

THE SARASOTA

December 21, 2012

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



NOISE ORDINANCE MEETING

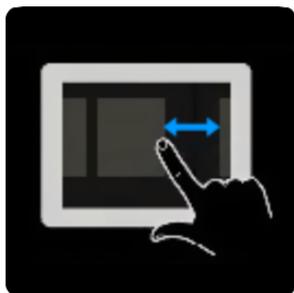
GIVING UP

GENUINE SURPRISE

Inside

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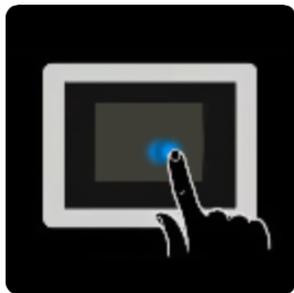
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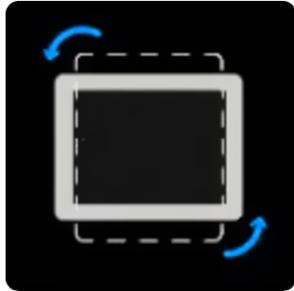
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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

For this week's issue — coming as it does right before Christmas — we felt it would be preferable to go lighter on the news stories and heavier on the features.

Fortunately, thanks to Fran Palmeri and Otus Rufous, we have breathtakingly beautiful nature photos for your viewing pleasure.

Fran presented us with an early Christmas present in the form of exquisite shots of a wide variety of creatures, as you will see in *Magnificent Abundance*.

We dare not ask how Otus manages a camera, but he has provided a whole array of the most delightful shots of birds you possibly can imagine. We invite you to savor his account of how an Audubon Christmas Bird Count transpires — and see how skilled you are at identifying some of his fellow winged creatures.

Of course, using a digital production platform enables us to present these images to you with incredibly clear, crisp color and quality. That being said, we also are extraordinarily fortunate to be able to make use of the skills of our production manager, Cleve Posey. Vicki Chatley, our copy editor, and I agreed that Cleve outdid himself with his layouts this week.

At this point, I also want to take the opportunity to tell all of you, our readers, just how much we appreciate you. Thanksgiving may be the traditional time for people to reflect upon their blessings, but I seem to do that more often during the Holiday Season. You are why we are inspired each week to work on hard-hitting news stories, fantastic photos and gorgeous layouts.

From all of our staff, our warmest holiday wishes to you.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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

This may take a while.

Some things are just hard to resist. Like *The Sarasota News Leader*. It's a feast of in-depth local news, delightful and entertaining features, and — thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota* — access to the best community calendar available.

The first impulse is just to gobble it all up.

But it's better to take it slow and relish every news "morsel." There's no rush.

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THE NOISE ORDINANCE MEETING

Some 'give' at a time of year for giving — Stan Zimmerman

Maybe it was the Christmas music on the radio or the Salvation Army bell-ringers. But what could have been a knock-'em-down disagreement over the city's noise ordinance took on a kinder tone Wednesday evening, Dec. 19.

Some people were strident, for certain. But if Santa was watching the streaming video, he added more than a few fighters to his nice list. Even the ranting of ex-Judge Frank Brenner (“Does the city need more noise?”) failed to provoke an aura of hostility.

When the meeting started, the audience of around 100 people were in chairs, standing in the back, sitting on the floor and spilling over into an adjacent room of the City Hall Annex. A stereotypist would have had no problem distinguishing between the players — it was youth versus age.

Neither side walked in prepared to give an inch. Many people walked away feeling a little of the other's pain, and ready — just maybe — to consider some modification to the city's entertainment-smothering blanket ordinance. ([Full story here](#))



GIVING UP

North Port wants out of Warm Mineral Springs deal — Cooper Levey-Baker

The North Port City Commission agenda simply called for a discussion about how to proceed in managing Warm Mineral Springs, the 87-degree “Fountain of Youth” the city co-owns with the county, but one commissioner placed a very different motion on the table.

“My motion is to sell the Warm Mineral Springs in its entirety to a private entity,” North Port Commissioner Cheryl Cook announced just minutes into the commission's Tuesday, Dec. 18, meeting. In less than two hours, that motion had been approved by a 3-2 majority, sending the county a clear signal that North Port has no desire to continue its joint management of the property. ([Full story here](#))



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GENUINE SURPRISE

CONA president says she found it hard to believe her former fellow Siesta Key Association director was charged with making a fraudulent campaign contribution in her name — Rachel Brown Hackney

Having served with Robert Waechter for years on the board of the Siesta Key Association, Lourdes Ramirez told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Dec. 17 she was not surprised

he had enough of her personal information to be able to use it in making a fraudulent campaign contribution in her name.

“We’ve known each other for 10 years,” she added, though they have had little contact since she stepped down from the SKA board in 2011.

Ramirez is now the president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA). She served on the SKA board from 2003 until 2011; Waechter remains on the board.

Waechter, 70, a former chairman of the Sarasota County Republican Party and a member of the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority, was charged Dec. 14 with a third-degree felony in connection with a \$200 contribution made in Ramirez’ name to the congressional campaign of New College professor Keith Fitzgerald. ([Full story here](#))



GOING UP

Fall tourism figures are ahead of the 2011 numbers, and early signs indicate more growth in the 2013 season — Rachel Brown Hackney

Based on strong numbers for October and November, the president of Sarasota County’s tourism office says she is “cautiously optimistic about the season ...”

Virginia Haley of Visit Sarasota County told *The Sarasota News Leader* Dec. 19 that in November, the county saw a 10.4 percent increase in visitors compared to the same month in 2011, and their spending was up by 13.7 percent.

The tourist development tax revenue for October was up 5 percent over the number for October 2011, she added.

Fall usually is a good time for European visitors to come to Sarasota County, Haley noted, but after seeing such strong growth last year from that market, she was not expecting much this year. ([Full story here](#))



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RESTORE RANKINGS

Sarasota County Commission settles on priorities for spending funds from the BP Deepwater Horizon settlement — Cooper Levey-Baker

The Sarasota County Commission this week made minor tweaks to a list of high-priority projects the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program hopes will be funded through the RESTORE Act, the federal law that guides how penalties paid by BP for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill will be spent.

While no one knows exactly how much money will eventually be made available through the RESTORE Act, local governments and agencies around the Gulf Coast are jockeying to pick up cash for hometown projects. The Joint Estuary Program Group — comprising organizations that oversee Sarasota Bay, Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor — plans to submit a ranked list of ecosystem restoration projects to the federal government in the hopes of winning some of that BP money. ([Full story here](#))



LOOKING BETTER

With another vote on mowing contracts, the County Commission hopes it has put the worst of problems behind it — Rachel Brown Hackney

After less than five minutes of discussion and a unanimous vote, the Sarasota County commissioners voiced optimism last week that they had put the worst of the county's mowing problems behind them.

At the recommendation of Spencer L. Anderson, director of the Field Services Office for the county, the board authorized County Administrator Randall Reid or his designee to extend mowing contracts for five county zones up to April 30, 2013 and to increase the aggregate not-to-exceed amount for all the contracts from \$1,058,000 to \$1.4 million. ([Full story here](#))



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THE NOISE ORDINANCE

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo (in white shirt at the podium, front) meets with residents to discuss the city's noise ordinance. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

SOME 'GIVE' AT A TIME OF YEAR FOR GIVING

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Maybe it was the Christmas music on the radio or the Salvation Army bell-ringers. But what could have been a knock-'em-down disagreement over the city's noise ordinance took on a kinder tone Wednesday evening, Dec. 19.

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When the meeting started, the audience of around 100 people were in chairs, standing in the back, sitting on the floor and spilling over into an adjacent room of the City Hall Annex.

A stereotypist would have had no problem distinguishing between the players — it was youth versus age.

Neither side walked in prepared to give an inch. Many people walked away feeling a little of the other's pain, and ready — just maybe — to consider some modification to the city's entertainment-smothering blanket ordinance.

A ZONE FOR CELEBRATION

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo sponsored the get-together. It was the second town-hall meeting assembling stakeholders to ponder any modification to the decade-old shutdown of amplified outdoor music citywide.



Police Officer D. Franklin (left) and Sarasota City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo compare noise meter readings on the night of Dec. 18 on St. Armands. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The regulations have turned many restaurateurs into violators for offering their patrons recorded or live music on speakers in their outdoor dining areas. More than a few have been busted by city police. The busts are made easier by allowing complaints to be cloaked in anonymity.

Deanna LaRue who lives on South Palm Avenue was the first of many to speak Wednesday night, and she set a tone that lasted for the duration of the nearly three-hour-long meeting. She said, “My main concern as we try to discuss this, as we go down this road, we don’t fall into the hole like we did with parking meters where people got loud and angry and strident. Let’s listen and be civil.”

Caragiulo wanted people to come forward with ideas, to offer proposals for bringing entertainment back to the downtown area. But at the same time, he hoped they would offer ways to buffer the impact on the people who live downtown. He initially suggested the city create an “entertainment zone,” perhaps as an overlay to existing downtown zoning.

Martha Schrantz is a resident of the Rivo on Ringling condominium complex. “You should not use the term ‘entertainment zone,’” she said. “As a 40-year real estate agent, I can tell you that nomenclature will send people packing. We were promised the enjoyment of our property.”

“ You should not use the term ‘entertainment zone.’ As a 40-year real estate agent, I can tell you that nomenclature will send people packing. We were promised the enjoyment of our property. ”

Martha Schrantz
Resident
Rivo on Ringling

Eric Sobol, the president of 50 Central Avenue — an address that is becoming Ground Zero for the debate — drew a clear distinction. “I’m totally in favor of growth and development in downtown Sarasota,” he said. “I’m all in favor of the youth movement and the music downtown. But we’re residents, and we need sleep, too.”

Caragiulo sees the effort to bring the two sides together as an exercise in planning. “This is a big conversation,” he said. “This is an issue of planning, with a process that is deliberate and sometimes tedious. It should be done with care, consideration and vision. If we don’t talk about it, we can’t fix it.”

Steve McCallister is one of those rare birds, a native Sarasotan. “I like the idea of a celebration zone,” he said. “I worked with the [Economic Development Corp.] on branding this area, and we called it ‘The Cultural Coast.’ Today it’s just ‘Sssssh.’”

PROJECTION OF THE PROFILE

More than any other person at the meeting, Nicholas Rossi personified the tug-of-war between fun and fear. “I also live at 50 Central. I came downtown three years ago from Bradenton. I wanted to be where the action was. I came down here every night before I moved,” he said.

And now that he is here? “Will there be enough restrictions to keep this thing from getting

out of hand? We must factor residential uses into the equation. Maybe we can draw circles around residential areas and write ordinances to protect them," he said.

Rochelle Dudley went the other way; she moved to Bradenton, mostly for the nightlife. She is a young professional, an entrepreneur and an employer.

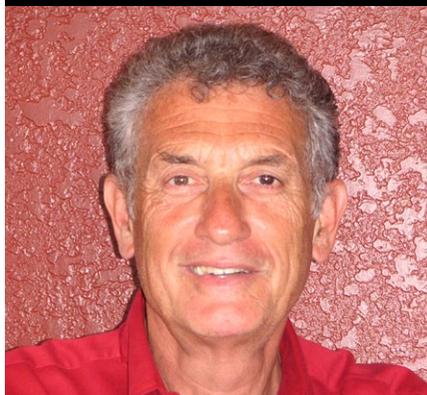
"You guys lost me to a neighboring city because there's not a place to go out at night here. We're the future of Sarasota. I would love for downtown to be someplace I want to come in the evening besides having dinner and going home," she said. "You're losing youth and young professionals to other areas. I hope we can all come to a compromise."

Such a compromise might involve moving the music north of Fruitville Road. "We need to consider the Rosemary District for this developmental feature," said Wayne Genther. "Let's be moderate, sustainable and enjoyable."

A total of 34 people spoke. They wrangled over hours of operation and decibels of loudness (at various frequencies, too); they wrangled over nomenclature and how to handle drunks in the street.

But nobody — with the exception of ex-Judge Brenner — drew any lines in the sand or erected ultimatums. As the meeting broke up, several knots of participants joined in discussion. By being pulled together that evening, they confronted a controversy with conversation. Confrontation was not in the holiday air. 

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GIVING UP



Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson/Photo by Norman Schimmel

NORTH PORT WANTS OUT OF WARM MINERAL SPRINGS DEAL

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

The North Port City Commission agenda simply called for a discussion about how to proceed in managing Warm Mineral Springs, the 87-degree “Fountain of Youth” the city co-owns with the county, but one commissioner placed a very different motion was on the table.

“My motion is to sell the Warm Mineral Springs in its entirety to a private entity,” North Port Commissioner Cheryl Cook announced just minutes into the commission’s Tuesday, Dec. 18, meeting. In less than two hours, that motion had been approved by a 3-2 majority, sending the county a clear signal that North Port has no desire to continue its joint management of the property.

Even North Port Mayor Linda Yates, who has been a constant critic of the process by which the springs was acquired, was shocked. “It did come to me as a surprise, because I really still had some optimism that we possibly can

come to a meeting of the minds,” she tells *The Sarasota News Leader*.

Not so much.

“I believe that this is a project that is better left to the private sector,” Cook said Dec. 18, adding the city should not be bound by commitments made by previous commissions.

Both Cook and Commissioner Rhonda DiFranco are new to the board. “There was an election,” Cook said, “and as far as I’m concerned, this is a new day.”

“I also have to agree with Commissioner Cook that we were elected. We’re there to protect the concerns of the citizens out there that elected us,” said DiFranco, seconding Cook’s motion and questioning the very constitutionality of plans to redevelop the property.

Vice Mayor Jim Blucher said he “couldn’t disagree more” with the motion, adding the city

had cleared the legality of the deal during the original buying process. “We wouldn’t have moved on that without that legal opinion,” he said.

Blucher has vocally supported the city’s and county’s push to explore options to redevelop the springs property — a notion that was shot down weeks ago when the North Port commission blocked an Invitation to Negotiate (known as an ITN) that would have solicited concept plans from interested developers.

“All we are trying to do with the documents that are in front of you is to try to get some people in the private sector ... to come up with some ways of improving the springs,” said Blucher, referring to the ITN. “Remembering that the No. 1 goal is to protect the springs, No. 2 is to promote tourism and economic development within the city.”

Speakers during the public comment section were divided about what to do with the springs. Some said the “deterioration” of the



A Sarasota County staff presentation to the County Commission in February included a copy of an old postcard about Warm Mineral Springs. Image courtesy Sarasota County



An aerial map shows the proximity of Warm Mineral Springs to U.S. 41 outside North Port. Map courtesy Sarasota County

springs should encourage the city to dump the property now, while others argued the springs is “too significant” to be left to the whims of the private market.

Cook doubled down on her motion to sell the springs, which set off confusion: Would the city simply sell its share in the property, or would the county have to agree to sell the whole property? Cook indicated the latter.

Yates said she could not support the motion at first, but after debate with Blucher, who rebutted several of Cook’s arguments, she changed her mind. Yates said she supported keeping the springs in public hands if it would become a park-like attraction, but she was “concerned” about calls from Blucher to explore the possibility of building a spa on the property.

Blucher pointed out that nothing prevented the commission from still insisting that the property become “a large park.” “It could end up that,” he argued, saying the ITN was merely a process to collect ideas. “I just don’t understand where the commission is coming from, afraid to get information. All we’re looking for is information.”

Yates’ flip on the issue gave the motion a 3-2 majority. In a six-month span, Yates has now voted to start the ITN process, to nullify the ITN process and to sell the springs entirely.

Yates tells the *News Leader* North Port residents are ecstatic over the decision, shaking her hand and thanking her. While she has branded herself a strong advocate for protecting the springs, she says she is unconcerned about allowing a private business to have its

way with the land, citing several governmental regulations. “There are so many protections,” she says.

But none from the city, if the county goes along with her vote.

That is a big if. County Commissioner Christine Robinson, speaking only for herself, says she has no interest in selling the springs. County attorneys are looking at the contract to see what that commission’s options are. The County Commission is not expected to address the matter again until early 2013.

Robinson says the North Port decision “jeopardizes public access and the preservation of the springs.”

She was not the only one surprised by the decision. After Tuesday’s vote, North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis asked the City Commission to stop the meeting for a few

minutes so he could huddle with staffers and come back to get direction from the board. Rather than adjourning, “I would request that you all take a short break,” he said, to “give us an opportunity to talk first.”

No dice. Cook made a motion to adjourn the meeting immediately, backed by Blucher, who seemed exasperated with the direction the discussion had taken.

“We need to take a step,” Yates said, pushing for a short break instead of adjourning. “We can’t just leave it in limbo.” But they did. The motion to adjourn was approved seconds later, supported by Cook, Blucher and DiFranco. 

 *I just don’t understand where the commission is coming from, afraid to get information. All we’re looking for is information.*

Jim Blucher
Vice Mayor
North Port





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GENUINE SURPRISE

Robert Waechter (left) watches the swearing-in of the newly elected Sarasota County commissioners on Nov. 20. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CONA PRESIDENT SAYS SHE FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE HER FORMER FELLOW SIESTA KEY ASSOCIATION DIRECTOR WAS CHARGED WITH MAKING A FRAUDULENT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION IN HER NAME

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Having served with Robert Waechter for years on the board of the Siesta Key Association, Lourdes Ramirez told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Dec. 17 she was not surprised he had enough of her personal information to be able to use it in making a fraudulent campaign contribution in her name.

“We’ve known each other for 10 years,” she added, though they have had little contact since she stepped down from the SKA board in 2011.

Ramirez is now the president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA). She served on the SKA board

from 2003 until 2011; Waechter remains on the board.

Waechter, 70, a former chairman of the Sarasota County Republican Party and a member of the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority, was charged Dec. 14 with a third-degree felony in connection with a \$200 contribution made in Ramirez’ name to the congressional campaign of New College professor Keith Fitzgerald.

Waechter immediately posted \$1,500 bond Friday after turning himself in to the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office, Community Affairs Manager Wendy Rose told the *News Leader*.

He formally was charged with Criminal Use of Personal Identification Information. He invoked his rights and did not provide a statement, the report added.

Ramirez reported to the Sheriff's Office on Oct. 15 that she had received a thank you note from the Fitzgerald campaign for a contribution she had not made. A Democrat, Fitzgerald challenged U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Longboat Key, for the District 16 congressional seat in the Nov. 6 election.

Ramirez reported to deputies that she felt someone had stolen her identity, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Ramirez told the *News Leader* she had been registered as a Republican in the county since 2006. In recent months, she has been mentioned frequently as a presumed candidate for Sarasota County Commission in 2014.

"I am almost 75 to 80 percent there," she told the *News Leader*, referring to plans to run for the seat held by Commissioner Nora Patterson. Although Patterson could not seek re-election because of term limits, Patterson also announced last year that she did not plan to run again.

Ramirez said if she does run for the seat, she will not file until November 2013. "A year before an election

is plenty of time for a candidate to get their name out," she added.

Although people had mentioned to her that Waechter could have been the person who made the contribution to Fitzgerald in her name, she continued, she did not suspect him. "I figured he knew the election law," she added. "That's why it took me by surprise."

Ramirez already had filed a report with the Federal Elections Commission about the fraudulent use of her identity information

in regard to the Fitzgerald contribution, she pointed out. When deputies notified her Dec. 14 about Waechter's arrest, she added, they told her they would forward their report to the FEC.

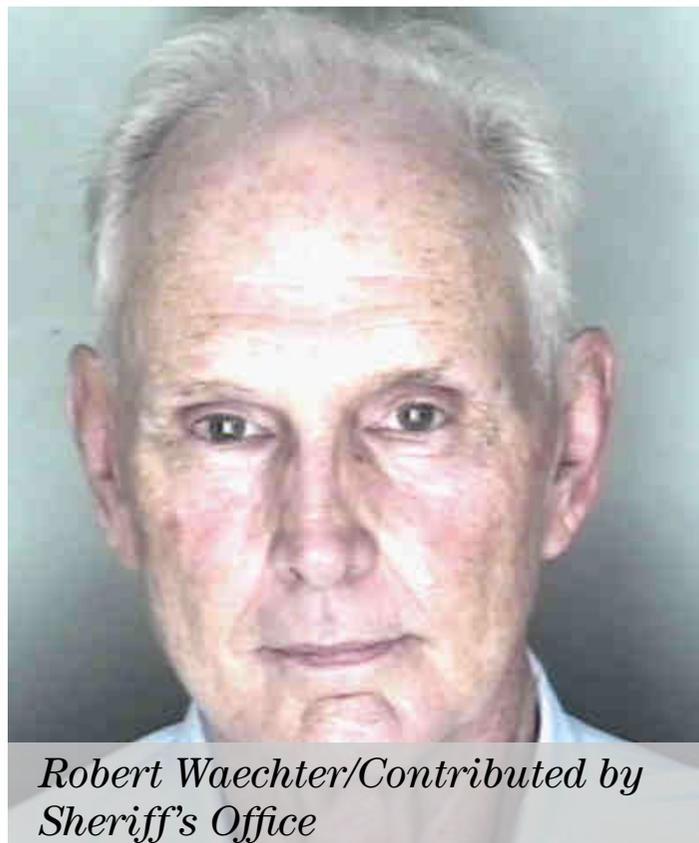
Asked whether she had any idea why Waechter would have done such a thing, she said, "I really think it does all have to do with politics."

Waechter has been an ally of developers in the county, while Ramirez has addressed the County Commission on numerous occasions to encourage slow-growth methods.

Along with his seat on the SKA board, Waechter has been a member of the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority and the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council.

“I figured he knew the election law. That's why it took me by surprise.”

Lourdes Ramirez
President
CONA



Robert Waechter/Contributed by Sheriff's Office

Frederick “Rick” Piccolo, president and CEO of the Airport Authority, told the *News Leader* on Dec. 18 that Waechter had withdrawn his name from consideration for reappointment to the authority. Waechter’s term — and those of the other members — expired in November, Piccolo explained, but Gov. Rick Scott so far has not released the list of those appointed for the next term. Therefore, Piccolo said, “A replacement [for Waechter] has not been named yet.”

Piccolo added he would expect the new appointments no later than January.

Waechter originally was elected to the authority in 2000 for a two-year term, Piccolo said. Then he was appointed to the authority in 2002, after members no longer were elected, Piccolo noted. Waechter served until 2006. Then-Gov. Charlie Crist reappointed Waechter to the board for another four-year term in 2008, Piccolo added.

Anna Madden, the county employee who is the liaison between the County Commission and the Tourist Development Council, said on Dec. 18 she had not received any notice from Waechter that he was resigning from the TDC.

DETAILS OF THE ALLEGED CRIME

A Sheriff’s Office investigator was able to use surveillance video from a Sweetbay store in Sarasota and IP addresses to connect Waechter with the purchase of the prepaid VISA card allegedly used to make the \$200 campaign contribution to the Fitzgerald campaign on Oct. 2, according to the Sheriff’s Office report.

Waechter also allegedly used the same credit card to make a \$35 campaign contribution to

Democrat Liz Alpert’s campaign. It is not clear from the report whether that contribution also was in Ramirez’ name.

Alpert ran against Republican incumbent Ray Pilon of Sarasota for the District 72 Florida House seat in the 2012 campaign.

On Oct. 24, the report says, an investigator determined the VISA card had been obtained through META bank. On Oct. 29, the investigator subpoenaed the bank for information about the card. About two weeks later, the investigator received information from the bank showing that the VISA card had been purchased at a Sweetbay supermarket on Bee Ridge Road in Sarasota, the report says.

On Nov. 15, the investigator contacted the firm that operated the Fitzgerald campaign website and advised it of the case. Then, on Nov. 26, the report continues, the investigator received an email from the website operator with the relevant logs and IP addresses from which the contribution was made. The investigator used that information to track the IP addresses to Comcast Corp., which was subpoenaed for information. The results led the investigator to RWR Installations Inc., which had a Sawyer Road address in Sarasota, the report notes. Using Sheriff’s Office records, the report adds, the investigator was able to locate Waechter as the owner of that business.

On Dec. 6, the investigator went to the Sweetbay on Bee Ridge Road and asked for information relating to the use of the prepaid VISA card. The manager was able to locate the receipt for the transaction and provide video surveillance footage, the report says. The investigator was able to identify Waechter from that footage, the report adds. 

SARASOTA COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX

COLLECTIONS BY LOCATION

*Collections through 10/31/2012

	CONSOLIDATED	LONGBOAT KEY	NORTH PORT	SARASOTA	SARASOTA COUNTY	SIESTA KEY	VENICE	TOTAL
October 2011	11,704.03	83,089.80	2,582.67	270,502.02	93,494.36	170,724.17	31,302.15	663,399.20
November 2011	21,123.03	92,089.08	2,585.36	292,337.01	102,904.66	174,168.14	41,791.78	726,999.06
December 2011	32,111.93	119,773.09	3,676.46	255,944.73	148,867.52	237,292.78	54,990.10	852,656.61
January 2012	103,036.24	149,210.67	5,960.04	385,659.75	247,314.66	389,519.36	243,628.78	1,524,329.50
February 2012	78,293.45	203,858.99	8,018.60	481,311.65	324,765.80	634,303.65	143,565.16	1,874,117.30
March 2012	64,165.67	294,824.98	14,482.74	693,472.16	464,982.25	829,907.44	169,896.82	2,531,732.06
April 2012	31,310.62	171,331.04	4,500.19	473,005.07	199,773.50	442,376.16	67,922.61	1,390,219.19
May 2012	15,979.55	120,640.36	3,126.55	322,106.78	150,017.10	247,396.11	41,611.92	900,878.37
June 2012	22,702.61	118,355.70	2,958.25	320,526.85	178,282.04	379,104.94	42,219.21	1,064,149.60
July 2012	18,354.19	122,376.61	2,835.49	346,129.65	178,578.75	367,657.38	46,874.28	1,082,806.35
August 2012	18,643.29	88,298.67	2,296.63	293,081.88	126,139.96	180,082.23	29,941.41	738,484.07
September 2012	6,955.27	56,810.83	1,806.23	235,947.30	100,759.93	121,887.20	26,258.37	550,425.13
Grand Totals	424,379.88	1,620,659.82	54,829.21	4,370,024.85	2,315,880.53	4,174,419.56	940,002.59	13,900,196.44
Percentage of Total (%)	3.05%	11.66%	0.39%	31.44%	16.66%	30.03%	6.76%	100.00%

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

GOING UP

Sarasota County Tax Collector
Barbara Ford-Coates

The City of Sarasota barely edged out Siesta Key for the total amount of tourist development tax revenue collected in the 2012 fiscal year. Chart courtesy Sarasota County Tax Collector's Office

FALL TOURISM FIGURES ARE AHEAD OF THE 2011 NUMBERS, AND EARLY SIGNS INDICATE MORE GROWTH IN THE 2013 SEASON

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

Based on strong numbers for October and November, the president of Sarasota County's tourism office says she is "cautiously optimistic about the season ..."

Virginia Haley of Visit Sarasota County told *The Sarasota News Leader* Dec. 19 that in November, the county saw a 10.4 percent increase in visitors compared to the same month in 2011, and their spending was up by 13.7 percent.

The tourist development tax revenue for October was up 5 percent over the number for October 2011, she added.

Fall usually is a good time for European visitors to come to Sarasota County, Haley noted, but after seeing such strong growth last year from that market, she was not expecting much this year.

"Frankly, we thought there would be a leveling off," she pointed out.

The numbers told a different story: The number of European visitors in November was up 21.7 percent over the same month in 2011, the count of Canadian tourists rose 16.7 percent and the number of Midwesterners visiting the area increased 25 percent, she said.

“We had really good numbers, too, from within Florida,” Haley said.

October and November traditionally were slow months for the area, Haley pointed out. However, the Ringling International Arts Festival has become a must-attend event in October. This year it was followed by the Rev3 Triathlon in Venice, the Sarasota Chalk Festival, the Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition and the Sarasota Medieval Fair. The fair was spread over two November weekends.

“All of that really starts to add up,” she pointed out.

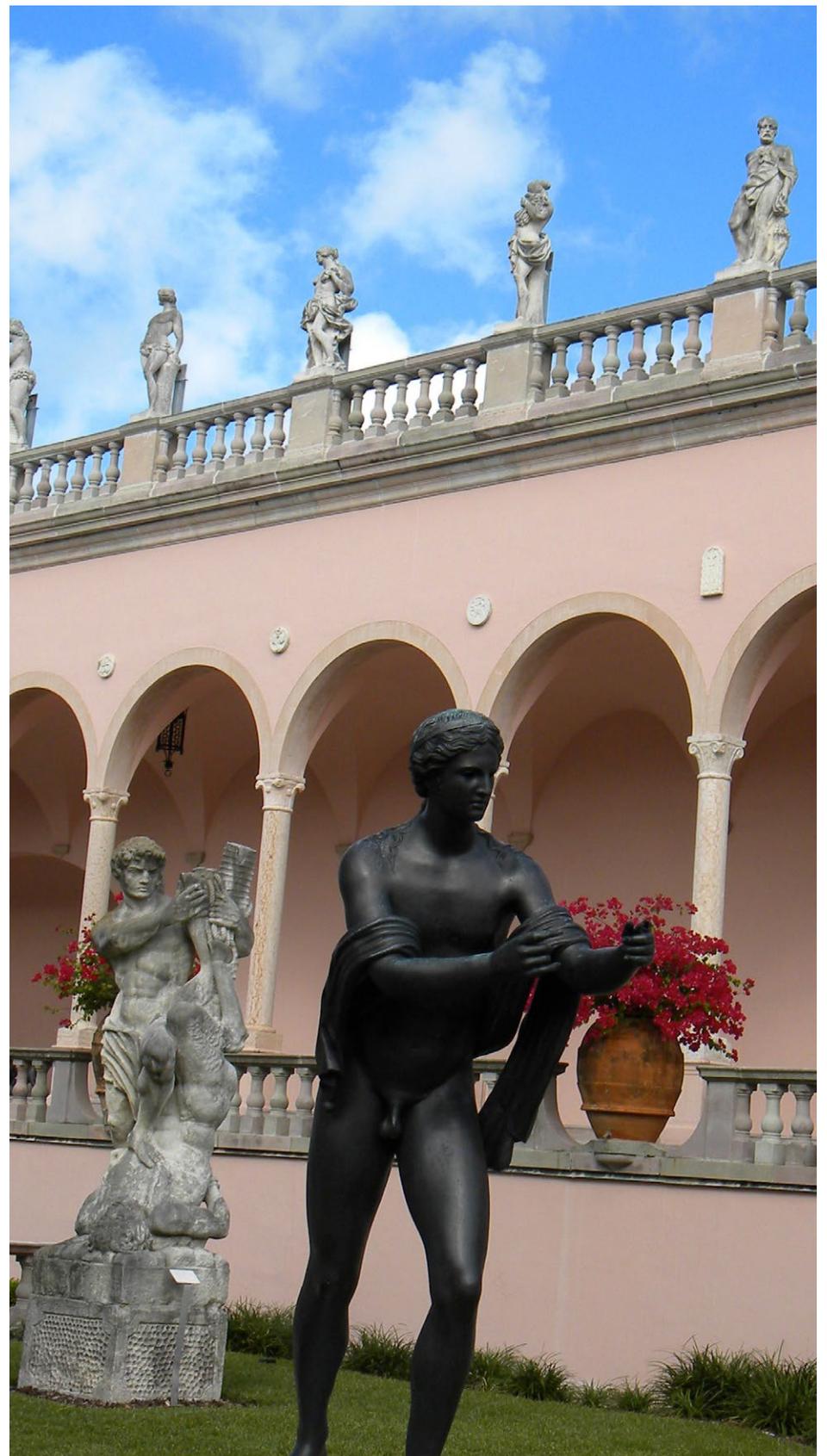
Cheryl Gaddie, co-chairwoman of the Crystal Classic, told members of the Siesta Key Village Association this month that that event drew about 33,000 people, approximately the same number as in 2011.

Reflecting on the tourism figures, Haley told the *News Leader*, “I think we’re being a lot more sophisticated with the marketing.” She added that Visit Sarasota County has been working on campaigns to target specific groups of people, from art lovers to those interested in ecotourism.

“I think that’s really made a difference,” she said.

Kevin Cooper, executive director of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, told the *News Leader* on Dec. 20 his organization had been told to expect a drop of about 15 percent to 20 percent in tourism once the flow of publicity had ebbed over the naming of Siesta Public Beach as No. 1 in the United States. That announcement came at the start of Memorial Day weekend in 2011.

“We didn’t seem to experience that,” he said. However, Siesta possesses an almost unique quality as a tourist destination, he pointed out: “We seem to have a very high percentage of returning visitors” every year. After people have stayed on the island once, he added, they just want to keep coming back.



The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is just one of the Sarasota attractions mentioned in a recent New York Times travel article. Photo by Norman Schimmel

He concurred with Haley that tourism has been strong on Siesta this fall.

In an email this week to the Sarasota County Commission, Haley also pointed to an article titled, *36 Hours in Sarasota*, which ran in the New York Times travel section on Dec. 16.

Written by Geraldine Fabrikant, it begins, “Where else can one spend the morning reveling in the beauty of works by Peter Paul Rubens, Frans Hals and Botticelli and the afternoon lolling on a powdery white sand beach? That is the lure of Sarasota, the city perched on the Gulf of Mexico where John and Mable Ringling, the circus impresario and his wife, set the stage for a vibrant cultural life after buying land there in 1911.”

Already, the pace of bookings for visits during the 2013 season is ahead of the figures for the

2012 season, Haley added, “and [this] was a good year.”

Once again, she said, she thought she would see a leveling off in those figures, “but I’m happy to be wrong.”

Through the 2012 fiscal year, the county collected \$13,900,196.44 in tourist development tax revenue, according to the Sarasota County Tax Collector’s Office. That was an increase of \$2,418,541.46 over the 2011 figure.

Haley noted that with consumer confidence up to the highest level in four years, she hopes the 2013 season will be as strong as those early signs indicate.

“By and large,” Cooper said, “the feedback I’m getting is fantastic.” 



Venice’s beaches also draw their share of tourists. Photo by Norman Schimmel

RESTORE RANKINGS

A 2010 Deepwater Horizon flaring operation. Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Patrick Kelley, via Flickr

SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION SETTLES ON PRIORITIES FOR SPENDING FUNDS FROM THE BP DEEPWATER HORIZON SETTLEMENT

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

The Sarasota County Commission this week made minor tweaks to a list of high-priority projects the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program hopes will be funded through the RESTORE Act, the federal law that guides how penalties paid by BP for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill will be spent.

While no one knows exactly how much money will eventually be made available through the RESTORE Act, local governments and agencies around the Gulf Coast are jockeying to pick up cash for hometown projects. The Joint Estuary Program Group — comprising organizations that oversee Sarasota Bay, Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor — plans to submit a ranked list of ecosystem restoration projects

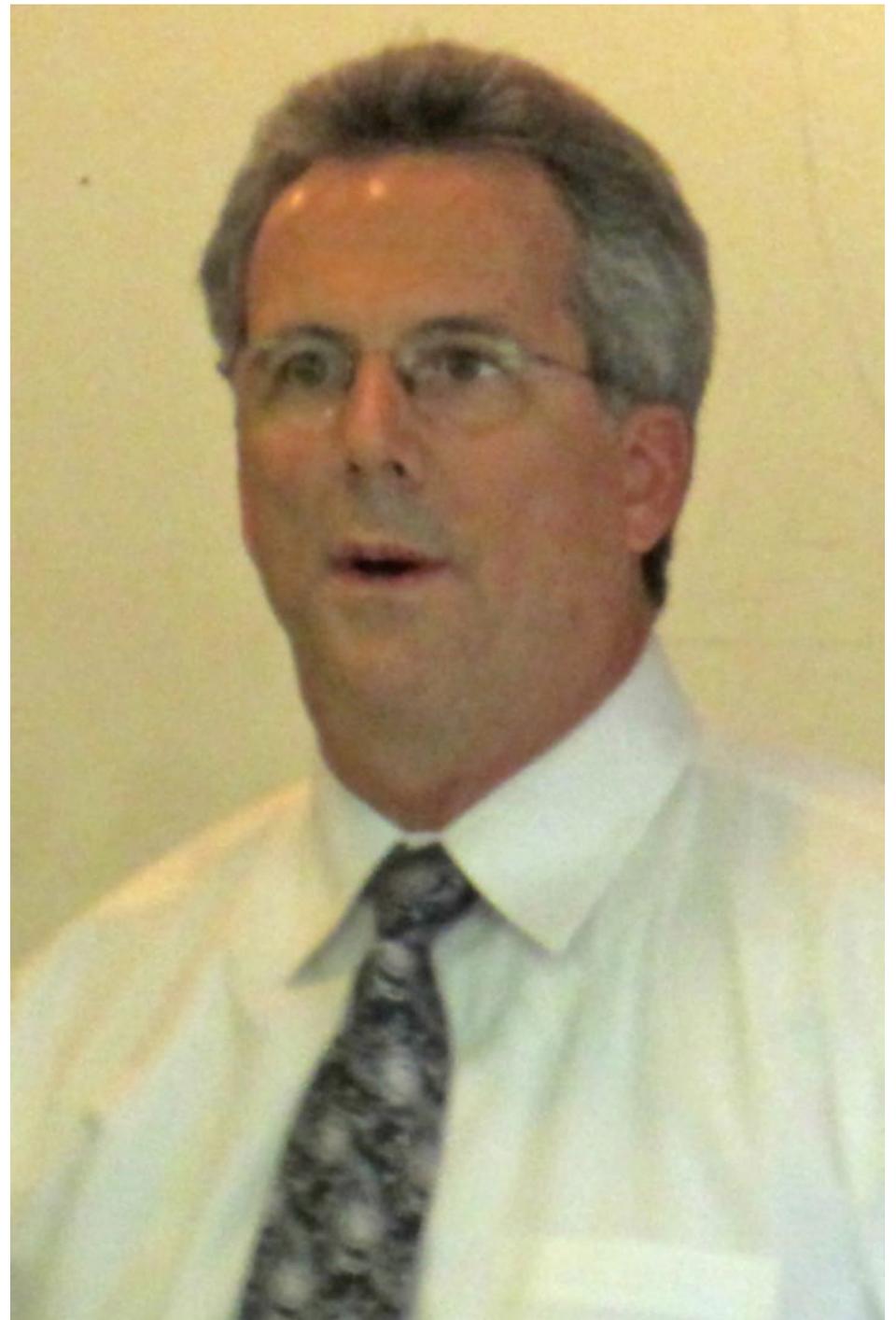
to the federal government in the hopes of winning some of that BP money.

Sarasota County Coastal Resources Manager Laird Wreford presented the original Sarasota Bay list to the County Commission Monday, Dec. 17, requesting approval before submitting the document to the regional group. The Sarasota list ranges from land acquisition to removing invasive vegetation to stormwater management upgrades. RESTORE Act rules stipulate that winning projects be guided by four goals: “Restore and Conserve Habitat,” “Restore Water Quality,” “Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources” and “Enhance Community Resilience.”

The county's wish list carries an estimated price tag of \$145 million. Commissioner Nora Patterson asked if the county is being "totally unrealistic" by asking for so much. Wreford said the "trick" is that no one knows how much total money will be dedicated, but he added that preliminary estimates are as high as \$300 million each year for 15 years. That money will be split among entities from around the entire Gulf Coast, though.

Sarasota's individual project costs start at \$20,000 and top out at \$60 million. The commission made only minor adjustments to the list, moving that \$60 million project (the Phillippi Creek Septic System Replacement Program) higher up and deprioritizing Little Sarasota Bay property acquisition. The land buy was pushed down amid concerns that the county was not in the position to actually acquire the property in question.

With the commission's approval, the rankings will now be submitted to the Joint Estuary Program Group. A team will collate and rank proposals from around the region before sending the completed list along to the federal government. Cross your fingers. 



Laird Wreford/File photo

"One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives." — *Mark Twain*

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LOOKING BETTER

An SUV drives past tall grass in the median of Webber Street in August. File photo

WITH ANOTHER VOTE ON MOWING CONTRACTS, THE COUNTY COMMISSION HOPES IT HAS PUT THE WORST OF PROBLEMS BEHIND IT

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

After less than five minutes of discussion and a unanimous vote, the Sarasota County commissioners voiced optimism last week that they had put the worst of the county's mowing problems behind them.

At the recommendation of Spencer L. Anderson, director of the Field Services Office for the county, the board authorized County Administrator Randall Reid or his designee to extend mowing contracts for five county zones up

to April 30, 2013 and to increase the aggregate not-to-exceed amount for all the contracts from \$1,058,000 to \$1.4 million.

Those contracts involve five separate firms: Storm Tech Inc., for the North Rural Zone; Reynolds Mowing Services Inc. for the South

Rural Zone; Rightmire's Land Services Inc. for the South Urban Zone; American Neighbors Inc. for the North Urban Zone; and JLC Hauling Inc., dba MegaMowers, for the North Urban Zone.

“*Emails that I've gotten recently have gone from 'Things look horrible' to 'They're looking better.'*”

Charles Hines
Commissioner
Sarasota County



The commission also authorized Reid or his designee to solicit additional quotes, as needed, for interim mowing services contractors up to April 30, 2013 in an amount not to exceed \$1.4 million.

“I know this has been a difficult few months for you and your staff,” Commissioner Charles Hines told Anderson after the vote. “The problems with the mowing contract ... [are] very visible to our public,” he added.

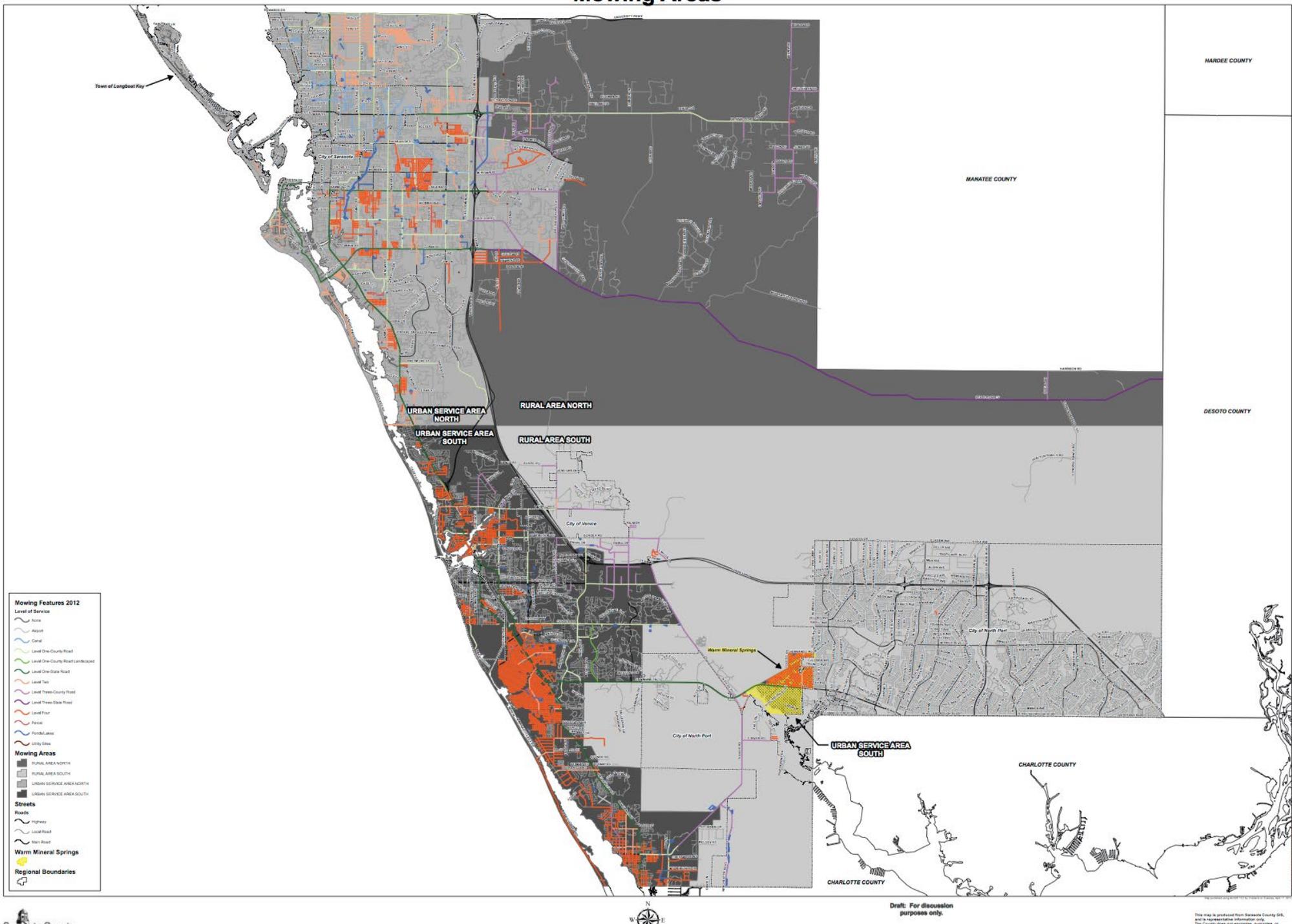
“You’ve made a lot of strides in trying to correct those problems,” Hines continued.

“Emails that I’ve gotten recently have gone from ‘Things look horrible’ to ‘They’re looking better,’” Hines added.

“Thank you ... for your efforts,” Chairwoman Christine Robinson told Anderson after the vote. “You’ve probably aged 10 years over this one”

A Dec. 11 memo from Anderson to the board pointed out that the commission on May 23 authorized then-Procurement Official Mark Thiele to solicit quotes for interim mowing services while a new solicitation for long-term

Mowing Areas



A Sarasota County map shows all the mowing zones. Map courtesy Sarasota County

contracts was developed — a period expected to take up to six months.

Because vendors had continued to struggle to provide stable maintenance in the North Urban Zone (generally north of Blackburn Point Road and west of Interstate 75), short-term actions had been necessary, the memo noted. County staff is being deployed to perform right of way maintenance in portions of that zone and will continue to do so as needed “until a stable internal or contract alternative is established.”

The memo also points out the county began employing temporary staff Nov. 19 to handle the work. As of Nov. 30, 10 people had been hired through Advance Talent Solutions, the memo says, adding, “Staff is assessing this temporary labor force and the feasibility of it evolving into a permanent County resource.”

On Oct. 30, Reid sent the following email to Anderson:

“Per our conversation yesterday regarding the potential of continuing problems with our newest vendor in the Northern mowing zone I remained concerned. I would request that after your meeting with them to provide clarity as to our expectations of them as a vendor you take some time to examine and recommend 1) the advisability of the further division of the northern zone into a smaller geographic unit and 2) the labor and equipment requirement for the county to create the internal capacity to maintain any single mowing zone with county crews.”

Reid added that he also was open to suggestions from Anderson and Procurement Official Ted Coyman regarding alternatives to hiring firms that did not have the capacity to han-

dle the mowing requirements. Reid wrote that they should change the scope of geographic responsibilities or tighten the eligibility requirements of vendors applying for the contracts. He added, “If privatization doesn’t work as envisioned internal capacity needs to be reestablished until we meet our service levels.”

Anderson’s Dec. 11 memo to the commission also said that in response to the number of phone calls and emails the County Commission had received about the mowing problems since spring, staff has been “implementing a tracking system to ensure email and phone communication is initially acknowledged within 1 business day and replied to within 3-5 business days.”

Among those communications, the following comments were made:

- From a July 22 email: “I am so embarrassed with no one mowing our medians in Sarasota. I was told that the grass and weeds are permissible up to one foot, which in my opinion is still too long. If you drive down Beneva, [Webber], Gulf Gate Drive or any other Sarasota Street, you will be appalled at the length of the grass and weeds in the medians. If you go to the East Coast, i.e. Deerfield, Boca Raton, etc., everything is manicured and the landscaping is beautiful.”
- From a man’s Sept. 4 call regarding the mowing in and around DeSoto Lakes and DeSoto Road, as related by a county employee to the commission: “[I]t’s the worst he’s seen it in 47 years. Whenever he calls he is told [the mowing will be done] next week, but [the mowing] still has not been done.”

- From an Oct. 17 email: “University Parkway hasn’t been mowed in quite some time. I imagine other areas in the County are in similar condition. The grass must be over 2 [feet] high in places. Isn’t that a code violation? ... Those medians/sidewalks should be cleaned up on a [weekly] basis. I’d fire my gardener if he didn’t show up weekly.”

EARLIER DISCUSSIONS

A little more than a month ago — on Nov. 6 — the commissioners vented frustrations about the ongoing mowing debacle. “The county looks like hell,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta said in underscoring the level of dissatisfaction.

The discussion was prompted by the release of an audit of the county’s mowing contract with one vendor, Bloomings Landscape & Turf Management, going back to October 2011. The audit was undertaken by the Office of the Clerk of Circuit Court at the request of County Administrator Randall Reid.

The audit pointed out a series of problems with Bloomings trying to handle the work. On May 5, the firm stopped performing under the agreement; Bloomings was formally notified of the contract’s termination on May 11, effective May 14, the audit said.

Among its findings, the audit cited a blurring of lines of responsibility among county staff

for overseeing the contract compliance; work orders for additional services that were approved by county staff without any formal amendment to the contract; waiving of re-inspection fees for a period without any amendment to the contract; and documents submitted by the contractor that “were inconsistent, inaccurate, and did not provide adequate information on the work performed.”

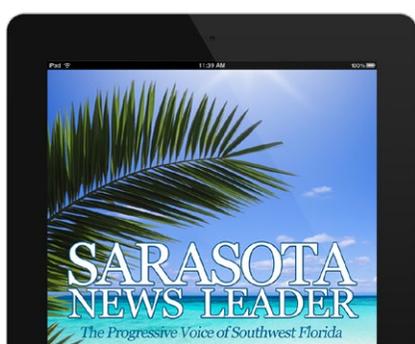
The commissioners peppered Thiele during their Jan. 10 meeting about his recommendation that the contract for the north zone be awarded to Bloomings this year. The firm’s bid was about half what the second-lowest bidder in each zone had proposed.

Nonetheless, Thiele insisted he and his staff were satisfied with the reasons Bloomings had provided for the low figure.

On May 22, Thiele appeared before the commission to tell them the county would be dismissing Bloomings.

His recommendation was for the commission to allow staff to secure quotes for the work through the end of the year — but no longer than six months — until new bids could be secured.

Thiele turned in his resignation on June 19, allegedly in the aftermath of questions raised regarding a separate matter. He had been on the job less than 10 months. 



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HOW MUCH???

Even on a cloudy day in the late summer, Siesta Public Beach sees plenty of activity. Photo by Rachel Hackney

COUNTY COMMISSIONER CONTINUES TO QUESTION COSTS FOR ITEMS IN SIESTA BEACH PARK PROJECT, INCLUDING \$3,500 TRASH CANS

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

Just a day after the Sarasota County Commission voted to proceed with the final design and bidding out of the Siesta Public Beach Park improvements, one commissioner began questioning staff about the cost of specific items proposed for the project.

“Could you find out for me the cost each for the trash cans and what we normally pay for trash cans in a beach area?” Commissioner Nora Patterson wrote the county’s Chief Engineer, James K. Harriott Jr., on Dec. 12.

Her question was following up on a list of items Siesta architect Mark Smith, chairman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, had included in a Dec. 10 letter to the board.

At the behest of commissioners, Smith had met with representatives of the county’s architectural and engineering consultants working on the beach project — Sweet Sparkman Architects and Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. — to determine, based on his expertise,

whether the \$16.7 million price tag for the project was too high.

Among the items Smith pointed to in that Dec. 10 letter to the commission were 13 trash/recycling receptacles costing \$3,500 each and 24 chaise lounges costing \$1,000 each.

He had found them listed in the section of plans for the park’s East Playground Area, he wrote in his letter. Altogether, the construction estimate for that part of the improvements is \$1,493,900, he pointed out. The trash bins and chaise lounges were among “several miscellaneous items listed on a cost estimate given to me that caught my attention,” he added.

Smith drew chuckles from the audience in the Commission Chambers for the Dec. 11 Siesta Beach vote when he told the board, “I understand that this is going to have to be like prison quality,” referring to the construction, “because when the sun goes down and the

orangutans come out, they're going to try to rip everything off the walls."

Still, he maintained the project could be constructed for about \$13.2 million.

On Dec. 14, Harriott responded to Patterson. Regarding the trash cans, he wrote in an email, "The quick answer is yes — the waste receptacles were estimated at \$3500 each. The design team indicated that these are a high quality receptacle with a 10-year warranty. While the upfront cost is high, this unit will last for over a decade in what is an extremely harsh coastal and public environment."

Harriott added, "The Landscape Architect on the design team indicated that units of lesser quality (typically costing under a \$1,000) do not have the same warranty or finish quality and degrade within a few years in this environment. That said, there are a number of alternatives between \$1,000 and \$2,000 that we will be evaluating and reviewing with the County for best value and life cycle costs as we move to [the] 90%" design completion point.

"With a quick internet search," he continued in the email, "we can identify many receptacles of varying quality, design and price (even up to several thousand dollars per receptacle). At the current stage of design (60%), we don't want to underestimate these types of items. The 60% to 90% is the stage of design ... where amenities are being [reviewed] for cost, quality [and] maintenance requirements so the appropriate cost effective option can be selected."

I have seen very attractive trash receptacles on St. Armands. They are concrete with a trash can inside. I doubt they cost \$3500.

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

Patterson's response in an email the same day: "That seems a totally out of line cost. I hope there are not other similarly budgeted items."

On Dec. 17, County Administrator Randall Reid emailed Harriott, asking him to "explain in more detail" the difference between a trash can and a trash receptacle that would be considered part of the streetscape in the park. Reid added that he suspected the item Smith had referenced in the Dec. 10 letter was a heavy receptacle designed to hold several cans.

Patterson then weighed in again on Dec. 17 in an email to Reid: "I have seen very attractive trash receptacles on St. Armands. They are concrete with a trash can inside. I doubt they cost \$3500. And by the way — why are we supplying Chaise Lounges? I think someone rents them to people."

Among other items whose cost Smith questioned for the East Playground Area were the following:

- 19 grills at a cost of \$1,000 each.
- 24 swivel chairs at a cost of \$2,000 each.
- 91 picnic tables at a cost of \$1,500 each.

Smith wrote that he had searched online and found parks and recreation commercial grade alternatives that could be considered as substitutes:

- Grills at \$242 each.
- Swivel chairs at \$500 each.
- Picnic tables at \$850 each. 

WILLIAMS LEAVES POST WITH ORIOLES IN SARASOTA

The Baltimore Orioles have announced that Laura Williams, who had been director of operations in Sarasota since the team began spring training in the city in 2010, “has decided to move on to other opportunities.”

Doug Duennes, executive vice president of business operations for the team in Baltimore, sent an email to staff on Dec. 17 about the change. “Until further notice, Trevor Markham will be [the] primary point of contact on all Orioles matters,” Duennes wrote.

Markham has been manager of ticket operations for the team in Sarasota.

Williams had been with the Orioles for more than 14 years, according to Duennes’ email. “Laura’s work over the past three years in assisting with the team’s Sarasota outreach has concluded with the club well placed in new state of the art facilities and firmly relocated to our vibrant new community,” Duennes



Trevor Markham/Photo by Norman Schimmel

added. “We wish Laura the best of luck in her future endeavors.”

Pat Calhoun of the Sarasota County Sports Commission notified the County Commission of the personnel changes in an email on Dec. 18. Referring to Williams, he wrote, “We will certainly miss her energetic and charming personality [and are] appreciative of a positive impact she [has] left on the Sarasota community.”

PINE VIEW STUDENT EARNS PERFECT SCORE ON AP EXAM

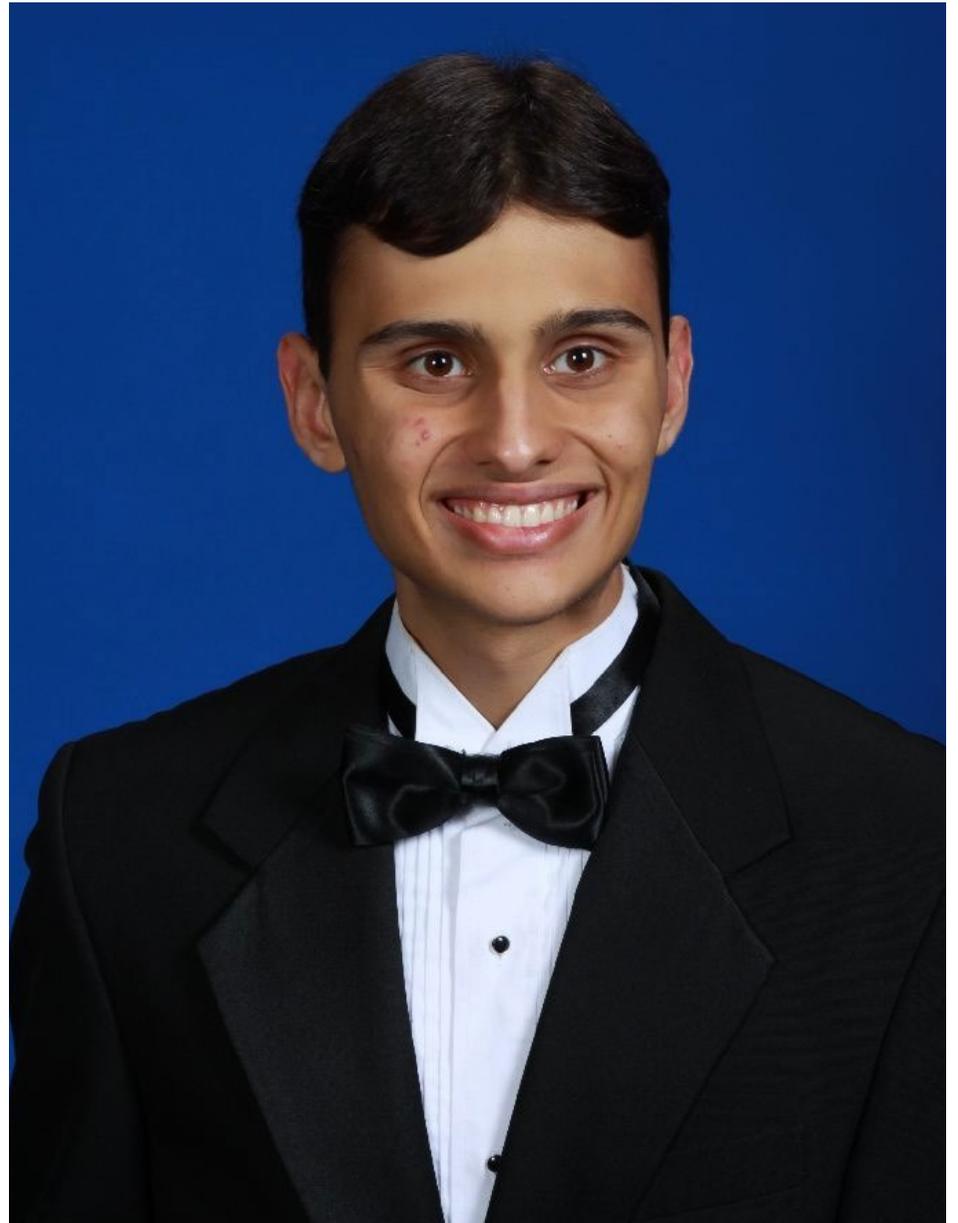
The College Board recently announced that Pine View School graduate Anthony Grebe earned every point possible on the Advanced Placement Macroeconomics exam he took in May. Grebe, who attends Washington University in St. Louis, was one of only 17 students to earn the distinction among the almost 100,000 students around the world who took the test in 2012, a Sarasota County Schools news release notes.

The College Board, which administers the AP Program, recently informed Grebe and Pine View Principal Steve Largo about the rare achievement.

“We congratulate Anthony on this outstanding accomplishment,” said Largo in the news release. “We’d also like to recognize Sharda Jagdish, his AP Macroeconomics teacher, for her ability to engage students and help give them the tools they need to excel in a college-level course.”

Advanced Placement exams are based on a composite score of 1 to 5, with 5 equivalent to a grade of A in the corresponding college course, the news release points out. Grebe not only received the top score of 5 — ranking among 15.5 percent of students to fall within this category in 2012 — but in doing so, he answered every multiple-choice question correctly and earned full points on each of the essays in the free-response section of the exam (90 out of a possible 90 points), the release adds.

Altogether, 99,903 students took the AP Macroeconomics exam in 2012.



Anthony Grebe/Contributed

The AP exams are written and scored by college professors from around the world and are typically designed to cover a full year of intensive college-level work, the release points out. Therefore, “it is very rare for a high school student to earn every point possible on any AP exam,” the release says.

In 2012, slightly more than 2 million students at more than 18,000 high schools took 3.7 million AP exams across a range of subjects, the release notes. Only 88 students earned every point possible — a result characterized by the College Board’s AP Program as “an extraordinary academic achievement,” the release adds.

POLICE WARNING ABOUT CRAIGSLIST RENTAL AGENT SCAM

Within the past couple of weeks, individuals have become victims of a rental housing fraud scam after responding to a posting on the popular Craigslist website, the Sarasota Police Department has announced.

In both instances, the victims responded to advertisements posted on Craigslist and arranged to meet with a rental agent to see the properties, a news release says. The perpetrators showed the houses to the potential renters and collected cash deposits from them. These “renters” were told they could occupy the residences once the houses had been cleaned, the release adds.

The first incident occurred on Dec. 4 at a house located in the 1600 block of 32nd Street, the release notes. The victim contacted an individual by telephone who identified himself as Gary. The victim agreed to meet Gary that afternoon to walk through the house; if she wanted to rent the home, Gary told her she would have to put down a deposit, the release says.

When the victim arrived at the house, she was met by an individual who identified herself as Summer King or Kung, the release continues. The victim gave King \$325 in cash as a partial deposit, signed a lease and received a key. She was told she could move in after the house had been cleaned and the remainder of the security deposit had been paid, the release notes.

When the victim returned to the residence on Dec. 5, she discovered the lock on the door had been changed and that the house had not been for rent, she told police.

The second case occurred on Dec. 7 at a house located in the 2000 block of Central Avenue. The victims had contacted an individual on the telephone who identified himself as “John Dougan,” the news release says.

The victims agreed to meet “Dougan” at the residence. There, the victims paid \$600 in cash and received a rental contract, the release notes. The victims realized they had been scammed when they learned the property had not been available to rent, the release points out.

Within a short period of time, three other couples arrived at the house looking for “Dougan” to potentially rent the home, the release says. The victims and the other couples all contacted “Dougan” after seeing the home listed on Craigslist, they told police.

When the victims tried to contact the rental agent (Dougan or Summer), they found the phones had been disconnected, the release adds.

“John Dougan” is described as a black, male, 5 feet 10 inches to 6 feet tall with a medium build. He was described as wearing a brown “kangaroo” hat with a gold band, a white shirt, tan shorts and sandals. He was unshaven with a goatee, and he had a single gold tooth, the news release says.

Police officers recommend that prior to completing a rental agreement, people verify the party renting to them is a reputable agent or owner. Never give cash as a deposit, the news release points out.

Anyone with information about these crimes is asked to call 954-7088.

COUNTY OFFICIALS URGE PROPER DISPOSAL OF FISHING LINE

The recent death of a bottlenose dolphin discovered in Venice Inlet has prompted county officials and wildlife experts to remind fishing enthusiasts that improper disposal of monofilament fishing line tackle can be fatal.

The 500-pound female dolphin was discovered tangled in fishing line and is suspected to have died from ingesting fishing gear, a county news release points out.

Proper disposal of monofilament fishing line and tackle is included in the educational component of the Sarasota County Manatee Protection Plan, a county news release says. Since the Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program (MRRP) began in 2006, more than 60 monofilament recycling bins have been installed at key water access points such as boat ramps, parks, canoe launches, fishing piers and other locations frequented by fishermen throughout Sarasota County, the release adds.

The monofilament bin locations are Ken Thompson Park, Turtle Beach Park, South Jet-

ty Park, Indian Mound Park Boat Ramp and Venice Pier.

Discarded monofilament is a threat to birds, turtles, manatees, fish, dolphins and other marine life, and it also poses a risk to divers and swimmers, the news release points out. Most monofilament fishing line is non-biodegradable and can last 600 years in the environment. Once entangled in it, animals have limited mobility and may drown, become strangled or maimed or can starve to death, the release notes. Many animals also ingest fishing line during normal feeding activities.

Fishing line should be cut into small portions and placed in a sealed container or garbage bag, the release says. Fishing line thrown in a garbage bin can end up in the environment from winds blowing it out of the receptacle or it can be pulled out by animals searching for food, the release adds.

For more information about the MRRP, to request a bin or to become a volunteer and adopt a bin, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 or visit www.scgov.net.

FREE ALERT NOTIFICATION SYSTEM OFFERED FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

Sarasota County is encouraging property owners, both year-round and seasonal ones, to sign up for the free CodeRED alert notification system.

The CodeRED system provides alerts to property owners through phone and text messages relating to issues in their neighborhoods, a county news release says. New this year is the ability to have text messages delivered to cell phones.

“Getting accurate and fast information on an event in your neighborhood can save you time, money and, possibly, even your life,” said Paula Parsons Grubb of Sarasota County

Environmental Utilities in the news release. “The free CodeRED system can alert you to evacuations, water/sewer service interruptions, road closures, Amber Alerts and more.”

To sign up for the CodeRED system, visit www.scgov.net and select the CodeRED Notification Registration link under “Public Safety” at the bottom of the page. Registration is free. Sarasota County does not share the information with private, third-party vendors, the news release notes.

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

SARASOTA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCATE HONORED BY LIGHTNING

Charley Richards, a local affordable housing advocate who partners with the City of Sarasota and Sarasota County to provide housing for adults with disabilities, was recently honored by the Tampa Bay Lightning as a Lightning Community Hero.

He received a \$50,000 donation from the Lightning Foundation to invest in his nonprofit organization, Community Affordable Supported Living, a City of Sarasota news release says.

Founded in 1997, CASL provides affordable housing for adults with disabilities throughout the Tampa Bay region, the release notes. Through the use of federal and state grants disbursed by the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development, Richards has purchased, renovated and managed 23 homes in Sarasota, the release adds. Altogether, more than 40 CASL homes in the Tampa Bay region are serving 100 developmentally disabled persons, the release says. Typically, the homes are located in neighborhoods near jobs and public transportation with monthly rent set at the affordable rate of \$250 to \$300, the release points out.

CASL also provides clients with a case manager who assists them with developing life skills,



Former Sarasota County Commissioner Charley Richards is honored by representatives of the Tampa Bay Lightning. Contributed photo

including handling a budget and job training, the release notes.

After Richards lost his wife and developmentally challenged son in a car crash, he dedicated his life to providing disabled persons the types of opportunities his son was never able to enjoy, the release says.

Richards is a former Sarasota County commissioner.

ORANGE AVENUE REOPENS AFTER CONSTRUCTION

Orange Avenue between 10th Way and 19th Street has reopened to all traffic following a temporary closure for a drainage improvement project, the City of Sarasota has announced.

However, to accommodate asphalt milling and repaving, intermittent lane closures will occur during the second and third weeks of January,

a city news release says. A flag crew will be on site to direct traffic, the release adds.

Road construction will continue on 17th Street west of Orange Avenue, the release notes. Small segments of sidewalk also will be under construction and trees will be planted along Orange Avenue, the release says.

SARASOTA COUNTY ANNOUNCES HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Most Sarasota County government offices and services will be closed Monday, Dec. 24, and Christmas Day, Tuesday, Dec. 25, for the holiday. That includes libraries, the History Center, recreation centers, Arlington Pool, Payne Park and Knights Trail Park, a county news release says.

The Sarasota County Health Department, which is a state agency, also will be closed Dec. 24 and 25. While only Christmas Day is an official state holiday, Gov. Rick Scott has directed that state offices be closed Dec. 24 “in recognition and sincere thanks for the dedication of state employees in service to the citizens of Florida.”

There will be no Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus service on Dec. 25. Regular bus service will operate on Dec. 24, with the following exceptions: Route 99 (Palmetto): no trips at 4:15, 5:15, 5:45 or 7:15 p.m. from Lemon Avenue; or at 3:35 or 4:05 p.m. from Palmetto. The 2:35 p.m. departure will end at the DeSoto station.

Residents who live in unincorporated areas of the county will not have yard waste, recyclables or garbage

collection on Dec. 25. Residents whose regular collection days are Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday will have their collection day for yard waste, recyclables and garbage moved to the next day in the week, the news release adds. For example, residents with a regular collection day of Tuesday will have their collection day on Wednesday; Wednesday’s regular collection will take place on Thursday. Because collection times vary, residents should place refuse materials at the curb by 6 a.m. the day of pickup, the release notes.

Sarasota County’s chemical collection centers at 8750 Bee Ridge Road, Sarasota, and 250 S. Jackson Road, Venice, will be closed Dec. 24

and 25. The Citizen’s Convenience Center at 4010 Knights Trail Road, Nokomis, will be closed Dec. 25. All three centers will be open Dec. 26.

The landfill at 4000 Knights Trail Road, Sarasota, will be closed Dec. 25, but it will be open Dec. 26. The landfill administration offices will be closed Dec. 24 and 25.

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



Members of the Sarasota County Commission pose in chambers in Sarasota for a holiday greeting to the public: (from left) Commissioners Joe Barbetta, Carolyn Mason, Christine Robinson, Nora Patterson and Charles Hines. Photo by Norman Schimmel

4-H YOUTHS BRING HOLIDAY JOY TO HOMELESS FAMILIES

Young people from Sarasota County's 4-H Youth Development Program recently hosted a holiday Family Fun Night for the residents of the Salvation Army's Families in Transitional Housing Faith Program, a transitional living program for homeless families with children.

Seven families participated in the event, which was held Dec. 10, a county news release says.

Now in their eighth year, the Family Fun Nights are held two or three times a year in partnership with the Salvation Army, the re-

lease notes. The 4-H members, volunteers and staff will next host a Family Fun Night on Feb. 4 in advance of Valentine's Day. Another one will be held in spring 2013.

4-H is the nation's largest youth development organization, the release points out. There are more than 670 members in Sarasota County, part of the more than 6.5 million young people who are 4-H members across the country, the release adds.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000.

CITY OF SARASOTA ANNOUNCES HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

City of Sarasota administrative offices will be closed Dec. 24-25 and Jan. 1 during the holiday season, the city has announced.

Weekly garbage and recycling collection will be impacted on Christmas Day and New Year's Day only, a city news release says. The regular Tuesday collection will be picked up on Wednesday, Dec. 26, and Wednesday, Jan. 2.

Bobby Jones Golf Club will be open every day. Additionally, it will host the fifth annual Reindeer Games on Christmas Day. The rate for 18 holes, with a riding cart plus a continental

breakfast at Bobby's Clubhouse Restaurant, will be \$29.50. Breakfast will be offered from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. Walk-ins will be welcome, the release adds.

Lido Pool will be closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

The Robert L. Taylor Community Complex will be closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day, with holiday hours on the following days: Monday, Dec. 24, and Monday, Dec. 31, 6 a.m. to 10 a.m.

USED CHRISTMAS TREES TO BE PICKED UP BY COUNTY STAFF

Sarasota County workers will pick up Christmas trees in the unincorporated areas of the county after the holiday, the county has announced.

Residents may put trees at the curb for collection. They should put trash on one side of the driveway and recycling, yard waste and Christmas trees on the other side, a county

news release says. Decorations and lights should be removed, and trees taller than 6 feet should be cut in half. The county will later mulch the trees.

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

FLORIDA SCRUB JAY BENEFIT PLANNED FOR JAN. 18

With the Florida scrub jay becoming more threatened each day as encroaching human development destroys its habitat, a news release says, Robin Draper, owner of AuthenticFlorida.com, has joined forces with Oscar Scherer State Park and Jack Perkins, Clyde Butcher and Jeff Klinkenberg to present *Authentic Florida Meets Real Florida*, a benefit to help the birds.

The event will be held Jan. 18 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. at the Girl Scout Event Conference Center, 4740 Cattlemen Road in Sarasota.

Perkins, an Emmy Award-winner and author, will serve as master of ceremonies. Among the speakers will be Butcher, the acclaimed Florida photographer, and award-winning journalist and author Klinkenberg.

AuthenticFlorida.com “is a travel and lifestyle website devoted to the simple and delightful pleasures of Florida living,” the press release notes.

“By bringing together three speakers who represent real and authentic Florida, we create

a synergy and celebration of Florida’s beauty, character and culture,” Draper says in the news release.

According to Tony Clements, Oscar Scherer’s park manager, the Florida scrub jay, a native to Florida only, is a threatened species that becomes rarer each day as human developments are constructed over areas where it traditionally has built its nests. It was officially listed as a threatened state species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 1975, and it was listed as a threatened federal species by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in 1987.

Tickets are \$30 per person. A box lunch with the speakers will follow the program for an additional \$40. All of the ticket sales will support Oscar Scherer State Park’s Florida scrub jay restoration program. Each of the first 100 ticket buyers will get a free park pass to Oscar Scherer State Park.

For tickets or more information, call 483-5956 or visit www.friendsofoscarscherer.com.



Clyde Butcher/Contributed



Jack Perkins/Contributed

NEWS LEADER STAFF GATHERS TO CELEBRATE HOLIDAYS

All the staff of *The Sarasota News Leader* gathered on Dec. 17 at Nancy's Bar-B-Q, located at 301 S. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota, to celebrate the holidays.

General Manager Robert Hackney pointed out it was almost unprecedented to have every

single member of the team present. That made it all the more special, because quite a few of the staff members never had met each other.

Doing all the weekly work "in the ether," so to speak, involves far more wireless connections than face-to-face meetings, Editor Rachel Hackney added. **SNL**



The staff of the Sarasota News Leader gathers at the publication's Christmas Party: (front row, from left) Fran Palmeri, Vicki Chatley, Harriet Cuthbert, Rachel Hackney; (middle row, from left) Robert Hackney, Cleve Posey, Trish Ivey, Arielle Scherr, Norman Schimmel, Scott Proffitt; (back row, from left) David Staats, Stan Zimmerman, Tyler Whitson and Cooper Levey-Baker. Photo by Rachel Levey-Baker



*Happy Holidays
from all of us at
The Sarasota News Leader*

AT PLANNED PARENTHOOD, CARE IS MUCH MORE THAN THE SERVICES WE PROVIDE; IT'S THE WAY WE APPROACH OUR WORLD.

WE CARE.

DEEPLY. WITH RESPECT. WITHOUT JUDGMENT.

WE ARE UNWAVERING IN OUR BELIEF THAT ALL PEOPLE DESERVE HIGH QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE.

WE ARE TIRELESS IN OUR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION SO PEOPLE CAN MAKE THEIR OWN HEALTH DECISIONS. WE PROUDLY FIGHT FOR WOMEN TO BE ABLE TO GET THE REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES THEY NEED. WE DO ALL OF THIS BECAUSE

WE CARE PASSIONATELY ABOUT HELPING WOMEN, MEN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE

LEAD HEALTHY LIVES.

NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE. NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE. WE WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO GET THEM THE CARE THEY NEED. BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRULY CARED FOR, THEY WILL MAKE THEIR LIVES, THEIR FAMILIES – AND EVEN THE WORLD – BETTER AND HEALTHIER.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD. CARE. NO MATTER WHAT.



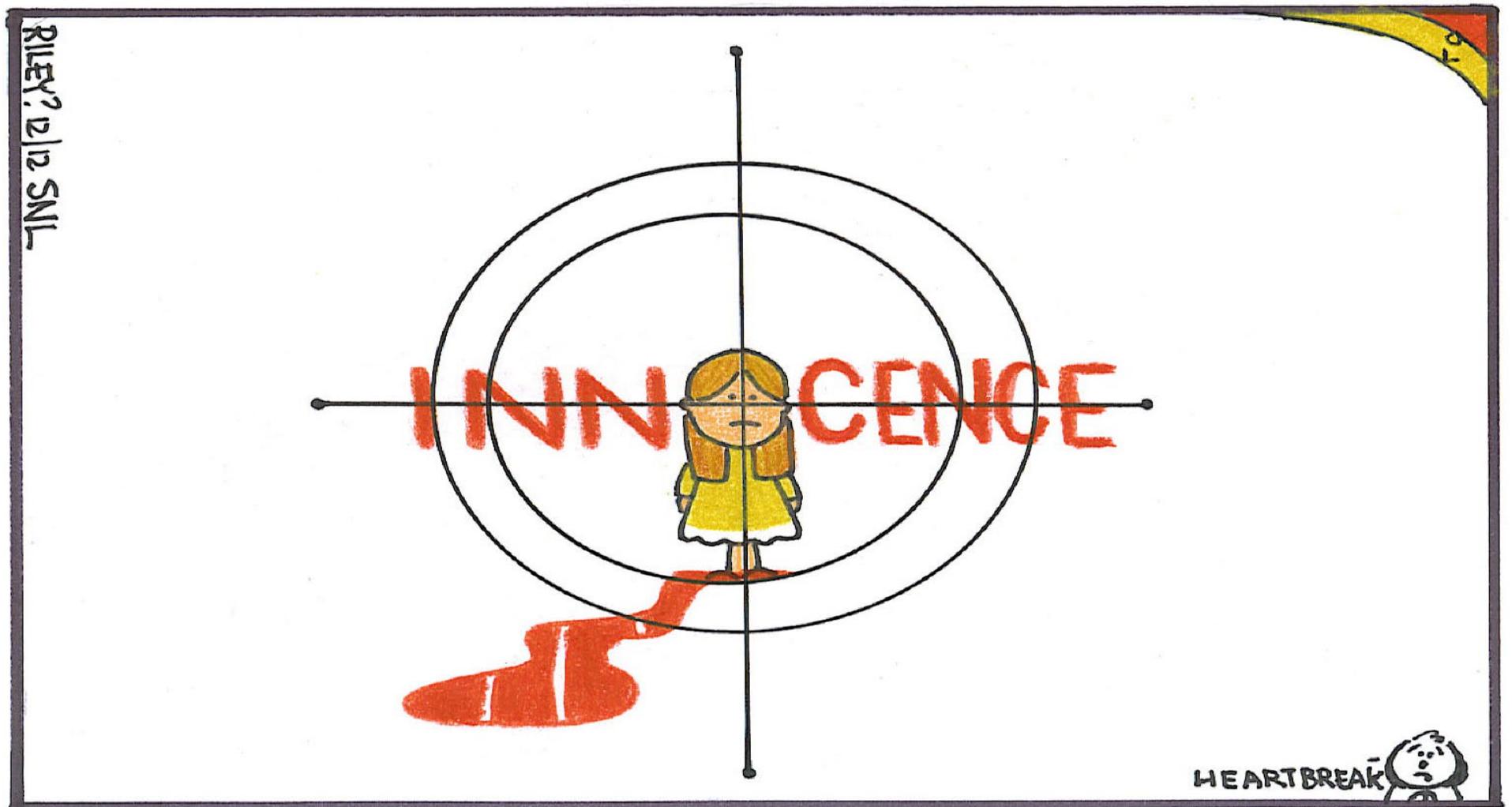
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OPINION



THE HOLY INNOCENTS OF BETHLEHEM AND NEWTOWN

EDITORIAL Three days after Christmas is another date in the Church's liturgical calendar that many would argue is just as important: The Holy Innocents. This is the feast day that commemorates the systematic slaughter by King Herod of all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding area.

Herod, who ruled Palestine for 37 years, was noted for two characteristics: his perpetual fear of losing his throne and his barbarity. When the visiting Wise Men told him of their search for the prophesied king of the Jews, who was newly born, Herod asked them to tell him when the child was found. But the Wise Men, after finding Jesus, departed the kingdom by another route without telling Herod.

When Herod learned of this, he sent his soldiers into Bethlehem to kill every male child

two years of age or younger. Joseph, meanwhile, had taken Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt for sanctuary. The untold innocents slaughtered in Herod's purge were victims of his paranoia.

And now, in this usually festive season, we have an even starker reminder of the tragedy of the Holy Innocents: the slaughter by a madman of 20 innocent children in the Newtown, CT, school shooting.

The lamentations in Bethlehem predicted by the prophet Jeremiah were coupled with the frustrating knowledge that nothing could be done about the excesses of a tyrant. Today, our lamentations are tempered somewhat by our knowledge that a single lobby, with millions of dollars to influence our lawmakers, has made the acquisition of a firearm no more difficult than that of a pack of cigarettes or

OPINION

a beer. Under the guise of a vaguely worded Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, this lobby has exalted guns and gun ownership to a degree unimagined by our Founding Fathers.

As a consequence, we as a nation are subjected periodically to the horror of a shooting massacre, whether in a theater in Aurora, CO, a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, WI, a university in Virginia ... or an elementary school in Newtown, CT. The blood of the innocents flows just as freely at the behest of our modern-day Herod, the National Rifle Association.

Despite the organization's fatuous maxims, such as "Guns don't kill people. People kill people," the sad truth is that the omnipresent firearm is used too frequently to kill in this country. Consider how we compare to other nations in the civilized world: Last year, 17 people were killed with guns in Finland; 35 in Australia; 39 in England and Wales; 60 in Spain; 194 in Germany; and 200 in Canada. In the United States? More than 9,400!

Adam Lanza may have been identified as the shooter in the Newtown massacre, but every person who has bemoaned efforts to ban assault weapons, or limit the easy availability of firearms through more intensive background checks, shares complicity in this tragedy.

Despite the U.S. Supreme Court's recent assurance that the Second Amendment protects our right to possess firearms, the government can and should do a number of things that can lessen greatly the odds of another tragedy:

- Ban assault weapons — Sophisticated firearms that are used by soldiers in combat or by tactical squads of law enforcement officers do not belong in the hands of ordinary citizens.

- Ban body armor — Likewise, no one who is not a soldier in combat or a law enforcement officer has need of sophisticated body armor that protects the wearer from gunshots. Ownership of body armor is not guaranteed by the Second Amendment, and possessing it should be a serious felony.

- Regulate firearm sales — The ownership of a gun might be a constitutional right for most, but it should not be for violent criminals or the mentally incompetent. A rigorous background check should be undertaken on all prospective purchases of firearms. If that results in a six-week, six-month or six-year backlog, so be it. The Second Amendment does not guarantee you can buy a firearm this afternoon. Oh ... and ban gun shows and sales that are open to the public.

- Prosecute noncompliance by gun dealers vigorously — Gun dealers who do not rigorously enforce the purchase procedures, including all background checks, should be prosecuted as accomplices if any firearms they sell are subsequently used by their customers in violent crimes. After a few firearms dealers go to prison potentially for life for enabling the next mass murderer, perhaps the remainder will get the message: Gun sale regulations are to protect everyone, and they do not diminish anyone's Second Amendment rights.

On Dec. 28, let us reflect equally on the tragedy of the Holy Innocents, both in Herod's day and in recent weeks. Let us resolve to do everything possible to ensure it does not happen again.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAY THE END OF ONE ERA MARK A BETTER BEGINNING FOR ANOTHER

To the Editor:

Dec. 21 marks the end of the Maya Long Count Calendar, said to be a 5,125-year cycle of time that began on Aug. 11, 3114 B.C. There are many theories and stories about the meaning of this date. However, since a Catholic bishop burned all but two Maya Codices, most stories are based on speculation.

Personally, from my many visits to the ruins at Palenque, I believe the date focused on a 5,000-year cycle of the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters, a group of stars in the Milky Way. And at 6:13 a.m. on Dec. 21, the exact time of the arrival of the Winter Solstice, this group of stars will be directly over the courtyard of the south group of temples between the Temple of the Cross, the sun and the Pileated Cross in the Palenque Archaeological Zone.

Thirteen years ago, I stood on the pinnacle of the Temple of the Cross at the exact moment of the solstice, and the howler monkeys that hang out around the temples let out a moan. This experience was so special that I vowed to be at that same location in 2012. Well, time has flown by, and just as in 1984, the time has come. So I will be flying out for Mexico on the 17th.

On my first trip to Palenque, in 1975, I experienced the “light” down in the bowels of the Pyramid of the Inscriptions, where King Pakal

the Great’s tomb with the carved sarcophagus of an astronaut is located. Suddenly, the lights went out and there was total darkness in the tomb. Three of us held hands and experienced a brilliant light in the middle of our circle. The light was pulsing and continued until one of us fell backwards.

There are still 10 million Maya living in and around the ruins of the Maya world — Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras. But what happened to their civilization, which had disappeared by 900 A.D. when all the major sites were abandoned and reclaimed by the jungle, is unknown. One can walk upon an overgrown pyramid without recognizing it.

Ours is another cycle of great civilizations building enormous edifices, developing great works of art, destroying their environments and then disappearing. The Maya practiced slash-and-burn agriculture and burned the trees to make a red plaster to cover huge pyramids and palaces. Malnutrition is evident in the bodies found in some of the tombs.

Let us pray that the End of Time in this cycle will be the beginning of the light shining on a new era, when human hearts will fill with compassion for all sentient beings and honor Mother Earth with respect for all living things.

*Johnnie Bohannon
Sarasota*

OPINION

CITY'S ZONING CODE DESIGNED TO ALLOW FOR COMPATIBLE USES

To the Editor:

Regarding recent discussion of a downtown entertainment district: I would like to clarify the City of Sarasota does not prohibit music or entertainment in the downtown area.

Acoustic (non-amplified) music has always been permitted. Acoustic music provides entertainment that has never created a problem.

Several years ago, a noise problem arose when a few businesses chose to play amplified music inside with doors open or outdoors, loud enough to disturb their neighbors up to several blocks away. As a result, the city was forced to establish regulations to address the compatibility of amplified music. In essence, outdoor amplified music at business locations was prohibited; however, allowances were provided for city leaseholders and special events.

The city also tried, but failed, to regulate "boom boxes" in moving vehicles.

Now, as the noise regulations are being re-examined with the intent of establishing an entertainment district, how should the city re-address the issue? First, city staff members and City Commission should educate the public and themselves about the need to enjoy music at different venues and through a variety of uses (e.g., outdoor cafes or concerts). Second, decision-makers must understand the ramifications of any options before making changes.

After 30 years of drafting policies and zoning regulations as an urban planner for the City of Sarasota, I want to explain that one rationale for any zoning regulation is to establish a degree of compatibility. The hallmark of the city's Comprehensive (policy) Plan is compatibility. The Zoning Code is a major tool for

implementation of the policy document. Specifically, the Comprehensive Plan is clear that new development and redevelopment need to be compatible.

The Zoning Code is also clear that property owners are not entitled to the maximum development rights unless they meet all regulations — including those which address compatibility.

Although compatibility is hard to measure and more difficult to enforce, personally, I don't understand a business model (indoors or outdoors) that chooses to operate with music so loud the customer cannot communicate with someone next to them (except during a major entertainment event).

Ultimately, there is no way to draft any regulation that satisfies everyone.

Mike Taylor
Sarasota

Editor's note: The writer was a City of Sarasota planner from 1982 until this year, when he retired.



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, 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*.

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ASK OTUS

A CAMPY NUT TO CRACK

Inside

MAGNIFICENT ABUNDANCE



IN SPITE OF THE CHANGES DEVELOPMENT HAS WROUGHT, SO MUCH OF FLORIDA'S NATURE REMAINS TO BE RELISHED

Story & Photos By Fran Palmeri
Contributing Writer

On a mild winter evening, I watch hundreds of thousands of tree swallows fly in to roost near Knight's Trail in Venice. The birds arrive from all over and then, as if on a signal, dive to earth in a huge black funnel cloud and just before touchdown, rise again to disburse.

Over and over, they rise and fall, the whirring of their wings sounding like distant surf in the Gulf of Mexico. Finally, the birds come to rest in the trees and we onlookers go our separate ways, still marveling.

Recently, some of us Northern “transplants” agreed that if we spent the rest of our days poking around Florida, we could never tire of its magnificent array of landscapes, plants and wildlife. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory lists 81 ecosystems — the most of any state — 750 springs, 7,800 lakes and 1,700 rivers and streams. Florida is the most biologically diverse state east of the Mississippi.

According to the Florida Ornithological Society, 512 species of birds occur here. Two hundred sixteen species have been observed at Sarasota’s Celery Fields near Fruitville Road. More than 4,000 native and naturalized plants grow in Florida, a result of the land’s unique shape, location and climate —temperate in the north; subtropical in the Keys.

With more spring-like days than most places, wildflowers bloom year-round. Even in winter, you can rely on blanket flower, bright yellow partridge-pea and the pink blooms of sensitive briar — just a few of a long list — sprinkled here and there in area parks.

Cheery tickseed blooms along trails in the coldest weather at [Myakka River State Park](#), where you can hike miles through pine woods, prairies and wetlands. In fall, acres of wildflowers and grasses billow across the flatwoods at [Oscar Scherer State Park](#). As I drive out the park gates, I ask myself, is magnificent abundance only an illusion?

Sometimes I think there is more of the real Florida left in the books I check out of Selby Library. In the 1770s, William Bartram reveled in the boundless cornucopia of plants and animals he found in Florida, which he documented in *Travels*, an account of his four-year pilgrimage through the Southeast.







In 1881, when Charles Torrey Simpson arrived in Bradenton, sea life was still ample enough to provide a ready feast for him and his friends when they sailed Sarasota Bay. And later, after he had settled near Miami, there were plenty of wild places for him to take weeklong treks with fellow scientists such as John Kunkel Small. “I loved Florida on sight. It is dearer to me, today, than any place on earth,” Simpson wrote in *Florida Wild Life*.

But he watched with dismay as Miami devoured the rockland hammocks he so treasured.

When I drive to Miami, I pass through the vast open spaces of the Everglades, which he and others, such as Margery Stoneman Douglas, worked so hard to preserve, but I end up on eight lanes of freeway running through a glass and steel canyon.

Simpson Park, a five-and-a-half-acre tract surrounded by skyscrapers, is about all that remains of Brickell Hammock.

In the 1970s, Florida’s eminent naturalist, Archie Carr, observed, “The history of Florida is a desperate sort of striving for growth and development ... this has dimmed or destroyed much of the natural charm that originally drew people here” —an excerpt from *Eden Changes in A Naturalist in Florida: A Celebration of Eden*.

Other times I realize that the old Florida has not quite disappeared. At T. Mabry Carlton Reserve in Venice, deer graze along the trails and in winter, flocks of robins settle into nighttime perches.

I can always count on wildflowers. At sunset on a tiny spit of land at Mirror Lake in Sarasota I have watched wave after wave of cor-





morants, herons, egrets and anhingas jockey for space in the trees that line the lake. By nightfall, more than a thousand shore birds have roosted in the trees and shrubbery, just blocks from busy Beneva Road.

At my nursery, a forgotten corner has reverted to a glorious chaos of climbing asters, fire

bush and salvia, attracting dozens of pollinators. Butterflies — zebra longwings, giant sulfurs and tiny skippers — and hundreds of bees flit about in great clouds of moving color. Like the tree swallows on the wing, they lift our spirits, and we sit here feeling at one with the world. 





I like to take my time.

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

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

You have a whole week.

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ASK OTUS

CONSIDER A HOLIDAY OUTING THAT IS TRULY 'FOR THE BIRDS'

Dear Readers,

The holiday season is upon us and I am delighted to announce that “Christmas is for the Birds.” Literally!

From Dec. 14 through Jan. 5, thousands upon thousands of volunteers throughout the U.S. will rise before dawn and brave the weather (while missing out on lots of NFL games) to join in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC), or “game,” as I happily term it.

Our local chapter, the Sarasota Audubon Society, will conduct its CBC survey on Saturday, Jan. 5, 2013, and I would like to tell you about the Siesta Key count because, truthfully, it is the only one I am familiar with.

What is the purpose of the CBC? “Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations — and to help guide conservation action.” That is good English for “your health may depend on that of your birds.”

Let us say you wake up one morning and realize that for weeks you have not seen or heard your permanent Osprey nesting pair and their offspring. For years your family enjoyed visiting the nest and taking photos of the babies.

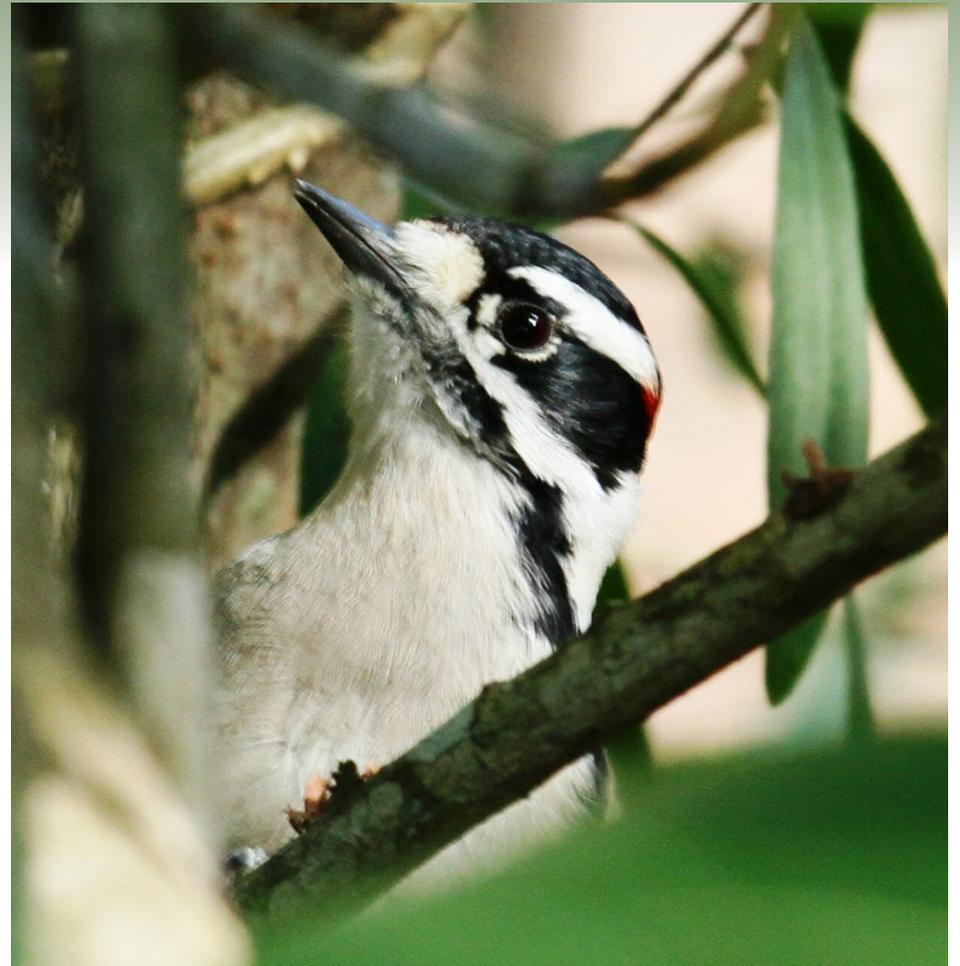


Can you identify this bird? If you are quite gifted in playing this 'name game,' you should consider participating in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count. File photos

It was fun having the Ospreys around except when one got tangled up in a fishing line and had to be cut free — not an easy task. Now they are gone. You accept the fact they have left for better fishing grounds, and after a while they are just a fond memory.

Not so for the conservationists! Ospreys catch and eat fish. People catch and eat fish. The Osprey family members, the sentinels of our bay, have alerted us by their absence to something that is wrong with our bay and our fish. All birds are the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, so when we fall silent, someone must speak out for us, assess the damage and lead the rescue mission.

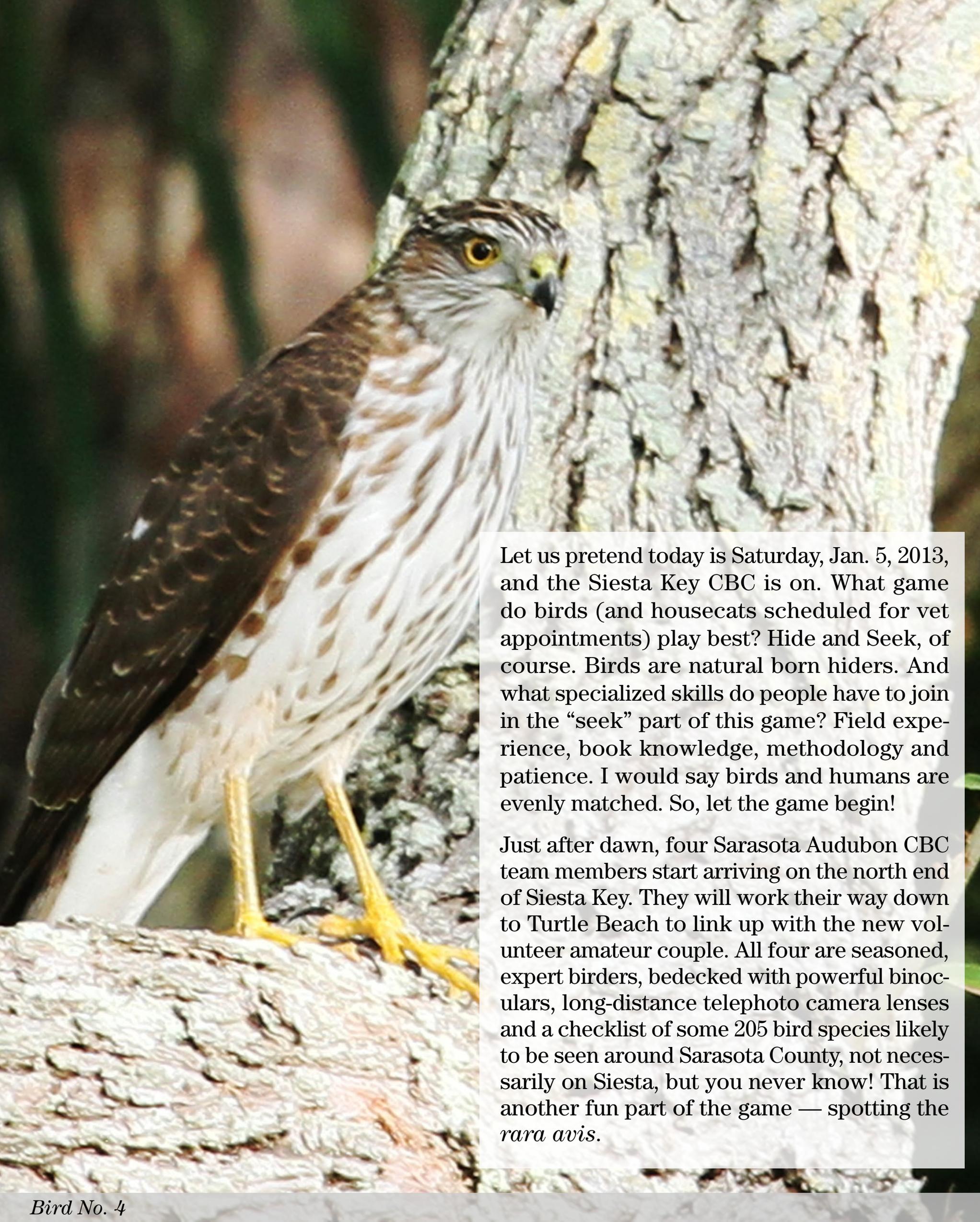
That is the end of a simplistic but serious informational. And now to the fun part of the CBC.



Bird No. 2



Bird No. 3



Let us pretend today is Saturday, Jan. 5, 2013, and the Siesta Key CBC is on. What game do birds (and housecats scheduled for vet appointments) play best? Hide and Seek, of course. Birds are natural born hiders. And what specialized skills do people have to join in the “seek” part of this game? Field experience, book knowledge, methodology and patience. I would say birds and humans are evenly matched. So, let the game begin!

Just after dawn, four Sarasota Audubon CBC team members start arriving on the north end of Siesta Key. They will work their way down to Turtle Beach to link up with the new volunteer amateur couple. All four are seasoned, expert birders, bedecked with powerful binoculars, long-distance telephoto camera lenses and a checklist of some 205 bird species likely to be seen around Sarasota County, not necessarily on Siesta, but you never know! That is another fun part of the game — spotting the *rara avis*.

The bird guide textbooks stay in their cars until the four link up with the amateurs. Then the worn, dog-eared and scribbled-on books are dragged out, used by the team to illustrate to the newbies why they saw a Hairy, not a Downy, Woodpecker. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but the team has to interpret its language into one comprehensible to the newbies. And the team members patiently and most cheerfully share their knowledge and repeat tutorials until they finally make sense to an amateur.

At dawn, the amateur couple are suddenly nervous about joining this expert team and are feeling inadequately prepared. When they enthusiastically volunteered for the CBC, they knew they had all their ducks lined up, so to speak. After all, they have been hunting and cooking wild ducks in Wisconsin for years.

The previous night, they read a Florida Fish and Wildlife study on our native ducks. Over



Bird No. 5



Bird No. 6



Bird No. 7

the years, the feral Mallard Duck males have been aggressively mating (to put it politely) with our resident Florida Mottled Duck females, spawning ducks called the Mallard Hybrid. And guess what the Mallard Hybrid looks like to a novice birder — a Florida Mottled duck! Uh oh!

Yesterday was a clear, sunny day, and the flash of red on an American Redstart's wing was as obvious as the buttercup-yellow on the Yellow-Throated Warbler. Blue Jays, Cardinals, and Mourning Doves depleted bird feeders. This morning, the fog rolled in and the temperature dipped considerably; the migrant Passerines are hunkered down — gray blobs in the dark shadows of the tree crown canopies. The only sign of life at the bird feeder is a flea-infested tree rat (i.e., gray squirrel), and the power lines are black and bare against the pale sky. The newbies barely distinguish the Great Blue Heron at the end of their pier from a piling.

Mother Nature has given us avians a huge advantage in this game. Go, Birds, go!

Oops! I bragged too soon. The pervasive haze makes it a fishing heyday for feathered fish-eaters; no dark shadows warning and scaring off the fish. The Magnificent Frigatebirds arrive. Check. Sharks and dolphins take advantage of this temporary camouflage and drive schools of fish into panicked flight and the pelagic birds — Brown Pelicans, Laughing and Herring Gulls and hosts of various Terns — join in the hunt and feast. Check. Check!

All five of our south Siesta Key Osprey are sighted (pew!) and the Red-Shouldered Hawk enjoys his hunt in our sand dunes — no “bunny wabbits” forewarned of his sudden deadly swoop. Checks also for the two rare Reddish Egrets on our beach, the elegant Tricolored Heron (whom Audubon called “Our Lady of the Waters”) at the pond and the Common Loon in the lagoon. Check!

It is a good thing we birds are playing Hide and Seek and not chess!

The Siesta Key Audubon team leader is none other than Rick Greenspun. You know him



from his Audubon lectures, birding workshops and the beautiful, lively bird photographs he so generously contributes to *SNL*. Over the years that I have observed him seeking while we have been hiding, I have come to the conclusion that he must be part Kingfisher, and one that eats tons of carrots! Rick's knowledge of birds — their habits, voices, flight patterns — is a given, but his eyesight is such he can announce to the team, "Northern Gannet directly south of the sailboat on the horizon!"

The seasoned members quickly raise binoculars and start commenting, "Two-year immature; check out the white spots on the coverts, scapulars and axillaries." Stuff like that.

The newbie couple is squinting, still searching for that sailboat and wondering, "What's a Gannet?"

That is when Kathwren (is that not a dreamy name?), the team's official recorder, again takes out the books and shows them what is

so spectacular about this Gannet, which flew all the way from Bonaventure Island to our shores just to be counted today.

Meanwhile, I am trying to find "scapulars" in my dictionary so I can spell it correctly here.

The Audubon team is checking us off its list one by one. What is worse is the sun is finally peeking through the clouds and it has warmed us up a bit. Butterflies and other insects have begun flitting about. The smaller birds are hungry and coming out from the trees to forage for insects and seeds.

Check for the Solitary Vireo (oops! now called Blue-Headed Vireo), the Mockingbird, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher and our lowly, native Palm Warbler — lowly because it forages in the grass and makes itself ridiculously easy for the team to spot and check.

I was ratted out fairly early in the game, found by a mere amateur, a newbie! This is how it





happened: Many private property owners have kindly allowed the team access to their land this day, and as the team and this totally clueless amateur birder couple were walking from the Gulf to Little Sarasota Bay, a resident parking his car yelled out to them (team members cannot be mistaken for anything other than birders or concerned citizens investigating a UFO crash site behind a neighbor's barn), "Looking for Otus? Third lower branch on that oak over there." Check! I ought to feel flattered that I am counted because I am not rare, just ... Oh, never mind. But by an amateur? Not fair and I hate this stupid game!

By late afternoon, Rick and team have left the amateurs in charge with careful

instructions to report only unchecked species. The 273 Brown Pelicans flying south this morn are flying north at dusk and the Tricolored Heron has left the pond for the bay. Do not count the same birds twice!

While noshing at Turtle Beach Pub, the couple, now comfortable with their new authority and responsibilities, are thrilled to see six Black-Hooded Parakeets land on the power lines. At dusk, a Spotted Sandpiper visits their dock. They cannot yet identify either species with certainty, so they email photos to Rick or Kathwren. Check! Check! Neither species was sighted until just now.

It is obvious they have learned so much and are enthusiastically caught up in the spirit of the game. Or perhaps they have contracted avian flu? (Yes, I am still sore over losing!)

The CBC ends at midnight. It is late evening. The team's work grinds on. Rick is home fielding questions, identifying bird photos and sorting through amateur birders' UFO reports

—bird pix can be very difficult or impossible to ID when blurry! That Pileated Woodpecker can look like a woman's running shoe missing some Velcro.

Kathwren is organizing and coordinating checklist data. Final submissions to the local and national CBC coordinators are due soon. Someone reported a Swainson's Hawk at Red Bug Slough. An impossible sighting in Sarasota? Probably. But, as Sam Spade said in the *Maltese Falcon*, it is "the stuff dreams are made of"; so tomorrow, the birders will be there before dawn for a look, just in case.

Everyone can participate in the CBC. Without sounding too gung-ho, because it is not everyone's cup of birdseed, I would like to encourage readers to participate in the count. If the concept intrigues you and the "game" grabs your fancy, please check out the [National Audubon Society link](#), which will provide you the path to your local chapter.

And just for fun, I am including several photos of our most commonly-seen-around-Sarasota resident birds. Can you name them?

The team, including those pesky newbies, have politely but firmly informed me there is no such bird as the Mangrove Raccoon-Masked Heron, but what do they know about birds that I do not? After all, I am ...

Otus

ABOUT OTUS

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



'Bird' No. 11

BOBCATS REMAIN ON THE PROWL ON SIESTA KEY

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to report that our beloved Siesta Key bobcat population is healthy and well fed. Recent sightings follow:

- At Island Reef condominiums on south Siesta Key at 4 p.m. on Dec. 10, Marilyn Donovan, who came here from Weston, VT, to visit her mother, happened to hear an anguished cry emanating from the bay shore. When she looked out the window, she saw a bobcat dragging its captured Yellow-Crowned Night Heron into the mangroves, where they both disappeared, but not that silently.
- Two days later, Joni Jimerson, manager at Hidden Lagoon Beach Club, spotted a large tawny bobcat “bouncing” down the driveway headed toward the dunes on Siesta Beach. It had a squirrel hanging from its jaws. The squirrel was very quiet.

Dear Marilyn, for future reference, see the accompanying photo of what a Yellow-Crowned Night Heron looks like (minus the bobcat surround). I think everyone knows what a squirrel looks like.

Otus



One of Siesta's bobcats made a meal recently of a Yellow-Crowned Night Heron. File photo

I've been spotted!



Siesta Bob

Otus asks Siesta residents to be ready with their cameras when bobcats make an appearance. File photo

A CAMPY NUT TO CRACK

SARASOTA BALLET'S NEW VERSION OF NUTCRACKER PROVES SHORT ON CHOREOGRAPHY AND BRILLIANT DANCING TO GO WITH ITS SPLENDID SETS AND COSTUMES

By Elinor Rogosin
A&E Writer

I would have liked to have been one of the enthusiastic audience members who stood and applauded as the curtain came down on the world premiere of *John Ringling's Circus Nutcracker*, Sarasota Ballet's sassy new version of the classic holiday treat.

The promotional information had sounded intriguing: The Sarasota Orchestra would play the familiar, melodic Tchaikovsky score; Matthew Hart would devise a scenario and choreography paying tribute to the Ringling family and the circus; Peter Docherty would design the faux deco costumes and set; and the young Sarasota dancers would bring the ballet to life. I have seen different interpretations of the Nutcracker ballet, so the fact that this was a playful version of the story should not have been important. So why was I not standing and applauding: simply because I was disappointed by uneven performances by the dancers and by the minimal choreography that at times appeared amateurish and at other moments harkened back to English music hall vulgarity.

At first, the Act I party appeared to set the scene for unknown possibilities to come. The women, dressed in slinky, satin dresses of a

style common in the 1930s, were stunning as they participated in the fun and games of a Christmas party, with tangos replacing sedate ballroom dancing and with an amusing, motorized mouse chugging across the stage. But the business with the so-called “gangsters,” who were neither menacing nor amusing, and the fight with the mice was a jumbled mixture of children and adults mincing around the stage.

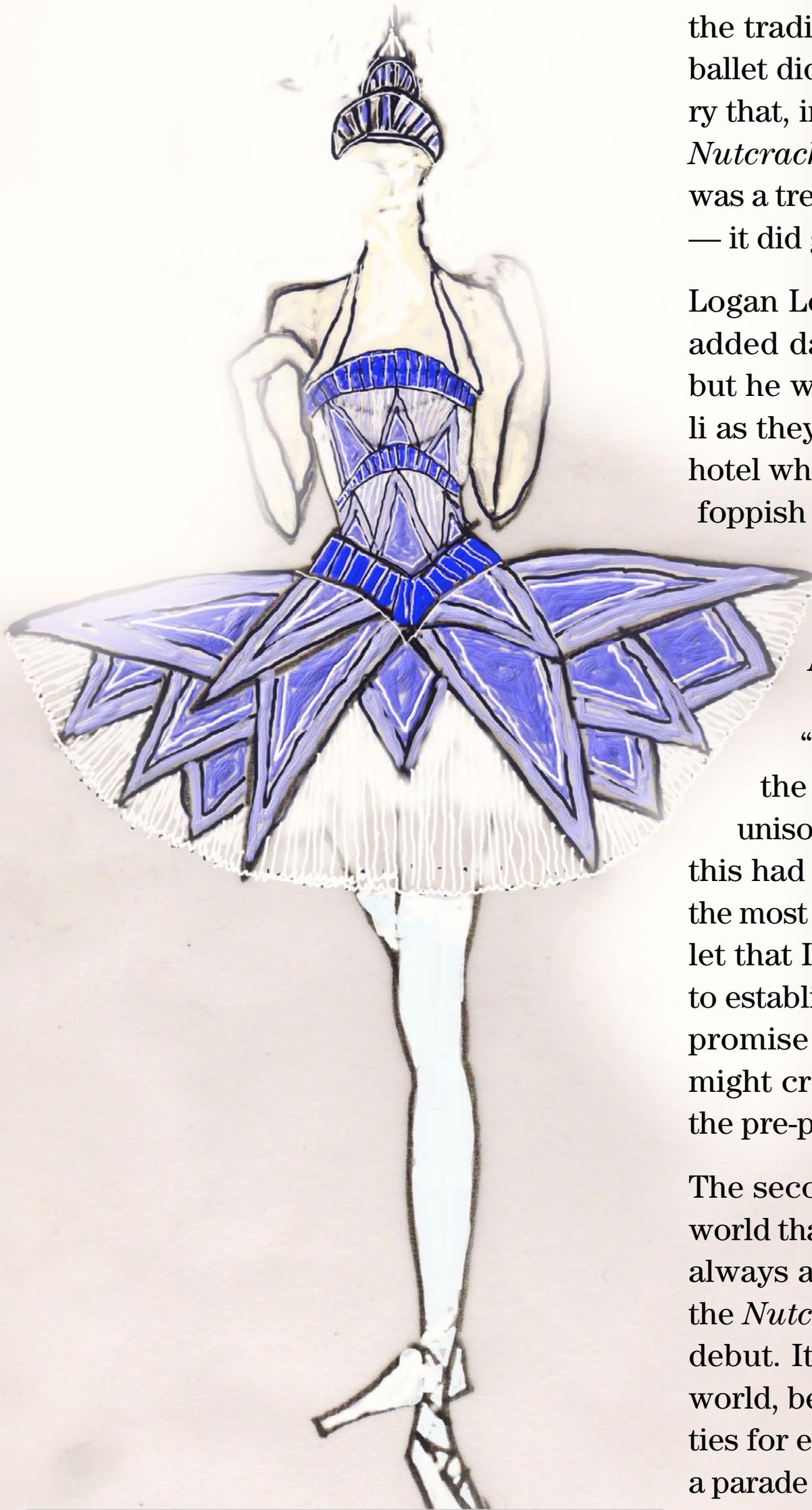
Yes, it was meant to be an amusing farce with Elizabeth Sykes as a gangster’s moll until

Victoria Hulland as Mable Ringling/the good fairy made a dramatic entrance, descending onto the stage from a quarter moon, to save the Nutcracker. Hulland, a musical, exquisite dancer not only created beauty out of the limited movements in her *pas de deux* with David Tlaiye as John Ringling, but her performance was easily one of the delights of the evening.

As Clara, Sara Sardelli, her hair in pigtails, light and graceful as she pranced across the stage, was a believable and charming childish presence throughout both acts. As she entered



This stage drapery greeted audience members at The Sarasota Ballet's version of Nutcracker. Contributed photo



Peter Docherty designed this costume for the Snow Queen. Contributed photo

the traditional dream world — because the ballet did follow the usual staging of the story that, in turn, is based on E.T.A. Hoffman's *Nutcracker and The King of Mice* — there was a tree, though not an evergreen and, yes, — it did grow.

Logan Learned as the Nutcracker not only added dash and charisma to his portrayal, but he was also an ideal partner for Sardelli as they enjoyed a stay at a New York City hotel where Jamie Carter, as an over-the-top, foppish hotel manager, caught the underlying cheeky sense of fun in Matthew Hart's choreography.

And as the snowflakes fluttered down on the brilliantly costumed group of "snowflakes" dancing in a send-up of the Rockettes and their synchronized, unison line dancing, I thought that though this had not been the most magical or even the most amusing first act of a *Nutcracker* ballet that I had ever seen, it had been enough to establish a scenario. However, I hoped the promise of a second act visit to the circus might create an experience that lived up to the pre-production publicity.

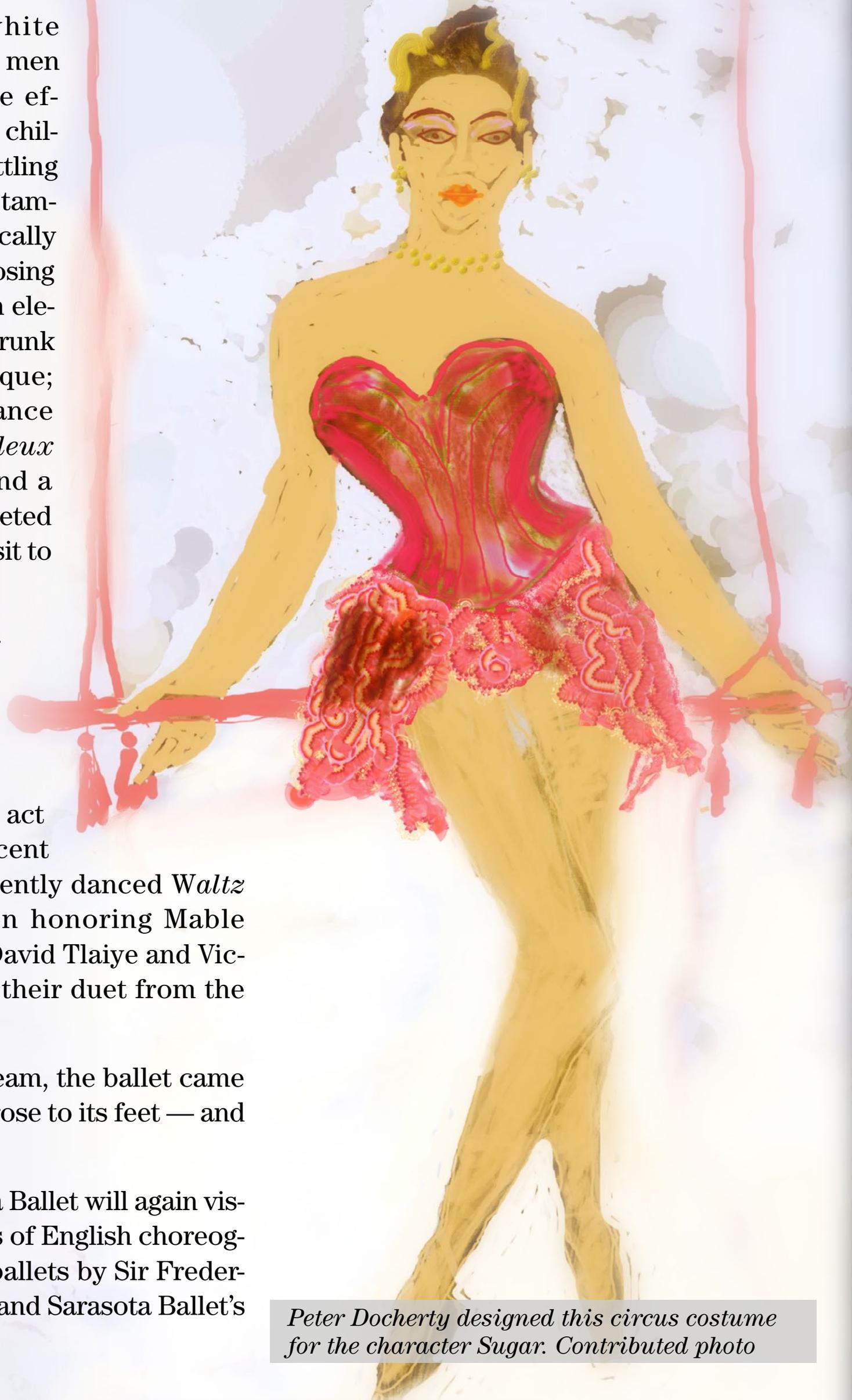
The second act variations, set in the dream world that the heroine, Clara, envisions, have always added to the enduring popularity of the *Nutcracker* ballet since its 1892 Russian debut. It seemed a natural fit as the circus world, because that offered myriad possibilities for excitement, but sadly, in this version, a parade of costumes and hints only at choreography paid tribute to the circus with sly wit and a reliance on walking and posing.

Men in black-and-white striped tights — zebras; men in white tights — more effeminate than acrobatic; children as mini clowns scuttling around the stage; a lion tamer with a group of exotically clad girls posing; more posing before a giant head of an elephant with a suggestive trunk borrowed from burlesque; and a leaden performance of a classical *pas de deux* by Ricardo Graziano and a grinning Kate Honea greeted Sardelli (Clara) on her visit to the circus.

But there is that beautiful, haunting Tchaikovsky waltz in the score, and without a backward glance at the circus, the second act was saved from its descent into camp by a competently danced *Waltz Of The Roses* variation honoring Mable Ringling and featuring David Tlaiye and Victoria Hulland reprising their duet from the first act.

Clara woke from her dream, the ballet came to a close, the audience rose to its feet — and I wondered why.

Next month, the Sarasota Ballet will again visit the dreams and visions of English choreographers, this time with ballets by Sir Frederick Ashton, Will Tuckett and Sarasota Ballet's own Jamie Carter. 



Peter Docherty designed this circus costume for the character Sugar. Contributed photo



THE OTHER BROTHER

The original Sarasota County Courthouse stands tall above buildings of the much newer Judicial Center in downtown Sarasota. Photos by Scott Proffitt

CHARLES RINGLING PLAYED A VERY IMPORTANT BUT DIFFERENT ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SARASOTA

By Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer

It would be difficult to visit Sarasota and not hear of John Ringling and the role he played in this community. If you live here, the Ringling imprint can seem even more pervasive to you. Streets, buildings, parks, museums, bridges — you can hardly step out of your front door without stumbling over some architectural icon with the name “Ringling” attached to it.

But did you know Ringling Boulevard was not named after John? The honor re-

flects the *Brother in The Shadow*, Charles Ringling.

Not coincidentally, that was the title of the latest lecture on Sarasota history sponsored by The Historical Society of Sarasota County

in its series *Conversations at The Crocker*. The Tuesday, Dec. 12, program was held — like the others — in the venerable Crocker Memorial Church in Sarasota. The lecture hosts were Deborah Walk and Ron McCa-

“*These boys got together; they saw a circus in McGregor, IA; it transformed their lives. They decided they wanted to become circus owners.*”

Deborah Walk
Tibbals Curator of the Circus
Museum and Historical Documents





Built by Charles Ringling as the Terrace Hotel, the building houses Sarasota County offices, including the Supervisor of Elections Office.

erty, curators at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and Ca' d'Zan, the Ringlings' waterfront mansion, respectively.

There were seven Ringling brothers, Walk and McCarty explained, but only five were among the original family circus entrepreneurs. They started their business as a song and dance troupe in the early 1880s, following that with their first small circus in 1884.

Of the seven brothers, only two had a major impact on Sarasota, McCarty and Walk noted. John's history is well known by most residents, as a result of the art museum, his palatial home, his development efforts — including the first bridge to, and development of, St. Armands and Lido — and his travails and economic downfall during the Great Depression.



Charles Ringling/Contributed



Ron McCarty, curator of Ca d'Zan, speaks with an audience member after the program.

Charles was neither the showman nor the developer his brother was, but he left his own not-insubstantial mark on the town.

Perhaps some of the best-known landmarks built by Charles Ringling were the Terrace Hotel — now the Sarasota County Terrace Building — at the corner of Ringling and Washington boulevards; the courthouse complex due north of the Terrace — designed by Dwight James Baum and beautifully restored by Sarasota County; and the Charles Ringling Building just west of Washington Boulevard (U.S. 301). All are on the eponymous Ringling Boulevard.

While Charles was born in McGregor, IA, all seven brothers (and one sister) — children of German immigrants — grew up in Baraboo, WI. Several of their homes remain as historic landmarks in that community, which also was the winter quarters for the Ringling family circus for many years.

The patriarch of the family was an itinerant harness maker, apparently quite skilled, Walk indicated. It was his fate, unfortunately, to be living in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Harnesses were being produced in factories in large quantities, so he could provide only a sparse upbringing for the eight children, according to Walk.

“These boys got together; they saw a circus in McGregor, IA; it transformed their lives,” she said. “They decided they wanted to become circus owners. This was what drove them to develop what would go on to become *The Greatest Show on Earth*.”

She continued, “In 1884, the boys ... left Baraboo and went to the first 10 stops on their first route. They had their winter quarters at Bara-



Deborah Walk, Tibbals Curator of the Circus Museum and Historical Documents at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, answers a question after the program.

boo, and now the Circus World Museum is on the same spot.”

THE FIVE BROTHERS

“We divided the job, but we stuck together,” said John Ringling.

While five of the brothers were members of the original partnership, all seven ended up working for the circus. Each contributed in his own way. All the evidence indicates a re-



The Charles Ringling Building stands on Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota.

markable partnership, too, which some historians say accounts for the success of the family business.

Nonetheless, some of the brothers are practically unknown to Sarasotans.

“Al Ringling was the brother who really got the others together to fulfill this dream of owning a circus,” said Walk.

He performed as an acrobat initially, and he was known for his ability to stage the spectacles that would make the circus famous. “He controlled how the circus was put together; he was the ringmaster,” Walk added.

Otto Ringling was considered the most well-read. He loved horses and was referred to as “The King,” as he held the purse strings for the entire circus, according to McCarty.

Alf T. Ringling wrote the program books for the circus, with all those delicious descriptions of wild and exotic animals and daring circus acts. In 1900, he penned, *The Life Story of the Ringling Brothers*, which to this day is a critical source for facts about the Ringling family and circus.

The last two brothers are far more famous in Baraboo than in Sarasota. Gus Ringling was “one of the kindest of the brothers,” said McCarty. He worked for the circus when it first converted to railroad transport, and he was the first brother to die.

Henry Ringling was the largest, at 6 feet 3 inches in height and a weight of about 300 pounds.

John was the first Ringling to “discover” Sarasota, buying the now famous bayfront land

that is home to his mansion and museum. Charles was close on his heels.

“John purchased the property in 1911,” McCarty said. “Charles came and visited and discovered how beautiful it was here. They decided to make a Ringling compound. Charles bought next door, and Alf T. Ringling owned a mansion north of them in the Whitfield area,” McCarty added.

The other great circus of the day was the Barnum and Bailey. In 1907, Otto and John decided the brothers should buy it. The two shows were run separately until 1919, when they were combined.

One of the saddest reasons for that business decision, Walk said, was the early deaths of a number of the brothers. Walk pointed out there just were not enough members of the family left to operate separate circuses.

According to public records, August Ringling died in 1907, William in 1911, Albert in 1916, Henry in 1918 and Alfred in 1919. The circumstances would have left just John and Charles to run the two shows.

Charles died in 1926; he was buried in a family mausoleum in Manasota Memorial Park in Bradenton. His wife, Edith, took on many of his responsibilities with the circus and continued living in the bayfront estate that was completed the year of his death.

Editor’s note: The lecture series continues on Jan. 15, 2013 with Kay Kipling speaking on *How We Became an Art Colony*. The Crocker Church is located at 1260 12th St. in Pioneer Park, located just east of U.S. 41. 



MAGIC IN MINIATURE

The miniature village is not the only seasonal décor in the Radauskas household.

THIS VILLAGE HAS DONE A LOT OF GROWING IN 20 YEARS

By Vicki Chatley
Contributing Writer

Twenty years ago, Lorraine Radauskas was shopping in Silver Springs, MD, when she purchased two tiny houses for a miniature village collection. Thus, began a hobby that has led to a winter wonderland that awes visitors to her Sarasota home.

“The first display was set up on top of a two-drawer file cabinet,” she said, but has since grown to cover four tables in a room known at other times of the year as husband Paul’s den.

And that does not include all of the figures — houses, people, churches, trees, streetlights, stores — that are part of Lorraine’s collection. The five cats the Radauskas added to their collection this year also are on the prowl in the village.

She estimates the total is about 1,000 individual pieces.

This year Lorraine selected “Home Town” as her theme. She said the process begins by



“having a plan for the village.” Then the tables are set up, the electricity put in place and the roads installed. Finally, the houses, skating rinks, cars and other figures are added.

Lorraine does most of the work during the month-long construction period. This year, Paul and three of their friends provided assistance. At the behest of the male volunteer, she set up the train instead of the streetcar she usually features.

Lorraine Radauskas shows visitors one section of her miniature holiday village.



Skiers take a lift up to the top of the mountain.

Lorraine says she often chooses a New York City setting, complete with miniature replicas of the Stock Exchange, Rockefeller Center, the Empire State Building and even the building known as One Times Square, with a ball that drops as it does at midnight on New Year's Eve in the Big Apple. These were among the items that failed to make an appearance in this season's display, along with a baseball stadium and a ship.

While the village is the focal point, the Radauskas' home is decorated to give a warm welcome to the holiday season. There are carolers atop a bookcase, a green wreath with a jaunty red bow overlooking a gingerbread

house, a Christmas tree adorned with colorful ornaments — something to reflect the holiday spirit everywhere you look. Lorraine says she loves this time of year, especially the seasonal decorations.

The village does need protection from the true rulers of the household — Sammy, Gracie and Chloe. If they had their way, the three family cats would dismantle “Home Town” long before Lorraine is ready to carefully place everything in their original boxes and store them until next year.

Editor's note: All photos are by Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel. 



The collection takes up most of a room in the house.



The two houses in the middle were the beginning of the miniature village collection when Lorraine Radauskas purchased them 20 years ago.



Dancers waltz across the roof of The Regal Ballroom. They are among the many figures in constant motion throughout the village.



The tall building is a replica of the Bromo Seltzer Tower, which was the tallest building in Baltimore when it was built in 1911, according to the Bromo Seltzer Tower website (bromoseltzertower.com).



The skater on the 'frozen' pond is one of the many figures that move.



Lorraine Radauskas set up the train this year at the request of a friend.



All the buildings and other figures in the Radauskas' collection were produced by Department 56. Its website, department56corner.com, pictures 130 items that are being discontinued, as well as many more that are being introduced. Use caution when accessing the website; there may be an irresistible temptation to purchase everything.



FATAL DECREE LAUNCHED

Author H. Terrell Griffin signs copies of his new book during a launch party. Photo by Scott Proffitt

GRIFFIN UNVEILS SEVENTH NOVEL IN HIS MATT ROYAL SERIES

By Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer

The rollout for *Fatal Decree*, H. Terrell Griffin's latest Matt Royal mystery, began with a book signing and cocktail party hosted by his publisher, Oceanview, on Dec 12 on Longboat Key, the island Griffin loves and loves to write about.

Griffin has come a long way from his first novel, *Longboat Blues*, which appeared in 2005. Then he was one among the hordes of unknown, self-published authors wandering into bookstores and asking them to stock his novel.

But Griffin beat the odds. *Longboat Blues* was a success, and Griffin was picked up by

Oceanview for his third novel in the series. He never has looked back.

Fatal Decree, his seventh novel, officially will be released on Jan. 15. Not only has he been relieved of trying to sell his titles store to store, he gets national coverage and favorable reviews from the likes of New York Times best-selling authors David Hagberg and Michael Connelly, whose comments grace the back pages of Griffin's latest novel.

The book signing was packed, and the line of people waiting for Griffin to autograph his latest mystery was long and steady. More than a few folks were buying stacks of his books, in fact.

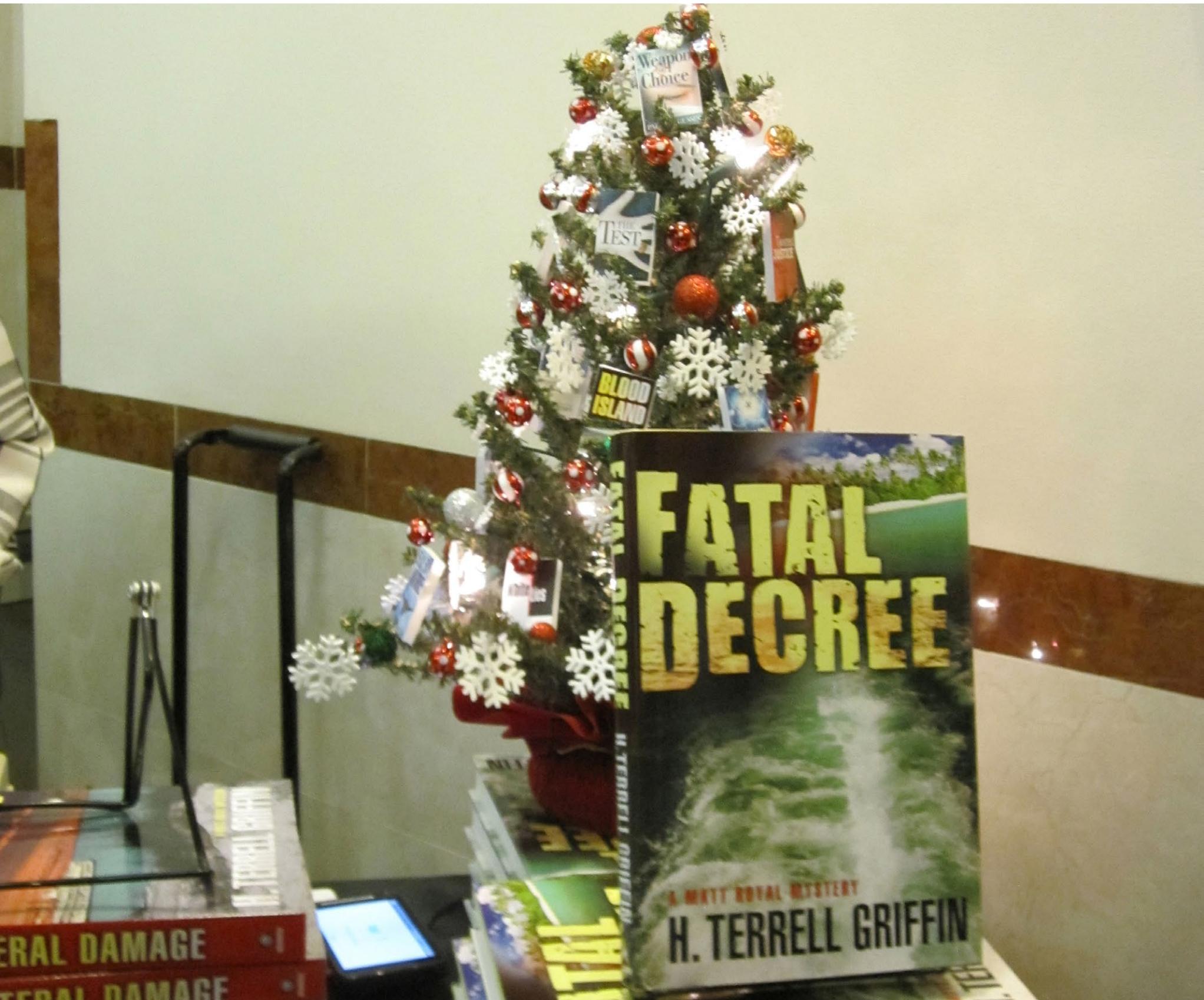
“As more and more of his books come out, he’s selling more of all his titles,” said author and publisher Pat Gussin of Oceanview. She noted fans were asking Griffin to sign his older books as well as his latest.

Having been a trial attorney in his previous life, Griffin has made good use of his expertise in his Matt Royal stories. Perhaps no other contemporary author gets compared to John D. MacDonald as frequently as Griffin

does. Readers can affirm his books are solid, well-written mysteries with a strong local flavor.

Among them is Sherelle Turner, who was leaving the book launch party with an armload of Griffin’s titles.

“I’ve known Terry since his first book came out,” she said, “and I’ve got ’em all. Every character in his books is a local. It’s great fun.” 



Fatal Decree awaits Griffin’s fans. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Siesta Seen

CONDO LIGHTING CONTEST JUDGED; CHRIS BROWN BUYS THE ARCHES IN SIESTA VILLAGE; PATTERSON SEEKS HELP FOR PLOVERS



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

With Mark Smith having blended up a batch of his signature eggnog, it was time once again for judging holiday lights at the condominium complexes on Siesta Key, sponsored by the Siesta Key Condominium Council.

And once again, I was delighted to be invited to participate. With Siesta Key Village Association President Russell Matthes having secured

one of his company's Siesta Island Trolleys for us, we judges set out shortly after 6 p.m. on Dec. 18 for a critical look at the decorations.

Our usual crew — headed up by Helen Clifford, a member of both the Condominium Council and the Siesta Key Association boards — was delighted to have Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson along.



The Harbour Towne condominium complex has trees and shrubs adorned in holiday lights. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

Although Patterson has done the judging many times in the past, she said, this was her first stint in several years.

Another newcomer was Diane Erne, who also is involved with the Condo Council. She assisted Clifford with the forms we had to fill out. (My good fortune was to sit next to SKA President Catherine Luckner, who always comes prepared; I had forgotten my reading glasses, but Luckner pulled out a small flashlight and handed it to me. It was a big help, needless to say!)

Accompanying Catherine was her husband, Bob. Cheryl Gaddie, immediate past chair-

woman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce; Smith, the current chamber chairman; and Matthes rounded out the island organization representatives. Rachel O'Hara, staff photographer for The Observer Group — who took the trolley holiday tour with me last year — was with us again, but this time working with Alex Mahadevan, news editor of the *Pelican Press*. Rounding out our news media contingent was Charlotte Owen, also of The Observer Group.

With Mark pouring some of that yummy eggnog, we headed first to Whispering Sands (“There’s all kinds of WOW!” Catherine point-



The Sea Shells Condominium's grounds sparkle for the holidays. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

ed out) and Terrace East (“Everyone notice the Christmas tree in the foyer,” Russell said).

As always, Helen reminded us that we were judging complexes in groups according to their size. She asks that we consider uniqueness of the decorations, the “WOW” factor, use of color and how the decorations reflect the Christmas season.

I have to interject two comments at this point: Mark Smith has incredibly good balance, as evidenced by his ability to pour eggnog without spilling it on a couple of occasions when

the trolley lurched from a standstill into full gear; and even without the eggnog, this outing would be tremendous fun. When you put this many diverse personalities together — everyone with a pretty darn good sense of humor — you end up with much laughter, and that laughter is infectious.

BEYOND THE VILLAGE

The only time we left the trolley on our tour was at the Gulf & Bay Club. After Helen prevailed upon the gate guard to let us in because we were judging the Christmas lights, our driv-



The group participating in this year's Siesta Condo Council holiday lighting contest are (from left) Alex Mahadevan, Mark Smith, Cheryl Gaddie, Catherine and Bob Luckner, Nora Patterson, Diane Erne, trolley driver Geoff van Deusen and Helen Clifford, with Russell Matthes (above) in the trolley window. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

er parked so we could head to the large green lawn area with the pond. From that vantage point, we could survey the multitude of lights around the grounds.

While Mark pointed out that the multi-hued lights draped over the shrubs were LED, and therefore energy-efficient and cool to the touch, he and others also pointed out that not all the lights were working. Bob Luckner made an attempt to see what the problem was.

“Are you fixing it for them?” Commissioner Patterson asked.

“They’re all plugged together,” he responded, unable to find a faulty connection.

Sadly, that meant a few notches taken off the score for G&B.

Back on the trolley, we continued south on Midnight Pass Road to Jamaica Royale and Beachaven. The latter, where Helen lives, had improved quite a bit over its 2011 display, we agreed.

As we whizzed past some complexes, Commissioner Patterson noted more than a few



Siesta Dunes' creativity won raves from the condo lighting judges. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

that were especially pretty, but they were not contest participants.

“Every time we say, ‘Wow!’ they’re not on the list,” Catherine agreed.

Then we slowed down for a look at the entrance to Siesta Dunes. It was on our list, and it probably scored the highest “WOW” count for the night, especially as the trolley headed into the interior of the complex.

“Look at those birds,” Catherine said, pointing to all the artful avian shapes adorning the landscape. “They’re beautiful.”

“Honestly, I’ve done this many years, and I think this is the best I’ve ever seen,” Commissioner Patterson said. “I love the little birds.”

Siesta Dunes won first place in 2011 in its size category.

Like Terrace East, Siesta Sands Beach Resort — located at 1001 Point of Rocks Road — was new on our list, and it won more than a few raves as the trolley wound back through its streets.

Commissioner Patterson noted that that whole area was under water in June, when Tropical Storm Debby was assailing our coast. Fortunately, things were merry, bright and dry this night.

With a bit of a drive down to our last two stops on Midnight Pass Road — Tortuga and Island Reef — the trolley picked up speed. Tortuga was new on our list, too, but apparently man-

agement was unaware of the level of competition it would be up against.

As we rolled past it on the way to Island Reef, Russell asked, “What happened to Tortuga?”

“It was very dry,” Catherine responded.

After Island Reef, it was back up Midnight Pass Road to Stickney Point Road and Casa Del Mar. Finally, we headed north again on Midnight Pass Road for our last couple of complexes.

As we returned to Davidson Plaza, Catherine commended Russell for all the efforts Village restaurateurs and merchants have put into their decorations this holiday season. “I think it’s the best year ever,” she told him.

As Diane collected our scoring sheets, we made our way off the trolley and gathered for the traditional judges photo. Just in time for our deadline she sent me the results:

- Category 1 — First Place: Siesta Dunes; Second Place: Palm Bay Club; Third Place: Gulf & Bay Club; and Honorable Mention: Horizons West.
- Category 2 — First Place: Beachaven; Second Place: Crescent Arms; Third Place: Terrace East; and Honorable Mention: Tortuga.
- Category 3 — First Place: Sandpiper Beach Club; Second Place: Siesta Harbor; Third Place: Siesta Sands Beach Resort; and Honorable Mention: Harbour Town Yacht Club.

Siesta Seen

The winners will be recognized during the Condo Council's meeting on Jan. 15 at Siesta Key Chapel.

If you find yourself needing some Christmas spirit, I highly recommend you take your own tour of the condo complexes on Siesta Key. You do not have to make your way past the guard gates, as we did, to enjoy the spectacular light show.

THE ARCHES HAVE NEW OWNER

Chris Brown, owner of The Hub Baja Grill, the Beach Club and The Cottage in Siesta Village, bought another piece of Village property on Dec. 19 — The Arches, which is home to Bonjour French Café and Used Book Heaven.

Brown told me he paid \$1.35 million for the parcel, which is slightly less than 10,000 square feet.



Siesta Key business owner Chris Brown has signed the papers to purchase The Arches of Siesta Key, home to Bonjour French Café and Used Book Heaven. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

“It’s hard to find [property] at that price per square foot,” he added.

However, one of the biggest perks, he said, is that The Arches has 47 parking spaces. “Parking is always a hot commodity” in the Village, Brown pointed out.

No one knows that better than he does, given his three lawsuits against Sarasota County over how his parking assessments have been figured since 2007. Brown’s attorney, Morgan Bentley of Bentley & Bruning in Sarasota, and Sarasota County attorneys remain in discussions regarding Brown’s third lawsuit, which was filed in October 2011.

“It’s always good to have parking,” Brown told me with a laugh. “To me, the parking lot was worth [the price].”

According to Sarasota County property tax records, the last time the parcel was sold prior

to this week was in 1996, when the Kauffman Family Partnership 1 LTD, which has an Osprey address, bought it from Mark and Irene Kauffman.

“It’s one of those properties that certainly doesn’t change hands very often,” Brown pointed out.

The retail space is 100 percent leased, he added, “which is nice.” Brown says he has no immediate plans for the property, which also has apartments on the second floor.

“Over time, I would like to add my touch,” he said.

PLOVERS AND PESTICIDES

A day before she joined us for the trolley light tour, on Dec. 17, Patterson brought a completely unrelated matter to the attention of her fellow county commissioners during a special meeting.



Fire ants on Siesta Key have proven a hazard to nesting snowy plovers, Sarasota Audubon volunteers say. Photo by Fran Palmeri

Siesta Seen

Bob Luckner and Dr. Allan Worms, a retired wildlife biologist who volunteers with Sarasota Audubon — like Bob and Catherine Luckner — had asked her, she said, to seek county staff's help in dealing with fire ants on Siesta beach.

“Apparently, [the fire ants] are perfectly capable of eating through eggs and killing the young babies as they hatch,” Patterson explained the concerns regarding the endangered snowy plovers that nest on Siesta each year.

Audubon volunteers noted considerable problems with the fire ants this year, especially in conservation easement areas where the birds have been likely to build their nests, Patterson added.

Luckner and Worms had asked her to seek consensus from the other commissioners to allow them to talk with staff about the use of organically friendly pesticides in those easements, she said. “They are prepared to do all the footwork of getting permission from the property owners” of the easements, Patterson added, so the pesticides can be used.

Patterson made a motion for County Administrator Randall Reid or his designee to meet with Bob Luckner and Worms about the issue, then report to the commission on the subsequent recommendations.

Vice Chairwoman Carolyn Mason seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CROSSWALK BID UPDATE

After my deadline for this column last week, Tom Maroney, general manager for business operations in the county's Public Works Department, notified me staff is going to try to accelerate the time frame for the County Commission to vote on the bid award for construction and installation of lighting for the Siesta Village crosswalks.

While it typically takes five or six weeks to get an item on the board's agenda, Maroney said, staff had been asked to move faster on this matter. Therefore, he added, unless a bid protest or some unexpected situation arises, the County Commission is scheduled to discuss the bid award on Jan. 29.

The bids are due by Jan. 9. Once they are in, the county's Procurement Department staff will vet them and rank them, to make a recommendation for the commission.

“We'll see what we can do,” Maroney added. “We're trying to get this done in the most expeditious way possible.”

During both the November and December Siesta Key Village Association meetings, SKVA President Russell Matthes had noted how critical it was to get the lighting installed before mid-February, when season gets into full swing. 

PERLMAN MUSIC PROGRAM RESIDENCY TO BEGIN

The Perlman Music Program/Suncoast (PMP/Suncoast) will present its ninth annual Winter Residency Dec. 23 through Jan. 5.

Toby Perlman, wife of internationally acclaimed concert violinist and conductor Itzhak Perlman, founded this intensive, two-week program, a news release points out. It “offers unparalleled musical training” for students ages 12 to 20+, who play the violin, viola, cello and bass,” the release adds.

“With a faculty including Itzhak Perlman and some of the most gifted musical talents of our time, the PMP Sarasota Winter Residency offers an artistic and personal experience that changes students’ lives forever,” the release says.

The Winter Residency is hosted in partnership with the University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee. The public is invited to attend more than 20 free events, including orchestra and chorus rehearsals, master classes and works-in-progress recitals. Question-and-answer sessions with the Perlmans and PMP students and faculty follow many of these sessions.

Most of the events take place in a heated outdoor performance tent on the grounds of the USF Sarasota-Manatee campus, located at 8350 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, the release points out.

Audience members are invited to show up 15 minutes prior to an event to ensure seating.

PMP/Suncoast also offers an online e-ticket program for a \$5 service charge per ticket. E-tickets are available at www.PMPSuncoast.org or by calling 955-4942.

The Sarasota Winter Residency will culminate with the *Celebration Concert* at the Sarasota Opera House, Saturday, Jan. 5, at 5 p.m. Tickets for the concert are \$40, \$60 and \$80; they may be reserved at the Sarasota Opera House's box office by calling 366-8450, ext. 1.

The "Perlman and Pearls" gala dinner event, which immediately will follow the concert, will celebrate the Perlmans, faculty, students and PMP/Suncoast sponsors and patrons. For gala tickets and information, call 350-2338.



Itzhak conducts the students in the orchestra. Photo by Barbara Banks

FST EXTENDS *LET'S TWIST AGAIN* AND *SMOKEY JOE'S CAFE*

By popular demand, Florida Studio Theatre has extended the run of the show *Smokey Joe's Café* through Jan. 12 and the run of *Let's Twist Again: with the Wanderers* through Jan. 20, the theatre has announced.

Smokey Joe's Café features music by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. "This [is a] toe-tapping celebration of a changing American music scene," a news release notes.

The show is presented in FST'S Keating Theatre.

Let's Twist Again: with the Wanderers is a 1950s and '60s-style musical revue that opened in FST's Goldstein Cabaret on Oct.

19. It was developed by Richard Hopkins and Jim Prosser with additional assistance from Rebecca Hopkins, the release notes. The show "features an all-male cast of performers who sing, dance and doo-wop their way through a multitude of popular songs," the news release points out. Among those songs are *At the Hop*, *Barbara Ann*, *Do You Believe in Magic* and *At Last*," the release adds.

Single tickets for *Let's Twist Again: with the Wanderers* are \$19 to \$36; they are \$19 to \$42 for *Smokey Joe's Café*. Tickets may be purchased from the FST box office in person at 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota; by calling 366-9000; or by visiting floridstudiotheatre.org.



Smokey Joe's Café will continue through Jan. 20 at Florida Studio Theatre. Contributed photo

CIRCUS SARASOTA ANNOUNCES HOLIDAY AND 2013 SHOWS

Sailor Circus, America's oldest youth circus and a program of Circus Sarasota, will present the *2012 Holiday Spectacular — The Polar Express* Dec. 27-30 at the Sailor Circus Arena, located at 2075 Bahia Vista St., Sarasota.

Based on the story of a young boy who boards a magical train headed to the North Pole in search of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve, "this circus adventure will embark on an extraordinary journey of entertainment that proves

the wonder of life never fades for those who believe," a news release says.

Tickets are \$16 for adults and \$12 for children under 12. They are available at the box office or by calling 366-0156. Showtimes are 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 27, and Friday, Dec. 28; and 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 29, and Sunday, Dec. 30.

Then for the New Year, Circus Sarasota will present *Nik Wallenda — His Journey Continues*

Internationally known aerialist Nik Wallenda will be the featured artist during Circus Sarasota's 2013 season. Contributed art

Sailor Circus will present its Holiday Spectacular Dec. 27-30 at its Bahia Vista Street arena. Contributed art

ues. Wallenda is the only person in the world to have crossed directly over the precipice of Niagara Falls, the news release notes.

“This circus engagement promises high wire excitement and daredevilry from Wallenda and his family in addition to other jaw-dropping performances from internationally acclaimed circus artists,” the release adds.

Among the others featured in the 2013 Circus Sarasota Big Top performances will be Encho, “an incredible hand balance act” who made his American debut last year in Sarasota, the release notes; Circus Sarasota Co-Founder

Dolly Jacobs, “who inspires with grace and beauty” in her aerial performances; the acrobatic act Duo Manduca; quick-change artists Vladimir and Olga Smirnov; interactive ventriloquist Willer Nicolodi; and the juggling Duo Platchkov.

The show will run from Friday, Jan. 25, through Friday, Feb. 15, at the corner of Tuttle Avenue and 12th Street, under the Circus Sarasota Big Top.

Tickets start at \$10. For more information regarding showtimes or to purchase tickets, call 355-9805 or visit www.CircusSarasota.org.

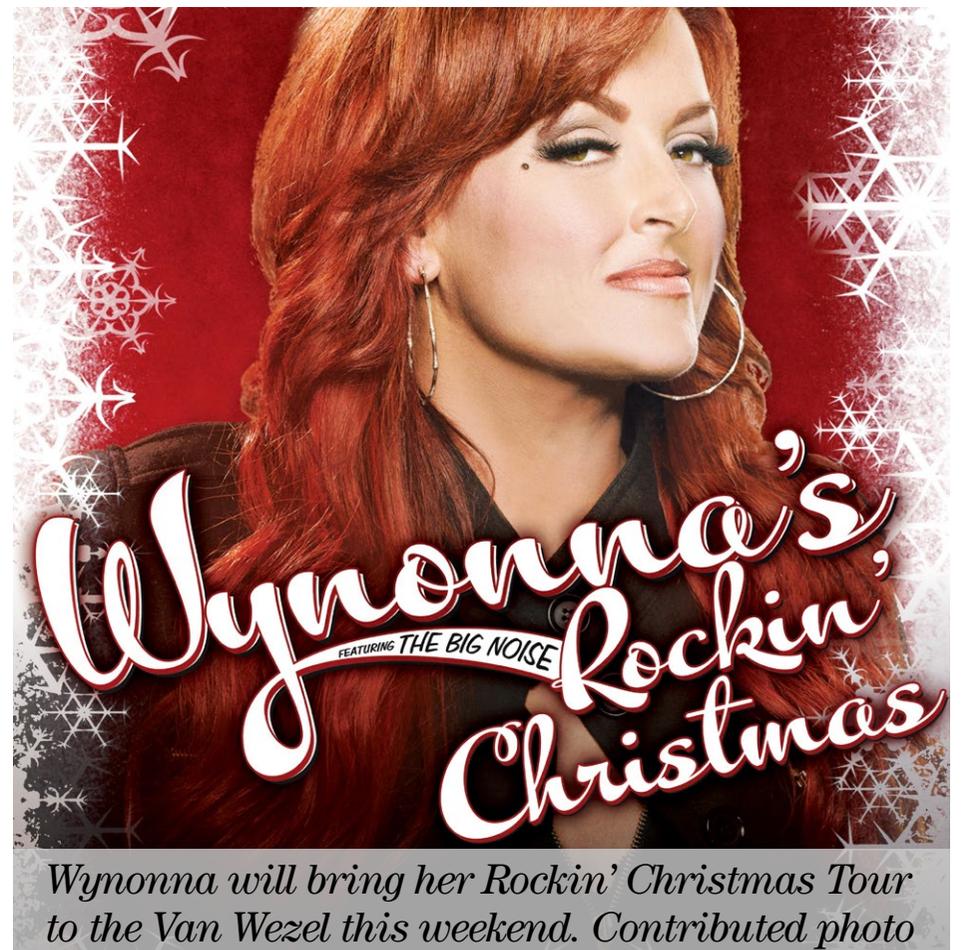
WYNONNA TO ROCK THE VAN WEZEL DEC. 22

Wynonna and her *Rockin' Christmas Tour* will hit the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall stage on Dec. 22 at 8 p.m., Sarasota's performing arts hall has announced.

“With her smooth, sultry voice and country/rock diva persona, this five-time Grammy Award winner could make even the grumpiest of Scrooges excited about the holiday season,” a news release says.

Wynonna will be backed by her band, the Big Noise, which features her husband on drums, the release notes.

Tickets are priced from \$30 to \$80. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org



RIGBY CANCELS PETER PAN SHOWS AT THE VAN WEZEL

Cathy Rigby's Feb. 19-20 engagement of *Peter Pan* at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota has been canceled because of the show's inability to lock in a second stop on the Florida leg of its tour, the Van Wezel has announced.

“Ticket sales for the Sarasota dates were strong,” a news release says. Mary Bensel, executive director of the Van Wezel, adds in the release, “We are extremely disappointed with the show's decision, as it was one of the highlights of the season.”

WBTT FOUNDING MEMBER TO HIT THE BROADWAY STAGE

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe (WBTT) has announced that founding Troupe member Teresa Stanley has just been cast in the role of Justice/Mother for the Broadway production of *Rock of Ages* at the Helen Hayes Theatre in New York City.

Stanley's first performance will be on Jan. 21 in the role she played on the first national *Rock of Ages* tour, a news release notes.

"We are very proud of our Teresa," said Nate Jacobs, artistic director of WBTT, in the release. "I met her when she was a small child, but her big talent was even evident then. Her mother, Rosa Stanley, recognized it as well and let WBTT work with Teresa to develop her skills as a performer," he added. "It's very gratifying to see her come to Broadway for the second time in her career. We are so happy for all of her successes."

As Justice/Mother, Stanley will play a madam in a brothel. A love story, the musical takes place in the 1980s in a place called the Bourbon Room. In the film version of *Rock of Ages*, released earlier this year, Justice/Mother was played by Mary J Blige.

"Justice/Mother is a really great role," Stanley said in the news release. "She's got a little edge to her, but at the same time, she's funny and very memorable. I'm really looking forward to being on stage again in this exciting and fun role."

She continued, "Looking back on my career, I have to say that everything I needed to get to this place was a result of those early years with WBTT. The experience and training I received from Nate Jacobs really prepared me.



Teresa Stanley, a founding member of the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, has landed a Broadway role in Rock of Ages. Contributed photo

I like to remind the Troupe members they are getting invaluable experience, and if they listen and choose to use these skills professionally, they will go further than they ever imagined."

The mission of WBTT is to produce plays that promote and celebrate the African-American experience while attracting diverse audiences, the news release points out. The Troupe's productions also are a vehicle for supporting African-American artists and building the self-esteem of African-American youth, the release adds. 



Wreaths adorn the red doors at Church of the Redeemer in downtown Sarasota. Contributed photo

CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS DAY MASSES PLANNED

The Church of the Redeemer, 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, invites all members of the community to join its congregation in worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

On Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, Redeemer's afternoon Family Mass (Rite II) will begin at 4 p.m. It will be preceded by a festive half-hour of traditional Christmas carols, beginning at 3:30 p.m., including favorites such as *Silent Night* and *Joy to the World*, sung by the congregation and choirs.

During the Eucharist, St. Nicholas will make a surprise visit, "receiving a special blessing from the Rev. Fredrick Robinson, rector of Redeemer, and reminding all of the true meaning of Christmas," a news release notes.

Babysitting for toddlers and infants will be provided.

The early evening service will be a Choral Mass (Rite II), which will begin at 6:30 p.m. This Mass will be preceded at 6 p.m. by a half-hour of singing of traditional Christmas carols, accompanied by organ and brass quartet, the news release notes. Babysitting for toddlers and infants will be provided during this Mass as well.

"Beginning at 9:30 p.m., a joyous musical celebration of organ and brass quartet with organists Ann Stephenson-Moe and Michael Stuart will welcome the congregation," the release says. The trumpet players in the quartet will be the world-renowned Daniel Mendelow, retired principal trumpet for the Sydney Sym-

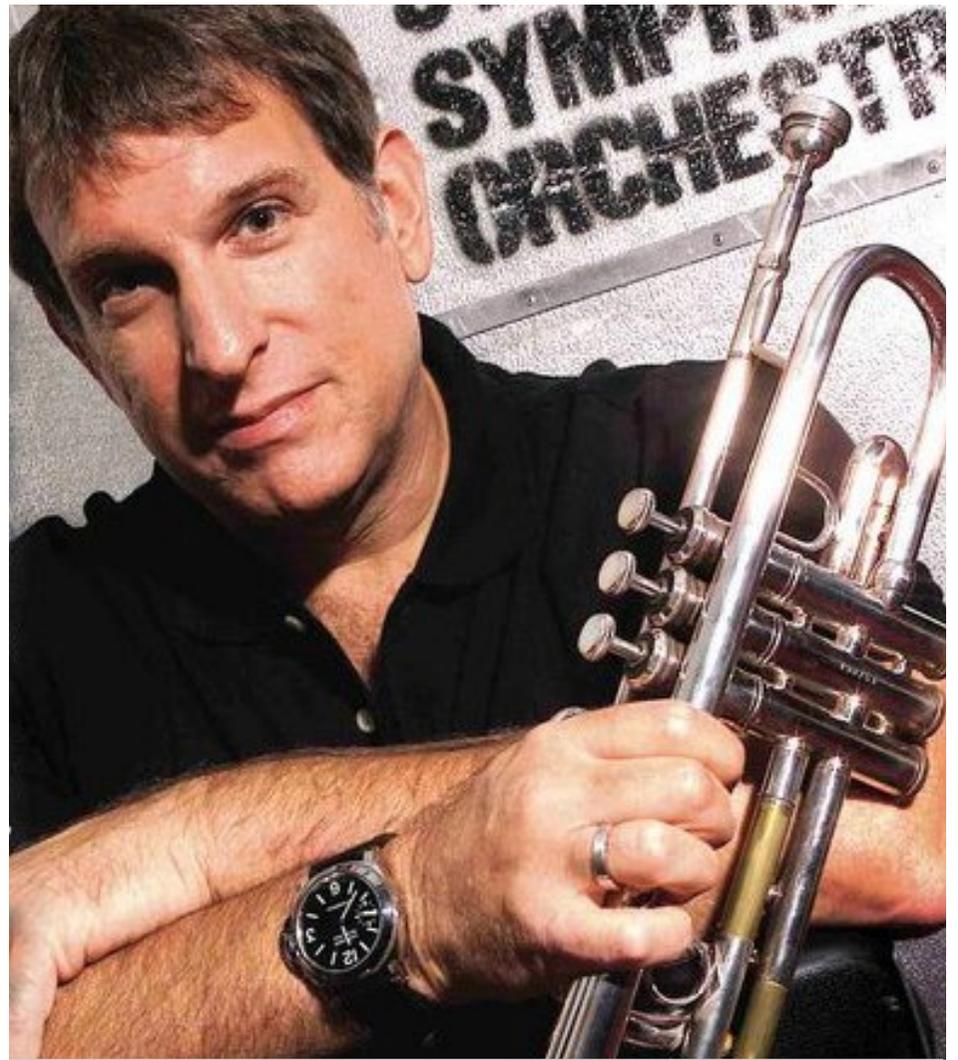
phony Orchestra, and well-known area player Andrew Kemp.

At 10 p.m., the choir of Redeemer will sing anthems and carols for 30 minutes, heralding the High Solemn Mass (Rite I with incense), which will begin at 10:30 p.m.

On Christmas Day, Dec. 25, Redeemer will offer Holy Communion at 7:30 a.m., Choral Mass at 10 a.m. and a Mass in Spanish at 1 p.m.

Complimentary parking is available at the BMO Harris Bank parking garage on McAnsh Square on Christmas Eve beginning at 3 p.m. and continuing through 1 a.m. Christmas Day.

For more information about the Church of the Redeemer, visit www.redeemersarasota.org, or call 955-4263.



Daniel Mendelow/Contributed

CONGREGATION TO HOST SPECIAL GUEST FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

Rabbi Binyamin Biber, who serves Machar, the Washington, D.C., Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism, will address the Congregation for Secular Judaism in Sarasota at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 21.

His topic will be “Social Action as a Key to Congregational Drive, Vitality and Success,” a news release says.

Biber operates the Humanist Chaplaincy of Greater Washington, D.C., and serves as Humanist chaplain at American University, the release adds.

He is president of the Association of Humanistic Rabbis, and

he was a leader of that group in its support of full equality for the homosexual community, the news release notes.

Additionally, Biber serves on the Rabbinic Council of J Street, the largest Jewish group working for a two-state solution.

In 2011 he joined the board of the Humanist Society.

The program is free and open to the public. The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism meets at Unity in Sarasota, located at 3023 Proctor Road.

For more information, visit www.chj-Sarasota.org or call 929-7771. 



Binyamin Biber/Contributed



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

21
DEC

Ninth Annual Lights in Bloom

Dec. 21-23 & 26-27, 6 to 9 p.m., Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, 900 S. Palm Ave, Sarasota. Admission: \$13 to \$15; children under 12 admitted free. Tickets at Selby.org; information at 366-5731.

21
DEC

1776 the Musical

Through Dec. 22 at the Asolo Repertory Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. For ticket information, call 351-8000 or visit asolorep.org.

23
DEC

A Christmas Carol

Dec. 23, 7 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Admission: \$10 to \$50. Information or tickets: 953-3368 or VanWezel.org.

31
DEC

The Pineapple Drop

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

31
DEC

WSLR Down Home New Year's Eve Party

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

04
JAN

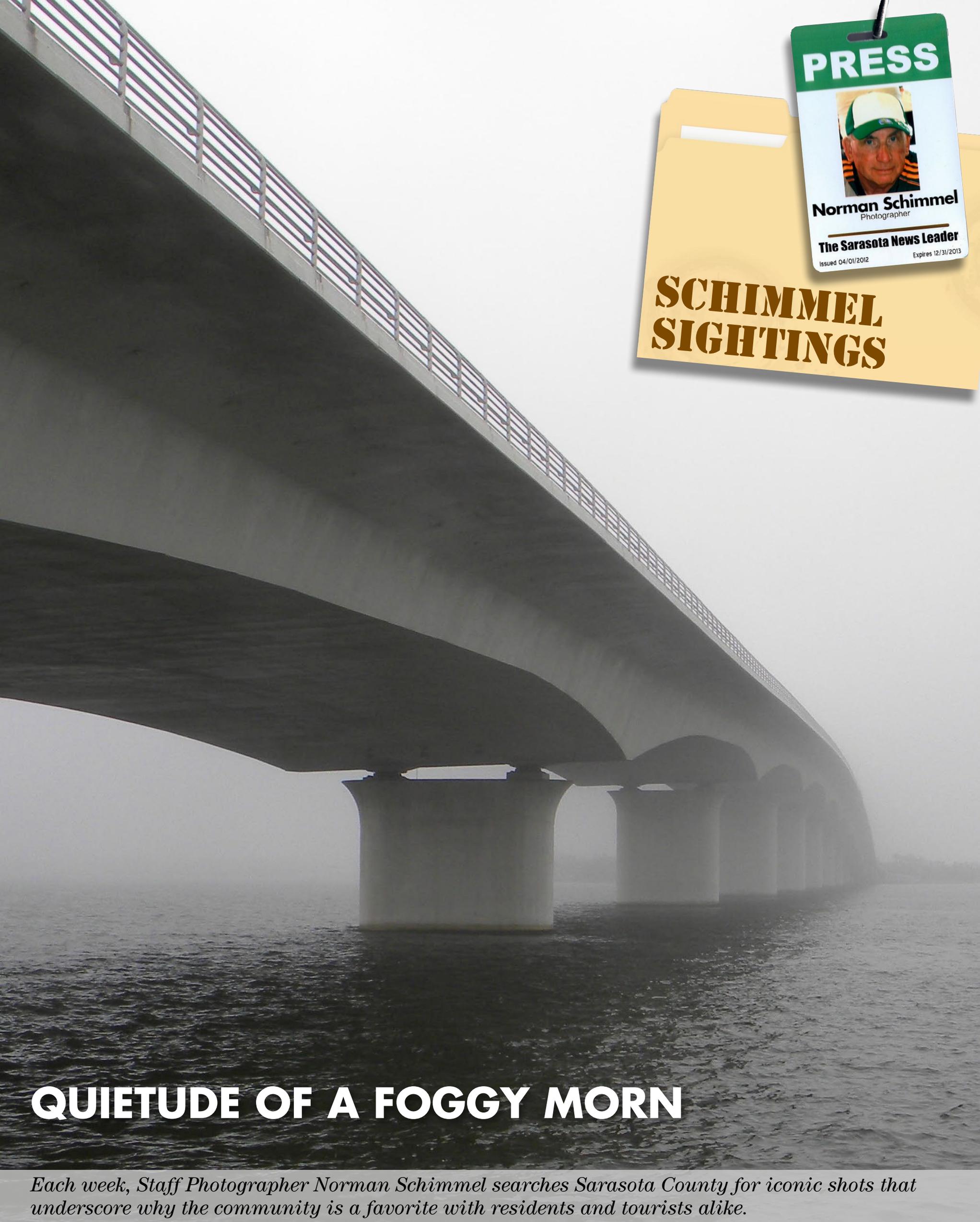
Dabbert Gallery presents A Legacy of Sarasota Masters

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

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



thisweekin
SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR



PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

The Sarasota News Leader

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**SCHIMMEL
SIGHTINGS**

QUIETUDE OF A FOGGY MORN

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.