

THE SARASOTA

February 1, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

PONDERING A FIX

NIK SKYWALKER

Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.

Inside

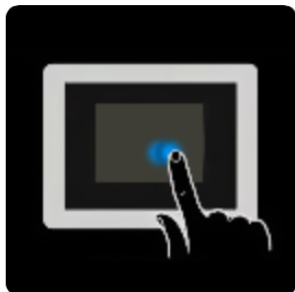
GET TO KNOW US



swipe:
flip pages left or right



Single Tap:
show/hide on-screen controls



Double Tap:
zoom-in or zoom-out on a single page



Pinch: (Not supported on some Android devices)
Zoom-in or zoom-out on a single page



Rotate: (Not supported on some Android devices)
View different layouts for landscape/portrait



Move:
When zoomed-in, move around the page

Toolbar Options



Text Mode



Search by keywords



Open/close the mini carousel of pages



View the table of contents



View the archives of this publication



Email the current page to a friend



Social bookmark the current page

A.K.A. HELP

SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher
Rachel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor
Cooper@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Stan Zimmerman

City Editor
Stan@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Norman Schimmel

Staff Photographer
NSchimmel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

David Staats

Columnist
DStaats@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Fran Palmeri

Contributing Writer
FPalmeri@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Harriet Cuthbert

Contributing Writer
HCuthbert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Elinor Rogosin

A&E Writer
ERogosin@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer
SProffitt@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Tyler Whitson

Staff Writer
TWhitson@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

John Riley

Editorial Cartoonist
Riley@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Vicki Chatley

Copy Editor
Vicki@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cleve Posey

Production Manager / Graphic Designer
Cleve@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Robert S. Hackney

General Manager
Robert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Advertising Sales

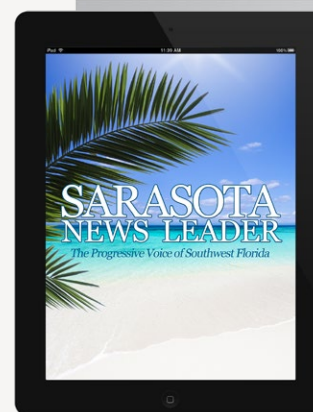
Sales@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Subscription Services

Subs@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Press Releases & News Tips

News@SarasotaNewsLeader.com



Copyright © 2012 Sarasota News Leader All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Member - National Newspaper Association • The Sarasota News Leader is a publication of:

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



Welcome

Professional photographers say the best photo is the one you take with the camera you have. How many of us have gazed at a beautiful sunset, watched a baby's first steps or spotted puppies frolicking in the grass ... and wished we'd had a camera?

The biggest story in Sarasota this week was Nik Wallenda's daredevil trek across U.S. 41 on the city's bayfront.

Norm Schimmel, our staff photographer, was in an ideal position to capture it — from the roof of One Watergate, and you will see his excellent chronicle in this issue.

But the photo that adorns our cover was taken by Tatyana Sharoubim, owner of T. Georgiano's Shoe Salon, using her iPhone. We think you will agree that it was a fantastic shot, and it was taken with the camera she had.

Of course, while Wallenda's walk was a welcome respite from the usual news this week, we found no dearth of other issues that demanded coverage.

The County Commission pondered everything from updating its 2050 master plan to Siesta Key trolleys to offering to buy out North Port's interest in Warm Mineral Springs.

The City Commission considered options for its pension funding shortfall, as it prepared for another busy regular meeting on Feb. 4 — which City Editor Stan Zimmerman kindly previews for us.

We also have a story about a Palestinian physician who suffered a heart-wrenching loss in the Palestinian conflict with Israel but still preaches peace and Tyler Whitson's informative article on Humanistic Judaism and our local Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. And I will warn you: Otus's column will leave you misty-eyed as he wraps up his installments on the lives of Great Egrets.

Your only question now is, where to begin?

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



CONTENTS



Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article



NEWS & COMMENTARY

DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

Proposed changes to the Sarasota 2050 plan headed to the public for comments — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

11

PONDERING A FIX

The Sarasota City Commission agrees to consider using an employee life insurance plan to try to help plug the pension debt hole — *Stan Zimmerman*

15

NIK SKYWALKER

International star Nik Wallenda makes it look easy as he walks a high wire across the bayfront on a sunny Sarasota morning — *Staff Reports*

19

LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE

A consultant with a national organization tells the County Commission Sarasota County has become too restrictive in employee use of purchase cards — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

25

REBUILDING TRUST

Sarasota's new police chief begins multiple initiatives — *Stan Zimmerman*

30

THAT MUCH?!

Sarasota County commissioners express shock over the cost of bus shelters and the time it takes to construct them — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

33

WHITHER THE SPRINGS?

The Sarasota County Commission offers \$2 million to purchase Warm Mineral Springs at the same time a petition drive surfaces — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

37

WHICH WAY?

The Sarasota County commissioners ask a lot of questions but hesitate to make a decision about the future of bus rapid transit before meeting with the City Commission next week — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

40

A DIFFERENT MOTIVATION

Palestinian doctor to bring message of peace to Sarasota — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

44

NOT QUITE READY

City of Sarasota staff and Floridays Development are still at work on final agreements for the new hotel planned for downtown — *Stan Zimmerman*

46



PHOTO CREDITS

Front cover - Nik Wallenda blows a kiss - Tatyana Sharoubim
Sarasota Leisure - Beached canoe at Selby Gardens - Robert Hackney

CONTENTS



Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article



CITY COMMISSION PREVIEW

48

Wife beaters, tandem parking and kayak storage on the agenda for Feb. 4 — *Stan Zimmerman*

ON TO MEDIATION

51

The Sarasota County Commission rejects a second settlement offer in a lawsuit filed in 2011 by Siesta Key business owner Chris Brown — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

TROLLEY TIME

54

The Sarasota County Commission approves funding for new public bus system employees needed to make trolley service possible for Siesta Key — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

NEWS BRIEFS

58

OPINION

EDITORIAL

67

Will the real Rick Scott please stand up?

COMMENTARY

70

Upcoming centennial of the ratification of the 16th Amendment prompts reflections on death and taxes — *David Staats*

SARASOTA LEISURE

'HUMANGELIZING'

75

Rabbi Adam Chalom carries on the legacy of a man who had a profound influence on his own life and work — *Tyler Whitson*

ASK OTUS

81

The story of Ardea and Alba reaches its final chapter — *Otus Rufous*

ARTS BRIEFS

85

RELIGION BRIEFS

93

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

95

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

96



DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

Proposed changes to the Sarasota 2050 plan headed to the public for comments — Cooper Levey-Baker

A list of proposed changes to the rules that guide new development in Sarasota County may soon be coming to a community meeting near you.

The County Commission voted Wednesday, Jan. 30, to have staff schedule a series of public meetings over the next 90 days to present and discuss potential changes to Sarasota 2050, the detailed land-use plan adopted a decade ago to encourage New Urbanist neighborhoods, particularly east of Interstate 75.

Developers have been pushing for the 2050 alterations, arguing that the regulations are too restrictive and present numerous obstacles to new construction. Supporters of 2050, meanwhile, have argued that the relatively small number of projects approved under the plan in recent years has more to do with the calamitous real estate crash than excessive government regulation. ([Full story here](#))



PONDERING A FIX

The Sarasota City Commission agrees to consider using an employee life insurance plan to try to help plug the pension debt hole — Stan Zimmerman

It was as if a Gothic curse were hanging in the air Tuesday, Jan. 29, in the chambers of the Sarasota City Commission: “The world will be a better place without you.”

Nobody said that, of course. But cutting through all the verbal underbrush in a meeting about pension fund shortfalls, the solution on the table was grisly. It is a solution adopted by thousands of banks and corporations, and the city is among the first municipalities to consider it.

In a nutshell, the city takes out a life insurance policy on its employees and retirees. When the grim reaper comes calling, the city makes a bundle and applies it to the enormous shortfall in the pension plans.

It is a double windfall for the city: no more retiree to pay for and a big check from the life insurance company. ([Full story here](#))





LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE

A consultant with a national organization says the County Commission Sarasota County has become too restrictive in employee use of purchase cards — Rachel Brown Hackney

A representative of the National Institute of Government Purchasing Inc. (NIGP) this week commended the progress Sarasota County government has made to implement better standards and practices in its Procurement Department, but he also told

the County Commission some of the county's self-imposed restrictions following a 2011 scandal in that department were excessive.

Louis Moore, lead consultant for the NIGP's review of measures the county has taken to improve procurement practices in the wake of that scandal, said on Jan. 30 that he and his team "see some definite productivity problems" with the restrictions on employees' use of county credit cards, or P-cards.

During discussions in late November with about 40 employees in the county's Procurement Department and its business units, he said he and his fellow NIGP consulting team members heard one story about an employee who had to make a 20-minute round trip to get a fuse, instead of being able — as would have been the procedure in the past — to use a P-card to buy one at a nearby store. ([Full story here](#))



REBUILDING TRUST

Sarasota's new police chief begins multiple initiatives — Stan Zimmerman

After a month on the job, Sarasota's new police chief has figured out two major problems and is making efforts to remedy them.

Chief Bernadette DiPino will be improving training for the force she leads, and she will work to restore trust between members of the public and officers. She also will push for changes in the court system.

"We have to re-establish and gain trust in the community," she said. "I believe outreach and education is important."

Within a few days, she hopes to announce the formation of a "Citizens Police Academy." It will start out as a once-a-year course for city residents through which they will take classes, go on tours, visit the gun range, mingle with special police teams and try their hands at simulated street confrontations. ([Full story here](#))



Click Any [Headline](#) To Go Directly To That Article





THAT MUCH?!

Sarasota County commissioners express shock over the cost of bus shelters and the time it takes to construct them — Rachel Brown Hackney

After Sarasota County commissioners expressed shock this week at the cost and length of time it takes to erect shelters for Sarasota County Area Transit bus stops, new SCAT Manager Glama Carter promised to provide an in-depth analysis of the issues

during an upcoming budget workshop.

As part of a two-hour presentation during the commissioners' Jan. 29 meeting in Venice, Carter pointed out that of the 2,000 SCAT stops across the county, only 138 have shelters.

She then provided a breakdown of the estimated total cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000 involved in putting up a single shelter:

- \$6,000 for land acquisition.
- \$15,000 to \$25,000 for design, permits and construction.
- \$6,000 for the bench and shelter itself.
- \$2,000 for the installation of the structure.
- \$4,000 for annual maintenance of each shelter, which has remained unfunded.

([Full story here](#))



WHITHER THE SPRINGS

The Sarasota County Commission offers \$2 million to purchase Warm Mineral Springs at the same time a petition drive surfaces — Cooper Levey-Baker

North Port wants to sell Warm Mineral Springs, and it looks like it may have a buyer: Sarasota County.

Two weeks back, after a month of wrangling, the North Port City Commission doubled down on its decision to rid itself of Warm Mineral Springs, the 81-acre tourist attraction it jointly owns with the county, asking the County Commission if it was interested in buying out the city's interest. This week, the county said yes, offering the city \$2 million. The original city/county purchase was \$5.5 million.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson outlined her plan for how to proceed with the purchase Tuesday, Jan. 29. Included: details on how the \$2 million would be paid out over time, requirements that the city alter its boundaries so the springs sits on county land and thoughts on how the city and county might manage the property in the interim. ([Full story here](#))



Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article



Herrmann's Royal Lipizzan Stallions

Witness the beauty and grace of the Original Lipizzan Stallions of Austria.
See the rare and beautiful "Airs Above the Ground,"
as seen in Walt Disney's "Miracle of the White Stallions"

Rehearsal performances Thursday thru Saturday, Dec. 20th thru May 4th
(Thur. & Fri. at 3pm; Sat. at 10am; Call to reserve groups of 15 or more)

Weddings • Events & Clinics • Riding Lessons • Breeding



[Click To Watch The Video](#)



[Click For Interactive Map](#)

(941) 322-1501

32755 Singletary Road • Myakka City, Florida 34251
www.hlipizzans.com



DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

Following the 2012 elections, the County Commission hears public comments in November. Photo by Norman Schimmel

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SARASOTA 2050 PLAN HEADED TO THE PUBLIC FOR COMMENTS

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

A list of proposed changes to the rules that guide new development in Sarasota County may soon be coming to a community meeting near you.

The County Commission voted Wednesday, Jan. 30, to have staff schedule a series of public meetings over the next 90 days to present and discuss potential changes to Sarasota 2050, the detailed land-use plan adopted a decade ago to encourage New Urbanist neighborhoods, particularly east of Interstate 75.

Developers have been pushing for the 2050 alterations, arguing that the regulations are too restrictive and present numerous obstacles to new construction. Supporters of 2050, meanwhile, have argued that the relatively small number of projects approved under the plan in

recent years has more to do with the calamitous real estate crash than excessive government regulation.

The commission asked staff last fall to meet with development companies to find out which aspects of the

If the developers can't make this business model work, then they should do the American thing — they should be innovators and adapters.

Lourdes Ramirez
President
Sarasota County Coalition
of Neighborhood Associations



2050 blueprint they would like to see tweaked. County employees held 10 such meetings, with companies ranging from Palmer Ranch to Schroeder-Manatee and Neal Communities, and submitted 37 suggested changes to the commission last week.

Just a few examples of those tweaks:

- Eliminate requirements that builders continue to prove the fiscal neutrality of their projects throughout the development process, in order to improve projects’ “predictability.”
- Allow developers to classify lakes as “Open Space” in their planning.
- Loosen up walkability stipulations “because of the population age group within Sarasota County” and because “there are other ways to address this issue such as incentivizing Low Speed Vehicles.”

Commissioners Joe Barbetta, Charles Hines and Christine Robinson all made specific requests for more data, but they voiced support for changes of some kind.

Barbetta argued at a meeting last year that the 2050 plan “will never work,” saying: “You can’t airlift an urban community and put it eight or nine miles out east.” On Wednesday, he reiterated his doubts, but he said the county needs to figure out a solution within the 2050 framework.

“We have to try to make this work,” he said, “as much as I’d like to scrap this.”

If 2050 proves to be too restrictive over the long run, the end result would be unplanned “five- and 10-acre ranchettes” out east, Barbetta cautioned.

“I guess I’ve got a little different perspective,” Commissioner Nora Patterson chimed in, citing the fact that she is the only sitting commissioner to have voted for the 2050 plan in the first place.

“We said to everybody, as long as we save open space and do it in a better way, we’re going to give everybody east of I-75 the ability to develop their land in something other than five- and 10-acre ranchettes,” Patterson said, offering examples of waivers the county had granted to help projects move

Minimum Size:	1000 acres of Developed Area if not adjacent to Urban Service Area Boundary (USB). Areas separated from the USB by I-75 are not considered adjacent to the USB.	
Minimum Open Space outside the Developed Area:	Equal to or greater than the Developed Area	
Residential		
Minimum Density within Developed Area:	3 du/Gross Developable Acre	
Target Density:	6 du/Net Residential Acre	
Maximum Density within Developed Area:	5 du/Gross Developable Acre or 6 du/Gross Developable Acre if the additional units are Affordable Housing Units	
Village Center		
Village Center Maximum Size:	100 acres	
Non-Residential		
Commercial/-Office		
Maximum Size:	300,000 gross leasable square feet	
Minimum Size:	50,000 gross leasable square feet	
Village Center Land Use Mix: Developed Land	Minimum Land Area	Maximum Land Area
Residential	25%	50%
Commercial/ Office	30%	60%
Public/Civic	10%	Not Applicable
Public Parks	5%	Not Applicable

A chart included in the 2050 plan provides minimum specifications for ‘Village’ developments. Image courtesy Sarasota County

forward. She warned that adopting all of the developers' suggestions would lead to haphazard growth and an escalating burden on county infrastructure.

One name that kept coming up throughout the hearing: Neal Communities.

Neal's Grand Palm development is the first project to meet the "carefully-crafted, low-impact standards of Sarasota County's 'Sarasota 2050 Initiative'" (according to a Neal press release) and Hines and Robinson both cited the seven years the project took to come to fruition as evidence that 2050 is fundamentally flawed.

Council of Neighborhood Associations President (and potential 2014 commission candidate) Lourdes

Ramirez also mentioned Grand Palm, but she instead argued that Neal's success shows how "2050 works."

"If the developers can't make this business model work, then they should do the American thing — they should be innovators and adapters," she said.

Developers are just "looking for corporate entitlements and bailouts," she said. "It is not the responsibility of our county taxpayers to ensure their profits."

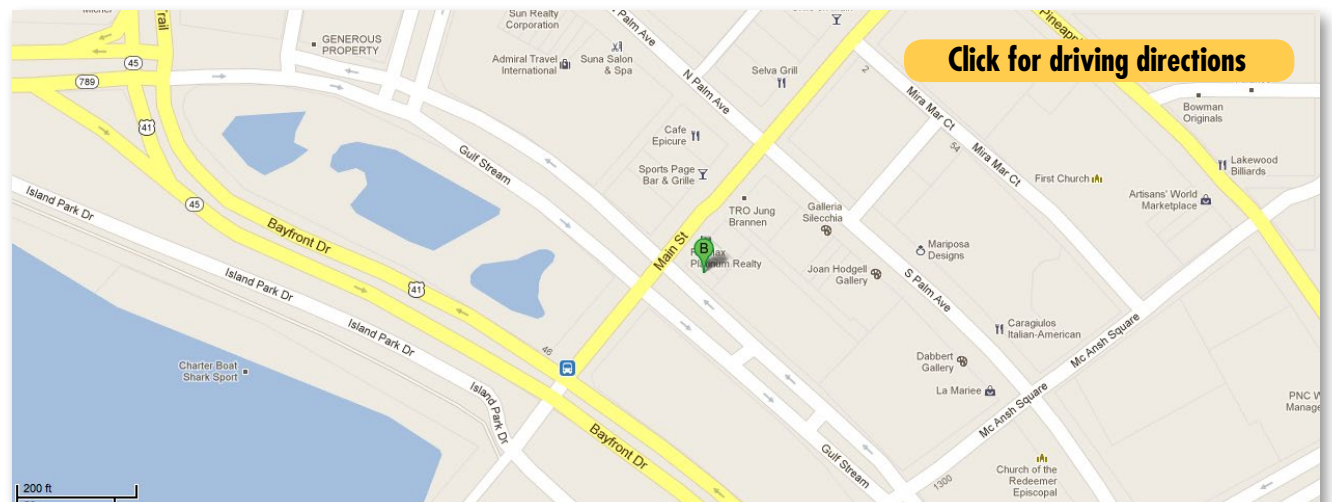
The commission eventually moved to approve bringing the proposed changes to a series of public meetings. The plan is for staff to bring back to the commission within 90 days a formal list of adjustments. **SNL**



*Commissioner
Nora Patterson/
File photo*

Manuel R. Chepote, LUTCF
Chepote Insurance Inc.
 1300 Main Street • Sarasota, Florida
(941) 366-0100
Serving Sarasota & Manatee Counties

Auto • Home • Life
Renters • Motorcycles
Flood • Business • Annuities
Financial Services



agents.allstate.com/manuel-r-chepote-sarasota-fl.html



**Open:
Mon-Sat
11:30am
to
9:00pm**

***nancy's*™ BAR-B-Q**

**Catering
Across
The
Suncoast
Since
2005**

Pulled Pork • Ribs • Chicken • Beef Brisket

Sides Made Fresh From Scratch

Big salad • Chilled Salmon

Beer & Wine • Homemade Desserts • Kid Friendly

301 S Pineapple Ave • Sarasota, FL



**Click For Driving
Directions**

**Click To View Our
Video Online**

941-366-2271 (BBQ1) • nancysbarbq.com



The Sarasota City Commission hears public comments during a recent meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE SARASOTA CITY COMMISSION AGREES TO CONSIDER USING AN EMPLOYEE LIFE INSURANCE PLAN TO TRY TO HELP PLUG THE PENSION DEBT HOLE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

It was as if a Gothic curse were hanging in the air Tuesday, Jan. 29, in the chambers of the Sarasota City Commission: “The world will be a better place without you.”

Nobody said that, of course. But cutting through all the verbal underbrush in a meeting about pension fund shortfalls, the solution on the table was grisly. It is a solution adopted by thousands of banks and corporations, and the city is among the first municipalities to consider it.

In a nutshell, the city takes out a life insurance policy on its employees and retirees. When the grim reaper comes calling, the city makes

a bundle and applies it to the enormous shortfall in the pension plans.

It is a double windfall for the city: no more retiree to pay for and a big check from the life insurance company.

DEVILISH DETAILS

There was doom and gloom in the room as Mark Pollock pointed out the holes in the city’s pension and healthcare plans for its retirees. He is the principal in the Pollock Financial Group of Novelty, OH, and he is a self-admitted salesman for the plan he pitched to the city commissioners. His street address is on Trappers Trail.

Using city-supplied figures, Pollock pointed out the city faces an estimated \$514 million in pension costs, but it has only \$370 million to back them up. That means a \$144 million shortfall. For the healthcare promises to retirees, the cost is estimated to be \$135 million, but the city has only \$13 million available — a \$122 million gap. Together, the city has promised \$265 million in benefits to retirees that it does not have. Blame the stock market meltdown.

“Seventy percent of Fortune 1,000 companies and 4,000 banks have bought this type of product.”

Mark Pollock
Pollock Financial Group
Novelty, OH

“About 18 months ago, we set out to find a solution,” said Pollock. “We came across a group that had done this before.” He noted of the insurance, “Seventy percent of Fortune 1,000 companies and 4,000 banks have bought this type of product.”

Pollock explained the city would have no liability, even if the scheme blew up. And the city does not have to put up any money now or later. Like many modern financial techniques, this one is a little tricky.

The first step requires the city to set up “an independent multi-life trust,” Pollock explained.

He is working with a company called Wilmington Trust that will administer the plan, borrow the money and buy the life insurance. Each employee will be asked if he wants to participate.

The trust borrows money from a bank at 3 percent interest; then, it buys an annuity that pays income to the trust. The trust takes out a \$250,000 life insurance policy on each and ev-

ery participating employee and retiree, and it pays the premiums from the annuity income.

When a participating employee or retiree dies, the insurance benefit is split among the trust, the city and the decedent’s beneficiary.

The trust gets half, or \$125,000 to cover taxes on the annuity income, interest on the loan, the insurance premiums and “some trust fees,” said Pollock.

The other half is split further, with the city receiving \$100,000 and the decedent’s beneficiary getting \$25,000 (an insurance payout for which the employee paid nothing).

Pollock said the plan is called TRIPEB, an acronym for trust-owned insurance for post-employment benefits. And if every one of the city’s current and prior employees — all 850 of them — desire to participate and receive a free \$25,000 life insurance policy, the city’s share of the deal is \$85 million.

That is not enough to fix the \$265 million shortfall in pension and healthcare promises. But without paying a penny, the city could reduce the deficit by about one-third.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

“This was never meant to — quote — solve the problem,” said Chris Lyons, the city’s finance director. “What would happen if the trust went ‘belly-up’? The employee wouldn’t get their coverage, and the city wouldn’t get any money. But neither is paying for this benefit.”

The city commissioners were not too worried about the trust going “belly-up.” They were worried future commissions might see this revenue as a questionable kitty.

“I understand the city *may* get \$85 million,” said City Commissioner Shannon Snyder. “We’re talking about somebody else taking all the risks and doing all the work. We are potentially looking at covering about 25 percent of our unfunded liabilities at no cost,” Snyder added. “I’m worried future commissions will use this as a slush fund to hide the unfunded liability.”


“The idea was to use this money to supplement the city’s usual contribution,” said Lyons. “To help buy us down [reduce the shortfall].” He stressed that neither the city nor employees nor retirees are investing a single penny in the plan.

Pollock said if financial conditions improve dramatically and the pension funds’ investments soar, his plan could be converted to a bigger death benefit for the employees’ beneficiaries.



“If the market goes gangbusters and the unfunded liability is taken care of, you could increase the benefit to the employees,” he said.

Several other cities are looking at the TRIPEB scheme, said City Manager Tom Barwin. “Some communities in Illinois are looking at it, as well as in Michigan.”

The commissioners agreed to continue looking at the plan, referring it to the city attorney for a thorough evaluation. 

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” — *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

*A Second Chance
on My Smile.*



I am so incredibly pleased, with my beautiful smile
and my comfortable and natural bite. - Barbara Lee

For a complimentary consultation call 941.923.5406 | Christine Koval, D.M.D. | www.askdrkoval.com



Barbara Lee

A Second Chance on My Smile.



**Awarded 20 Gold Medals
for Smile Makeovers by
the Florida Academy of
Cosmetic Dentistry.**

A smile is the first thing I notice about someone. However, that was the part of me I wanted to hide from everyone, including myself. In 2007, my family dentist of 30 years told me he could help. He then crowned all of my teeth. They looked better, but they immediately started to crack, one by one. He kept promising me he could correct them by re-making them. He was frustrated, but I was devastated. I then realized that I never received a stable, comfortable position to chew. My bite was totally off.

After four consultations with different dentists and lots of research, I chose Dr. Christine Koval for her warmth, reassurance, confidence, and experience in correcting bites and making teeth beautiful! Dr. Koval's team is very caring and professional, and her skill level is second to none. I am so incredibly pleased, not only with my beautiful smile but also with my comfortable and natural bite.

I feel so thankful and blessed for this second chance on my smile!

For a complimentary consultation call **941.923.5406**
To view our extensive smile gallery, visit **askdrkoval.com**

ENHANCE YOUR SMILE. ENHANCE YOUR LIFE.

NIK SKYWALKER

INTERNATIONAL STAR NIK WALLEDA MAKES IT LOOK EASY AS HE WALKS A HIGH WIRE ACROSS THE BAYFRONT ON A SUNNY SARASOTA MORNING

Staff Reports

Just as they did almost exactly three years ago, thousands thronged Sarasota's bayfront Tuesday morning, Jan. 29, to see the man who conquered Niagara Falls last summer take a relatively short hike over U.S. 41 — from 200 feet in the air.


Aerialist Nik Wallenda made it look easy again — just as he did in 2010, when he walked a high wire stretched between the One Watergate condominium complex and the Ritz-Carlton Sarasota.

This time, he and Pedro Reis, CEO and co-founder of [Circus Sarasota](#), took a cage to the top of a crane situated on the west side of

U.S. 41. From there, Wallenda took his 45-foot-long balancing pole and began the trek over to Marina Tower.

Just as Wallenda told the Sarasota City Commission last week he was hoping to do, he framed his latest escapade against a picture-perfect Southwest Florida morning, with boats bobbing on crystal-blue water in the bay.

The walk took approximately 11 minutes, or about a minute shy of his 2010 feat.

Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel recorded the event from his perch at One Watergate. 



Nik Wallenda starts downhill after leaving the crane.



The crane stands ready and waiting for Nik Wallenda, just to the right of the Unconditional Surrender statue on Sarasota's bayfront.



Pedro Reis (left), co-founder and CEO of Circus Sarasota, and Wallenda ride to the top of the crane in a cage.



Wallenda stands atop the crane on the bayfront, preparing to start his walk.



This closeup shows Wallenda high in the air on Jan. 29.



Wallenda wows the crowd by kneeling on the wire as he approaches Marina Tower.



From this perspective, Wallenda seems to walk along the edge of the roof of Dolphin Tower.



Wallenda is directly over U.S. 41 as the crowd watches his every move.

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.

You have a whole week.



LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE

Sarasota County Procurement Official Ted Coyman addresses the County Commission. File photo

A CONSULTANT WITH A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION TELLS THE COUNTY COMMISSION SARASOTA COUNTY HAS BECOME TOO RESTRICTIVE IN EMPLOYEE USE OF PURCHASE CARDS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

A representative of the National Institute of Government Purchasing Inc. (NIGP) this week commended the progress Sarasota County government has made to implement better standards and practices in its Procurement Department, but he also told the County Commission some of the county's self-imposed restrictions following a 2011 scandal in that department were excessive.

Louis Moore, lead consultant for the NIGP's review of measures the county has taken to improve procurement practices in the wake of that scandal, said on Jan. 30 that he and his team "see some definite productivity problems" with the restrictions on employees' use of county credit cards, or P-cards.

During discussions in late November with about 40 county employees in the Procure-

“If [employees are] not responsible with their own finances, it's likely they are not going to be responsible with a P-card.”

Louis Moore
Lead Consultant
National Institute
of Government Purchasing Inc.



ment Department and its business units, he said he and his fellow NIGP consulting team members heard one story about an employee who had to make a 20-minute round trip to get a fuse, instead of being able — as would have been the procedure in the past — to use a P-card to buy one at a nearby store.

During a 90-minute presentation, Moore recommended the County Commission not only allow more employees once again to use the P-cards but that it also raise the purchase limits on the cards from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Adequate controls are in place now, Moore added, to prevent inappropriate use of the cards.

In 2012, Moore pointed out, 44 percent of the county's purchases were less than \$5,000, and they represented only 1.4 percent of the county's total expenditures.

P-card abuse was one factor uncovered in reviews of Procurement Department practices when the 2011 scandal erupted.

Moore also pointed out that the county could undertake credit checks on employees being considered for use of P-cards. Such checks cost about \$7 each, Moore pointed out, adding, "If [employees are] not responsible with their own finances, it's likely they are not going to be responsible with a P-card."

Still, he told the board, "We're not just suggesting you give everybody a P-card."

An audit undertaken in July 2011 by the Office of the Clerk of the 12th Judicial Circuit Court found that of the county's 2,000 employees at the time, 1,000 had P-cards, Commissioner Nora Patterson noted. "That struck me as ridiculous to supervise."

Moore countered that his team had never seen documentation of more than 500 cards being held by county workers at any one time, and the research went back several years.

In response to a question from Commissioner Christine Robinson, Moore pointed out,



County Commissioners Charles Hines and Christine Robinson listen to a presentation during a recent board meeting. File photo

“You didn’t have a P-card administrator that focused on the program” when the scandal broke. “No one was really monitoring what was going on.”

A full-time administrator has been in place since 2011 as one of the recommended measures to improve practices, he said.

The county should look at changing the P-card guidelines over a period of three to five years, he added. “Problems didn’t happen overnight, and you’re not going to fix them overnight.”

Moore also pointed out that the county did not have a single procurement specialist on staff two years ago.

Although a 50 percent turnover in Procurement staff has taken place, he added, the four new employees have an average of 16 years of experience, and three of them have multiple certifications.

“You’re getting much better quality of people in Procurement as you proceed,” he said.

“We have a certain number of vendors we deal with,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta pointed

out. “Why don’t we just have an account with [those] vendors?”

“You should,” Moore responded.

When Barbetta said, “We seem to be the only county I read about having this problem” with P-cards, County Administrator Randall Reid replied that he felt the problem had been lack of appropriate controls in the past, as Moore had noted.

Reid added that cards could be coded to prevent their being used except for specific types of purchases. “Other counties use P-cards all the time and they don’t run into issues” like those Sarasota County had experienced, Reid said.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the 263 changes in procurement practices offered in the original NIGP review after problems arose in 2011, Moore said, the biggest ones yet to be completed are the updating of the Procurement Code, the rewriting of the Procurement Manual to reflect the changes and subsequent use of that manual to train employees.

Purchase Orders by Dollar Range

Purchase Order Value	Transactions	Percent	Total \$ Value	Percent	Avg. Value
< \$1,000	381	11.9%	\$ 90,990	0.1%	\$ 501
≥ \$1,000 and < \$2,500	492	15.4%	832,636	0.4%	1,692
≥ \$2,500 and < \$5,000	533	16.7%	1,922,173	0.9%	3,606
≥ \$5,000 and < \$10,000	453	14.2%	3,353,319	1.6%	7,402
≥ \$10,000 and < \$25,000	526	16.5%	8,995,856	4.3%	17,102
≥ \$25,000 and < \$50,000	317	9.9%	11,604,382	5.5%	36,607
≥ \$50,000 and < \$100,000	226	7.1%	16,625,796	7.9%	73,565
≥ \$100,000 and < \$250,000	146	4.6%	23,475,237	11.1%	160,789
≥ \$250,000 and < \$500,000	58	1.8%	19,868,338	9.4%	342,558

A report to the County Commission by the National Institute of Government Purchasing Inc. includes a chart showing county purchase orders by dollar range in Fiscal Year 2012. Image courtesy Sarasota County

“The code is crucial to the success of the procurement program,” he pointed out.

Additionally, Moore encouraged the County Commission to oversee a shift of focus in the Procurement Department work from a transactional nature to a strategic one.

Moore also suggested the county raise its threshold for use of competitive bids for purchases from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

That would free staff to deal more efficiently with the 80 percent of purchases that are below the \$100,000 level, he pointed out.

Yet another recommendation was for the county to shift to more efficient technology in the Procurement Department. In June 2011, the employees were using six different systems to handle transactions, Moore said. “They still have that today,” Moore noted, adding that one system should be used for all the work.

Moreover, he pointed out, “This is one of the few organizations around the state that still issues purchase orders through the U.S. Mail.”

POSITIVE SIGNS

Moore told the County Commission that the consulting team had seen improvement in

staff morale in the Procurement Department. However, he did note that the consulting team’s November visit found employees in that office still “are afraid of taking risks” and are fearful of criticism from the commissioners and auditors.

That situation, Moore pointed out, “is inhibiting their ability to do their jobs well.”

During the original NIGP visit in June 2011, Moore said, the department had a backlog of 263 objectives. In November, he added, that had dropped to 125. For January, he noted, the number was 53. “They’re working very hard to mitigate that backlog,” he pointed out.

The new focus on ethics and compliance “is an area in which the county has done extremely well,” he added.

SINGLE BIDS

Robinson also took the opportunity to ask Moore’s views on recent instances when the county received just one bid for a project.

“Some of them just defy logic to me,” she said, citing tree-trimming bids and roof repair projects as examples.

While lots of firms’ names may be visible in the Yellow Pages, Moore said, that does not mean all of them are qualified to undertake

Purchasing Card Usage 2010-12					
	FY10	FY11	FY12	Reduction \$	Reduction %
Total Dollars Spent	\$17,280,604	\$15,118,907	\$6,207,775	(\$8,911,132)	-59%
Number of Transactions	38,127	32,350	15,486	(16,864)	-52%
Average Transaction	\$453	\$467	\$401	(\$66)	-14%
Number of Cardholders	481	431	254	(177)	-41%
Number of Suppliers	3,426	3,286	2,596	(690)	-21%
Rebate	\$123,485	\$82,410			

The National Institute of Government Purchasing report to the County Commission shows the use of county purchase cards from 2010 to 2012. Image courtesy Sarasota County

county projects. He pointed out that some may lack the necessary bonding and others simply may be too busy. In some cases, he noted, a firm might not bid on work because its owners know another company has specialized equipment that will make its bid more competitive.

In cases when the county receives only one qualified bid and brings that to the commission for approval, Moore told Robinson, the board members should not shy away from asking Procurement staff to call other vendors with which it is familiar to ask why they did not bid.


"I'm glad you said that," Robinson told him. "It's not a criticism when we ask that to be done."

Nonetheless, she said, the word has gotten back to commissioners that it appears they

have not had confidence in the work of staff members.

"I think in time both sides are going to get more comfort level on this," Moore said, pointing out, for example, that Procurement Official Ted Coyman still is relatively new in the job. (Reid appointed Coyman to the post in July 2012.)

"He will learn what to expect," Moore said. "Ted is going to start anticipating your questions."

In summarizing the consulting team's findings, Moore told the commissioners, "The staff here has done a phenomenal job in a short period of time. ... I'm just amazed that they're able to get this much done, and I think that bodes well for the future." 

SARASOTA'S HAIR COLOR SPECIALIST



John-Norman Tuck
(941) 928-1203

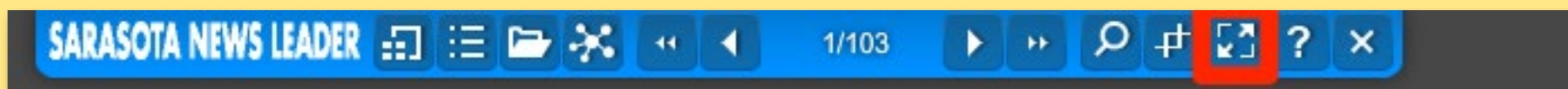
John-Norman Tuck is Sarasota and Bradenton's premier hairstylist and hair color artist. Getting his customer's hair to look and feel it's best is his passion. John-Norman started fulfilling his customers' hair dreams in his Pasadena, CA salon and now has brought his talents to Sarasota.



Full Service Salon

369 St. Armands Circle • Sarasota • John-NormanTuck.com

QUICK TIP



For the best viewing experience on a computer click the  icon in the menubar to zoom to fullscreen mode.



REBUILDING TRUST

SARASOTA'S NEW POLICE CHIEF BEGINS MULTIPLE INITIATIVES

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

After a month on the job, Sarasota's new police chief has figured out two major problems and is making efforts to remedy them.

Chief Bernadette DiPino will be improving training for the force she leads, and she will work to restore trust between members of the public and officers. She also will push for changes in the court system.

"We have to re-establish and gain trust in the community," she said. "I believe outreach and education is important."

Within a few days, she hopes to announce the formation of a "Citizens Police Academy." It will start out as a once-a-year course for city residents through which they will take class-

es, go on tours, visit the gun range, mingle with special police teams and try their hands at simulated street confrontations.

She hopes to begin recruiting students in March, and they will be screened, she says.

This is not a new idea. Sarasota Sheriff Tom Knight offers such a course, and DiPino in her old job as police chief in Ocean City, MD, oversaw one.

The academy could begin as early as May.



Sarasota City Manager Tom Barwin congratulates Police Chief Bernadette DiPino after her swearing in on Jan. 18. Photo courtesy of Jan Thornburg/City of Sarasota

"I think that's going to help bridge some gaps. It's up to us police to gain that trust," she told *The Sarasota News Leader*.

More quietly she also will institute internal training for officers.

STAFF REASSIGNMENTS

Among other measures, DiPino plans to re-establish the full-time position of crime prevention officer.

"You cannot have community policing without it," she said. "You can have a crime prevention officer without community policing, but if you want community policing, you have to have a crime prevention officer."

In addition to having the officer make the residential association rounds to inform people about how to protect their homes, DiPino wants this department representative to experiment with social media to reach beyond the standard neighborhood meetings. "Maybe they could write a column for the local newspaper," she mused.

She plans to make permanent the temporary reassignment of an officer to monitor homelessness and vagrancy downtown. Her predecessor slotted an officer to that task temporarily after Mayor Suzanne Atwell complained last year of feeling unsafe downtown after dark.


DiPino expects the position to be much more than keeping tabs on Five Points Park. "The

homeless are not a police problem unless they are breaking the law," she said. "There are mental issues or addiction issues or just the personal choice to be homeless," she said. "There's not enough facilities, counselors or doctors to handle this problem."

She said City Manager Tom Barwin's ad hoc committee on the homeless will be coming up with suggestions soon. "We need to spend money to help these people with rehabilitation and social work," she said. "Police officers know how to write tickets and arrest people, to enforce the law. Is there another way we can handle these individuals?"

To that end, she is working with Sarasota paralegal Michael Barfield and the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. Barfield and the ACLU have played a watchdog role recently in defending the rights of homeless people.

"I met with Barfield today. We both agreed to see if the judicial system can help us," she said on Jan. 30. "Maybe we can get our mental health court to expand its parameters. The police don't want to keep arresting people over and over."

Her hand is not free. Sarasota's police officers do not have a contract with the city, despite months and months of negotiations and mediations. Meanwhile, city budget preparation is getting under way for next year, and DiPino must conform to the fiscal reality that the city's police force is the most expensive item in it. 

We have to re-establish and gain trust in the community. I believe outreach and education is important.

Bernadette DiPino
Police Chief
Sarasota



THAT MUCH?!

The planned route system for Sarasota County Area Transit shows the widespread area where bus shelters are needed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS EXPRESS SHOCK OVER THE COST OF BUS SHELTERS AND THE TIME IT TAKES TO CONSTRUCT THEM

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

After Sarasota County commissioners expressed shock this week at the cost and length of time it takes to erect shelters for Sarasota County Area Transit bus stops, new SCAT Manager Glama Carter promised to provide an in-depth analysis of the issues during an upcoming budget workshop.

As part of a two-hour presentation during the commissioners' Jan. 29 meeting in Venice, Carter pointed out that of the 2,000 SCAT stops across the county, only 138 have shelters.

She then provided a breakdown of the estimated total cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000 involved in putting up a single shelter:

- \$6,000 for land acquisition.
- \$15,000 to \$25,000 for design, permits and construction.
- \$6,000 for the bench and shelter itself.
- \$2,000 for the installation of the structure.
- \$4,000 for annual maintenance of each shelter, which has remained unfunded.

“Now, Glama, please don’t take this wrong,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta began. “You are new to this, but we’ve been talking about this [shelter issue] for the six years I’ve been on the commission — from day one. ... I have



A chickee hut stands on the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation in Glades County. Photo by Ebyabe/Wikipedia Commons

a hard time with the \$6,000 land acquisition fee.”

(Carter began working for the county on Aug. 27, 2012.)

As for the design, permitting and construction costs, he added, “I’m shocked at that. These [shelters] should be prototypes ...”

Regarding the maintenance fee, he continued, “I find that extremely shocking also.”

Referencing Carter’s estimate that the county would double its number of shelters from 7 percent of the total to 14 percent in five years, Barbetta said, “We should be close to 100 percent as soon as possible.”

Nothing was worse than driving down the road and seeing people standing in the hot sun, waiting for a bus to come, he added.

Staff should be working to find companies that could put up the shelters at a much lower price, Barbetta said, adding that former Sarasota Mayor Jack Gurney several years ago had broached the idea of using chickee huts for shelters, because they could be erected quickly.

(Chickee huts are shelters supported by posts with raised floors, thatched roofs and open sides. The Seminole and Miccosukee Indians have built them for centuries.)

“I absolutely agree,” Carter said.

SCAT Senior Planner Sarah Blanchard explained that part of the cost is associated with making bus shelters compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

When Blanchard reiterated that all the facets involved in the completion of a shelter resulted in the cost ranging between \$30,000 and \$40,000, Commissioner Nora Patterson responded, “That’s just nuts.”

Each design had to be specific to its location, Blanchard explained. Among other issues, she continued, the design has to deal with existing culverts and adequate drainage of the property.

Each shelter also has to have a sidewalk leading up to it, she pointed out.

Carter suggested that perhaps more of the construction could be done in-house.

“First of all,” Patterson said, “most of the shelters I see look like they were prefab or put in whole. ... So we’re paying \$6,000 for this little box?”

Blanchard responded that the cost of the shelter structure itself is about \$5,500, while the bench is another \$300 to \$400.

“That’s just a lot for what we get for it,” Patterson said and asked whether staff had checked with other counties to determine how they handle bus shelters.

Having served on the Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization [MPO] for a number of years, Patterson added, she had seen Manatee County win approval for 20 or more shelters at one time. “Is there a grant possible we’re not taking advantage of?” she asked.

“We have the opportunity to go after funding,” Carter replied.

“So we could get more?” Patterson responded.

“Yes, we could,” Carter said, pointing out that she had been attending meetings of the MPO, a regional planning transportation agency, since she came to work for Sarasota County,

so she could learn more about any funding opportunities available.

Patterson suggested Carter discuss grant possibilities with MPO staff.

TIMING, TOO

Then Commissioner Christine Robinson asked how long it takes from the time the County Commission approves locations for shelters before the structures are completed.

“Approximately one to two years,” Blanchard replied.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Patterson said.



Shelter Plan

- Of 2,000 bus stops, 138 have shelters
- 45 are contracted advertising shelters
- The average capital cost of a shelter and amenities is \$30,000 to \$40,000 including:
 - \$6,000 land acquisition
 - \$15,000 - \$25,000 design, permit, construct
 - \$6,000 average cost of shelter and bench
 - \$2,000 installation
- Shelter maintenance is estimated at \$4,000 per shelter annually and is currently unfunded

Robinson pointed out that it had been more than two years since the board had approved shelters for the City of Venice, and those still were not in place. "It just doesn't seem logical to me that it takes that long," she added. "I'm just flabbergasted by this whole thing. There's just got to be a better way ..."

Robinson asked Carter to tell the County Commission what it could do to assist her and her staff in speeding up the process.

"I'm a firm believer ... we can construct a shelter in less than one year," Carter said, noting she and her staff need to figure out a better plan for the process.

Regarding the shelters in Venice, Carter added that the five approved are scheduled to be completed by October.

"That's almost three years," Robinson said.

County Administrator Randall Reid weighed in at that point, saying he believed a reduction in county staff in the Operations and Maintenance [O&M] Department to save expenses in the economic downturn was part of the reason for the delay in getting shelters constructed.

"I do think you can do this faster," he added of getting the shelters in place.

However, Blanchard said she did not believe the O&M Department staff reduction had made that much of a difference, though its

“First of all, most of the shelters I see look like they were prefab or put in whole. ... So we're paying \$6,000 for this little box?”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



employees had helped with some of the sidewalk construction necessary for the shelters.

Reid pointed out another factor was the need to work through the county's procurement process to hire

contractors.


"Our efficiencies have to really be examined in cost and time," Robinson said.

Commissioner Charles Hines encouraged Carter to come to the board members with problems she identifies, to ask for their help in improving situations. "Say, 'This is a mess. ... This is wrong.' Offer to us ways to save money and do things quicker. ... Help us make these decisions rather than pushing them back to you."

"I totally agree, and great advice," Carter told him.

Barbetta then pointed out that when the Walmart was constructed in Osprey a number of years ago, the County Commission had requested the developer put in a SCAT shelter. Construction started within months, he added. "The private sector got it done quickly."

Barbetta added, "There's got to be best practices ... that other communities are utilizing."

"We will look into the numbers," Carter told the commissioners, adding that she would be prepared to discuss them in detail during a budget workshop. 



WHITHER THE SPRINGS?

The purported healing properties of the water in Warm Mineral Springs draws thousands of tourists to the site each year. Photo by Rachel Levey-Baker

THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION OFFERS \$2 MILLION TO PURCHASE WARM MINERAL SPRINGS AT THE SAME TIME A PETITION DRIVE SURFACES

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

North Port wants to sell Warm Mineral Springs, and it looks like it may have a buyer: Sarasota County.

Two weeks back, after a month of wrangling, the North Port City Commission doubled down on its decision to rid itself of Warm Mineral Springs, the 81-acre tourist attraction it jointly owns with the county, asking the County Commission if it was interested in buying out the city's interest. This

week, the county said yes, offering the city \$2 million. The original city/county purchase was \$5.5 million.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson outlined her plan for how to proceed with the purchase Tuesday, Jan. 29. Included: details on how the \$2 million would be paid out over time, requirements that the city alter its boundaries so the springs sits on county land and thoughts on how the

“*I think there can be a positive spin on this, in that having one governmental entity controlling [the springs] is probably the way to go.*”

Charles Hines
Commissioner
Sarasota County



city and county might manage the property in the interim.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta quickly spoke up in favor of the blueprint. “We owe it to the taxpayers of the entire county, and the citizens of North Port also, to come up with a viable solution,” he said. “We can’t sit in limbo here and allow things to deteriorate.”

“I think there can be a positive spin on this,” Commissioner Charles Hines said, “in that having one governmental entity controlling [the springs] is probably the way to go.”

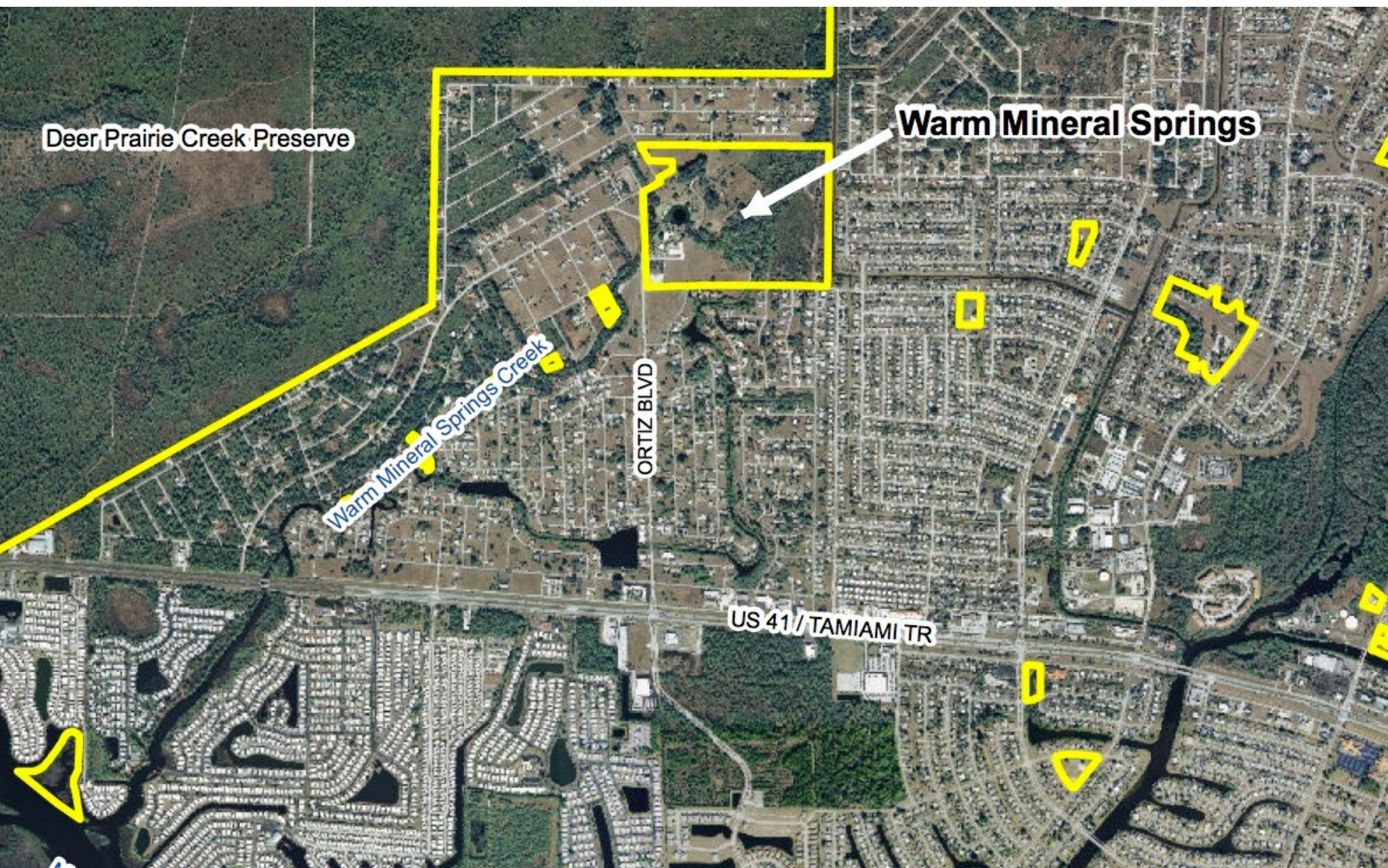
Commissioner Nora Patterson supported the motion, but expressed disappointment that the city had opted out of joint management. “I feel as if a trust has kind of been broken on

this thing,” she said, “but we’ll see what North Port has to say.”

North Port Mayor Linda Yates was cautious when asked her thoughts on the offer.

“On the surface,” Yates told *The Sarasota News Leader*, the county’s offer represents “a major, significant financial burden on South County residents.” Declining to go into more detail, Yates said, “The most important thing is to allow staff the time to gather all of the information the [city] commission needs.”

And add another twist to the Warm Mineral Springs saga: a new, anonymous [petition](#) opposed to the county’s proposal to solicit ideas on how to redevelop the springs property.



A Sarasota County graphic illustration shows the location of Warm Mineral Springs in south Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County


The petition objects to the county's Invitation to Negotiate process and the "fast-tracking of the economic development of Warm Mineral Springs," which "does not advance the best interests of long term eco-tourism and the health of the springs."

The statement calls for "objective environmental research and rehabilitation" before any new development is planned, and it argues that the springs "is best left as primarily a public nature park."

The person or persons behind the petition declined to speak about the statement when contacted by email. The website hosting the petition belongs to [New Hope](#), an anger management counseling service based in Houston, TX. The *News Leader* received no response when it contacted New Hope or the website's

administrative contact, [Donel King](#), who also appears to have posted a PowerPoint slideshow, promoted alongside the petition, at the site.

It was the North Port City Commission that originally put the brakes on the ITN process late last year, so, should the city accept the county's \$2 million offer, the ITN denounced in the petition would likely get a boost. But the only certainty in the Warm Mineral Springs debate these last few months has been uncertainty. What will happen next week? Or the week after? I do not think anyone knows for sure.

Sarasota News Leader Editor Rachel Brown Hackney contributed to reporting on this story. 

A Very Special Offer For Advertisers



Purchase a full-page, advertising twelve pack between now and January 31st, 2013 and receive four of these fantastic SNL 16oz Tervis® Tumblers.

Show your support for The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida around the house, around the office, wherever you go with these locally manufactured, high-quality insulated tumblers.

Sales@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

or

(941) 227-1080

Advertisers must meet all terms and conditions of sale for the 12-pack advertising package. Limit of one set of four tumblers per advertiser. Offer is valid while supplies last. "Tervis" is a registered trademark of Tervis® Tumbler Company. The *Sarasota News Leader* is not affiliated with Tervis® Tumbler Company.



WHICH WAY?

Orlando is one of the Florida cities that has a bus rapid transit line in operation. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS BUT HESITATE TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF BUS RAPID TRANSIT BEFORE MEETING WITH THE CITY COMMISSION NEXT WEEK

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Because of changes in federal guidelines, the corridor the Sarasota city commissioners and the County Commission settled on several years ago for a bus rapid transit system (BRT) probably will not gain approval, County Administrator Randall Reid told the county commissioners during their regular meeting on Jan. 30.

The federal focus has shifted to land use and redevelopment, Randall Reid said.

Denser development is needed along the chosen corridor “or the BRT doesn’t really work,” he added.

The County and City commissions are facing a September deadline for proceeding on the CSX railroad line corridor they reaffirmed for their BRT plan in April 2010. If the boards choose to pursue an alternative corridor, they could submit material about that plan to the Federal Transit Administration in September 2014, Jonathan

“The question today is what do we really want our community to look like in the future.”

Charles Hines
Commissioner
Sarasota County



B. Paul, the county's interim transportation planning director, said during a Jan. 30 presentation to the County Commission about its options.

Reid told the commissioners that when he met with FTA officials last summer, they made it clear to him that it was crucial for the County Commission to decide whether it really wanted to pursue a BRT project.

However, if the county chose not to go forward, he pointed out, "Once we're out of the federal funding cycle, we're out for a very long time."

When the city and county boards held a joint meeting on April 17, 2012, the BRT focus shifted to using Old Bradenton Road instead of the CSX Railroad right of way.

"We would probably have better opportunity to capture future multi-family housing" along

Old Bradenton Road, City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo said at the time.

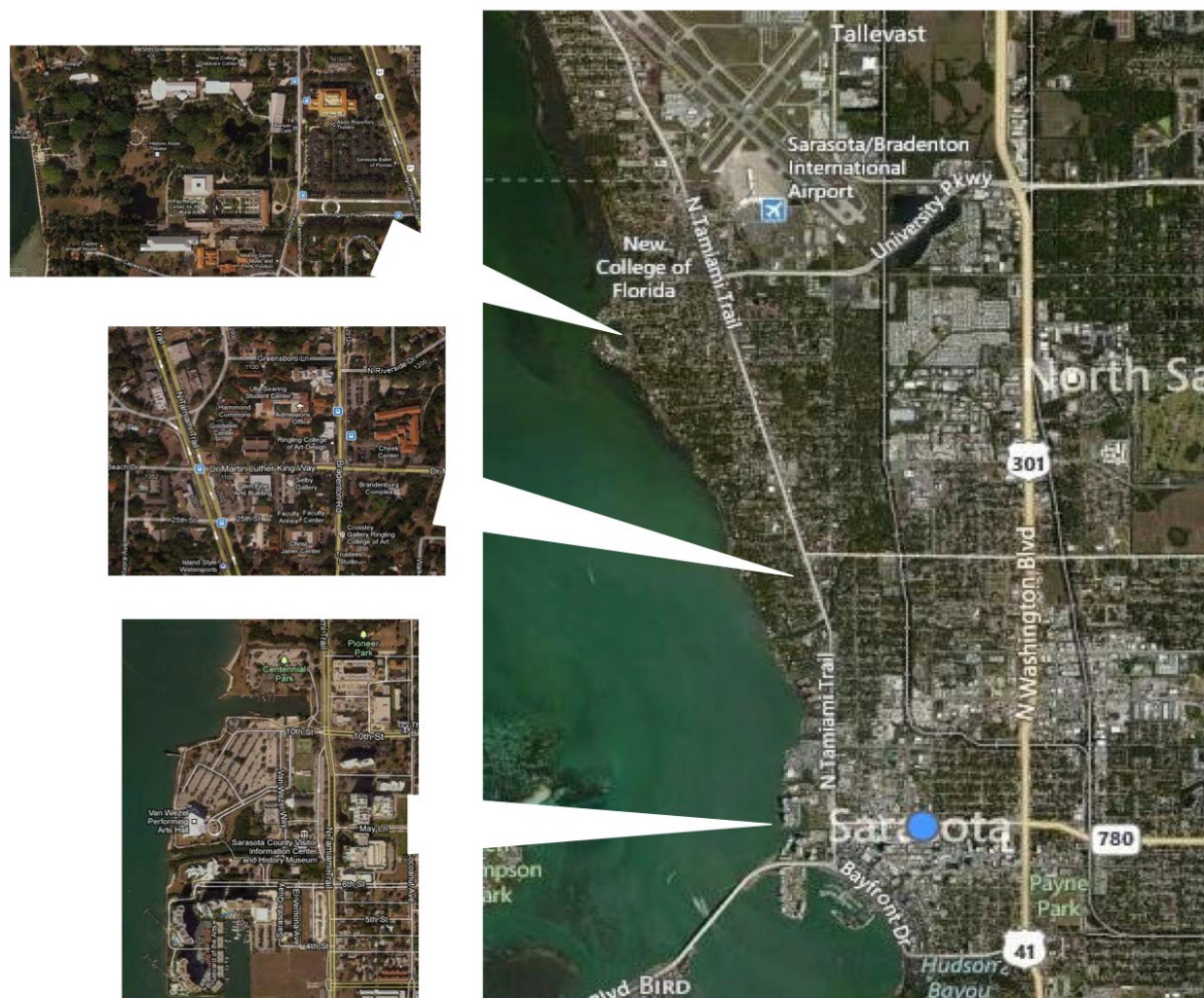
County Commissioner Nora Patterson said she had not thought of that route. "I have to admit," she added, "I've been looking at the project and wondering if we have chosen the best corridor."

However, discussion also focused on a U.S. 41 corridor and land-use issues.

After that meeting, Rob Lewis, then the county's director of planning and development services, told *The Sarasota News Leader*, "BRT is more than just a transit project. It is really more about economic development."

With another joint meeting coming up on Feb. 5 with the City Commission, the county commissioners on Jan. 30 indicated hesitancy about proceeding with any BRT plan, given the potential expense.

Connecting Destinations



A graphic illustration shows major destinations in Sarasota County that could be linked by a bus rapid transit line. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Yet, some again pointed to the advantages of using the U.S. 41 corridor compared to the CSX, U.S. 301 or Old Bradenton Road corridors.

With time running out before they were scheduled to hold an executive session over a legal matter, the questions hung in the air with no consensus.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

During his presentation to the County Commission, Paul put considerable focus on the land-use factor.

“How are you going to get ridership on your corridor?” he asked.

Paul pointed out that the application the county had submitted to the FTA for the rail corridor “was solely [about] people moving.”

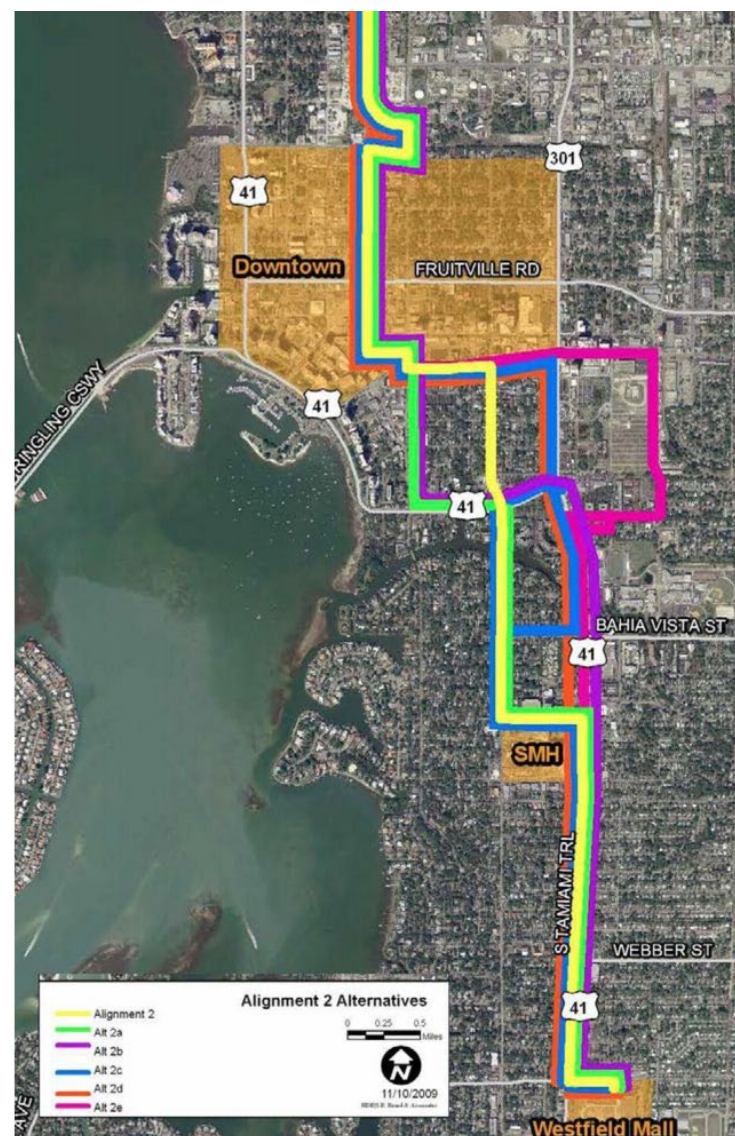
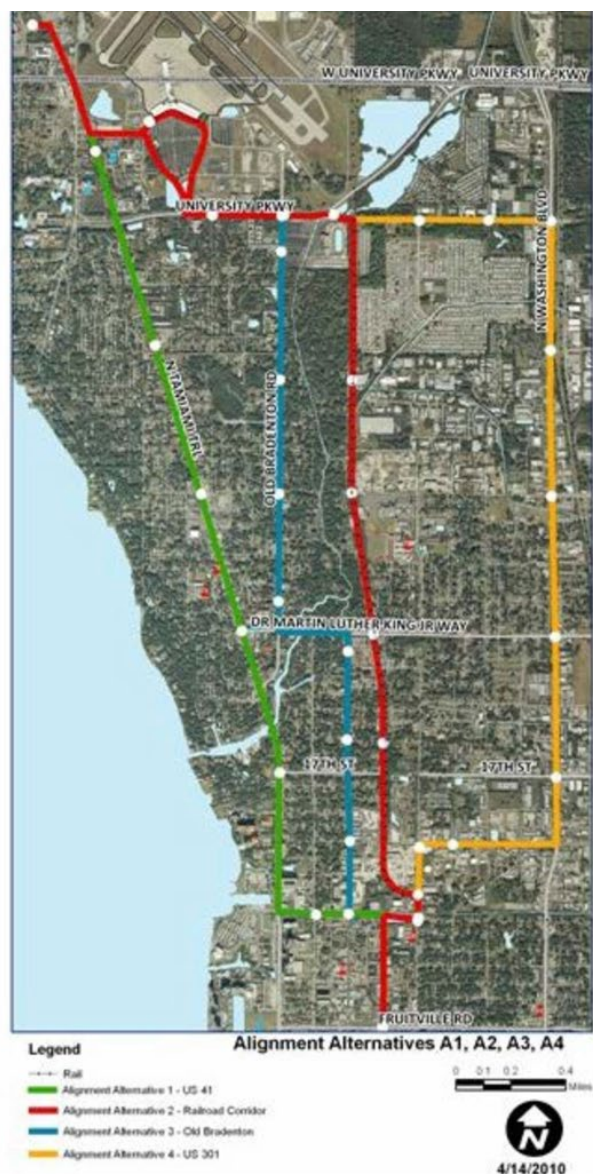
The new transit system, Reid stressed, should be “a tool for redevelopment,” based on his discussions with federal officials.

Whatever corridor is chosen, Paul noted, the local government that has jurisdiction over it will have to commit to zoning code and comprehensive plan to encourage the type of development along the BRT line that will make it more attractive to riders.

Yet, Patterson pointed out, “It takes a long time” to pursue such changes.

CORRIDOR CONSIDERATIONS

The U.S. 41 corridor is solely within the city of Sarasota, Paul said, which would entail the city’s making the necessary changes. If the city and the county decided to go with a corridor along U.S. 301, for example, both local



Maps show options for a bus rapid transit system route through Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County

governments would have to modify their comprehensive plans.

In his recent conversations about the BRT with City of Sarasota staff members, Paul noted, they had indicated more interest in the U.S. 41 corridor, as it would encompass a number of parks as well as the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

By using the U.S. 41 corridor, Paul also pointed out, the county would have more opportunities for private partnerships to help cover its expenses. For example, he said, staff could work with the Hyatt Regency Sarasota, the Van Wezel and Publix to pay for BRT stops branded with their names.

The FTA program to which the county already had applied would provide up to \$75 million in grant funds, Paul said. That Small Starts program calls for total expenses not to exceed \$250 million.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta said he supported the shift to a U.S. 41 corridor, pointing out that a BRT line from the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport and New College to Southgate Mall would have the potential to draw sufficient ridership to make it practical.

He also noted that the City of Sarasota already is at work on a draft North Trail Overlay District plan that would satisfy the type of land-use goals for the northern part of the line that Paul had referenced.

Additionally, Barbetta said the BRT would be attractive to students attending New College and the Ringling College of Art and Design. "Right now, the students don't come downtown," he pointed out. "They stay on campus; they can't get downtown."

Paul concurred that student demand for use of the line would be strong.

Patterson focused on the potential operating costs of the line. Further, while she agreed on the advantages of using the U.S. 41 corridor, she noted the "right of way on 41 is extremely limited," posing problems for adding a bus lane and other infrastructure.

Regarding the U.S. 301 corridor, Patterson added, "[there is] quite a residential population that I am sure would love to see real transit there."

Moreover, she noted, that corridor has "tons of property that would be very appropriate for redevelopment."


"The question today is what do we really want our community to look like in the future," Commissioner Charles Hines said. "I think [U.S.] 41's a better way to look at it from a planning aspect," he added.

When Commissioner Christine Robinson asked about more detailed cost estimates for the project, Paul said he would have those ready by the Feb. 5 joint meeting with the City Commission.

"For me, that's critical," Robinson said.

Hines concurred with Robinson.

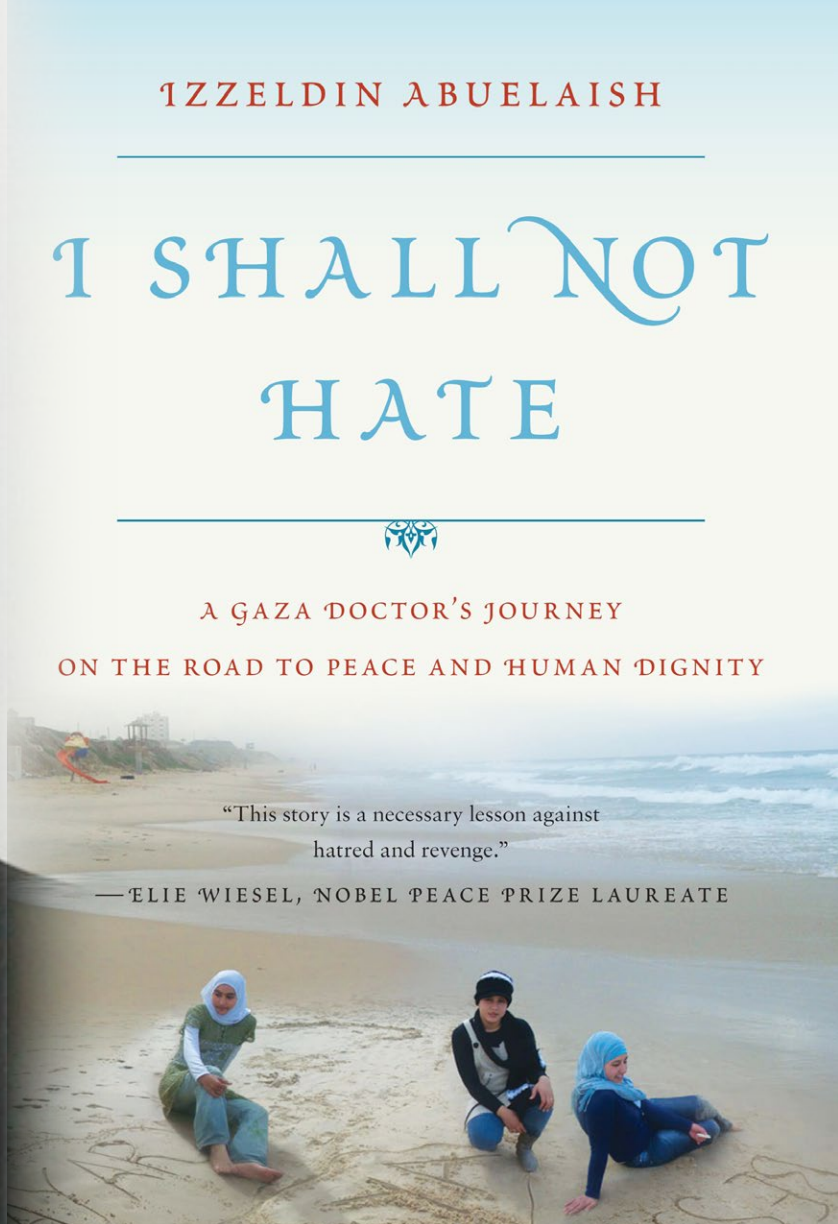
Paul earlier told the board that by using existing infrastructure for a BRT system, the cost would range from \$1 million to \$5 million per mile, depending on how much private assistance the county could get through sponsorships such as those he had mentioned.

If the County Commission chooses not to proceed with a BRT project, Paul said, the board members still would need to address how they can use transit dollars most efficiently. "It's a bigger philosophical discussion," he added. 



A DIFFERENT MOTIVATION

Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish/Photo by Jacob Stevens via Wikimedia Commons. I Shall Not Hate is the memoir of Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish.



PALESTINIAN DOCTOR TO BRING MESSAGE OF PEACE TO SARASOTA

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

“I shall not hate.”

That’s the simple message coming to Sarasota next week with the arrival of Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish — a Palestinian doctor whose efforts to bring peace to the Middle East were sparked when three of his daughters were killed by Israeli shells in Gaza in 2009.

After the explosions, Abuelaish placed a call to an Israeli journalist, who ended up carrying the conversation on live television, a moment captured and [posted on YouTube](#). As devastating as his daughters’ deaths were, Abuelaish decided on a mission: “to tell his family’s story and, in doing so, prove to the world that

not every Palestinian is motivated only by revenge,” in the words of the [The Observer](#).

According to Dan Boxser, who invited Abuelaish to Sarasota on behalf of The Herman & Sally Boxser Diversity Initiative (named for his parents and affiliated with Temple Beth Sholom), Abuelaish had two options: seek revenge or go beyond politics to try to bring people together. He chose the latter. He created [a foundation](#) to promote educational opportunities for girls and young women in the Middle East and speaks out forcefully for peace, earning a Nobel Peace Prize nomination and publishing a memoir, *I Shall Not Hate*.


Now living in Toronto, Abuelaish will journey to Sarasota for a dinner and program at Temple Beth Sholom and for a visit with local students at Florida Studio Theatre. Embracing Our Differences is joining the Boxser Initiative and FST as a sponsor of the doctor's visit.

Boxser says he hopes for a diverse crowd at the talks — emphasizing the importance of bringing together Jewish, Christian and Muslim residents in Sarasota, which rarely acknowledges how segregated it is.

That push is particularly vital in the wake of a December appearance by anti-Islam firebrand Brigitte Gabriel at a Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee event. Gabriel has been named to the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Anti-Muslim Inner Circle," and she has frequently been criticized for her hateful rhetoric.

According to Boxser, after some initial skepticism, the Abuelaish visit "has gotten an incredible reaction," and the doctor's appearances should have venues overflowing with audience members. Abuelaish's message may be simple, but it is obviously one we need to hear.

Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish's appearances will be as follows:

- 5:45 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7: Dinner, Temple Beth Sholom, 1050 S. Tuttle Ave., Sarasota, \$50; call 552-2780 to RSVP.
- 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7: Program, Temple Beth Sholom, 1050 S. Tuttle Ave., Sarasota, free; call 552-2780 to RSVP.
- 11 a.m. Friday, Feb. 8: Student program, Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota, free. 

Click to watch the video





NOT QUITE READY

The new Floridays hotel will be built on a parcel at the intersection of Cocoanut and Palm avenues in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CITY OF SARASOTA STAFF AND FLORIDAYS DEVELOPMENT ARE STILL AT WORK ON FINAL AGREEMENTS FOR THE NEW HOTEL PLANNED FOR DOWNTOWN

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

A little more hammering is needed to finish off the agreements between the City of Sarasota and the developers of the Floridays hotel proposed for downtown at the intersection of Cocoanut and Palm avenues.

The issue came up Thursday, Jan. 31, during the Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board meeting, when Sarasota Senior Planner Steve Stancel said the deals were not quite ready for primetime.

The city sold the property to Floridays in October 2012 for \$2.5 million. At that time, staff was told to wrap up two additional agreements in 60 days. Stancel says the parking agreement is nearly done, but the redevelopment document “is not quite ready.”

He blamed the holidays and subsequent influenza season for the delays. “It is just a matter of getting people together,” he said. “There’s not sticking points so far.”

The land is zoned for a 10-story building. Floridays principal and founder Angus Rogers of Sarasota says it will be a \$40 million project with retail space on the ground floor and 180 rooms.

Rogers told the advisory board last July, “My vision is to design something authentic and specific to Sarasota. Let’s play to our strengths — the arts. This will be a boutique hotel that plays to the arts theme.”


The hotel will utilize parking in the adjacent Palm Avenue garage. The number of spac-

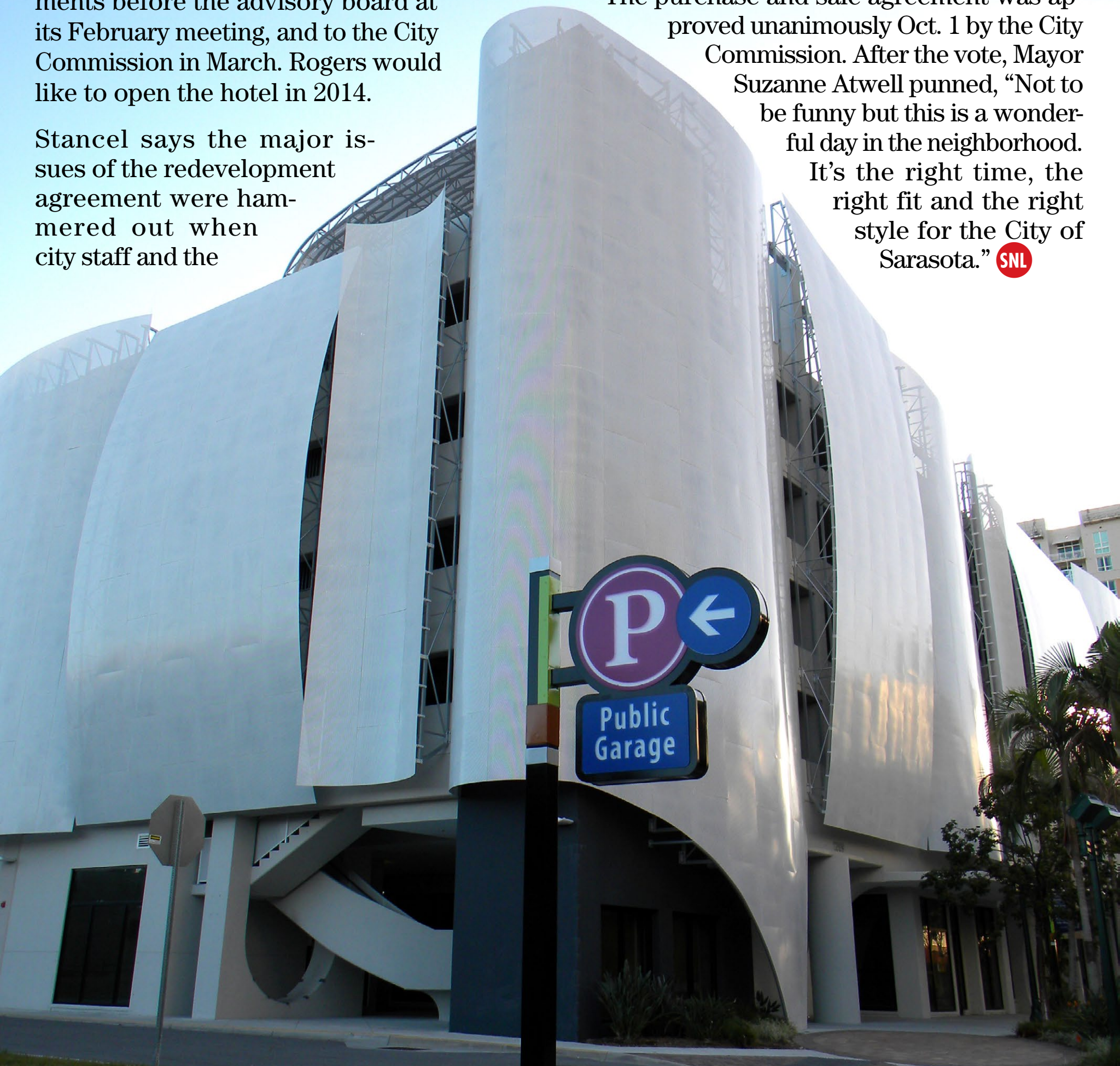
es and cost to Floridays will comprise “the parking agreement.” There are 735 spaces in the garage; Floridays would like to use 300 of them, but negotiations are not yet final.

Stancel hopes to bring the two agreements before the advisory board at its February meeting, and to the City Commission in March. Rogers would like to open the hotel in 2014.

Stancel says the major issues of the redevelopment agreement were hammered out when city staff and the

Floridays representatives were writing the purchase and sale documents, including payment for underground utility improvements. “The redevelopment agreement shouldn’t be a big issue,” he added.

The purchase and sale agreement was approved unanimously Oct. 1 by the City Commission. After the vote, Mayor Suzanne Atwell punned, “Not to be funny but this is a wonderful day in the neighborhood. It’s the right time, the right fit and the right style for the City of Sarasota.” 



The City of Sarasota is working with Floridays Development on an agreement for use of the Palm Avenue garage for hotel guest parking. Photo by Norman Schimmel



CITY COMMISSION PREVIEW

Residents of Golden Gate Point are upset about a new parking proposal for their neighborhood. Photo by Norman Schimmel

WIFE BEATERS, TANDEM PARKING AND KAYAK STORAGE ON THE AGENDA FOR FEB. 4

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota City Commissioners will sit down Monday, Feb. 4, to face a local firearms issue, a proposal for easy kayak storage in city parks and some citizens from Golden Gate Point upset about a proposal for changing their parking.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONCERNS

The city's Independent Police Advisory Panel took on two major initiatives in its first year. One was the use of mediation to reduce the number of official complaints citizens are filing over police behavior.

The second was an examination of domestic violence. Monday afternoon, the panel will

suggest the commission approve and forward to the State Attorney's Office and the Florida Legislature three measures that could save the lives of battered spouses.

The first would add a "domestic violence weapons search warrant" to any Domestic Violence Injunction issued by local judges. The violence could turn lethal if there is a handgun in the house. The search warrant would allow police to hunt for weapons as part of the process of serving the injunction papers.

The second measure seeks a change in the state law to prevent the expiration of temporary injunctions if the accused violator cannot

be served with legal papers. “In other words, the victim [who] applied for and received a temporary injunction based on her allegations of abuse should not wait for additional abuse to occur so that she can reapply and start the process over,” writes the panel’s chairwoman, Eileen Normile.

Another change to the law would prevent a judge from putting automatic expiration dates on Final Domestic Violence Injunctions. Normally, final injunctions expire after a year. Normile is asking that the restraining order remain in effect until a court hears why it should be cancelled.

An earlier recommendation from the panel was approved last summer when the Sarasota Police Department re-established a “victim’s advocate” position on the force.

KAYAK STORAGE FOR PADDLERS

The Parks, Recreation and Environmental Protection advisory board is recommending the city issue “invitations to negotiate” to build one or more kayak storage facilities at city parks along the bay.

The board notes most kayakers load their craft on car-top carriers, but lifting them on and off is difficult for some people. Condominium-dwellers often do not have a place to store a kayak, and even homeowners face regulations in areas with homeowner associations.

Sarasota County built a kayak storage facility in the Robinson Preserve, and it has proved very successful, operating at full capacity virtually since it opened. Units rent for \$30 per



Kayakers are hoping the City of Sarasota will create storage space for them in city parks. Photo courtesy Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

month, and there is a waiting list. Total construction cost \$73,000 and the annual rents provide \$14,400.

The advisory board looked at nine city parks, from Sapphire Shores in the north to South Lido Park. It zeroed in on South Lido, Centennial, Ken Thompson and Bayfront parks as the best areas to create a demonstration project.

The city commissioners will be asked if the city should proceed.

WHACK THE SPEED LIMIT

In the evening, the commissioners will hold a public hearing and then determine whether the city engineer should have the power to recommend lowering neighborhood speed limits to 20 mph. Right now the engineer can suggest a limit at 25 mph.

City Engineer Alex Davis-Shaw has studied several neighborhoods with an eye to lowering the limits, but under the current ordinance she is unable to make that recommendation.

TANDEM PARKING AT GOLDEN GATE


The commissioners will also hold a public hearing on a staff-endorsed proposal to allow a Golden Gate condominium development to allow two cars per unit by parking them nose-to-tail — so-called “tandem parking.”

The Planning Board voted unanimously to reject the idea. The Golden Gate Point Association is dead-set against the proposal. A Dec. 10 letter notes the association floated a \$5.8 million bond issue to improve the streetscape and add 100 parking spaces in the neighborhood.



City Hall will be the site of the Feb. 4 City Commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Neighborhood President Brent Parker fears this change to the zoning code for his neighborhood will help just a specific landowner. “This text amendment has been created to benefit a proposed project of eight units,” he wrote. “So in this scenario, we will now have eight new units, with one-half of the cars parking in the street! (At \$58K apiece, we are giving away \$464,000 of value to the developer via the neighborhood taxpayers).”

“This is un-acceptable [sic]. Our neighborhood paid for this streetscape. It was not created to benefit a developer so he could squeeze another unit or two into the development,” wrote Parker. 



*The Hub Baja Grill (right) and The Cottage are two of Chris Brown's properties in Siesta Village.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION REJECTS A SECOND SETTLEMENT OFFER IN A LAWSUIT FILED IN 2011 BY SIESTA KEY BUSINESS OWNER CHRIS BROWN

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Once again, the Sarasota County Commission has rejected a settlement offer in the October 2011 lawsuit Siesta Village property owner Chris Brown filed after parking assessments rose substantially on three of his parcels while assessments on other Village parcels dropped.

Following a 90-minute executive session on Jan. 30 with County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh and Assistant County Attorney David Pearce — who has been handling the case for the county —

DeMarsh announced at the start of the commission's afternoon session in Sarasota that Brown's attorney, Morgan Bentley of Bentley and Bruning in Sarasota, had offered to settle the case for \$315,000.

DeMarsh added that the matter is "scheduled for mediation in the very near future," then recommended against the settlement.

Mediation has been planned for Friday, Feb. 1, court records show.

“ *The [settlement] terms are not what we wanted — not what I wanted, anyway.*

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

”

With Commissioner Charles Hines prevented from voting because of a conflict of interest, the vote was unanimous to oppose the offer.

(Hines, an attorney, filed a Memorandum of Voting Conflict with the clerk to the board saying he previously had represented Brown in legal matters.)

Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, made the motion. Commissioner Christine Robinson seconded it.

“I’m of the impression that these issues were settled earlier,” Patterson said of her motion, referring to a revised lawsuit Brown filed against the county in July 2009 regarding parking assessments and other matters related to The Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village.

Brown has maintained he never would have signed that agreement if he had known county staff would continue to assess him unfairly for parking fees related to a municipal lot in the Village. Last year, the County Commission — citing inequity issues that had arisen in determining those assessments — voted to cover the remaining expense of the parking lot and no longer bill Siesta property owners for it.

During the Jan. 30 meeting, Commissioner Joe Barbetta — who has argued in the past that the latest lawsuit should be settled — reiterated that point. However, Barbetta said he would support Patterson’s motion. “The [settlement] terms are not what we wanted — not what I wanted, anyway,” he added.

Contacted after the vote, Brown said he had no comment.

Bentley told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Jan. 30, “I wasn’t aware that a vote on the settlement was scheduled for today. I was under the impression [the executive session] was to discuss the upcoming mediation per the court rules on mediation.”

Bentley added, “It’s always disappointing when the county chooses litigation rather than resolution, particularly when the litigation is against a small business owner. Still, I am always optimistic that the parties can come to a resolution that works for everyone.”

On Aug. 21, the County Commission voted 3-2 to reject a \$277,219.22 settlement offer from Brown. At that time, Robinson joined Barbetta in voting to accept the offer, while Commissioners Thaxton and Mason joined Patterson in opposing it.

Barbetta pointed out then that some of the parking assessments for businesses in Siesta Village went down 15 percent to 30 percent in 2010, while Brown’s assessments for The Hub Baja Grill and The Cottage restaurant doubled.

The assessment for the Avenida Messina parcel where Blu Que Island Grill stands went up about 1,500 percent, according to the lawsuit.

“If that isn’t singling somebody out — I think we have some incredible exposure here,” Barbetta added during that discussion.



THE HISTORY

Brown originally filed a lawsuit against the county in the fall of 2007, alleging that actions by then-Zoning Administrator Tina Brown, under pressure from various parties, resulted in his being unable to open The Hub when it was completed, costing him about three months of revenue.

The county ended up settling with Brown over the amended lawsuit filed in that case in 2009. He received \$35,000 in damages. Additionally, the county vacated a portion of the right of way along Ocean Boulevard adjacent to The Hub to resolve a pending code enforcement action. (Brown had been accused of allowing outside tables at The Hub to encroach upon the right of way.)


Finally, the county confirmed that a special exception Brown had for live entertainment

on the property had not elapsed, allowing him to have music played from 9 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. seven days a week, with the noise level not to exceed 85 decibels from the property line.

On Jan. 31, 2011, Brown filed his second lawsuit against the county, alleging he had been charged an excessive amount for his parking assessments for The Hub, the Beach Club and Blu Que and contesting the special assessment charged businesses for upkeep of Siesta Village.

That lawsuit ultimately led to a revision of the ordinance governing that upkeep as well as to a yearlong process to hire a new contractor to handle Village maintenance.

The county reimbursed Brown \$2,500 in parking assessments in that case.

Brown has said it was only about a month after he received the reimbursement that he also received the 2011 tax bill with the new set of high assessments. 

Care. No matter what.

- Lifesaving cancer screenings
- Annual GYN exams
- Affordable Birth control



Join us for our 47th Annual Dinner Celebration!

March 5, 2013 • Municipal Auditorium Tickets start at \$175
Enjoy a fabulous dinner and silent auction

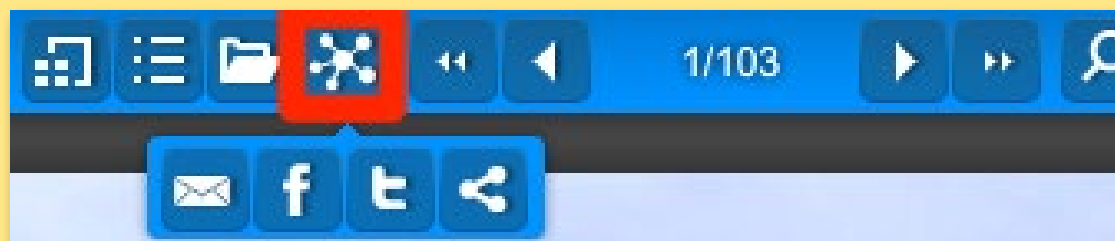
Meet guest speaker Lizz Winstead, comedian and political satirist known for her work as co-creator and former head writer for "The Daily Show," and "Air America Radio."

Become a sponsor or silent auction donor!
941.365.3913 x1124 or MyPlannedParenthood.org



Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida • Sarasota 941-953-4060 • MyPlannedParenthood.org

QUICK TIP



Share stories by clicking the  icon in the menubar and choosing to share via e-mail, post to Facebook or Twitter, or many other sharing options.



TROLLEY TIME

Siesta Village business owners have been asking county staff for a number of years to establish trolley service to the barrier island, where parking can be problematic at busy times of the year. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES FUNDING FOR NEW PUBLIC BUS SYSTEM EMPLOYEES NEEDED TO MAKE TROLLEY SERVICE POSSIBLE FOR SIESTA KEY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

It will take two new Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) buses and nine new operators to serve Siesta Key, with one route going from Southgate Mall to Turtle Beach, according to plans presented to the Sarasota County Commission this week.

By a 4-1 vote on Jan. 29, the commissioners approved the hiring of the new employees after hearing from a manager in the Sarasota County Area Transit department that sala-

ries for those workers could be used to match a state grant to fund operating costs of the new Siesta service.

Glama Carter, the new general manager of SCAT, explained to the County Commission on Jan. 29 that unlike normal grant processes, the Florida Department of Transportation had provided the county \$1,087,500 to fund operations of the trolley service to Siesta in 2014-15, with the

“The kit is a little cuter, but [the wrap], to me, is fine, if we’re going to save \$61,000.”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



county required to match that amount. Usually, FDOT provides capital funds for such projects, she pointed out.

The grant is to be used over three years. After that, the county would have to cover all the expenses for the service out of its general budget, Carter explained.

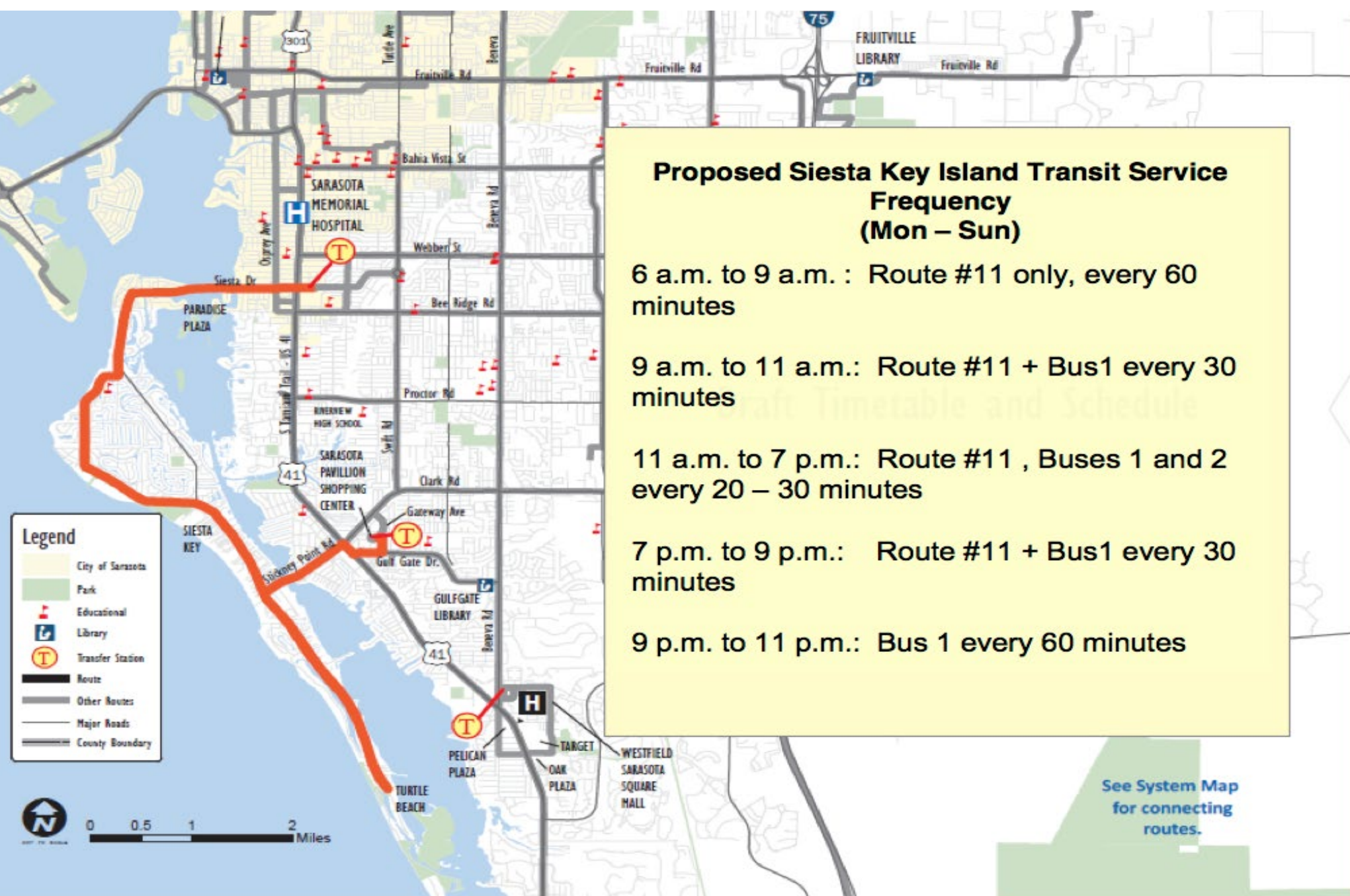
Cindy Zambella, the fiscal program manager for SCAT, told the commissioners the salaries for the new bus operators would qualify as the county's match.

The County Commission then voted 4-1 to authorize the nine new full-time SCAT positions. Commissioner Christine Robinson cast

the "No" vote, saying she felt she did not have adequate information to approve the proposal.

Though she supported the motion, Commissioner Nora Patterson cautioned Carter, "Please don't take this vote as a [sign] we have a lot of extra money to add to SCAT in the next year or so."

When Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, asked how soon the service could start, Carter said it takes about 18 months for buses to be delivered after they are ordered. Once SCAT has the buses and the new personnel, she noted, the service could begin.



A Sarasota County graphic shows planned bus route schedules for proposed new service to Siesta Key. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The two buses would cost about \$760,000 altogether, Carter pointed out.

Carter noted that the existing Route 11 from downtown Sarasota to Siesta would be combined with the new route from Southgate to Turtle Beach, with operations from 6 a.m. to about 11 p.m.

When Patterson asked how often the buses would run to Siesta Key, Sarah Blanchard, SCAT's senior planner, explained that Route 11 would stop for passengers from every 30 minutes to every 60 minutes, depending on the time of day. It would pick up riders every 20 to 30 minutes and a bit more frequently during peak times, she added.

The Turtle Beach route would take about an hour between stops, she noted; it also would stop in Gulf Gate.

The buses would run Monday through Sunday, Blanchard said.

In a related matter, Carter explained that a typical kit to transform a bus into a vehicle that looks like a trolley costs about \$68,000. However, a "wrap" is only about \$7,000, which is why she would recommend that option. "It accomplishes the goal of helping our buses fit into the island atmosphere," she added.

"The wrap's pretty cute," Patterson said as she looked at a slide Carter presented to the commission.



Trolley Kit \$68,000



Trolley Wrap \$7,000



Photos presented to the Sarasota County Commission show the difference between a kit and a 'wrap' for making buses look like trolleys. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Zambella pointed out that with county plans calling for five buses to look like trolleys, the savings between the kit and wrap almost would pay for another bus.

In talking with representatives of both the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce and the Siesta Key Village Association the previous evening, Patterson said, she had mentioned the county might opt for the wrap. Their response, she said, was, “That’s fine. We need the transportation.”

Patterson added to Carter, “So I don’t think you’re going to get a lot of push-back.”

“That’s fantastic news,” Carter replied.

“The kit is a little cuter,” Patterson said, “but [the wrap], to me, is fine, if we’re going to save \$61,000.”

Carter also noted that the colors and design of the wrap could be different from those depicted in a PowerPoint presentation she provided to the commission.

Patterson said she felt the Siesta Key trolley would prove very popular in transporting tourists to the island.

SOME STATS

During her presentation, Carter pointed out that except for a 3 percent decrease in ridership on the SCAT routes in the 2012 fiscal year, usage of the bus service has grown consistently over the past several years.

The county’s cost per rider is \$4.89, Carter noted, with 70 percent of that paid by the county’s general fund; 20 percent by grants; and 10-13 percent by rider fares.

From 2008 to 2012, Carter explained, the percentage of fare revenue covering the cost of

ridership had increased from 8 percent to 14 percent. A major reason for that, she said, was the popularity of the county’s express bus service. Rider fares on those routes pay for 30 percent of the county’s expense, she noted.

Regarding “headway,” the amount of time a rider has to wait for a bus on a specific route, Carter said the headway is 30 minutes on five county routes and 60 minutes on 17 routes. The express routes take about 75 minutes one-way, she added.

Except for the express routes, she said, SCAT’s goal is to have most routes working with a 30-minute headway.


Carter also pointed out that the routes with 30 minutes of headway or less are the most popular with riders.

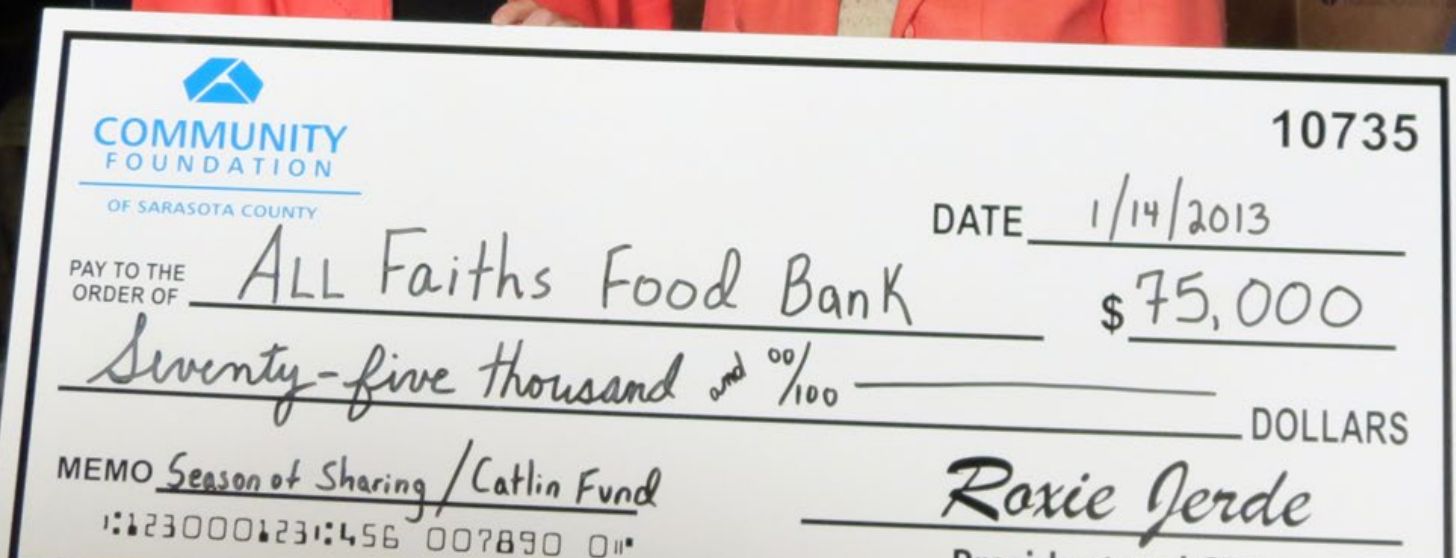
The newest express bus route, 90X, began on Jan. 28. It has stops in North Port and Venice as it brings passengers to Sarasota.

EFFICIENCIES

In one other SCAT vote on Jan. 29, Robinson did join her fellow board members in supporting Carter’s request to convert 17 part-time positions to seven that would be full-time, a move Carter and her staff characterized as creating more efficiency and saving money in the long run.

Robinson pointed out that, unlike the earlier vote, it did not represent a shift from private firms handling work to county staff doing it, so she would approve it.

Patterson said she relied on confidence in Carter’s cost analyses that the move would not end up adding to county expense for the SCAT system. 



Community Foundation of Sarasota County President and CEO Roxie Jerde (left) makes a grant presentation to All Faiths Food Bank Executive Director Sandra Frank. Photo contributed by Community Foundation

FOUNDATION PROVIDES \$75,000 TO ALL FAITHS FOOD BANK

Since October 2012, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County (CFSC) has awarded two grants — \$45,000 through the Season of Sharing Fund and \$30,000 through the Kathleen K. Catlin Fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County — to help replenish food stores at All Faiths Food Bank, the Foundation has announced.

Last fall, news of empty shelves at All Faiths Food Bank spread throughout the community, a news release notes. “CFSC immediately sprang into action, granting \$45,000 to All Faiths so that the shelves could be refilled, and the hungry in Sarasota and DeSoto counties fed,” the release notes. These funds were raised through the Season of Sharing campaign, which provides emergency assistance to rescue families on the brink of homeless-

ness in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties, the release adds.

In late 2012, CFSC awarded another \$30,000 to All Faiths through a “holiday needs” grant from the Kathleen K. Catlin Fund. For a number of years, the Catlin Fund has supported All Faiths, which is in keeping with Catlin’s “caring for the most vulnerable in our community,” the release points out.

“With the lingering recession, the basic need for food has been magnified,” says Roxie Jerde, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, in the release. “The generosity and giving spirit of our community in caring for others is demonstrated by the overwhelming support of Season of Sharing. To have funds available to fill the shelves

at All Faiths when they are bare is just what Season of Sharing is intended to do,” she adds.

“The problem of hunger in our community is far greater than most people realize,” says All Faiths Food Bank Executive Director Sandra Frank in the release. “We cannot help feed those in need if our shelves are empty; we are so grateful to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County for recognizing the overwhelming and ongoing need, and filling it.”

The Season of Sharing campaign, which began in 2000 as a partnership between the Herald-Tribune Media Group and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, raised approximately \$1.8 million in 2011-2012 for

distribution to human service organizations in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties last year. “Over the years, Season of Sharing has distributed more than \$7.2 million to area nonprofits serving those in need; last year alone the program helped more than 2,400 people keep the lights on, put food on the table, receive child care and stay in their homes,” the release notes.

The Kathleen K. Catlin fund is administered by an advisory committee of Community Foundation of Sarasota County. An open, competitive grant cycle is available to organizations meeting qualifications and guidelines of the fund, the release adds. For more information, call 955-3000 or visit www.CFSarasota.org.

SAY I DO AGAIN RETURNS TO SIESTA BEACH FOR VALENTINE’S DAY

Sarasota County Parks and Recreation’s popular *Say I Do Again* wedding vow renewal event will return to Siesta Public Beach, 948 Beach Road, Siesta Key, at 6 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 14, the county has announced.

Every year on Valentine’s Day, hundreds of people renew their commitment to the special person in their lives during a ceremony “on the powdery soft white sand of Siesta Beach, which was designated as the No. 1 Beach in America by Dr. Beach in 2011,” a county news release says.

Advance registration is required by Feb. 11; it can be undertaken online at www.parksonline.scgov.net or by calling 861-7275, the release notes. The cost is \$5 per couple.

“It’s one of our most popular events that draws hundreds of couples from all over the area,” says Jonathan Poyner, Sarasota County Parks and Recreation program coordinator, in the release. One of the highlights is the announce-

ment of the couple that has been married the longest, he adds. “It’s the perfect way to spend Valentine’s Day,” he points out, “sharing a gorgeous sunset on America’s best beach with the person most special in your life.”

The vow renewal ceremony will be officiated by Magistrate Ed Wilson, the release notes. New to this year’s event will be the Good Time Groove, “one of the region’s most popular 10-piece orchestras,” which will play Big Band and swing music from 4 to 5 p.m., the release points out. Event sponsor Marriage-Works also will provide music and giveaways.

Following the ceremony, each couple will receive a commemorative certificate and enjoy wedding cake from Beautiful Cakes by Ron, the release says. Music will be provided by radio station WCTQ, 106.5 FM.

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

LIBRARY SYSTEM ANNOUNCES ONE BOOK FEBRUARY LINEUP

The Sarasota County Library System and community partners have planned the February Finale Month events that will conclude this year's One Book, One Community project, the county has announced.

Each event will focus on the program's current selection, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*, by Laura Hillenbrand.

A variety of events are scheduled, including the following, a county news release says:

- 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7: NOAA Scientist and Mote Marine Laboratory visiting scientist Dr. José Castro will present *Sharks and Men* at the Morgan Family Community Center, 6207 W. Price Blvd., North Port.
- 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 13: Justus Doe-neckke, professor emeritus of history, will present *The Coming of the Pacific War: The events that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor* at Sainer Auditorium on the New College campus, 5313 Bay Shore Road, Sarasota.
- 10 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 14: Librarian Alexa Torchynowycz and The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Library will present *The Merci Train: A World War II Tribute to America from France* at the Historic Asolo Theatre, 5401 Bay Shore Road, Sarasota.
- 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 19: A conversation with student historians on topics inspired by *Unbroken* will be presented in the Selby Auditorium at the University of South

Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus, 8350 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Among the topics discussed will be *Broadcasting Consent: War Propaganda on the Airways*; *The B-24 and Beyond*; *Hideki Tojo: Understanding the Enemy*; *Bushido: Contextualizing Japanese POW Treatment*; and *The Scars that Don't Show: The POW Effect*.

- 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 20: Stacy Spriggs, community and school gardens coordinator with Sarasota County's Extension Office of the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, will present *The History of Victory Gardens: A World War II Homefront Effort* at the Fruitville Library, 100 Coburn Road, Sarasota.

Event details are available at www.onebooksarasota.com on the events calendar.

Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption is the true story of Louis Zamperini, who competed in the Berlin Olympics, crashed into the Pacific Ocean during World War II, was lost at sea for 47 days, and served time in a Japanese prison camp, the release points out.

Since 2003, the Sarasota County Library System and partner organizations have sponsored the popular One Book, One Community program, which brings people together to discuss a specific story.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000, or visit the One Book website at www.onebooksarasota.com.

CITY HIRES INTERIM HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

Stacie Mason has been appointed interim human resources director of the City of Sarasota by City Manager Tom Barwin, the city announced Jan. 25.

Mason is a general manager overseeing employee compensation, benefits, and risk and safety management, a city news release says. For the past several months, she has been transitioning into the new position, the release notes. She will officially take on the interim position beginning Friday, Feb. 1, the release adds.

“Stacie played a key role in facilitating the hiring of our new chief of police and incoming finance director and utilities director,” said Barwin in the release. “I was very impressed with her and her attention to detail with those important processes, which are culminating in an assembly of exceptional talent and dedication,” he added in the release.

Mason has worked for the City of Sarasota for 10 years, the release notes. Through the

Affordable Care Act, she helped the city secure a \$675,000 reimbursement for the city’s medical fund, the release points out. The City of Sarasota was one of the first municipalities in the nation to enroll in the program before funding was depleted, the release adds.

Mason also has assisted with Teamster negotiations and facilitated the opening of an employee health center to help lower medical costs for the city, the release says. In addition, she has managed the city’s self-insurance funds for medical, workers’ compensation and liability issues, it notes.

This is the fourth major department chief’s position Barwin has filled since starting work as city manager in early September, the release points out. His first appointment was Chief of Police Bernadette DiPino. He subsequently announced the hiring of Finance Director John Lege and Utilities Director Mitt Tidwell, it adds.

SBEP RECEIVES GRANT TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) has received an EdExploreNEXT Grant to support environmental education benefiting local students, the nonprofit organization has announced.

The \$25,000 grant was awarded by the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County to support the SBEP PIER Education Program, a news release says. PIER stands for Protection, Involvement, Education and Restoration, the release points out. More than 40,000 students from public and private schools have participated in the program since 2003, the release adds.

SBEP partners for the grant include Sarasota County Natural Resources and Around the Bend Nature Tours. The funds will be used to purchase equipment teachers can use in their classrooms to enhance student activities, the release notes. PIER includes field trips and curriculum lesson plans.

The EdExploreNEXT Grants are part of a larger focus by [The Patterson Foundation](#) to support community education, the release says. The initiative includes [EDExploreSRQ.com](#), a public website hosted by the Sarasota School District that is designed to give teachers access to learning opportunities, the release adds.

SARASOTA COUNTY OFFERING FREE TAX AID

Free help is available at AARP tax aid sites and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations throughout Sarasota County for quick filing of federal individual income tax returns, the county has announced.

Residents who earned \$51,000 or less last year can use the VITA sites operated by the United Way Suncoast, a news release says. The United Way Suncoast also is offering free online tax preparation for people who want to file their own taxes. The website is myfreetaxes.com/sarasota. The income limit for online tax preparation support is \$57,000.

There are no income limits or age limits at the AARP sites, the release adds. "This service is not for business returns or complex tax issues," it points out.

The United Way Suncoast will operate four VITA sites in Sarasota County as part of a coordinated effort between the United Way's Financial Stability Partnership and the Sarasota County Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Task Force, the release notes. The goal is to help ensure that residents who are eligible for the various tax credits receive their earned share. The other 12 tax aid sites will be operated by the AARP foundation. There are no appointments at the AARP or VITA sites, the release adds.

Both the AARP and VITA free tax sites allow residents to electronically file their tax returns so they can receive refunds sooner, if they are eligible for them. Generally, a refund can be posted to a person's bank account within seven to 10 days after the visit to one of the AARP or VITA sites, the release says.

Trained IRS-certified volunteers will be at each location to provide free personal income

tax assistance to EITC-eligible residents and older adults (some guidelines apply). Services include responding to questions; assisting eligible persons, including older adults, in filing their taxes; and support in reporting and receiving the benefit of all available and eligible credits, including the EITC and Child Tax Credit.

Many people will qualify for the EITC for the first time because their income declined, their marital status changed or they added children to their families, the release points out. Families with three or more children also get an extra boost with a larger EITC this year, it adds.

Taxpayers should bring the following to the sites to help determine their EITC eligibility and to help prepare their tax returns: photo identification; valid Social Security cards for the taxpayer, spouse and dependents; birth dates for primary and secondary filers and dependents on the tax return current year's tax package, if received; wage and earning statement(s) Forms W-2, W-2G or 1099-R from all employers; interest and dividend statements from banks (Form 1099); Form 1098, mortgage interest/property tax information, if applicable; a copy of last year's federal and state returns, if available; bank routing numbers and account numbers for direct deposit; other relevant information about income and expenses; total paid for daycare; and the daycare provider's taxpayer identifying number.

For more information, including a link to online EITC filing, visit the Sarasota County government website at www.scgov.net. Those with mobile or pay phones may call 308-4357.

There are no appointments offered, the release says, but walk-ins are welcome at all locations.

SUNRISE BEACH WALKS WELCOME MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Sarasota County Parks and Recreation's popular Sunrise Beach Walks return to Siesta Beach, 948 Beach Road, Siesta Key, and Nokomis Beach, 100 Casey Key Road, Nokomis, beginning Wednesday, Feb. 6, the county has announced.

"Walking on the beaches of Sarasota County is a great way to stay in shape, relax and enjoy the most beautiful sunrise on Florida's Gulf Coast," a county news release says. "Residents and visitors are invited to feel the sand between their toes while strolling on some of the best beaches in the country, including the 2011 Best Beach in America, Siesta Beach," the release adds.

Every Wednesday in February and March, walkers can meet new friends and enjoy getting in shape, the release notes. For a one-time \$1 registration fee, all participants receive a punch card to keep track of their walks. After completing four beach walks, each participant receives a free T-shirt.

Registration runs from 8 to 9:30 a.m. at Siesta Beach and Nokomis Beach each week, the release adds.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 and ask about the Sunrise Beach Walks.



Sarasota County is inviting the public to Siesta Public Beach for sunrise walks by the Gulf of Mexico. Photo by Norman Schimmel

COUNTY, CITY WIN AWARD FOR NEWTOWN REVITALIZATION

Sarasota County and the City of Sarasota have been named winners of a national award for community development for their efforts to revitalize the Newtown neighborhood.

The county and city will receive the Audrey Nelson Community Development Achievement Award from the National Community Development Association (NCDA) during a ceremony Feb. 1 in Washington, D.C. the county has announced.

The award recognizes the efforts by the county and city to work with residents and community organizations to achieve a “holistic change in the Newtown Neighborhood,” a news release says. Those efforts include Janie’s Garden, the Robert Taylor Community Center, the Newtown Training Center, commercial storefront improvements, the King Stone and St. Monica apartment redevelopments, Fredd “Glossie” Atkins Park and playground and drainage improvements, the release points out.

“This award recognizes the tremendous progress Sarasota County and the City of Sarasota have made to revitalize the Newtown area,” said Carolyn Mason, County Commission chairwoman, in the release. “These improvements address the needs of our residents for high-quality safe housing, provide facilities

for recreation and community events and improve the community’s infrastructure. The award also is a tribute to all of the community organizations that served as partners in these projects,” she added in the release.

The county and city have made improvements in Newtown valued at more than \$60 million, using funds that included a \$23 million Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the release notes.

The NCDA established the Audrey Nelson Community Development Achievement Award to recognize outstanding uses of the Community Development Block Grant Program and partnerships between local governments and nonprofit organizations to assist low- and moderate-income persons, the release says. Audrey Nelson was the first deputy executive secretary of NCDA.

The NCDA is a non-partisan national nonprofit membership organization that represents local governments that administer federally supported community, economic development and affordable housing programs.

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



**For The Best
Reading Experience**

**Get *Sarasota News Leader*
On Your Tablet**

SarasotaNewsLeader.com/webapp

FUGITIVE WANTED FOR HEROIN TRAFFICKING ARRESTED

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, working in conjunction with the U.S. Marshals Florida Regional Fugitive Task Force, has captured 57-year-old Demares Beatrice Castillo-Isa, aka Lourdes Milagros Ortiz Canuelas, of 3100 Hawthorne Street, Lot No. 69, Sarasota, the office announced Jan. 25.

She has been wanted since August 2012 "for her role in a large heroin trafficking operation," a Sheriff's Office report says.

"Castillo-Isa was part of a group distributing significant quantities of heroin from La Universal Carniceria, 2862 Ringling Blvd., as well as her home," the report adds. "Undercover detectives from the

Sheriff's Office and the Sarasota Police Department obtained heroin from her and two co-defendants, who were arrested in June and now face federal charges in the case," the report notes.

One witness allegedly obtained more than 500 grams of heroin from Castillo-Isa for approximately \$20,000 over a period of several months, according to the report.

Castillo-Isa was arrested on the night of Jan. 24 in the 2100 block of 34th Street West in Bradenton. She was charged with Conspiracy to Traffic Heroin and is being held without bond. She was arrested on similar charges in Boston in 2009, the report points out.



Demares Beatrice Castillo-Isa/Contributed photo


NURSE ARRESTED FOR OBTAINING OXYCODONE BY FRAUD

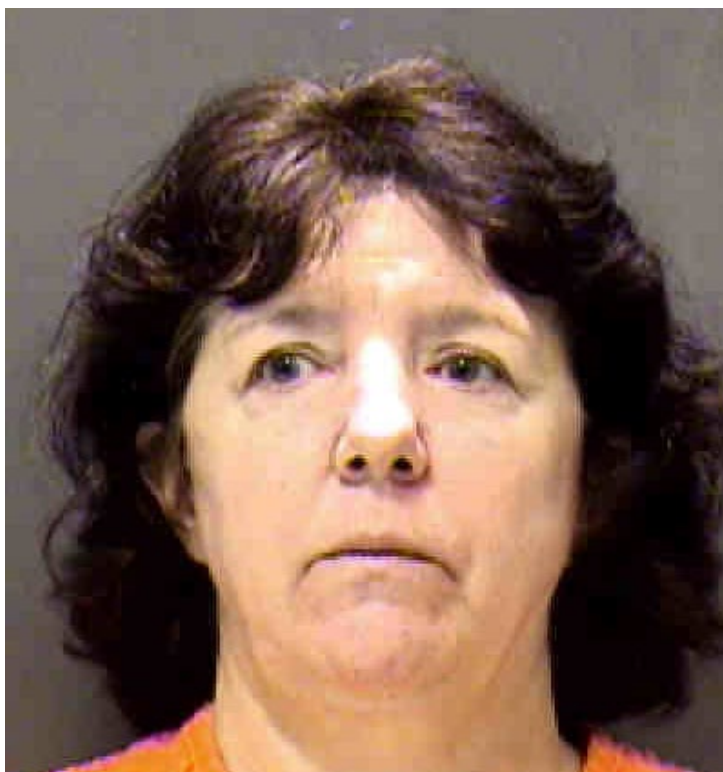
The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested Evelyn Kay Weisenborn, 53, of 4112 26th Avenue East, Bradenton, for fraudulently ordering more 100 bottles of Oxycodone through her employer for personal use, the office has announced.

Associates at Premier Surgery Center contacted investigators with the Pharmaceutical Diversion Unit after discovering an unauthorized shipment of Oxycodone, a medication that is not prescribed by any of the physicians at the center, a Sheriff's Office report says.

Detectives learned that from January 2010 to July 2012, Weisenborn, a registered nurse responsible for ordering medication for the practice, "had created fraudulent purchase

orders for 30 mg 100-count bottles from the center's two distributors," the report adds. During that time, she allegedly obtained 111 bottles of Oxycodone, totaling 11,100 pills, the report continues.

Weisenborn was arrested Jan. 28 and charged with 54 counts of Obtaining a Controlled Substance by Fraud, the report says. 



Evelyn Weisenborn/Contributed photo

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 CARE PASSIONATELY ABOUT HELPING WOMEN, MEN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE

LEAD HEALTHY LIVES.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD. CARE. NO MATTER WHAT.



**Planned Parenthood Of
Southwest And Central Florida**

941-953-4060

MyPlannedParenthood.org



Join us for our 47th Annual Dinner Celebration!

March 5, 2013 • Municipal Auditorium Tickets start at \$175
Enjoy dinner and a spectacular silent auction experience while
supporting Planned Parenthood.

Meet guest speaker Lizz Winstead, comedian and
political satirist known for her work as co-creator
and former head writer for "The Daily Show,"
and "Air America Radio."

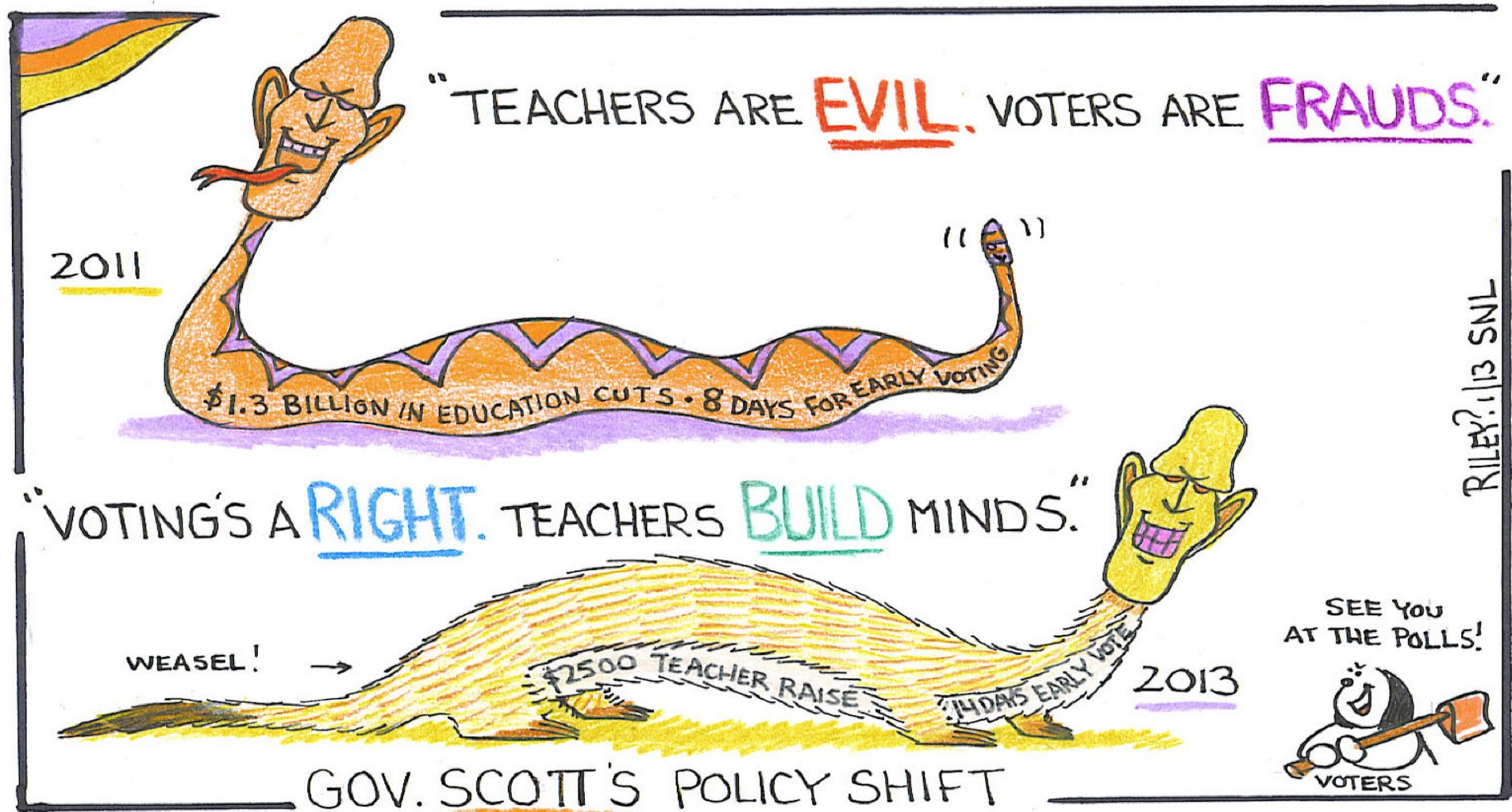
Become a sponsor or silent auction donor!

941.365.3913 x1124

www.MyPlannedParenthood.org



OPINION



WILL THE REAL RICK SCOTT PLEASE STAND UP?

EDITORIAL

In the late 1950s and 1960s there was a game show on the CBS network called *To Tell the Truth*. A panel of four celebrities would face three contestants, one of whom had an unusual occupation. The other two panelists were impostors, pretending to be the third contestant.

The celebrity panelists would quiz the three contestants in an effort to correctly discern the true holder of the strange occupation. At the end, the host would order, “Will the real (whoever) please stand up.”

For each wrong panel vote, the genuine contestant received a larger prize. If none of the panelists guessed correctly, the prize was larger still.

The vicarious fun for the audience was rooting for the contestant to fool all of the celebrity panelists, so they would vote for the wrong person. It was great entertainment, as evidenced by the fact the show enjoyed 12 seasons on the network, followed by an even longer run in syndication. And no real harm was done by the playful subterfuge that was the centerpiece of the show.

Unfortunately, were the celebrity panelists actually voters in a state — let us say, Florida — and the contestant was trying to trick those panelists out of their hard-earned tax dollars or, worse, planning to despoil their homes and property ... well, that would have been a tad too sinister for family television. The scenario likely would not have enjoyed a record-breaking television run.

OPINION

In 2010, Rick Scott ran for governor, touting his business record and a promise to put Florida's unemployed back to work, building a vibrant state economy in the process. He drove home his talking points with thousands of commercials bought with more than \$70 million of his own fortune. When the dust settled at the end of Election Day, Scott had won only 23.7 percent of registered voters ... less than a fourth. Fortunately for him, only 48.5 percent of registered voters actually bothered to go to the polls, so he received 48.9 percent of the votes cast.

In a perfect world, a candidate would have to enjoy the support of at least a majority of those voting, but in Florida, a plurality carried the day for Scott, as he bested Democrat Alex Sink and a host of lesser candidates, who collectively had the other 51.1 percent of the votes. He became governor of Florida with the assent of fewer than 14 percent of the citizens of the state.

Once sworn into office, Scott — along with his legislative allies — went about fulfilling his pledge to emasculate state government by firing thousands of state workers; slashing \$1.3 billion from the education budget; virtually eliminating environmental oversight; handing out tax breaks to corporations; systematically disenfranchising minority, elderly and young (collectively, *Democratic*) voters; and effectively transforming insurance from a risk-management mechanism for the people to a cash-cow for unfettered insurance companies.

When he stopped to catch his breath, he was perhaps taken aback to learn that his approval ratings among voters had dropped into the 20s. Oops!

The next year he championed a billion dollars in new education spending, pointing out how valuable our schools are to the future of Florida. When the Legislature went along, he crowed about his newfound generosity. Somehow, it was never mentioned that the state's education system was still \$300 million poorer than it had been before Scott had begun his austerity drive in 2011.

Fast-forward another year and the 2014 gubernatorial election looms. With Scott struggling to get his approval rating slightly higher than that of castor oil, something had to change. A wholesale image makeover was needed. And Rick Scott knew just what to do.

In the aftermath of a humiliating election debacle brought on by Republican voter suppression, Scott suddenly has proposed comprehensive election reform, including extending early voting days to 14, allowing local supervisors of election more latitude in setting hours and expanding polling places and limiting the length of ballots. Never mind that every "change" was simply to undo the nefarious depredations Scott and his legislative henchmen had visited upon the citizenry.

Next, Scott decided that teachers were underpaid — something that could be attributed to his move to cut their pay by 3 percent

OPINION

through forced contributions to their pension plans, which always had been 100 percent state-funded. He decreed each teacher needed an extra \$2,500 per year, with the total expected to add almost half-a-billion dollars to the state budget (but actually only putting us \$200 million ahead of where we were before Scott first slashed education spending).

All told, Scott wants the Legislature to increase education spending by \$1.2 billion this year. For those keeping track at home, that is a \$1.3 billion cut and a total of \$2.2 billion added back, for a net increase in education spending during his first term of less than \$1 billion.

Undoubtedly, Scott is sowing the seeds for his 2014 campaign, when he will harvest the sound bites and fudged data to make the case that he deserves a second term, a case to be vigorously prosecuted by another massive commitment from his vast personal wealth. But are Floridians to fall for this scam twice?

Fortunately, Scott's approval ratings are so low that even a majority of Republicans hope that someone else bests him in the primary. Charlie Crist, the former Republican governor who recently became a Democrat, is polling 14 points ahead of Scott in a theoretical matchup between the two.

To counter this, Rick Scott is hoping voters in Florida will believe he is in favor of expanding government, increasing education spending, helping voters to exercise their constitutional

rights, and caring for the state's fragile environment. But he is none of those things.

He has eviscerated the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, firing scores of experienced stewards of the public lands and replacing them with industry toadies who are ready to sell what is left of our waterways and pastoral lands to the highest bidder.

He has demonized state workers in general, and teachers in particular, as leeches on the collective body of the state, siphoning off hard-earned tax dollars he intimated they used for their "plush" lifestyles. And he besmirched these workers further by requiring them all to submit to random drug tests, a folly prudently blocked by the courts.


He has steadfastly refused to allow Florida's participation in the Affordable Care Act, sacrificing billions of dollars in federal assistance to implement the programs, and potentially costing hospitals — and their paying patients — even more billions by denying a needed expansion of the Medicaid program.

He has backed away from his pledge to create 700,000 new jobs in addition to those a recovering state economy would create anyway. He fudges the job creation numbers to make his record appear better than it is, but when unemployment data indicate he is not making much progress, he dismisses the figures as "federal numbers." Of course, his recent choice to head the Department of Economic Opportunity, a very important post when

OPINION

it comes to creating those promised 700,000 jobs, is a 32-year-old lawyer whose only experience in creating jobs is the government positions he has created for himself since graduating from law school.

The voters were clearly deceived by Scott in 2010 as borne out by his approval ratings throughout his first term. If he has his way, they will be deceived again next year.

But the voters' task in 2014 would be far easier if the real Rick Scott would please stand up ... and this ersatz humanitarian pretending to be our governor would disappear. 



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*.

UPCOMING CENTENNIAL OF THE RATIFICATION OF THE 16TH AMENDMENT PROMPTS REFLECTIONS ON DEATH AND TAXES



By David Staats
Columnist

COMMENTARY

Feb. 3, 2013, marks the centennial of the ratification of the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which created the federal income tax. And while taxes, along with death, may be inevitable, most people try to avoid both for as long as possible.

A Sarasota friend complained to me recently that his 2013 take-home pay is less than it was in 2012. He earns \$43,000 annually, putting him in the top 50 percent of American wage earners. A stalwart Democrat, my friend voted to

reelect the president to ensure, among other things, that the rich paid a hefty tax premium on their sizeable incomes. He had expected that his own taxes would decline as the rich shouldered more of the burden. His own tax obligation, he believed, should not have ballooned 18 percent overnight. It is unfair, he said.

Unfair or not, most middle class wage earners will pay more in taxes in 2013. According to the non-partisan, Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution's Tax Policy Center, 77

OPINION

percent of all U.S. households will face higher federal taxes this year. Individuals like my friend who earn \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year can look forward to an average increase of \$822, most of which is due to the expiration of the 2-percent Social Security payroll tax cut. The full weight of the costs associated with the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (Obamacare) has yet to be felt by middle class taxpayers. They will not have to wait long.

Tax hikes are never popular, especially when they come as surprises. Reactions by those affected vary widely. Last month former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, 58, announced plans to move to London to escape his socialist successor's proposed 75 percent tax on the country's very rich. Also in January, French actor Gérard Depardieu, 64, became a Russian citizen rather than submit to the confiscatory new taxes. Russia has a flat tax rate of 13 percent.

My friend said that he did not want, and in any case could not afford, to relocate to England or Russia. (He has left Florida only twice in his life — to visit his aunt in Mobile, AL.) But he also did not want to bring home less this year than he did last. Wisely, he went to his boss and explained the problem. His boss offered to increase his take-home pay to last year's level, as well as to add 2 percent to his take-home pay as a cost of living increase in recognition of the value of his contribution to the business.

Unwisely, some people choose to pay no income tax whatsoever. That decision can have undesired consequences. Orlando, FL-born actor Wesley Snipes, 50, known to many for his starring role in the *Blade* film series, was sentenced in 2008 by the Federal District Court in Ocala, FL, to three years of imprisonment for willfully failing to file tax returns. He was also ordered to pay \$17 million in taxes, penalties and interest.

Convicted of tax fraud in 1989, New York City hotelier Leona ("only the little people pay taxes") Helmsley (1920-2007) served four years in prison and was ordered to pay \$7.1 million in restitution.

In 1931, Chicago mobster Al Capone (1899-1947) was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment, five of which he spent in Alcatraz. Capone is quoted as having said at trial, "The income tax law is a lot of bunk. The government can't collect legal taxes from illegal money." Big Al was wrong.

On occasion tax policy has profoundly influenced the course of American history. British financial and tax policy toward the American colonies was a major cause of the American Revolution.

For example, the Tea Act was passed by Parliament on May 10, 1773, for the sole purpose of bailing out the financially distressed British East India Co. Established by royal charter in

OPINION

1600 with £72,000 contributed by 125 prominent investors, the company had 17 million pounds of unsold tea and was in urgent need of a “stimulus.” The act granted the company a monopoly on the American tea trade.

The company’s newly sanctioned exclusive rights allowed its tea to be sold directly and untaxed to colonial markets. Earlier it had been compelled to sell tea at auction in London, where it was taxed. The taxes would now be paid by the Colonials.

The company’s monopoly threatened the livelihood of American tea merchants. It was also a troubling precedent. If the tea trade were monopolized by order of Parliament, could not the textile or china trade be as well?


On the night of Dec. 16, 1773, members of the Sons of Liberty lightly disguised as a Mohawk raiding party rowed to three British merchant ships lying at anchor in Boston harbor, overpowered their crews and threw 340 chests containing 92,000 pounds of tea into the harbor’s frigid waters.

While the Tea Act may have been the final step in a procession of ill-considered British financial and tax policies toward the Colonies, the Stamp Act of 1765 was among the first. Briefly, the Stamp Act imposed for the first time a direct tax on the Colonists by requiring that legal documents, newspapers, pamphlets, etc., be exclusively printed on paper manufactured in England that carried an embossed tax

stamp. Further, these taxed documents had to be purchased in hard currency (pounds sterling) and not in Colonial paper script.

Reaction in the Colonies against the Stamp Act was swift and acute. Parliament repealed it on March 18, 1766. On that same day, however, Parliament also passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted Parliament’s “full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America ... in all cases whatsoever.” Many Colonists interpreted this to mean that further parliamentary acts of taxation over which they themselves would have no say were being contemplated. Its passage, together with subsequent missteps, set the colonies on an irreversible collision course with England.

Death is also taxed. More precisely, it is the “transferable estate” of a deceased person that is subject to taxation under federal law; that is, the Revenue Act of 1916, as amended. Federal estate taxes (or “death duties”) were repealed during the whole of 2010, but they have since been restored. The District of Columbia and several states impose their own death duties. Other states, like Florida, do not.

No one cheats death and few avoid the watchful scrutiny of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Both are lifelong companions on the road to reaching one’s destiny. But if you master your destiny, as someone quipped, you will find that there is a destiny tax waiting for you. 

Sarasota Leisure

Featuring



thisweekin

SARASOTA.com

SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR

'HUMANIZING'

ASK OTUS

Inside



chillounge[®]night

the ultimate outdoor lounge party

presents

"Return to Romance"



Triple Grammy Award Winner
Jon Secada

Valentine's Day 2013
February 14

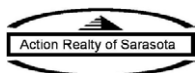
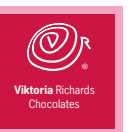
Enjoy the ultimate lounge experience at
the Powel Crosley Estate.

Ambiance, great music, fine food and
drinks. Special music performance by
Lotus Fire.

Purchase tickets at
www.chilloungenight.com



Mark your calendar for 6th annual Sarasota Chillounge Night — March 9, 2012





‘HUMANGELIZING’

Rabbi Adam Chalom gladly signs copies of Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine’s A Provocative People: A Secular History of the Jews for audience members who purchased it after he completed his lecture at The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee Jan. 17. All photos by Arielle Scherr

RABBI ADAM CHALOM CARRIES ON THE LEGACY OF A MAN WHO HAD A PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON HIS OWN LIFE AND WORK

By Tyler Whitson
Staff Writer

To say Rabbi Adam Chalom, dean for North America of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, has been incredibly busy the past several years is an understatement.

Not only is he a major leader for Humanistic Judaism, but he is also an academic scholar; author and lecturer; and the rabbi for the Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation in Chicago.

Chalom nonetheless marked off days on his crowded calendar for a trip to Sarasota Jan. 17-20, to lead traditional Jewish Shabbat and weekend services and to offer a series of ed-

ucational lectures for the Sarasota Congregation for Humanistic Judaism.

With a doctorate in Near Eastern Studies and a master’s degree in Hebrew and Jewish Cultural Studies — both from the University of Michigan — as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in Judaic Studies from Yale University, Chalom delivered talks on a variety of topics over the long weekend. They ranged from Jewish history based on archaeology and contemporary analysis to insights into the present realities of Jewish people and their cultures all over the world to the philosophical underpinnings and practical daily applications of Humanistic Judaism.

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM (SHJ)

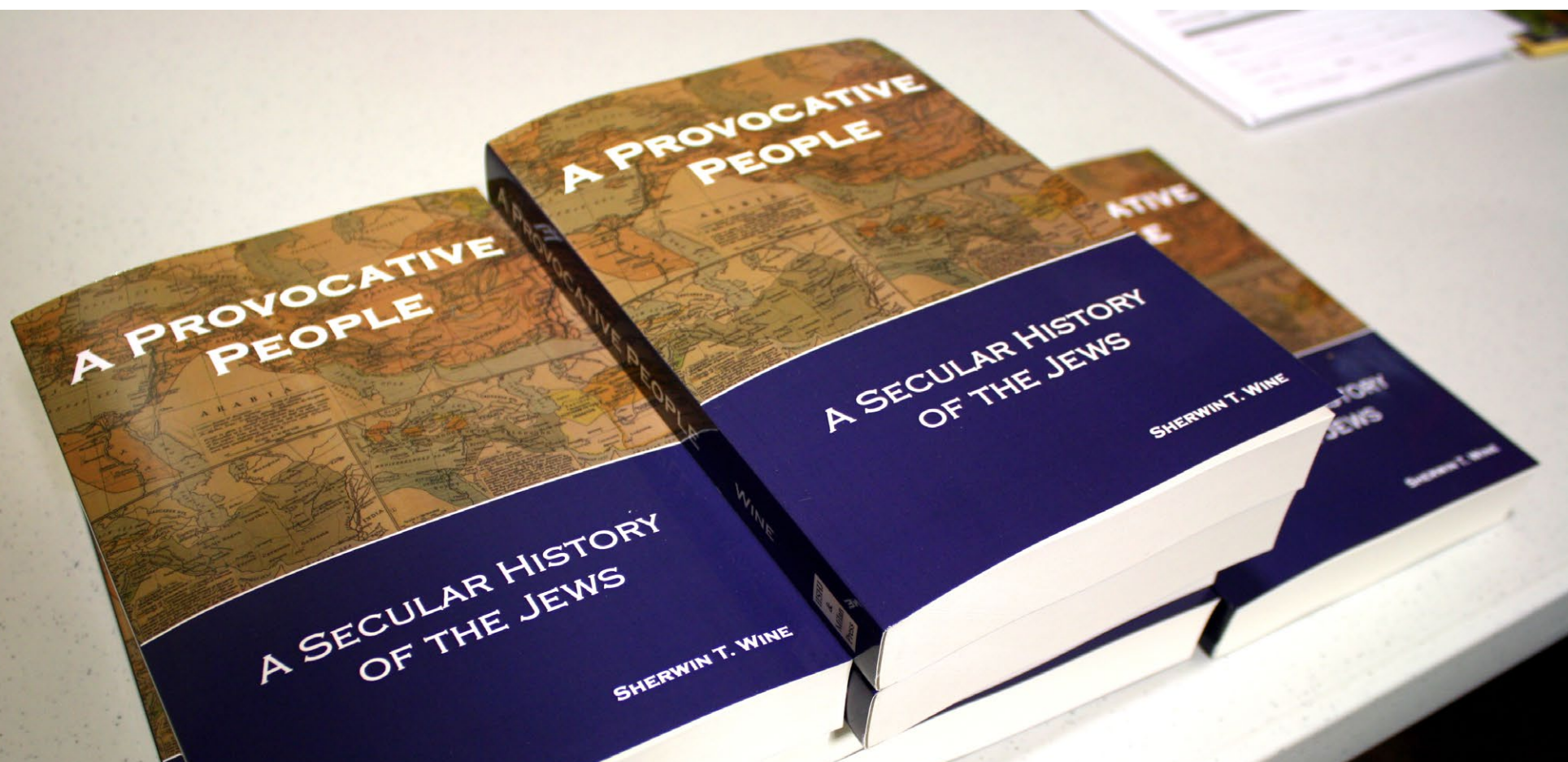
Chalom's lecture at The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee on Jan. 17 served as an introduction to the SHJ and the life and works of its founder, Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, who established the organization in 1969. Of particular focus was Wine's final book, *A Provocative People: A Secular History of the Jews*, which, though not finished at the time of Wine's passing in 2007, was published in June 2012 after Chalom edited it and wrote an introduction for it.

"Initially I was a bit trepidatious to tackle it," Chalom told the audience, describing his reaction when the manuscript found its way to his desk. "After all, it takes a certain amount of chutzpah to write a survey history of the Jews of all times and places," he said, eliciting chuckles from the crowd for his use of the Yiddish word for "audacity."

"It's another level of chutzpah to edit someone who's written a survey history of the Jews of all times and places."

In examining the book, Chalom — who had been taught, bar mitzvahed, confirmed, ordained and married by Wine — offered a brief overview of Wine's life leading up to the establishment of SHJ. He discussed Wine's traditional Jewish upbringing, extensive education in philosophy, training and ordination as a Rabbi and the formation of a philosophical viewpoint that would lay the foundation for the organization's teachings.

"Sherwin Wine took the pursuit of truth very seriously — truth in philosophy, truth in science, truth in the history of his people," Chalom said. "He ultimately found his calling, even though there was no one really on the other end of the phone, in the early 1960s," Chalom continued, "when he formed the Bir-



Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine's A Provocative People: A Secular History of the Jews, was published posthumously last year. The introduction, which Rabbi Adam Chalom wrote, describes the book as 'arguably Wine's magnum opus, the culmination of half a century of reading, writing and teaching on Jewish history and its meanings.'

mingham Temple, which became the first Humanistic Jewish Congregation in the world.”

Chalom explained that Wine followed three important conceptual steps, which inspired him to establish Humanistic Judaism. Wine began with the philosophical viewpoint that is also the basis of much humanistic thought, Chalom said: “We are the only conscious force for good in the universe.”

This means that there is no “benevolent divine personality directing or intervening in history,” Chalom said, “[that] the Jews created the Torah, not the other way around,” and, finally, that “Jewish survival is a function of tenacity, creativity and useful skills like literacy — not a miracle from above and beyond.”

Wine’s second step was “to find a way to apply this truth to Jewish life,” Chalom explained. “When you take that more secular approach, you’re willing to apply this lesson of a secular world to Jewish history; you are willing

and even eager to embrace new Jewish creativity and new Jewish culture,” he added. “It may also be the case that the new secularized reality of Jewish life is a natural outcome of Jewish history — even to be celebrated — and not a disaster.”

The third and final step was to continue the search for truth, “to begin to find out what really happened, to understand who Jews are today,” Chalom said. “What does archaeology really say about this period? Does it confirm what the Bible claims, or does it challenge what the Bible claims? Sometimes it does one and sometimes it does the other,” he continued. “A secular history can provide those kinds of fascinating insights into Jewish life, past and present.”

Chalom went on to explain how Humanistic Judaism relates to the current state of Judaism in the world. He put special focus on the increasing secularization of people of Jewish background in society, highlighting the con-



The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee, where Rabbi Adam Chalom’s lecture was held on the evening of Jan. 17, frequently hosts events at its headquarters in Sarasota and within the community. It describes its vision on its website, www.jfedsrq.org, as promoting ‘a vibrant Jewish community.’

trast between the decreasing proportions of those who follow orthodox laws or keep kosher and the relatively large proportion of those who continue to celebrate Hannukkah as a family holiday.

This trend, Chalom explained, could be viewed as signaling an opportunity for Humanistic Judaism, rather than as a loss for Judaism overall, because involvement in the community allows people of Jewish background an opportunity to hold onto their history, culture and traditions, even if they no longer believe in a supernatural power.

“When you look at Jewish history from a secular perspective, Jewish politics and economics can actually be more interesting than theology,” Chalom said. “It turns out religion is an important aspect, but it is just one aspect of a wide-ranging Jewish cultural experience.”

THE SHJ TODAY

On the afternoon of Jan. 18, Chalom sat down with *The Sarasota News Leader* for an extensive interview in which he provided further

details about Jewish people maintaining their cultural identities as well as other significant aspects of the SHJ and Humanistic Judaism overall in the modern world.

“What we’ve done,” Chalom said of Humanistic Judaism, “is take what people choose to do as connecting to being Jewish in a more secular way and make that the center of what they do, make that dignified and appropriate and meaningful and relevant.”

The idea, Chalom continued, is “to relate to how people actually already are Jewish rather than tell them to do things they’re not interested in doing anyways.”

This approach, he explained, has helped Jewish people who may have lost interest in Judaism as a religion find positive reasons to actively pursue or associate with their cultural heritage, something he said he has seen happen on many occasions.

Another aspect of the SHJ that attracts many people, Chalom said, is the community’s openness. The SHJ does not concern itself with



Rabbi Adam Chalom answers questions from the audience after completing his lecture at the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee on Jan. 17. Among the questions were those focused on statistics about how many Americans believe in a supernatural power, differing definitions of the word ‘secular’ and how members of the Society for Humanistic Judaism celebrate or observe traditional Jewish holidays.

beliefs, gender or sexual orientations, racial backgrounds or any other characteristics that could be discriminated against.

“We create a humanistic celebration of Jewish life, that’s what we do,” Chalom explained. “If you find that relevant, meaningful, inspirational, then that’s wonderful!”

As a humanistic organization that looks beyond questions of the supernatural, the SHJ emphasizes the positive potential and value of the members of its congregation. “We’re focused on what we can know, what we can do here and now,” Chalom said. “So you think there’s no personality intervening in the world. What next? What do you do now? How do you live a good life? How do you connect to your past?” he continued. “There’s so many more things to do than spend time worrying about what isn’t there, or at least what isn’t involved in your life if there may be something there.”

The time freed up by moving past these questions, Chalom explained, can be utilized in a number of ways, including examining Jewish culture — both historical and present-day — conducting academic or scientific research and providing aid or services to those in need.

“Most of our communities have either a community service or a social action committee that does works,” Chalom said when asked about the SHJ’s involvement in helping others.

“We absolutely try to involve ourselves in the world, at least in part because we don’t know that anyone or anything else is going to do it for us,” he added. “In the end, it does lead to a kind of human activist approach because you can’t rely on anyone else to do it.”

THE CONTINUOUS PATH

In addition to his work as a rabbi, lecturer and academic scholar, Chalom puts a substantial amount of effort into maintaining the membership of his congregation and promoting Humanistic Judaism as a whole, a process, he told the *News Leader*, he sometimes refers to as “humangelizing.”

“I think we’ve been steady for the last few years,” Chalom said in regard to membership of the SHJ: “Not growing, but not falling apart.”

Chalom explained that the organization had to reorient its structure after Wine’s death and that divvying up the founder’s responsibilities among the current leadership has been an intense process.

However, he said, the SHJ continues to push forward through the 21st century, adapting its outreach to new forms of social media, including Facebook and Twitter, releasing some of its publications in eBook-compatible formats and offering “freebies” as much as it possibly can to increase awareness.

As an organization funded largely through dues and donations, Chalom said, it is important that the SHJ strike the right balance between what can be given away for free and what should be sold, so it can continue to cover overhead costs and support its leaders financially.

Despite the challenges it has faced with the loss of its founder, Chalom is confident the SHJ will carry on its tenacious mission. “I’m still convinced,” he said, “that if we’re relevant and interesting, then we’ll continue to attract members.” 



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.

SarasotaNewsLeader.com • Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.



ASK OTUS

THE STORY OF ARDEA AND ALBA REACHES ITS FINAL CHAPTER

Dear Readers,

This is the end of Ardea's story. She and Alba remained a devoted pair for three breeding seasons, and each season they renewed their affections through courtship, mating and nesting.

One day Alba failed to return to the nest. I heard rumors he had died in a boating accident. This happened after two of their chicks had fledged and the third was about to do so. Ardea could still ensure the survival of the two older chicks.

Had Alba died a few days earlier, she could not have managed feeding all three on her own, and within minutes of her leaving the nest to hunt for their meals, her chicks would have been exposed and vulnerable to any predator seeking an easy takeout meal.

Fortunately, the next mating season, Ardea easily attracted another Alba and they nested together over the next two years.

Ardea is now dying. She is in her eighth year and has lived a longer-than-normal span of life for a Great Egret in the wild.

People often ask me if birds are capable of mourning or if they understand death and loss. The answer is that birds suffer terribly when they lose their mates or when a pair loses a nest.



Aging gracefully, Ardea grooms herself in the mangroves. File photo

It is not only the loss from the physical and emotional dependency on a mate or the investment and sacrifices made in order to procreate that are mourned, it is also the loss of tenderness experienced in a harsh, demanding and unforgiving world. Outside of its mate, trust and joyful intimacy do not exist in an adult Egret's life.

No one will mourn the loss of Ardea. She is old, barren and alone. Her children, even if not busy with their children and mates, would not even know her.

I spotted her several times at Turtle Beach Park. She is still immaculately groomed and lovely, but so pitifully thin. It is then I recall *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ardea, like Blanche, is relying more on the kindness of strangers. And people are ever so kind to her — fish scraps, sometimes even a whole pinfish from the fishermen; and picnickers toss her bits of

their hamburgers and chips. They are thrilled to have her come so close to their table and delight in taking photos of their children standing near her.

There is a very special time of evening, and it does not happen every evening, when the color of the sky exactly matches the color of the water and they blend to a dusky gloom where white objects suddenly appear opalescent and whiter than white. Mediterranean fishermen refer to this dusk as “the hour of the pearl.”

One such dusk, I flew back to my oak by the mangroves, the very same oak from which I first saw Ardea feistily pecking her way out of that turquoise-blue egg. She was deep inside the mangroves, grooming her glowing white feathers, one by one. I quickly flew away as that beak of hers was still a formidable weapon. That may have been the last time I ever saw her.



Ardea has had a full life since she hatched from one of those turquoise-blue eggs. Photo courtesy Rick Greenspun

The hesitation in that statement comes from my wonderful sojourn at the Sarasota Audubon's Celery Fields. There were so many *Ardea Alba* there — flocks of them were fishing, preening, merrily chasing one another; all vying for their very own places in the sun.

A couple of times I thought I caught a glimpse of *Ardea* in a certain strut, with a toss of the beak or glint in the eye. But it was not she.

Then the most wonderful thing happened to me. I suddenly awoke from a noon nap, looked into the skies and saw her gracefully

gliding right above me. The sun hit my eyes and I blinked. When I looked up again, there was only ...

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@sarasotanews-leader.com. Thank you.

SARASOTA AUDUBON



CELERY FIELDS

© Taj

Ardea flies through the Celery Fields. Photo used with kind permission of the Sarasota Audubon Society

Sir Frederick Ashton's

BIRTHDAY OFFERING

Plus **Between Longing & Yearning** by Jamie Carter
and the **World Premiere** of **Changing Light** by Will Tuckett

1, 2, 3 February 2013 | FSU Center

••• Attend the Evening Performance on Sunday, February 3
and you will automatically be entered into a drawing to win numerous prizes
including a 32" LCD TV! •••



PHOTO BY FRANK ATUPA

BOX OFFICE: 359-0099 x101 | SARASOTABALLET.ORG



The Venice High School Jazz Band will perform in Centennial Park in Venice on Feb. 3. Contributed photo

CENTENNIAL PARK TO HOST JOY OF JAZZ CONCERT

The Jazz Club of Sarasota's Joy of Jazz concert series will continue with the Venice High School Jazz Band and Kitt and Mike Moran on Sunday, Feb. 3, from 1:30 to 4 p.m. in Centennial Park in downtown Venice.

The concert is free, but donations will be accepted in support of the Jazz Club's scholarship fund, a news release says. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets.

Under the direction of Venice High School Band Director Jonathan Case, the 10-member Venice High School Jazz Band is an audition group that changes every school year, the release notes. This year's band includes a full rhythm section and features young musicians playing piano, bass, drums, guitar, trombone,

trumpet and sax. The band will be performing works by Charlie Parker, Thad Jones, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, George Gershwin and Neal Hefti.

Following its performance, jazz vocalist Kitt Moran and her husband, pianist Mike Moran, will take the stage, the release adds. The Morans have been regulars on the New York City jazz club circuit, performing at such venues as Michael's Pub, the Village Vanguard, The Blue Note and Shanghai Jazz, the release continues. Kitt Moran has opened for Jay Leno, Rodney Dangerfield and Jackie Mason and has performed with a number of other jazz greats, it notes.

Bassist Dominic Mancini and drummer Dane Hassan will join the Morans; the quartet will perform songs by their friend, Dave Frishberg, and other jazz standards, the release says.

“This concert lineup showcases the present and future of the rich tradition of jazz music in our community,” says Bill Beckman, a Jazz Club of Sarasota board member and producer

of this series, in the release. “It should be a perfect way to kick off Super Bowl Sunday!”

The 2012-2013 Joy of Jazz series will conclude on March 17 with Ron Kraemer and the Hurricanes.

For more information about the Jazz Club of Sarasota, call 366-1552 or visit www.jazz-clubsarasota.org.



Kitt and Mike Moran will perform in the Joy of Jazz Concert on Feb. 3. Contributed photo

THE COLUMNIST OPENS FEB. 1 AT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Florida Studio Theatre will present David Auburn's *The Columnist*, the story of noted political writer Joseph Alsop's fall from power in the 1960s, in the Keating Theatre from Friday, Feb. 1, through April 7.

"For decades, political columnist Joseph Alsop was beloved, feared and courted in equal measure by the people whose careers he determined," an FST press release says. "He sat at the center of Washington life as one of the most powerful journalists in the country," it adds.

Based on the true events of his life, *The Columnist* explores the turmoil of the '60s, the Vietnam conflict "and the profound personal cost of Joe Alsop's political involvement at a time of dizzying change," the release points out.

Auburn, whose Tony and Pulitzer Prize Award-winning *Proof* dazzled critics and audiences alike, "brings this riveting story to the stage," the release notes. The show is being directed by FST Associate Director Kate Alexander.

"*The Columnist* is a refreshing play, full of intrigue and passion," Alexander says in the release. During the period it covers, she adds, "Every aspect of our lives changed; every institution, from the very personal, such as marriage, to our grand institutions, such as our government. Powerful people and powerful organizations once thought sacrosanct were brought down. A quest for 'the truth' emerged from the youth generation and a new idea of 'truth' was born."

The cast includes returning FST favorites Jeff Plunkett as Joe Alsop, Rachel Moulton as Susan Mary Alsop, Rob Gomes as Stewart Alsop and Seth Teegarden as Philip. New faces to the FST stage will be John Keabler as Andrei, Marie Claire Roussel as Abigail and Michael Zlabinger as Halberstam, the release adds.

Single tickets are \$18 to \$36. Season subscriptions are still available. Tickets may be purchased from the FST box office in person, (1241 N. Palm Ave.), by calling 366-9000 or going online at FloridStudioTheatre.org.



Jeffrey Plunkett is Joseph Alsop in *The Columnist* at Florida Studio Theatre. Contributed photo by Brian Braun.

ART UPTOWN TO FEATURE WORKS OF SHARON STEWART

The mixed-media/collage works of Sarasota artist Sharon Stewart are being featured in a month-long, one-woman show under way at Art Uptown, 1367 Main St., Sarasota.

An artist's reception is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 8, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the gallery. The public is invited.

Before moving to Sarasota 20 years ago, the self-taught artist was active in the Michigan art scene for a dozen years, serving in leadership positions for several arts organizations, a news release says. Her works, which have earned numerous awards, are held in private collections across the U.S. and around the world, it adds.

Stewart notes that much of the art she creates is done on a commission basis. She offers home consultation, custom design and individual color choices. She offers visits to her Sarasota studio by appointment, the release points out.



Sharon Stewart/Contributed photo

"She has worked with a wide range of creative media, including clay, pencil, wood, fabric, oils, acrylics and pastels," the release says. "Today she primarily works with mixed media on canvas and three-dimensional collage for home décor," some on gallery-wrapped canvas as large as 60 inches by 48 inches, using acrylics and collage techniques, the release notes.

"I love to create something that catches your eye as you enter a room and makes you stop, look and then move closer to experience the richness of the compositions," she says in the release.

Stewart's featured exhibit will run through Feb. 23 at Art Uptown, Sarasota's oldest cooperative fine art gallery, representing the work of 28 area artists.

The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. During the monthly First Friday Gallery Walks on Palm and Main streets, evening hours are 6 to 9 p.m.

For more information, call 955-5409 or visit www.artuptown.com.



Inner Circles is among the Sharon Stewart artwork on exhibit at Art Uptown. Contributed photo

FIRST CHURCH TO HOST EVENT WITH VOCALIST ROBIN FERNANDEZ

First United Methodist Church, 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota, will host *An Evening of Dinner and Music with Robin Fernandez* on Friday, Feb. 15, at 6 p.m.

Fernandez has performed in musical theater in Europe, New York City and other major U.S. cities, a news release says. She also has appeared locally at the Asolo Repertory and Venice theatres, the release notes.

The evening's performance will include excerpts from her one-woman show, *That Thing Called Love*, the release adds. Liz Goldstein, First Church's director of music, will accompany Fernandez.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 10 and under. The reservation deadline is Monday, Feb. 11. For tickets or additional information, contact the church office at 955-0935.

FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE ANNOUNCES POETRY LIFE WEEKEND

"Running on the fuel of last year's successful event, The Favorite Poem Project," this spring will bring Poetry Life Weekend to Sarasota, Florida Studio Theatre has announced.

Scheduled for May 3 and 4, "the weekend will provide memorable opportunities for students, educators and any others who love poetry," allowing them to listen to and celebrate works by individuals in the Sarasota community and notable guest poets, a news release says.

"The weekend will be a culmination of several months' work in cultivating the love of poetry in Sarasota," the release adds. Leading the events will be two honored guests: Naomi Shihab Nye and W.S. Merwin. "Nye is a prize-winning poet dedicated to exploring her Palestinian-American heritage, and Merwin, a two-time Pulitzer winner and former U.S. poet laureate, is known for his prolific work and penetrating themes," the release adds.

"Nye and Merwin will explore their work and methods with teachers at a dinner honoring

community educators," the release notes. Students will have the chance to submit their own work to present to the poets for the Student Poetry Readings part of the weekend, the release adds.

All members of the community are encouraged to submit their favorite poems — written by an established poet — for the opportunity to participate as part of the Favorite Poem Reading, the release says. In addition, teachers are invited to perform in a Teacher Poetry Slam.

Details and applications may be found at co-sponsor Bookstore1Sarasota, 1359 Main St., Sarasota, or at www.bookstore1sarasota.com.

The weekend will conclude with a dinner and celebration of poetry with Nye and Merwin to raise money for local educators, the release says. "These funds will aid educators in their efforts to grow and foster poetry in Sarasota classrooms," it notes.

CONCERT ASSOCIATION TO PRESENT THE VIENNA BOYS CHOIR

The Sarasota Concert Association's 2013 *Great Performers Series* will continue with the acclaimed Vienna Boys Choir on Feb. 12 at 8 p.m. at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, the association has announced.

The Vienna Boys Choir comprises boys ages 10 to 14 who are trebles and altos based in Vienna, a news release says. They are divided into four touring choirs — named for Bruckner, Haydn, Mozart and Schubert — and they perform about 300 concerts each year, the release adds.

During the Sarasota concert, the choir will perform more than 15 songs, including selections by Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Rob-

ert Schumann and Johann Strauss, as well as folk songs from Austria and other parts of the world, the release notes.

The *Great Performers* season will continue with violinist and local resident James Ehnes, accompanied by pianist Andrew Armstrong, on Tuesday, Feb. 26, the release notes.

Ehnes has been called the “Jascha Heifetz of our day,” while Armstrong is an award-winning artist who has given solo performances at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, the release points out.

Tickets are \$40, \$50, \$60 and \$70. Tickets and information for the series are available by calling 955-0040 or visiting www.scasarasota.org.



The Vienna Boys Choir will perform at the Van Wezel on Feb. 13. Contributed photo

VIOLINISTS AND HARPIST TO PERFORM IN *MUNCHTIME MUSICALE*

Violinists Dan Jordan and Chung-Yon Hong and harpist Cheryl Losey, members of the Sarasota Orchestra, will present a *Munchtime Musicales* performance on Feb. 20 at noon in David Cohen Hall inside the Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center, 709 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.

Sponsored by the Sarasota Concert Association, the concert is free and open to the public.

The three musicians will present a selection of duets and trios encompassing music from the Baroque period through the 20th century, a news release says. Among the highlights will be Bach's *Double Concerto*, with the harp playing the role of the orchestra; Massenet's *Meditation*, from the opera *Thais*; and tangos by Astor Piazzola, the release notes.

Jordan has been a concertmaster of the Sarasota Orchestra and a member of the Saraso-



Dan Jordan/Contributed photo


ta String Quartet since 1998. “He was also concertmaster at the New World Symphony’s 20th anniversary alumni concert in Miami, an achievement that he considers a high point in his career,” the release points out.

Hong joined the Sarasota Orchestra in 2002, the release says. “An avid traveler, Hong lived in South Korea, England and Australia before landing in New York, where she earned both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree from The Juilliard School,” the release adds. She spent the past two summers playing the 10-week summer season for the prestigious Santa Fe Opera, it notes.

Losey began playing harp at age 5, and she has been fascinated “by the seemingly infinite possibilities of the instrument’ ever since,” the release points out. She joined the Sarasota Orchestra in 2008.

In addition to performing in 18 countries on four continents — in such venues as Carnegie Hall and the Sydney Opera House — Losey is a past winner of the Alice Rosner Prize at the Munich International Competition, “one of the music world’s most prestigious contests,” the release adds.

Munchtime Musicales is a series of free concerts featuring performances by high-caliber, area-based artists, the release notes. The series is designed to offer a wide variety of musical genres, including classical, folk and jazz, with both vocal and instrumental performers.

All performances are at noon at the Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center in Sarasota. Seating is open; no reservations are taken. For more information about *Munchtime Musicales*, call 351-7467 or visit www.scasarasota.org. 



Cheryl Losey/Contributed photo



Chung Yon Hong/Contributed photo



Gilad Schalit (left) and Dr. Gershon Baskin/Contributed photo

TEMPLE TO HOST SHOWING OF *THE SECRET CONDUIT TO FREEDOM*

J Street and Temple Sinai will present Dr. Gershon Baskin lecturing on *The Secret Conduit to Freedom — the Story of Negotiations between Israel and Hamas To Free Gilad Schalit* at 3 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 3.

Baskin is the veteran peace activist “who was instrumental in creating the breakthrough that brought the abducted soldier Gilad Schalit home safely” after Schalit was held as a prisoner of Hamas for more than five years, a news release says.

“A long line of diplomats from Egypt, Germany, France, Turkey and other countries tried for more than five years to reach a deal between Israel and Hamas to free Schalit,” the release points out. Baskin “will share the details and fascinating story of the secret and direct channels of talk that were held with Hamas,” the release notes.

This program is free and open to the public; however, reservations to jstreet.org/signup/

[Sarasota](#) would be appreciated, the release says.

J Street is a somewhat controversial organization, the release points out. Though it is pro-Israel, it believes “that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the single best chance we have to secure Israel’s future as a Jewish democracy,” the release says.

Rabbi Geoffrey Huntting of Temple Sinai is a member of J Street’s Rabbinic Council, the release adds

A Super Bowl party with big-screen viewing and food will follow the presentation, the release continues. The cost of the dinner is \$20. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to 924-1802. For more information visit TempleSinaiSpeaker@gmail.com.

Temple Sinai is located at 4631 South Lockwood Ridge Road in Sarasota. It welcomes guests, the release points out. For more information about the temple, visit Templesinai-sarasota.org.

SHABBAT ALIVE! RETURNS TO TEMPLE EMANU-EL FEB. 8

Shabbat Alive! — an all-musical celebration of Shabbat featuring upbeat, contemporary arrangements of the traditional prayers — will return to Temple Emanu-El on Friday, Feb. 8, at 7:30 p.m., the Temple has announced.

The Temple is located at 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota. Conducted by a full band of professional and volunteer musicians and vocalists, *Shabbat Alive!* has become one of Temple Emanu-El's signature programs, a news release says. This installment of *Shabbat Alive!* will feature the music of Rick Recht, "one of the leading young composers of Jewish popular and sacred music," the release adds. The

public "is warmly invited to this unique and inspiring service," the release says.

The *Shabbat Alive!* service will be preceded by a catered Shabbat dinner at 6:15 p.m. Paid reservations for the dinner are due by Feb. 4, the release adds; the cost is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 6-12, with no charge for children under 6.

Reservations may be mailed to Dinner Committee, Temple Emanu-El, 151 McIntosh Road, Sarasota, Florida 34232.

The *Shabbat Alive!* service is free, with no reservations required.

For more information, call 371-2788. 



(Top row, from left) Temple Emanu-El Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman, Sam Silverberg, Deborah Cameron, Dawn Dill; (bottom row, from left) Dan Cartlidge, Stuart Miller, music director Cynthia Roberts-Greene and Joe Bruno will lead the *Shabbat Alive!* service on Feb. 8 at Temple Emanu-El.



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

01
FEB

Jazz Club of Sarasota presents *Skip Conkling's Dixie Mix*

Feb. 1, 2 to 4 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, 3975 Fruitville Road. Tickets: \$7 for members/\$12 for non-members. Information: 366-1552 or jazzclubsarasota.org.

01
FEB

***Old Friends, New Paintings* — a show featuring artists Craig Rubadoux and Robert Baxter**

Feb. 1, 6 to 8:30 p.m., opening reception at the Dabbert Gallery, 76 S. Palm Ave.; free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

02
FEB

FST Improv

Feb. 2 & 8, 8:30 p.m.; Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Admission: \$12. Information: 366-9000 or floridastudiotheatre.org.

04
FEB

Author Yue Chi discusses her world travels

Feb. 4, 6 p.m., Bookstore1Sarasota, 1359 Main Street
Free admission. Information: 365-7900 or www.bookstore1sarasota.com

08
FEB

WSLR presents Richard Smith and Julie Adams

Feb. 8, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$12 (\$15 at door); buy tickets at WSLR.org.

09
FEB

Philadelphia Orchestra with pianist Andre Watts

Feb. 9, 8 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Admission: \$30-150; 953-3368 or VanWezel.org.

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

SPANISH MOSS AT SPANISH POINT

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

The Sarasota News Leader

Issued 04/01/2012

Expires 12/31/2013

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



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.