

THE SARASOTA

February 8, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

CITY COMMISSION WRAP-UP

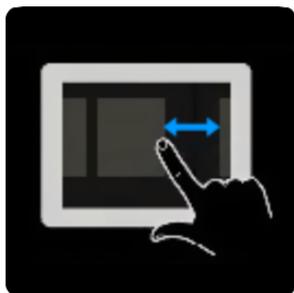
MAKING THEIR CASES

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

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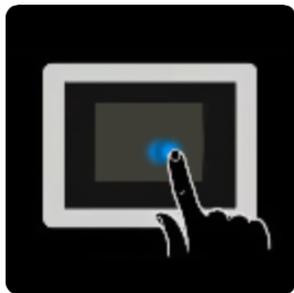
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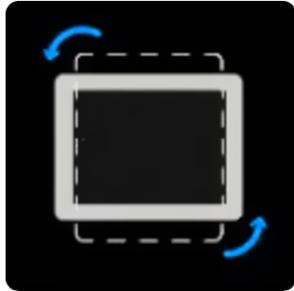
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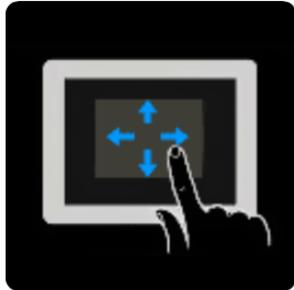
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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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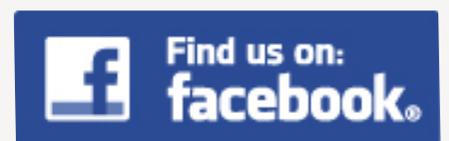
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Welcome

Our desire from the very early days of *The Sarasota News Leader* has been to provide stories you will not find elsewhere and to highlight events and people deserving of more attention than they have received in other news media. This week's issue perhaps offers more emphasis on the second part of that goal.

Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker has written a touching article about the strong support of the Baltimore Orioles for the Miracle League of Manasota: Orioles All Star pitcher Jim Johnson explains very clearly the team's motivation in helping to create a wonderful, safe environment where children and adults with special needs can play baseball.

Sports pundits use a lot of ink and airtime to complain about overpaid, spoiled athletes. When you read this story, you will have nothing but admiration for what Johnson and his teammates are doing.

On a very different subject: Scott Proffitt took the time to attend the first Ken Thompson Day celebration in the city of Sarasota. While Scott does a wonderful job of covering the School Board for us, he also has a tremendous love for this community's history. Fortunately, he has been more than willing to share that love with readers by covering Historical Society of Sarasota County panel discussions over the past months. The Thompson Day story is another fine effort to help us all understand more about this community and the people who helped mold it.

Finally, you do not have to be a fan of ballet to appreciate critic Elinor Rogosin's articles about Sarasota Ballet performances. Elinor has such a fascinating background — and so much expertise in the world of dance — that we should feature her in a story one day. In the meantime, if you want to read a very well written review, take a look this week at her *Very pleasant surprises*.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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PHOTO CREDITS

Front cover - Sarasota Sunset - Norm Schimmel
Sarasota Leisure - Spanish Point Tranquility - Norm Schimmel

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CITY COMMISSION WRAP-UP

Domestic violence measures narrowly win approval, while the city attorney wrestles with tangled legal questions — Stan Zimmerman

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The proposal came from the city's Independent Police Advisory Panel, and it concerned details of court-ordered injunctions in domestic violence cases. If a spouse petitions a judge for help from an abusive husband (in rare cases, it could be an abusive wife), the judge issues an injunction ordering the husband to stay away from the wife.

However, if deputies cannot hand the husband the necessary court papers, the injunction dies because it was not served. Eileen Normile with the advisory panel also proposed the injunction be accompanied by a civil search warrant to seize threatening weapons in the home. ([Full story here](#))



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On Feb. 2, the six candidates faced one of their most critical audiences, members of the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations. These are the men and women who are elected to lead their neighborhoods, and they often help their neighbors figure out whom to support in the elections. They know the issues and are passionate about their city. ([Full story here](#))



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THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

The County Commission gives the City Commission a mid-April deadline to determine whether support exists for a bus rapid transit system — Rachel Brown Hackney

Facing a federal deadline and the risk of jeopardizing federal funding for its existing bus system, the Sarasota County Commission voted unanimously on Tuesday, Feb. 5, to give the Sarasota City Commission until April 15 to determine whether it has sufficient constituent interest to support the pursuit of a bus rapid transit (BRT) system for the community.

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who made the motion, characterized the creation of new land-use plans to make a BRT viable — along with the transportation system itself — as means to generate the necessary revenue to save the city from fiscal collapse.

“This all comes down to [the fact that] vibrant, successful, desirable cities make great counties, and we want a great city of Sarasota,” Barbetta said. “That’s why we are here at the table, asking for some help and some input on whether this is a viable plan.” ([Full story here](#))



WHERE IDEAS GO TO DIE

Analysis: City, County commissioners consult without conclusions — Stan Zimmerman

About once a year the Sarasota City and County commissions sit together and try to work out common solutions to common problems. This week, once again, the venue was the “Think Tank” on the third floor of the Sarasota County Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard.

The room had lots of seats, plenty of video screens and even historical panels on the wall to lend perspective to the hardball discussions. Only four items were on the Tuesday, Feb. 5, agenda. And only one — maybe — “got fixed.”

Efforts to resolve the homeless problem, the creation of a bus rapid transit (BRT) system, extending the term of the Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency, and stormwater drainage issues in north county all were on the agenda. ([Full story here](#))



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GRANDSON OF DROD

Greater density on the drawing board for downtown — Stan Zimmerman

First there was DROD, then Son of DROD. And now a third generation is stirring, Grandson of DROD.

No, this is not a Japanese movie serial in which a monster stomps on cardboard constructions and people flee for their lives.

This is an old squeaking wheel coming back to life: how to create affordable housing downtown.

DROD stands for Downtown Residential Overlay District, a two-year experiment that permitted developers to jump to 200 dwelling units per acre instead of their having to adhere to the cap of 50 per acre allowed in the city's comprehensive plan — except nobody tried it.

By allowing increased density, city planners and the City Commission wanted to see if developers might propose building smaller units — but a lot more of them — to bring prices down — or build large rental complexes.

The DROD expired long ago, and only one builder — Chris Brown — gave the idea a spin, but he decided on a conventional mixed-use condominium we now call 1350 Main. ([Full story here](#))



LESS ENERGY EQUALS MORE MONEY

The Sarasota County Schools realize \$16 million in savings through a five-year program to reduce energy consumption — Scott Proffitt

A five-year contract initiated by the Sarasota County School Board with Cenergistic Inc. (formerly Energy Education Inc.) has resulted in savings of \$16 million, the school district has announced.

The Sarasota News Leader caught up with the district's chief operating officer, Scott Lempe, to see how he felt about the program and find out what is next.

“First of all, just because our contract is up, doesn't mean our relationship with Cenergistic stops,” Lempe said. “The contract with us financially, where they get 30 percent of the savings, has ended, but our relationship otherwise will continue. So I see us still meeting with their mechanical engineers and see them informing us of new technologies and developments they have learned from other sites,” Lempe added.

“We are at the front end of a very long relationship with Cenergistic,” he pointed out. ([Full story here](#))



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CITY COMMISSION WRAP-UP

The City Commission listens to public comments during an October 2012 meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MEASURES NARROWLY WIN APPROVAL, WHILE THE CITY ATTORNEY WRESTLES WITH TANGLED LEGAL QUESTIONS

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

A set of recommendations for the Florida Legislature won Sarasota City commission approval by the barest of margins on Feb. 4.

By a 3-2 vote, the commissioners agreed to seek other partners to strengthen their political clout to push changes to state law in the 2014 legislative session, which begins in March.

The proposal came from the city's Independent Police Advisory Panel, and it concerned details of

court-ordered injunctions in domestic violence cases. If a spouse petitions a judge for help from an abusive husband (in rare cases, it could be an abusive wife), the judge issues an injunction ordering the husband to stay away from the wife.

“*Seizing property under a civil action is iffy. Are we going to confiscate all the kitchen knives?*”

Shannon Snyder
Commissioner
City of Sarasota

However, if deputies cannot hand the husband the necessary court papers, the injunction dies because it was not served. Eileen Normile with the advisory panel also proposed the injunc-

tion be accompanied by a civil search warrant to seize threatening weapons in the home.

“When a woman testifies she’s been threatened with weapons, the judge writes on the injunction to ask the person to surrender them voluntarily,” she said.

The third element for which Normile requested commission support was a push to eliminate the virtually automatic “sunset” of such an injunction after one year.

Commissioner Shannon Snyder asked Sarasota Police Capt. Lucius Bonner for statistics: “How many deaths did we have in the city from firearms in a domestic violence case in the past five years?”

“I don’t have that number, but I will get it,” said Bonner. “We need to get as many people as we can behind this. The judges and lawyers and as many stakeholders as we can.”

The proposals were strongly supported by Vice Mayor Willie Shaw. “Having my sister killed 18 years ago by domestic violence, I am adamantly supporting you,” he said. “I raised three girls without a mother because of this. It is of great importance that we stay ahead, on the cutting edge.”

Mayor Suzanne Atwell mentioned her career experiences in handling domestic violence cases as a mental health counselor. “We need to stay in the forefront,” she said.



The Marina Jack complex on the bayfront has won City Commission approval to take over 275 parking spaces, with a city manager sign-off, for special events. Photo by Norman Schimmel

However, Snyder was unconvinced. “Seizing property under a civil action is iffy. Are we going to confiscate all the kitchen knives?” he asked. “Almost one-third of these cases are *nolle prossed* [by the State Attorney’s Office].”

“We are going in the right direction,” Snyder continued. “Domestic violence homicides are down. But the person serving the restraining order is the one most affected. To tote and store all these seized items, that is outside what we should be involved in as a city.”

The commission approved moving forward in terms of drafting a resolution for the Legislature, in collaboration with the State Attorney’s Office, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office and other municipalities. Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Snyder were in the minority on the 3-2 vote.

JUDGE SMACKS CITY OVER SIGN WAVING

City Attorney Bob Fournier put two thorny problems before the commissioners Monday. On Feb. 1, 12th Judicial Circuit Judge Rick DeFuria ordered a temporary injunction on the city, banning interference with anybody standing in public right of way with a sign.

Fournier knew the ordinance — dating from the 1960s — would probably be held unconstitutional on free speech grounds, so he sent an email last September to the Police Department, recommending officers not enforce it. He also began the process to repeal the ordinance, which passed the first reading on Jan. 7.

While the second reading, which would confirm the repeal, was scheduled for Jan. 22, city

police arrested a man in the public right of way on Jan. 17 for holding up a sign saying. “Stranded and Hungry,” and put him in jail for five days.

The Sarasota chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union has been “watchdogging” the city Police Department’s treatment of homeless and vagrant people; it jumped on the case. Meanwhile, four days after getting out of jail, the man took his sign to the intersection of Washington Boulevard and Fruitville Road. Although he was not arrested, he was told twice to “move on” by the police.

DeFuria heard the case the next day. Fournier said this second incident “tipped the scales for the judge, and that’s why this injunction says these people can’t be told to move along because they are exercising their First Amendment rights.”

Fournier is in a jam only the law could create. He is forced to defend an ordinance he knows is unconstitutional and will be repealed. Yet, he does not want the city to remain under a permanent injunction, because that greatly complicates writing and passing a new and presumably constitutional ordinance regarding public safety.

Fournier suggested the City Commission give him authority to appeal DeFuria’s injunction, because the law provides only a 30-day window within which to file an appeal. In addition, he wants to meet with the ACLU chapter to see if its members will ask DeFuria to drop the injunction.

The commissioners agreed to the “talk first, appeal if necessary” tactic.

GOODWILL GETS A CO

Fournier's second legal tangle was how to grant a final certificate of occupancy to the new Goodwill store on the North Tamiami Trail.

The builder was sued by neighbors in the 12th Judicial Circuit Court after the Sarasota Planning Board gave its approval to the site plan. Circuit Judge Lee Haworth found the neighbors did not have standing to file the suit and dismissed it. The neighbors then appealed to the District Court of Appeal, which agreed to rule on the case.

While the court case(s) were ongoing, the developer decided — at his own risk — to continue construction of the store. He and the city signed an “agreement to issue permits.” Now construction is complete, and a temporary certificate of occupancy has been issued. But that is not good enough for the developer to get financing on the completed building. At the same time, the tenant — Goodwill — would like to move in and get its business up and running, but it is leery of operating in a building with a temporary occupancy permit.

Fournier said he does not normally second-guess judicial decisions, but it is possible the appeals court could rule in the neighbors' favor and send the case back to Circuit Court for trial. In turn, that could result in a judge again finding in favor of the neighbors — meaning the building could possibly be torn down or repurposed to a legal use. And that would probably violate the financing agreements.

City Commissioner Terry Turner moved to withhold the final certificate of occupancy until the city receives a letter from the bank's lawyer acknowledging the issue is in the courts, or put a stamp on the certificate saying the same thing. The motion passed unanimously.

LAUREL PARK PLAT, PARKING PLANS OK'D

It is the first new “subdivision” plat to be filed in years, and it was approved unanimously for one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. “The Homes of Laurel Park” will provide 18 platted lots for new single-family homes.

The area can be explosively touchy for a developer, but only two people showed up on the issue, and both blessed the new subdivision.

Former Laurel Park President Kate Lowman said, “To date it seems they have every intention of doing a good project that will add to the neighborhood.”

In another neighborhood matter, the city commissioners spurned a unanimous Planning Board negative vote and approved “tandem parking” for Golden Gate Point.

“There are many properties that could use tandem parking,” said Commissioner Turner.

The commissioners also approved a zoning code change that allows people to park cars one-behind-the-other, as many families do in narrow driveways.

Golden Gate's neighborhood association opposed tandem parking, saying it would lead

to residents parking on the street so both cars could be used easily.

City Planner Cliff Smith said staff is looking at tandem parking for the proposed North Trail Overlay District. "Tandem parking is a tool," he said. "It's not unusual to park one behind the other in a driveway. It's used all the time."

While the commissioners agreed to the plan, they added a four-year "sunset" to it. At that time, the city can reexamine the impact.

"This is about smaller, more compact cities. It is about density," said Mayor Suzanne Atwell.

And the commission unanimously granted administrative approval for Marina Jack Inc., by

Bayfront Park, to take over 275 parking spaces for special events, if the city manager approves a specific request. Right now anything more than 175 spaces requires City Commission approval. Normally, the restaurant and marina business has 84 dedicated spaces.

Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown told the commission administration approval is not automatic. "There have been times when it's been denied, when it doesn't meet the need," he said.

The commissioners will get one more chance to look over the new plan. It will come back for final approval in the "consent" section of an upcoming agenda. 



The Laurel Park neighborhood will see new development, thanks to City Commission action on Feb. 4. Photo by Norman Schimmel

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MAKING THEIR CASES



City Commission Candidate Kelvin Lumpkin has the mike. Next to him – and going down the row – are Suzanne Atwell, Richard Dorfman, Pete Theisen, Linda Holland and Susan Chapman. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATES SHADOWBOX IN FRONT OF THEIR NEIGHBORS

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

The City of Sarasota seems to conduct “retail” elections, through which an office is won or lost by a handful of votes. And many voters rely on their better-informed neighbors to guide them on their choices.

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On Feb. 2, the six candidates faced one of their most critical audiences, members of the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations. These are the men and women who are elected to lead their neighborhoods, and they often help their neighbors figure out whom to support in the elections. They know the issues and are passionate about their city.

This was one of the earliest candidate forums of the season, so the campaigners were not yet stuck in verbal ruts or wedded to certain issues. Campaigning was still fun, and it showed.

THE BIG ISSUES?

The forum encompassed six candidates, 11 questions, 90 minutes, a full house and one news reporter.

Question one: “What are the main issues facing the city?”

Kelvin Lumpkin: “Crime and violence in North Sarasota, the looming budget crisis, finding an honorable solution for our homeless.”

Suzanne Atwell: “The State Street [parking] garage; break the impasse over the Quay [property, which remains undeveloped in the

wake of the Great Recession]; reinvigorate the cultural district; more mixed-use on North Trail; and revitalize Rosemary.”

Richard Dorfman: “How we treat our homeless, how we deal with policing. The single overriding issue is fiscal health. A no-growth attitude isn’t the road to health. You’re going to be paying more in taxes; count on it.”

Pete Theisen: “I also spoke with [City Finance Director Chris] Lyons. He didn’t tell me we had to double taxes. He did say we were funding an awful lot of things that are not core government functions. In other words, there’s fat in our funding.”

Linda Holland: “The three things I’m committed to work on: a balance between the development community and our neighborhoods; we need to provide quality public safety; third, we need to promote our cultural, educational and environmental assets. We could do a better job on that.”

Susan Chapman: “Maintain our high quality of life. Economic development. Government stability. Our quality of life is the goose that lays the golden eggs; it’s why most of us came here. We should not compromise our standards for economic development.”

WHO ARE THEY?

In a nutshell, three of the candidates are retirees: Atwell, Dorfman and Theisen. Atwell was a clinical psychologist; Dorfman was a sports promoter; Theisen was an acupuncturist. Three hold down jobs: Lumpkin is a Protestant church leader; Holland is a property manager; Chapman is an attorney.

How long have they been here, and where do they live? Lumpkin was born here and lives in north Sarasota. Holland has 30-plus years in Gillespie Park. Chapman has more than 20 years in town; she lives near Hudson Bayou.

Atwell has been in town less than 20 years and lives on Bird Key. Theisen lives in Alta Vista near Payne Park and has also lived in Sarasota less than 20 years. Dorfman is the only condominium resident (near the North Tamiami Trail Publix) and has been in town about four years.

Four of the candidates have run for City Commission at least once before: Atwell, Dorfman, Theisen and Holland. Chapman previously ran for a judgeship. Lumpkin is making his first run for public office.

THE ‘MOMENTS’

The big anti-incumbent moment during the CCNA debate involved responses to a question about the sale of city parkland at the Beneva and Fruitville roads intersection to Benderson Development Co. Five of the six candidates had unflattering things to say about the proposed \$1 million sale.

The “fan-dance” moment went to the only incumbent in the race — Atwell: “Yes it was a 3-2 vote, and certainly I value parkland. But this is a very different case.”

The diplomatic moment went to Chapman. She was the first to respond to a very clever question: Since voters can vote for two, who is your second choice?

With almost no pause, she responded: “I choose Linda [Holland] because of her history in the community. And I choose Pete [Theisen] because he makes me laugh. And I choose Suzanne [Atwell] because she has the soft skills. I choose Kelvin [Lumpkin] because of his commitment to the High Point [N.C. community policing] strategy. And I choose Richard [Dorfman] for his show business skills and good listening.”

The other five were basically speechless after that. 

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

This may take a while.

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THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

The bus rapid transit system in Portland, OR, is one of the premier systems in the United States, according to Sarasota County staff. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE COUNTY COMMISSION GIVES THE CITY COMMISSION A MID-APRIL DEADLINE TO DETERMINE WHETHER SUPPORT EXISTS FOR A BUS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

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“*Do I think the city is emotionally ready to do this? The answer's, 'No.'*”

Shannon Snyder
Commissioner
City of Sarasota



“This all comes down to [the fact that] vibrant, successful, desirable cities make great counties, and we want a great city of Sarasota,” Barbetta said. “That’s why we

are here at the table, asking for some help and some input on whether this is a viable plan.”

Barbetta added, “As a resident of the city of Sarasota, I see a stagnant tax base, and if you guys don’t redevelop ... pursuing land-use changes ... you’re going to die. There’s not enough money coming in now to keep up with the expenses,” he pointed out, alluding to the city’s difficulties in trying to figure out how to cover the costs of its pension plans and its police force.

A transit system is an added municipal amenity, Barbetta noted. All thriving, successful cities in the United States offer such service, he added.

Although the county BRT application pending with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) focuses on use of the CSX railroad corridor, Barbetta said, the U.S. 41 corridor is the only one that makes sense of all the alternatives the two boards could consider.

“You can have quality mixed use” along that U.S. 41 corridor, with redevelopment similar to Citrus Square downtown, Barbetta continued, “and end up with a super vibrant corridor that adds [tremendously] to your tax base.”

City Commissioner Shannon Snyder agreed with Barbetta regarding the tax base. “We are more than stagnant,” Snyder said. However, he continued, “From a political standpoint, I don’t think that we’re ready to do the density that is required to do what you describe.”

“It’s political will,” Barbetta replied.

“Unfortunately, we live in this democracy,” Snyder said, adding that Barbetta should come to the next City Commission meeting. “Do I think the city is emotionally ready to do this? The answer’s, ‘No.’”

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo said, “We need to really have a serious heart-to-heart with folks along the North [Tamiami] Trail and say, ‘How serious are you about redevelopment?’”

He asked the County Commission to give the City Commission at least 60 days to hold such discussions, adding he hoped his constituents would be able to understand the need to create a sounder fiscal future for the city.

City Commissioner Terry Turner said he was “very optimistic that in a two-year or 30-month time frame, we could make very significant changes in land use.”

The effort would entail educating city residents about the multiple issues involved, Turner noted.

Adding that the idea would have to be sold to neighborhood residents as well as business owners, County Commissioner Nora Patterson

told the city commissioners, “If you guys really don’t want to undertake [this], it’s dead to start with, because you are the elected city leaders.”

Patterson also expressed reservations about whether the

“As a resident of the city of Sarasota, I see a stagnant tax base, and if you guys don’t redevelop ... you’re going to die. There’s not enough money coming in now to keep up with the expenses.”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

city commissioners would be able to “sell” the idea to enough city residents to pursue the necessary comprehensive plan and zoning code changes to make the needed land-use initiatives possible.

Barbetta pointed out, “We get elected to make tough decisions. Some tough decisions are going to have to be made here, but the alternative ... is a potential 200 percent increase in city property taxes ...”

He added, “I’m not trying to scare anybody, but I don’t know how else the city can survive.”

“I said a year ago we’re broke,” Snyder responded. “I have no problem dying on the battlefield, but I’m telling you I don’t think our community will fully embrace this.”

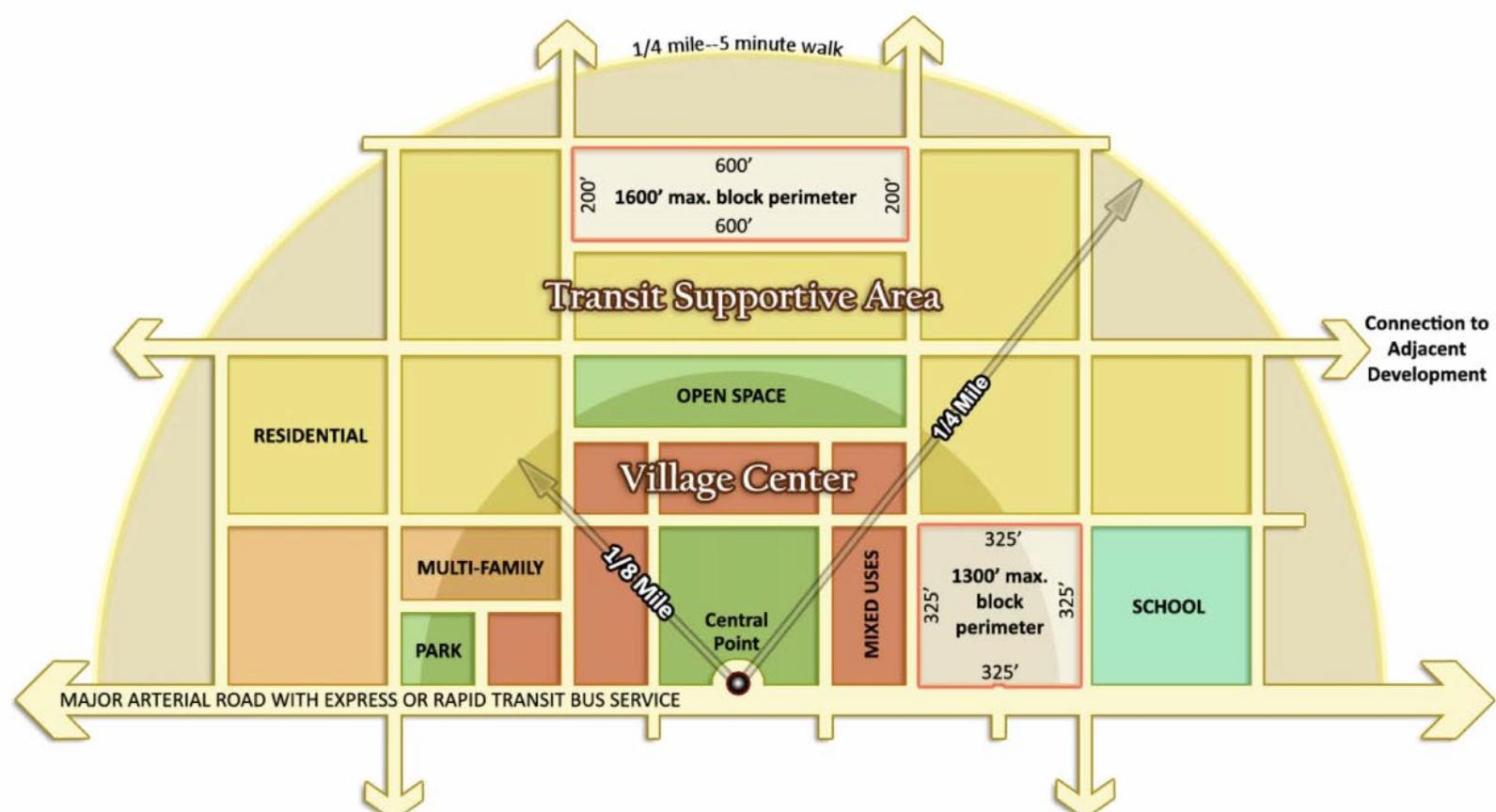
THE TIMING FACTOR

Earlier, Jonathan B. Paul, the county’s interim transportation planning director — and the principal author of Alachua County’s mobility plan — explained that if the two boards chose not to pursue the railroad corridor, they would have until September 2014 to file a new BRT application with the FTA.

However, Paul pointed out, County Administrator Randall Reid needs to know within two months whether the commissions definitely want to pursue a different corridor. “He [just] doesn’t need to know all the details of it,” Paul said of Reid.

Turner asked what would happen if the City Commission was approaching the September 2014 deadline with no apparent success in

What is TOD?



A suggested land-use model that would support a successful bus rapid transit system shows people would not have to walk more than a quarter-mile to a bus stop. Image courtesy Sarasota County

gaining the necessary public support for the land-use changes. “What’s the implication for the rest of our non-BRT transit system?”

Reid replied that he could explain to FTA officials the initiative fell apart. “We wouldn’t be the only community that was unsuccessful in doing this,” Reid added.

However, his preference would be to tell the FTA well before then if it appeared the city

and county commissions would be unable to pursue a BRT system, Reid said.

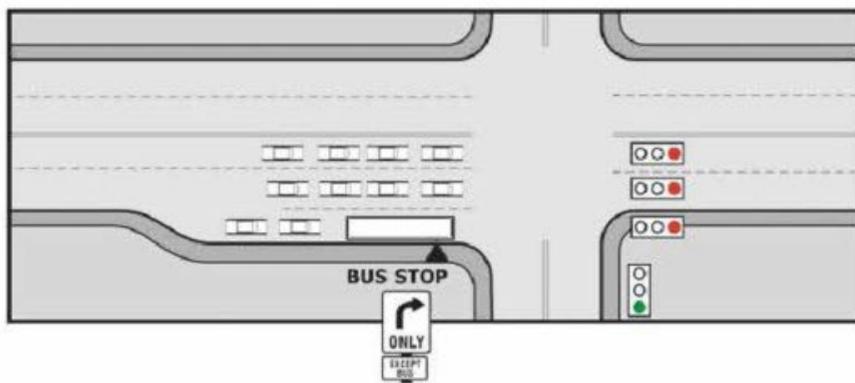
On the other hand, Reid pointed out, the county’s lobbyist had made it plain that once the county was out of the funding cycle for a BRT, it would take many years to gain consideration again.

Barbetta noted, “Charlotte County got bounced out [of the funding cycle] for 10

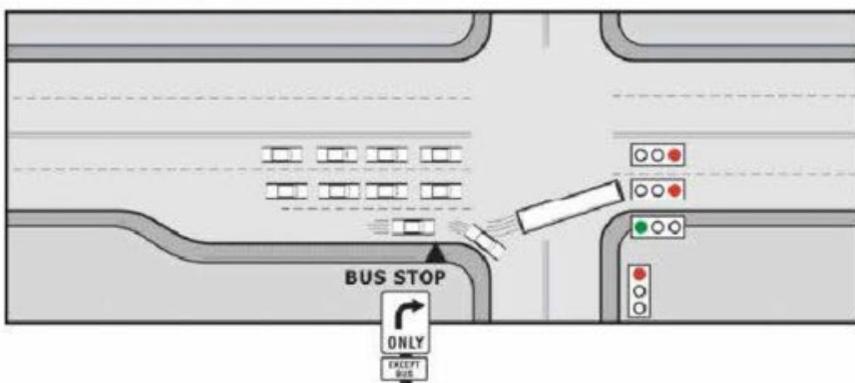
BRT Corridor Treatments

Bus Queue Jump Illustration

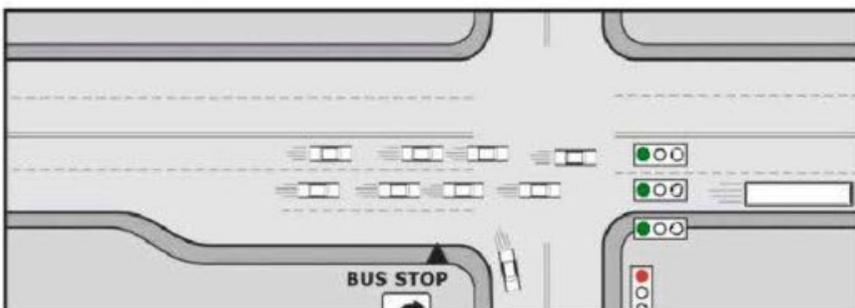
Bus pulls into near side turn lane; Passengers board during red



Bus receives green before other vehicles

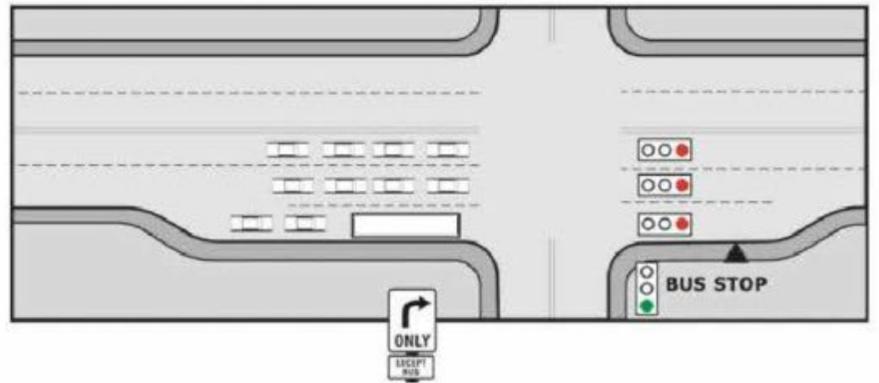


Other vehicles proceed a few seconds later

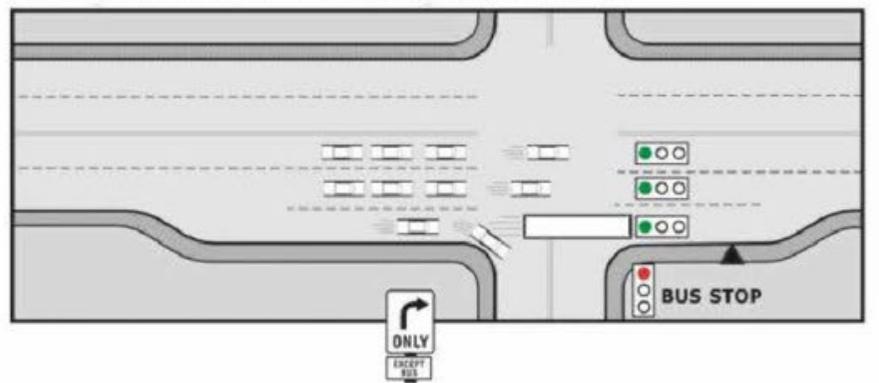


Bus Queue Bypass Lane Illustration

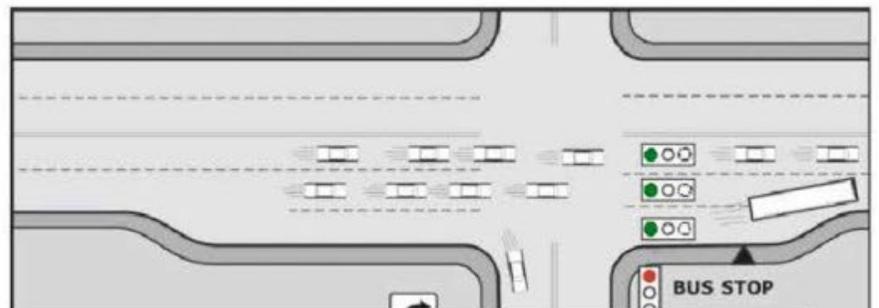
Bus pulls into near side turn lane



Bus pulls into far side station; Passengers board



Bus merges into general traffic



Suggested corridor treatments for a bus rapid transit system show how the bus drivers could use electronic devices to change traffic signals to enable the buses to pull into traffic ahead of other vehicles. Image courtesy Sarasota County

years, and now they're fighting their way back in."

"We need millions for [Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)] funding from now on," Reid said. "Being out of BRT [consideration] is a minor issue compared to being out of favor with federal officials who can hold up money for grants and operating [expenses for SCAT], because that will fall back on us."

THE EXPENSES

Glama Carter, the county's new general manager of SCAT, pointed out that the cost of an analysis of an alternate route to the railroad corridor would be about \$850,000.

"That's even a serious commitment," said Patterson, "unless our city commissioners are going to tell us [they want to pursue the U.S. 41 corridor]."

During his presentation — a shorter version of one he made on Jan. 29 to the County Commission — Paul pointed out that the application the two boards had on file with the FTA was part of the federal government's Small Starts program. With a maximum capital investment of \$250 million in such a program, he said, the FTA could provide the county a grant of up to \$75 million.

If the county pursued a BRT system costing \$100 million, Paul said, the county would be required to pay \$25 million.

Paul suggested other grant funds could be found to cover about half million of that expense.

Paul did caution, "More and more this is becoming a very competitive process," so some

communities are aiming to cover half their costs on their own.

With use of the railroad corridor for the system from downtown Sarasota to Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, Paul continued, and use of a road corridor such as U.S. 41 to Southgate Mall, the annual operating expense would be about \$1.5 million.

Alternatives without the use of the railroad corridor would cost about \$2.5 million per year to operate, he added.

The FTA will put considerable emphasis on how the community plans to pay for the ongoing costs of a BRT system, Paul pointed out.

Reid noted that some communities in the United States are implementing transit taxes to cover BRT system costs.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson told the city commissioners the county board learned last week that the cost of providing shelters for all of its existing SCAT stops, as well as replacing 59 SCAT buses, would total close to \$80 million. The BRT expenses, she said, would be "on top of that."

Robinson also cautioned that residents in the southern part of the county would have to be convinced of the importance of putting county resources into the BRT system, even though it would not extend into that part of the county.

"This is a defining moment for the North Trail," Mayor Suzanne Atwell said.

Agreeing with Barbetta on the need to move forward with creating a BRT system, she added, "I'd like to get it done as soon as possible." 



WHERE IDEAS GO TO DIE

The Sarasota City Commission and Sarasota County Commission meet in the Think Tank at the County Administration Center in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ANALYSIS: CITY, COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CONSULT WITHOUT CONCLUSIONS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

About once a year the Sarasota City and County commissions sit together and try to work out common solutions to common problems. This week, once again, the venue was the “Think Tank” on the third floor of the Sarasota County Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard.

The room had lots of seats, plenty of video screens and even historical panels on the wall to lend perspective to the hardball discussions. Only four items were on the

Tuesday, Feb. 5, agenda. And only one — maybe — “got fixed.”

HELP WITH THE HOMELESS

By a fluke both County Administrator Randall Reid and City Manager Tom Barwin are relative newcomers to the community. Reid has tenure of a bit more than a year; Barwin is working on the six-month mark.

Almost from Day One, Barwin has been confronted with problems with the homeless and vagrants. Citizen com-

“*We would ask the county to mirror what we do in the city. We do not need the city to be a bigger magnet for the homeless.*”

Tom Barwin
City Manager
Sarasota



plaints and American Civil Liberties Union lawsuits have pushed the issue. He came to the joint meeting Feb. 5 hoping to get some county assistance.

He earlier empaneled an ad hoc working group to help him understand the local problem. The members report the City of Sarasota has about three times the number of homeless people it should, using national statistics regarding the general population and the average incidence of homelessness. This is a large squeaking wheel, in other words.

Homeless and vagrant people in downtown's Five Points Park prompted Mayor Suzanne Atwell to tell a City Commission audience — and viewers watching on TV — last fall she did not feel safe downtown. Police pressure moved those groups to Gillespie Park, where

neighbors complained. Police pressure then moved them to Central Avenue and the Rosemary Cemetery — where they remain.

“Our [police] officers on the streets would appreciate some thoughtful help. What can we do?” Barwin asked both commissions. The preliminary answer from his working group is to put more social workers on the street.

“We don't have enough caseworkers. These folks are strained to their limits,” said Barwin. “They believe up to 60 percent [of the homeless] are dealing with serious mental health and substance abuse issues. The No. 1 priority is caseworkers.”

“We would ask the county to mirror what we do in the city. We do not need the city to be a bigger magnet for the homeless,” he added.



Homeless people gather on Central Avenue in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“But we don’t want to push the problem into our sister cities in the county.”

TRYING FOR TRACTION

Barwin was like a runner on a soap-scummed racetrack; he made a lot of effort but very little headway. “I have a problem wrapping my arms around government entities taking this on,” said County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason.

Barwin kept pumping. “This will migrate into a discussion of housing. They need to come up with \$2,000 for first and last [months’ rent] and utilities,” he said. “There are ways to do this for \$400 to \$500 per month. If you do the math, I know you’ll be saving money. They won’t end up in the emergency room. I think you’ll find we’ll be saving money.”

Barwin has asked the Community Foundation of Sarasota County for funding to hire one full-time and two part-time caseworkers. They would cooperate with the police and try to find help for homeless people. But he ran into a county bureaucratic buzz saw.

“The myth out there is the county doesn’t do a thing for the homeless,” said County Commissioner Christine Robinson. “Last year our health and human services budget was just under \$5 million. In order to get funding, there is a strenuous process those agencies go through with our Human Services Advisory Council. Did you look at what we’re providing as a county?” she asked. “Why do you believe it shouldn’t be done through another agency?”

“I didn’t want to spend months going through all the hoops,” said Barwin.

“I’m not sure that will be quicker,” said Robinson.



City Manager Tom Barwin raises an issue during the joint meeting of the City and County commissions on Feb. 5. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“You need to have more of these conversations, Mr. Barwin,” said Mason. “It didn’t get like this overnight, and we can’t fix it overnight.”

Mason concluded the agenda item by saying, “What I’m hearing from my board is, we don’t have enough information to make a decision.”

Robinson softened the blow. “You’ve heard questions, not a ‘No.’”

The next joint meeting? Maybe a year from now.

THE RAILROAD IS DEAD

The bus rapid transit (BRT) discussion (covered in-depth elsewhere in this issue) was the second item on the agenda, and it was another “kill” in the Think Tank.

After enormous wrangling, the BRT route was proposed to use the old CSX Railroad route from the airport to near downtown. That was the official and approved plan. But on Tuesday, the city and county commissioners killed that idea and picked U.S. 41 instead.

The decision will require an explanation to the federal government, which paid more than \$800,000 to fund a study that decided the railroad was the best route. To propose U.S. 41, the county must pay \$850,000 more for another study explaining why the Tamiami Trail is the best path for a BRT line.

THE \$4 MILLION GOLD MINE

In 2016, when most of the current city and county commissioners will be retired and gone from power, the Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) will expire after 30 years of existence. The CRA uses a complex device called tax-increment financing to provide the city today with an extra \$4 million in annual tax income.

Furthermore, this is \$4 million the city can spend as it wants. The only limit: The funds must be spent downtown to fight “slum and blight.” Over the decades the CRA has paid for a wide variety of uses — more police, for example; beautification and infrastructure and much more. But in 2016, the CRA is over. Or is it?

City commissioners were all in favor of continuing the CRA. None opined how far into the future it should continue, though. County commissioners’ opinions were divided.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta said, “It’s been successful. We all win if we reinvest in our community. I’m for extending it.”

His only beef: change the administration of it.

Commissioner Nora Patterson: “The county needs that extra \$4 million a year. I’m as committed to the downtown as anybody at this table. I live in the city. I love the city. But I think extending this is not a good idea.”

Both the city and county governments have used financial reserves (e.g., “savings”) to balance their budgets for the past several years during the economic downturn. Those reserves are running dry. County financial staffers are already budgeting the CRA’s \$4 million to return to county coffers in 2016. That means if the CRA is not allowed to die, the county budget starts in the hole in 2016.

In other words, this was a prickly discussion between two boards facing another year of deficits in their proposed budgets. Their “savings” are dwindling, and neither board wants to propose a property tax increase.

A Feb. 5 memo to both boards sent in advance of the meeting notes that county contributions to the CRA through the 2013 fiscal year have totaled \$53.7 million. The estimated remaining county contributions through the CRA’s expiration in Fiscal Year 2016 total \$11.4 million.

The easy out was to kick the can down the road. Both commissions agreed to nominate people to an ad hoc advisory committee to work with the city manager and county administrator to help them reach a conclusion on the fate of the \$4 million. Ordained with unanimous votes of both bodies, the ad hoc future-of-the-CRA advisory board was affirmed.

On the way out of the meeting, City Attorney Bob Fournier said the whatever-it-would-be-

called group should be subject to Florida's Government in the Sunshine Laws.

Will the CRA expire in 2016? Politicians yet-to-be-elected will decide that question. But in February 2013, the endorsement did not ring. Chalk another one up to — as one city staffer described it — the “Dunk Tank.”

CLEAN THE DITCH!

The only agenda item that may — repeat, may — result in action concerns stormwater. Northern Sarasota east of the Tamiami Trail still suffers — after all these decades — from flooding after a major deluge. Flooding is a county responsibility.

Reid proposed either a joint meeting or a special briefing for the city commissioners on stormwater mitigation designs such as

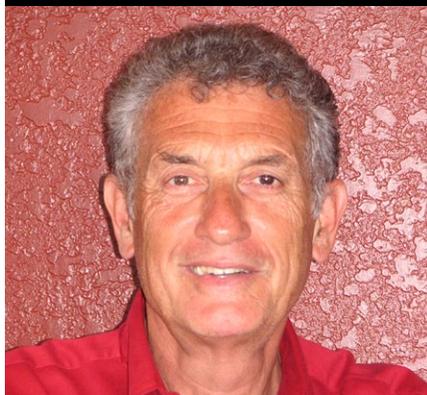
low-impact development. The combined commissions decided a special briefing was best. Then it was time for public comment.

Barbara Langston, the “liaison” from the Amaryllis Park Neighborhood, wanted to know when the city or the county was going to clear the weeds from the deep ditches along Myrtle Avenue.

“During heavy rains the road is totally underwater,” she said. “The ditches are overgrown. We’ve been trying to get the city to address them. Can we get a schedule when the ditches are cleaned and maintained, and how often that will be done?”

The county commissioners told Reid to provide Langston with a ditch-cleaning schedule. The action concluded the meeting with a decisive outcome: Clean the ditch! 

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Linda turned to Dr. Koval to repair her smile and jaw which was so misaligned she couldn’t chew her food properly. “Tonya’s comforting smile and advice gave me hope and direction,” she says. “I’m so grateful to her, and of course to Dr. Koval. Now I have a smile that I love to share with everyone I meet.”

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GRANDSON OF DROD

GREATER DENSITY ON THE DRAWING BOARD FOR DOWNTOWN

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

First there was DROD, then Son of DROD. And now a third generation is stirring, Grandson of DROD.

No this is not a Japanese movie serial in which a monster stomps on cardboard constructions and people flee for their lives.



The Downtown Improvement District has begun discussions about how to encourage new, denser development other than condominiums in Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

This is an old squeaking wheel coming back to life: how to create affordable housing downtown.

DROD stands for Downtown Residential Overlay District, a two-year experiment that permitted developers to jump to 200 dwelling units per acre instead of their having to adhere to the cap of 50 per acre allowed in the city's comprehensive plan — except nobody tried it.

By allowing increased density, city planners and the City Commission wanted to see if developers might propose building smaller units — but a lot more of them — to bring prices down — or build large rental complexes.

The DROD expired long ago, and only one builder — Chris Brown — gave the idea a spin, but he decided on a conventional mixed-use condominium we now call 1350 Main.

The idea of increasing density is coming back, and the Downtown Improvement District appears ready to embark on an education and persuasion campaign to convince residents, voters and politicians density is not all bad.

“Under the DROD, it wasn't economically feasible to provide attainable units unless it was with a 300 to 400 percent density increase, or 150 to 200 [dwelling units per acre],” said Dick Smith, the city planner who is the general manager for integration. “The minimum profit developers were looking at was in the 23-25 percent range. Nationally, the figure was

around 18 percent, but with the high cost of land and construction, it wasn't doable.”

District Chairman Ernie Ritz said one problem is putting together a parcel. “It is nearly impossible for a developer to assemble an acre of land downtown,” he said. “But a smaller parcel, say 20,000 square feet, you could build 22 units. For

a rental, you could probably get \$1,000 per month. Or you could build 22 condominiums and charge \$800,000 and make \$16 million instead.”

Ritz's numbers make a point. A condo deal (\$800,000 x 22 units = \$17,600,000, minus land, construction and marketing costs) is certainly more attractive than \$264,000 in annual rent payments, assuming all units are full all the time. The rent money might not even pay the interest on the construction loan.

The DROD offer “sunsetted” in 2006. A “Son of DROD” proposal offered similar density increases but over a smaller area; it, too, died. Ritz and others are gearing up to try it again, and they think the environment may be more favorable this time. Land prices are roughly half what they were at the peak of the boom, for example.

“This will need broad community support,” said Smith. “You might want to start in a smaller area.”

Last year the City Commission held a “retreat” to talk about big issues and to set ambitious

From what I've seen over the years, the city and county have missed the boat on developing Sarasota.

William Pettey
Member
Downtown Improvement District



The 1350 Main condominium complex towers over neighbors along Main Street in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

goals. “Increasing downtown density is one of the City Commission’s strategic goals,” said Senior Planner Steve Stancel.

It is cheaper to put more people in already developed areas because they will not need new roads, new sewer lines, new water lines, new libraries and schools and all the rest.

However, that has not been the Florida experience. “Growth management in the state is kind of a failure,” said Smith. “Counties are providing urban services at very low densities, one unit on a quarter-acre lot. It makes economic sense to have higher densities in urban boundaries.”

DID board member William Pettey is normally quiet at the meetings. But on this issue, he erupted. “I like Sarasota the way it was in 1960. That’s my philosophy. From what I’ve seen over the years, the city and county have

missed the boat on developing Sarasota,” he said. “My concept is, to increase density downtown, we need the [proposed transportation] circulator already in place. They stimulate economic development. We need to have something in place to get developers to want to come in and develop the area. Without incentives for developers to come in, it’s not going to fly. We will need some type of density increase.”

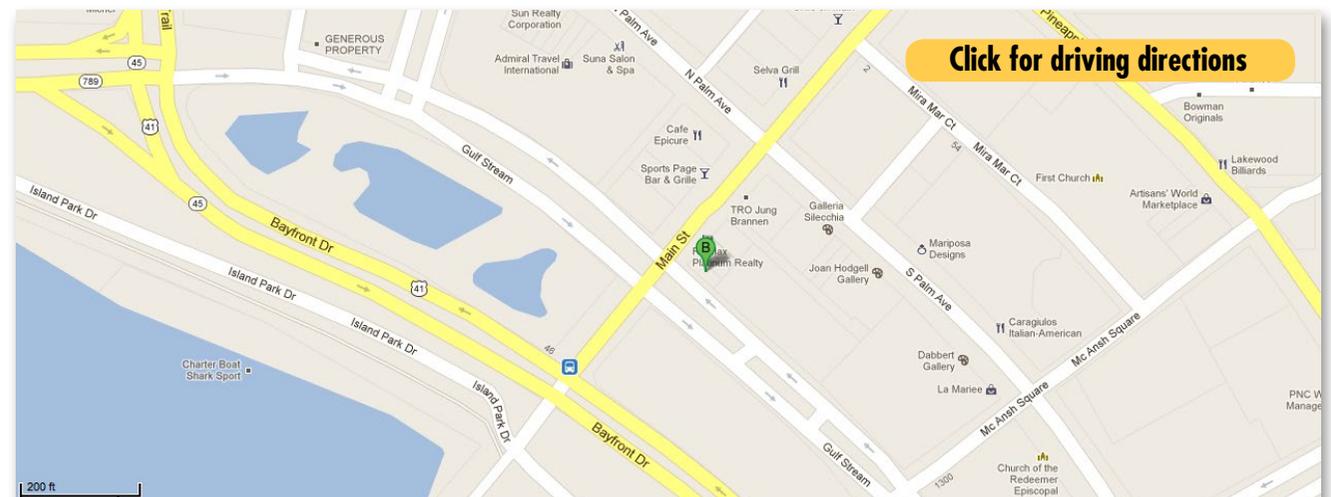
The board members agreed to do homework on DROD and Son of DROD, then discuss their thoughts at the next meeting.

By coincidence later in the afternoon, the city and county commissioners talked about changing land use along the North Tamiami Trail to support a bus rapid transit system — another possible density change in the land development regulations. 

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LESS ENERGY EQUALS MORE MONEY

Thermal energy storage tanks are used at Riverview High School in Sarasota. All photos courtesy Sarasota County Schools

THE SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS REALIZED \$16 MILLION IN SAVINGS THROUGH A FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM TO REDUCE ENERGY CONSUMPTION

By Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer

A five-year contract initiated by the Sarasota County School Board with Cenergistic Inc. (formerly Energy Education Inc.) has resulted in savings of \$16 million, the school district has announced.

The Sarasota News Leader caught up with the district's chief operating officer, Scott Lempe, to see how he felt about the program and find out what is next.

"First of all, just because our contract is up, doesn't mean our relationship with Cenergistic stops," Lempe said. "The contract with us financially, where they get 30 percent of the savings, has ended, but our relationship oth-

erwise will continue. So I see us still meeting with their mechanical engineers and see them informing us of new technologies and developments they have learned from other sites," Lempe added.

"We are at the front end of a very long relationship with Cenergistic," he pointed out.

According to the press release, the Polk County school district has continued working with Cenergistic for free and for a very long time.

"The [Polk County] district has been out of contract with the company for over 20 years, but [it] still [receives] training for new energy managers, data assistance ... free nation-

al training conferences and engineering services,” said Alisha Burris, an energy manager with the Sarasota district, in the release.

However, Cenergistic is by no means an eleemosynary organization.

Referring to the firm’s receipt of 30 percent of the savings, Lempe pointed out, “They probably got about a million dollars a year...”

The contract began in 2007 after Lempe convinced the School Board of the program’s potential, after meeting with representatives of the firm.

The program was funded solely by the savings it generated, and it allowed the district to allocate those savings to other priorities, ac-



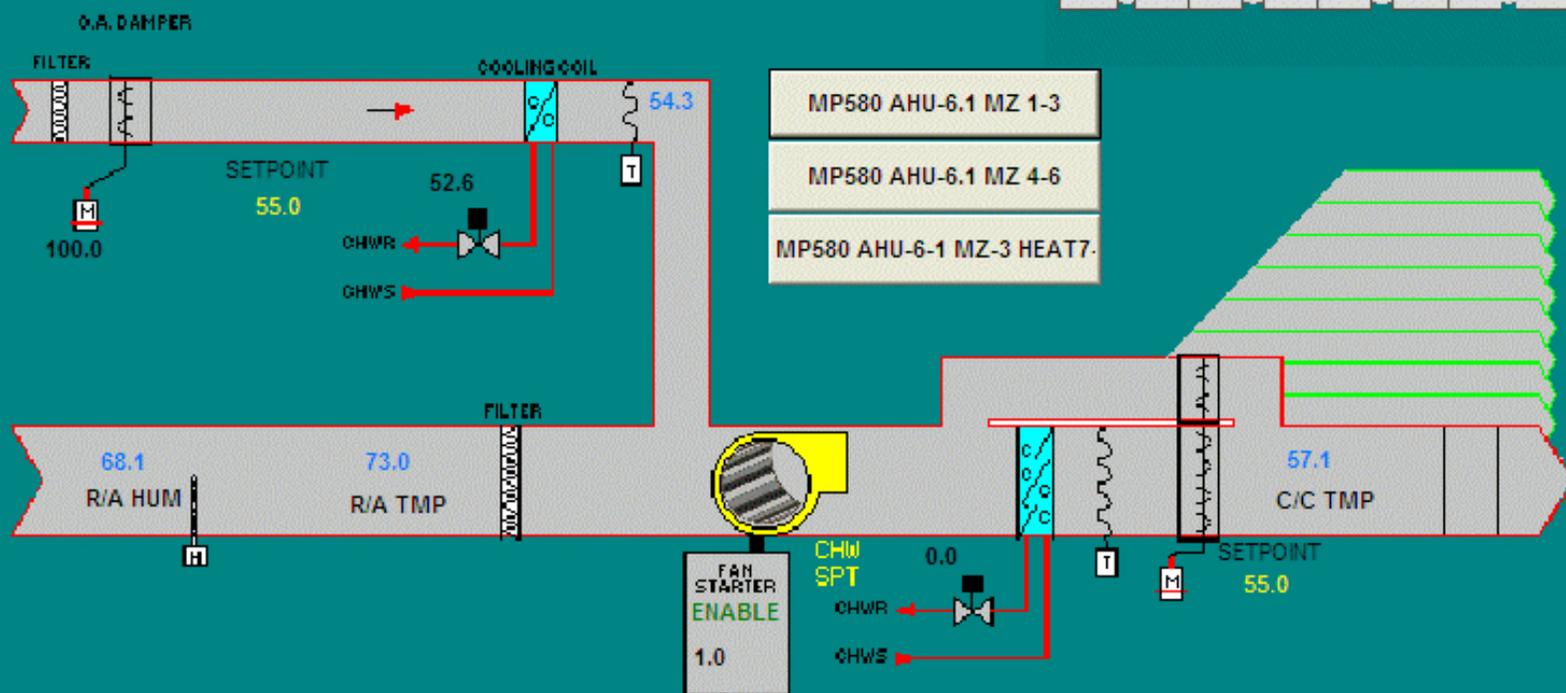
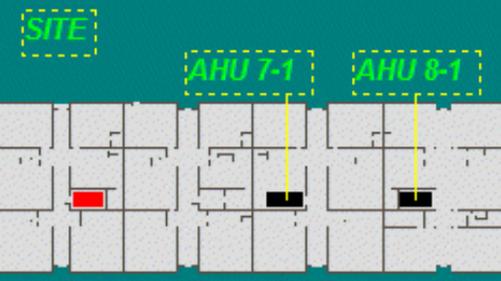
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ZN	ROOM	TMP	C SPTH	DMP	POS	HI1	HI2	ZN	ROOM	TMP	C SPTH	DMP	POS	HI1	HI2
1	100 H	74.7	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off		6	709	74.9	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	Off
2	602	74.8	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	Off	7	610	74.6	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	
3	604	71.9	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	Off	8	609	74.5	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	
4	701	73.7	75.0	70.0	0.0	Off	Off	9	605	75.1	75.0	70.0	0.1	Off	
5	705	74.7	75.0	70.0	17.2	Off	Off	10	601	75.1	75.0	70.0	14.2	Off	

Equipment monitors the temperature and humidity level in each classroom at McIntosh Middle School in Sarasota.

ording to district Communications Specialist Scott Ferguson in the press release.

“In 2007, when the program began our kilowatt-per-hour usage was almost 100 million,” said district Energy Manager Jon Hampton in the press release. “By 2011 that usage was reduced by 13 million to 87 million kilowatts per hour, even though we added three new schools during that period.”

On top of all that, the district was able to take advantage of rebates offered by Florida Power & Light Co. to realize about \$2.2 million in additional savings, the news release notes.

“Part of what we do is take the rebates we get from FPL and reinvest [them] in further energy-saving technologies,” added Lempe.

School Board member Caroline Zucker, who was on the board when the Cenergistics agreement was approved, concurred with Lempe that the contract period may be over, but the work will go on, not only to maintain but also to enhance energy conservation measures.

“I think we need to continue to move forward,” she said. “We need to encourage the behavioral changes — turning off lights, turning off computers, things like that.”

“We won’t see the large decreases in energy usage,” she added. “We’ve accomplished that, but we can still improve,” Zucker said.

Lempe agreed.

“I think we still need to work on behavior,” he said. “I think you need to remind people of that all the time, like when you walk out the door, turn off the light. That sounds silly, but we’ve got 8.8 million square feet of floor space [throughout the district]. Turning off the lights

matters. And then we’ll continue to look at things like systematically shutting down or putting to sleep the computer systems” when they are not in use.

Some of the highlights of the energy conservation program have been reported to the School Board, the release noted:

- Three district schools recently earned the Energy Star Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Atwater Elementary in North Port, Pine View School in Osprey and Riverview High School in Sarasota. Earning the award means these schools operate in the top 25 percent of schools across the U.S. in responsible energy use.
- The bus garage at the district’s Transportation Department uses energy-saving induction lighting in its service bays.
- Demand-controlled ventilation, a method of ensuring cost-effective air ventilation while maximizing indoor air quality, has been installed district-wide where appropriate.
- Efficient, cost-saving light-emitting diode (LED) lighting has been installed at Gulf Gate Elementary and McIntosh Middle schools, both in Sarasota.

The district continuously researches alternative energy technologies, such as solar and wind. Solar-panel arrays are in place at Atwater Elementary, Bay Haven School of Basics Plus in Sarasota and Pine View School, and as the initial cost of implementing this cost-saving technology continues to decrease, district officials hope to add more solar arrays. 

**SO EVERYONE
CAN PLAY BALL**



Baltimore Orioles closer Jim Johnson/Photo courtesy Jeff Lantz

THE ORIOLES COME TO TOWN FOR MORE THAN SPRING TRAINING

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

A Sarasota nonprofit that gives kids and adults with special needs the chance to play the American pastime is set to get a financial boost from the Baltimore Orioles and their All Star closer on Wednesday, Feb. 20.

[The Miracle League of Manasota](#) came together five years ago with a plan to build a rubberized baseball field to allow those with special needs the chance to swing a bat, round the bases and shag fly balls. Working with Sarasota County, the League took over an underutilized softball field in Longwood Park, just south of University Parkway.

Last March, the League hosted its first 10-week season, with games held every Saturday

morning. It drew a little more than 50 participants right off the bat, a number that jumped to more than 90 during the League's subsequent fall season.

While the county has been a major partner, the League has also received big-league help from the two pro teams that spend their spring in the area: the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Baltimore Orioles, who together contributed \$150,000 for the field. For the Orioles, the commitment is ongoing. The team, whose spring training session kicks off in Sarasota in just two weeks, will hold its third annual Birdland Golf Classic at Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club on Wednesday, Feb. 20.



Baltimore Orioles Hall of Fame pitcher Scott McGregor (far right), Orioles closer Jim Johnson (second from right) and other Birdland Golf Classic participants. Photo courtesy Jeff Lantz

Who made the connection with the Orioles happen? All Star closer and Sarasota resident Jim Johnson, says Sherwin Taradash, the Birdland event chairman and a Miracle League board member.

“Three years ago, Jim Johnson spearheaded the movement with the Orioles after they came to town, to develop a relationship with a charity,” Taradash says. “And he heard of the Miracle League and thought it would be a perfect fit, baseball-baseball. He basically lobbied the Orioles to take it on as a charity of choice and he was going to take the lead on it.”

Taradash calls past Birdland tournaments an “amazing success.” In two years, the event has raised more than \$56,000 for the Miracle League, according to an Orioles press release.

Johnson says the goal for this year’s tournament is to raise something in the high 30-thousands. While phase one of construction is complete, the League wants to build a concession stand, accessible bathrooms, a storage facility and a covered patio, and that is where future donations will go.

Johnson brought teammates to last year’s Miracle League season, and their response was beyond enthusiastic. This year, “I’ve got to keep guys away from the tournament, because I don’t have enough spots for everyone,” he says.

Taradash notes there are more than 200 fields like the Miracle League’s around the country, and that the impact of playing baseball on the life of a child or adult with special needs is tremendous. The chance to play baseball in a safe environment, on a field that is easy to get around on with a wheelchair or other as-

sistance, gives players the opportunity to experience something that was previously completely off-limits, he says.

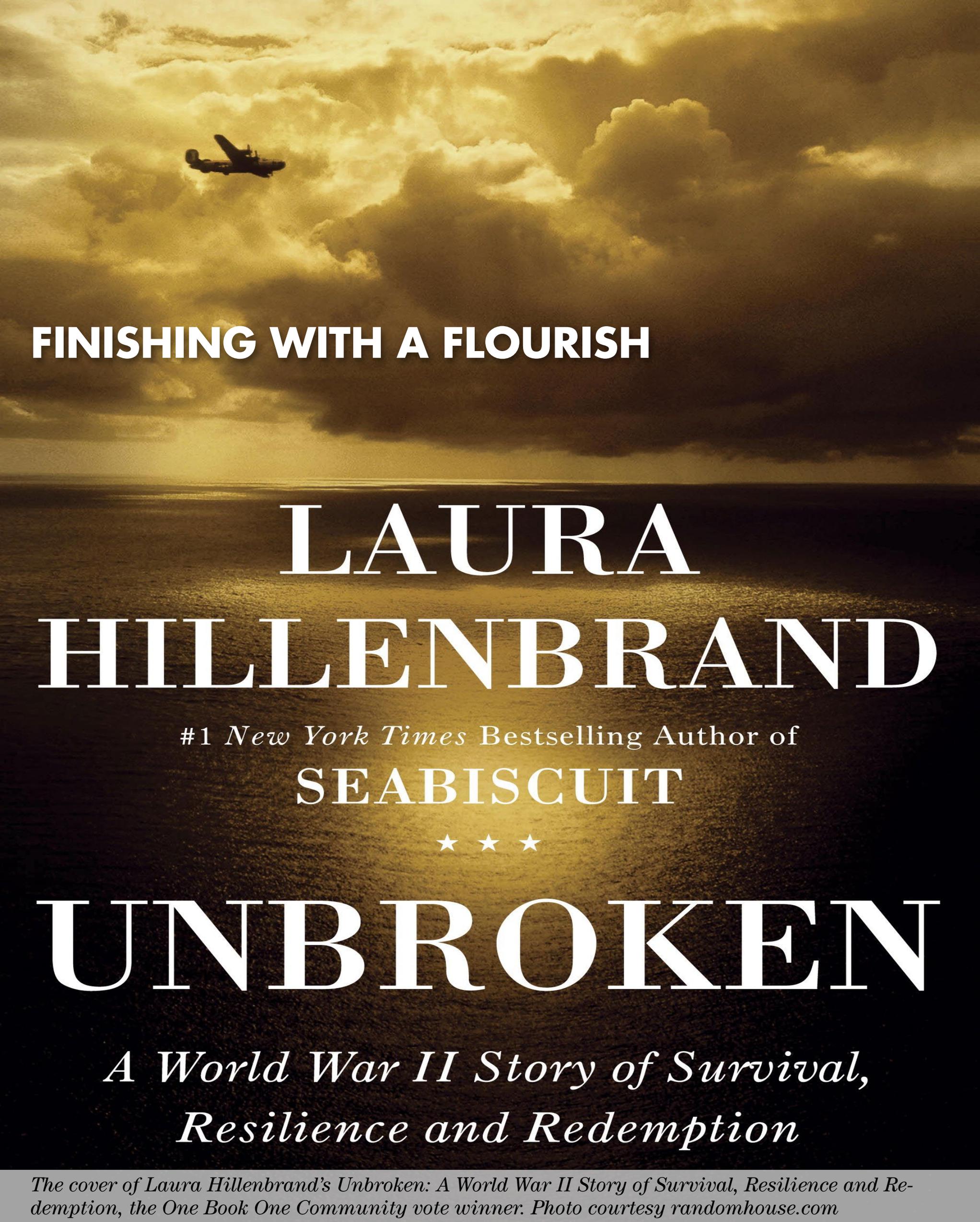
“The greatest experience to understand it is to come to a game, and you’ll see the smiles on the kids and you’ll see the tears in their parents’ eyes,” Taradash adds. “It’s really a heartfelt thing. It’s a great opportunity for the parent or the guardian to have a bit of a break in a fun way.”

“When you go and watch and see what happens when those kids get on the field, you realize that what you’re doing is worthwhile,” Johnson says. “There’s really no other reason to do it. There are some things you have to witness yourself.”

Johnson says that once the Longwood field is complete, the next step is to help the Miracle League sustain itself from year to year. Taradash agrees, and thinks the Birdland Golf Classic will be a reliable source of operating capital for the long term.

“Hopefully it’ll be on autopilot in a couple years, where the tournament’s just sold out every year and we can relax and have fun,” Johnson says, “and I can move on to another project.”

The Birdland Golf Classic begins with registration and lunch at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 20, with a shotgun start set for 12:30 p.m. The tournament is held at Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club, 7650 Legacy Blvd., Bradenton. For more information, contact the Miracle League of Manasota at 941-225-2966 or via info@miracleleaguemanasota.org. 



FINISHING WITH A FLOURISH

**LAURA
HILLENBRAND**

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of

SEABISCUIT



UNBROKEN

*A World War II Story of Survival,
Resilience and Redemption*

The cover of Laura Hillenbrand's Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption, the One Book One Community vote winner. Photo courtesy randomhouse.com

COMMUNITY MEMBERS, RINGLING MUSEUM STAFF HELPING LEAD THE LAST OF THIS YEAR'S ONE BOOK PROGRAMS ON *UNBROKEN*

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

[One Book One Community](#), the Sarasota County Libraries' attempt to get as many residents reading the same book at the same time as possible, hits its big finale this month, with a string of free events that dovetail with the book's major themes.

Last summer, county residents [were asked](#) to help pick which book the community should read, and thousands of voters weighed in online and at libraries, Sarasota's Bookstore 1 and Venice's Books-a-Million, eventually [selecting](#) Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption*. The book's popularity should be no surprise: It spent 100 consecutive weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list, and it has picked up a dandy handful of prizes.

Unbroken is the nonfiction odyssey of Louis Zamperini, an American Olympian-turned-airman whose bomber crashed in the Pacific Ocean in 1943. Surviving 47 days at sea, Zamperini was eventually captured by the Japanese and kept in a prisoner of war camp till the end of World War II. Hillenbrand, best known as the author of *Seabiscuit*, spent seven years writing the book, and when it was finally published in 2010, she had a hit on her hands.

According to libraries Outreach Coordinator Barb McDonald, Hillenbrand is "not well" and unable to travel to Sarasota for the One Book festivities or to participate via Skype. So rather than build their event calendar around the author's participation, the libraries reached

out to a wide range of community partners to create events that echo the book's themes and history.

Next Wednesday, Feb. 13, for example, New College history professor Justus Doenecke will discuss the origins of the war in the Pacific, specifically "the events that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor," on the New College campus. And the day after that, Ringling Museum librarian Alexa Torchynowycz will discuss the Merci Train, the boxcars loaded with gifts of thanks from the French people that were distributed around the U.S. after World War II. The Ringling Museum ended up with some of the Florida train's contents, and Torchynowycz will present and discuss some one-of-a-kind books, propaganda posters and advertisements the museum has in its possession.

McDonald says the *Unbroken* selection is bringing out a different One Book crowd. It is the first nonfiction work selected in the past few years, and the last two winners (*The Book Thief* and *The Hunger Games*) were young adult titles. *Unbroken* book discussion groups and related film screenings have been going solid for a while now, and McDonald says the events are drawing hundreds of folks, skewing older than in past years.

She does not know how many folks will attend the flurry of February dates, but a *Hunger Games* event drew 350 residents, so her expectations are high. McDonald is building buzz for the home stretch by schlepping all

over the county, handing out posters and flyers to get the word out. There are only a few weeks left.

“I’ve had four cups of coffee,” she says, “so I’m a driving machine.”

This month’s remaining One Book One Community events, from the One Book [website](#):

- **7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 13:** Professor Emeritus of History Justus Doenecke will present “The Coming of the Pacific War: The Events That Led to the Attack on Pearl Harbor” at Sainer Auditorium, New College of Florida, 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 at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee’s Selby Auditorium, 8350 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Topics include “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 University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension, will present “The History of Victory Gardens: A World War II Homefront Effort” at the Fruitville Library, 100 Coburn Road, Sarasota. 

“You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.” — *Naguib Mahfouz*



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NEW CROSSING CONUNDRUMS

Siesta Key business owners say pedestrians are not watching for traffic before entering new crosswalks on Midnight Pass Road. At the same time, some vehicles are stopping because of the 'Stop here' signs (far right), even when no one is in a crosswalk. File photo

CROSSWALKS ON BEACH ROAD AND MIDNIGHT PASS ROAD POSING DIFFERENT SETS OF PROBLEMS FOR DRIVERS ON SIESTA KEY

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

With Sarasota County expecting bids on Feb. 13 for the illumination of seven crosswalks in Siesta Village, two new crosswalk issues arose during the Feb. 5 general meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association.

Peter van Roekens, vice president of the Siesta Key Association and a Terrace East representative to the SKVA meetings, raised the new matter this week: The four pedestrian crossing caution signs near the main entrance to Siesta Public Beach “are constantly blinking,” van Roekens said.

(Van Roekens is also the person who broached the need for Village crosswalk lighting in January 2012.)

Drivers become so inured to the situation on Beach Road, he indicated, that the lights are ignored.

“It looks like somebody’s coming, always crossing,” he said, “and, obviously, that’s a dangerous thing.”

When he checked with Ryan Montague in the county’s Traffic/Mobility Office — the same person involved with the bollards initiative for the Village crosswalks — van Roekens said, Montague reported, “It’s a matter of programming the signs.”

The lights could be adjusted to come on only when someone pushes the button on the sign

in preparation for crossing Beach Road, van Roekens added. “Obviously, that is the way it’s supposed to be,” he noted.

Montague had no idea why the signs have been blinking continuously, Van Roekens said.

Deputy Chris McGregor of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office pointed out that when officers asked about the lights a couple of years ago, they were told sand accumulation had caused problems with the programming. “We brought up the same concerns,” McGregor said: “that they are constantly blinking.”

Van Roekens responded that Montague gave him no indication that sand was the reason for the need to reprogram the mechanisms.

“*The minute they push that button, the lights come on and these people ... cross the street.*”

Maura Thompson
Jonny’s Free Beach Rides



Van Roekens' remarks prompted comments from other members about problems with the six new pedestrian crosswalks on Midnight Pass Road between the Beach Road and Stickney Point Road intersections. Those were installed last year at the request of residents who wanted to improve pedestrian safety along that 1.2-mile stretch of road.

Maura Thompson with Jonny's Free Beach Rides at first thought van Roekens was referring to those new crossings. After he explained he was discussing the crosswalks near the public beach, she pointed out that pedestrians — especially in the area of Palm Bay Club — are not staying alert to traffic as they enter Midnight Pass Road.

"The minute they push that button, the lights come on and these people ... cross the street," she told the approximately 22 SKVA members present.

Although her vehicle does not operate faster than 25 mph, she added, she barely has had time to stop for people in the crosswalks.

"The problem is that's a state road," McGregor said, while Beach Road is a county road.

McGregor added that the state ordinance governing such crosswalks makes it clear that a person has to look for traffic before walking into the road.

"I totally understand," he told Thompson. "They've jumped out in front of me before and they go, 'Hey! You've got to stop!'"

McGregor added, "I always pull over and I educate them."

Van Roekens suggested the possibility of installing signs at those crosswalks, right above

the buttons that activate the lights, advising people to make certain traffic stops before they start crossing.

However, Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson, who was attending the meeting, questioned whether anyone would take time to read a sign.

"You're right; they're not," Thompson said.

One SKVA member suggested that in spite of the problems, the new crosswalks still create a safer environment for pedestrians on that part of Midnight Pass Road.

Nonetheless, Thompson said, "I'm telling you, I'm really concerned."

"We'll look into that [situation]," van Roekens replied.

"It scares me," Thompson added. "I actually slow down at every one, even if no one's there, because I'm so petrified."

"Common sense, I would believe, says that you look [before crossing]," SKA Director Michael Shay interjected, even if a pedestrian does have the right of way at those crosswalks.

"These are all new this year" to snowbirds, McGregor pointed out of the crosswalks, adding that education will be the key to resolving the problems.

Yet one other problem with those six new crosswalks, SKVA Director Mark Smith noted, is confusion created by the signs erected yards in front of the crosswalks, which advise motorists about where to stop. He was recently following one vehicle that slammed on the brakes parallel to that sign, even though no one was in the crosswalk, he said. 



AN AGREEMENT REACHED

The Hub Baja Grill stands at the four-way-stop intersection on Ocean Boulevard in Siesta Village. It is partly obscured by the gazebo as traffic approaches the intersection on Canal Road. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE SARASOTA COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WILL RECOMMEND THE COUNTY COMMISSION PAY A SIESTA PROPERTY OWNER \$75,000 AND VACATE 220 FEET OF RIGHT OF WAY TO SETTLE A LAWSUIT

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

Sarasota County attorneys reached a tentative settlement with Siesta Village property owner Chris Brown during mediation on Feb. 1 regarding his third lawsuit against the county since 2007, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh told *The Sarasota News Leader* this week.

“It is tentative because any settlement must be approved by the [County] Commission,” DeMarsh wrote in an email. “The administration and Office of the County Attorney will rec-

ommend the settlement and seek Commission action,” he added.

On Feb. 5, DeMarsh wrote the *News Leader*, “I will be sending the Commission a memo today. The Commission will be asked to consider the tentative settlement at its next regular meeting. The two essential terms are that the County will pay Plaintiffs \$75,000 for a full and final release and the Commission will need to vacate a very small section of right-of-way.”

The 220 square feet of right of way is along Avenida Messina, adjacent to Brown's restaurant The Hub Baja Grill. The Hub is located at the intersection of Avenida Messina and Ocean Boulevard in Siesta Village.

The agreement says the payment should be made within 20 days of the County Commission's approval of the settlement "at the next available Board meeting." The board's next regular meeting is scheduled for Feb. 12 in Venice.

It also stipulates that each party "shall pay their own costs and fees."

DeMarsh's memo to the County Commission pointed out that Brown claimed more than \$1.7 million in damages.

Brown filed the lawsuit after his 2011 tax bill showed three of his assessments in an ongoing effort to pay off Siesta Village's cost of the municipal parking lot between Avenida Madeira and Avenida de Mayo had gone up for that year. At the same time, assessments for all the other parcels had gone down in Siesta Village. Some of the other Village properties had seen decreases of up to 30 percent.

Brown's assessments for The Hub and The Cottage doubled in 2011. The assessment for his Avenida Messina parcel where Blu Que Island Grill stands went up about 1,500 percent, according to the lawsuit.

Reached by the *News Leader* on Feb. 5, Brown said he would prefer not to comment until af-



The municipal parking lot in Siesta Village has been a factor in all three lawsuits Chris Brown has filed against Sarasota County. Photo by Rachel Hackney

ter the County Commission votes on the settlement.

However, Brown's attorney, Morgan Bentley of Bentley & Bruning in Sarasota, did say of DeMarsh's memo, "This looks like a fair summary of the agreement. We are very hopeful that this will be approved by the Commission and the parties can put this unfortunate situation behind them once and for all."

During their Jan. 30 regular meeting, the commissioners turned down a \$315,000 offer from Brown to settle the case. That unanimous vote followed a 90-minute executive session the board held with DeMarsh and Assistant County Attorney David M. Pearce, who has been handling the case.

An Aug. 16, 2012 memo DeMarsh provided to the County Commission as part of his Feb. 5 memo noted that Brown's first lawsuit against the county was filed in 2007. It involved allegations that a last-minute decision by then-Zoning Administrator Tina Crawford to deny Brown a certificate of occupancy for his new Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village caused Brown to lose about three months of revenue. The case revolved around the number of parking spaces for the restaurant relative to its seating capacity.

That lawsuit eventually was amended in July 2009. The county settled it in November 2009 after mediation. Brown had claimed about \$180,000 in damages and attorney's fees.

The settlement in that case, the memo notes, comprised the following terms:

- The county paid \$35,000 to Brown.

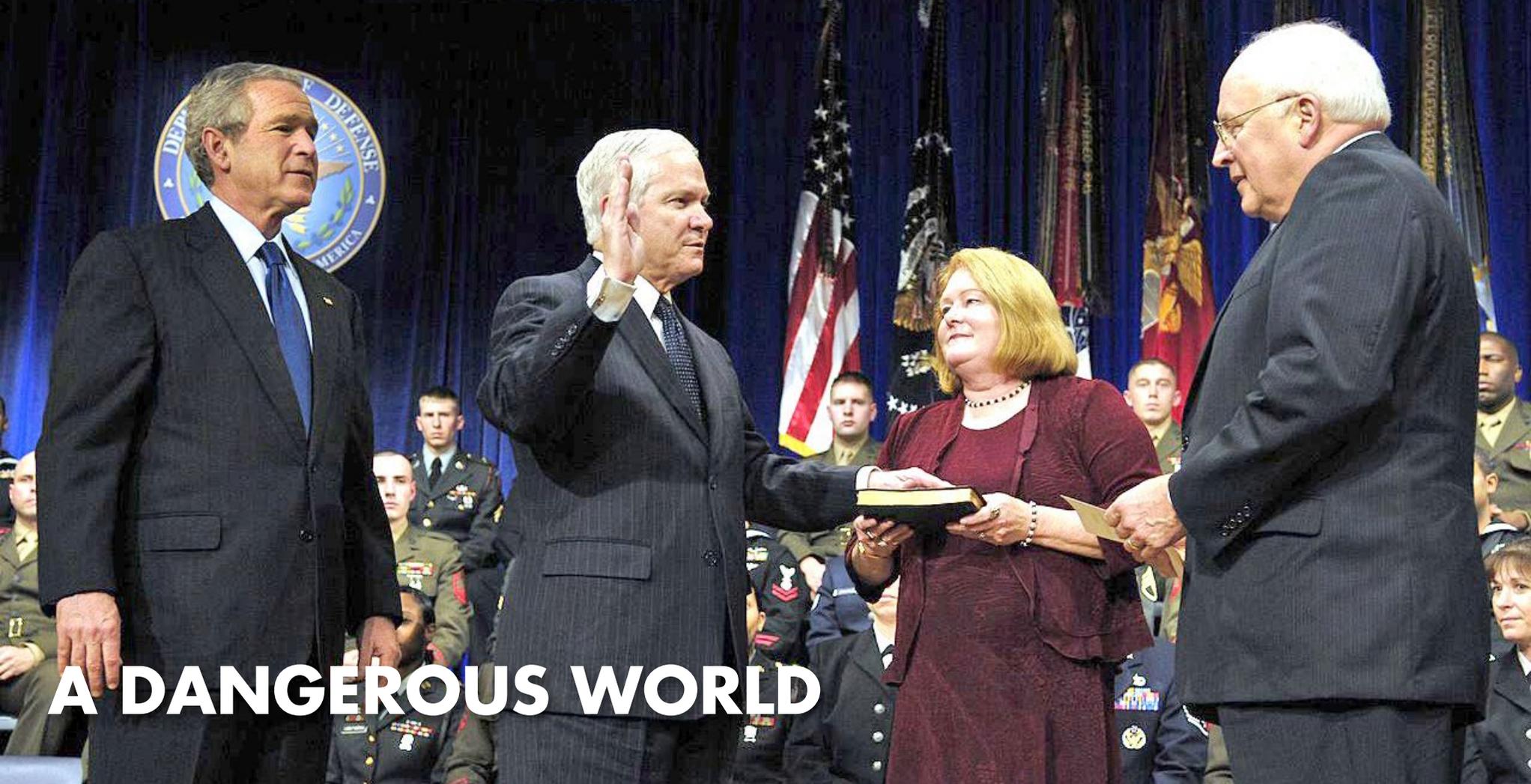
- The county vacated a portion of the right of way along Ocean Boulevard adjacent to The Hub to resolve a pending code enforcement issue. (Brown had been cited for having restaurant tables over his boundary line.)
- The county affirmed his special music exception, which allows him to provide live music later into the night than any other establishment in the Village: from 9 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. seven days a week; the sound level cannot exceed 85 decibels as measured at the property boundary.

Brown's second lawsuit against the county, filed on Jan. 31, 2011, alleged he once again had been assessed inappropriately for parking expenses. The county settled that suit by paying Brown \$2,500.

It was about a month after he received that payment, he said, when he received the 2011 tax bill with the charges that were the focus of the third lawsuit.

The County Commission voted 4-1 on Dec. 4, 2012 to pay off the rest of the cost of the municipal parking lot in Siesta Village, citing inequity in the way staff had figured the parking assessments through the years. (Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, cast the "No" vote.) A memo to the board from county Chief Engineer James K. Harriott Jr., also sent on Dec. 4, said anticipated revenues from assessments for the 2013 fiscal year were \$47,811, "leaving an anticipated debt of \$286,868" for the lot.

The county's general fund would absorb the remaining amount, Harriott's memo noted. 



A DANGEROUS WORLD

Becky Gates holds the Bible as Robert M. Gates (center) is sworn in as the 22nd secretary of defense by Vice President Dick Cheney (right) at the Pentagon, Dec. 18, 2006. President George W. Bush (left) looks on. Gates was confirmed Dec. 6, 2006, by the U.S. Senate in a 95-2 vote. Defense Department photo by Helene C. Stikkel

FORMER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT GATES, SPEAKING AT THE VAN WEZEL, IDENTIFIES THREATS TO U.S. SECURITY

By Vicki Chatley
Contributing Writer

The “security challenges facing the United States” were the focus of remarks by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on Feb. 5 before a full auditorium at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota.

Gates, the second speaker in the Ringling College Library Association’s Town Hall 2013 lecture series, began his career in public service in 1966 as an entry-level employee of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 1974 he joined the staff of the National

Security Council, serving under three presidents before returning to the CIA in 1979, where he later became deputy director and, in 1991, director. His first retirement from government service came in 1993, but he answered the call again when nominated to become secretary of defense in 2006.

“ *Not a single Arab state has building blocks for democracy.* ”

Robert Gates
U.S. Secretary of Defense
Retired

In describing the areas that present security threats, Gates briefly mentioned Korea. He dealt in more depth with China, which he described as a growing power that has huge

cash reserves. However, he views China as seeking to sustain “economic growth that is fundamentally unsustainable.” To divert attention from economic problems resulting from slowing export trade, Chinese leaders are promoting nationalism. Gates sees “no ... reason for China and the U.S. to be enemies.”

The Middle East received detailed attention. In Gates’ opinion “the tectonic plate of the Middle East has shattered.” Old regimes have been destroyed with nothing to replace them. Fledgling governments, such as in Egypt and Syria, are weak. He stated, “Not a single Arab state has building blocks for democracy.”

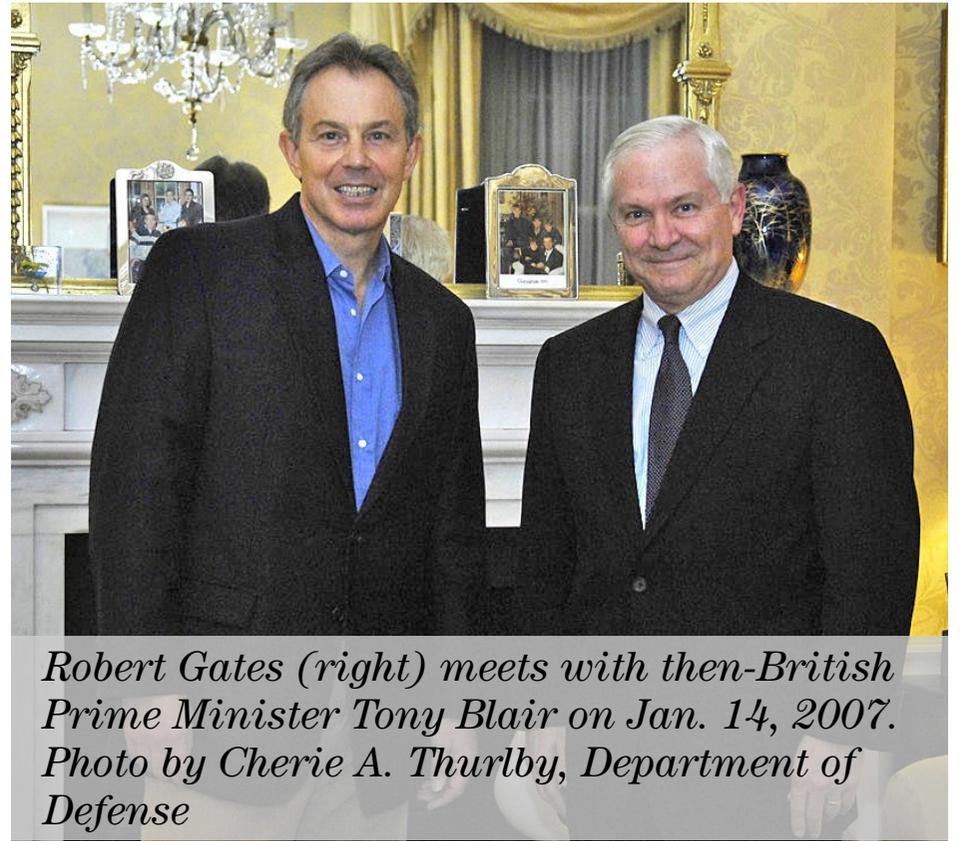
According to Gates, Iran does present a nuclear threat, particularly with respect to Israel. He stated it would be “catastrophic” if Israel, which lacks the “capability to destroy all [Iranian] nuclear facilities,” were to attack Iran, a country that has “virtually no military ability to attack the U.S.”

The assault could result in a significant disruption in the flow of oil, he pointed out.

He believes the United States must retain military forces in the Middle East.

Gates described Afghanistan as presenting “steep challenges.” He is concerned that if the U.S. exits too quickly, the Taliban will take over and increase its power. He believes the U.S. objective should be to “degrade the military ability of the Taliban” and increase support, including financial aid, for the Afghan government.

Although he believes “military force should be the last resort, not the first option,” in Gates’ opinion “slashing the defense budget makes no sense.”



Robert Gates (right) meets with then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Jan. 14, 2007. Photo by Cherie A. Thurlby, Department of Defense

He also addressed the dysfunction in Washington, calling the capital a place where “few are lost in thought because it’s unfamiliar territory.” He cited gerrymandering, the decline of tough power brokers in Congress and the extremist voices of the media as reasons for the inability to reach bipartisan agreement on the issues of the day.

In addition, the country must get its finances in order while, at the same time, he said, the United States’ leaders must put “patriotism and national interest” above party politics.

In spite of a “world that is getting more belligerent and dangerous,” Gates is “fundamentally optimistic” that the United States has the power and means to overcome its problems.

A lively question-and-answer session followed the formal presentation. Among the highlights: Gates supports women in combat; a voluntary military force is preferable to returning to the draft; and he has never seen a movie or read a book “that gets the CIA right except *Argo*,” which he says is “for the most part an amazingly accurate” portrayal. 



The boxes begin to stack up outside the Baseball Operations Center, awaiting the baseball players themselves. The first Orioles home game in Sarasota is set for Feb. 23 against the Minnesota Twins. Photo by Norman Schimmel

LIBRARIES AND BALTIMORE ORIOLES TEAM UP TO PROMOTE READING

For the third consecutive year, Sarasota County libraries and the Baltimore Orioles are teaming up to promote reading through the Orioles Big League Reader program.

Children who sign up for the program and read three or more books in the month of February will receive a reserved grandstand ticket to the Thursday, March 14, game between the Baltimore Orioles and the Tampa Bay Rays at Ed Smith Stadium, the team and the county have announced.

During the month of February, children ages 6 and up who check out three or more books from any Sarasota County public library will receive a Home Run Reading Card, a county news release says. After they finish the books

and return them to the library, a library staff member will initial the children's Home Run Reading Cards, which they may trade in for a reserved grandstand ticket to the game at Ed Smith Stadium.

"It's a great program that kids love to take part in," said Sarabeth Kalajian, director of Sarasota County Libraries, in the release. "Most start out with the intention of reading the books so they can get a ticket to the game, and in the end they win not only a great day at the ballpark, but also a lifetime of discovery through reading."

Last season, more than 130 Sarasota-area children completed the program and were eligible to receive a free ticket to an Orioles spring training game.

March 14 is also “Kids Run the Bases Day,” the release points out. Following the game, all youngsters 14 and under will be invited onto the field to take their turn running the bases.

“The Baltimore Orioles are proud to team with Sarasota County’s libraries to encourage youngsters to read,” said Greg Bader, vice president of communications & marketing for the Orioles, in the release. “Youth literacy is

a key community initiative supported by the Orioles, and we are excited to reward Big League Readers with a day at Ed Smith Stadium.”

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 and ask about the Big League Reader program or visit www.scgov.net.



The first Von Paris moving and storage truck, representing the firm that has moved the Baltimore Orioles between their spring training and home facilities since 1991, arrived at Ed Smith Stadium on the morning of Feb. 3 — a sure sign games will be getting under way soon in Sarasota. Orioles staff was on hand to greet the truck and begin unloading equipment into the Baseball Operations Center near the corner of Euclid Avenue and 11th Street. Photo by Norman Schimmel

100TH DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRATION RECORDED IN CITY

The 100th domestic partnership was registered within the City of Sarasota last week, less than three months after the program began, the city has announced.

“The success of the registry has generated interest from other Florida municipalities inquiring about possibly using the City of Sarasota’s program as a model,” a city news release says. After the City Commission approved the program, registrations began Nov. 6, 2012.

The registry offers domestic partners many rights within the city limits, including health-care decisions, hospital visitations, correctional facility visitations and funeral decisions,

the release notes. City of Sarasota residents as well as non-residents may register.

Partners may register in the Office of the City Auditor and Clerk, located in Room 110 within City Hall, 1565 First St. Registration hours are Tuesday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 4 p.m.

Appointments also may be scheduled by contacting the Office of the City Auditor and Clerk: 954-4160.

More information on the domestic partnership registry may be found [here](#), where frequently asked questions and other important information is posted, the release points out.

SEVEN OPEN HOUSES SET ON DRAFT BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PLAN

Sarasota County will hold seven open house-style meetings this month on the draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Attendees will have the opportunity to view the draft plan and maps, which identify existing facilities and high-priority areas for improvements, and to ask questions and provide comments, a county news release says.

The meetings, 5 to 7 p.m., will be held as follows in north county:

- Wednesday, Feb. 6, Longwood Run Park, 6050 Longwood Run Blvd., Sarasota.
- Monday, Feb. 11, Sabal Palm Bank, 5101 Fruitville Road, Sarasota.
- Wednesday, Feb. 13, Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, 1845 34th St., Sarasota.

- Wednesday, Feb. 20, Bee Ridge Park, 4430 S. Lockwood Ridge Road.
- Thursday, Feb. 21, Twin Lakes Park, 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota.
- Tuesday, Feb. 26, Siesta Key Chapel, 4615 Gleason Ave., Siesta Key.
- Wednesday, Feb. 27, Selby Library, 1331 First St., Sarasota.

Five open houses were held in south county in January, the release points out.

“The draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan identifies a vision, mission and purpose for a bicycle and pedestrian network and provides a framework to promote and encourage safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian travel within Sarasota County,” the release adds. “It recognizes key partnerships and ongoing ef-

forts to increase the safety and education of bicyclists and pedestrians,” the release notes.

The draft plan includes facility design types and graphics, points out existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities and recommended connections and identifies opportunities and deficiencies in the network for improvements, the release says. “The plan is an essential tool for the county to use when applying for grant funds from state, federal and nonprofit organizations,” it points out.

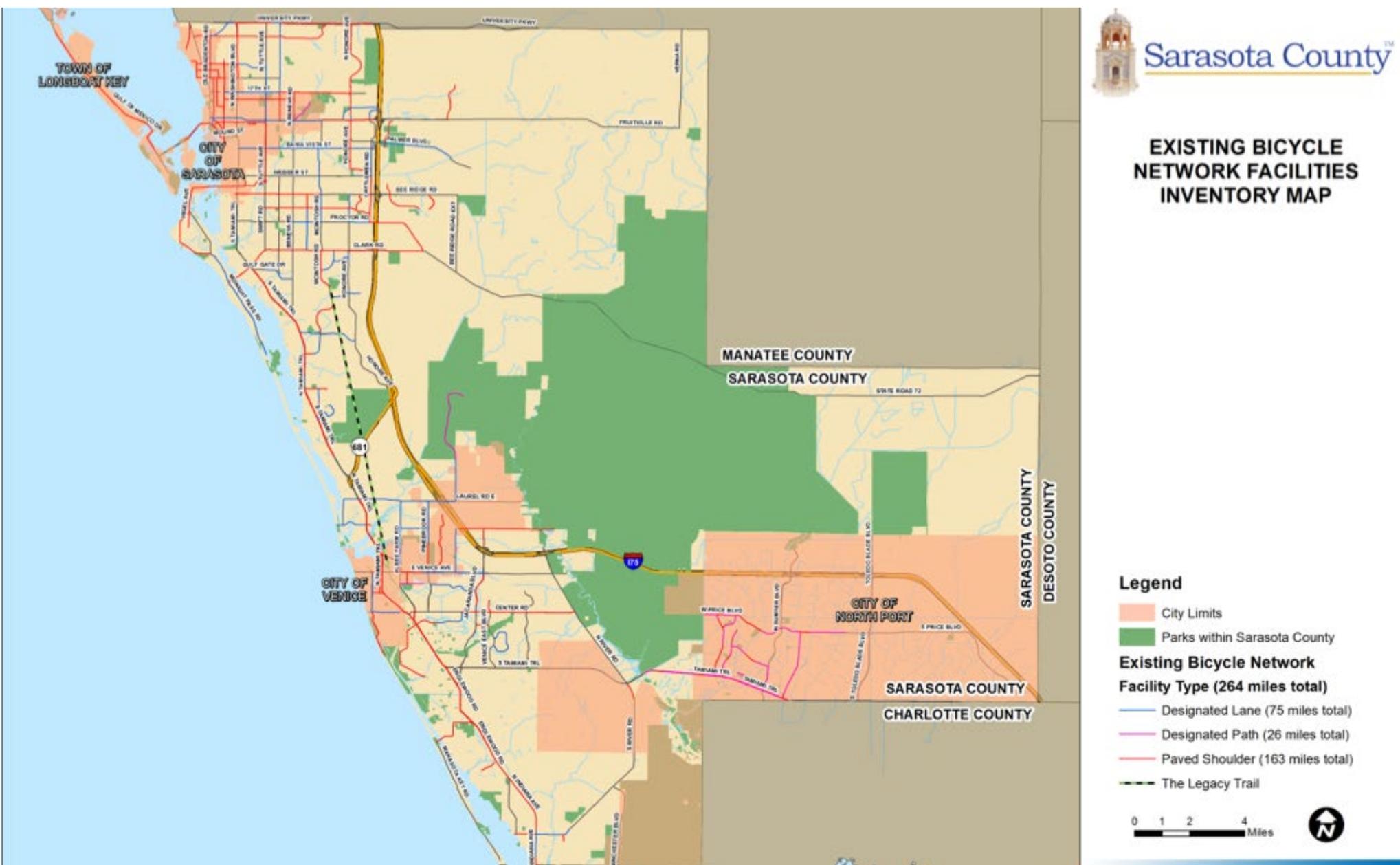
In addition to the open houses, the county has extended through Feb. 28 the opportunity for public input and comments on the draft plan via the county’s wiki site. A link to the wiki may be found online at the Sarasota County

website, www.scgov.net, keyword “Pedestrian.”

After submitting a valid email address and agreeing to follow the civility code, users will be sent a password via email for this citizen feedback tool.

After the wiki is closed and the open houses have been held, county staff will prepare a summary on the citizen feedback for the County Commission and present the draft plan to the commission this spring, the release says.

For additional information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 or email bikepedplan@scgov.net.



The Sarasota County draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan includes a map showing existing bike paths. Map courtesy Sarasota County

NOVA CLUB TO DISCUSS OBAMACARE

A distinguished panel will discuss “What You Need to Know about ObamaCare” at the NOVA Republican Club’s monthly meeting, Tuesday, Feb. 19, from 6:15 to 8 p.m. at the Nokomis Community Center, 234 Nippino Trail, Nokomis, the club has announced.

The event is free. Non-members and guests are welcome.

The panelists will include Dr. Michael Patete, an otolaryngologist; Joan Farnham, an insurance expert with AFLAC; Andres Malave with Americans for Prosperity; and Frank Patti, a retired health pension and benefit executive, a club news release says. Dr. Joe Neunder, with Sarasota Spinal Mechanics, will moderate.

For additional information, contact Frank Patti at 408-7423 or visit www.novagop.com.

SEASON OF SHARING HOPING TO REACH \$1 MILLION MARK

With more than \$970,000 in donations so far, “the generous Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto region is nearing the \$1 million fundraising goal for Season of Sharing, the annual campaign that benefits thousands of individuals and families on the verge of homelessness,” The Patterson Foundation has announced.

“This year, however, there is still the opportunity for approximately \$60,000 in new or increased donations to be matched through The Patterson Foundation — funds that can be used to help an additional 500 families on the verge of homelessness,” a news release notes.

To inspire the community to fulfill the match, Charles and Margie Barancik stepped in with a \$100,000 capping challenge. This means the Baranciks will donate \$100,000 if the community raises the \$60,000 in new or increased donations, the release points out. If both are achieved, The Patterson Foundation’s offer of a \$500,000 match will be a success.

“We’ve come to love Sarasota over decades and Season of Sharing is a demonstration of the generosity we love about this community,” says Margie Barancik in the release. “Our eyes have been opened that not everyone can share in such an enhanced life here. We know Sarasota will rise to the occasion,” she adds.

Each year, Season of Sharing thrives from the generosity of many people from all walks of life. Nearly three quarters of the 3,100 gifts received during last year’s campaign were \$100 or less, the release points out. The all-encompassing community support makes the difference for those in need.

“As a front line agency, the Community Coalition on Homelessness relies on the compassion and generosity of our community,” says Joe Mercado, operations manager for the Manatee County based Coalition, in the release. “In the last few years, we have seen a huge increase in families and children needing help and these numbers continue to grow. We have received thousands of applications for assistance in the last couple of months and if it wasn’t for Season of Sharing, we just wouldn’t be able to help.”

To make a new or increased donation, click [here](#).

The Herald-Tribune Media Group founded season of Sharing in 2000 to provide emergency assistance to families on the brink of homelessness. The Community Foundation of Sarasota County administers the Season of Sharing fund at no cost; therefore 100 percent of the money collected is distributed to those in need.

SARASOTA CITY HALL MARKING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

For the fifth consecutive year, educational materials are on display at City Hall, 1565 First St., commemorating Black History Month.

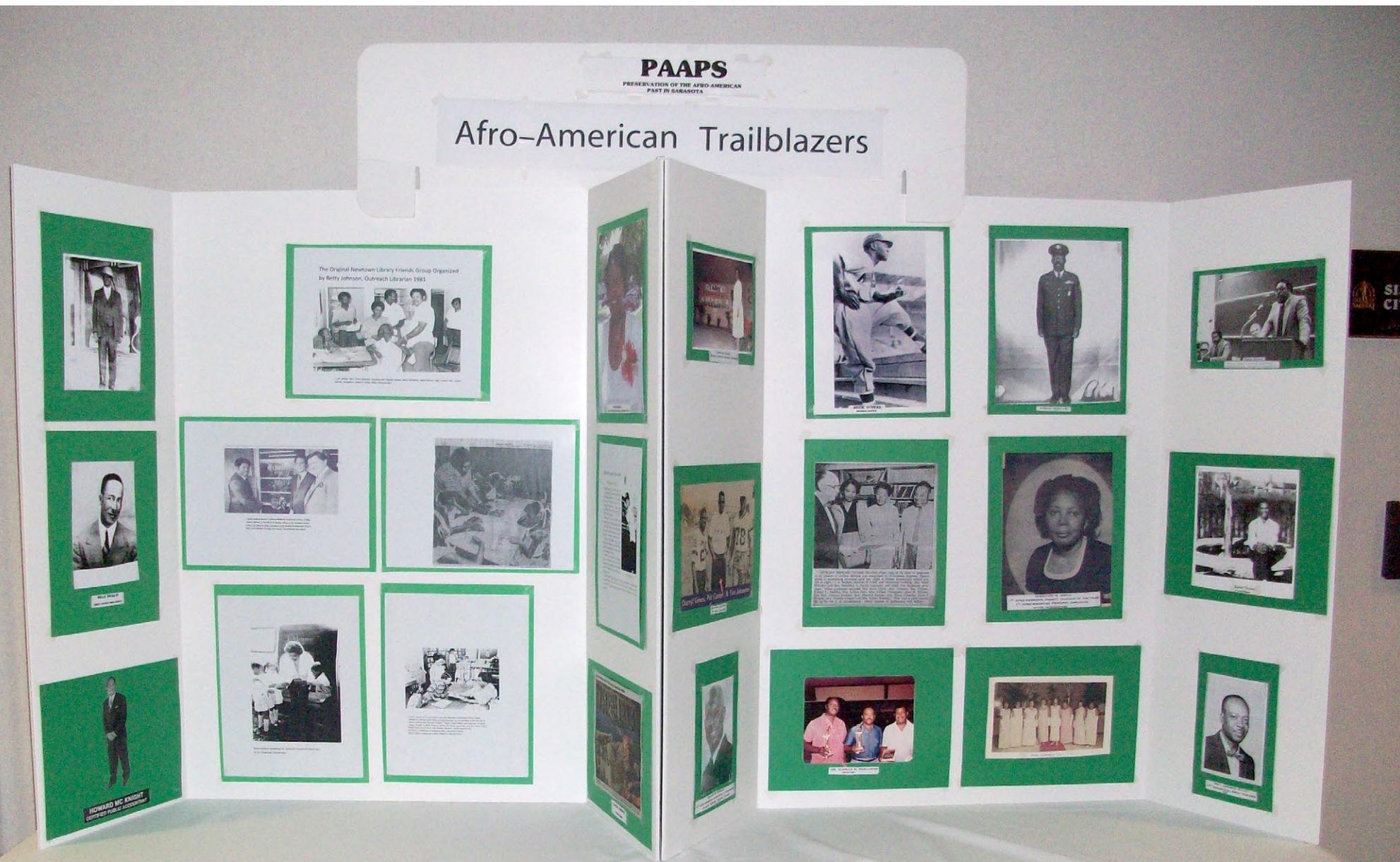
The displays include photographs and newspaper articles charting African-American trailblazers in Sarasota and the history of racial integration in Sarasota County, a city news release notes. The exhibit will be open to the public all this month, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A display also will be open to the public at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, 1845 34th Street, starting Saturday, Feb. 9.

“The exhibits document the achievements of athletes, elected officials, entertainers, teach-

ers and others who were and are at the forefront of black achievers in our community,” the release notes. One photo shows Dorothy Smith, the first African-American Teacher of the Year and first African-American principal in Sarasota County. Another depicts two of the earliest members of Sarasota’s African-American community, Irene and Louis Colson, who, in 1897, donated land to the Bethlehem Baptist Church, which became the center for educational, cultural and recreational activities in the community, the release adds.

The display has been organized again this year by Sarasota residents Dorothy Smith and Mary Edmunds, the release points out.



Educational materials are on display in City Hall to commemorate Black History Month. Contributed photo

PRINCETON REVIEW RANKS NEW COLLEGE NO. 3

New College of Florida has been ranked the No. 3 Best Value Public College in America for 2013 by The Princeton Review, one of America's best known education services companies, the college has announced.

The Princeton Review's 2013 list features 75 public and 75 private colleges; it ranks the top 10 in each category, a news release says. New College was the only Florida institution to appear on either Top 10 list this year, the release points out.

The appearance continues a five-year run of recognition for New College, the release notes. This is the fifth year The Princeton Review has teamed with *USA Today* to publish a list of the nation's top public and private colleges, and each year New College has been among the top three public schools for offering students exceptional academics at an affordable price, the release adds.

New College was ranked the No. 2 Best Value Public College in 2011 and 2009, and No. 3 in 2012 and 2010. Only three other U.S. public colleges made the list all five years, the release points out.

"New College is honored to be recognized once again by The Princeton Review and *USA Today* as one of the nation's best value public colleges," said New College President Donal O'Shea in the release. "During this time of economic uncertainty for so many families,

we take great pride in delivering the highest level of academic quality at a cost that is substantially lower than almost all other leading colleges and universities in the country."

New College of Florida is the State of Florida's honors college for the liberal arts and sciences. With a student population of slightly more than 800, New College emphasizes individualized learning for academically talented students from 40 states and some 25 foreign countries.

For the 2011-2012 academic year, New College's in-state tuition and fees are \$6,783. Among colleges in the Princeton Review's "Best Value" public college list, the average cost of attendance for in-state students is about \$8,300, the release says.

The Princeton Review used institutional data and student surveys from fall 2011 to fall 2012 to assess 650 colleges nationwide, the release says. It examined 30 criteria, including academic performance, costs and financial aid. The Review also considers the percentage of students who take out loans and the average debt those students have at graduation. It then selects 75 public and 75 private colleges as the best values, ranks the top 10 schools in each category and lists the rest in alphabetical order.

The Best Value Colleges lists are available on The Princeton Review [website](#).

Press Releases & News Tips

News@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

ARTS/CRAFTS/AUTHORS EVENT PLANNED FOR FARMHOUSE MARKET

On Wednesday, Feb. 13, the Farmhouse at Phillippi Estate Park will host the Arts/Crafts and Authors Event, featuring more than 25 artisans and authors to satisfy every person's desire for one-of-a-kind items, event organizers have announced.

People will be able to choose from a wide selection of books, for every age level by local authors, many of whom will be on hand for autographing their work, a news release says.

The Sarasota Humane Society also will be on site "with adorable adoptable pets and a Smooch a Pooch Booth!" the release notes.

Additionally, Theresa Wilcox from Soho Downtown hair salon will be on hand to snip braids at least 10 inches long and pony tails to donate to Locks of Love.

The Market, which is open every Wednesday at 5500 S. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. It regularly features 50 vendors who sell locally grown produce, seafood, breads and pastries, oils, soaps and craft creations of all kinds, and it offers music and free parking. For details, visit www.farmhouse-market.org.

LEARN HOW SARASOTA BECAME A REAL ESTATE DESTINATION

Sarasota officially became a real estate destination in 1885 when 60 men, women and children from Scotland (called the Ormiston Colony), who had purchased land in the area from the Edinburgh-based Florida Mortgage and Investment Co., arrived on an uncharacteristically chilly December day at what is now lower Main Street. "They were mightily unimpressed with the mud and wood huts they saw. They thought they were coming to sunny Florida to become gentlemen farmers. Then it snowed," a Historical Society of Sarasota County news release says.

Want to know what happened next? Then be sure to be in the audience at the Crocker Memorial Church (1260 12th St., Pioneer Park, Sarasota) on Tuesday, Feb. 12, at 7 p.m. "for an entertaining and illuminating panel discussion called *Pay Dirt: How Sarasota Became a Real Estate Destination*," the release points out.

The discussion will be about "those who were deceived by promises of paradise but also about key developers and visionaries who created a specific kind of paradise," the release notes.

The event is free to Historical Society members and \$10 for members of the general public.

The moderator of the panel will be Bob Plunket, who has been writing about Sarasota's people and places for more than 30 years. His articles appear regularly in *Sarasota Magazine*, plus national publications such as *Barron's*. For several years he also appeared on ABC 7 as The Real Estate Junkie, the release notes.

"After owning eight different houses in Sarasota over the years," he says in the release, "I'm as obsessed as ever about all the amazing places you can own, rent, and be foreclosed in." Joining him will be author/historian Jeff

LaHurd, who has written 15 books about the history of the community. His newest is *The Rise of Sarasota, Ken Thompson and the Rebirth of Paradise*.

Also on the panel will be two long-time experts in selling real estate, realtors Lynn Robbins and David Jennings, the release adds. With 38 years in the business, Robbins consistently earns her top honors in Sarasota and recognition throughout the country, the release points out.

“Jennings lives in a vintage home in Sarasota and is a real estate professional dedicated to helping to preserve Sarasota’s early examples of residential architecture,” the release adds. “Being the past president of the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation and the director of Sarasota’s Tour of Historic Homes for nine years has given me a great deal of experience in dealing with preservation, restoration and historic designation issues and how all of

that impacts the buying and selling of property in Sarasota County,” he says in the release.

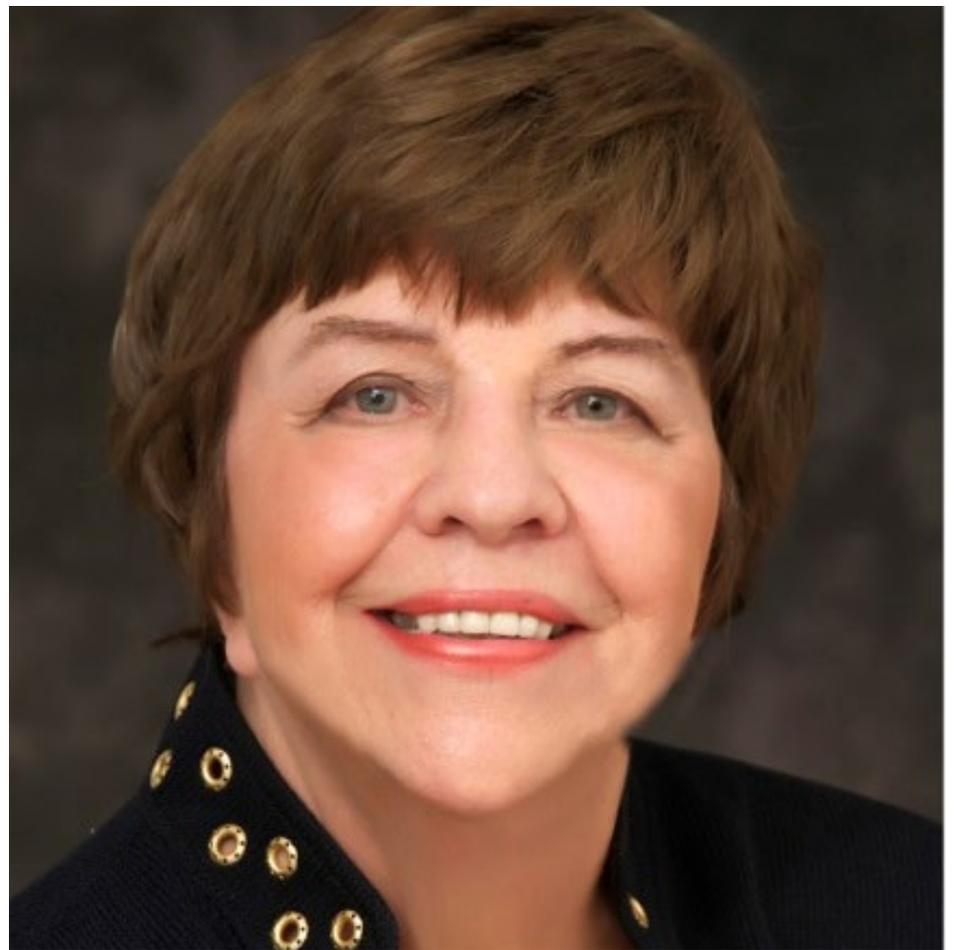
The *Pay Dirt* event at the Crocker Memorial Church is the fifth in a series of panel discussions this year that have been organized and produced by the Historical Society of Sarasota County. *Conversations at The Crocker* events highlight specific aspects of Sarasota’s past and examine pivotal events and people who have influenced Sarasota today, the release points out.

Proceeds from the series help to maintain the Historical Society’s two heritage properties at Pioneer Park — the Bidwell-Wood House (1882, Sarasota’s oldest private residence) and the Crocker Memorial Church (1901). Docent-led tours of both buildings are available an hour before each of the *Conversations at The Crocker* events.

For additional information, visit the web site: www.HSOSC.com.



David Jennings/Contributed photo



Lynn Robbins/Contributed photo

FUGITIVE FELON CAPTURED IN OSPREY AFTER DISAPPEARING LAST MAY

On Feb. 6, the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Fugitive Apprehension Unit, working in conjunction with the U.S. Marshals Florida Regional Fugitive Task Force, captured Henry Lee Morganstern, a convicted felon who has been on the run for the past nine months, the Sheriff's Office reported.

Morganstern was wanted for Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon and Larceny for trying to steal a \$200 reciprocating saw from Ace Hardware, 2881 Clark Road, last March, a report says. The saw was valued at \$199.99 plus tax, according to the report.

Morganstern had tried to conceal the saw in the front of his pants, the report adds.

"After being confronted by the manager, he fled the store and tried to run down an employee who was writing down the tag number on his vehicle," it adds. Investigators identified Morganstern as the suspect and obtained an arrest warrant in May 2012, the report notes.

Morganstern was taken into custody on the morning of Feb. 6 in Osprey without incident, the report says.



Henry Morganstern/Contributed photo

Morganstern was released from Florida State Prison in August 2010 after serving seven years for trafficking methamphetamines, the report notes. He was also previously convicted of Carrying a Concealed Firearm by a Convicted Felon, Burglary and other narcotics-related crimes, the report adds. **SNL**

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OPINION



THE DARK CLOUD AROUND TOURISM'S SILVER LINING

EDITORIAL

When winter arrives elsewhere in the nation, accompanied by ice, snow and frigid temperatures, we continue to bask in balmy temperatures here in Southwest Florida.

Winter also brings outbreaks — even epidemics — of the flu. Epidemiologists tell us that cold, dry air dries out our mucous membranes and makes us more susceptible to viral infections, which helps to explain why being sick is another ill effect of the season. And it should present yet another benefit of our warmer weather. Not breathing frigid, dry air should make us less prone to catching the flu.

However, when the current epidemic made its inexorable way across the country, Florida was not spared as one of the hot spots of infection. And we have had a warmer-than-usual winter so far.

So why are we suffering this much? The answer might just come down to one word: tourists.

As much as we love their visits to our little corner of paradise, especially their generous spending, visitors to Southwest Florida come

“Everyone reading this likely has been affected by the flu this season, either personally or through a loved one.”

from all over the frozen wasteland to our north. Too often the pernicious flu virus hitches a ride with them, and our warmer

OPINION

air is no longer a defense for us. We are sitting ducks for the bug.

Consequently, everyone reading this likely has been affected by the flu this season, either personally or through a loved one. The chills and fever, the aching, the cough, the congestion and sneezing, the wheezing ... it is misery personified.

Earlier in the flu season we were gratified that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had determined that the most prevalent strains actually were represented in the vaccine this year.

Typically, it is something of an epidemiological crapshoot, since vaccines normally are developed months before a particular flu season, so the vaccine can be produced in needed quantities once the infection rate rises. Some years the vaccines simply do not provide much protection against the nasty bugs. But this year was supposed to be different.

That is, until you consider the caveats: Warnings of a severe flu season have created sporadic shortages of the vaccine. In addition, the flu vaccine must be taken at least two weeks before exposure to the virus for one to be fully protected. And even when one is "fully protected," the vaccine only reduces the odds of getting the flu about 60 percent. That might sound OK to most, but we would wager few

would fly on a plane that had only a 60 percent chance of landing safely.

However, given the risk of complications of the flu, particularly in high-risk groups such as children, the elderly and those with immunocompromising diseases, the vaccine is a wise choice. And the odds still are much better than those for blackjack or the slots.

If we get the flu, is there any shortcut to recovery? It appears not. Even the much-hyped Tamiflu and similar drugs have been oversold as a quick remedy for the flu. Recent research indicates that, on average, such antiviral drugs — known as neuraminidase inhibitors — shorten symptoms by only 21 hours. If the drugs are not administered within hours of the onset of symptoms, efficacy is reduced even further.

So we find ourselves, despite being in a warm, sunny region, still exposed to a disease that, at best, causes days or weeks of misery and, at worst, can put victims in intensive care with life-threatening complications. Moreover, the drugs touted ubiquitously on TV as a quick solution to our suffering apparently do not deliver on those promises.

The medical advice that has persisted for generations still offers the wisest course: Stay in bed and drink lots of liquids — and be grateful you no longer live in a time when there were only three TV networks and they showed only game shows or soap operas all day. After all, distraction seems to be the best balm of all. 

OPINION

YEARS OF REFLECTION POINT TO THE TRUTH ABOUT MY BEST FRIEND



By Harriet Cuthbert
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY Recently, a friend asked me to go with her to the Sarasota Designer Showhouse, and I told her, “No thanks, I’d rather go by myself.”

What? Is this I talking, social butterfly that I am, telling my friend that I am going solo and liking the idea? When did I become my own best friend? And when did I begin to prefer my own company rather than joining a circle of many? Maybe, this realization was always brewing, but I got sidetracked along the way by life.

College encourages social interaction (i.e., sharing dorm rooms, studying for exams in groups, hanging out at local pubs). We do not think much of doing our own thing at that point, because we are still finding our own way.

After college, some of us get married and later have children —two huge reasons that continue to make us likely to interact with others. After all, it is our family members whom we love and with whom we choose to spend most of our time. Yet, all of us are growing up together, but separately, and we do show some independence to display our individual growth.

I used to think that if I were doing something alone that more traditionally would involve the company of another person, then people would stare at me and consider me a social outcast because I was not “with a friend” — such as going to the beach, movies, museum, etc. Even going for a walk or a run seemed to require companionship — anything to appear as though I fit in.

Holding a job was a situation even more likely to encourage togetherness — group lunches in the cafeteria, weekly group meetings, brainstorming as a group.

It is amazing we ever gain the confidence or realize we have enough personal interest in something to choose to pursue activities by ourselves.

It took me awhile to realize that if I did not go by myself to my favorite events or local places, I would miss out on all of them and then where would I be? Back home, wallowing in self-pity because I did not have the courage to do my own thing and enjoy it.

When you stop to consider how easy it is to feel free to decide for yourself, it almost makes a group activity too much of a burden. It seems as if there are far fewer time constraints when you are a group of one. Wan-

OPINION

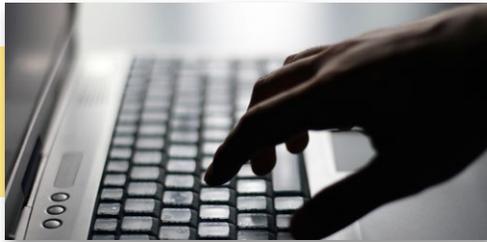
dering around a park or a zoo, for example, is very enjoyable when you are by yourself. People watching is best done alone, as well, and the beach is my preferred environment.

It does not take long to go from feeling self-conscious to feeling self-confident. Silent thoughts are good for the soul. Opinions do

not have to be expressed out loud or to another person.

A friend says we grow into our comfort zones and as a result, we can actually look forward to spending leisure time alone. After all, think of how much more we can accomplish without waiting for other people.

Table for one, anyone? 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LET CANDIDATES KNOW YOUR VOTE IS NOT FOR SALE

To the editor:

No matter how much money may be available to an individual candidate in these, our local elections, the “ordinary folks” can have an impact that can’t be bought by simply choosing “the right” candidate to allow to put a sign in their yards.

Regardless of what they paid for their little pieces of real estate, their property has become a most valuable commodity this election season.

Essentially, we can reform the electoral process in Sarasota — diminishing the significance of the “Large Donor Class” by letting their candidates’ signs go to waste in the warehouse while we offer “our guy” (or gal) a special place on our lawn.

After all, it is our neighborhood that will suffer the most if Mr. Big and his wallet hold sway.

So, choose wisely and then call your favorite son/daughter and invite the person to place a

sign in your yard to let your neighbors know what you think is best for Sarasota — and that your vote is not for sale.

*Charles Senf
Sarasota*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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



A photograph of Burns Court Cinema at night. The building is illuminated with a warm, orange-red glow. A large, bright neon sign at the top reads "BURNS COURT CINEMA". Below the sign, the entrance is visible with a canopy and a sign for the "Sarasota Film Society". Several people are gathered outside, some looking at movie posters on the wall. A red car is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

BURNS COURT CINEMA

Sarasota Film Society

SARASOTA ON THE SILVER SCREEN

*Burns Court Cinema in downtown Sarasota, where the private screening of *Blind Pass* was held, is a small, independent theater known for showing indie or limited-release films that are often not available at major movie theaters. All photos by Arielle Scherr*

LOCAL FILMMAKERS PREVIEW THEIR NEW INDEPENDENT MOVIE, *BLIND PASS*, AND TALK OF THEIR HOPES FOR ITS IMPACT ON THE AREA'S FUTURE IN FILM

By Tyler Whitson

Staff Writer

When Sarasota-area director Steve Tatone and actress Danielle White previewed their new psychological thriller, *Blind Pass*, to a packed house of crew members, potential investors and media representatives at Burns Court Cinema on the evening of Jan. 26, the atmosphere in the room was one of great excitement, not just for the film itself and all the effort that went into it, but for what it could mean to the future economy of the Sarasota-Bradenton area.

Tatone and White — who co-produced *Blind Pass* for their production company, Midnight Pass Productions — had previously worked together on the Sarasota-based musical *Beau-*

tiful Noise. They have made it clear they see *Blind Pass* as a statement that the Sarasota-Bradenton area has the potential to compete with powerhouse film production locations such as Los Angeles and New York in producing independent films shot on location with the hard work and support of local professionals and community members.

“It’s definitely a watershed moment,” Tatone, who directed his latest film on what he referred to as a “low budget,” told *The Sarasota News Leader* in an interview the day before the screening. “We’re building something here that doesn’t exist,” he continued: “Indie filmmaking that’s not brought from the outside in,

but something that's growing organically from the inside out."

Tatone said *Blind Pass*, which features recognizable outdoor locations on Siesta Key Public Beach and in Lakewood Ranch, among other local places, could not have been made without the assistance and cooperation of community members and organizations. In fact, in certain cases, he noted, the collaboration has been integral to the plot of the movie.

The film follows the life of Carrie James, a privileged, mercurial Sarasota heiress in her early 20s, played by White, who discovers she has an untreatable, congenital, ocular disease — which remains unnamed in the film. She learns it will render her blind over the course of about three months.

Much of the plot focuses on her treatment by an acclaimed Sarasota psychologist named Dr. Michael Roselli, played by Los Angeles-based

television and film actor Chris McKenna (*House, Castle*) and his efforts to help her cope emotionally with the inevitability of her visual impairment.

Part of this adjustment involves White's character's learning how to use tools and technolo-



Blind Pass, which was screened for a private audience at Burns Court Cinema on Jan. 26, is the second film produced by Sarasota-based Midnight Pass Productions, following *Beautiful Noise* in 2010. The next project Midnight Pass will be working on is the musical *Serenade*, a sequel to *Beautiful Noise*.



(From left) Ed Lauter, Steve Tatone, Danielle White and James Sexton pose for a photo following the *Blind Pass* preview at Burns Court Cinema on Jan. 26.

gy designed to aid the visually impaired, which is where, Tatone explained, the expertise of local not-for-profit organizations Southeastern Guide Dogs and Lighthouse of Manasota came in.

“We didn’t just take the storyline and pretend,” he said. “We actually went out and sought the help and assistance of people who deal with individuals in this community and throughout the region who are sight-impaired.”

This collaboration had reciprocal benefits, Tatone explained. On one end, featuring Southeastern handlers and guide dogs as well as Lighthouse instructors and technology in the film imbues it with a certain level of authenticity. On the other end, the organizations are credited at the end of the film, which Tatone

hopes will help raise awareness of them and their humanitarian efforts.

Aside from highlighting local organizations and locations, Tatone added, shooting and producing independent films in the Sarasota-Bradenton area has the benefit of providing talented individuals who live nearby — actors, actresses, screenwriters, cinematographers, graphic designers, lighting specialists, microphone operators, promoters, producers and more — with employment opportunities they might otherwise have to leave town to pursue.

Of course, not every part of the film pulls its resources from the local community. Tatone worked with casting directors in Tampa and Los Angeles to secure the talents of veteran blockbuster actors Armand Assante (*Judge Dredd*, *The Mambo Kings*, *American Gang-*



(From left) Ed Lauter, Danielle White, Steve Tatone and James Sexton answer questions from the audience about the filming of *Blind Pass* after the preview at Burns Court Cinema on Jan. 26. When Sexton told a couple of stories about the portion of filming that took place in Dublin, Ireland — with locals at small pubs — he had the audience laughing heartily.

ster), who is cast as Richard James, the main character's deceased father, and Ed Lauter (*The Artist, The Longest Yard, Trouble with the Curve*), who plays the pastor who presides at the father's funeral.

In addition, a portion of the film was shot over the course of a week in Dublin, Ireland, with the assistance of Irish actor and *Blind Pass* Associate Producer James Sexton, who acted in the film as well as guided the cast and crew to various locales, such as pubs, restaurants, castles and vistas that are prominently featured in the movie.

While Tatone and White are confident the inclusion of well-known actors and footage of the streets, establishments and landscapes of Dublin will help to increase the mass appeal of the film, they also hope the resulting exposure will demonstrate to those in the film industry that the Sarasota-Bradenton area has enough attractive locations, talented artists and skilled technicians to be seen as a viable place to produce independent movies.

White, in fact, was so dedicated to the idea that she moved back to Sarasota from Los Angeles, where she was pursuing a career as an actress, to take up the leading role in *Blind Pass*, join Tatone's Midnight Pass Productions as co-producer and collaborate with Tatone on his draft of the script for the film, in which she also sings.

"I became very excited about the idea of being able to produce and being able to really make the script come to life," White told the audience during a question-and-answer session with Tatone, Lauter and Sexton after the *Blind Pass* screening. "I was trying to get a job in L.A. while I had a job here. It made no sense," she continued. "I had a really cool opportunity here to learn and to grow an indus-

try in this area — my hometown — and that was very exciting to me."

Those not from the Sarasota-Bradenton area who were involved with *Blind Pass* also have high hopes for what the film could portend for the community. In an interview with the *News Leader* the day prior to the preview, Sexton said he is confident it will boost tourism, particularly from Ireland. "Generally, [when] Irish people think Florida, they think Orlando, Miami; they think of the bigger cities," he said. "I think the movie showing in Ireland will do a lot for Sarasota because people will look at it as a destination."

Only time will tell if *Blind Pass* proves to have the national or international impact its producers are hoping for in regard to the future of the Sarasota-Bradenton area. As Tatone noted following the preview, the next step is to market the movie: attract investors, submit it to film festivals and secure a release. Tatone added that he hopes *Blind Pass*, like his previous film, *Beautiful Noise*, will be shown at the upcoming Sarasota Film Festival.

Since the screening of *Blind Pass*, there have been a few developments. In a follow-up email interview with the *News Leader* on Jan. 30, Tatone wrote the response to the private screening had been "terrific." He added that he also has been "fielding a tremendous amount of calls and inquiries from international film distributors interested in bidding on the film to secure worldwide distribution rights."

Regardless of what transpires, those involved with the movie have expressed much satisfaction with the final product.

"I think it's a very good movie and it's going to entertain a lot of people," Lauter said on stage after the screening, having seen *Blind Pass* for the first time. "I'm just proud to be in this film." 



I like to take my time.

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

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

You have a whole week.

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ASK OTUS

WHEN PENGUINS FLY: THE AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT NETS SOME RARE FINDS ON SIESTA KEY

Dear Readers,

Having carefully explained how important the results of the Jan. 5 Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Siesta Key are to the health and well-being of our key's birds and, by extension, its residents, I was expecting hundreds of letters from readers anxiously asking, "Well, how did it go? Is it safe to eat that bay-caught Red Drum I filleted and froze last month?"

As it was, I received only one question from a reader. It was my editor asking me if I had ever heard of Spell Chick, a device that would make me spell better; or something too that affect.

So, as long as no one asked, here goes!

The count was a huge success for the team as well as for all Siesta residents and visitors to our lovely isle. Everyone, not just the CBC team, has bragging rights to two species of birds that never, ever before have been seen and documented on Siesta Key. And thanks to Rick Greenspun, SK's CBC team leader, readers now have the *exquisitely beautiful* photographs to prove our claim to fame.

Seventy-seven species of birds were sought, found and "checked" off the list. Can you name 20 bird species? "Seagull," "little bird"



A Razorbill/Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun



A Black Scoter/Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun

and “duck” do not count! Two thousand, seven hundred and fifty-five birds were seen (or heard) and tallied.

As I have written before, numbers and statistics are a dry, meaningless lot unless a story accompanies them. I shall highlight a few species “checked” in this game of Hide and Seek and explain what they should mean to people and SK’s fragile ecosystem and why it is so exciting to be a part of an Audubon CBC:

- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) 15
- Razorbill (*Alca torda*). 1
- Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*). 38
- Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) 1,240
- Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*). 0
- Eastern Screech-owl (*Megascops asio*)
(That is me!). 2

The 15 Osprey, particularly when found in their established or new nesting sites, confirm the health and well-being of the fish in our Gulf waters and Little Sarasota Bay, thus assuring fisher-folk to consume their “catch of the day.”

The team’s documentation of the one Razorbill confirms the mental well being of everyone on Siesta Key. It attests to their sanity and sobriety. It means that people here are not as crazy or drunk as some would believe.

You see, beginning in mid-December 2012, people around Florida’s coastal areas, starting in Miami-Dade, began reporting seeing “flying Penguins.” Well, there is no such thing as a flying Penguin. Nevertheless, more and more sightings poured in and this mass hysteria reached almost epidemic proportions, spreading throughout various Florida counties and



A Green Heron. File photo

finally impacting Siesta Key. People fishing in our Gulf or walking the pristine sands of Siesta Beach would come home and say, “You wouldn’t believe what I saw.” And, of course, no one did!

Sitting on my favorite oak branch, I overheard every cruel rebuttal, from, “You really need to make that ophthalmologist’s appointment” to “I know you’re drinking again.” The atmosphere was getting pretty ugly and hostile around here until the CBC team discovered that Razorbill. It is not related to Penguins; it is a close relative of the now-extinct Great Auk, and it sure does look like a penguin, particularly in flight.

Please click on this Cornell University [link](#) to the Razorbill and see if you do not agree that it really does look exactly like a flying penguin.

And do read some of the interesting facts of its life history.

The team’s elation upon sighting this migratory Razorbill faded rather quickly because this sub-Arctic dweller is as much out of its element in Florida’s warm clime as a true Penguin would be. And our waters do not provide the food its specialized diet requires.

On a cheerier note: The newbies, that couple who moved here from Wisconsin, discovered the second *rara avis*, the Black Scoter — quite inadvertently, of course. They were photographing the Red-Breasted Mergansers who had flocked into Little Sarasota Bay in unprecedented numbers, and among them were some other “sitting ducks.” The newbies had no idea what any of these birds were, but, as second year-CBC tutees, they knew they



Nebougepas and Otus Rufous/File photo`



Mme. Osprey flies off from her nest before its relocation. File photo

had seen something unusual and had the common sense to document the birds in a series of grainy, over-exposed photographs.

The team's delight upon this discovery does not fade because the sub-arctic Black Scoter will fare well here during its migratory sojourn. And, rest assured, concerned ornithologists and conservationists are already on the job — analyzing the data to discover the cause of these aberrant avian migratory patterns.

Last, but not least, what does it mean to people on Siesta that some 1,240 Laughing Gulls were counted? Well, it means that a lot of property maintenance crews, homeowners, boat owners and car owners will spend a lot of time scraping up gull poop from docks, tarps, car roofs, walkways, kayaks, etc. He who laughs last??

Now to what the count means to us avians ...

Since the Audubon CBC's inception, 112 years ago, it has been the privilege of Eastern Screech Owls to preside over the ceremonial awards presentation in which First Prize for Best-in-Hiding and Booby Prize for Worst-in-Hiding are bestowed upon meritorious avian subjects. The reason my species has been singled out for this particular honor has nothing to do with the fact that Eastern Screech Owls are wise, prescient and charmingly photogenic. It has to do with the fact that we are nocturnal and most of the subjects of the awards are diurnal. Therefore, as we "night owls" love to nap during the day, our awards ceremonies are mercifully brief — no interminable speeches; no forced, gratuitous humor or commercial interruptions. It is "Here's your prize. Now, nap!"

This year's SK CBC Best-in-Hiding Prize was awarded to Green Heron. Day in, day out, like clockwork, Little Green perches on the bridge railing of Heron Lagoon at noon. But he was simply nowhere to be found CBC day! Good no-show, Little Green!

Booby Prize. Hmmm. That was shared by two Eastern Screech Owls. Nebougepas (which means "don't move!" in French. And she doesn't!) and Otus. (That's me!) You see, I was watching the team members look for Little Green Heron and laughing so hard at them that my hoots betrayed our position. Uh oh!

This year's Honorable Mention goes to Mme. Osprey, who valiantly tried to escape being checked. The day before Siesta Key's CBC, Helen Clifford, a director of the Siesta Key Association and the Siesta Condo Council, ratted out Mme. Osprey's nesting site to *SNL*, and the team honed right in on it! Noble and valiant try, Mme. Osprey! (For even more on that story, I direct you to a follow-up [article](#) in the *SNL*.)

As I am a poor loser, it is with begrudging admiration and respect that I thank the CBC team, even those pesky newbies, for seeking us out that day; the owners of private property on SK who allowed the team access to their lands; and Helen Clifford — all for caring enough to make the 2012 Audubon CBC a huge success and also for making it a wonderfully fun day!

Otus

ABOUT OTUS

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

VERY PLEASANT SURPRISES

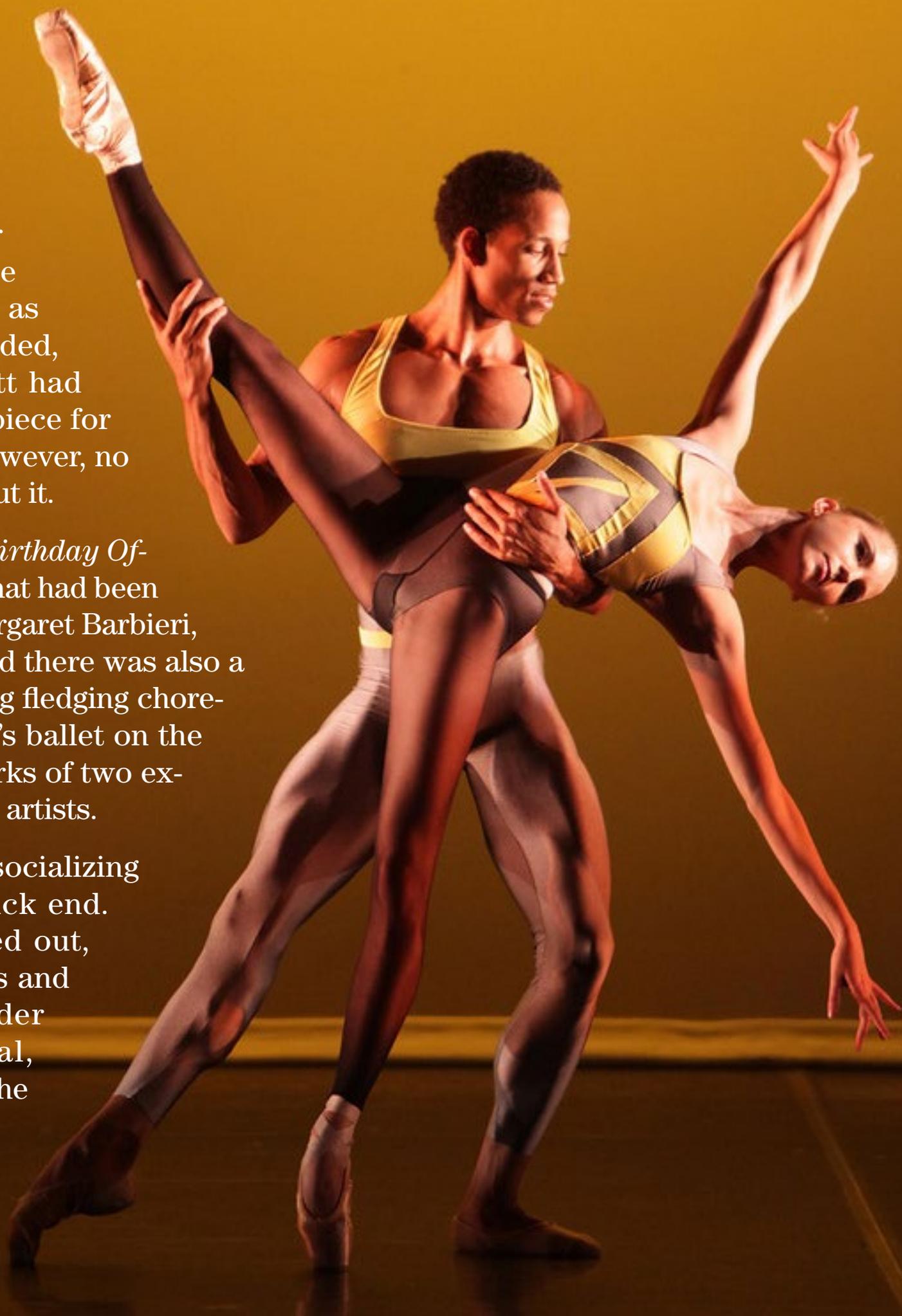
SARASOTA BALLET'S OWN JAMIE CARTER SHOWS EVEN MORE PROMISE, BUT WILL TUCKETT TRULY TRIUMPHS WITH *CHANGING LIGHT*

By Elinor Rogosin
A&E Writer

It was a cold night in usually balmy Sarasota, and along with the unusual sight of fur jackets was a tangible feeling of anticipation as everyone, myself included, knew that Will Tuckett had choreographed a new piece for The Sarasota Ballet. However, no one knew anything about it.

Sir Frederick Ashton's *Birthday Offering*, the 1956 ballet that had been lovingly restaged by Margaret Barbieri, remained a mystery; and there was also a question about including fledgling choreographer Jamie Carter's ballet on the same program with works of two extraordinary, established artists.

The pre-performance socializing came to an all-too-quick end. Programs were handed out, people took their seats and the sound of Alexander Glazunov's emotional, rhapsodic music filled the theater as the curtain rose on the formal arrangement of women in jeweled and gilded tutus positioned in front



*Ricardo Rhodes and Christine Peixoto dance their duet in *Between Longing and Yearning*. Photo by Frank Atura*

of their partners dressed in equally dazzling outfits. Yes: a colorful and familiar sight signaling a familiar but dated staging of a ballet.

Birthday Offering was created to celebrate the struggling Sadler Wells Ballet Company's elevation into The Royal Ballet. To honor each of the seven ballerinas in the company, Sir Frederick Ashton choreographed solos that revealed their personalities. Recreating the individual qualities of these celebrated dancers was a challenge that Barbieri tackled with determination and grace. However, I would say that of the seven variations — lyrical Amy Wood (in the part created for Svetlana Beriova), who danced with deliberate, slow control as though the steps had meaning for her; and Ellen Overstreet (Violetta Elvin), with her flirtatious, neat solo, presented the most successful interpretations.

Victoria Hulland (Margot Fonteyn) had the most challenging variation, and though she is a musical dancer and her technique is flawless, there was little to remind me of Fonteyn's easy gracefulness.

The seven men — including three new dancers — were competently energetic in the Mazurka and able partners.

Ashton likes busy footwork, and each solo had as many small *batterie* and mincing steps as he could put into a variation; but in general, the dancers wore too many pasted-on smiles on their faces and showed little connection to the choreography as they automatically danced their way through the classical vocabulary. Still, all was forgiven in the finale as the soaring Glazanov score swept the seven couples around the stage in a sparkling waltz,



Victoria Hulland has the Fonteyn role in Birthday Offering. Photo by Frank Atura



Will Tuckett lifts Rita Duclos during a rehearsal of Changing Light. Photo by Shirley Blair

capping this *ballet d'occasion* with a feeling of delight.

The first surprise of the evening was Jamie Carter's reworked ballet, *Between Longing and Yearning*. Set to Bach's *Chaconne in D Minor*, his ballet followed the architectural quality and structure of the music with an emphasis on controlled, geometric patterning as the dancers moved in unison or separated for five different duets. It is an intense ballet of different couplings set against a changing backdrop lit to reflect the emotions of the convoluted, acrobatic duets that were both smooth and inventive.

In the different duets: Rita Duclos was fascinating and boneless as a snake, coiled around Ricki Bertoni; Victoria Hulland and Steven

Windsor were elegant, reflecting Hulland's regal bearing; and Login Learned was an able partner for Elizabeth Sykes, but his duet with Bertoni was the most intense and sexually suggestive. It reflected changing social attitudes that could accept a sexually charged duet between two men, but I felt it became repetitious and could have been shorter.

The final duet between Ricardo Rhodes and Christine Peixto was a pleasant and conventional one that gave each of the dancers an opportunity to show their strengths.

There is no question that this ballet proves Jamie Carter is talented, but I wonder whether the work he is choreographing for the May performances will reveal a developing aesthetic.



Logan Learned (left) and Ricki Bertoni perform a sexually charged duet in *Between Longing and Yearning*. Photo by Frank Atura

I had a feeling of curious anticipation about Tuckett's *Changing Light*, not really knowing what to expect, as both the work of the composer and the choreographer were unknown to me. As the curtain lifted to reveal a sea of 25 orange-and-blue costumed dancers floating across the stage in strong, energized dancing, I knew we had stepped into the 21st century. It might have been last on the program, but *Changing Light*, set to Jeremy Holland-Smith's contemporary, percussive and exhilarating score, promised to be a sophisticated joy ride.

The ballet is constructed in a series of constantly changing, complex patterns with varying moods that alternate sections of free-wheeling dancers sliding, leaping and turning in configurations that shift like the tide: solos, couples, groups — all coming together and then parting, with the music intrinsically connected to both the emotions and the choreography.

At first the focus was on three couples who circled around as if in a giant square dance. There was a quiet intensity to the dancing of Ricardo Rhodes and Ricardo Graziano and their partners — Danielle Brown and Kate Honea — as they mirrored each other's choreography of overhead lifts and squared-off fish dives.

In another section of duets, Sara Sardelli and Logan Learned were happily reunited.

Throughout and in between the solos and the duets, a group of happy women, whom I called the "bluebirds," came and went — arms stretched out into the universe, as they hopped in unison, moving backwards in quick



Will Tuckett/Contributed photo

little steps like birds skimming along the shore.

Though the nonstop, energetic choreography had to be challenging, the company appeared to dive into the work, dancing with an open ease that contrasted with the stiffness apparent earlier in the evening. At the finale, with all 25 dancers back on stage, there was an explosion of joyful dancing as the ballet came to a close.

Little had I or anyone else guessed that the evening would reveal *Changing Light* to be such an extraordinary world debut of both music and dance, and how lucky we were to come away with such a gift of having been at this premiere of a rare experience in the ballet world: an original, successful, new work. I know, I could have turned around and gone back into the warmth of the theater and watched the ballet all over again. 



CELEBRATING KEN THOMPSON

A monument to Ken Thompson stands in the park named for him, which looks out over Sarasota Bay. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CHIDSEY CENTER EVENT DRAWS A CROWD TO OFFER FOND RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MAN CALLED 'THE ARCHITECT OF SARASOTA'

By Scott Proffitt
Staff Writer

Elected officials of the City of Sarasota, members of the Friends of the Sarasota County History Center and friends and family of Ken Thompson celebrated the life and times of the man on Feb. 1 during a program at the Chidsey Bayfront Community Center.

Not coincidentally, the day marked the First Ken Thompson Day celebration in the city, an occasion marked by speeches, tales of days gone by and fond memories of the man who was the manager of the City of Sarasota from 1950 until 1988. Thompson still holds the record for being the longest serving city manager in the United States.

Jeff LaHurd, a history specialist at the Sarasota County History Center, held court as the master of ceremonies and the author of *The Rise of Sarasota*, a history of Thompson and the town Thompson helped build.

Speeches by Mayor Suzanne Atwell, Vice Mayor Willie Shaw, previous mayors and Thompson family members mixed pleasantly with food and beverages supplied by the Friends of the History Center.

LaHurd has written 15 books on Sarasota and is perhaps as well known for his presentations as he is for his publications.

“If you came to Sarasota in 1920 and then again in 1950, you came to basically the same place,” LaHurd began his remarks.

The intervening 30 years were a period of recession, depression, stagnation and world war, he continued.

That was all about to change. After World War II, Sarasota and much of Florida saw growth that has been unmatched by any other period of the state’s history. And that was just when Ken Thompson showed up in town.

“He built the thing from scratch. Sarasota went from a one-stoplight town to the city it is today,” said former state Sen. Bob Johnson.

Thompson shepherded the community through that period, and, by all accounts did much good. In LaHurd’s book, mention is often made of Thompson’s engineering background and his common sense approach to getting the infrastructure laid for the growth to come.

“Thompson secured the Verna well fields, where our drinking water comes from, and planning for the needs and a future he would not live to see,” said current City Manager Tom Barwin. “The wastewater facilities, the water treatment plants ... it’s amazing what was built under the direction of Ken Thompson. Sarasota will never be involved in those water wars rocking so many communities,” Barwin added. “This is due to Ken Thompson.”

A prime mover in getting Feb. 1 recognized as Ken Thompson Day, Atwell read the City Commission proclamation marking the occasion. In the document, signed by all of the city commissioners, Atwell referred to Thompson’s integrity, his visionary planning and his development of everything from Island Park to Marina Jack to the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall to the current City Hall, and the “many ways



City Manager Tom Barwin addresses the audience. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Former Sarasota Mayor Elmer Berkel reflects on the Thompson legacy. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Vice Mayor Willie Shaw speaks during the program. Photo by Scott Proffitt

he helped bring Sarasota from a small resort town to the modern city it is today.”

Vice Mayor Willie Shaw offered praise for the man and a different perspective — that of a black man in a segregated community.

“I have to let you know that ... Mr. Thompson was more than the visionary who saw the need to build the streets and great buildings. He had to build a people. And at a time in 1957... when four black students came and wanted to check out books in this very building (the Chidsey facility was the city library at that time), it was beyond ... the librarian’s ability to give them books. So she called Ken Thompson. Mr. Thompson made the decision, called the librarian back and books were granted unto these young men,” Shaw told the audience.

“If we don’t make this an inclusive community, we will just about remain that Sarasota that

had that span of time that nothing happened. We thank God for Mr. Thompson,” Shaw concluded.

Thompson is still referred to as “the architect of Sarasota,” and he is remembered for his upstanding nature.

“In 35 years, there has never been so much as a whisper about Thompson’s integrity, not so much as a free lunch, it is said, or a cocktail,” said Rick Barry, a former reporter and editor at The Tampa Tribune and former reporter at the *Pelican Press*. Barry is a long-time Sarasota resident.

Twenty-five years after Thompson’s retirement, Barwin said, “I was introduced at a Rotary meeting the other day. The man introduced me as the person who has Ken Thompson’s job.” 



Mayor Suzanne Atwell talks about Thompson’s accomplishments. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Siesta Seen

COUNTY MIGHT CONSIDER ADDING PARKING SPACES TO MUNICIPAL LOT; MAINTENANCE ISSUES RAISE QUESTIONS; CLYDESDALES COMING SOON



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Are you interested in adding a few extra spaces to the municipal parking lot in Siesta Village?

That was the question Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson posed to about 22 members of the Siesta Key Village Association during their regular meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 5.

Patterson pointed out that she had been contacted by realtor Lee DeLieto about the fact

that the Add-A-Closet storage space business — right next to the parking lot, on Avenida de Mayo — is for sale.

“If you think it’s something that landowners in the Village might be interested in,” Patterson said, “it really should be up to you guys to bring it to the county ...”

The asking price, according to the DeLieto & Associates website, is \$499,000.



The property where the Add-A-Closet storage business is located on Avenida de Mayo abuts the municipal parking lot in Siesta Village. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

The Sarasota County Property Appraiser's website says the parcel comprises 12,797 square feet; its taxable value is \$400,500.

Of course, Patterson noted, "I don't know whether the commissioners would be willing to do something again," adding, "It seemed like a pretty good deal."

Last December, the County Commission voted formally to absorb the remaining cost of the municipal parking lot in the Village, with Patterson casting the lone "No" vote.

The decision stemmed from the lawsuits Chris Brown, owner of The Hub Baja Grill, The Cottage and the Beach Club, had filed against the county over the past five years regarding inequity in how Village property owners have been charged assessments to cover their share of the lot's construction costs. (See the related story in this issue.)

Past SKVA President and Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce board member Mark Smith pointed out that the northern part of the Add-A-Closet property is a lawn zoned for residential purposes; the front part is zoned Commercial.

If the county purchased the property, Patterson said, the land could be rezoned for government use.

Asked how big the parcel is, Patterson replied, "It's smallish, but it abuts the [municipal] parking lot."

"If we could get it rezoned, then it wouldn't be an issue," Smith told her.

Lourdes Ramirez, president of the Sarasota County Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, pointed out that changing the zoning from Residential to Commercial would not be allowed under the county's comprehensive plan; that would be a matter of "up-zoning."

Patterson told her that removing a business use to put in parking spaces "doesn't really do that." Patterson added, "In the end, it would be up to the commissioners."

She told Smith she would send him the information she had received from the realtor, so he and other SKVA members could take a more thorough look at the site and the proposal.

MAINTENANCE ISSUES

During the SKVA meeting, Mark Smith offered a bit of a curious tale about a county contractor trimming the hedges in the municipal parking lot.

It was a story strange enough to prompt Patterson to say, "That's weird."

In discussing the work of Championship Landscape Maintenance Professionals of Fort Myers, which won the Village maintenance contract in August 2012, Smith said he had asked the firm to give him a bid on painting the wall now exposed by the hedge trimming.

What he had learned, Smith reported, was that workers with Wilhelm Brothers Inc., a county contractor, did the trimming. Wilhelm had been in charge of the Village landscaping while the county was responsible for the Village maintenance during the approximately 13

Siesta Seen

months it took to get a new proposal put out for bid and approved.

Championship workers talked to the people from Wilhelm after seeing them doing the trimming, Smith continued, and the Wilhelm employees said, “We have a contract with the county,” and “they just kept on trimming.”

Smith added that he had made a point to county staff that Siesta Key property owners who are assessed annual charges for the upkeep better not be double-billed for Wilhelm’s work, since Championship took over the maintenance in September.

Second, he pointed out, the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp., which oversees the upkeep, had not asked for the hedges to be trimmed.

Is county staff under the impression that the parking lot remains its responsibility? Patterson asked.

Smith had talked with both Ryan Montague and Gary Spraggins in the county’s Public Works Department — both of whom have been involved in the maintenance issues for the Village — “to kind of clear that up,” he replied.



Hedge trimming by a Sarasota County contractor has left the wall exposed in the municipal parking lot on Siesta Key. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

He had not heard an answer from them so far, Smith said.

When I called Tom Maroney, general manager of business operations in the Public Works Department, this week he said, “We’re still looking into it.”

However, Maroney told me he had found the situation curious, too.

“You can’t have two sets of people not communicating, taking care of the same thing,” Patterson told the SKVA members, adding she also would check into the matter.

THE STORMWATER PROJECT

In other comments during the SKVA meeting, Patterson reported on her worries about further delays with the beginning of the stormwater project at Siesta Public Beach. Not only did county Procurement Department staff have to extend the bid period because of lack of response, but the lowest of the three bids it finally received was almost three times the \$1.5 million staff estimate for the work, as *The Sarasota News Leader* reported on Jan. 25.

“That’s a pretty big swing” in cost estimates, Patterson told the SKVA members. “I just don’t



A Sarasota County diagram shows plans for the stormwater project pipeline to discharge effluent into the Gulf of Mexico. Graphic illustration courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

know what we're going to do with that. But it's for sure going to delay the project."

The latest update to the commissioners that I could find from Chief Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. was issued on Jan. 28. It said, "Capital Projects staff has ... Environmental Services/Utilities (Jody Kirkman) staff [preparing] to finalize a report to administration and the Board. The report provides the history of the project (piping the stormwater into the Gulf), results of the recent bids, and how the bids relate to the project estimate."

Patterson told members of the Siesta Key Condominium Council during their Jan. 15 meeting that the stormwater project had been set to begin just after Easter, which is March 31. (The holiday generally is considered the end of the winter tourist season.)

When Siesta Key Association Director Michael Shay asked Patterson about the fate of the grant for the project that had been committed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, Patterson said county staff had been working with SWFWMD representatives to keep them apprised of the delays. "They like the project," she added, indicating her hopefulness they would continue to work with county staff to keep the funds in place.

SWFWMD has committed up to \$975,000 to the project, with the funds to be reimbursed to the county when the project is complete.

"As far as I'm concerned," Patterson pointed out, "the beautification of the beach [park] is

really less important than [avoiding] beach closures."

The stormwater project was designed to prevent future situations like those that had arisen in the past, with runoff from Beach Road and the beach parking lot creating such high bacterial counts in the Gulf of Mexico that the Sarasota County Health Department had to post "No Swimming" signs on Siesta Public Beach.

Patterson added that, according to her understanding of the project, the most expensive portion of it is the construction of the pipeline into the Gulf of Mexico to discharge overflow effluent from the new stormwater collection pond.

That effluent is to be treated by ultraviolet light before it is carried offshore.

When SKVA President Russell Matthes asked how far the pipeline will extend into the gulf, Patterson said she thought the distance was about "2,000 feet or so."

She added, "The permits are very specific as to the engineering of that thing."

Then Mark Smith said he had talked recently with a landscape architect in the Kimley-Horn and Associates firm, which has been the county's consultant on the beach park beautification project. He had asked the architect why the treated stormwater could not be used for irrigation of the new park landscaping as well as to "hose down the parking lot every night."

Siesta Seen

The architect had told him, “Well, that was somebody else’s thing,” referring to the stormwater project.

“There is expertise that put the entirety of the project together,” Patterson replied.

Moreover, she told Smith, “Think about it logically: The time you need to get rid of extra stormwater is when it’s raining, when you really probably don’t have plants in need of irrigation.”

“I hear you,” Smith said.

Then Patterson pointed out that the county’s original proposal for the stormwater project called for the effluent to be discharged into the Grand Canal on Siesta Key, and residents living along the canal “became unglued about it. So this [pipeline to the gulf] was the solution.”

Finally, Patterson said, “I’m not an engineer, [but] I do know [the Siesta Beach projects were not] engineered with three different people not talking to each other.”

VILLAGE EVENTS

This weekend, Feb. 9-10, Siesta Village will host its annual Arts and Crafts Fair, put on by [Howard Alan Events and American Craft Endeavors](#).

SKVA President Matthes pointed out the vendors will have booths along the sidewalks on Ocean Boulevard, not in the street, as they do during Siesta Fiesta.



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The fair was rescheduled so as not to conflict with the Super Bowl, he explained. Future schedules also have been planned to avoid that conflict, he pointed out.

Next, on Valentine’s Day — Feb. 14 — the Village will host its Valentine Stroll from 5 to 8 p.m. Participating businesses will be flying pink and red balloons, and every member of the public who participates will get a kiss — a Hershey’s Kiss.

Musical entertainment will be offered, as well, at the gazebo located at the intersection of Ocean Boulevard, Canal Road and Avenida Messina.

Siesta Seen

Then, on March 1, Matthes said, the Budweiser Clydesdales will return to the Village. “It is a neat draw,” he said. “A lot of families bring the kids out ...”

The horses will have their harnesses put on and get hooked up to the Budweiser wagon around 3:30 or 4 p.m. that day behind Circle K on Ocean Boulevard, he continued. Then they will make two circuits of Siesta Village starting at 5 p.m.

Kay Kouvatso, co-owner of Village Café, said the circuits usually took about 90 minutes.

“The real show is watching them unload and getting ready,” Smith said. “These things are the most pampered horses I’ve ever seen.”

When Smith mentioned, “unload,” SKA Director Michael Shay asked someone seated next to him, “What do they mean, ‘unload’?” (Shay is the person who heads up the Adopt A Road cleanup program on the island.)

When Shay asked his question more loudly, reminding everyone that Smith is well known for his sense of humor, Smith replied that he meant the unloading of the horses from their trailer.

“Get the shovel,” Matthes said, prompting laughter.

“I’ve got plastic bags, but they’re not big enough,” Shay responded, prompting even heartier laughter. 



A pair of Budweiser Clydesdales awaits the start of the 'parade' through Siesta Village in January 2011. Photo by Norman Schimmel



The famed Clydesdales pull the Budweiser wagon through Siesta Village in January 2011. Photo by Norman Schimmel



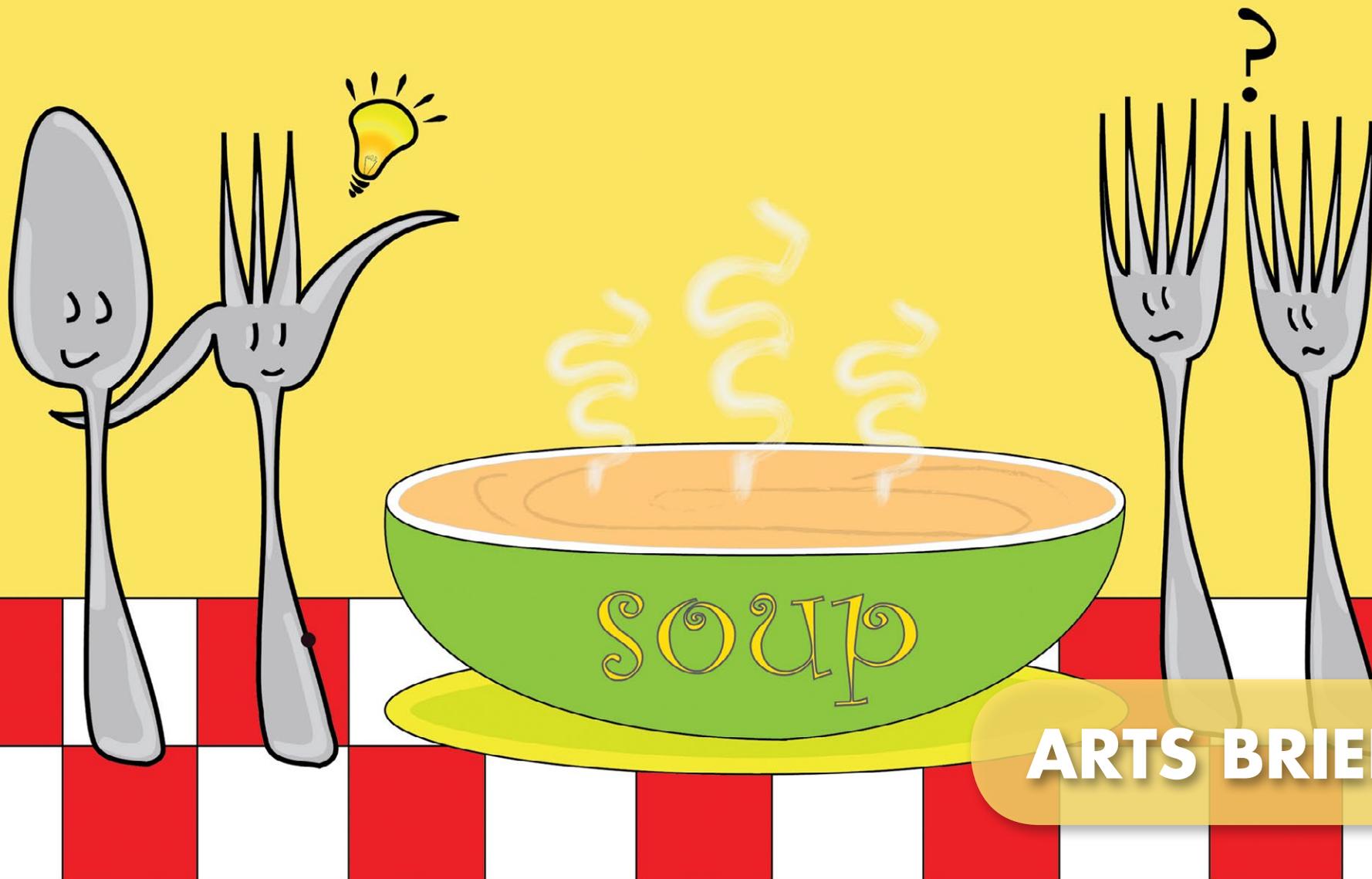
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*La Fille
mal Gardée*
{The Wayward Daughter}

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Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall

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ARTS BRIEFS

Differences Work, Just Ask a Fork by Liat Waks is the Best in Show Adult winner for 2013. Contributed photo

EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES ANNOUNCES EXHIBIT WINNERS

“For 10 years, Embracing Our Differences has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, children and others to create powerful statements of diversity and acceptance in its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 39 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote,” a news release says. “The response to this year’s call for artwork and quotes was strong with more than 2,400 entries pouring in from 44 countries and 32 states,” the release adds.

The winning quotes and art will be showcased in the 10th anniversary edition of the exhibit in Sarasota’s Bayfront Park from March 31 through June 2. It also will be on view at the Anthony T. Rossi Waterfront Park in downtown Bradenton from March 31 to April 29 and at North Port High School from May 1 to June 2, the release notes.

“Our jury committee spent the past two weeks in almost total lockdown reviewing thousands of submissions,” says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, in the release issued the last week of January. “Throughout the process, we’ve been excited by the high quality of the work and moved by the heartfelt passion that animates it,” he adds.

The winning art is judged on how effectively its message can be read when enlarged to billboard size, Shelton points out in the release. Awards are given for Best in Show Adult, Best in Show Student and People’s Choice categories, with the last chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Each winner receives \$1,000.

The Best in Show Adult winner is Liat Waks from Petach-Tigwa, Israel, for her work titled,

Differences Work, Just Ask a Fork, the release says.

The Best in Show student winner is *Cyber Bullying: Beware of the Big Bad Predator* by Steven Staub, Bobby Alvarez and Gennadity Kazimirov, seventh-graders at Heron Creek Middle School in North Port.

Dottie Cory is their art teacher, the release notes.

Submissions for the exhibit arrived from people of all ages from countries including the United Kingdom, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore, Iran and the Philippines, as well as the United States, the release points out. Students in 85 elementary, junior and high schools made up

almost 60 percent of the individuals submitting art and quotes, including students from 43 schools in Sarasota, Manatee and Port Charlotte counties, the release adds.

“We’re always especially impressed with the entries we receive from our own community,” says Shelton in the release, adding that work from 25 local residents was selected for display in this year’s show, including artwork entered by an entire kindergarten class from Phillippi Shores Elementary School. Works by two Ringling College of Art and Design students were also among the winners.

A critical part of the exhibit, says Shelton, are the quotations that accompany the artwork. “The combination of visual art and the written



Cyber Bullying: Beware of the Big Bad Predator, the Best in Show Student winner, is by Steven Staub, Bobby Alvarez and Gennadity Kazimirovo. Contributed photo



Siblings is by Melanie Chatot. Contributed Photo

word adds a deeper dimension to the overall experience,” he explains in the release. “We’ve received over 2,000 quotes for consideration and, with the artwork selected, we can now begin the process of finding those perfect companion quotes.”

The annual outdoor art exhibit is the centerpiece of a year-round program of activities designed to further Embracing Our Differences’ mission to use art as a catalyst for creating awareness and promoting the value of diversity, the release points out. Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences’ ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives include the following:

- Teacher workshops developed by nationally acclaimed educators to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education.
- The Make-a-Day-of-It! program, providing free bus transportation for area students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and to other

cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Aquarium and The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

- A docent program that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led tours of the annual exhibit, with more than 200 student docents participating in 2012.

According to Embracing Our Differences founding co-chairman, Dennis McGillicuddy, “Of the nearly 24,000 students who visited last year’s exhibit, 18,000 were area students brought in via our free bus program.”

Since 2004, he adds in the release, “more than 117,000 students have participated in Embracing Our Differences’ various education initiatives. We look forward to expanding on this during this 10th anniversary season.”

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 323-1010 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.



You Me Them Everybody is by Olivia Junghans. Contributed photo

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA TO PERFORM AT THE VAN WEZEL

The Philadelphia Orchestra, with Musical Director Yannick Nezet-Seguin, Conductor Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos and soloist Andre Watts (piano), will be at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall on Feb. 9, the hall has announced.

Nezet-Seguin “has been making significant waves and garnering some of the best reviews that the Philadelphia Orchestra has received in recent history,” a news release says. Critics have been saying he appears to be “exactly

what the Philadelphia needs to revitalize itself during one of the lowest points in its existence,” the release adds.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is known as one of “The Big 5” orchestras in the world, the release notes, and with Nezet-Seguin at the helm, it is poised to retake its position as one of the preeminent orchestras in the world.

Tickets are priced from \$30 to \$150. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org



The Philadelphia Orchestra will perform in Sarasota on Feb. 9. Contributed photo

ROMANTIC REVOLUTIONARIES TO FEATURE BEETHOVEN AND SCHUBERT

Faith Lutheran Church in Sarasota is offering a concert that will cap this year's Valentine weekend "with the highly romantic — and revolutionary — music of two composers whose private passions inspired some of the greatest music of all time," the church has announced.

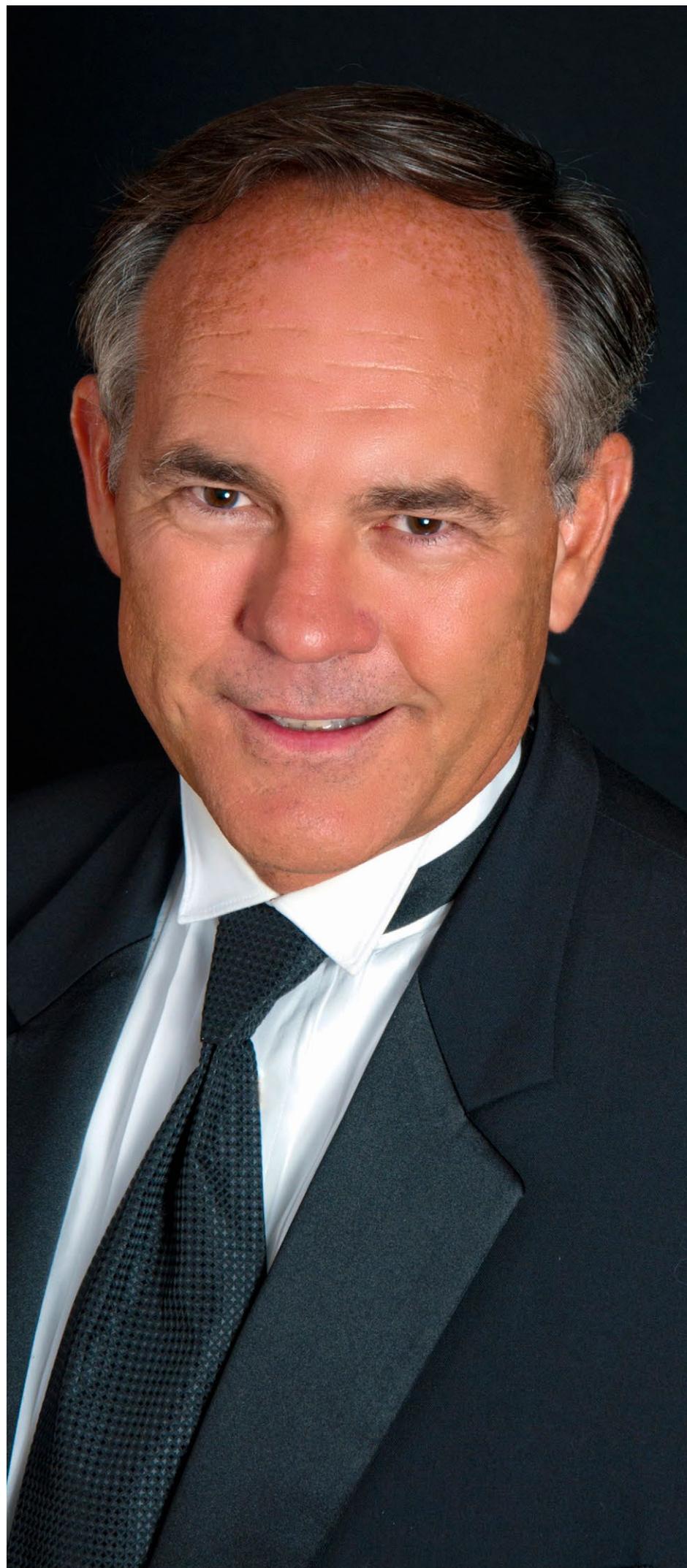
"The extraordinary music of Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert" will be presented at 4 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 17, featuring Rachel Assi, mezzo-soprano; Joseph Assi on French horn; and Joseph Holt and Michael Stuart on piano, a news release says. A meet-the-artist reception will be held afterward in the Fellowship Hall.

"Beethoven and Schubert bridged the gap between the Classical and Romantic eras in music," says Holt, Faith's music director, in the release. "The selections to be performed in this concert will offer a lush and fittingly romantic end to the Valentine weekend," he adds.

"Rachel Assi will sing some of the most beloved lieder by Schubert, and her husband, Joseph Assi, will play Beethoven's unique composition for horn and piano — the rarely performed *Horn Sonata in F Major*," Holt notes.

Stuart and Holt will play *Military Marches* by Schubert as well as Beethoven's entire *Symphony No. 1* as arranged for piano, four-hands.

Rachel Assi has performed with several opera companies, including the St. Petersburg Opera, the New Jersey Opera Theatre and Rutgers Opera at Rutgers University, the release points out. In addition to her singing activities, she is the grants officer for the Sarasota Opera.



Faith Lutheran Church Music Director Joseph Holt/Contributed photo

Joseph Assi is a principal horn for the Sarasota Orchestra.

Holt, a pianist for the U.S. Army Chorus for 20 years, is also the artistic director for Gloria Musicae, and Stuart is Faith's associate music director.

This February *Romantic Revolutionaries* concert is part of a three-concert series offered by Faith Lutheran; tickets are \$15, the release says. The second concert will feature the U.S. Army Chorus Vocal Quartet on March 15, followed by a season-ending April 14 concert featuring Sarasota's own Maria Wirries in a benefit for Haiti.

Single-concert tickets are available online at www.faithsarasota.com, by phone at 924-4664 or in person at the church; a \$40 three-concert package is also available.

Faith Lutheran Church is located at 7750 Beneva Road in Sarasota; for more information, visit the website or call 924-4664.



French horn artist Joseph Assi/Contributed photo



Mezzo-soprano Rachel Assi/Contributed photo

WINNERS OF STUDENT PLAYWRITING FESTIVAL ANNOUNCED

Theatre Odyssey has announced that *Therapy*, a 10-minute play written by Sabrina Viota and Summer Begalka from Saint Stephens Episcopal School, has won this year's Student Playwriting Festival.

Therapy was directed by Cinda Goeken. *Friends Forever*, written by Francesca DiMaio, Melina Cuffaro and Amanda Robbins from Lakewood Ranch High School, received an Honorable Mention award; Julie Look directed it, a news release says.

The competition took place at State College of Florida.

The winner received a cash prize of \$300, donated by Theatre Odyssey trustees Terry and Susan Romine. Saint Stevens Episcopal School will receive an engraved trophy in recognition of its students' accomplishment, the release adds.

The trophy will rotate annually.

Therapy, will be featured at Theatre Odyssey's annual Ten-Minute Play Festival, set for March 29-31 at the Westcoast Black Theater Troupe's home, 1646 10th Way in Sarasota. For ticket information, visit www.theatreodyssey.org.

While the jury was evaluating this year's plays, Theatre Odyssey conducted a playwright workshop for the audience, the release points out. Tom Aposporos was the host, along with local playwrights Ron Pantello, Marvin Albert and Bernie Yanelli. Each discussed the challenges of writing short plays, the release adds.

Theatre Odyssey was founded in 2006 to encourage and promote the efforts of local playwrights and actors. Over the years, the group has premiered more than 50 plays written, directed and performed by Gulf Coast playwrights, actors and directors.



(Back row, from left) Terry Romine, Susan Romine, Catherine Randazzo, Sabrina Viota (with trophy), Kemery Colbert; (middle row, from left) Kenneth Erickson, Howard Millman, Jay Handelman, Tami Vaughan, Summer Begalka, Francesca DiMaio; and (kneeling) Preston Boyd. Contributed photo

TRIBUTE TO GERSHWINS ADDED TO FST SCHEDULE

Florida Studio Theatre has announced a change to its 2012-2013 cabaret season.

The season was scheduled to end with the musical revue *Caribbean Soul*. The final show in the series will now be *By Gershwin: A Tribute to George and Ira Gershwin*, opening in FST's Goldstein Cabaret on Friday, March 1, at 7:30 p.m., the theater has announced.

According to FST Artistic Director Richard Hopkins in a news release, "This change in season has occurred due to the additional development time needed for *Caribbean Soul*. The show will go back into development this spring with the hope of returning it to the schedule for next year."

By Gershwin is a revue previously developed and scheduled for the 2014 cabaret season,

Hopkins added in the release. The 2013-2014 schedule has yet to be announced.

"In the meantime," Hopkins notes in the release, "*By Gershwin* will be an elegant and spirited rendition of the greatest songwriting team of the 20th century. We've wanted to get back to the Gershwin brothers for over a decade now, and I'm delighted that we will finally have the opportunity to undertake the sweep, the brilliance and the wonderful sense of humor that only the Gershwins can create."

Tickets for the premiere music revue will be on sale through June 2 and may be purchased by phone at 366-9000, online at FloridaStudioTheatre.org or by visiting the box office at 1241 N. Palm Ave.

AUDITIONS TO BE HELD FOR 10-MINUTE PLAY FESTIVAL

Theatre Odyssey has released date and time for actors' auditions for this year's 10-Minute Play Festival.

The auditions will take place on Monday, Feb. 11, beginning at 6 p.m. in the conference room at the Arts and Cultural Alliance building, 1226 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.

The plays for the 2013 festival are four comedies and four dramas. The festival will open on Friday, March 29, and run through Sunday, March 31, a news release notes. Performances

on March 29 and 30 will be at 8 p.m.; 2 p.m. matinees are set for March 30 and 31.

Parts are available for nine men and eight women, ages 20-60, the release says. "Some actors may be cast to play more than one role," the release notes. Interested persons should bring a headshot and resume to the audition. Lines to be read will be given out at the auditions.

For more information call 799-7224. 

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RELIGION BRIEFS

Members of the City of Sarasota Pipe Band will perform at the Church of the Redeemer on Feb. 17. Contributed photo

REDEEMER TO BLESS SCOTTISH TARTANS DURING EVENSONG

The Church of the Redeemer, 222 S. Palm Ave., in downtown Sarasota, invites members of the community to a special “Kirkin’ o’ the Tartan” Solemn Evensong on Sunday, Feb. 17, at 5:15 p.m., which will include a performance by the City of Sarasota Pipe Band.

The Evensong anthem will be *Highland Cathedral*, presented with choir, organ and bagpipes; music for the service will be by T. Tertius Noble, a church news release says.

Scots of the St. Andrew Society of Sarasota, dressed in full Scottish regalia, will bring forward their clan tartan banners to be blessed at the altar, the release notes. The Kirkin’ tradition dates back to the 18th century, when the English prohibited the public display of tartans and Scots began secretly to bring pieces of them to church to be blessed, the release notes.

A catered parish dinner with British fare will follow in the church’s Gillespie Hall — named after the “Father of Sarasota,” John Hamilton Gillespie, who came to Sarasota in 1886 and subsequently helped found Redeemer and was one of its earliest parishioners, the release adds. The buffet-style dinner will offer meat pies, several side dishes and bread pudding dessert.

The Pipe Band will perform again for dinner guests.

Tickets for the dinner, which are \$10, must be purchased in advance by calling or visiting the parish office (955-4263); the deadline for ticket purchase is Friday, Feb. 15.

For more information, visit redeemersarasota.org or call 955-4263.

FROM MADRID TO MARRAKESH PLANNED AT TEMPLE EMANU-EL

On Sunday, Feb. 10, at noon, the social hall of Temple Emanu-El, 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, will come alive with the exotic sounds, tastes and visions of all things Sephardic.

A term used to refer to Jews of Middle Eastern, Spanish or North African origin, “Sephardic” encompasses a unique style of Jewish food, music, art and folklore; these lesser-known aspects of Jewish culture will be brought to life by Temple Emanu-El’s director of religious education, Sabrina Silverberg, in an adult learning program titled, *From Madrid to Marrakesh*, a Temple news release says.

After a Mediterranean lunch catered by the Oasis Café, Silverberg — “herself a proud Sephardic Jew,” the release says — will present an interactive workshop about Sephardic Jewish life. Covering topics such as the history of Sephardic Jews; their holidays and life-cycle customs and ceremonies; the contributions of notable Sephardic Jews; and more obscure subjects such as superstitions, mysticism and taboos, the lecture will include a video presentation of short films and music samples as well as a question-and-answer session. The session will conclude with a surprise hands-on activity prepared by Silverberg, the release notes.



Sabrina Silverberg/Contributed photo

“When I was asked to give a presentation on Sephardic Jews, I was intrigued,” Silverberg says in the release. “I saw it as an opportunity to get in touch with my Sephardic roots and speak about a subject that is dear to my heart. I was thrilled to learn more about Sephardic Jewry, and I am excited to share this richness and diversity.”

The cost of *From Madrid to Marrakesh*, which includes lunch, is \$10 for Temple Emanu-El members and \$15 for guests. For more information, call Judilee Sterne at 349-9287 or email judisterne@msn.com.

CONGREGATION TO PRESENT THE COMEDY 37 POSTCARDS

The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism will present *37 Postcards* on Feb. 8, a “laugh-out-loud comedy about a zany family with a prodigal son who is unprepared for what he finds after his long absence,” a news release says.

Having been performed in various U.S. and German venues, this staged reading will be presented in Sarasota by members of the Bir-

mingham (MI) Temple: Mike Beltzman, Judy Schneider, John and Noreen Zimmer, Ruth Goldman, Jerri Sasson and Sandy Altman, the release adds.

The program will begin at 7:30 p.m. at Unity, 3023 Proctor Road, Sarasota. CHJ members will be admitted free; for non-members, the cost is \$10.

Reservations are required by calling 929-7771.

FLORIDA'S INNOCENCE PROJECT DIRECTOR TO SPEAK IN SARASOTA

Seth Miller, executive director of the Innocence Project of Florida, will be the guest speaker following a Purim service hosted by the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 15 at Unity of Sarasota.

An adjunct professor at the Florida State University College of Law, where he teaches about post-conviction remedies, Miller serves on the boards of the International Innocence Network and Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, a news release notes.

He provides pro-bono representation, teaches litigation training to lawyers and speaks out to raise awareness of wrongful convictions, the release adds.

The program is free and open to the public.



Seth Miller (left) and Juan Melendez, who was released after 17 years on Florida's Death Row, speak to an audience. Image courtesy Innocence Project of Florida

Unity is located at 3023 Proctor Road in Sarasota.

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

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

08
FEB

FST Improv

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

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.

09+
FEB

Siesta Village Arts and Crafts Fair

Feb. 9-10, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., on the sidewalks along Ocean Boulevard, Siesta Key. For details, visit www.ArtFestival.com.

14
FEB

Valentine Stroll

Feb. 14, 5-8 p.m., Siesta Village on Siesta Key, with kisses for all. Participating businesses will be flying pink and red balloons. Golf carts and pedi-cabs will be available at the Siesta Public Beach parking lot to help with transportation. Click [here](#) for more information.

14
FEB

Chillounge presents Jon Secada in concert

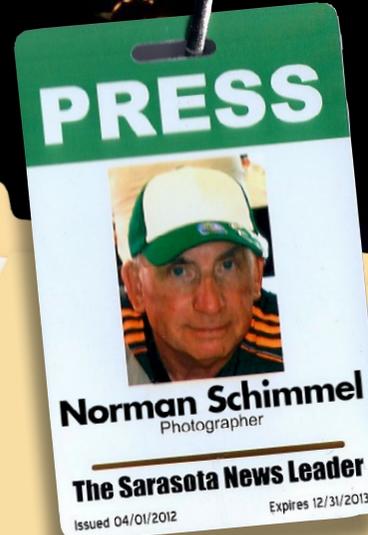
Feb. 14, 7 to 11 p.m., Powel Crosley Estate, 8374 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota
Tickets: \$140-160, includes food, open bar.
Click [here](#) to purchase tickets

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

SHADOW MAGIC ON THE HIGH WIRE



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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.