues were up 8.1% for August and 5.3% year-to-date over what the financial planning staff had projected. The total cash receipts were listed at \$90,180,634 through August.

The county’s fiscal year ends on Sept. 30.

Among the line items, the half-cent sales tax revenue was up 7% for the fiscal year through August, compared to what had been projected.

For the fiscal year through July — the latest month for which figures were available

## SARASOTA COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX

### COLLECTIONS BY LOCATION

\*Collections through 8/31/2012

	CONSOLIDATED	LONGBOAT KEY	NORTH PORT	SARASOTA	SARASOTA COUNTY	SIESTA KEY	VENICE	TOTAL
October 2011	11,704.03	83,089.80	2,582.67	270,444.14	93,719.35	170,591.88	31,002.15	663,134.02
November 2011	21,123.03	92,089.08	2,585.36	292,244.19	103,090.65	173,989.96	41,791.78	726,914.05
December 2011	32,111.93	119,773.09	3,676.46	255,869.31	148,502.23	237,176.55	54,990.10	852,099.67
January 2012	103,036.24	148,890.67	5,960.04	385,568.94	246,439.99	389,348.72	243,328.78	1,522,573.38
February 2012	78,293.45	203,858.99	8,018.60	481,311.65	324,390.28	634,029.17	143,565.16	1,873,467.30
March 2012	64,165.67	293,924.98	14,482.74	692,470.36	463,974.02	828,705.00	169,896.82	2,527,619.59
April 2012	31,310.62	171,331.04	4,500.19	473,005.07	199,826.70	442,263.59	67,922.61	1,390,159.82
May 2012	15,979.55	120,640.36	3,126.55	322,106.78	151,307.35	246,603.89	41,611.92	901,376.40
June 2012	22,702.61	118,355.70	2,958.25	320,526.85	177,462.99	376,809.28	42,219.21	1,061,034.89
July 2012	18,354.19	108,958.32	2,835.49	345,544.84	176,237.91	358,796.41	46,824.28	1,057,551.44
August 2012								
September 2012								
Grand Totals	398,781.32	1,460,912.03	50,726.35	3,839,092.13	2,084,951.47	3,858,314.45	883,152.81	12,575,930.56
Percentage of Total (%)	3.17%	11.62%	0.40%	30.53%	16.58%	30.68%	7.02%	100.00%

Note: All figures are subject to change following audit and enforcement actions.

*The latest Sarasota County tourist development tax revenue report by location shows Siesta Key once again has edged out the city of Sarasota by percentage of collections.*



— utility revenues were up 7.6% over projections.

Gas tax revenue was down 4% for the fiscal year through August. Budget projections had put the total at about \$15.1 million, but collections were about \$14.5 million.

“There’s some good news there, fortunately,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta said during the board’s Sept. 11 regular meeting, as he and his fellow commissioners perused the figures.

In an email to the commissioners, Steven Botelho, the county’s chief financial planning officer, also noted, “We remain slightly higher with our overall expenditures” — 8% — compared to the same point in the county’s fiscal year in 2011.

Referring to that comment, Commissioner Nora Patterson said, “If the expenditures are up, it may be that we have chosen to do some additional things to benefit folks.”

## ‘ELECTRIC’ VENUE

In her Sept. 12 email to the County Commission, Haley also noted the impact the exceptionally good seasons of two Major League Baseball teams was having on her promotions.

“Thanks to the agreement between Sarasota County Government and the Baltimore Orioles,” she wrote, “we have the use of a suite for both the Washington Nationals and the Baltimore Orioles.”

She had just returned from a visit to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area,

she noted, where she and staff had entertained “clients in two cities in the grip of major baseball fever, with both teams in first place. We entertained rowing coaches, baseball tournament operators, soccer tournament owners and travel agents.”

She added that fans who attended the “thrilling Orioles versus [New York] Yankees game” on Sept. 8 “received a Sarasota lunch bag at the gate and were rewarded with an Orioles victory.”

Moreover, Haley wrote, Sarasota advertisements behind home plate at Camden Field were displayed for an inning during each of the televised games of that Orioles-Yankees series.

Haley told the News Leader she and her staff have made use of those suites for the past three years, “but, I have to say, [it was] a completely different atmosphere this time. ... It was electric.”

## SIESTA EDGES AHEAD

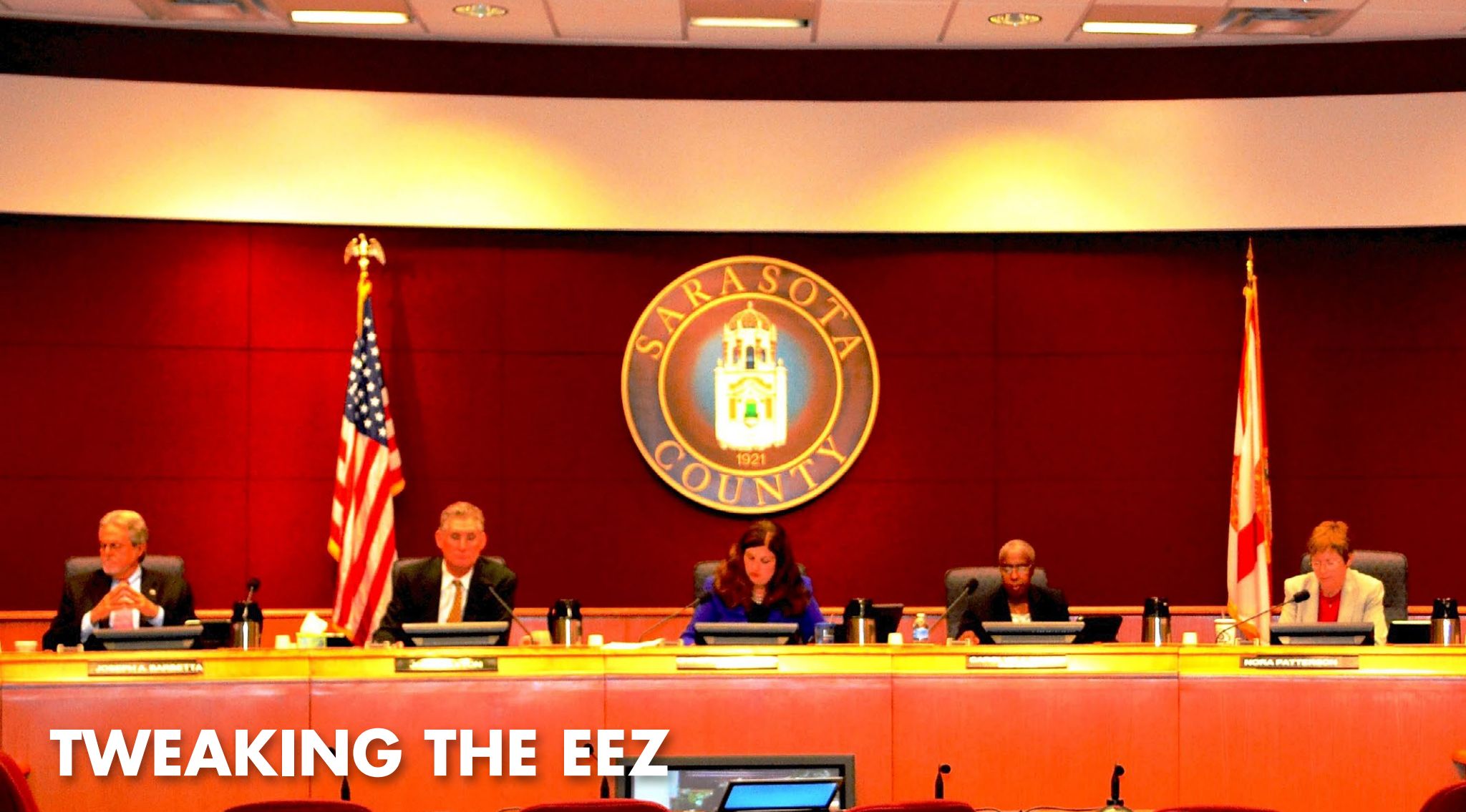
In the breakdown of the county’s tourist development tax collections by location, Siesta Key and the city of Sarasota have remained close over the summer. The July figures once again put Siesta ahead.

According to the figures provided by the Tax Collector’s Office, Siesta had 30.68% of the collections through July 31 — \$3,858,314.45 — compared to 30.53% for the city of Sarasota — \$3,839,092.13.

For a detailed look at the collections by location, see the accompanying table.







The Sarasota County Commission has been addressing EEZ Pilot Program issues over the past year.  
Photo by Norman Schimmel

## REBRANDING TO REFLECT NEW, LESS GEOGRAPHICALLY STRICT PLAN

By Cooper Levey-Baker  
*Associate Editor*

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 geo-

graphic 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. According to Damschroder, that change was driven by the state Legislature, which last year broadened the pilot program's operations.

During a regular meeting last week, the County Commission debated some of the specifics of the tax breaks it will offer, focusing specifically on whether companies should receive benefits for hiring workers who (a) live just in the original Energy Economic Zone, (b) live within any county enterprise zone or (c) live within any regional enterprise zone.

Commissioner Jon Thaxton argued for the strictest interpretation, saying the original legislation was intended to discourage long commutes. The [2009 law](#) that created the pilot program cited "discouraging sprawl and developing energy-efficient land use

## State Enterprise Zones



**FY2011 –  
7,559 new  
businesses**

*A Sarasota County staff PowerPoint presentation from Feb. 8 includes this map of enterprise zones throughout the state of Florida. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



patterns and greenhouse gas reduction strategies” as a goal. And, according to a “Community Outreach” PowerPoint presentation provided by Damschroder, one of the state’s “Application Criteria” is that the county’s plan “Reduces reliance on automobiles.”

“Rewarding long-distance commutes is completely the opposite of what this was intended for,” Thaxton argued Sept. 12. “It’s explicit that this is designed to reduce trip lengths.”

Commissioner Christine Robinson pushed back, saying the most restrictive option would discourage applicable businesses from hiring workers in, for example, North Port. Commissioner Joe Barbetta spoke up for the regional idea, saying any limitations on the program might reduce the county’s ability to attract top-tier businesses.

The commission eventually voted to approve the countywide version of the tax rebate. Theoretically, that means a business located along South River Road in Englewood is eligible for the tax incentive if it employs someone who lives in Newtown.

After their vote, the commissioners heard from [Jeff Maultsby](#), the manager of business and economic development for the county, who told them he plans to bring the rebranding proposal back to them at a future meeting. He said the county has already received state approval to make a change.

Damschroder says the goals of the new plan are “to incentivize businesses to be sustainable” and “to establish businesses that themselves can be sustainable,” and it needs a new name to reflect those ambitions.

When asked about worries that the program might become so open-ended that it fails to support the kinds of green tech businesses it was created to help, Damschroder says the rules remain “pretty strict.” Aside from the geographic restrictions, the companies “have to be a clean technology business or a green business that does industrial manufacturing or research and development,” she says. “So a retail store couldn’t apply; a restaurant couldn’t apply.”

And all those requirements are “just to be eligible for the program,” she stresses.

When companies begin applying for the incentives, they all will be vetted and come before the County Commission for approval.

Damschroder has already offered two community workshops for local residents and business owners interested in the program. A third is scheduled from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 27, at North Port City Hall. Video of the first workshop will be available on the county website soon.







# CHARTER CHANGERS

*One of the proposed amendments to the City of Sarasota's charter would necessitate a super-majority vote of the City Commission to approve a lease of any city property for more than 10 years. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **ONE SARASOTA CITY CHARTER AMENDMENT ON THE NOV. 6 BALLOT CALLS FOR 'SUPER-MAJORITY' VOTES OF THE CITY COMMISSION TO ACHIEVE CHANGE IN TWO TYPES OF SCENARIOS.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

*Editor's note: There are seven weeks until the Nov. 6 election and seven amendments proposed for the City of Sarasota's charter. Each week until Election Day, The Sarasota News Leader will examine an amendment.*

The seven amendments to the city charter are not numbered or lettered. There is no “shorthand” way to remember the amendment except by its title and summary. But cutting through the legalese finds each one of the amendments has a unique feature that will allow voters to recognize it on the ballot.

Only one amendment references a “super-majority” of four city commissioners out of the five. Like many charter amendments over the years, its genesis lies in a hot political topic of the day.

In this case, the Sarasota city commissioners, by a bare 3-2 vote, had approved a 30-year lease extension for a bayfront marina and restaurant downtown. The lease was not up for renewal anytime soon. When the 30 years was added to the time remaining on the existing agreement, the lease on the prime city-owned land was good until the mid-2040s.



Some citizens who were outraged suggested the property owner had waited until he was confident of three votes on the commission before asking for the lease extension, a legislative version of “judge shopping.”

A vote in favor of the super-majority amendment would require the affirmative vote of at least four city commissioners to approve any lease of city property for longer than 10 years.

The amendment also requires a super-majority to approve any change to city pension plans which increases “the actuarially accrued liability of the plan ....” In today’s environment, this provision takes on added weight. Six of the seven amendments were crafted two years ago, when city pensions were just starting to enter a crisis stage.

Today the “unfunded liability” of the city’s three pension plans – for firefighters, police officers and general employees – could top \$100 million. City commissioners are already talking about raising property taxes to cover the amount.

The amendment’s language is a bit ambiguous, because the City Commission does not make changes in pension plans. Three independent pension boards administer those plans. However, the commissioners are responsible for making sure the plans are sufficiently funded.

The language reads: “The affirmative vote of four (4) city commissioners shall be required to approve any change in the terms

of the city’s pension plan which has the effect of increasing the actuarially accrued liability of the plan, as calculated by the plan’s actuary.”

The amendment was written before city pensions began to receive serious scrutiny from commissioners, pension boards, attorneys and rating agencies. For example, the amendment says, “pension plan” when in reality, the city has three pension plans.

On Monday, Sept. 17, the City Commission passed a resolution “recommending” the three independent pension boards consider reducing their projected rates of return (which haven’t been achieved for several years), which will increase the plans’ unfunded liabilities.

The commission vote satisfied the terms of the proposed charter amendment, passing 4-1, with Commissioner Paul Caragiulo in the minority.

Some of the proposed charter amendments have single topics. Others, like this “super majority” amendment cover two or more topics. Voters who favor stricter control of long-term leases and a higher standard of approval for pension changes will favor this amendment.

Voters who think a regular 3-2 majority is sufficient for approval of any lease longer than 10 years, or approval of changes to city pension plans, will vote against this amendment.





# PAINT WITH YOUR CHALK FESTIVAL?



*The annual Chalk Festival draws tens of thousands of people to Burns Square every fall. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## PROPOSAL FOR USE OF PAINT IN SOME FESTIVAL ARTWORK INCITES CITY CONCERNS.

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

The annual Chalk Festival on and around Pineapple Avenue in Burns Square is now a major tourist destination, and the 2012 version could prove bigger and better than ever.

The theme this year is “Circus,” and it will even feature a live monkey armed with chalk.

The festival will also feature artists armed with paint, and that has city officials in a tizzy. When Denise Kowal, founder and organizer of the event, told the City Commission on Sept. 17 that at least one artist

is planning on using paint on the street, hackles went up.

“This is the first time I’m hearing about paint,” said Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown.

Kowal was asking the city to hold off pressure-washing the artistic renderings on the street for a while after the festival ends. “Maybe keep it up during [tourist] season,” she suggested. “Some of it would last for nine months, but we want a very clean street before the next festival so we would want to pressure-clean it after six months.”

She then mentioned in passing that the premier chalk street artist in the world – Kurt Wenner – planned on using some paint in his piece. “It would be our responsibility



to remove it,” said Kowal. “But if we have rain, we want to be able to fix it quickly.”

She promised the artist would use an environmentally benign paint, and that it would be removed without being flushed into the gutters and eventually the bay.

Kowal said artists will come from Florida and across the United States as well as from Canada, Italy, Germany, France, Peru, Japan, Spain and other countries.

In her presentation, Kowal also noted that two changes are being made to the festival “rules” this year. No pets will be allowed because the crowds are becoming dense, and pedestrian traffic will be one-way.

The festival encompasses not only Pineapple from Ringling to Orange Avenue, but also several side streets.

Kowal additionally asked the commission to waive several fees “that run between \$3,000 and \$5,000 each year” as the city’s donation to the festival. And the organizers have proposed two blocks on South Pineapple be closed for 10 days to allow more people to see the art.

Commissioners asked the Chalk Festival organizers to appear before them again on Oct. 1, after working through several issues – paint, road closure, etc. – with city staffers.



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WELCOME TO

# CITY OF SARASOTA FLORIDA

## BACK FROM LIMBO

*City of Sarasota staff has unveiled new signage for a wayfinding project.*

### THE CITY OF SARASOTA HAS RESURRECTED A PROJECT TO HELP VISITORS AND NEWCOMERS FIND THEIR WAY TO AN ARRAY OF DESTINATIONS.

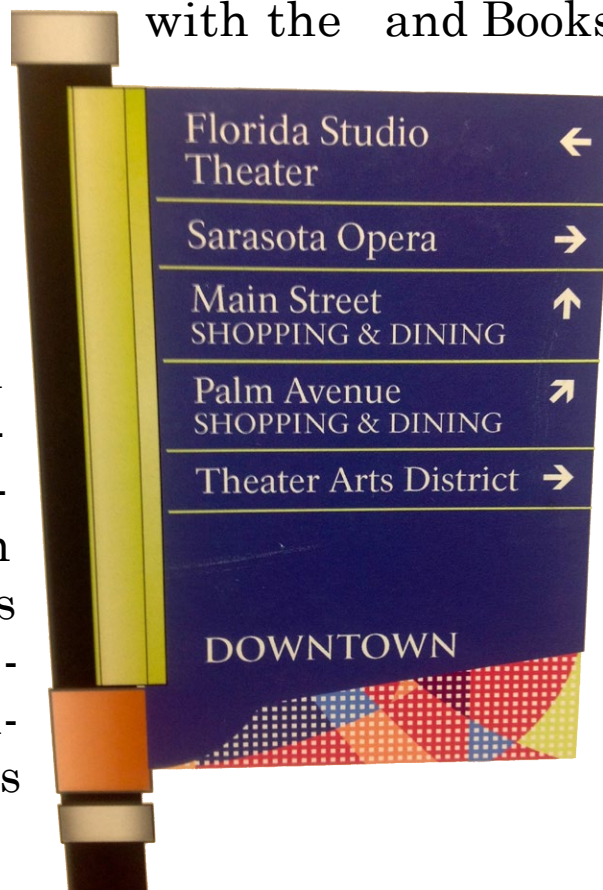
By Stan Zimmerman  
*City Editor*

“It’s not just a bunch of signs. It’s a program, a system; it’s a brand,” said Clifford Smith, a senior planner with the City of Sarasota.

Whatever it is, it is called “wayfinding.”

For more than a decade, the city has grappled with finding a way to help visitors and other newcomers find the best things in town. “It’s not intended as a directory or as advertising,” Smith told the Downtown Improvement District’s

board of directors on Tuesday, Sept. 18. “It will never say, ‘This way to Sarasota News and Books.’”



Just as that Main Street and Palm Avenue landmark disappeared, so did wayfinding. In 2007, the City Commission put the plan on hiatus. It was too expensive, the commissioners said at the time.

But unlike the bookstore, the concept of wayfinding refused to disappear. In 2009, the City Commission brought it back up, and even approved an aesthetic



design. The Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board recommended funding the project, because many of the destinations to be “way-found” are in downtown Sarasota.

City commissioners approved \$832,000 for phase one of the project, Smith said. He was briefing the DID as a dress rehearsal for a formal presentation to the City Commission in late September or early October.

“Wayfinding informs people about things they don’t know about,” said Smith.

He pointed to the years-long effort it took to get a sign on Interstate 75 saying, “Next Exit: Historic Downtown District.”

“Before that sign, nobody driving on the interstate knew there was a historic downtown here,” he said.

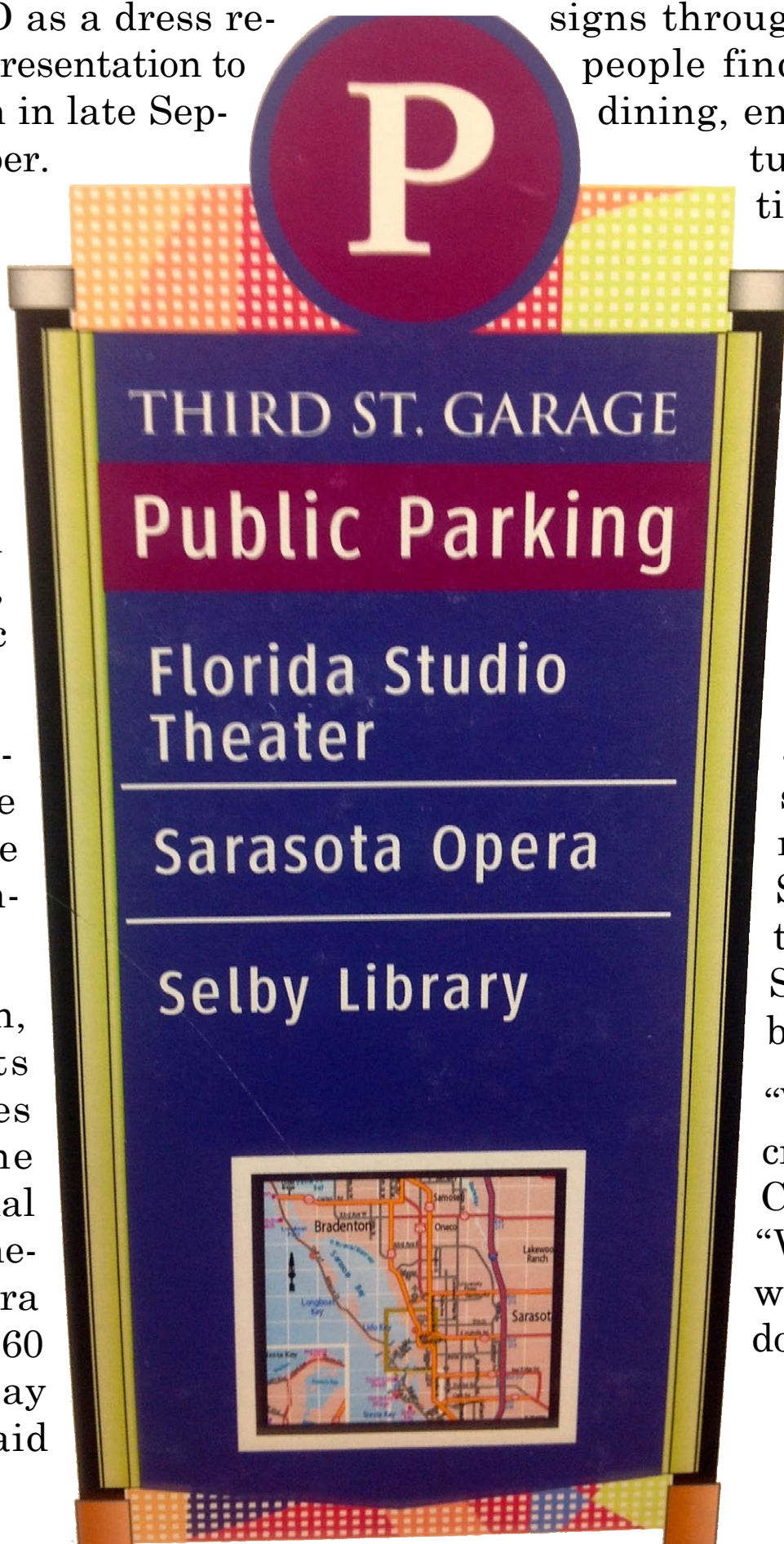
In a similar fashion, once a visitor gets downtown, how does the person find the multitude of individual destinations? “The theater district, the opera — this will give them 60 destinations they may not know about,” said Smith.

The first hint of wayfinding will appear on Fruitville Road, one of the entry arteries for visitors arriving in the county. A large “Welcome” sign will greet them and give them their first taste of the design for the markers they can spot to learn more.

The program will eventually feature 360 signs throughout the city to help people find parking, shopping, dining, entertainment and cultural and scientific destinations. “All of them will meet [Florida Department of Transportation] and federal highway specifications,” Smith told the DID.

In a prior incarnation of the wayfinding project, the DID promised to pay to help erect a downtown kiosk to serve as a specific directory for businesses. Such a kiosk is not in the current plan, but Smith indicated it could be included.

“We put \$49,000 in escrow for that,” said DID Chairman Ernie Ritz. “We still don’t know what they’re going to do.”





# BIG RETURN ON INVESTMENT



*Film companies are shooting in Sarasota County far more often than once in a blue moon.  
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **FOR EVERY \$1 IN INCENTIVES FROM SARASOTA COUNTY, FILM COMPANIES ARE SPENDING ABOUT \$22 IN THE COMMUNITY**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Sarasota County has realized a return on investment of \$21.80 for every dollar it has provided as incentive money for film production, Jeanne Corcoran, the director of the county's Film & Entertainment Office, told the County Commission last week.

"So we've been very satisfied with how this project has worked out," Corcoran added during remarks before the commission on Sept. 11.

Potentially the latest "feather in the cap" for her office, she reported, has been an expression of interest in the county by the president and CEO of Bollywood Holly-

wood, "the leading producer and distributor of major Bollywood movies that are huge globally," Corcoran said.

"Because of the incentive, he became interested in what we had to sell," she pointed out.

The commissioners voted unanimously on Sept. 11 to allocate an extra \$178,590 to the incentive fund — replenishing it to the original amount of \$250,000.

The county has provided a total of \$428,590 to the Sarasota County Film and Entertainment Industry Incentive Program since it was established on Sept. 15, 2010, Eliza-



beth “Lisa” Damschroder with the finance office in the Planning Services Department told the commissioners prior to Corcoran’s presentation.

A staff memo, dated Sept. 11, says the commission has reimbursed several projects that have spent more than \$2 million each in the county, equating to a return on investment of 2,390%.

Referring to the Bollywood Hollywood CEO, Corcoran noted that while she had spoken with him on the phone a few times over the past couple of years, a person on her office’s advisory panel who knew him was the link that led to his visit to the county just the previous week.

Not only did county staff arrange for a VIP reception for him, Corcoran said, but staff arranged for him to tour the area by car and by yacht, “and he is very interested in bringing some projects here. He has two feature films in development,” as well as four TV series and some new media projects, she said.

“It’s a very promising jigsaw puzzle of pieces,” Corcoran added.

To date, 10 projects have applied for, or are in the process of being paid from, the incentive program, she said. “Our incentive rebate program is very selective about what it rebates cash on,” she pointed out.

Four new projects in the process of consideration for rebates, Corcoran said, were “very diverse.”

They ranged from an independent film comedy called “Attorney at Low,” to a six-month-long multi-media project that incorporated commercials and web broadcasting, to “[Spring Breakers](#)” — a film starring James Franco, Selena Gomez and Vanessa Hudgens — to production work focused on a skin-care product

The only reason the “Spring Breakers” crew considered shooting in Sarasota, she added, was because of the incentive program. The original plan for its production work called for filming in the Tampa Bay region, she said, but the company ended up spending about \$250,000 in Sarasota County.

The movie “may not be Disney-esque,” Corcoran noted, “but it’s still going to have a huge audience, and it’s going to showcase the community very well as a great, fun, exciting place for young people.”

One project that was pending for the incentive program, she added, was an MTV show. At \$1 million, Corcoran said, it had the single biggest budget for a production shot in Sarasota County since her office had been open over the past five years.

“MTV came in under the radar ... and did a reality show,” she said. “It’ll be very interesting to see how much of the community is recognizable, or if [the show is] all focused around the participants ... Either way, we’re glad to get that million dollars.”

“Absolutely,” responded Commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson.



Corcoran then noted that Toyota representatives had been in the county about two weeks earlier, shooting commercials on the Ringling Causeway and, reportedly, at Myakka River State Park. "They spent a quarter of a million dollars," Corcoran added.

Noting that she had visited a set in North Port last year when the film "Free Ride," starring Anna Paquin of "True Blood" fame, was shooting, Robinson said she had found it intriguing to see how much a movie crew could consume.

"They do consume a lot," Corcoran agreed, including "raiding 7-11s for bottled water, sunscreen and all the twine, to tie down equipment."

Businesses such as shoe stores and thrift shops also reap dollars from the film companies, Corcoran said.

"Hardware stores," Commissioner Jon Thaxton interjected.

"It really reaches into a lot of layers in the community," Corcoran said.

[As for the Paquin film](#), Corcoran said that experience had been responsible in a large way for leading a veteran husband-and-wife film production team to relocate from Michigan to North Port.

"Jeanne's a great cheerleader for Sarasota County throughout the country," Commissioner Joe Barbetta said.

"This has been one of the ... less-talked-about incentive programs that we've had," Thaxton said, "but it just continues to grow ..."

Thaxton made the motion to approve the replenishment of the incentive pool, with Barbetta seconding the motion.



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## LET THERE BE LIGHT

*Although relatively easy to see in the daytime, many of Siesta Village's crosswalks — and people using them — are hard to spot at night. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **NEXT WEEK, THE COUNTY COMMISSION IS EXPECTED TO DISCUSS THE LATEST COST ESTIMATE FOR INSTALLING LED LIGHTING AT SIESTA VILLAGE CROSSWALKS.**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Next week, it appears likely the Sarasota County Commission once again will tackle the issue of better illumination for crosswalks in Siesta Village.

A Sept. 13 memo to the commission from James K. Harriott Jr., director of the county's Public Works Department, recommends the commission direct staff to prepare a bid packet "for the procurement and installation of 14 decorative LED bollards at the 7 identified crosswalk locations" in the Village.

The memo adds that staff estimates the cost of each bollard at \$750, with an extra \$1,500 per installation, for a total of about \$31,500.

In the memo, Harriott also sums up the lighting demonstrations conducted by two firms this summer, for which representatives of Siesta organizations and county staff gathered.

The proposal for better crosswalk illumination originated during the January meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association. Peter van Roekens, the Terrace East representa-



tive to the SKVA and vice president of the Siesta Key Association, talked of the difficulty drivers — especially older ones — experience in trying to spot pedestrians in the crosswalks, with some areas of the Village darker at night than others.

Van Roekens called the situation a dangerous one.

County Commissioner Nora Patterson brought the matter to the attention of her fellow board members, who agreed to allow staff to explore options. When apprised during the spring of the potential cost of bollards, the commissioners asked staff to work with representatives of the Siesta organizations to determine the best way to proceed.

Contacted this week by The Sarasota News Leader about the Sept. 13 Harriott memo, Van Roekens said he had received a copy of Harriott's memo from Ryan Montague, the county Mobility/Traffic office staff member who coordinated the lighting demonstrations in June and July.

Van Roekens was traveling out of the country, he wrote in an email, and looked forward to talking with Montague upon his return, "to get a better understanding of the installation costs."

Van Roekens added, "Overall I am very happy that the County is moving forward with this critical safety issue."

The County Commission is scheduled to meet both Sept. 25 and Sept. 26 in its chambers at the Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota. The News Leader was unsuccessful in try-

ing to reach Commissioner Nora Patterson, who represents Siesta Key on the board, to learn with certainty whether she planned to bring up the memo for discussion during commissioner comments at one of those meetings. Patterson was out of town, attending a Florida Association of Counties conference through Sept. 21, according to her assistant.

Mark Smith, chairman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, told the News Leader he understood the matter would be included on the Sept. 25 agenda. Smith and Russell Matthes, president of the SKVA, also participated in the lighting demonstrations.

Harriott further noted in his memo that the representatives of the Siesta organizations had requested placement of the bollards in the center of each crosswalk ramp, at the edge of the red Americans with Disabilities pad.

"Based on current best practice guidelines," he added, "staff would recommend that the bollards be placed at the outside edge of the crosswalks angled slightly inward. The specific location of each bollard will have to be evaluated on a site-by-site basis as each crosswalk is configured differently."

Although county staff had tried to arrange demonstrations with three different lighting vendors during the summer, one of the companies contacted was unable to participate because of scheduling conflicts, Harriott wrote in the memo.

Of the other two — Sunovia, located in Sarasota, and JAG Lighting, located in Orlando — Sunovia had the product that most



appealed to the Siesta representatives, according to interviews conducted by the News Leader. However, Tom Maroney, general manager of business operations in the Public Works Department, pointed out to the News Leader that, according to county policy, the specifications would have to be drawn up and put out for formal bid.

Harriott cited the following crosswalk locations for the installation of the bollards:

- 5250 Ocean Blvd., between the Daiquiri Deck and Gilligan’s Island Bar and Grill
- 5218 Ocean Blvd., between JoTo’s Japanese Steakhouse and Hanna Plaza

- 5202 Ocean Blvd., between Key Corners Plaza and the Village Gazebo
- 5148 Ocean Blvd., between The Hub Baja Grill and the Beach Club
- 5124 Ocean Blvd., between Siesta Plaza and Coldwell Banker
- 5124 Ocean Blvd., between Siesta Plaza and Siesta Center
- 5100 Ocean Blvd., between the Michael Saunders & Co. office and Siesta Center



# GET TO KNOW US



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# A.K.A. HELP





## SAFE PASSAGE

*Dr. Mike Sullivan (right) points out a mislabeled condominium complex on an FDOT map as he speaks with Richard Howard (left), the project manager, and Jay Winter, the engineer of record. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

### **MAJORITY OF SIESTA KEY RESIDENTS ATTENDING SEPT. 17 OPEN HOUSE ON NEW PEDESTRIAN CROSSWALKS VOICE APPROVAL OF THE PLANS**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson's pronouncement, "Looks good," was the view of the majority of Siesta Key residents who attended an open house on Sept. 17 to take a look at final plans for the construction of six pedestrian crosswalks on an approximately 1-mile section of Midnight Pass Road.

The \$198,000 Florida Department of Transportation project is set to get under way Sept. 24. The work is expected to take 45 days, though it will not be continuous, FDOT consultant Brian Bollas, planning

and environmental manager for Parsons Brinckerhoff, has reported.

The bulk of the work — construction of the bases for 12 signs that will feature flashing beacons — should take only about two weeks, Bollas said.

At the same time, the asphalt in the six crosswalk locations will be prepared for the layering of thermoplastic striping. The asphalt will have to cure out over a period of about 30 days, he told *The Sarasota News Leader*, before the plastic can be put down.







Subsequent to that meeting, FDOT sent two surveys to the owners of condos in the 34 complexes along that stretch of Midnight Pass Road.

The survey results showed that a majority of respondents wanted painted crosswalks, instead of raised crosswalks, with no paddle signs in the centers of those crosswalks to warn drivers to be alert to pedestrians.

Instead, people planning to use the crosswalks will be able to activate the flashing-beacon signage on either side of each crosswalk.

## MAP INACCURACIES CITED

One resident who attended the Sept. 17 open house at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church on Midnight Pass Road did complain to the project staff that the map showing the crosswalk locations was not entirely correct.

Dr. Mike Sullivan said the condominium complex labeled “Excelsior” on the beach side of the road was actually Crystal Sands. He said it was inappropriate to have a crosswalk at that location, because the area “is very congested [there].”

Residents of Crystal Sands had no reason to use a crosswalk, he pointed out, because they already were at the beach.

Instead, Sullivan said, it would be better to place a crosswalk closer to Excelsior’s buildings on the bay side of the island.

Three other parts of the map were labeled incorrectly, Sullivan wrote in a letter he hand-delivered to the News Leader’s office on Sept. 19.

He added in the letter that FDOT officials were informed “at a public meeting over six months ago about their inaccuracies” in the map, “but FDOT failed to inform the residents and owners of the mislabeled residential complexes and where the crossover would actually be located.”

Clemmons told Sullivan during the open house that she would check with FDOT staff involved in the site locations, to determine why one crosswalk was to be situated at Crystal Sands instead of closer to Excelsior.

“If someone brings something [like this] forward,” Clemmons told the News Leader, “we will look into it. ... We’ll find [the designers’] rationale for the placement” of that crosswalk.

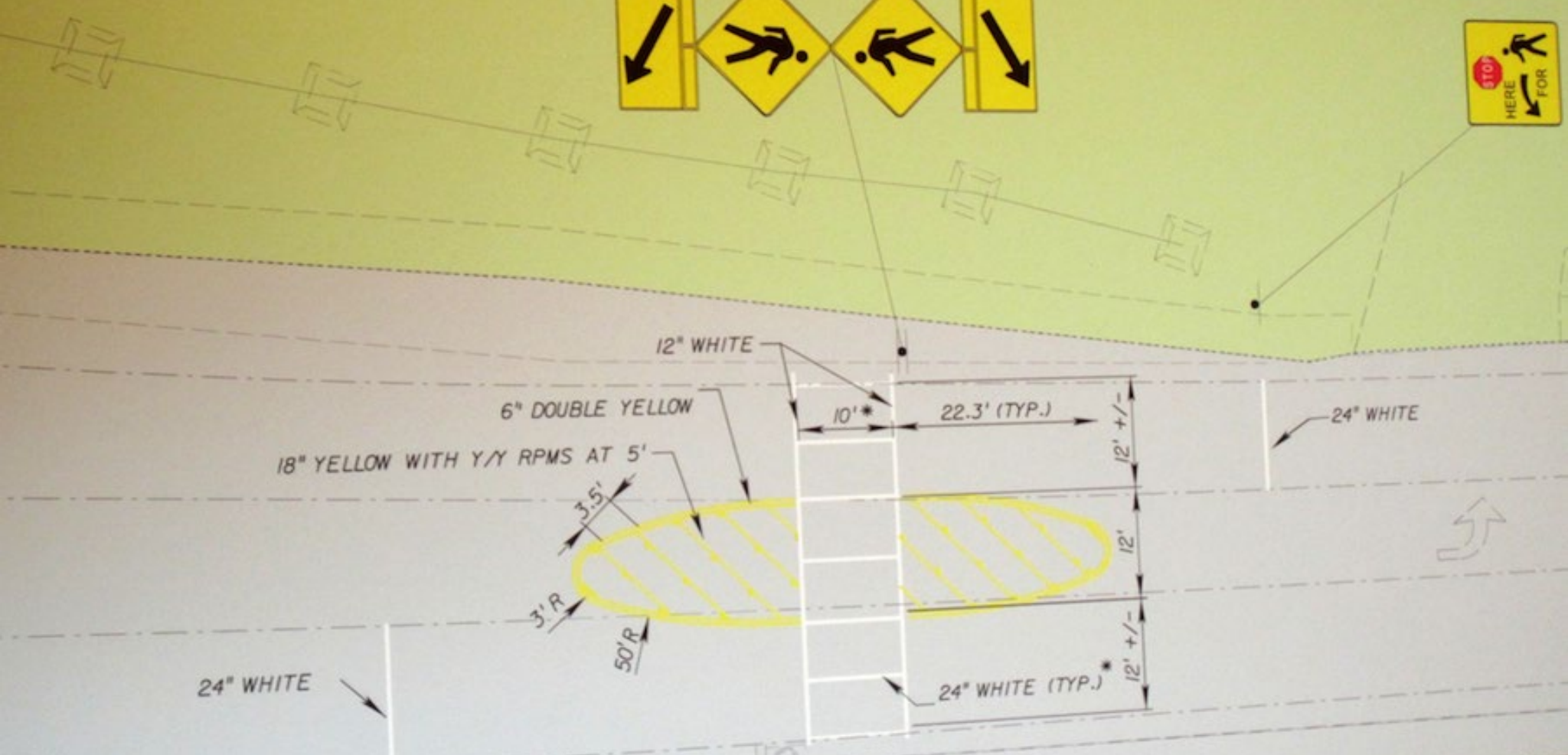
## SATISFIED RESIDENTS

Among the other, approximately 25 people who came to the open house, Maggia Molloy, who lives in the Summerhouse condominium complex, was worried about whether the placement of the crosswalks would affect her ability to get out onto Midnight Pass Road. If a crosswalk was in front of Summerhouse, she said, drivers would be stopping to let people cross the road, making it that much more difficult to merge into traffic.

However, Molloy mostly was concerned about the fact that the only way she can get into traffic some days is to use that center lane for merging purposes.

After talking with FDOT representatives, she told the News Leader, “I’m going home happy.”





An FDOT rendering shows the design of the pedestrian crosswalks to be installed beginning Sept. 24.  
Photo by Rachel Hackney

Her sister-in-law from New Jersey, who owns a unit in Excelsior, “will be happy, too, that [using] that middle lane is not illegal, as long as you don’t drive in it.”

Richard Chapman, a Sarasota County fire safety inspector, told the News Leader, “This is nice,” as he looked at the crosswalk rendering. “This whole design here will work.”

He, like Malloy, was relieved to know the crosswalks would not impede the use of the center lane. “As much as [it] gets used as a merge lane by the residents, it gets used as a loading zone,” he added.

Kathy Barshinger, manager of the El Presidente condominium complex at 6326 Midnight Pass Road, also was pleased with the plan for the crosswalks. “It looks good to me.”

Vern Johnson was concerned about whether the flashing-beacon signs would impede bi-

cyclists, after looking at the crosswalk rendering. However, once he had spoken with project consultants, he too, was pleased. He said he learned the signs would be adjacent to the sidewalks.

The FDOT plans call for the crosswalks to be placed approximately at the following locations:

- Sarasota Surf & Racquet Club
- Gulf & Bay Club/Wells Fargo
- Siesta Royale/Midnight Cove
- Excelsior/Siesta Harbor
- Peppertree Bay
- The Palm Bay Club

For more information on the project, visit [www.siestakeypedcrossing.com](http://www.siestakeypedcrossing.com).







## CIRCUS CENTER

*Khera Smith, a home-schooled junior and unicyclist for Sailor Circus, enjoys the festivities. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

### **CIRCUS SARASOTA AND SAILOR CIRCUS WILL SHARE A NEW, REFURBISHED HEADQUARTERS ON BAHIA VISTA STREET.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

Two improbable local institutions joined at the hip are now joined at the head.

On Wednesday morning, Sept. 19, the combined Sailor Circus and Circus Sarasota opened their refurbished headquarters on Bahia Vista Street, just east of the Tamiami Trail.

The HQ includes not only a new ticket office, but also a suite of new administrative offices for the 19 people who keep the two circuses going. It is not an extravagant place. The offices are tasteful but small, with a conference room that might hold five people (or 15 clowns).

The combined headquarters is the first physical manifestation of the year-old merger of the two organizations. Sixty-three years ago, the Sailor Circus was born at Sarasota High School, a unique extracurricular activity through which students learned how to perform on the high wire, the unicycle and the trapeze, juggling and how to master other hallowed circus arts.

Eight years ago, the Sarasota County School Board said it could no longer afford to insure the young circus artists; it turned the program over to the Police Athletic League. That proved an uncertain fit.





*(From left) Dolly Jacobs, Sarah Pappas, Pedro Reis and Richard Knight, chairman of the Circus Sarasota Board of Directors, make use of two sizes of scissors to cut the ceremonial ribbon. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

A year ago, the program was turned over to Circus Sarasota.

Pedro Reis, the co-founder and chief of Circus Sarasota, was master of ceremonies at the ribbon cutting. He noted his organization was founded in 1997 as the National Circus School of Performing Arts, but it quickly morphed into a performing circus with a debut — fittingly — on the grounds of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

By bringing the Sailor Circus un-

der the wings of Circus Sarasota, the original objectives of both organizations have become fused — teaching the circus arts. “Our dream has come true,” said Reis.

Funding for the headquarters rehab came, in part, from a \$75,000 grant from the William and Marie Selby Foundation. Sarah Pappas, foundation president and CEO, said the organization has given \$420,000 to both circuses over the past decade. “This merger represents what we hope all nonprofits can do — reach out and form alliances.”

Dolly Jacobs, the other co-founder of Circus Sarasota — and one of its stars — repeated Pappas’ goal: “You don’t get anywhere in life by yourself.”

Only time will tell if the two circuses become joined at the heart.



*Sarah Pappas of the Selby Foundation and Pedro Reis of Circus Sarasota unveil the plaque on the new headquarters. Photo by Norman Schimmel*





# PERVIOUS PARKING PARRY

*The proposed redesign of the existing parking lot of Siesta Public Beach calls for use of bioswales to help filter stormwater before it reaches a new collection pond. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

## **PLANS CALL FOR PERVIOUS CONCRETE, NOT ASPHALT, IN SIESTA BEACH PARK IMPROVEMENTS.**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Days after hearing a discussion about plans for the proposed new parking lot at Siesta Public Beach to have a pervious surface, Commissioner Nora Patterson raised concerns during the Sept. 11 County Commission meeting about a letter from a Sarasota asphalt contractor who questioned those plans.

As it turns out, the beach design includes pervious concrete, not asphalt, Program Manager Carolyn Eastwood, a project team member in the Public Works department, informed the commissioners in an email on Sept. 17.

During the Sept. 11 commission meeting, Patterson pointed out the contractor's comments in a letter sent to a member of the consulting firm that is assisting county staff in designing the beach park improvements.

Copies of the letter went to Patterson, Commissioner Joe Barbetta and representatives of Siesta Key organizations.

That Aug. 24 letter from Gregory D. Anderson, president of Anderson Asphalt of Sarasota, to Erik Stuart of Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. said pervious asphalt "does not work on the Key or the beach."

Yet, Patterson pointed out, county Project Manager Curtis Smith had told members of the Siesta Key Association during their Sept. 6 regular meeting that, according to the current proposal for the beach improvements, "All the new parking that we provide will be pervious pavement."

SKA Director Ron Flynn specifically had asked about that aspect of the beach plan, as it has been important to SKA members



from the early stages of discussions regarding the improvements.

In his Aug. 24 letter, Anderson wrote, "The idea that pervious asphalt will soak up water instead of [the water] flowing out to the beach is a good idea in theory. However, when sand blows on the surface and fills the voids this will 'clog' the effectiveness of the asphalt."

Anderson added that the county had tried using pervious asphalt in the municipal parking lot in Siesta Village and had found it ineffective, necessitating the repaving of that lot several years later.

St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church on Midnight Pass Road had suffered the same fate with pervious asphalt in its parking lot, he noted.

When SKA Director Joe Volpe brought up the municipal parking lot example during the SKA meeting, Patterson pointed out that that paving problem arose around 1996 or 1997, she believed. "I think they may have improved the product substantially since then," she added.

Then SKA Director Bob Waechter pointed out that pervious asphalt laid at Beach Access 12, just south of the Midnight Pass Road/Stickney Point Road intersection, was showing considerable wear and tear in the area used for the vehicle turn-around. (The improvements at that access were completed just before Labor Day weekend in 2011.)

One way to address that problem, Smith told the SKA audience, was to be careful about where the pervious asphalt was used.

The design team was aware of problems with the asphalt in areas that experienced heavier load bearing, he added.

In his letter, Anderson suggested the county use a green product called Sun Shield. Because it is gray, he wrote, it would be 50% cooler on hot days; beach-goers could walk across it and not burn their feet.

Using that product also would save the county money, he said, because the asphalt would last longer.

Commissioner Jon Thaxton said during the Sept. 11 board meeting that the design team should have the opportunity to react to Anderson's points.

"I'm not looking for anything but an email" providing the team's reaction, Patterson said.

In her email, Eastwood forwarded to the commissioners comments from Stuart, referencing findings at the University of Central Florida's Stormwater Management Academy "that porous asphalt is not recommended for most applications here in Florida."

Stuart's email adds that once sediment filled the pores in the asphalt, it "could not be effectively removed with a vacuum truck to restore the infiltration/storage capabilities."

Moreover, Stuart added, "During the summer, the pavement would heat up to near 120 degrees and the binder would become 'sticky' again and the sediments would become bound to the material permanently."



He continued in the email, “The porous asphalt was also found to be less structurally sound in the extreme heat ...”

However, Stuart wrote, “Pervious concrete ... is a rigid pavement material that has a constant pore structure even in extreme heat that remains porous throughout.” He added that it also “was found to remain at [a] cooler temperature [than] the porous asphalt during the summer heat.”

## LOW-IMPACT DESIGNS

In a related discussion at the SKA meeting, Flynn pointed out that the county has a low-impact design manual. “Are we maximizing the use of [that]?” he asked Smith.

“I believe that we are,” Smith said.

In renovating the existing parking lot at the beach, Smith said, the design team was planning to provide a network of bioswales, too, to bring runoff into the stormwater pond. “We will have that natural filtration coming directly off the parking lot,” Smith added.

When Flynn asked whether any improvements were planned to Beach Road itself, in conjunction with the work in the park, Smith said the project included nothing for the street.

Beach Road changes were not part of staff’s charge for the park improvements, Smith added.



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## CHECK OUT THE PLUG-INS

*The super-quick Tesla roadster is all carbon fiber, and now the company's producing a sedan.*

### **ST. ARMANDS SHOW ON SUNDAY TO FEATURE BOTH ALL-ELECTRIC AND HYBRID VEHICLES.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

With gasoline flirting at \$4 per gallon, admit it: You've been thinking about your mileage. Your gas mileage.

If you'd like to forget about it forever, go to St. Armands Circle on Sunday, Sept. 23, and look over the alternatives.

Not all autos need gasoline. Nissan's Leaf is an all-electric vehicle, while Chevy's Volt is a plug-in hybrid with

a gasoline generator aboard. And the carbon-fiber Tesla will propel you to 60 mph in two heartbeats of silent acceleration.



*It's an altogether different scene, looking under the hood of an electric vehicle.*

From 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., a variety of electric-only and hybrid plug-in vehicles will be on display at St. Armands. If you go to the big parking lot, you can take a ride or maybe even a drive.

It's National Plug-In Day, and they don't



mean your cordless shaver. The city of Sarasota has installed a number of electric-vehicle charging stations, including one on St. Armands.

I've been writing about, riding in and driving electric vehicles for years now. I've learned 80% of vehicle trips in America cover 10 miles or less. That electric vehicles pollute less, are cheaper to operate per mile than anything but a bicycle and are eerily silent.

See for yourself. Yes, they are costly, but the cost keeps coming down. Ford this week announced a plug-in hybrid Fusion to compete with Chevy's Volt. And Mitsubishi's electric vehicle is giving Nissan's Leaf a run. There are now sufficient players to prompt competition.

If you think \$1 gas is just around the corner, don't bother. If you believe the peak oil price was yesterday, hitchhike over to St. Armands on Sunday.

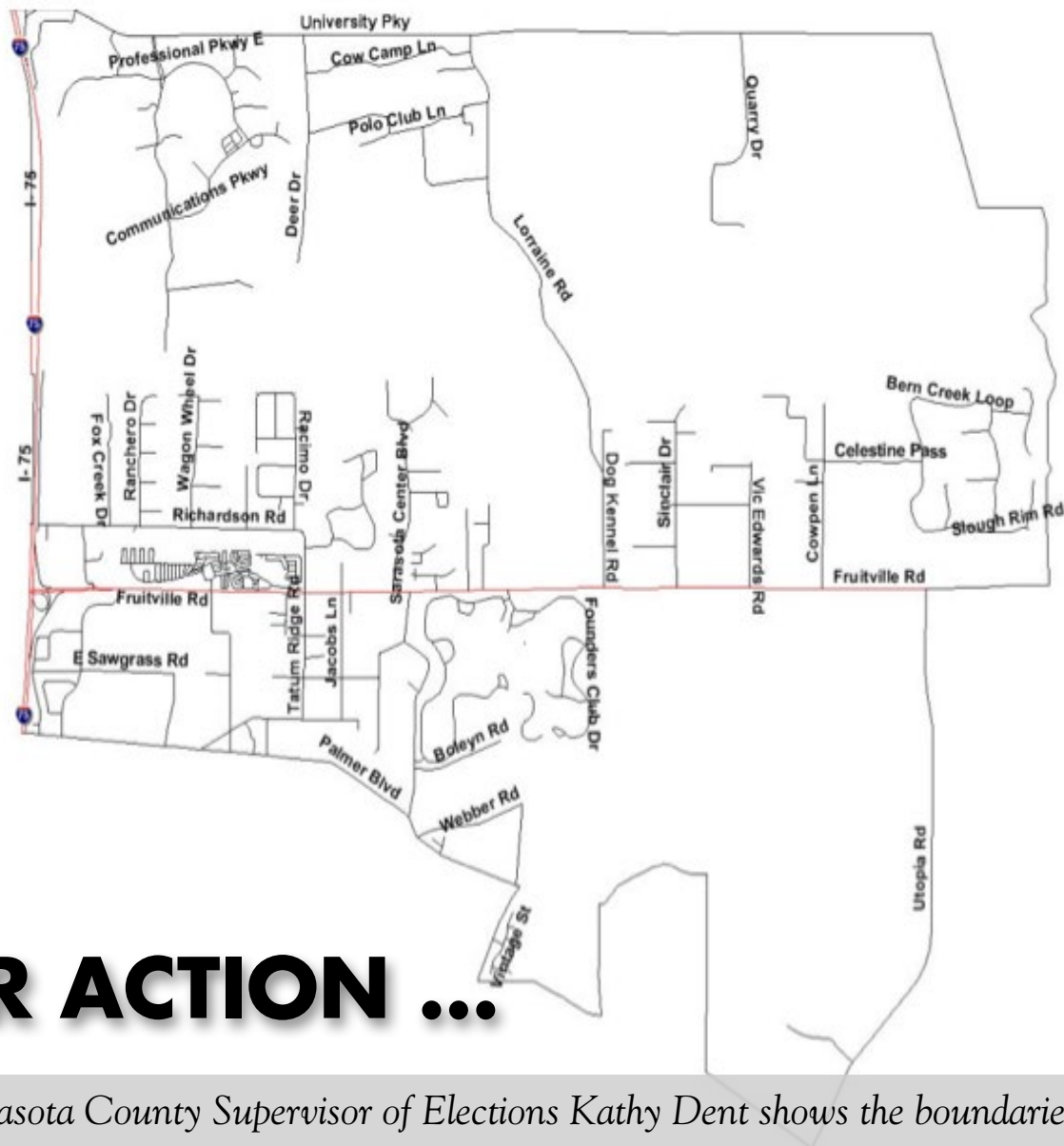


*Gasoline in one side, and plug-in-power on the other: The Chevy Volt takes propulsion power both ways. Just don't confuse one opening with the other.*



*Charging stations are expected to become more common, as electric-vehicle usage grows.*





## IN OTHER ACTION ...

*A map submitted by Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent shows the boundaries of Precinct 106.*

## IN RECENT SESSIONS, THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION ACTED ON PROPOSED PRECINCT CHANGES AND FUTURE RENOURISHMENT OF TURTLE BEACH.

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

### PRECINCT CHANGES APPROVED AFTER RESOLUTION REVISION

The item on the Sept. 11 Sarasota County Commission consent agenda said simply, “To adopt a Resolution creating a new Precinct 106 and revising the existing precinct boundary lines for Precinct 107, pursuant to Florida Statute 101.001.”

Precinct 106 was split by Fruitville Road, with University Parkway as its western boundary; Interstate 75 as its southern boundary; Palmer Boulevard as part of its

eastern boundary; and Utopia Road as part of its northern boundary.

Precinct 107 appeared to begin next to that Utopia Road boundary and move north, slightly beyond Verna Road.

However, Chairwoman Christine Robinson wasn’t satisfied with the resolution Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent had proposed.

The first paragraph of the resolution said, “Whereas, the creation of one new precinct and the revision of one precinct boundary line will better accommodate the electorate ...”



The second paragraph said, "Whereas, the Board of County Commissioners of Sarasota County, Florida ... is of the opinion that such creation of one new precinct and revision of one precinct boundary line is in the best interest of Sarasota County, Florida, and the electorate thereof, and will facilitate elections within Sarasota County, Florida."

"We're making some distinct findings," based on that language, Robinson told her fellow commissioners. Yet, the packet Dent had submitted "was pretty bare bones. ... I emailed the supervisor back and forth" over the matter, Robinson added, but Dent had declined to appear before the board to discuss it.

Therefore, Robinson said, "I would like to amend the resolution to remove the findings [because] we don't have to make those findings."

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh advised Robinson that the resolution could be amended to say the action was being taken on the recommendation of the county's supervisor of elections.

Robinson then provided the other commissioners with written copies of her proposed revision of the first two paragraphs:

"Whereas, the Supervisor of Elections recommends the creation of one new precinct and designation of polling place, and the revision of one precinct boundary,

"Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Board of County Commissioners of Sarasota County, Florida upon the recommendation and with the approval of the Supervisor of Elec-

tions of Sarasota County, Florida in public meeting assembled:"

Commissioner Jon Thaxton made the motion to substitute the resolution Robinson had proposed. Commissioner Nora Patterson seconded it.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **STATE FUNDING SOUGHT FOR NEXT TURTLE BEACH RENOURISHMENT**

Ever since Sarasota County completed a renourishment project at Siesta Key's Turtle Beach in 2007, county staff has been monitoring erosion at the site.

More than a year before Tropical Storm Debby chewed off a big chunk of the beach, county officials already were fielding complaints about the loss of shoreline.

Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, has pointed out in public meetings that, unfortunately, Turtle Beach's geographic location creates a situation in which it suffers almost constant erosion problems while Siesta Public Beach tends to accrete sand.

Laird S. Wreford, manager of the county's Coastal Resources Department, told this reporter in the fall of 2011 that just about the time a Turtle Beach property-owner assessment that is covering 8% of the cost of the last renourishment project ends, permitting for the next renourishment should be completed.

On Sept. 11, the County Commission approved a resolution authorizing County Administrator Randall Reid to proceed with an application to the Florida Department of



Environmental Protection to obtain partial funding for the permitting and design work for that project.

According to a staff memo submitted to the commission, state law provides for an annual allotment of \$30 million into Florida's Ecosystem Management and Restoration Trust Fund to pay 50% of the costs of beach erosion-control projects.

The memo notes that the South Siesta Key Beach Restoration Phase II project extends

north to south, from a point about 3,000 feet south of Point of Rocks "to a tapering end north of the former Midnight Pass."

The request will be submitted to DEP as part of the Fiscal Year 2014 funding cycle.

If DEP approves the application, the staff memo added, a specific funding agreement would come back to the County Commission for review and approval.



*While Siesta Public Beach (shown here) has been growing wider over the past several years, Turtle Beach has continuing erosion problems. Sarasota County staff already is seeking funding assistance for another renourishment project for Turtle Beach. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



# CITY BRIEFS



*New parking fines and penalties loom for drivers in the city of Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **FINANCE CHIEF RETIRING; SCOPE CONTINUES URBAN INSTITUTE TEAMWORK; PARKING FINES MODIFIED**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*



*Chris Lyons*

### **CITY FINANCE GURU RETIRES**

For a quarter of a century, Chris Lyons has been up to his elbows in city money. He announced his retirement Sept. 19 for health reasons.

Lyons crossed the annual budget finish line for the 23rd time Monday

after the city commissioners approved the hard choices and validated the spending

plan. The budget still must pass two public hearings, but the hard work is over.

Lyons will serve an additional 60 days while a national search is conducted for his successor.

He was promoted internally to his position five years ago, after the retirement of longtime City Finance Director Gib Mitchell. Lyons started with the city in 1987 as an accounts and payroll manager after working as a Certified Public Accountant in the private sector.

His departure will make him the third senior city staffer to leave office in 2012. In



January, City Manager Bob Bartolotta resigned, and City Police Chief Mikel Hollaway will step down next month.

All five city commissioners are first-termers.



## **SCOPE CONTINUES URBAN INSTITUTE TEAMWORK**

After looking at four different funding models, the board of Sarasota Coun-

ty Openly Plans for Excellence decided to continue its two-year collaboration with the Urban Institute.

The two organizations are teamed up with several local governmental offices to create an enormous database of community information. The website is up, live and running at <http://nccsweb.urban.org/sarasota.php>

If you visit the site, don't be distressed if you don't immediately find a wealth of information about your neighborhood. The site is a work in progress; it only recently was let out "into the wild" for public viewing.

The SCOPE board hopes neighborhoods will "populate" the site with stories, pictures and videos, to complement the government data SCOPE staff members and consultants are feeding into the site.

Allison Pinto, the architect of the effort, will be leaving the organization at the end of this month.

Tim Dutton, who led SCOPE for 11 years, is also stepping away from the organization. He was the founding director; now he will be assisting one of its spin-offs, the Institute for the Ages.

## **PARKING FINE AND FEE MODIFICATIONS AIRED**

One week remains for people to pay old parking tickets and skip the \$15 late fee. Not only will you save on the late fees, but you also will clear your record of unpaid tickets, just in time to breathe more easily as new – and expensive – fees kick in.

City of Sarasota Parking Manager Mark Lyons briefed the city commissioners on Sept 17 on plans to change fines and late fees, as well as the cost of a "boot" for scoff-laws who refuse to pay.

Lyons said the current \$15 late fee is the same no matter how late the fine is paid. He'd like to add an additional \$15 after the 14th day, and another \$15 after 30 days. However, if somebody pays the ticket within 24 hours, he's willing to knock off \$5 for good citizenship.

In reviewing the parking ordinances, he said he found there is no penalty for removing, tampering with or attempting to remove a "vehicle immobilizing device," commonly call "the boot." Lyons would like to impose a \$25 fine for messing with the device.

He'd also like the city to be a bit more aggressive in using "the boot." "The threshold right now is one of the most restrictive I've seen," he said. "If somebody owes us \$50



(in fines and late fees), we have the right to immobilize.”

He'd like to adjust that level up to \$100 or more and employ it also if there are two unpaid tickets in 45 days or three unpaid tickets within 30 days.

The fee to remove “the boot” is now \$50, but Lyons would like to bump that to \$75. “Sometimes it takes two people” to put on “the boot,” he said. “The \$50 doesn't cover the time.”

Fines will double for handicapped people who park in handicapped spots but fail to display their handicapped permit. That oversight would cost \$15 instead of the cur-

rent \$7.50. “We now have a high number of abusers,” said Lyons.

The City Commission agreed in concept to the new fee and fine schedule, and it authorized the city attorney to draft revisions to existing ordinances to set the penalties in place. Those changes should be ready just in time for tourist season.

Lyons has been forced to seek additional revenue since the City Commission pulled the parking meters from downtown. Parking enforcement now will be funded strictly by fines.



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## ALSO OUT YOUTH CALLED A KEY FACTOR IN AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE HONOR FOR SARASOTA COUNTY



The [America's Promise Alliance](#), a nationwide organization [dedicated](#) to reducing the country's high school dropout rate, last week named Sarasota

County to [its annual list of the 100 Best Communities for Young People](#), in part because of the LGBT outreach work of Sarasota's [ALSO Out Youth](#).

America's Promise selects its winning cities by measuring how they are living up to their "[Five Promises](#)": "Caring Adults," "Safe Places," "A Healthy Start," "Effective Education" and "Opportunities to Help Others." In [citing Sarasota](#), the group singled out five programs for special recognition, among them ALSO, which "has provided services to LGBTQ youth ensuring safe spaces and supportive adults to enhance self-esteem."

The recognition comes on the heel's of ALSO's Stand Up Sarasota week. Over the course of three days, Hudson Taylor — the founder of Athlete Ally, an organization that fights homophobia and transphobia in sports — [spoke to students at four different Sarasota County schools](#) about the importance of standing up against bullying and hate.

## VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE NEARS FOR NOV. 6 ELECTION

Sarasota County residents must be registered to vote by Tuesday, Oct. 9, to be eligible to vote in the Nov. 6 general election,

## NEWS BRIEFS

the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office has announced.

New voter registrations must be postmarked by Oct. 9 or delivered in person to any supervisor of elections Office no later than 5 p.m., Oct. 9, a news release notes.

Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent also is urging all voters to verify and/or update their registration information prior to Election Day. Changes and updates may be made as follows:

- New registrations and signature updates must be submitted on a Florida Voter Registration Application (FVRA).
- Name and party changes may be made by signed written notice, including on a voter registration application, but they must include the voter's date of birth or Florida Voter Registration System ID number.
- Address changes within the state of Florida may be made by phone, fax or email but must include the voter's date of birth.

A voter may check his or her voter registration status by going to the [supervisor of elections' website](#). Select "Voter Information" from the menu, then select "Voter Lookup" and follow the instructions.

Florida Voter Registration Application forms are available at all supervisors of elections' offices, city halls, county libraries and offices and social service agencies. They also may be downloaded from the elections' office website.



For more information, call the supervisor of elections at 861-8600 or write to Supervisor of Elections, PO Box 4194, Sarasota, FL 34230-4194.

## **DAY OF REMEMBRANCE PLANNED FOR SEPT. 25 IN SARASOTA**

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with local representatives of Parents of Murdered Children Inc. (POMC), is inviting members of the public to attend the POMC National Day of Remembrance at 7 p.m. on Sept. 25.

That day, representatives of the National Organization for Parents of Murdered Children and countless other crime victims and survivors will gather in cities and towns across the United States to pay tribute to murder victims and their surviving family members. "This event also honors the organizations that provide services such as support, advocacy and counsel to loved ones of murder victims," a Sheriff's Office news release says.

The local Day of Remembrance ceremony will be held at the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, 2071 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota, in the second-floor conference room.

## **CANDIDATES' FORUM TO BE HELD SEPT. 27 AT CITY HALL**

The Florida League of Cities, in cooperation with the ManaSota League of Cities, will offer a candidates' forum on Thursday, Sept. 27, at 9:30 a.m. at Sarasota City Hall, 1565 First St.

Candidates vying to be state representatives and state senators will be on hand to discuss priorities facing Florida's cities, a

League news release says. The public is encouraged to attend.

The following candidates are scheduled to attend include:

- [Paula House](#) – Democratic candidate for Senate District 26
- [Jim Boyd](#) – Republican candidate for House District 71
- [Adam Tebrugge](#) – Democratic candidate for House District 71
- [Liz Alpert](#) – Democratic candidate for House District 72
- [Ray Pilon](#) – Republican candidate for House District 72
- [Bob McCann](#) – NPA candidate for House District 73
- [Greg Stuebe](#) – Republican candidate for House District 73

Candidates will respond to questions regarding their positions "on the most pressing issues facing cities throughout Florida, and specifically in Manatee and Sarasota counties," the news release says.

The event is scheduled to conclude at noon.

## **'UNBROKEN' SELECTED AS THE 'ONE BOOK' OF THE YEAR**

Readers from across Sarasota County have selected "Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption" by Laura Hillenbrand as the "One Book, One Community" book of the year.

"Unbroken" has spent nearly 100 consecutive weeks on the New York Times



best-seller list, and it has been hailed by Time magazine as the best nonfiction book of the year, a county news release notes.

It won the Los Angeles Times Book of the Year Award for nonfiction.

Thousands of votes were cast for the 'Unbroken,' the true story of Louis Zamperini, who competed on the 1936 U.S. Olympic Track Team in Berlin, crashed his Army Air Force bomber into the Pacific Ocean during World War II, was lost at sea for 47 days and served time as a Japanese prisoner of war.

As in years past, One Book community partners include high schools, New College of Florida, University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, Asolo Repertory Theatre, the Sarasota Herald Tribune Community Center and area bookstores, the news release adds.

Since 2003, Sarasota County Libraries and the One Book, One Community supporting organizations have annually promoted this read-together project, which engages members of the community in discussion, the county news release notes.

Interested people may look on the One Book, One Community website, [www.onebooksarasota.com](http://www.onebooksarasota.com), for a calendar of events featuring discussions and programs about "Unbroken" at the nine Sarasota County public libraries and participating One Book partners.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000, or visit [www.onebooksarasota.com](http://www.onebooksarasota.com).

## RIVERVIEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL NAMED TO GLOBAL IB COMMITTEE



Paul Gallagher

Paul Gallagher, assistant principal and coordinator of the Riverview High School International Baccalaureate Program, has been named to the diploma program's Review Committee to represent IB of the

Americas, the Sarasota County Schools district has announced.

The 14-member committee provides strategies for, and supervises the direction and quality of, IB diploma programs in about 2,400 schools in 143 countries around the world. Gallagher will represent more than 1,200 diploma programs in the 40 countries of the Americas, the news release says.

Gallagher is the former president and current chairman of the College Relations Committee for the Florida League of International Baccalaureate Schools.

When the IB program was authorized at Riverview High in January 1999, Riverview became the 29th IB Diploma School in Florida. The state has more than 70 high school IB programs.

In Sarasota County, Brookside Middle School hosts an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, and Phillippi Shores Elementary School is home to an IB Primary Years Program.

Riverview High School is located at One Ram Way in Sarasota. The principal is Linda Nook



## ANNIE'S PROJECT TO EMPOWER FARM AND RANCH WOMEN

Annie's Project, a national program developed to empower farm and ranch women to be better business partners, is coming to Sarasota.

The seven-week course, taught by UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County faculty, begins Oct. 1 and continues through Nov. 13. The course is limited to 20 participants, and the deadline for registration is Monday, Sept. 24.

The purpose of the program is to help agricultural women gain entrepreneurial skills to operate their farms, a county news release says. "In addition, Annie's Project will help women find new ways to balance demands of family, community and professionalism within the agricultural community," the release adds.

Sessions will combine lectures, discussion, individual and small group activities and software training.

Among the topics will be Social Style (interpersonal skills), Farm and Family Finances, Farm and Ranch Financial Analysis, Computer Programs designed for Farm Business Management, Crop and Livestock Marketing and Farm Business Planning.

The weekly course sessions will be held from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at the UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County office, 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota. The class dates are Oct. 1, 8, 17, 22 and 29; and Nov. 8 and 13. A light dinner will be served before each session.

The course costs \$60, which includes software, books, meals and materials. For more details and registration information, visit [sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu](http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu).



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# OPINION

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## TEBRUGGE, ALPERT FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE

### EDITORIAL

With a majority of the seats in the Florida legislature in 2001, Republicans proceeded to use the decennial redistricting process to gerrymander themselves into relatively non-competitive districts, while packing Democrats into districts that would ensure the likelihood of continued Republican majorities in the Legislature in future elections.

The effort was so successful that, 10 years later, the Legislature found itself with veto-proof super-majorities of Republicans in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. And this was in a state where registered Democratic voters outnumbered Republican voters by approximately 900,000.

Perhaps that also explains a successful citizens initiative in 2010 that resulted in constitutional amendments forbidding gerrymandering of legislative or congressional districts in the redistricting to follow the 2010 Census.

Republican legislators resisted the amendments by seeking relief in the courts, but they were rebuffed. Clearly, another strategy was needed to hold onto Republican control of the Legislature going forward, and the strategy that evolved was an old one: the disenfranchisement of those who might vote against them.

Not since the Jim Crow era in the South has the nation seen a more concerted effort to suppress voting by those more likely to

vote as Democrats than Republicans, and Florida has been at the vanguard of this effort.

Decrying an epidemic of “voter fraud” — which has been disproven in every impartial examination of the issue — Republican legislators in Florida undertook a series of efforts to discourage or even deny the right to vote of Floridians likely to vote against them, including implementing draconian voter ID laws, criminalizing third-party voter registration groups (such as the venerable League of Women Voters), dramatically reducing early voting days, virtual eliminating the practice of changing one’s registration at the polls, and implementing a harsh new policy denying the reinstatement of civil rights to felons who have served their sentences.

The net effect of these changes was to limit voting by minorities, the elderly, the poor, college students and prospective new voters — groups all statistically unlikely to support Republican candidates.

It is against this backdrop of naked promotion of Republican self-interest in the Florida Legislature that we consider those candidates who deserve voters’ support on Nov. 6.

Incumbent Reps. Ray Pilon and Jim Boyd have been loyal foot soldiers in the legislative effort for voter suppression. Both have steadfastly maintained throughout the campaign the need to “preserve the integ-



rity of our election process,” as Boyd put it in a campaign statement — a need never proven by either candidate or his party.

Challengers Adam Tebrugge and Liz Alpert recognize this ploy for what it is — an overt attempt to dilute the democratic process in Florida by disenfranchising certain classes of voters. Both have been outspoken in their opposition to these new state policies.

As Tebrugge pointed out in a debate among legislative candidates at the Tiger Bay Club earlier this month, “It was clear that the majority party in the Legislature was trying to suppress the registration of voters around the state.”

If that were the only issue on which this election hinged, it would be enough to earn Tebrugge and Alpert our unqualified endorsement. But there are many other important issues on which the Republican incumbents’ positions are found wanting.

Both incumbents favor eliminating the state income tax on corporations. They maintain that it places an untenable burden on businesses in Florida and stifles “job creation.”

Yet, the corporate income tax makes up less than 1.5% of state revenues. Moreover, a comprehensive annual ranking of states by CNBC — titled “America’s Top States for Business” — found that Florida’s rating for “Cost of Doing Business” was dragged down more by utility costs and property taxes than by its corporate income tax.

Tebrugge and Alpert wisely oppose eliminating the corporate income tax.

The incumbents also are willing participants in their party’s legislative attacks on Citizens Property Insurance Co., the non-profit corporation that insures more Florida property than any other firm. They support efforts to force Citizens policyholders into the private market, in spite of the inadequacies in that market that necessitated the creation and expansion of Citizens in the first place.

Both Tebrugge and Alpert support maintaining Citizens as a viable insurer of last resort, while calling for efforts to reform the property insurance industry in our state.

On other issues — from budget shortfalls to infrastructure preservation to school vouchers and standardized student testing — Tebrugge and Alpert bring thoughtful, intelligent consideration to issues of urgent importance to Florida’s citizens.

In the general election on Nov. 6, we urge voters to cast their ballots for **Adam Tebrugge and Liz Alpert for state representative.**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sarasota News Leader welcomes letters to the editor from its readers. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length, and include the name, street address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be emailed to [Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com](mailto:Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com), with “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line. Letters actually printed will be selected based on space available, subject matter and other factors. We reserve the right to edit any letters submitted for length, grammar, spelling, etc. All letters submitted become the property of *The Sarasota News Leader*.

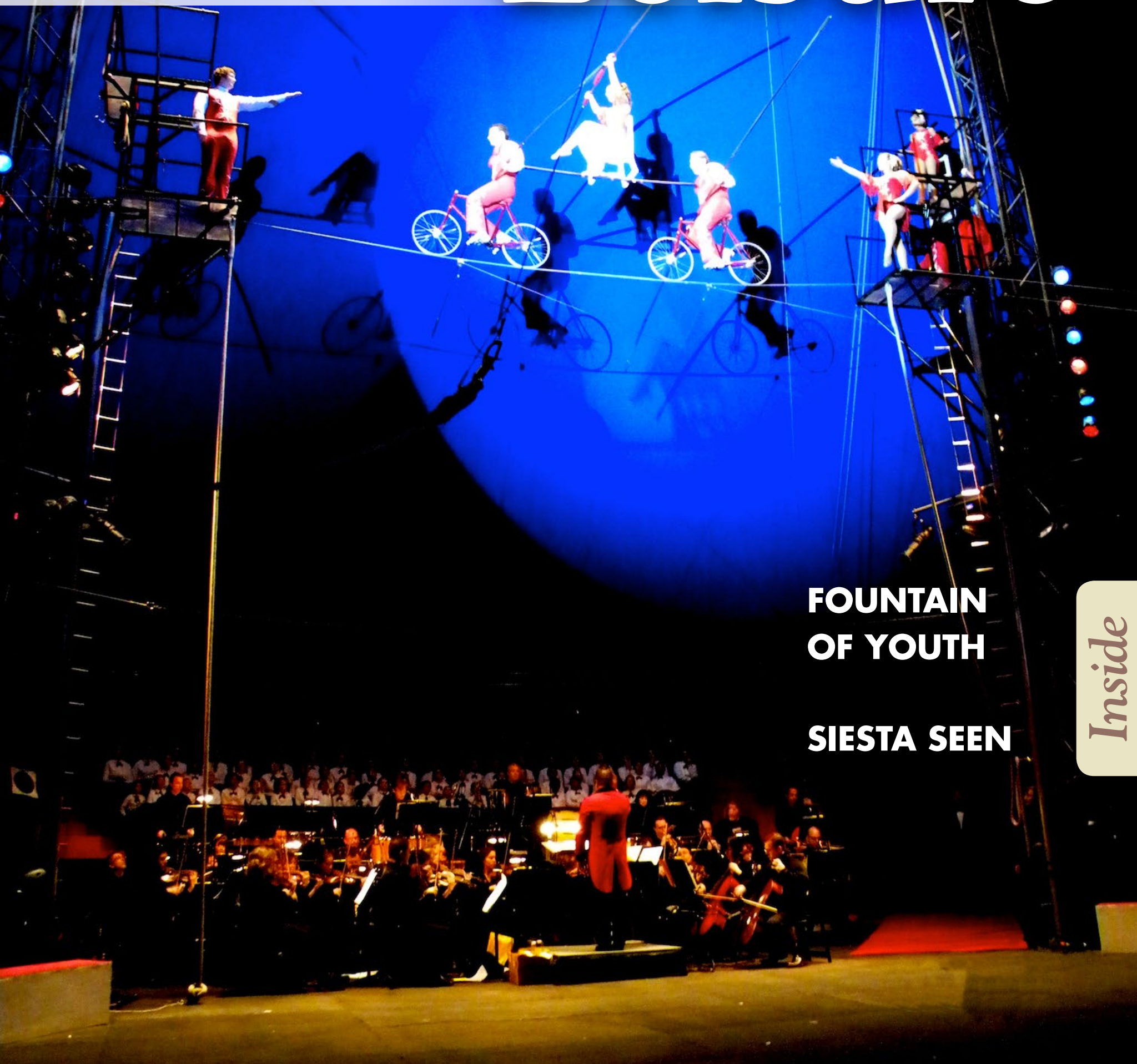


# Sarasota Leisure

FEATURING



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**FOUNTAIN  
OF YOUTH**

**SIESTA SEEN**

*Inside*



# Fountain of Youth

**Story and photos  
by Fran Palmeri**  
*Contributing Writer*

This summer, I traveled up north and by a circuitous route discovered the fountain of youth.

Actually, it wasn't until I got back home that I realized what I had found.

In Chapel Hill, N.C., where I stayed, most people spend time outdoors. This puts me comfortably in the picture but out on a trail while the rest of the populace flies by at breakneck speed. I stroll along photographing weeds, fungi, burls and other oddities. Joggers hardly notice me or anything around them, so hooked up are they to iPhones or cell phones. Exchanging a greeting is impossible.

I'm no city girl and a few days into my stay, I fell flat on my face on a sidewalk. It was embarrassing for someone who's expert at navigating through tangles of greenbrier, saw palmetto, and cypress knees. Recovery was slow. Every morning when I looked in the mirror, it seemed I was getting older. I'd become a "doddering" senior citizen.

My daughter broached the subject of my moving in with her when I got "really old." But slowly my wounds healed and I was back on the trail, this time plodding along at a snail's pace.

I finally made it home and am in the parks and out on the beach again. The air is soft; the water warm. No more pink-shortened wood sprites flying past. People greet me.



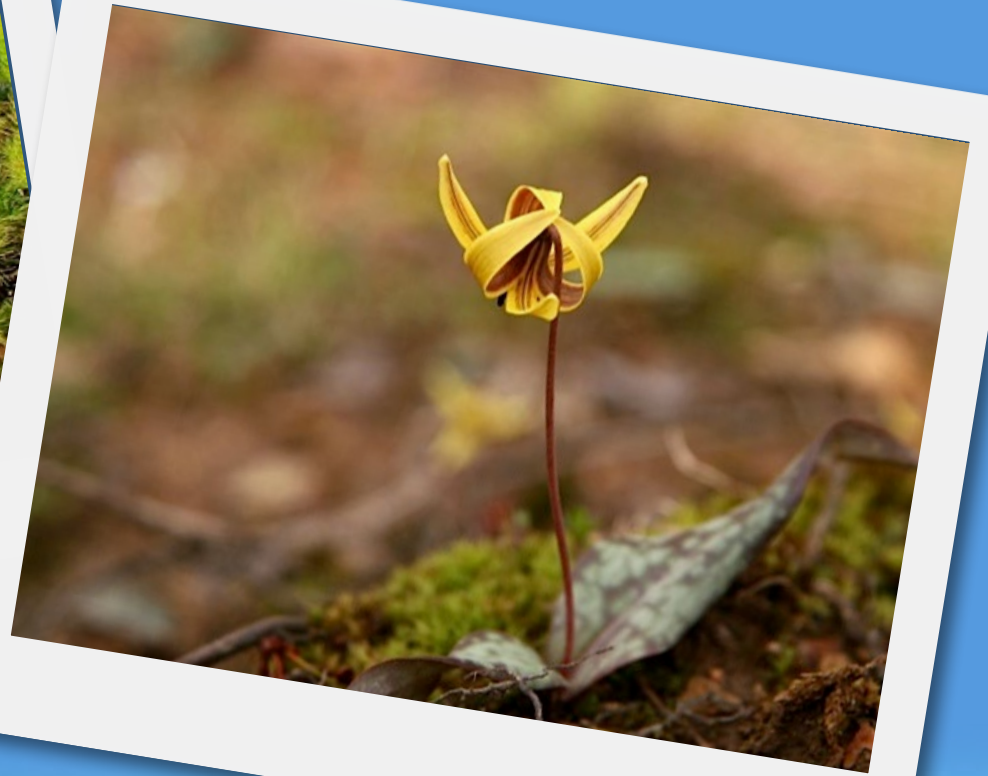
Age, I found, depends on where you are. In Florida, 50-year olds are the babies. Some 90-year olds still play tennis, jog the beach, swim in the Gulf. Those who “dodder” are accepted for themselves. Me — I’m barely approaching middle age.



This morning I looked in the mirror to find my old (young) self. Florida’s fountain of youth had worked its magic.

*“...while the rest of the populace  
flies by at breakneck speed.”*





*“Florida’s fountain of youth  
had worked its magic.”*





## BIG MONTH ON THE HORIZON

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*



*Editor's note: Former readers of the Pelican Press who enjoyed Rachel Brown Hackney's "Island Beat" column, which kept all apprised of goings-on on Siesta Key, will be pleased to know that her new column — "Siesta Seen" — will be a regular feature in The Sarasota News Leader.*

Heading into the final third of September, members of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce and the Siesta Key Village Association are becoming more intently focused on their two biggest events of the year.

The chamber, which took over management of the Crystal Classic Master Sandsculpting Competition this year, is in full-court press to be ready for that event to start on Nov. 8, and SKVA members have organized themselves into committees for Light Up



Peter van Roekens was kind enough to share this photo of another glorious sunset on Siesta Key, taken from Beach Access 4.



# *Siesta Seen*

the Village, the festive kickoff for the holiday season.

Light Up the Village is scheduled for Nov. 24, the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

SKVA President Russell Matthes convened the first official meeting last week to plan Light Up the Village and its holiday parade. Many of the same people volunteer every year to make this event the huge success it is, but the SKVA eagerly welcomes newcomers.

Matthes' post-meeting list of committee assignments tells the story clearly: It takes a lot of work to create Light Up the Village, but year after year, the grins and giggles of children sitting in Santa Claus' lap are perhaps the biggest rewards.

SKVA members also are focusing positive energy on making the parade a bigger event this year.

Last year, the fact that the organizers couldn't get the route closed to traffic posed a few problems, but the early planning for this November includes getting a permit to close Ocean Boulevard for one-and-a-half hours — from 5:30 to 7 p.m. — and putting up signs to alert drivers to that effect.

Those plans include coordination with Sgt. Scott Osborne, leader of the Sheriff's Office's Community Policing Station in the Village.

The star of the parade, of course, will be the Jolly Old Elf himself, before he takes a

seat at Siesta Center to hear all the holiday wishes of the children.

However, one might say Siesta Key Association Director Bob Waechter's antique fire truck has been the No. 2 star of the two past parades.

Last year, the truck broke down, resulting in SKA members having to push it along the route. Apparently its electrical systems suffered an overload.

Fortunately, those who supplied the "people power" were able to chuckle about it afterward.

When Siesta Chamber Chairman Mark Smith stood in for Matthes at the Sept. 6 SKA meeting, Waechter told him, "You can put us down for pushing the fire engine" in the 2012 parade.

Needless to say, that comment drew ripples of laughter among the approximately 30 people in the audience.

Smith told Waechter he needed a younger crew. "That's a big truck."

## **CLASSIC PLANNING**

As for the Crystal Classic: During their regular meeting on Sept. 4, Matthes urged SKVA members to support the event as sponsors.

News from Classic Co-Chairwoman Maria Bankemper that buses transporting visitors to the event at the public beach would stop in Siesta Village should be all the in-



# *Siesta Seen*



Master sandsculptors from across the country and Europe will be crafting Siesta's fine quartz sand into imaginative sculptures like this 2011 winner, when they 'take the sand' during the third Siesta Key Crystal Class Master Sandsculpting Competition, Nov. 8-12.



# *Siesta Seen*

centive Village business owners and managers needed to help underwrite the cost of the Classic, Matthes pointed out.

The Crystal Classic was planned to bring visitors to the island during a traditionally slow time of year. The tens of thousands of visitors the first two years of the event have more than underscored its value, organizers have pointed out.

This year, Brian Wigelsworth, founder of the Crystal Classic, has noted that not only will all of the Travel Channel's "Sand Masters" program sandsculptors be participating, but also seven sculptors from The Netherlands — one of the top two countries for producing masters. (Italy is the other one.)

During the SKVA meeting, Cheryl Gaddie, the other co-chairwoman for the Crystal Classic, announced that a new website was being designed for the event. It should be ready before the end of September, she said, and "it's going to be quite impressive."

Visitors will be able to purchase their tickets online, she said, as well as find information easily about the bus transportation, which will be based again at Phillippi Estate Park, 5500 S. Tamiami Trail.

Sponsors will have their logos rolling continuously on the front page of the site, she added, which will be good publicity for them.

During the SKA meeting, Smith noted that 400 volunteer spots would be open again for people to assist with all the logistics of the event; he added that more than a few people sign up for multiple spots.

As it has the two previous years, Mote Marine Laboratory will be in charge of organizing the volunteers, Smith said.

Mote's sea turtle programs are the beneficiary of proceeds from the Crystal Classic.

When a member of the audience told him she had been unsuccessful so far in finding a link on Mote's website to sign up as a volunteer, Smith assured her, "It will be up."

During the SKA meeting, the directors voted unanimously to contribute \$1,250 to the Crystal Classic. The SKVA has contributed the same amount.

The SKA and SKVA logos will be on opposite sides of one of the sculptures to be crafted to recognize the sponsors, President Catherine Luckner pointed out.

Anyone else interested in becoming a sponsor of the 2012 Crystal Classic may call the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce at 349-3800, email [info@crystalsand.org](mailto:info@crystalsand.org) or visit [crystalsand.org](http://crystalsand.org).

## **BEATING THE AVERAGES**

No one knows better than Catherine Luckner how rough a summer it was for the endangered snowy plovers that nest on Siesta Key.



# ***Siesta Seen***

She and her husband, Bob, are among the dedicated group of Sarasota Audubon volunteers who watch over the nesting pairs and keep eyes peeled for hatching chicks.

This summer saw Tropical Storm Debby and an array of natural predators wipe out nests.

With September marking the end of the nesting season for the tiny birds, Luckner finally had some good news for SKA members on Sept. 3: "One [chick] has made it, and I believe he flew this morning."

The news was met with a chorus of "Aww-ww" from the audience.

"Chick patrol" volunteers consider their work done when a baby bird fledges, or flies on its own.

Longboat Key had just one chick fledge this season, too, Luckner reported.

Still, she pointed out, "That's better than some years."

Wildlife experts have reported the average success rate in the state of Florida is

0.72 births per nesting pair, she added. "So we've exceeded that, at least for this year."

## **THOSE DOGGONE DOGS**

Although SKA members, law enforcement officers and beach access signage emphasize that it is a violation of county ordinance to have dogs on Siesta Public Beach, people continue to ignore the warnings, Luckner reported during the SKA meeting.

Not only do people come onto the beach with dogs on leashes, she said, but recently, "a lot of dogs" have been observed running loose.

Nonetheless, Sheriff's deputies remain diligent in responding to complaints, she said.

Just that week, Luckner said, a woman called the Sheriff's Office to report an owner with a dog at Access 10. A deputy was waiting at the entrance to the access when the person and pooch prepared to leave.

"Thank you so much," Luckner told Sgt. Osborne.



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and out of religion





# ASK OTUS

## A BIT OF A MYSTERY

To the Editor:

What a delightful looking owl! Lovely and entertaining to finally see something different from lizards! We had a little owl in our yard in Siesta Village, but we didn't see it this past season. Do owls move far from where they were born? That may be a mystery, though.

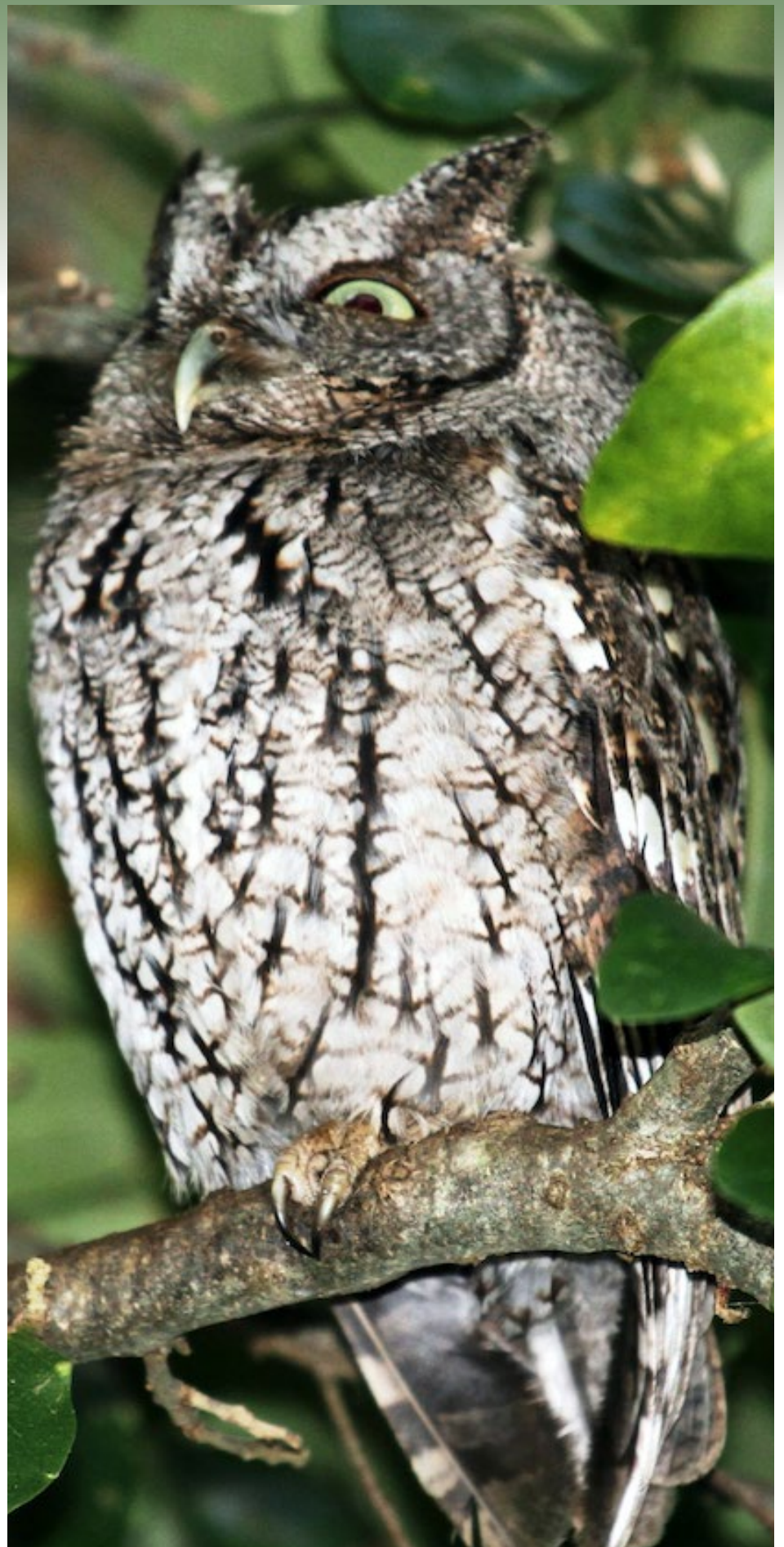
Lisel

Dear Lisel,

And what a delightful sounding name you have! Thank you for finding me more pleasing to the eyes than some of our key's scaly reptilian inhabitants.

The word "mystery" in your letter caused me delightful frissons. I love a good mystery and am off today to solve one of the greatest in the animal world. But, first, back to your kind note and questions ...

Lisel, I believe this is your backyard owl. Otus Offal (pronounced "awful") is a gray morph Screech-owl and my cousin many, many times removed. At times, I wish he were even further removed. You see, he was nicknamed Offal because even when a ludicrously cute owlet, he had the most disgustingly opportunistic eating habits; he would gobble anything, including poisonous caterpillars, and then engage in retroperistalsis right at the dinner table! It made me



*Otus Offal, File Photo*

## 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](mailto:askotus@sarasotanewsleader.com). Thank you.*



want to up-chuck too. (Readers, if you suspect you have a resident owl in your yard, check for little scraps of regurgitated mice bones and pelts under a tree, usually an oak.)

Unlike the ibises that flock together (safety in numbers; please see <http://sarasotanewsleader.com/ask-otus-the-prescient-ibis/>), owls and other raptors are more solitary and will claim separate territories for their hunting, mating and chick-raising. This in part is due to the fact that owls compete with so many other birds, mammals, and reptiles for the same food: insects, mice, crayfish, grubs, etc., that it is wiser for them to spread out and prevent a lot of food fights at the dinner table.

When Siesta Key was voted No. 1 Beach in the USA, Offal, a very astute real estate investor, sold his tiny tree hole — an abandoned woodpecker's nest — on the north end of the key and now resides in his own splendidly huge oak at [Historic Spanish Point](#).

Now, to the great mystery: A few days ago, Offal informed me that a visitor to HSP saw a Florida Black Panther prowling around. As THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BLACK PANTHER, I would have ignored this news, but Offal, despite his bad table manners, is the leading owl authority on cryptozoology in all of Sarasota County and his report must be taken seriously. He's such an expert on the subject that he even considered a visiting-professor position at

Ravenclaw House, Hogwarts, but nixed the idea after seeing the dreary, drafty boarding conditions at its Owlery. (Please see <http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Owlery>)

For every single reported sighting of a black panther, there are at least a dozen scholarly and scientific treatises repudiating its existence. I chose this particular link out of hundreds of others because it not only has superb video footage of the beautiful wild cats at Big Cat Rescue, but Chelsea Feeny, its staffer/narrator, gives the most succinctly intelligible explanation of exactly what a black panther isn't and why it does not exist. (Please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6przuR7ITfY&feature=related>.)

That's on the one panther paw. On the other paw, I have not found a single scholarly repudiation of a Pink Panther's existence. Home builders and remodelers should enjoy [watching this](#).

(And, yes, I'm aware than I have two more paws to go!)

If Florida black panthers are proven not to exist, what is it that people are seeing and reporting around here? All we know is that it is a cat — large and black, with a markedly long tail, with emphasis on the “long” tail. Sightings have been reported by reliable witnesses throughout Florida, as well as on Siesta Key, using those exact same words, and these accounts are from people who know the difference between a short-tailed bobcat and a long-tailed wild cat.





Is it Kipling's "The Cat That Walked by Himself"? (Photo courtesy the Victorian Web, kindly see link below:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/kipling/23.html>)

Or is it Mowgli's beloved Bagheera?

I'm off to HSP today to solve this mystery with Offal's help. Offal has generously allowed me to rent, at off-season rates, a small branch in a tree adjacent to his capacious oak. As for Historic Spanish Point, it is a beehive of activities during daylight hours. (For more info, please click on the [September program schedule link](#). As a most eminent cryptozoologist, Offal par-

ticularly enjoys the Point's Thursday program.

At dusk, HSP transforms into a truly mysterious world. It is then that the creatures of the night begin to stir. Dark shadows slide silently behind the black mangroves. Strange cries are heard over the sing-song chattering of the frogs. Then, a sudden flash of eyes is reflected in the moonlight. Could those be the eyes of a Florida black panther?

While I am away, I hope that readers will continue to report their sightings of our elusive (but documented!) bobcats and will send me their photos.

*Otus*







# A TENNIS CLASSIC FOR TENNIS FANATICS

*Briton Andy Murray defeated Novak Djokovic to win the 2012 U.S. Open tennis tournament.  
Photo: Zairbek Mansurov | Dreamstime.com*

**By Harriet Cuthbert**  
*Contributing Writer*

I recently participated in a five-hour tennis match at the U.S. Open.

Actually, I was home watching it in the air-conditioned comfort of my bedroom, while Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic were doing all the work. They were competing in the men's final at Arthur Ashe Stadium, Queens, New York.

The U.S. Open is one of the four major tennis tournaments played annually around the world. It is a grueling two-week contest and a challenge, both mentally and physically, of such high caliber that I think it deserves its own place in tennis as the most difficult of them all.

Just being able to play on hard courts, being the best in three out of five sets and earning your way into the second week of the games, is a reward in itself. Then, at that point, when the top players are about to be tested, and the average match lasts well over three hours, if you're a tennis fan like me (a fanatic), you feel compelled to watch every shot, every bounce and every match that you can emotionally withstand.

The men's semi-final matches are both played on a Friday, followed by the final match on a Sunday — unless it rains. Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic prevailed against wind, rain, cold and flying debris on the court and became the finalists this year



for the fifth consecutive year that necessitated the match be played on a Monday.

Novak had been somewhat accustomed to being a finalist and to winning a few majors, but once again, Andy got there and everyone in the UK and many other countries was hoping that he would finally close it out. After all, he had the huge momentum from the Olympic Gold Medal that he won by defeating Roger Federer.

The match began about 4 p.m., and each game held me and the live audience completely engrossed. It was competition at the highest level — a chess game on a tennis court between two of the world's master players. The first set went to a tie-breaker, and Andy prevailed. The strong winds were increasing and posing a real challenge to the players. Andy seemed to understand the elements better than Novak, and he also won the second set.

Suddenly, about three hours into the match, Novak found his footing and his A-game, and he managed to outplay Andy and win both the third and fourth sets. The fans were going wild. I was hiding under the covers. I desperately wanted Andy to find his way back into the game, to regain his confidence. The exhaustion evident both on the players' faces and in their movements was a reminder of how hard they play and

also how hard they train to become the best in the world.

Eventually, I summoned the courage to look back at the screen. I saw that Andy was winning the fifth set and Novak was faltering. And, when he finally did win the match, at 6-2, I don't think even he believed it himself. It took a few long seconds before he looked up at the sky, looked at his mom and his coach and finally gave way to a tremendous and happy smile. The roar of the audience convinced him that he had indeed won his first tennis major tournament.

It took almost five hours to complete the match, and both men made watching it worth every second of the time invested.

Where is John McEnroe when I need him? I'm already suffering from tennis withdrawal.

## ABOUT HARRIET CUTHBERT

*Harriet is a contributing lifestyle writer for The Sarasota News Leader. She is from Boston and remains a committed Red Sox fan. She loves living on Siesta Key, and volunteers at the Sarasota Visitors Center to greet newcomers. She enjoys travel, meeting new people, photography, theatre, tennis, reading, writing, "beaching" and fine wines.*







# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

**21**

SEPT

**GatorNate and the Gladezmen: The Swamp Rock Super Show**

Sept. 21 to 28, 8 to 10 p.m., 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota, FL 34230; 941-894-6469.

**22**

SEPT

**S/ART/Q Fourth Annual Print Party**

Saturday, Sept. 22, from 5 to 10 p.m.; Sunday, Sept. 23, from noon to 4 p.m., Fogartyville Media and Arts Center. Free admission; \$5 per printed item.

**22**

SEPT

**Defense Issues Forum: "Searching for MIAs" — Bryan and Christopher Moon**

Saturday, Sept. 22, 9:30 a.m., USF Sarasota Manatee. Free admission; 8350 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota; 941-371-0375.

**22**

SEPT

**YPG's Art in the Park**

Saturday, Sept. 22, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Free admission, Five Points Park, 1331 First St., Sarasota.

**22**

SEPT

**Sarasota/Manatee Heart Walk**

Saturday, Sept. 22, 7:30 a.m. Free, but donations accepted. Payne Park, 2000 Adams Lane, Sarasota; 800-257-6941, ext. 4916.

**26**

SEPT

**Grand Opening: The Blue Owl Tavern on Main**

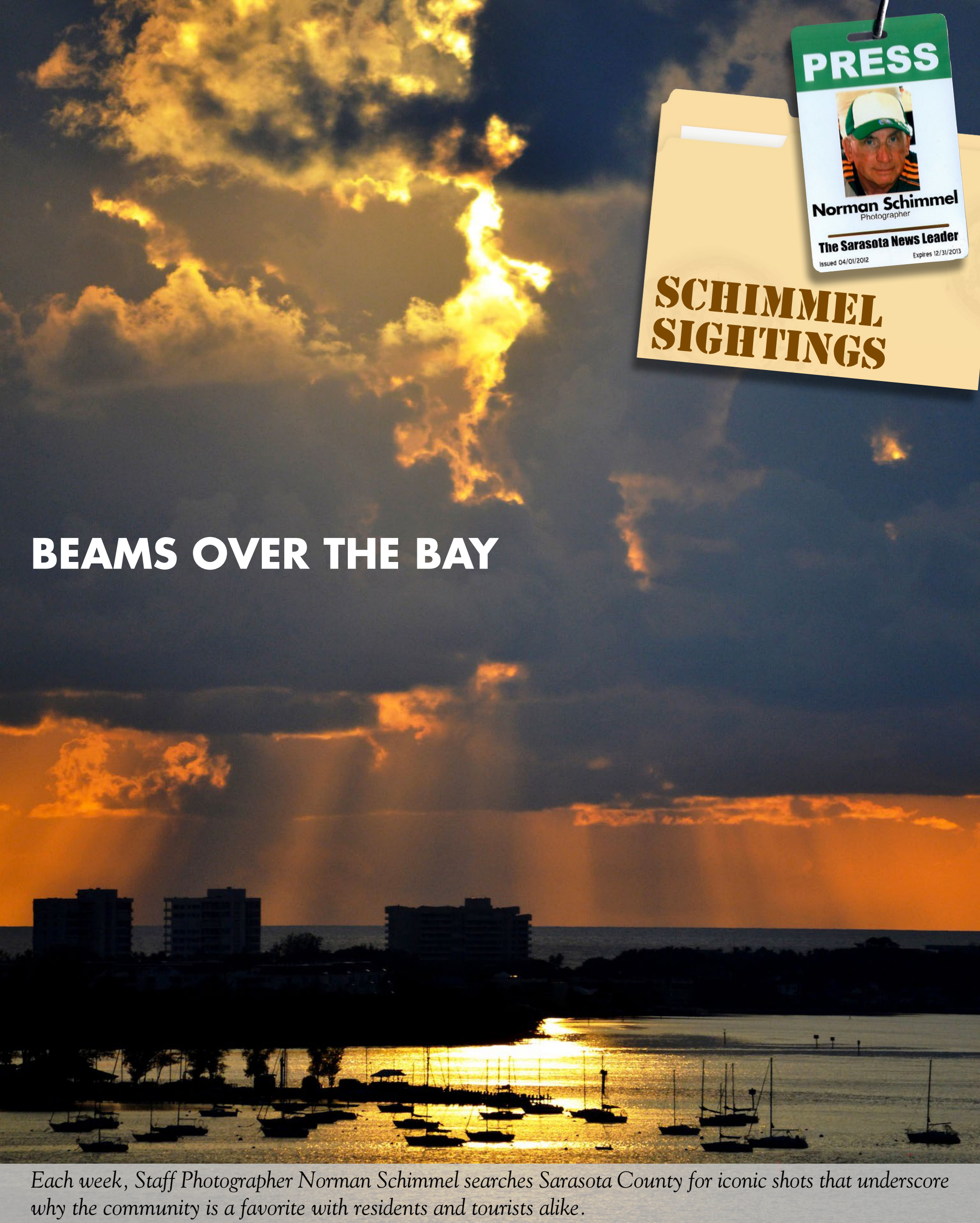
Wednesday, Sept. 26, 5 p.m. Live music: The Strangeways; free food, giveaways, beer specials; 1507 Main St., Sarasota. Free admission.

*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





# BEAMS OVER THE BAY

*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.*