



March 1, 2013

THE SARASOTA

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

MEET THE CANDIDATES, PART II

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PUT OFF AGAIN

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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

I am sure you know the saying, “It’s always something.” That is the most succinct way to describe my work on this issue of the *News Leader*.

When I graduated from college with a degree in journalism, I went to work for a newspaper with typewriters, not computer terminals, so we used the old “cut-and-staple” method of putting stories together. Whenever I realized I needed to reorder paragraphs — or add in something I had forgotten — I grabbed the scissors and the stapler and went to work. The goal was to make certain the typesetters could figure out what went where, so the story made sense.

Now we use computers, but they do not always have a good day. (My husband insists no one has stranger things occur with the kind of inanimate object on which I am typing this letter than I do.) When my computer balks, that translates into a wee bit more stress for me as I finish up articles for the publication.

Still, once I complete them, I do not have to worry about literally pasting stories on pages, as I also did at that first reporting job.

Actually, it is pretty remarkable that reporters can email me their stories; our photographer, Norman Schimmel, can email me his photos; our copy editor, Vicki, can proof everything online in a system that allows her to make extensive comments; and our production manager, Cleve, can use that same online system as his source for everything to lay out an issue. We do not have to see each other to create the *News Leader* each week!

Even when my computer is being testy, I have tremendous appreciation for the fact I no longer need to fear dropping an Xacto knife on a toe (yes, it hurts a lot). And our result is a publication that looks far superior to anything that shows up in print.

That is quite a lot for which to give thanks.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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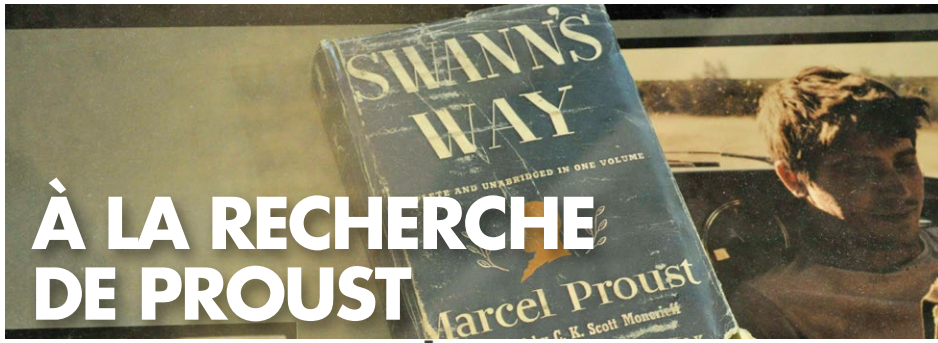
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PHOTO CREDITS

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Sarasota Leisure: Sarasota Sunset, Norman Schimmel

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MEET THE CANDIDATES: PART II

Candidates for the two at-large City Commission seats address a Coalition of City Neighborhoods Association meeting: (from left) Susan Chapman, Linda Holland, Pete Theisen, Richard Dorfman, Suzanne Atwell and Kelvin Lumpkin. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATES SUZANNE ATWELL, SUSAN CHAPMAN AND LINDA HOLLAND ANSWER QUESTIONS POSED BY THE SARASOTA NEWS LEADER IN ADVANCE OF THE MARCH 12 ELECTION

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

(Editor's note: In the Feb. 22 issue, The Sarasota News Leader presented a set of questions with answers from the three men running for two-at large seats on the City Commission. This week, we present the same questions with the answers of the three women candidates.)

The basics:

Top education?

Atwell: Master's degree in counseling psychology, Marymount University, Washington, D.C.

Chapman: Juris Doctor and Master of Social Work in social policy, planning and practice.

Holland: Some college courses; no degree.

Marital status?

Atwell: Married.

Chapman: Widow.

Holland: Single.

Children?

Atwell: Two: Maj. Justin Atwell, U.S. Army; and Josh, a stormwater engineer.

Chapman: No.

Holland: None.

Years in the community?

Atwell: Just under 20 years

Chapman: 23.

Holland: 32.



How many times have you run for office?

Atwell: This is the third time, after 2005 and 2009.

Chapman: This is the third time; 2002 and 2004 for circuit judge.

Holland: This will be my third.



Do you have a website? Is there a telephone number people can use to call you?

Atwell: www.suzanneatwell.com; 957-0010.

Chapman: SusanChapman4Sarasota.com; 365-4546.

Holland: www.lindaholland2013.com; 313-0201 (cell).



Some of these are “yes” or “no” questions; there is a lot of territory to cover, so ...

Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor and city manager?

Atwell: [City Attorney] Bob Fournier, absolutely [satisfied]. [City Manager] Tom Barwin is new, but I can't say enough about him. Tom has brought a Midwestern, deliberative, laid-back style, but he's very proactive. He brings out the best in our staff. He's got those soft skills: He listens; he looks at you; he's comfort-



Suzanne Atwell/Photo by Norman Schimmel

able with what you have to say. He has those skills. And he's getting out and about. And he isn't the center of attention in the room. He isn't the smarty-pants.

Pam Nadalini: I like [Auditor and Clerk] Pam Nadalini. I'm going to preface this with the Turner Amendment [a recently defeated city charter amendment that would have stripped the auditor and clerk of several responsibilities]. I agreed with the merits of the case, but I just think it wasn't handled right. I did not like the way it was done. That's my opinion.

For years I've been talking about relationships between the City Manager's Office and the city auditor and clerk. It started with [former City Auditor and Clerk] Billy [Robinson] saying they never invited him to staff meetings. When Pam was appointed, I congratulated her as the first African-American woman [to be a charter

official], and that's important. You know how I am: "Hi and let's do lunch." It's not her style.

I did say [recently] maybe we need to have an outside auditor as well as an internal auditor.

And this is no secret: Why does someone I consider extremely well qualified to be our public information officer have to get permission from [Deputy Auditor and Clerk] Karen McGowen, when she should have the back of the city manager and us? Nobody knows who she is in this town. If all hell breaks loose, which it sometimes does, she should be right there with Barwin. "I'm on it. What do you want?" She has to call Karen and raise her hand. [The city's public information officer is Jan Thornburg, who reports to City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini.]

I told Pam that; this is no secret. I said, "Pam, what's going on here? First of all IT [the Information Technology Department] needs to get back over to us."

"I know Suzanne. We're getting the investigation done," she said. "I agree with you." She's the most careful, protected personality I've ever seen. There's that little island over there.

So the merits of Terry [Turner's] amendment were fine, but he went for an amendment. Yes, the merits of the case were good. I will not deny that.



Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor, city manager?

Chapman: I think we need to make sure they get along better. With Tom Barwin, he hasn't had a chance yet to be evaluated on his per-

formance. I believe we need to upgrade our audit function. I wonder sometimes if we settle too many lawsuits.



Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor, city manager?

Holland: As of today I would say generally yes.

Any thoughts about suggestions for improvements?

Holland: Mr. Barwin is so new, I think trying to judge at this point is unfair. I have been satisfied with a number of things he's done. In my neighborhood [Gillespie Park], we had some good interaction with both Mr. Barwin and the new [Police] Chief [Bernadette] DiPino. He's been responsive to our needs.

At this point, I don't have any specific suggestions for the city attorney or the city auditor and clerk. That's from the outside looking in. At the point where you would be a commissioner and more involved with those charter officials, that would certainly give me a better feel for and ability to assess their abilities and responsibilities.



Your preference: city manager or elected mayor with management responsibilities?

Atwell: That's a tough one. I want to look at [the] elected mayor. I've said that. We have fractional leadership sometimes. We have leaders that often emerge when there's a hot and heavy issue, a Walmart or School Avenue

or the mooring field. But then they go back into the womb of the neighborhood and you're back to square one.

Can we get some sort of leader that embraces the whole city? I've been mayor for two years. I feel I've embraced the city. Whether you agree with the last vote, or parking meters, whatever, I've been out and about meeting hundreds and hundreds of people.

But the trick is, can you have an elected mayor and a city manager at the same time. I'm willing to look at all the language. I'm not going out on a limb and say, "Strong mayor, period." I'm not sure what that means yet. But we need to look at a three- or four-year elected leader in the city. I don't say strong mayor; I say elected mayor.

A lot of people may want the St. [Petersburg] model, the CEO [chief executive officer] model. But whether you like it or not, I'm not sure in this town it would go down. Maybe it shouldn't. But I'm willing to look at it. It's all about the language.

A lot of the business people want a strong version. We aren't Tampa. We are emerging, and I want a leader.



Your preference: city manager or elected mayor with management responsibilities?

Chapman: I have a strong preference for the city manager/council form of government.



Linda Holland/Photo by Robert Hackney

Your preference: city manager or elected mayor with management responsibilities?

Holland: I have — as you well know — I have been a proponent of the elected mayor for a number of years, because of the leadership void. Ten or however many years ago, it was because the community felt there was a leadership void.

The community wasn't satisfied with some of the proposals so they voted them down. I still find in my time out in the community, they still feel there's a leadership void. We've gone through several city managers lately, so I continue to believe in the concept and the opportunities and the possibilities that are there.

I understand the concern you can point to good elected mayors and bad elected may-

ors. But there's risk with that. I do continue to believe that's a possibility, and I think that's because we've done it and it hasn't worked in the form we've presented it before, [but that] doesn't mean we have to stop trying.

If the argument is, we've tried it three times and it's been defeated three [times] so stop trying, I don't adhere to that argument. If you use that argument, then Linda Holland, Pete Theisen, Susan Chapman shouldn't be running for City Commission because the electorate has told me twice before they didn't want me. The electorate's told Pete Theisen twice before, and they've told Susan once before. If you use that theory, then we shouldn't be out there running because we've already tried it and been told, "No." That just doesn't hold water for me.

The first time it was proposed, we heard, "so-and-so is going to run." The fear was the person who was predetermined in a lot of people's minds. I think the current discussion, I think that's still a factor. I think that fear factor bothers me in terms of not opening our minds.



Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage?

Atwell: I'd have to say no, because it's not going to fly.

If not, how will the city attract commissioners who are not retired people?

Atwell: If they're not retired, that's the \$64,000 question. Paul [Caragiulo] is the youngest; he works. Four of us are retired.

I think as this city moves forward and we build revenue, and we're getting out of the recession right now — I think in an ideal world, yes, because you would draw people that make a real commitment, part of the workforce. The more sophisticated we get, and the more we get out of this and keep going, we may be headed in that direction, if we can be financially healthy.

If you cannot pay a living wage, the only people you attract are either retirees or trust fund babies. You are going to be eating rice and beans for four years, especially if you have children.

Atwell: What's the public going to say? This rift between City Hall and the public: "We're going to pay them what?" But until we get some younger people who get a living wage, who have families — we're all getting older. But how do you make it palatable to the community? How do we begin the process now of saying, what are we doing here?

The Charter Review Committee recommended it and you vetoed it.

Atwell: I know, because I knew it would go down in flames.



Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage?

Chapman: I think we might get better candidates if they were paid a better wage, or the downside is we might have people running for the job. I do think it's important we have young people represented on the commission, and it's very difficult for them — a working person — to run and to serve on the City Commission.



Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage?

Holland: I have heard that argument that we would have better candidates if that were the case, and that could very well be a possibility.

It was proposed by the Charter Review Board, but the City Commission took it off the ballot.

Holland: I do recall that. I would imagine one of the considerations the City Commission gave was the budget issue. That would be a difficult thing for the community to accept, given the budget constraints, staff being laid off, services being cut. It was probably a timing thing at that point.

Maybe at some future time it could be considered again. The concept through the years [is that] it is a part-time job because they meet at night, and I think that people have always considered [it] a part-time job. But the reality is, if they really do their job, it is not a part-time job. I think the reality is they do need to be better compensated, but I think the budget issues currently probably prohibit that from being feasible.

If we're not going to raise salaries, how does the city attract new and younger leadership? Is there something else we can do?

Holland: With the budget constraints and trying to pull in retirement costs, pension and health costs, it doesn't appear we have any ability to use the benefit package as a way to bring them in. I think we have to have a good working environment at City Hall — very inviting — and there's no question over the last



Susan Chapman/Photo by Stan Zimmerman

several years, and under the last city manager, the staff I talk to — and I spend a lot of time in City Hall because I'm so active in neighborhood stuff — a lot of the staff love this city and love their jobs but want to be treated with recognition for sacrificing some of the monetary aspects.

We're getting a lot of retirements now, people here 15, 20 and even 30 years. They didn't do it for just the benefits. They did it because they love the city and love working with the citizens of the community. New people coming in need to have that feeling, too — to feel they are respected by the supervisors and commissioners and the rest of the community.

Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels? Have you attended any of their meetings?

Atwell: I have an issue with the Police Complaint Committee. The IPAP [Independent Police Advisory Panel] I think is run — I was one of the ones that wanted it to unite, and they both said no, we're doing OK.

I would like to continue with the IPAP and somehow morph the Complaint Committee. I had trouble with this from the very beginning, especially complaints. So I have real issues with the Complaint [Committee], but I would support the IPAP. There's some interesting things happening, especially with Eileen Normile and domestic violence and what she's doing. She's raising the standards higher.

The Complaints [Committee], by the nature of the name of it, I don't like.



Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels?

Chapman: Yes.

Have you attended any of their meetings?

Chapman: Yes. [Editor's note: Chapman chaired the Ad Hoc Police Advisory Panel, which recommended the formation of the two civilian police review panels.]



Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels?

Holland: I've been pretty vocal on that, pretty passionate about it and the answer is, "No," particularly the police complaints panel. I understand the concept, what they wanted to achieve. I've gone to those meetings; you and I have sat through them for hours, and we're the only people there. If they were designed to help the community that felt disenfranchised or felt the police were doing wrong things and needed to understand the process, then I would support it. But to my knowledge, nobody's come to find out what's going on. To me it's a huge waste of time and staff. I've sat on a lot of advisory boards, and it's a waste of volunteer time, too. I'd like to know what the results are. What has it accomplished?

The overall panel [the Independent Police Advisory Board] — the couple of meetings I attended, it did not appear to me there was any particular direction. I didn't see exactly what they were supposed to be doing. There were some domestic violence initiatives that [came] out of that. I think it could have come without the expenditure of funds and staff time.



Police consume the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself?

Atwell: I'm going to start with, a lot is going to change whether people like it or not with Chief [Bernadette] DiPino as far as what she's doing with training, domestic violence, sensitivity training.

There's talk of consolidating with the county, and I'm totally, unequivocally opposed to that. Law enforcement is very important to people in this community.

What's going to happen now is Chief DiPino is going to take law enforcement — and she's going to be the people's policeman — to every neighborhood. Whether it's St. Armands, Bird Key, North Trail, whatever. She's going to be everybody's cop. That's powerful.

She's going to balance things out. As an at-large commissioner, I like that. As for consolidation of services and things like that, I know I've talked to Tom [Knight, Sarasota County sheriff] about things we're doing and trying to do.

I love the Police Department and I don't want them consolidated, but how do we avoid what we've gone through in the past few months? And yes, some of these cops who have done the abuse of force, they may be errant cops. I don't know, but [DiPino] is going to look into the whole picture. What is going on? What is the morale? Who are the ones flying off the handle?

She takes charge and she has a second skin like I've never seen.

When you look at the whole pie, when you look at this city, it wants a good police department, and they want to pay for it if they get a good police department.



Police consume the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself?

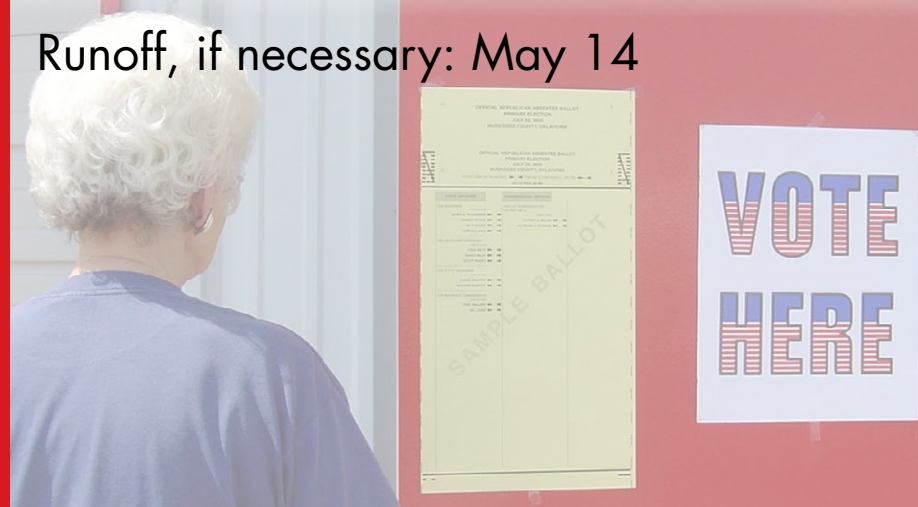
Chapman: Yes. We need more modern policing practices, including intelligence-led policing with the David M. Kennedy strategy of deterrence and hot spot policing. The High Point [N.C.] strategy came from the *Ad Hoc* Police

City Commission Election

March 12: Polls open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Early voting begins March 2 and runs through March 9, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Supervisor of Elections Office, The Terrace Building, 101 S. Washington Blvd. (U.S. 301), Sarasota.

Runoff, if necessary: May 14



For more information
visit www.sarasotavotes.com.

Advisory Panel, so I very much endorse that strategy.



Would you consider merging the Sarasota Police Department and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office?

Chapman: Not at this time.

Merge some special teams such as Marine Patrol, Bomb Squad, SWAT and others?

Chapman: Yes. That needs to be studied a little bit more, to see if it can result in reduced expenses. Some units require specialized training and equipment, like SWAT and the Bomb Squad. K-9 units require air-conditioned facilities. Those things require more than just staffing.



Police consume the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself?

Holland: I think there's always room for improvement on anything. As I think you've heard me say, I do believe with the new police chief and some new policies and procedures and some fresh eyes to look at the operation of the police department, there's room for that. I think more and more — because we're not the only city facing this.

We need to look at success stories, things that work in other places, and not just for the police. One of the things that's bothered me in the past several years is, the city decided — and I'm not exactly sure when — the city is no longer a member of the Florida Redevelopment Association. They did that because of budget cuts, so three or four years ago. But 20 years ago, those conferences were places to really find programs that work and ways other cities figured out to do things that may be more cost-effective, smarter. One example for the police is the citizen volunteer program. I remember when we went over to Delray Beach, or one of the beach cities, and that's where that program came from. It was brought back, and look at its success: well over 100 volunteers that save the Police Department a tremendous amount of time. That's the sort of thing that, when I'm a commissioner, we are going to rejoin the Florida Redevelopment Association. That's only one example of many, many initiatives. Things to improve Main street, affordable housing — we need to find the successes of other people and share ours. The Street Teams program

[through which homeless people assist the city's Public Works Department in cleaning up parks and other areas] is another one that was found someplace else and brought in, and I can't tell you how much that program is doing wonders.

Would you consider merging the Sarasota Police Department and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office?

Holland: No. Period.

Merge some special teams such as Marine Patrol, Bomb Squad, SWAT and others?

Holland: I'd really have to look into it deeply. It would take a lot to convince me to do that.



The city continues to run a deficit in its annual budget, making up the difference from reserves. Will you raise taxes, cut services, continue tapping into savings or turn it over to staff to balance the budget?

Atwell: The bone is almost to the core right now, as far as I'm concerned. Don't talk about cutting staff unless you're talking about cutting services. To your point, yes to everything. Nobody wants to raise taxes. I'd be willing to raise the millage rate.

If we cut staff any more, it's ridiculous, and the town won't put up with it. Even though a few are complaining because this isn't mowed here, are you willing to raise the millage?

I've watched my taxes year after year after year go down because my assessment went down. I'm paying a fraction of the taxes I paid

six years ago. I've had six years of tax cuts. After six years of sequential tax cuts, where does it stop?

For a lot of people, it doesn't matter. They wouldn't even think of raising taxes. That's the mantra everywhere you go. But they don't understand. How much do we tap into [the reserves]? It doesn't resonate with the public.

When I sit at the table, I have to look at everything.



The city continues to run a deficit in its annual budget, making up the difference from reserves. Will you raise taxes, cut services or continue tapping into savings or let staff figure it out?

Chapman: I think part of leadership is coming up with viable answers. I am not in favor of raising taxes or cutting services, but I am in favor of looking at everything to look for efficiencies and focusing on core services.

We do a lot of things and spend a lot of money on things that are not core city services. I do not believe in kicking the can down the road.

Can you give examples?

Chapman: There are a myriad of little programs that add up — take-home police cars; take-home vehicles for other staff who do not live in the city. There are a lot of different little things that add up. When I talk to people like [retired city Finance Director] Chris Lyons, they indicate those things can add up.



The city continues to run a budget deficit. We're about to start the exercise again. It makes up the difference from reserves. In reality, city staff has exercised restraint, and at the end of the last fiscal year, the staff made up the difference and the reserves were not touched.

It was not the policy guidance from the City Commission that balanced the budget. It was the city manager and staff that balanced the budget. The city manager and staff took it upon themselves to change policy to achieve further savings. It was done piecemeal, but it was not what the City Commission voted for; it was not the budget the commissioners approved. We are talking about millions of dollars in cuts to services.

If elected, you have three choices: raise taxes, cut services or dip into savings, and the savings are just about shot — or there is a fourth option: You pass some fantasy budget and let staff figure it out. What will it be?

Holland: Certainly no one running for office wants to start out saying, "Let's just raise taxes." The community doesn't want to hear that. And the community doesn't want to hear, "Cut services." And they probably don't want to hear, "Dip into reserves."

I wouldn't be a big one for dipping into reserves, but I think, if that's part of a combination of things we can do, and recognizing we're getting close to not having any more reserves, that would be a very tricky way to go. All of [the options] are tricky ways to go. All of them are difficult. "Challenging" is probably a better word than "tricky," because of

the connotations, but perhaps we're going to have to look at a combination of those things. Maybe the commission discussion needs to be a little more intense. As much as people hate meetings, they need to take a deeper look.

I really hope the new finance director — because over the past several years we've had such tremendous trust in [retired Finance Director] Chris Lyons — I hope we can have that same level of trust. These are some new eyes on the finances, and perhaps just a different look at it will bring in some possibilities we had not thought of. And I go back to my earlier comment about utilizing what other cities have done.



Pensions: Did we overpromise and under-deliver?

Atwell: We kicked the can down the road, the whole pension issue. Those were the days when we didn't pay them much but we protected them. It got way ahead of us, and we're not alone. They were promised the moon and the stars.

You bet we have to deal with this pension thing. Each commission cannot say, "It's not my problem. I'll be dead."

Is a tax increase the answer to our promises?

Atwell: That's one of the answers. That is an answer, of course, because the way staff is now, how do we cut any more? And when will we do that? We're having preliminary budget workshops soon, and you bet I'll put everything on the table. What's the revenue stabilization fund [e.g. the reserves] look like? How do we consolidate?

Would you support a bond issue to cover the shortfall (as Fort Lauderdale did last November)?

Atwell: Look I'm willing to take a look at everything, including the pros and cons of that. People in this community are getting wind [of the problems], and it's coming out in the forums. So we're trying to prepare you who live in this beautiful town, and it is paradise, [but] we've got some financial woes here. We're not broke, but we need to deal with this. Taxes? A bond issue?

All of it should be on the table. We're at bare bones. You want a good police force. You want boots on the street. What are you willing to do? Isn't it amazing the fear of taxes?

Have you ever attended any of the three pension board meetings?

Atwell: Actually, no.



Pensions: did we overpromise and under-deliver?

Chapman: We made a lot of assumptions that were not accurate, and we did overpromise. One assumption was an unrealistic rate of return. Another assumption is we like these people [e.g. staff] and let's just reward them for city service on the assumption public sector employees are paid less so they should get more retirement benefits. That isn't true. So yes, there were a lot of assumptions.

And there was not a lot of fiscal knowledge that was used in making these assumptions and giving these benefits out. So the unfunded liabilities are a problem.



Would you consider a bond issue to cover the shortfall (as Fort Lauderdale did last November)?

Chapman: I would look at anything to try and solve the problem. But a bond has to be paid, too. That may not be an adequate solution.

Private industry is realizing that fixed-benefit [retirement plans] cannot work, and public pensions have not caught up. I'm sorry about that, because I do think public employees are deserving, but it's a matter that there is no political will to continue unaffordable pensions at the cost of all city services.

Have you ever attended any of the three pension board meetings?

Chapman: No, but I've watched them.



You're aware of the overall dynamic of the pension shortfall. Is a tax increase the answer to this problem? If not, would you support a bond issue to cover the shortfall as Fort Lauderdale did last November?

Holland: So we're saddling the next generation, kicking the can down the road? Answer: "Yes." I had not heard of Fort Lauderdale's bond issue. Raising taxes is not a popular choice. If those were the two choices, I guess you'd let the electorate decide ... if they want their taxes raised or if they want the bond.

What if you had a City Commission candidate saying, "We have to raise taxes, folks"? "The city doesn't have the reserves anymore. If we're going to balance our budget, we have to raise taxes, and if we want to improve our services,

it is going to cost us even more, and, by the way, we have a pension deficit that has to be dealt with. Vote for me. I will raise your taxes." Nobody is offering that choice.

Holland: Nobody wants to say directly: "That's what I'll do." And I don't want to say that because I'm a candidate and there are people out there who are going to say, "She's going to raise my taxes, so I'm not going to vote for her." But I think if you take raising the taxes off the table, you're not being realistic.

I'm a taxpayer. I don't want my taxes raised. But do I want a safer city? Absolutely. And do I want city services? Absolutely. They don't have to be frivolous or excessive, but I want a safe place to live and good municipal services. I think every possibility has to be put on the table.

As property values declined for tax purposes, the dollars out of your pocket have gone. That is what has caused the budget crisis at City Hall.

Holland: Exactly. It's an education because so many people either don't understand that or just ignore it and don't want to understand it because raising taxes is a difficult thing for anybody to say or do. But it has to be a consideration. There is just no question.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to reevaluate the noise ordinance?

Atwell: Oh yes. I said that at [the] Tiger Bay [Club's recent meeting]. I want to take a look at it. He's had two meetings. We need to reframe this, frame it into something palatable

for everybody — if we're moving along with a more active live-work-play downtown, and there are a lot of young people, and it's not just about coming down and playing music forever.

It's part of diversifying the economy. Some people want to come downtown, listen to music, hear it in a restaurant, make it a bit more viable. You bet I'm willing to look at it.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to reevaluate the noise ordinance?

Chapman: I think the noise ordinance was carefully considered in 2003. I do believe there are technological issues that might resolve some of the conflict. But if those technological issues don't work, I go for the people who have a vested interest already. Recreation needs to take a back seat to quality of life.

An 'entertainment zone' has been proposed.

Chapman: An entertainment district only works if you don't fully understand how sound operates. Sound does not operate like vision, which deteriorates over distance. Controlling sound is an issue of absorption, and it's a very difficult technological issue, as I know from living in a neighborhood that faced a sound issue [quieting Sarasota Memorial Hospital's emergency generators].

It's much more complex than has been addressed so far. I do not favor changing the noise ordinance without facing the complexity of how sound operates. Sound is vibration and it reverberates off hard surfaces. Areas that don't have a lot of trees — like the down-

town — carry sound much more efficiently than an area that has a lot of things to absorb the sound.

The whole idea you want to identify the person complaining is an opportunity to intimidate that person out of making a complaint, rather than resolving the issue.

I am willing to look at the issue, but I'm not willing to change things unless there is more competent analysis.

There's some buzz about "live-work-play" downtown, vitality downtown. And the noise ordinance seems to be in the way of that.

Chapman: The development community and The HuB types [say that]. My feeling about live-work downtown is we've been there, done that. We have two buildings that are still authorized under the Downtown Residential Overlay District (DROD) that haven't been built. [The one at] 1350 Main was built under the DROD, and the units that were built as so-called attainable units have not been sold because there's not a market for them.

We talk a lot about creating supply without analyzing whether there is demand. I have been to events with young people at The HuB. The striking thing, the depressing then is, many of them don't have a steady paycheck job. So to talk about live-work, if these young people cannot afford the units that are proposed, it's an empty promise. It just rewards speculative development.

Without a careful analysis of demand, we're just rewarding speculation again, without addressing the underlying problem. I talked to a few family people at The HuB, and they live in

single-family houses with children and don't care a hoot about a downtown noise ordinance because they have to go home at night because they can't afford a babysitter.

I think this is an interesting exercise, but we in this city have been deluded by this whole idea that if we create a supply, there will automatically be demand. That hasn't really happened. What has happened instead is oversupply and lack of economic development due to speculation.

We have these big, glitzy projects that are supposed to alter the total downtown experience: Pineapple Square; we had the Irish-American project [after the demolition of The Quay]; we had the [unbuilt] Proscenium; we had the [unbuilt] Atrium. All of those do not exist. What exists in their place is a lot of empty, underused space. That is a drag on our economy rather than a benefit.

In fact *24/7 Wall St.* had a report about best-run cities and worst-run cities. They looked at foreclosure rates. They found cities that weathered the recession better were the ones that very much controlled supply based upon the demand.

A lot of the people now proposing 200 units per acre, or increased density downtown, didn't live here when the [New Urbanism advocate Andres] Duany Downtown Master Plan was developed. They didn't live here when we dealt with the density bonus before. They didn't live here during the Downtown Residential Overlay District. They're brand new to town, and they're the newest, fashionable big thing. But we've been through all of this before, and not too long ago.

One of the candidates is proposing 200 units per acre density, and I don't think he knows

what that looks like. That's Manhattan density. For Sarasota, there is not the will of the people to be Manhattan. My guess is, if you want to live in Manhattan, it would be a lot easier to move to Manhattan than to try to make Sarasota into Manhattan.

I was talking with my building manager, and he said we're 10 years away from occupying all the office space that's available in town. That's a depressing thought.

Where the big development is happening in this community is in the single-family neighborhoods. You go to those neighborhoods, and it's unbelievable what's happened.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to reevaluate the noise ordinance?

Holland: Yes, I do, to reevaluate the noise ordinance. I don't think there's anything wrong to periodically reevaluating most things. We have a growing dynamic downtown, with the greater vibrancy of downtown. I wish I'd attended those meetings [Caragiulo hosted], but I had knee surgery.

I understand there is a consideration of entertainment districts, i.e., the Rosemary District. I love to go to Mattison's [restaurant at the intersection of Lemon Avenue and Main Street] and listen to the music. I'd love to see some of that noise, energy, music in the Rosemary [District] because the residential [area] is not as affected.

You remember the years we tried to figure out what to do with the Rosemary. None of the ideas gelled the way we thought they might. It's a little bit of an open palette still, that you can do some things that can harness some of

this creative energy, the musical energy of the younger people. Perhaps a better venue there. The seniors in the condos downtown do deserve some respect. Yes, they moved into an urban area, but they have the right to the quiet enjoyment of their lives.

Certainly, getting a balance in the Main Street area is harder than in the Rosemary District area. I love the idea. It appears the meetings are based on getting something for everybody. I like that.



Expand the Domestic Partnership Registry? Eliminate it?

Atwell: Eliminate it? No.

Chapman: I think the Domestic Partnership Registry is one of the more forward-thinking things that Sarasota has done. It proves what a great community we are. I believe it's a model.

Holland: I don't think we should eliminate it. Expand it? I'm a huge advocate of the partnership registry. I'm a member of Equality Florida, and it needs to continue.



Do you have an opinion of Agenda 21, and how do you think it impacts the City of Sarasota?

Atwell: I'm representing the city, and some things you shouldn't be involved in. There are a lot of people with real issues with the U.N.



Do you have an opinion of Agenda 21 and how do you think it impacts the City of Sarasota?

Chapman: I don't know what is Agenda 21. But there are certain groups that are very, very afraid; they are security-oriented and afraid of internationalism.

I think it's a denial of reality and a retrograde movement based on fear. People get into the reference groups and feed on each other's fears.

We can't change that we are in an international world. It's going to threaten a lot of people, but it is a reality we have to face.



Do you have an opinion of Agenda 21 and how do you think it impacts the City of Sarasota?

Holland: How could I know about that? I am not familiar with it.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Atwell: I couldn't get to Mote Marine one day because it was all flooded. I said, "What are we doing progressive about stormwater?" So [City Manager] Barwin is having meetings with Randall Reid [Sarasota County administrator]. Is that something that comes first, where you provide appropriate stormwater retention in an environmentally low-impact way so developers will come?

St. Armands and Lido Beach have strong neighborhood associations. They are very protective and savvy. How much more development do we need there, I'm not sure. Before you get more development, you need appropriate and environmentally sound infrastructure there to do it in a safe way.

That's kind of a tough area.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Chapman: That's another reality we're going to have to face: rising sea levels. It's very complex, and we have to recognize the lack of insurance, the lack of ability to stop it, is very much going to impact our area. And it's not just on barrier islands.

It's an earth issue we are going to have to face. There's a substantial amount of investment out there. And it may resolve itself, like it's resolving itself in New York right now with the big storm that wipes everything out. Then we'll really have to face that issue.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Holland: Barrier islands are so sensitive, but also so desirable. I believe we have to be very, very careful on development on barrier islands, and my tendency is not to look to the barrier islands for development.



Renourish beaches?

Atwell: Sure. Absolutely.



Should we continue to renourish the beaches?

Chapman: That's a hard question. I have mixed feelings on that. It's feeding a marshmallow that's floating in the ocean, but it's also our economy, too. We're a tourist economy. We realize beaches ebb and flow, but it's hard to say, "Let it go."

I have exceedingly mixed feelings on that. Our economy is very dependent on tourism, and we have to recognize we have these incredible beaches. Having been here 23 years, I've seen no beach and a lot of beach coming and going, and lots of renourishment. Siesta Key seems to be benefitting and Lido Key doesn't.



Should we continue to renourish the beaches?

Holland: Yes, I believe we have to. They are such a critical part of our community and the whole ecosystem.



The following are planning questions, dealing with land-use issues

A. Why does Sarasota not have the skyline or the canals of a Fort Lauderdale?

Atwell: I think it's multiple factors. You have a community here that is multi-dimensional. And it's fairly recently that we've become so cosmopolitan. We didn't get into that New York high-rise kind of thing. Now people are discovering Sarasota.

[This is] when you get a mass of people accustomed to compact living and [they] want [greater density of] units and bus [transportation] to get around.



The following are planning questions, dealing with land-use issues

A. Why does Sarasota not have the skyline or the canals of a Fort Lauderdale?

Chapman: We took a different direction. We took the direction of arts and culture rather than just boating. We had people who came to this area who really valued arts and culture, including John and Mabel Ringling, Bertha Potter Palmer, and that helped us establish our identity.

And then we had people like David Cohen, who worked to develop the Van Wezel [Performing Arts Hall] with [former long-time City Manager] Ken Thompson. That established a different kind of identity. Instead of just boating and sun, we have that high level of cultural influence in our area. And we have other economic opportunities. Arts and culture are [a] \$180 million-a-year economic generator for us in Sarasota.

Yes, our city fathers and mothers built on a certain cultural identity, and that has continued to thrive with new cultural aspects like the ballet, the theaters, jazz club, and that draws authors.

Would you favor pursuing the proposed Cultural District Master Plan?

Chapman: Yes. I think the arts and culture are a significant factor in creating the goose that laid the golden egg. It draws people who could live anywhere, who want to live in a place with a small-town atmosphere with tremendous cultural amenities.

Most of our really important cultural assets are on the North Trail.



The following are planning questions, dealing with land-use issues

A. Why does Sarasota not have the skyline or the canals of a Fort Lauderdale?

Holland: Many people don't want Sarasota to become like the East Coast. Because we've been protective of our small-town feeling, and because our zoning codes and our neighborhoods have tried to protect and insure the growth has been not just rampant. We've got a community that is engaged and involved, and we've had good planning practices, and that's a result of what we've done.

There is something different about Sarasota. It is like the poem, "Two paths diverged in a yellow wood and I took the one less traveled by" A century ago, both were small villages. In the 1920s, they went hurly-burly crazy. But after that, the divergence began to show. Fort

Lauderdale embraced the high-rise culture. Sarasota did not. What is the difference?

Holland: We're just better people. We're more thoughtful, we're more kind, more aware. There is a strong environmental community in Sarasota. I don't know much about the history of the East Coast. The desire of the people who live in the city and county is very strong environmental. It's the people, the good people.



B. Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Atwell: That's going to be coming to us, April or May. I tend to look favorably on administrative review. The [proposed] North Trail [Overlay District] is an optional thing. I'm a commissioner and policymaker. I have to craft policy based on information from everybody, including the neighborhoods.

When we have a Planning Department and zoning, and they go out and give their imprimatur to this and the neighbors say, "No," you get into a dilemma. When do you stop that? Do you think the planners don't know the neighborhoods? You're assuming it's the staff and the neighborhoods.

The staff are planners; they have that resume. Yes, the neighbors live there, but some might have only been there two years.

Citywide?

Atwell: Yes. I would love to look into that. And I'm willing to look at the DROD [Downtown Residential Overlay District] again and tie that into the form-based code.



B. Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Chapman: No.

Citywide?

Chapman: No.

Why?

Chapman: I believe it's important for the residents to have a say-so when development is in their front yard. And I believe it's a constitutional right to assemble and petition your government.

The basis for administrative site plan approval in planning is that you have clear planning and design regulations that you stick by. That isn't what has happened in Sarasota.

What has been predictable in Sarasota is the changing of every plan. Even though the staff would like that, there are no clear criteria upon which we can base administrative site plan approval. So it gives staff maximum discretion to harm residents and neighborhoods and even areas that are commercial with incompatible development.

We don't have a form-based code anywhere in the city at this point which has very clear standards to stick by. We don't have an urban transect with a step-down in intensity as it moves toward the neighborhoods.



Bradenton recently finished and adopted a form-based code, and it seems to be palatable to everybody.

Chapman: The reality is the development community in this community has always felt the rules could be changed for their benefit. They never consider the need for the neighborhood or the existing developed area to have compatibility as well. There has to be predictability on both sides in order to reach an agreement.

Otherwise, we're going to repeat this conflict again and again and again. We seem to be on the road to it one more time. When the density bonus was there, we proposed a compromise; we thought we had a compromise: "Let's do a test case and see if it works." By Monday, there was no compromise because they decided they could beat us.

It turned out we beat them, and thus began my reputation of being anti-development, whether I am or not.

Your voting record on the Planning Board does not suggest you are anti-development.

Chapman: Ninety-three percent of what the Planning Board sees is approved. What is not approved is things that are changes that are incompatible.

The reality is, we don't have a supply issue. We have a demand issue. But we also have a development community that, in their belief system, actually believes Sarasota is anti-development.

They honestly believe that, sincerely believe that. It's not true. Just because you don't get a change of every rule every time you want it doesn't mean we're anti-development.

B. Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Holland: It's so tricky. I say [it can be handled] through ... Planning Board [hearings] and the redevelopment meetings. I'm a neighborhood person, and I understand the issues of neighbors not wanting tall buildings next to their houses. I understand lot sizes are a problem, the depth of the lots.

I do not have the fear of administrative approval that some neighborhood candidates do. I think the discussion needs to continue. You and I have done this: We've gone to meetings since the 1980s about the North Trail. Some things have been done. There have been improvements, but there is still so much that needs to be done.

I feel it could be a tool. But I have a real struggle with it, not because I'm afraid to say, "Yes" or "No" as a candidate. It's that balance I always struggle with, having worked so long and so hard to protect neighborhoods and be sensitive to neighborhoods, and yet know that we've got to have redevelopment, retrofit, particularly on the North Trail, where those places sit there stagnant, and in some instances are magnets for the criminal activity there.

[Administrative site plan approval] deserves some serious consideration, but I understand the friction with the neighborhoods and how you come to some kind of agreement. I do not have, and perhaps I should, have the fear of it.

Citywide?

Holland: I would consider it. Yes, I would consider it.

C. Would you consider high-rise development north of 10th Street? South of Whitaker Bayou?

Atwell: One of my aspirations is to reinvigorate the Cultural District. We paid \$260,000 for that plan and it's in a closet somewhere. The Quay is a fractured property. I would love to see something down there.

You have a lot of mega-houses there. A condo rather than a mega-mansion? We'd need to concentrate them in an area. That would be a long time coming. I'm pro-business and pro good development. Your eyes get wide when you think of that.

I think we need to start inside and work outside. That's a large, a very large idea right now. I'd like to get live-work-play downtown first. But that's intriguing to look at. I don't think we're there yet.

Say we had a strong mayor and worked with developers, could that happen?



C. Would you consider high-rise development north of 10th Street? South of Whitaker Bayou?

Chapman: I think there is a potential along the waterfront to build more density. I do think there are very viable neighborhoods along the way. Some of those neighborhoods back up to very narrow lots.

It's a difficult planning issue. Yes, I do think we need to carefully consider the North Trail because there is all kinds of opportunity. But it requires three things to be done at the same time. There has to be a decent code, not this unpredictable thing where you opt in or opt out, and there are no design standards.

It has to deal with the parking issue. It has to deal with 45 to 55 mph traffic that has to be slowed. It has to deal with the policing issue as well, which is prostitution and drugs.

South of Whitaker Bayou?

Chapman: No. It's very residential and high-end residential.



C. Do you favor high-rise development north of 10th Street? On the shore of the bay?

Holland: I would think I would tend not to. I hate to say one way or the other. You have to consider people's property rights.

The trending phrase is, "We have to grow the city." Single-family homes? That does nothing for the tax base. What does is density, and the only place people are going to pay for height and density is on the water. If you do not want to do it on the barrier islands, what other water do you have? It becomes either Harbor Acres or north of 10th Street.

Holland: Going back to the Rosemary District, there is so much potential there that I think that is the area. I'm not sure I want to see 18-story high rises there. That is an area super-ripe for our creative venues, and not just artists but professions.

You have a Salvation Army in the middle of it, but it's not going anywhere. We have to figure out how to integrate the Salvation Army and social services. So when you get into some of the more creative professions, those folks are not turned off by the Salvation Army, as [are] the retirees that want to shop at Brooks Brothers downtown.

Utilize the places and the people and the opportunities that are there, that can work together, and get some of this energy that seems to be out there and ripe for things.

Nothing is off the table, but we can take a look at particular areas of the city where it makes sense to grow there.



D. In Newtown virtually all streets have sidewalks (many on both sides of the street), curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in town have none of that. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention in other neighborhoods?

Atwell: [Resident] Andy Dror comes to me all the time in McClellan Park and the sidewalks are a mess. This was last year. We don't have the staff, and lost five landscape people. Some of our good neighborhoods are a mess. Again, services, and upgrade of infrastructure.

I want to look at mobility fees, and increased density downtown. Bird Key doesn't have sidewalks.



D. In Newtown virtually all streets have sidewalks (many on both sides of the street), curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in town have none of that. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention in other neighborhoods?

Chapman: Boy, is that a hard one. All infrastructure issues in built-up areas become fighting issues. I would love to have sidewalks throughout, love to have complete streets where pedestrians and bicyclists and other transit can be used. But it is a really difficult issue.

This shows what happens when you don't have the foresight to require this when the neighborhood is developed. But that's what we've had: development without foresight.

When there are sidewalks, people use them. And bike lanes: People use them. I love the idea on Old Bradenton Road [where] they are painting the bike paths green. They're putting chickee huts at both ends for the bus stops and painting the bike paths green. It's really an exciting project. They've waited 14 years for it.

But this is going to set an example for how to do a "complete street." The light fixtures are decorative, and it will create a real impetus for that [Bayou Oaks] neighborhood.

One of the hard parts for the neighborhood is, they took away their name, Old Bradenton Road. Now they have to fight to get their name back.



D. In Newtown virtually all streets have sidewalks (many on both sides of the street), curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in town have none of that. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention in other neighborhoods?

Holland: Yes.



Does everybody deserve a sidewalk?

Holland: I think everybody who wants a sidewalk, yes. In our neighborhood, and we have sidewalks on both sides and some on one side, but on Fourth Street they don't even have any sidewalks on one portion.

From a safety issue, I do believe sidewalks are necessary in neighborhoods. At least on one side, preferably on both sides. And I do believe the city needs to give attention to other neighborhoods.



On a 1-10 scale with 1 being of highest importance, how would you rate the following? Concurrency?

Atwell: State law says we can relax concurrency, so I'd say about five.

Impact Fees?

Atwell: It depends; it has to be in the middle. People are up in arms that we've relieved developers from it. I would favor doing a mobility fee. I want to look at a progressive fee to mitigate impact, so a five.

Growth Management?

Atwell: Everybody wants to manage growth, but how do we do it in this day and age? Who wouldn't be for growth management? I'm looking at alternative ways to bring progressive growth to increase our tax base and sales tax receipts. I tend to like Benderson [Development Co.] and what they've done for the community. A lot of people despise it. I have to vacillate on these by putting down five.



On a 1-10 scale with 1 being of highest importance, how would you rate them?

Concurrency:

Chapman: One.

Impact Fees:

Chapman: One

Growth management:

Chapman: One, if growth management means planning. Sometimes growth management is mistaken for no growth. I'm for planned growth.



I'm going to rattle off some planning buzzwords. On a 1-10 scale with 1 being of highest importance, how would you rate them?

Concurrency?

Holland: It's gotta be up there, certainly a one or two.

Impact fees?

Holland: That's probably two or three, in that range.

Growth management as a tool.

Holland: As a tool, I'd have to say two or three. It has to be up there.



Final question: should you succeed and win a seat on the Sarasota City Commission, is there a tangible goal you want to achieve?

Atwell: There's so many. I could be narrow or big. I have a few things. I've begun with Payne Park and the sports festival to make it one of the best parks in the county. Get a soccer school going. We have the disc golf there now. It's a gorgeous 29-acre park in Alta Vista, and not enough is going on there now. I want more people downtown living over the stores.

We really need to do something about The Quay. And we're moving with lightning speed on these social workers for the homeless.



Final question: should you succeed and win a seat on the Sarasota City Commission, is there a tangible goal you want to achieve?

Chapman: Database decision-making. Reality-based policymaking. I've always been considered a visionary, and many of my visions have come into reality because I'm not into fantasy.

It's interesting: I'm being portrayed as the person who always says, "No." Many of my visions have been realized in this community.

Examples?

Chapman: The Women's Legal Fund, the Mental Health Community Centers, the Hudson Bayou Neighborhood Association, the power plant at the hospital with sound-management technology, the lift station and upgrade of our entire sewage system, the modernizing of our policing.

What do you want to accomplish?

Chapman: I would like to accomplish a degree of problem solving between development and residential communities — where we can talk to each other and work on things without it being us-versus-them.

We are a community of high standards. I hope we retain them.



Final question: should you succeed and win a seat on the Sarasota City Commission, is there a tangible goal you want to achieve?

Holland: Both are tied together. My primary goal is to achieve the balance between the neighborhoods and the business/development community. I've watched it for so long, and sometimes we've gotten closer to it than other times. I feel that right now, we're not.

Are we ever going to achieve a perfect balance? Absolutely not, but I feel like we were closer to that balance a little bit in the past, and we're not there now.

If I can bring my dedication to the neighborhoods and preserving the neighborhoods and fighting for the things the neighborhoods want, but also to the point where the neighbors don't feel so strongly that the development/business community is such an arch enemy, and that we cannot work together, and that's the feeling I get when I sit there and listen to these discussions in the public hearings. We don't have to be enemies. And the business community doesn't think the neighborhoods are just a bunch of whiney babies.

We've achieved a better balance in the past, and I'd like to think I'd like to help bring that balance where the scales are a little more even. I live in a neighborhood, and there are certain things I don't want right next door to me. But I also understand that things are changing.

I've lived in my house for 32 years, and there are changes coming. 

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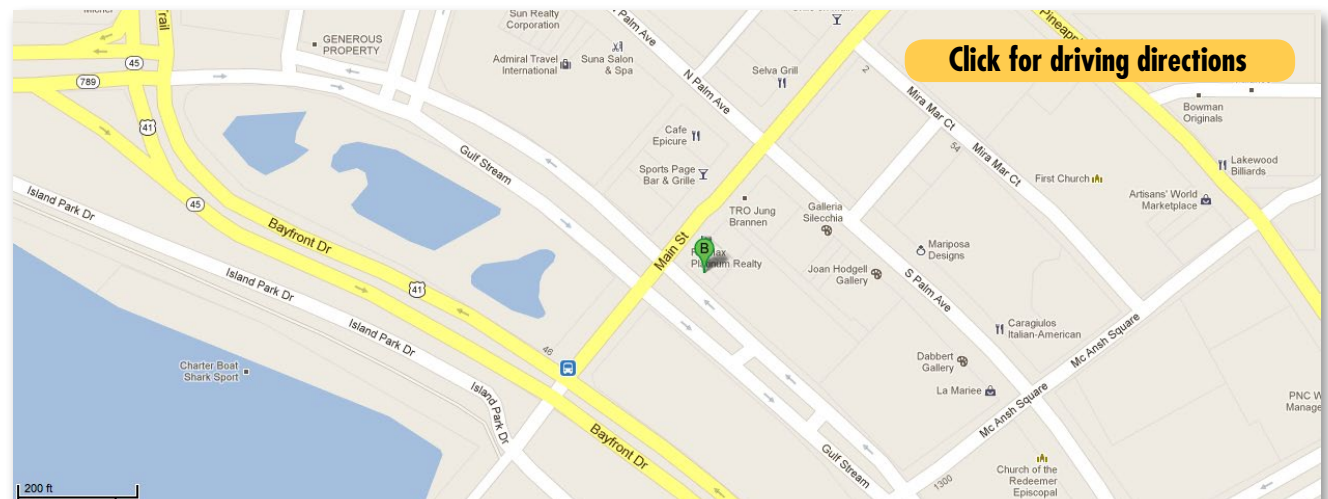


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ABOUT THOSE CLUBS ...



HOW A NATIONAL EVANGELICAL ORGANIZATION IS SPREADING ITS MESSAGE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

When Katherine Stewart first heard about the Good News Club, it did not seem like a big deal.

She was living in Santa Barbara, CA, where her 6-year-old daughter was attending what

she calls “a very lovely public school” — a school that happened to allow a chapter of the Good News Club, an evangelical ministry of the Child Evangelism Fellowship, to come on campus after school hours. Stewart calls herself a “big supporter of free speech”

and believes wholeheartedly that “the Bible is worth studying,” so she did not think twice about it.

“But then I started to hear stories from parents in town whose kids went to Good News Clubs,” Stewart says, stories that often involved attendees “targeting their peers for bullying and bigotry.” One little girl approached a classmate and said, “You don’t believe in Jesus and so you’re going to go to hell.” When the other student rebuked her, telling her different religions have different beliefs, the girl was distraught. According to Stewart, the girl asked, “How can this be true? I learned this in school.”

That experience led Stewart, [an investigative reporter by trade](#), deep into research about the Good News Club, the Child Evangelism Fellowship and the surprising intersection of faith and public schools in America today. The result? Her 2012 book, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*, which she will be discussing this Sunday, March 3, at a Sarasota event hosted by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

Does Stewart’s topic seem remote? Academic? It should not. There is a Child Evangelism Fellowship chapter right up the road in Bradenton that proselytizes to 100 students a week.

[The Child Evangelism Fellowship](#) was founded by Pastor Jesse Irvin Overholtzer in 1937. “Mr. Overholtzer read one of Charles Spur-

geon’s sermons which stated, ‘A child of five, if properly instructed can as truly believe and be regenerated as an adult,’” the Fellowship website states. “The Lord used this statement in Mr. O’s life to lead him to begin the ministry of *Child Evangelism Fellowship* when he was 60 years old.”

Over the decades, the organization grew slowly, holding Good News Clubs meetings in churches, homes and parks, but its influence did not fully explode till 2001, when a Supreme Court decision said it was OK for the organization to enter public schools.

“Can we really teach the Bible in public schools?” a section of the Fellowship website

asks. “Yes! The Gospel has been taught freely in public schools all over the world for some time. Now children in the U.S. have that opportunity, too!”

The site says Good News Clubs can meet “after school hours on the same terms as

other community groups,” but it notes that children may attend “only with their parents’ permission.”

Stewart says the Supreme Court victory “was part of a long strategy by the legal advocacy groups of the religious right: [the Alliance Defending Freedom](#), [Liberty Counsel](#) and (the [American Center for Law and Justice](#)).”

What bothers Stewart the most about how Good News Clubs operate is what she calls the “deceit” that lies at the heart of their tactics — the use of public school space to suggest to students that the Club’s lessons are

“Whether or not they’re talking to kids about same-sex relationships the level of contempt and scapegoating of LGBT people that goes on in this organization is just bound to filter through.”

Katherine Stewart
Author

just another part of the school day. “It’s part of a conscious program,” she says. “They know very well that kindergarten students, 5-year-olds, can’t distinguish between what their teachers say and what they’re learning after school.”

What are the kids learning? The Fellowship is very explicit about its goal: “The purpose of *Good News Club* is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and establish (disciple) them in the Word of God and in a local church for Christian living.”

Stewart says the Fellowship curriculum, which is standardized around the country, is “all about sin and obedience, and it’s a very authoritarian version of the Christian religion.” She attended a national Fellowship convention and was struck by the narrowness of the group’s definition of Christianity. Catholics, Episcopalians and Methodists, for example, were contrasted with those who attend “Bible-believing churches.”

“I wince, because Christianity is so diverse in this country,” Stewart adds.

And while the Fellowship curriculum does not directly address such hot-button social issues as equal rights for gays and lesbians or abortion, the Fellowship’s stance on those issues was clear at the convention Stewart observed.

“Whether or not they’re talking to kids about same-sex relationships,” Stewart

says, “the level of contempt and scapegoating of LGBT people that goes on in this organization is just bound to filter through.”

CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

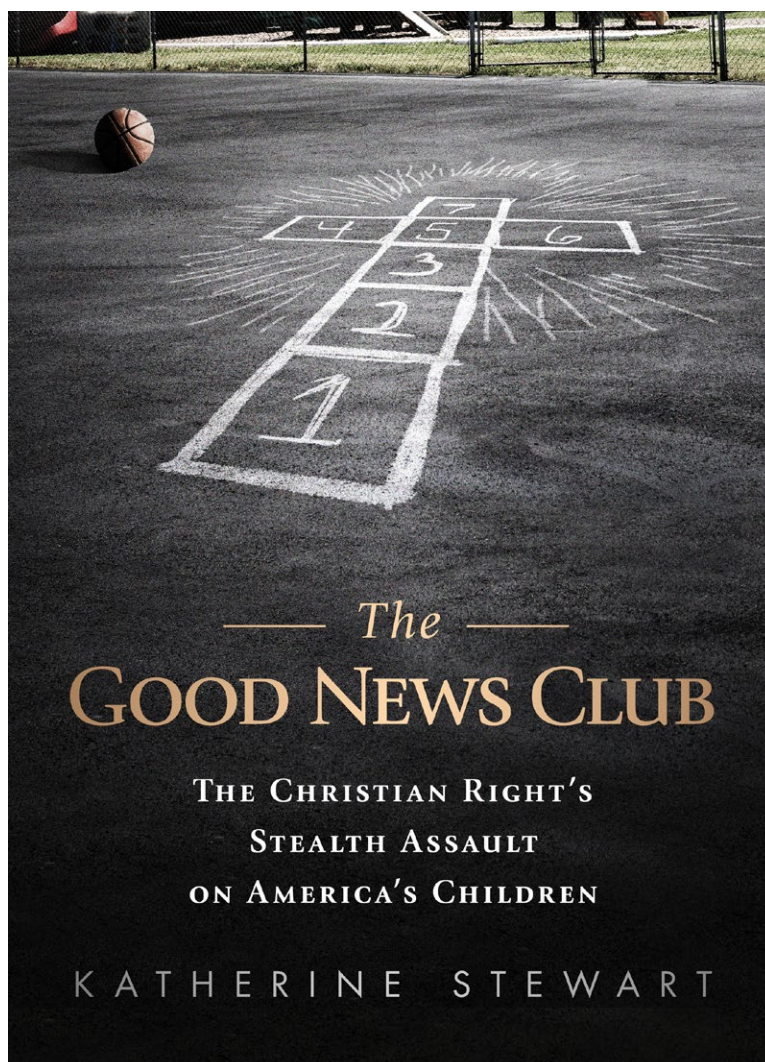
The Fellowship website lists [16 chapters](#) in Florida, including a [Manatee-Sarasota branch](#)) headquartered in Bradenton.

“Basically it’s like Sunday school,” says Joe Vaughn, the head of the local chapter. “We play games and have refreshments. We want to see them come to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.”

The Fellowship chapters usually team up with local churches to recruit volunteers and raise money. Vaughn, who took over the Manatee-Sarasota group with his wife about three years ago after the original founders moved away, notes the group has around 20 to 24 vol-

unteers drawn from roughly 10 local churches. Each week, those volunteers visit both [Tara Elementary School](#) and [Samoset Elementary School](#) at 3 p.m., after school is over, and reach a total of 80 to 100 children. (The group is not active in the Sarasota County Schools, according to a district spokesperson.)

All the students who do participate must have their parents sign a permission slip, and the volunteers are screened by the Manatee County School District. The Fellowship pays for the time and space.



The cover of Katherine Stewart's book *The Good News Club*/Contributed photo

“It’s not sponsored by the school, nor is it endorsed by the school,” stresses Samoset Principal Pat Stream. “What we do is rent them a room.”

Parents are informed about the Good News Club through a flyer, which is vetted and approved by the main school district office. Stream says the Club operates like any other organization — the Boy Scouts, for instance — that rents space at the school.

That misses the point, says Barry Lynn, the executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, a national nonprofit “dedicated to preserving the constitutional principle of church-state separation.” He says it is “ridiculous” to think that elementary school students can differentiate between an arithmetic class taught during normal school hours and a Bible class taught in the same building right after the bell rings.

“These evangelical groups have the easy pickings of students seconds after classes end,” Lynn points out. “You have a captive audience at 3 o’clock and then at 3:01 they’re being lured by their friends, lured by their promises.” Comparing the Good News Club to other after-school clubs just does not wash; “These classes are not about the Bible,” he says. “They are hard-sell evangelical messages.”

Tara Principal Steve Royce disagrees. “It’s not in the school,” he says. “It’s outside the school hours. It’s not like they come in at 9 o’clock. The school day is finished before they even start, so the students who choose to stay, their parents are definitely aware of what they’re staying for.”

Both he and Stream note they have received no parent complaints about the Good News Clubs.

“Our role with them is a facility lease,” Royce says. “That’s really what it comes down to.”

Lynn says that because of the 2001 Supreme Court decision, challenging the Fellowship legally would be ineffective. He calls the right-wing legal groups that helped the Fellowship win in court “real masters” when it comes to advancing their agenda.


“I have to give them credit for this: They very carefully orchestrate the campaigns to get the right cases to the right courts,” he adds. “Sadly, they’re very good at being on the wrong side of almost everything.”

STRATEGIES

Americans United is now focused on alerting parents to the organization’s presence in their children’s schools, an effort aided by Stewart’s book. Stewart says she is “really grateful” for the reception her book has received. She regularly speaks to libertarian organizations, progressive religious groups and LGBT rights activists about her research.

“We have an irreducible diversity of faith in our society,” she adds. “There are so many different types of Christianity. ... If our public schools are to function, we need to set aside our religious affiliations, our political affiliations, and see schools as places to come together.”

“Do we really need to be turning our public schools into these religious battlefields?”

The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children, will be presented from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday, March 3, at the First Congregational United Church of Christ, 1031 Euclid Ave., Sarasota. The program is free. 



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PUT OFF AGAIN

Supporters of a statewide domestic partnership registry as well as a registry just for Sarasota County so far are making little progress. Image courtesy morguefile.com

COUNTY COMMISSION DECLINES TO MEET WITH ADVOCATE FOR DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY UNTIL IT HEARS A LEGAL ANALYSIS OF SUCH ORDINANCES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Ken Shelin is not giving up on his goal to see a domestic partnership registry established in Sarasota County, even though the County Commission this week rebuffed his latest effort to address the issue.

Commissioner Christine Robinson raised the matter during the Commission Reports

portion of the board's Feb. 26 meeting, saying she did not understand why she had received an email from the county administration saying Shelin was asking to appear before the commission.

“*So, the county is dithering while inequality and a lack of fairness prevails for county domestic partners.*”

Ken Shelin
Sarasota resident

Robinson added that she recalled the commissioners agreeing they wanted to see the fate of a bill filed in the

Florida Legislature this session that would establish a statewide registry before addressing a county measure. They had settled on that, she pointed out, after first asking the County Attorney's Office to prepare a report on legal issues related to establishing such registries.

The bill, she noted, had been tabled, and "that is typically a way of killing things ... but we haven't had the county attorney's report yet."

Robinson continued that her personal preference would be to get the report before staff scheduled a formal discussion on a registry, which would end up being followed by a second discussion on the report. "It just doesn't seem like an efficient way of doing things," she pointed out.

"I don't want to do this," Commissioner Nora Patterson said, "if the implication is that we're going to, by virtue of the registry, be responsible in some way for legally representing the rights of those who have registered. That, to me ... would feel good but be very expensive," Patterson continued, "and I want to know from the Attorney's Office whether there's a potential for getting pulled into litigation by virtue of [establishing a county registry]."

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh replied that he and his staff are examining legal ramifications related to domestic partnership registries. "Our efforts are to analyze the pro-

posal and be able to report to the board as to what we see, as lawyers, [as ways] to reduce risk or be more clear" in the wording of an ordinance.

He added that he expected to be able to prepare a memorandum for the commissioners, based on his staff's findings.

County Administrator Randall Reid told the commissioners one other individual wanted to talk with them about a registry. If the board members wished, he said, he could contact the individuals and tell them about the commissioners' decision to await the County Attorney's Office report first.

Reid added that the individuals had requested just 10 minutes before the County Commission. They were free to address the commission at any time during the public comment portion of meetings, he noted. (Those comments are limited to three minutes per person.)

Shelin did address the board during one of those segments of the regular meeting on Jan. 30 in Sarasota, urging it to set up a county-wide registry.

Chairwoman Carolyn Mason, who originally broached the idea of the registry in January, said on Feb. 26, "If it is the board's consensus that they want to wait until we have something from the attorney [before scheduling the formal presentation], then I'm fine with that."



Ken Shelin/Contributed photo

“I want [the report] before [the presentation],” Patterson reiterated, “so we have the opportunity to ask questions.”

In an email exchange with *The Sarasota News Leader* on Feb. 27, Shelin pointed out that it took him from Jan. 30 until Feb. 25 to get a response from Reid regarding his request to make a formal appearance before the Commission. He sent the following log of those attempts:

- “2/5/13 — I sent an email to Chair Mason and asked how I make a formal request to be placed on the agenda. She referred me to and copied her email to the County Administrator. No response.”
- “2/7/13 — I sent Chair Mason another email copied to the County Administrator reiterating my request.”
- “2/10/13 — Chair Mason copied her response to me to the County Administrator.”
- “2/13/13 — I made a formal request directly to the County Administrator. No response.”
- “2/25/13 — I sent an email to the County Administrator asking why I can’t get a response and again asking how I get on the agenda.”
- “2/25/13 — County Administrator finally responds and says a staffer will be in touch with me to schedule me for March.”

- “2/25/13 - Email from county staffer saying she would schedule me.”
- “2/26/13 — Email from county staffer saying she wouldn’t be scheduling me because Commissioners had decided to wait for a report from Mr. DeMarsh on what is happening at the state.”

Shelin added, “So, the County is dithering while inequality and a lack of fairness prevails for county domestic partners. They are being treated as though they were strangers to each other even though they contribute productively as a couple to the county’s economy and tax base and to its social stability. I guess these citizens don’t count. I’m sure you’ll hear denials from the County staff and Commissioners when they hear this, but if they are serious about the quality of life in the County for all of its citizens, they wouldn’t dither, they would act.”

When contacted by the *News Leader* on Feb. 27, Reid summarized the County Commission’s action on Feb. 26 and added that Shelin was welcome to address the commission during the public comments portion of any meeting. “That is a right and opportunity [Shelin] has always known he has,” Reid noted. “There is not a right for every citizen to be on the business agenda of the Commission,” he added.

After the County Commission has had the opportunity to dis-



Florida Rep. Darryl Rousson/Photo courtesy Florida State House

cuss DeMarsh's report, Reid continued, a staff member in the commission office would contact Shelin about scheduling a formal presentation.

Reid added, "I would suggest the registry is a potentially controversial item and the Commission desires to understand fully the additional liability, parameters and use of this device should the County sponsor or maintain the registry."

THE SENATE BILL

During a telephone interview with the *News Leader* on Feb. 26, Shelin said he testified on Feb. 19 when Senate Bill 196 was heard during a meeting of the Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee, which is chaired by the bill's sponsor, Sen. Eleanor Sobel, a Democrat from Hollywood.

The members, Shelin said, "felt that the bill was too broad."

The local ordinances that have been adopted by municipalities and counties — including the City of Sarasota — are "very specific and constrained," Shelin explained. However, Sobel's bill provided for a large number of rights for domestic partners.

When state Sen. Nancy Detert of Venice, who is a member of that committee, asked the private attorney who had drafted the bill how many rights it would confer, the attorney responded the number was about 800, Shelin continued.

"So the bill is being revised," he pointed out. "They expect to bring it back within another week or so. ... I have heard no date at this point."

This is the fifth consecutive year Sobel has introduced such a bill in the Legislature.


In the meantime, Shelin said, he had the opportunity over the past weekend to talk with Democratic state Rep. Darryl Rouson of St. Petersburg, who co-sponsored a domestic partnership registry bill in the State House. Rouson said that bill still had not been scheduled for a hearing and he did not know whether it ever would be, Shelin added.

Rouson represents part of Manatee County in the Legislature.

Shelin pointed out in his email to the *News Leader*, "A five year history of failure to deal with [domestic partnership registry] legislation at the state level tells us it is unlikely to happen this year ..."

The only potentially positive factor for such a bill, Shelin told the *News Leader* on Feb. 26, would be a U.S. Supreme Court ruling declaring the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional.

The high court is scheduled to hear that case this session, and the Obama Administration has filed a brief with the court asking that DOMA be struck down.

If the Supreme Court does declare DOMA unconstitutional, Shelin said, "Then who knows what's going to happen." 

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NTOD ON SCHEDULE

An artist's rendering shows the type of development envisioned for the North Tamiami Trail if the new overlay district is approved. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

ADMINISTRATIVE SITE PLAN APPROVAL REMAINS THE STICKING POINT IN THIS LATEST INITIATIVE FOR NORTH TRAIL REDEVELOPMENT

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota City Planning Board on Wednesday evening, Feb. 27, narrowly approved the North Trail Overlay District, a planning tool aimed at revitalizing the northern gateway to town. The next step is City Commission deliberation and a vote to make it happen.

The Planning Board's 3-2 approval reflects a polarization in the city about the overlay district's primary feature — administrative site plan approval. Regular readers know the term well.

Laurel Park residents recently won their own overlay district as a response to administrative approval in the downtown zoning districts that surround their neighborhood. This mechanism is the newest face in the age-old battle between neighbors and developers.

“*The city plan says citizens should have the maximum opportunity for meaningful involvement in decisions that affect their neighborhood.*”

Jennifer Ahearn-Koch
Chairwoman
Sarasota Planning Board



Administrative approval gives city staff the authority to sign off on development activity — if the project meets each and every single rule — without Planning Board or City Commission action:

North Trail Overlay District



Comment: The NTOD currently "overlays" 10 zone districts including; RSF-4, RMF-3, RMF-4, OPB, CN, CG, CGD, CI, CRD, and NT.

Legend

-  North Trail Overlay District
-  City Limit

Created: October 20, 2009

Note: For representation purpose only. See Official Zoning Map for Specific Boundaries.

A city map shows the boundaries of the proposed North Trail Overlay District. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

Check all the right boxes and here is your permit.

The public is not totally excluded from the process. Before an application is filed, a developer must hold a neighborhood meeting to inform nearby residents of the plans. If the project is approved administratively, neighbors can still seek a Planning Board hearing on it, but only if they pay for an appeal. The cost is around \$1,400.

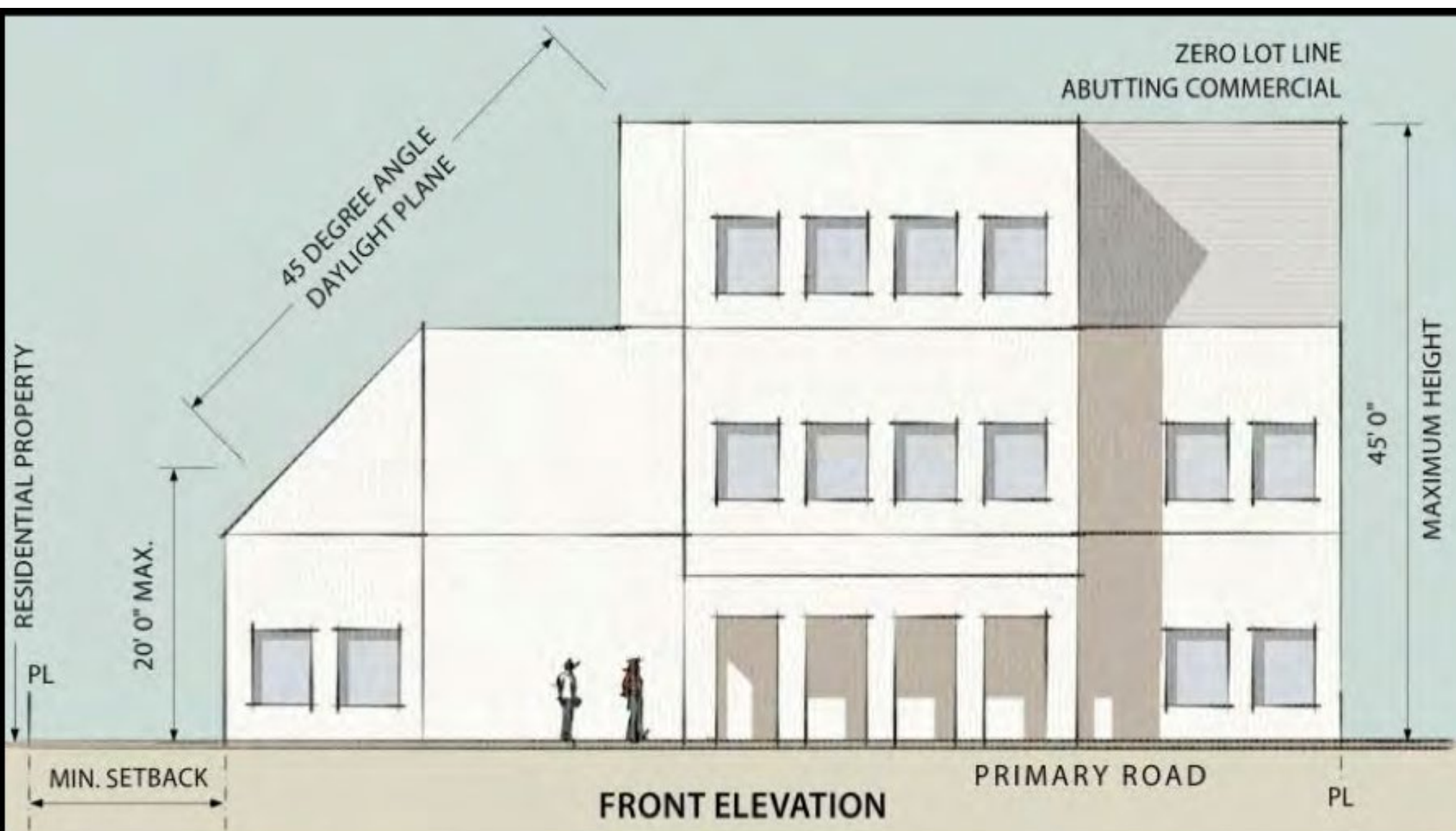
For decades the city has grappled with the declining fortunes of the North Tamiami Trail. The mom-and-pop motels were essential to Sarasota tourism in the 1950s before the big hotels came. Some, such as the high-rise Holiday Inn at U.S. 41 and the Ringling Causeway, were built, busy, then torn down while the North Trail mom-and-pops stayed in business — kind of.

City Planner Ryan Chapdelain gave the Planning Board city police statistics for the area. “Over the past five years, index crimes run about 410 per year, or more than one per day,” he said.

Index crimes are the most serious felonies, including murder, armed robbery and rape.

The North Trail is not exactly a tourist destination anymore. It became the place for stay-alive business, the wait for “Daddy Warbucks” to arrive and shower mom and pop with millions for their valuable land. When the dust cleared and boom turned to bust, Mr. Warbucks found there was no way to make the land more productive under existing zoning regulations.

“That’s when the pressure started to get greater densities and heights,” Paola Summers told



The draft North Trail Overlay District plan offers concepts of how more daylight can be allowed between buildings. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

the planning board. “There is reluctance to build a small building if they have a shot at a bigger building if they just wait.”

Summers is a leader of a North Trail neighborhood.

THE GUTS OF THE DEAL

The North Trail Overlay District (NTOD) is a complicated interplay of procedures, design guidelines, incentives and restrictions. It came out of three years of figurative head banging by local businesses, neighbors and property owners. Not a single North Trail neighborhood has endorsed it, although the area it would cover spans at least four.

City staff presented 13 distinct issues for the Planning Board to ponder. On most points, the board responded with unanimous approval. For a few, the vote was 3-2, with member Susan Chapman and Chairwoman Jennifer Ahearn-Koch always in the minority. (It was the same 3-2 split to approve the Ringling Walmart site plan in January.)

The first point of deviation was a simple question: Should the NTOD be voluntary or mandatory? As proposed, once a developer decided to use the NTOD, he or she had to stick with it; no going back. The action would be recorded on the deed and binding on any future property owner. Three Planning Board members said the adherence to NTOD guidelines should be voluntary, allowing developers to choose if they want to participate.

The board was unanimous in approving a height bonus of 10 feet (up to 45 feet) and allowing the use of current zoning standards for “daylight plane” configuration — a kind of “let the sunshine in” separation of structures.

For developers not wishing to utilize the NTOD, the Planning Board agreed unanimously to let the current zoning standards remain

in place. Presumably, those standards would be “grandfathered” into perpetuity.

The district calls for several design standards. One concerns signs; another establishes criteria for building frontages, sidewalks and streetscapes. All breezed by with 5-0 votes. A provision on parking passed 3-2.

THE APPROVAL PROCESS

Administrative site plan approval in the NTOD was a major point of contention.

“This thing goes nowhere without the administrative approval process,” said Planning Board Member Chris Gallagher.


Ahearn-Koch replied, “The city plan says citizens should have the maximum opportunity for meaningful involvement in decisions that affect their neighborhood.”

Gallagher responded, “I support administrative review because when it becomes public, it’s unmanageable and unpredictable. That’s the simple reason they don’t want it.”

Chapman referred to the City Commission’s Walmart decision this week. (See the story in this issue.) “We just had an example of staff interpretation for compatibility and the neighborhood’s idea of compatibility,” she said. “In a built-out city, we have to have a concept of compatibility. Staff’s analysis is not the same as the public’s.”

When it came to a vote, it was again the guys versus the gals. Vald Svekis, Gallagher and Morton Siegel voted for NTOD administrative review, ensuring it passed 3-2.

Then it was time to vote on the entire NTOD package and the vote was the same, 3-2, with Ahearn-Koch and Chapman in the minority.

The issue probably will go before the City Commission in April, when one or perhaps two city commissioners may be lame ducks. 



This may take a while.

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A DEPUTY CHIEF

The Sarasota Police Department is located on Adams Lane in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SARASOTA'S POLICE CHIEF IS ADVERTISING FOR A NO. 2, A POSITION THAT HAS BEEN VACANT SINCE JANUARY 2006

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sarasota's new Chief of Police Bernadette DiPino is now looking for a No. 2.

The posting puts emphasis on community policing, problem-oriented policing and "change initiative[s]."

The job of deputy chief was posted on Friday, Feb. 22; the application period will close March 8.

It lists all the duties expected of a strong deputy — overseeing budget preparation and administration, representing the department in collective bargaining and taking responsibility

for administration — including training, personnel, equipment and records.

Under the heading of "job-based competencies," the posting calls for "comprehensive knowledge of community policing and problem-oriented policing best practices."

And it calls for "proven ability to command [the] respect of division members with the ability to establish and maintain an effective program of supervision, communication, evaluation, discipline and remediation."

It was widely speculated that DiPino wanted a deputy chief of her own choosing to "watch

her back” as she took control of the city’s Police Department.

A supplemental questionnaire on the posting poses several essay-type questions that give some indication of DiPino’s plans for her deputy. For example: “What was the most difficult change initiative you have managed? What would you do differently?”


Another says, “Describe a change initiative you have led in the area of law enforcement.”

A third: “Do you have experience with community policing and problem-oriented policing best practices? If yes, please describe.”

The deputy chief will move into the top-floor office now occupied by Capt. Paul Sutton, the department’s current No. 2. Sutton is scheduled to retire soon.

Sarasota has not had a deputy police chief for more than six years. The last was Ed Whitehead, who was deputy to Chief Skip Jolly and who served as acting chief after Jolly’s resignation in May 2002.

Whitehead continued as deputy chief under Police Chief Peter Abbott until Abbott was suspended and placed on administrative leave in September 2005 for what were deemed inappropriate remarks. Whitehead retired as deputy chief on January 19, 2006 after 32 years on the force. Abbott left the position vacant.

Ironically, on Feb. 26, during a budget workshop, city commissioners tacitly agreed to reduce the police force by seven officers. Meanwhile, DiPino is seeking to fill a top slot. That translates into fewer Indians but another chief. 



Former City Manager Robert Bartolotta (left) talks with Capt. Paul Sutton in the new police headquarters. Photo courtesy City of Sarasota



'SOLICITATION' VERSUS 'OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC'

*An emergency county ordinance that went into effect this week addresses public safety instead of solicitation in response to the numbers of people on local roads seeking money or help finding jobs.
Dreamstime.com photo*

THE COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES AN EMERGENCY ORDINANCE IN RESPONSE TO A CIRCUIT COURT RULING ON THE CITY OF SARASOTA'S PANHANDLING LAW

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In an effort to prevent a potential legal challenge, the Sarasota County Commission unanimously approved an emergency ordinance on Feb. 27, changing parts of the current county code banning solicitation on roads and rights of way.

The changes substitute "obstruction of traffic" for "solicitation" and prohibit the "distribution of any item to, receipt of any item from, or exchange of any item with the

occupant of any motorized vehicle upon a road in the unincorporated area of Sarasota County"

Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Nora Patterson, however, voiced some concerns about some of the new language, and Barbetta ob-

jected to having to act on the basis of a threat. County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh assured them the board could advertise a public hearing at any time on the ordinance,

“*I think we need to stand our ground.*”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County



with further tweaks if they wish, before making it a long-term part of the county code.

DeMarsh recommended the action this week on the basis of a recent 12th Judicial Circuit Court judge's ruling that struck down part of a City of Sarasota ordinance related to pan-handling.

In his Feb. 1 ruling in *Hill v. City of Sarasota*, Judge Rick DeFuria granted a temporary injunction against the city, preventing police officers from arresting people holding signs on public sidewalks or medians, issuing such people citations or directing them to "move on," DeMarsh informed the commissioners in a Feb. 27 memo.

"Additionally," DeMarsh wrote, "our office received inquiries from the same attorneys representing the plaintiffs [in the Hill case] as to the constitutionality of the County's code provisions governing solicitation and commercial activities in the right-of-way."

Therefore, DeMarsh continued, he recommended the County Commission adopt the emergency ordinance amending Sections 98-11 and 98-12 of the county's Code of Ordinances to prevent a constitutional challenge.

"All of a sudden we're reacting because of a threat," Barbetta said. "It seems like we're jumping because [Michael Barfield, a legal advisor to the Sarasota chapter of the Americans for Civil Liberties Union] has confronted us about [county ordinances]."



County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh/Photo by Norman Schimmel

DeMarsh responded, "I would say we're reacting to the Circuit Court's order."

Barbetta then pointed to two parts of DeFuria's ruling, which allows for law enforcement action if an "individual is obstructing or impeding pedestrian or vehicular traffic or creating an unsafe condition."

"I think that we can substantiate that this is creating an unsafe situation by somebody standing in a 2-foot-wide median. I would much rather hold to that. ... I think we need to stand our ground."

DeMarsh explained that while in his and his staff's view "it is lawful to regulate activity in the right of way," that is defensible

“It's America, and I don't mean that as a joke. ... We have public freedoms.

Charles Hines
Commissioner
Sarasota County

only if the ordinance is “content-neutral” and provides “the least amount of regulation necessary to achieve the objective.”

The emergency ordinance includes the language, “This section is intended to be narrowly-tailored to serve the significant government interest of public safety, and to leave open ample alternative channels for distribution, receipt, and exchange upon the public sidewalks or other areas of the Public Right-of-Way not outlined [in the ordinance].”

DeMarsh pointed out that since the existing ordinance was limited to prohibiting the solicitation of donations in the public rights of way, “We believe the legal argument we would face in defending it is it chooses between types of speech.”

The new language, he added, “doesn’t address the purpose for the exchange” between the person on the road and a person in a vehicle.

Furthermore, DeMarsh told the commissioners, the new ordinance defines “road” as “roadbed, islands, medians, travel lanes, turn lanes and all ways open to travel by operators of motorized vehicles within unincorporated Sarasota County.”

PROBLEMATIC ENFORCEMENT?

When Barbetta asked whether the County Attorney’s Office had consulted with the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office on the changes, DeMarsh said a copy of the proposed ordinance had been provided to Sheriff Tom Knight’s legal counsel, who had talked with Deputy County Attorney Rick J. Elbrecht about it.



The Sarasota County Commission sits in session. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“I believe that at least at a preliminary level, they felt [the new ordinance] could work,” DeMarsh added.

The measure does keep a law on the books, he noted, giving the County Commission time to refine it.

Then Barbetta asked, “If you see somebody standing in the median holding a sign looking for a job ... is that lawful or unlawful?”

“It is lawful unless it disrupts the normal flow of vehicles,” DeMarsh replied. “It’s problematic to go much further because of First Amendment rights that people have to hold signs.”

“Why can’t we just have an ordinance that says you can’t stand in the median unless you’re crossing the road?” Barbetta persisted.

“We want to explore that,” DeMarsh said, adding that he and his staff did not have time to delve into all possible options for new language in the ordinance before they felt they had to present something to the commission.

“It seems to me that under the definition of obstruction of traffic, you’re trying to get at that issue,” Patterson said in reference to Barbetta’s comment. “But I don’t know how you would determine that somebody walking along the median — who happens to be holding a sign — that they are actually inhibiting or obstructing traffic. Some of our medians are only a foot-and-a-half wide.”

A deputy would have to observe a violation, DeMarsh told her, adding that was part of the ordinance that could be amended before it became a permanent part of the county code.

Again referring to Barbetta’s remarks, Patterson said, “Unless you see [a person] hold his hand out, take money — that would be the only way you could even move him along, because you’d have to see it to know that it’s for that purpose — unless you interpret the sign, which says, ‘Give money.’”

“We want to work with the Sheriff’s Office on this,” DeMarsh replied.


Sheriff’s deputies and the County Attorney’s Office will be paying attention to such practical aspects of enforcement, he added.

In response to a question from Chairwoman Carolyn Mason, DeMarsh said he and his staff would work with the stakeholders on any amendments to the emergency ordinance and return with those suggestions to the commission in seeking the advertisement of a public hearing on a revision.

“We would advise you not to adopt an emergency ordinance and leave it forever,” he reiterated.

Patterson made the motion to approve the emergency ordinance, with Commissioner Charles Hines seconding it.

“This is a very difficult situation,” Hines said. “It’s America, and I don’t mean that as a joke. ... We have public freedoms.”

The ordinance at least will allow the county to keep a measure in its code to promote public safety, he pointed out, until a better ordinance can be developed. 



IN THE HOLE ALREADY

Sarasota City Hall could see fewer employees coming to work next year as part of the effort to balance the next budget. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY'S FORMER FINANCE DIRECTOR AND A RETIRING CITY COMMISSIONER SPEAK FRANKLY ABOUT PROPOSALS FOR FINDING \$4.8 MILLION TO BALANCE THE NEXT SARASOTA BUDGET

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

To understand government, you have to understand budgeting, because the money in the budget pays for implementing policies. Increased public safety shows up as an increase in the police budget, for example. When there is not enough money to go around, something will suffer.

The Sarasota City commissioners held their first budget workshop this week to develop a spending plan for the

fiscal year starting Oct. 1. That plan begins with a \$4.8 million deficit that will have to be filled. By law, the city's budget must be balanced.

“*The current staff is really stretched. You want to rewrite the zoning code? That takes a lot of staff time. You want more eyes on the streets dealing with the homeless, that takes police.*”

Marlon Brown
Deputy Manager
City of Sarasota

Staff came forward with a rough income estimate and expenses outline to ask the commissioners for help in filling the hole. If new city Finance Director John Lege (pronounced “leggy”) was expecting

real decisions on tough questions, he was disappointed.

CANDOR SPICES DEBATE

Lege was assisted by Chris Lyons, the former city finance director who is helping the new guy fit into the job.

“You have to make some tough decisions,” said Lyons. “The bottom line is, cut staff or use the fund balance [reserves]. And that’s only good for two more years.”

The “revenue stabilization fund” — a fancy name for “reserves” — is estimated to stand at \$2.9 million when the 2014 fiscal year begins.

Commissioner Shannon Snyder said he “had no appetite for a tax increase” and suggested “the county is going to have to pick the cost of some of this stuff, or eventually they’re going to get all of it.”

Commissioner Terry Turner did not throw up his hands as Snyder did. “Reduce police positions: I think we have to. Up to now we’ve only focused on pensions. We need to engage our employees to changes in the terms of employment. Flexible work rules; healthcare; the DROP [early retirement] program. This is a long-term problem, and we can’t just focus on things that help out now.”

Talk then turned to how “the ratings agencies” will treat the city. “The \$15 million fund balance is reflected in our credit rating,” said Turner.

“How we balance the budget is something they rate,” said Lyons. “If we’re willing to raise the millage [property tax rate] if the state takes away revenue, they’ll note that.”



City Manager Tom Barwin (left) was away on vacation, leaving Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown to work with the City Commission during its budget workshop this week. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“We could increase the millage for the \$300,000 pushback by the county for the parks agreement,” suggested Lyons.

When the county redrafted an interlocal agreement on parks a few years ago, it forced the city to pick up \$300,000 in maintenance expenses.

Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown reminded the commission, “The current staff is really stretched. You want to rewrite the zoning code? That takes a lot of staff time. You want more eyes on the streets dealing with the homeless, that takes police.”

With Lyons leaving the city, for the first time in his long career he seemed to be speaking candidly to the commission as a whole.

“OK, so far, no tax increase. We transfer \$1.5 [million] or \$2 million from the revenue stabilization fund; we cut seven cops and five other employees. That’s \$3.5 million, leaving \$1.3 [million]. Use more revenue stabilization

funds? That would use it up. Without a [property tax] rate increase, it will come out of the general fund.”

“I’m worried about raiding the revenue stabilization funds totally,” said Mayor Suzanne Atwell. “I think the millage needs to be on the table. I want a real, balanced approach.”

Lege said he would come back with ways to pare the remaining \$1.3 million imbalance.

Commissioner Paul Caragiulo wondered about the impact of larger personnel reductions. “We’re now at 12. What would 20 look like?” he asked.

Brown said it was unwise to take wild stabs in the dark. “If you don’t pinpoint where the employees come from, the public won’t understand the service reductions. When you do start to identify specific areas, that raises the angst in that area.” Snyder added, “You end up producing fear among employees. If you’re at the bottom of the ladder, you start looking around.”

“You have to do it with attrition,” said Vice Mayor Willie Shaw. “Otherwise, you do create fear.”

“I believe the thing that will be real to our constituents is a tax increase,” said Turner. “They won’t understand hypothetical reductions in service. Our employees would understand it right away, so identifying specific slots is not going to be productive.”

The commissioners will hold a second budget workshop in July. One or perhaps two of the five commissioners could be replaced by then. Turner is not running for re-election, and



Atwell faces five competitors in the March 12 balloting.

“When we come back in July,” said Lyons, “It will be jobs versus a tax increase.”

As a lame-duck commissioner, Turner, too, was free to speak his mind. “You have an 18-month to three-year challenge to renegotiate ... contracts to change the way we do business. Management should come back with a wish list for union contracts. Take-home cars [for police] — we’re still talking about it,” he said. “This summer sets the stage for balancing the budget in the later years as well.”

Revenues are actually inching upward after years of decline. The property tax revenue is down \$6 million from its peak in 2008, but it is expected to creep up \$150,000 in FY14 as a result of an estimated 1.5 percent increase in property tax valuations. Other taxes — franchise fees, excise and sales taxes and revenue sharing from the state — are all trending up slightly.

The proverbial elephant in the budget is the cost of police, fire and general employee pen-

sions. This year the city is contributing \$12.4 million to those funds. For FY14 the number will jump 46 percent to \$18.2 million. “You have to look at pensions and healthcare for other savings,” said Lyons.

Snyder pointed out that consolidation of the Police Department with the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office would probably make up the difference. “Do we have the stomach to contract with the sheriff? Duplication in administration could probably pay for the pension shortfall,” he said. “If we don’t do it, we’re on to a tax increase, and I fear where that’s going.”

The Sarasota Police Department, without pensions, consumes 52 percent of the city’s general fund.


“My concern is the integrity of the SPD,” said Atwell. “At this time it may be kind of radical. What we could do is prepare to look at it.”

“I’m skeptical,” said Caragiulo. “You should be honest in your choices and put it out there.

It’s reasonable to make that available to the constituents.”

The Florida Legislature has been starving local government funding sources for more than a decade. The current legislative session already has a bill under consideration that would ban red-light cameras. Fines from drivers running those lights are expected to total \$1.8 million in FY14 funds for the city. If the red-light cameras were eliminated, the city would need to find a source to cover that shortfall. The situation is the same with possible state cuts in the communications service tax, the local business tax and taxes on fire and police pensions.

“You don’t have any friends in the Legislature,” said Lyons.

The takeaway for the Finance Department from the workshop? Burn through the reserves, let at least 12 people go and look for ways to cut \$1.3 million more — and no tax increase. 

“A true pacifist is one who is capable of dealing immeasurable damage but chooses not to when confronted with provocation.”
— *Morihei Ueshiba*



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MORE PROBLEMS LOOM

The City Commission chambers are full before the start of the Walmart hearing on Feb. 26. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ANALYSIS: CITY COMMISSION'S DECISION TO UPHOLD THE WALMART APPEAL RAISES THE QUESTION, WHAT IS NEXT?

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

If you have ever trained a dog, you know how to drive it nuts. It does not take long. You reward and punish it for the same act. And so it was Tuesday night, Feb. 26, with the City Commission's review of the appeal of a Planning Board decision to approve a Walmart store at the Ringling Plaza Shopping Center.

For months, if not years, commissioners urged city staffers to be "open for business," to fast-track new development (especially

the infill kind) and to embrace "economic development" as a true planning goal. When staff members did that for the Walmart project, they essentially were setting themselves up for a hearty slap in the face. By a 3-2 vote, the

City Commission sided with the neighborhood group appealing the Walmart decision, overturned the best judgment of staff (and the Planning Board) and set the stage for a possibly expensive lawsuit.

“It's clear something has to be done about our code. This is absolutely something we need to be working on immediately.”

Paul Caragiulo
Commissioner
City of Sarasota



THE PLAYERS

The commission heard more than eight hours of testimony and at least one hour of legal advice — pro and con — over two evening sessions. It was sitting in a quasi-judicial role, able to make a decision only on the sworn testimony and factual evidence offered by staff, the appellants, Walmart representatives, “affected parties” and the general public.

The issue was not Walmart’s wages, the source of its goods, the degree of its philanthropy or the historic impact on small businesses nearby. The only issue on the table was, did the site plan meet the requirements of the arcane city zoning code.

Both sessions — one on Feb. 19 and the other on Feb. 26 — were heavily attended. The crowd was demonstrative at times, its cheers and applause pounded silent by Mayor Suzanne Atwell’s gavel.

Walmart is an enormous corporation, the world’s largest retailer and employer and second-most-valuable corporation in America. Sam Walton founded it in 1962, and by 1972, it was publicly traded. Roughly 48 percent of the stock is owned by Walton’s family and heirs and “is equal to all the assets of the entire bottom 40 percent of the U.S. population — 120 million people,” according to a new book by Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Hedrick Smith.



Residents sign in to address the City Commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The appeal was brought by five residents in the Alta Vista neighborhood, self-described as a working-class area with a huge variety of homes from all decades of Sarasota's existence. The neighborhood association financially supported the appeal. Architect Jerry Sparkman, who has an office nearby, joined the five residents. If they lost the appeal, they and the neighborhood faced the prospect of fighting Walmart in court to stop the project. But their appeal succeeded, and now it is the city facing the specter of a legal wrestling match.

Oddly, residents of the neighborhood actually adjacent to the store took no official position at the Planning Board or City Commission meetings, although individual members of the

Gardens of Ringling Park weighed in on both sides of the issue.

While Walmart representatives can hope for possible vindication by taking the city to court to overturn the commission's vote, there appears to be no vindication for the city staff members. Time and again they wrote and testified how Walmart's site plan met all the city's requirements. The case planner, Courtney Mendez, shepherded the proposal through two Development Review Committee meetings with a full sign-off by all city departments plus the county Fire Department. And she made the case at the Planning Board on Nov. 14, 2012, where the site plan was approved on a 3-2 vote.



The City Commission prepares to continue the Walmart appeal on Feb. 26. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Mendez then gave birth and went on maternity leave. Defense of the staff position was taken up by Tim Litchet, director of building, zoning and neighborhoods. He was supported by Gretchen Schneider, general manager of planning and development.

The level of scorn in the audience was high on Feb. 26, and some of that was tossed at staff. One Alta Vista resident even brought up news articles about Walmart bribing officials in Mexico to put its stores where the company wanted them despite adverse zoning rules. "Just like we do here," he said.

City Commissioner Terry Turner was on the prevailing side to support the appeal. After the vote, he praised staff: "For the record, I find the city staff work to be professional and

exemplary. The criticisms of staff were irrelevant," he said.

But he overruled the staff's analysis, saying the project was "not compatible — the bulk, the 24/7 [operation], the truck noise and traffic and the intensity of the project in a neighborhood area."

THE STAKES

The biggest sigh of relief came from Alta Vista residents, who will not have to foot the bill for an expensive lawsuit against the Walmart Goliath. Even though Bob Turffs was acting as the neighborhood's *pro bono* attorney, fees for court costs, expert witnesses and deposition transcriptions would have been borne by Alta Vista. Now the city will be the party in court, not the neighborhood.



Several city residents brought with them signs protesting the Walmart plan. Photo by Norman Schimmel

It would appear the toll on city staff members would be both psychological and related to their workload. Their ultimate bosses rejected their best efforts, and that would seem to bode poorly for morale. What may be even worse is additional workload on an already diminished planning staff.

After the vote was taken, Commissioner Paul Caragiulo — who supported Walmart — said, “It’s clear something has to be done about our code. This is absolutely something we need to be working on immediately.”

For years the city has toyed with embracing a “form-based” code for zoning decisions. Bradenton recently adopted a form-based code, and Caragiulo suggested that might be a model for Sarasota to examine.

Meanwhile, the city planning staff continues to get smaller and smaller. Harvey Hogland will retire at the end of February, following Mike Taylor who retired late last year. Together they represent more than a half-century of planning experience in the city. “Re-coding the city” will require a significant reorientation of the planning staff’s priorities, duties and responsibilities.

Plus, of course, Litchet, Schneider and Mendez must be available for depositions and eventual testimony in court should Walmart sue the city over their approved-appealed-denied site plan on Ringling Boulevard.


There will be political fallout as well, especially for Mayor Atwell. As the only incumbent running for re-election on the March 12 ballot, she carries the responsibility of explaining all commission decisions. Now she has been on

the “developer end” of two controversial decisions — the Walmart matter and the sale of parkland at the Fruitville/Beneva roads intersection to Benderson Development Co..

The majority of the five challengers for the two at-large City Commission seats are pounding the drum for economic development, which is a code phrase for more physical development of property. Despite Atwell’s vote in favor of the Walmart project, she will find it difficult to shake the failure to lead the commission to approval of the project. Furthermore, all the anti-Walmart voters have already pinned a target on her candidacy.

A lot of gas will be vented over the city’s anti-business reputation, too. This is the second time Alta Vista has put a figurative torpedo into a major project. The neighbors battled a proposal for adjacent 10-story towers almost a decade ago, losing the zoning battle but convincing developer Ron Burks to scale back the height of his project. And now another torpedo has gone into Walmart’s plans.

Underlying this neighborhood activism is the need for the city to address this east-from-downtown expansion that puts the Gardens of Ringling Park and Alta Vista in the cross hairs of development. The creaking code of “non-implementing districts” in the area causes confusion and turmoil. If the city wants to “re-code,” there is no better place to begin than the neighborhoods around Payne Park.

Full disclosure: Stan Zimmerman is a resident of Alta Vista, and he was the sole vote in the neighborhood association against filing the Walmart appeal. 



LOOKING FOR SOME ACCORD

Warm Mineral Springs remains a popular attraction, especially for people who believe in the healing value of its water. Photo by Rachel Levey-Baker

THE COUNTY COMMISSION STARTS THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS TO TRY TO RESOLVE THE OWNERSHIP ISSUE OF WARM MINERAL SPRINGS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Next step: conflict resolution.

That was the unanimous decision of the Sarasota County Commission on Feb. 26 regarding the ongoing dispute with the North Port City Commission regarding the future of Warm Mineral Springs.

Commissioner Nora Patterson made the motion to initiate the procedures of the Florida Governmental Conflict Resolution Act, with the North Port Commission hav-

ing made no counteroffer in response to the County Commission's Jan. 29 offer to buy the city's half share of the springs for \$2 million.

"I feel like we're doing a lot of talking, but we're not getting a lot of information back," said County Commissioner Christine Robinson, who proposed the county buyout in January.

“I'm not willing to say we're just going to shut the springs down

Linda Yates
Mayor
City of North Port

“I don't want to sell it,” County Commissioner Joe Barbetta said of the springs, “so that leaves us the option of trying to buy out their interest or coming up

with some other method via conflict resolution. I don't have hope on either."

The first step in following the Florida Governmental Conflict Resolution Act, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh explained, will be for the county to send a letter to Jonathan R. Lewis, North Port's city manager, asking him to work with County Administrator Randall Reid to set up a meeting to see whether the two of them can resolve the issues.

By law, DeMarsh added, that letter has to be sent within five days of the County Commission vote authorizing it. Then, that meeting has to be scheduled within 30 days of Lewis' receipt of it, DeMarsh pointed out.

Robinson asked that the letter go into the mail Feb. 27 and that it be emailed to Lewis as well.

DeMarsh responded that he would make sure the letter went into the mail Feb. 27.

Robinson also asked for clarification from Patterson about whether her motion called for the use of a facilitator to assist the two commissions in reaching an agreement.

"Yes, it does," Patterson responded.

If Reid and Lewis cannot reach an agreement both their boards will approve, the next step, DeMarsh indicated, would be for the commissioners to meet.

"We need to try to get everybody together to get this [matter] on the right track again," Robinson said, "and I'm hopeful everybody will go into [the conflict resolution] with an open mind."



County officials have pointed out they could be hampered in planning for Warm Mineral Springs unless the City of North Port de-annexed the spa. Image courtesy Sarasota County

A memo to the County Commission from Reid and DeMarsh points out that the county and the City of North Port purchased the Warm Mineral Springs property on December 20, 2010 as joint owners. That action included an agreement to allow the owner, Cypress Lending Group Ltd., to continue operating the site through June 30, the memo notes.

During a joint meeting on July 16, 2012, the County and City commissions “agreed that an Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) would be issued for management and development of Warm Mineral Springs. The process was to be completed prior to the expiration” of the agreement with Cypress Lending, it adds.

However, the North Port Commission did not approve the ITN when it was presented for the members’ consideration on Nov. 26, 2012, the memo points out.

The letter the County Commission authorized to be sent to Lewis says, “The County and the City have exchanged several pieces of correspondence since November 2012 with respect to the Invitation to Negotiate for proposals to operate, develop, or utilize the Warm Mineral Springs property, and the City’s desire to sell its interest in the Warm Mineral Springs property. It is clear that Sarasota County and the City of North Port have a conflict over future use of the jointly-owned Warm Mineral Springs property as well as the City’s expressed desire to sell its interest in the property.”

THE OPTIONS

During his report to the board on Feb. 26, Reid pointed out three options he felt the commissioners should consider:

- Sell the county’s interest to North Port for \$2.75 million and “an equal division of all costs incurred from acquisition of the property to the

date of transfer and closing, including those related to the purchase, management and sale of the property to the City.”

- Purchase the city’s interest in the spa for \$2.75 million and an equal division of all costs.
- However, Reid told the commissioners, as long as the Warm Mineral Springs property remained part of the City of North Port — which had annexed it — the city would have final say over any use of the property. “We might be limited in what the county wished to do,” he added.
- Initiate the conflict resolution process in an effort to avoid litigation. The memo points out that, “Ultimately, if joint owners cannot agree upon the use or disposition of a property, one or the other could file a lawsuit seeking partition under the provisions of Chapter 64, Florida Statutes.”

Regarding the conflict resolution process, Reid noted, “It also has the potential of being difficult if there’s not a clear desire to solve the issue or there’s not a [desirable] compromise on positions.”

Patterson suggested the ideal situation would be to put all 10 of the elected officials together in a room with a facilitator.

DeMarsh replied that the county had used the process once before in a property matter involving North Port. “I think it would be possible to include both a meeting of the entire boards and also have some work sessions where you break out [for discussions].”

Barbetta said he did not have any hope the conflict resolution would work. “I think a couple of the [North Port] board members are intransigent,” he pointed out, adding that he had heard comments made privately by North Port

commissioners, “and they’re not healthy, and it’s unfortunate. ... Until the elected officials in the City of North Port put aside any animosity and do the right thing for the community, we’re going to get nowhere here.”

“We should not be arguing with other governmental entities within our own jurisdiction,” Commissioner Charles Hines said. “This is a great project that has gotten sideways so quickly, and we need to put egos aside and just address it as what it is. It’s a phenomenal asset ...”

“I feel very strongly that the springs should remain in public ownership,” Chairwoman Carolyn Mason said. “And I strongly support proceeding with the conflict resolution process as soon as possible.”

CONCERNS AND FRUSTRATIONS

During the public comments portion of the County Commission’s afternoon session on Feb. 26, 11 speakers pleaded with the board to resolve the issues with the city so the spa can remain open. A number of them asked that Cypress Lending be allowed to continue to operate Warm Mineral Springs.

However, DeMarsh explained — at Patterson’s behest — that Florida Statute 125.35 would not allow the county to continue the agreement with Cypress Lending. That would violate the state requirement calling for competition on county contracts, DeMarsh noted.

The city is not subject to that particular statute, he added.



County Commissioners Christine Robinson and Charles Hines listen to a presentation during a meeting late last year in Sarasota. File photo

After DeMarsh completed his answer, the board members were quiet for a few moments. “Don’t all look at me!” Robinson told them jokingly, as she has taken the lead on action regarding the spa in past meetings.

She said she felt it would not be productive to make another offer to purchase the springs. When the County Commission asked the North Port commissioners to address the ITN, she pointed out, “They couldn’t come back to us with any communication on what was wrong with the ITN.”

Robinson added, “We’re not getting a whole lot back from them as far as plans or ideas about how to go about this ...”

She also pointed out that the North Port Commission had discussed the springs during its regular meeting on Feb. 25, but it could not reach consensus on its next step.

During that North Port meeting, Vice Mayor Jim Blucher suggested the board hold a workshop on the springs. After City Attorney Robert K. Robinson told the city commissioners the county commissioners were scheduled to discuss the matter on Feb. 26, Blucher said he felt the city board should await the county action before scheduling a workshop.

However, Mayor Linda Yates said she wanted to have a discussion on how much it would cost the city to keep Warm Mineral Springs open just for swimming after the June 30 contract with Cypress Lending expires.

Robinson recommended the city commissioners hold off on any Warm Mineral Springs discussion until after the County Commission

acted, warning about the possibility of the county bringing suit against the city.

“We have to concentrate on what’s going to happen on July 1,” Yates persisted.

Then Yates asked for the consensus of her board members for City Manager Lewis to pull together numbers for them to consider about the potential costs of basic operations at the springs.

“Any number that we could begin to come up with would be based on lack of knowledge,” Lewis told her.

“We should not be arguing with other governmental entities within our own jurisdiction. This is a great project that has gotten sideways so quickly, and we need to put egos aside and just address it as what it is. It’s a phenomenal asset”

Charles Hines
Commissioner
Sarasota County

All she wanted, Yates said, was information about the cost of a park attendant to take tickets plus the expense of the number of lifeguards necessary to ensure the safety of swimmers, “and, obviously, we’re going to have to mow the grass.”

Lewis pointed out that the bathrooms would need to be cleaned as well. “I don’t know what that frequency is,” he noted, adding that Cypress Lending also is responsible for the on-site septic system. “There are a lot of things that go into the day-to-day operation of that facility,” Lewis told Yates.

“I’m not willing to say we’re just going to shut the springs down,” Yates said.

However, Blucher refused to give his consent to Lewis’ researching the numbers Yates had requested. Blucher said the board needed to await the County Commission action.

City Commissioner Rhonda DiFranco concurred with Blucher. 

A photograph of a coastal area shrouded in thick fog. In the foreground, a curved road with palm trees runs alongside a body of water. Buildings are visible on either side of the road, their details softened by the mist. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat somber due to the weather.

A THING OF THE PAST?

Thanks in part to Tropical Storm Debby in June 2012, Sarasota County received more rain than it had in previous summers. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SUFFICIENT GROUNDWATER SUPPLIES IN SARASOTA AND ITS THREE NEIGHBORING COUNTIES MEAN NO WATER RESTRICTIONS FOR NOW

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

It is that time of year, the peak of the dry season, when water managers mobilize the “water cops” and issue restrictions on water use. Car washing and lawn watering are the first targets, and it gets tougher after that.

Despite extraordinarily low rainfall this year, the four counties forming the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority are sitting on nearly a year’s worth of groundwater. And no restrictions are in sight.

The Authority’s executive director, Patrick Lehman, reported good news to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFW-

MD) board of directors on Tuesday, Feb. 26. His organization supplies water to Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties.

Other parts of the district are not so fortunate. Before Lehman spoke, Lois Sorensen asked the SWFMD board to impose a Phase III water restriction on Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties. She is the district’s demand management program manager.

The measure cuts car washing and lawn watering to one time per week per household. The restrictions would go into effect March 13 and extend through the end of July.

“Conditions are declining throughout the district,” she noted. “But the Peace River [Authority] has almost a year’s reserves.”

Warren Hogg, the permitting manager for Tampa Bay Water, reported its reservoir has been drained — on purpose. The 15-billion-gallon C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir came into service in 2005, but it has a cracked erosion-control layer. “Abnormal cracking in the reservoir’s interior lining has limited the reservoir’s use,” a press release says. It will take two years for repairs to be completed and 18 more months to fill it up again.

In the meantime, Tampa Bay Water will depend on a 20-million-gallon-per-day desalination plant, plus other workarounds. Hogg supported the Phase III restrictions for his service area.

THE OUTLOOK

Granville Kinsman Jr. is the water management district’s hydrology manager; he keeps track of rainfall, aquifer levels and other indicators of the region’s water supply.

“We received about four-tenths of an inch of rain last month [January],” he said. “Normal rainfall is 2.4 [inches of rain].” Overall, he said rainfall in the district is about half of the normal level.

Surface water bodies — creeks, streams and rivers — are down as well, starved for rain. “The Peace River is very, very low, at the low end of the severe range,” he said. But the newly completed reservoir for the Peace River Authority now contains 5 billion gallons, “or about 289 days of storage.”



The four-county area of Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties received sufficient rainfall in past months to avoid water restrictions. Photo by Eloquence via Flickr and Wikipedia Commons

Kinsman noted the forecast continues to show below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures for the next two months. And he said some data used by long-range forecasters indicates the below-normal pattern for rainfall and higher-than-normal temperatures could last through October.

By comparison with the rest of the water management district, the circumstances in Lehman's four-county area looked positively rosy. Bradenton's Bill Evers Reservoir, the Peace River's 6 billion gallons in a mile-square man-made lake, and Manatee County's reservoir on the Manatee River — all healthy and full — make the water future of the authority look good.

That was not true 20 years ago, when Sarasota County was utterly dependent on Manatee County for water supplies. At substantial expense, Sarasota County bought the so-called

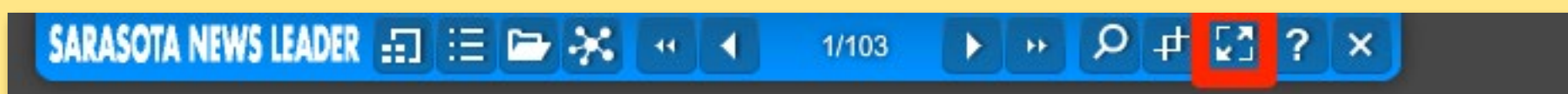
MacArthur Tract to develop it into a surface water supply, but the water was so substandard it required the same degree of treatment as saltwater.


However, the four neighboring counties came together to form the Peace River Authority, which allows each of them to connect with each other. If Manatee were to develop a problem, the Authority would open the appropriate valves.

All of this was not cheap to achieve. In the past decade, the Authority spent more than \$340 million to insure its water future. Of that total, \$190 million was bonded. The remainder came from the four counties, the water management district and the state and federal governments.

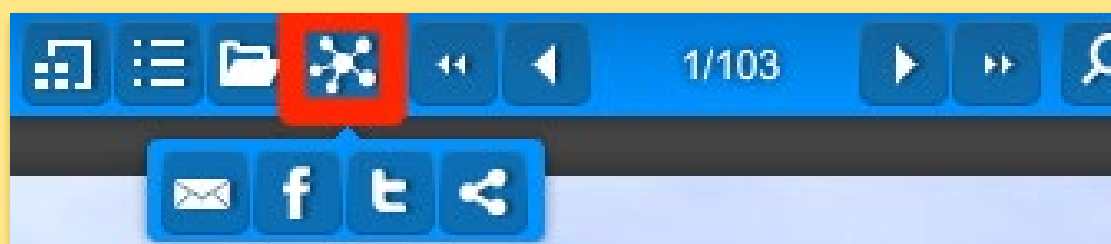
The City of Sarasota has its own independent water supply from wells. 

QUICK TIP



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'AN ENORMOUS MAGNET'

Dredge spoils from the lake are being used to create Regatta Island at Nathan Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE COUNTY COMMISSION FORMALLY APPROVES A FUNDING TRANSFER TO FACILITATE THE EFFORT TO LAND THE 2017 WORLD ROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Although they voted unanimously on Feb. 12 to approve the effort, the Sarasota County commissioners this week added another unanimous vote for the expenditure of funds needed to help a regional nonprofit pursue a bid for the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park off University Parkway.

Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, pointed out in a brief presentation during the commission's Feb. 27 regular meeting that her board as well as the Sarasota County and Manatee County Tourist Development councils and the Manatee County Commission all were supportive of the initiative.

“Frequently in south county, you get folks who are skeptical of stuff that’s happening in north county, but not with this. They are as excited in North Port as they are in Sarasota about the possibilities of this”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



The County Commission's formal vote authorized the transfer of \$245,000 from the Tourist Development Promotion Fund Reserves to the Visit Sarasota County Fiscal Year 2013 budget to assist in pursuit of the championships bid.

Haley and Paul Blackketter, executive director of planning for Benderson Development Co., have said the event could have a \$24 million economic impact on the two counties, and Blackketter had emphasized that was a conservative number.

Blackketter appeared before the commission on Feb. 12 to explain the timeline to which the nonprofit Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates (SANCA) has to adhere to submit

the formal bid in late May. The preliminary bid submittal was due Feb. 28, he pointed out.

During the county's Tourist Development Council meeting on Jan. 17, Blackketter said, "The impression that we get is that this is basically ours to lose."

He told both the TDC members and the County Commission the last time the World Rowing Championships was held in the United States was in 1994; yet, the U.S. has more rowers than the European countries do. Representatives of the International Federation of Rowing (FISA) are looking at the SANCA bid as the U.S. bid, he added.



County Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Carolyn Mason present a trophy to the winning Sarasota Crew team at a regatta held at Benderson Park in April 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel

In response to a question on Feb. 27 from Commissioner Christine Robinson, Haley said both the bid fees and the event fees will be split evenly by Sarasota and Manatee counties. During the January TDC meeting, she said the overall expense would be \$1.178 million for each of the counties, with the funds to be paid over five years if SANCA wins the bid.

Blackketter also pointed out to the TDC and the County Commission the importance of having local government officials make trips overseas to FISA events in the effort to win the bid.

Blackketter has said SANCA will learn in September whether it has won the bid.

When Robinson asked whether the Manatee County Commission was committed to sending its members on some of the trips, Haley said, "Yes, absolutely."

Haley added, "We're trying to alternate [trips by representatives of the two county governments] to lower some of the travel costs."

Commissioner Charles Hines said it had been made clear in public meetings why the travel was necessary. If it were not, he noted, commissioners would not have any desire to "hop on a plane and travel halfway around the world and turn around the next day and come back."

Robinson made the motion to authorize the transfer of funds, with Commissioner Joe Barbetta seconding it.

"What's amazing about this is ... the regional support that this has garnered," Robinson said of the bid initiative. "Frequently in south county, you get folks who are skeptical of

stuff that's happening in north county, but not with this," she added. "They are as excited in North Port as they are in Sarasota about the possibilities of this ..."

"The return on investment is pretty incredible," Barbetta added. "We've seen it over the past several years with the regattas we've had so far" at the park.


During the Feb. 12 County Commission meeting, Blackketter pointed to a \$4.5 million economic impact from just the first regattas held in 2009.

The county owns the park, but Benderson Development Co. has been overseeing the construction of facilities for the rowing venue.

Commissioner Nora Patterson noted that the ultimate purpose of collecting Tourist Development Tax revenue "is to promote tourism. There's just no two ways about it."

She conceded that in some of the early discussions about the economic potential of rowing events at Benderson Park, some TDC members showed resistance to committing county funds to the park's development. (She chairs the TDC.) "I don't think you'd find a voice on that board now that doesn't believe [the rowing facility is] an enormous magnet to bring people to this area."

The county has invested about \$20 million in the infrastructure.

Haley told *The Sarasota News Leader* that the names of the other bidders for the World Championships would become public in late February. That information was not available before the *News Leader's* deadline for this issue. 



A BIT STEEP

A Sarasota County aerial map shows where new restrooms are planned to be built on South Lido Beach. Image courtesy Sarasota County

AN \$860,000 CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC RESTROOMS AT SOUTH LIDO BEACH PARK SPARKS COUNTY COMMISSION DISCUSSION ABOUT RECENT PROJECT EXPENSES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Saying it appeared project teams are designing structures “to a standard that is unreasonably expensive,” Commissioner Nora Patterson this week refused to support awarding an \$859,754.45 bid to a local firm for the construction of new restrooms at South Lido Beach.

Her queries of staff during the Feb. 26 regular commission meeting led to Commissioner Christine Robinson winning unanimous approval from the board for a fuller dis-

cussion of the project during the morning session of the commission’s March 6 meeting.

The commissioners also agreed, by consensus, to ask County Administrator Randall Reid to schedule a workshop in the not-too-distant future on how county staff and consultants

are designing new buildings for which bids seem to be coming in at higher costs per square foot than they expected.

Patterson pulled the South Lido project

“ I think the problem is the specs. We’re doing restrooms that I can’t justify to the taxpayers. ”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

from the consent agenda, saying, “This comes out to \$533 a square foot. ... It would be pretty unusual unless you were dealing with gold faucets and things” for the cost to be that high.

However, she added, enough bids came in to indicate “other people thought that it would cost that much as well.”

The county received six bids for the project, according to agenda material provided to the County Commission. The low bidder — which was recommended to win the contract — was Core Construction Services of FL, based in Sarasota. The highest bid came from Jon F. Swift Inc. of Sarasota: \$1,212,708.80.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta agreed with Patterson. “I think more concerning is the total project cost,” he said, which is \$1,287,000. That came out to \$798 per square foot, he added.

He and Patterson concurred that the contractors that bid on the project have very good reputations. “I’m sure they follow the specs,” he continued. “I think the problem is the specs. We’re doing restrooms that I can’t justify to the taxpayers.”

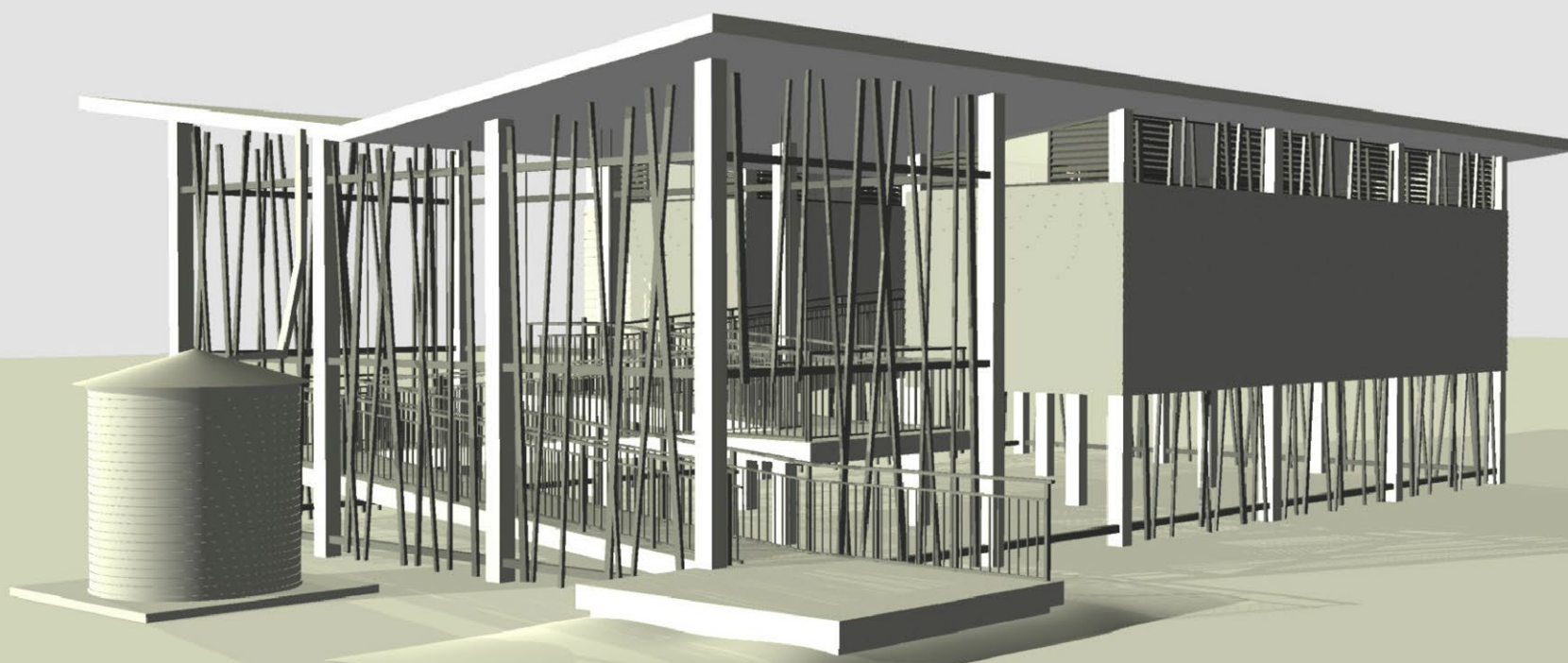
Barbetta praised the architect for the project, Sweet Sparkman of Sarasota, but he added, “This is just over-designed.”

Furthermore, he pointed out, the design and permitting fees totaled about \$400,000. “I can’t support [the project] as it is right now,” he told his fellow commissioners.

DESIGN FEATURES

Carolyn Brown, general manager of the Parks and Recreation Department, appeared before the board to explain that the structure will be elevated, a necessity for it to comply with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines, and that it will have a ramp to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The total area of the structure under roof is 3,200 square feet, she pointed out.

Additionally, the building has been designed to withstand 130 mph winds, and the site will have four ADA parking spaces and ADA-compliant sidewalks, Brown noted. A cistern will be used to collect water for flushing the toilets, and durable fixtures and features have been selected to last a long time with lower maintenance costs.



Sweet Sparkman Architects of Sarasota designed the new South Lido Beach restroom pavilion. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Moreover, Brown explained, the bid award to Core Construction includes the cost of portable restroom facilities that will have to be cleaned twice a day during the projected nine months of construction.

Brown also pointed out that the cost estimate of the project was lower than it was two years ago.

“Which, to me, says your estimates need to come down to something reasonable for what we’re expecting to get,” Patterson replied. “I’m sorry,” she added, “but it’s not the first time I’ve felt that way when [bid awards] finally came to us, but this one time seemed a bit over the top to me.”

Patterson continued, “I just can’t support it ... We just don’t have a gold-plated budget anymore. There are lots of projects we’re not getting to build.”

Regarding the design, Brenda Bair, the program manager for the South Lido project, told the commissioners, “It’s not gold-plated.”

County restroom structures generally last 30 years, Bair continued. “So what we’re designing now is something that will hold up to vandalism, hold up to the hurricane season and hold up to the day-to-day operation costs.”

Bair told the commissioners, “I understand what your concern is,” but the staff goal is to build structures that will last as long as possible with maintenance costs reduced as much as possible.

“I would like to have a full-up discussion on this,” Robinson said, just as the board had in December on the Siesta Key Public Beach improvements.

When Commissioner Charles Hines asked whether the ramp was necessary, Bair responded, “We have no option. ... We would

prefer to build it at grade,” but FEMA will not allow that.

An email sent this week to the commission from Kim Humphrey, vertical design project manager with the county, said the finished floor of the restroom would be elevated to 13 feet 8 inches, which necessitated the structure being placed on concrete columns with 12-inch footers — “(much more expensive than traditional slab-on-grade)” — and nearly 110 feet of the switchback ramp was needed to maintain ADA accessibility to that height.

That ramp would be under the roof, she pointed out.

Bair also explained to the commission that staff had been working with City of Sarasota staff on the project. Because the city’s building code changed in 2012, she said, county staff had to go through a new permitting process with the city. County staff then reached an agreement to complete the restroom project before the end of the 2013 fiscal year, she added. “The city is anxious to have this construction,” Bair told the commissioners.

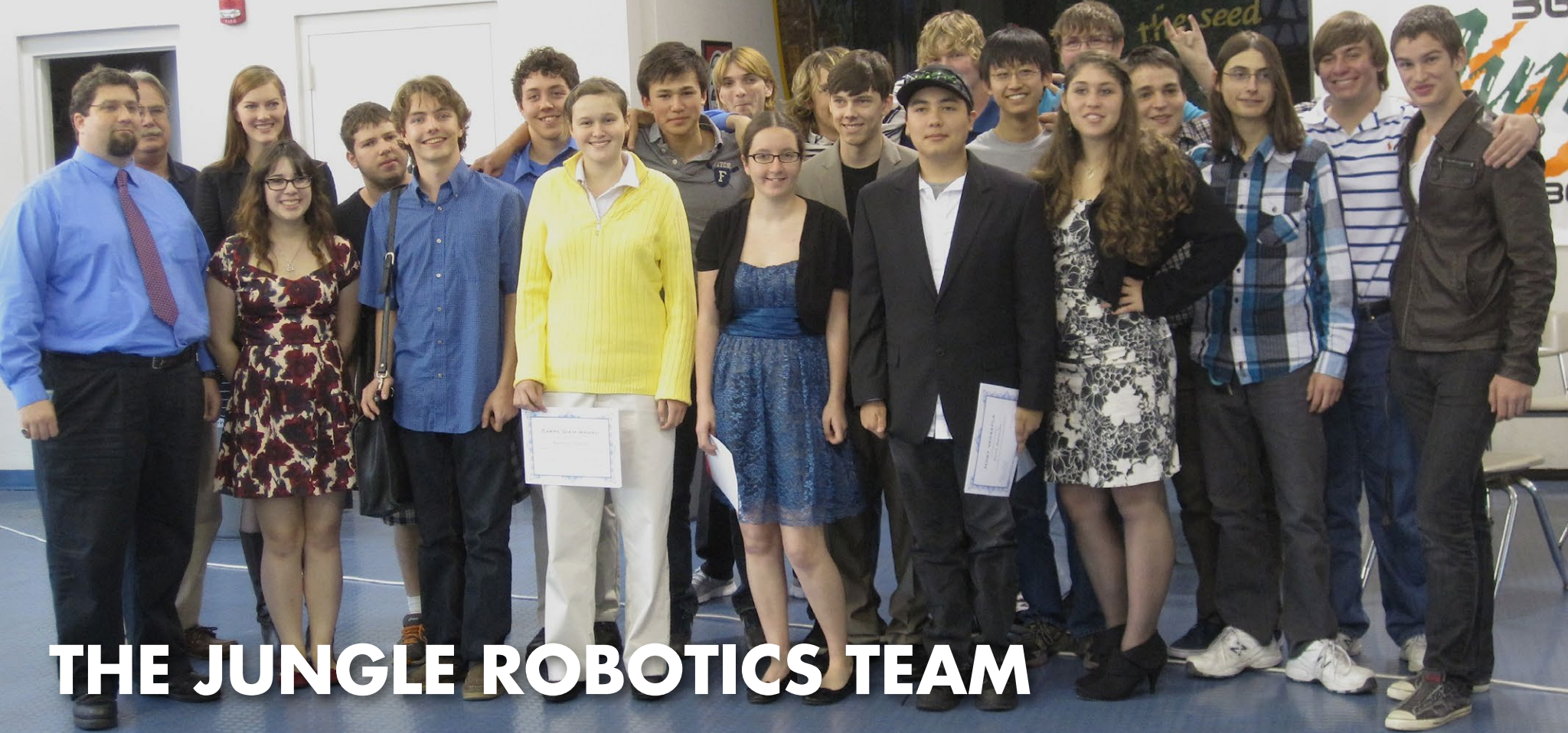
When Robinson asked Reid when the discussion could be continued, he responded that he could provide 30 minutes for it on the March 5 agenda.

Patterson pointed out that the follow-up would not take long, but Robinson responded with a laugh: “Just for the discussion we’ve had this morning, it might be.”

The commissioners spent about 20 minutes on the matter on Feb. 26.

Barbetta also asked Bair to make certain she came back with a breakdown of all the costs for the project.

Bair said she would. 



The members of the Jungle Robotics Team are headed to Orlando next week. Photo by Scott Proffitt

SARASOTA COUNTY STUDENTS WILL BE IN ORLANDO MARCH 7-9 TO PIT THEIR FRISBEE-FLINGING CREATION AGAINST OTHER TEAMS' ROBOTS

By Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer

I want you to make a robot for a competition. You have six weeks. And you have to start from scratch. Oh, and the robot has to throw a Frisbee into small slots while competitors try to stop you. Finally, the robot must climb up a jungle gym. We are giving you no direction, just telling you what the robot must do. You are all in school, and some of you have jobs along with homework and other activities. Did we mention you have six weeks?

This was the assignment relayed to a group of Sarasota County students known as Jungle Robotics Team 3627.

Presidents Day, Feb. 18, was the finale of "Build Season," as it is called, for all the international members of the First Robotics Club, sponsored by FIRST, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology.

The regional FIRST competition will be held March 7-9 in Orlando.

Kyle Violete, a member of the Sarasota County team, put everything in perspective.

"We get the videos and have six weeks to build a robot. So six weeks ago, we watched the videos telling us what the competition would be. We were given no instructions. We were given no 'how to.' We were given, 'Here's the challenge: Go ahead.' Over the next six hours we designed ... a lot of prototypes. For a human to throw a Frisbee is one thing, but to make a robot throw a Frisbee was almost impossibly hard."

During the six-week building period, the students gathered together most days after school till late in the evening, and they worked at least six hours on Saturdays.

This is the 24th year of First Robotics, the program that was the brainchild of Dean Kamen and Woodie Flowers, an entrepreneur and an MIT Professor, respectively. Having started

out with a small competition in New Hampshire, First Robotics has grown into an international series of competition with sponsors including Microsoft, Google and Texas Instruments. However, a critical element of the process is the local sponsors, who help out financially and technically in the development of the robots.

Sun Hydraulics, the Pine View Association, Sarasota County Technical Institute, JC Penney, Loggerhead Instruments, Star2Star communications and Sarasota Manatee Manufacturers (SAMA) are among those who have made the efforts of the local team possible.

Technical assistance from Sun Hydraulics seemed as exciting a part of the process for the students as it was to Justin Clay, an employee at the company.

“I love robots. I’m one of the younger engineers at Sun,” he said. “But this was put together by the students. The things these kids learned will be carried through life, no matter what they do.”

He added, “It’s impossible to build a robot like this in six weeks, but no one told these kids [that]. I’m really proud of them.”

The team is representative of the entire county, with members from Venice, North Port and Riverview High Schools, Cardinal Mooney High School, The Out-of-Door Academy and Pine View School.

Laura O’Connell is the captain of the Jungle Robotics Team 3627. Peter Straw, the executive director of SAMA, could not praise her enough.



Kyle Violete shows how the Frisbee-throwing robot works. Photo by Scott Proffitt

“This young lady ... realized it wasn’t about just building a robot, it was about building an organization,” Straw said. “This young lady did it. The kids themselves put it together and raised the money.”

SAMA, through Straw, was instrumental in the early stages of the teams’ work. He also was the one who introduced the students who wanted to start a FIRST chapter to representatives of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce and companies such as Sun Hydraulics.

“The teams they compete against have sponsors like Caterpillar, Lockheed Martin.” Straw said. “Yet, last year, we went to Nationals,” he pointed out.

Go Sarasota. Go Jungle Robotics. 



Sarasota County School Board member Caroline Zucker and her husband, Mike, come to a team meeting to see the robot in action. Photo by Scott Proffitt



Peter Straw and Laura O'Connell/Photo by Scott Proffitt



Turtle Beach, on the southern end of Siesta Key, is one of the areas affected by red tide again this week. Photo by Norman Schimmel

RED TIDE RETURNS TO SOUTHERN COUNTY BEACHES

Recent beach water samples collected by the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County and analyzed by Mote Marine Laboratory for the red tide algae (*Karenia brevis*) show an increase over test results from last week, Sarasota County announced on Feb. 27.

Higher levels of *Karenia brevis* were found at the following county beaches: Siesta Beach, Turtle Beach, Nokomis Beach, North Jetty, Venice Beach, Service Club Park, Venice Fishing Pier, Brohard Beach, Caspersen Beach and Manasota Beach, a county news release says. Lifeguards at impacted beaches post signage advising the public about the red tide and recommending that they check Mote Marine's Beach Conditions Report about red tide effects on local and other regional beaches in Southwest Florida, the release notes.

Sarasota County lifeguards were reporting slight to moderate respiratory irritation caused by red tide's airborne toxins blowing ashore at the various beaches, the release points out. Beachgoers may experience coughing, sneezing, scratchy throat or teary eyes, it notes. These effects should be temporary, disappearing when the affected people leave the beach, the release adds.

However, people with asthma, emphysema or other chronic respiratory impairments should be aware of places where red tide impacts are being reported and avoid those areas, the release cautions. If persons experience symptoms — especially if they have a chronic lung condition — health officials advise them to make alternative plans away from red tide-affected areas. If symptoms persist, persons

should seek medical attention, the release points out.

Residents living in beach areas where red tide is present are advised to close windows and run the air conditioner (making sure that the AC filter is maintained according to manufacturer's specifications), the release points out.

Prevailing southerly winds earlier this week are believed to have contributed to the resurgence of red tide in Sarasota County, the release says. "It is important to note that since winds are variable, conditions can change frequently throughout the day," it adds. For those who are susceptible, the symptoms associated with red tide tend to become more noticeable when the winds are blowing onshore.

Small amounts of dead fish have been reported and were being cleaned up at Blind Pass Beach, Manasota Beach, Venice Beach and the area from Caspersen Beach to Service Club Park, the release noted. As a precaution, health officials recommend that beach goers wear shoes when walking on the sand. This will help to prevent puncture wounds from the spines or bones of dead fish, the release adds.

"Most people can swim in red tide, but it can cause skin irritation and burning eyes," the release says. "If your skin is easily irritated, avoid red tide water. It is advisable to get out and thoroughly wash off with fresh water. Swimming near dead fish is not recommended."

Pet owners are advised that red tide also poses a risk to animals brought to the beach, the release says. Red tide can affect dogs after they come out of the water, lick their paws or fur and ingest the algae, which can be harmful to their health. Be sure to rinse dogs off with fresh water if they swim in red tide waters, the release urges.

Beach goers are encouraged to check the Mote Marine Laboratory Beach Conditions Report before they go to the beach, since conditions can change daily. The report is updated twice a day; it may be accessed online at www.mote.org/beaches. Click on the same link to the mobile-friendly version of the beach conditions report.

Visitors also may register to receive email reports about specific beaches. For telephone updates, call 941-BEACHES (232-2437) and press "1" for Sarasota County beaches.

SMOKING BAN BILL ADVANCES IN STATE SENATE

On Feb. 21, Senate Bill 258, which would allow local governments to restrict smoking on property they own or operate, passed the Senate Regulated Industries Committee by unanimous vote, Marsha Hosack, manager of governmental relations for Sarasota County, reported to the county commissioners.

The County Commission sent a letter to the county's legislative delegation on Feb. 12,

asking all the members to support both the Senate bill and House Bill 439, which would allow local governments to restrict smoking on property they own.

A 12th Judicial Circuit Court ruling in December 2012 on a City of Sarasota ordinance held that any local government effort to restrict smoking was a violation of the state's Clean Indoor Air Act.

Hosack pointed out in her email to the commissioners that the Senate bill “was amended to narrow the authority to restrict smoking to specific properties to include parks, public buildings, public beaches, and recreational and sports areas.”

Further, she reported that “no smoking” signs must be posted, and designated smoking areas must be provided.

The bill also provides for enforcement, she continued, specifying that persons first must be issued a warning prior to any assessment of a civil penalty.

Hosack added, “Bill proponents are hopeful that the amended language will help get the bill heard in the House, where it is referenced to three committees and getting it a hearing is proving somewhat of a challenge.”

She noted, “Sarasota County will continue to work with [the Florida Association of Counties], the League of Cities, American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association towards the bill’s passage.”

Rachel Brown Hackney

WETHERINGTON FOUNDATION SURPASSES \$1 MILLION GRANT MARK

The Lee Wetherington Foundation — a supporting organization of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County — has recently surpassed the \$1 million mark for grants to local nonprofits, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County has announced.

Established on Dec. 30, 2002, the Wetherington Foundation has supported causes ranging from helping at-risk children to education to the arts to community planning to the environment and social services, a news release notes.

Since 2002, it has invested a total of \$1,044,100.51 in the community, the release adds.

“The Lee Wetherington Foundation truly exemplifies our community’s giving spirit and heart,” says Community Foundation of Sarasota County President and CEO Roxie Jerde in the release. “The Lee Wetherington Foundation’s passion for and commitment to this community are clearly evidenced by his generosity toward innumerable local causes, with a focus on kids in need. The Community



Lee Wetherington/Contributed photo

Foundation of Sarasota County is privileged to partner with Lee to be stewards of these significant philanthropic funds.”

Nearly half of the funds granted by the Wetherington Foundation have gone to benefit the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota and Manatee counties, the release adds.

PUBLIC MEETINGS TO BE HELD ON 2050 POLICY AND REGULATIONS

Sarasota County will hold two initial public meetings for public comments on Sarasota 2050, a policy component of the county's comprehensive plan.

The meetings will be from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 13, and Wednesday, March 20, in the Green Building Conference Room at Twin Lakes Park, 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota, the county has announced.

Staff of the county Planning and Development Services Department will notify people who would like to be contacted about meetings on Sarasota 2050, a news release notes. Contact information should be emailed to planner@scgov.net.

The County Commission included a review of Sarasota 2050 as part of a comprehensive plan evaluation and appraisal report (EAR) process, the release points out. The commission initially requested discussions with private sector development representatives to identify issues related to the process of approval and construction of 2050 development projects, the release adds. The issues identified in those discussions include the following: fiscal neutrality, housing type requirements, open space/buffer requirements, commercial location requirements, walkability requirements, density limitations and flexibility limitations.

Following those discussions, the commission asked for public comments on these issues and the development of a broader public outreach plan for commission consideration, the release notes.

"The comprehensive plan provides the principles, guidelines, standards and strategies for orderly and balanced future economic, social, physical, environmental and fiscal development of the county," the release says. The principles and strategies consistently guide future decisions, it points out. "The county's programs and services are aligned with the plan to ensure implementation," it continues.

The Sarasota 2050 component of the comprehensive plan was adopted in 2002, covering a 50-year time frame. It was intended to allow additional development outside the county's Urban Service Boundary, generally east of Interstate 75, based on a framework that applied substantial environmental and open space conservation strategies, the release notes.

"The Sarasota 2050 policy and implementation regulations created an optional overlay to manage growth with an incentive-based land use plan involving Resource Management Areas (RMAs). The goal is to preserve the county's natural, cultural and physical resources and to make all neighborhoods more livable," the release adds.

The incentives are density bonuses — a larger number of allowed dwelling units — that are granted to landowners who agree to preserve open space; preserve agricultural and environmentally sensitive land; and build new, compact, mixed-use, walkable developments in appropriate areas

For more information on Sarasota 2050 or the public meetings, contact Bill Spaeth of Planning and Development Services by calling 861-5140 or by sending an email to wspaeth@scgov.net.

ROVINE NAMED VICE PRESIDENT OF ORIOLES-SARASOTA

The Baltimore Orioles on Feb. 27 announced the addition of David Rovine as vice president of Orioles-Sarasota to oversee the club's Sarasota business affairs and community development.

In his new role, Rovine will represent the Orioles in the Sarasota County community, expanding the club's presence through OriolesREACH and its many programs and establishing and cultivating club partnerships with business, civic, charitable and nonprofit organizations throughout Sarasota County and the Gulf Coast region, an Orioles news release says.

In that capacity, Rovine will oversee the Orioles' combined complex (located at the Ed Smith Stadium and Twin Lakes Park sites), "which is devoted to presenting Orioles baseball games; generating other sports and entertainment events that promote area tourism and provide substantial economic impact in Sarasota and throughout the region; and hosting year-round athletic training through the Orioles Major League and Minor League Spring Training, Extended Minor League Spring Training, Summer Gulf Coast League, Fall Instructional League, and other athletic rehabilitation programs," the release adds.

A native of Baltimore and a graduate of Towson (MD) University, Rovine has extensive experience in marketing and venue management, the release notes. He spent seven years with SMG Entertainment, a worldwide entertainment and convention venue management



David Rovine/Photo by Norman Schimmel

company. In his roles as general manager of the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg and the Genesee Theatre in Waukegan, IL, Rovine was responsible for day-to-day operations, marketing and talent booking, the release notes.

Rovine also spent nearly nine years as director of marketing at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach, where he oversaw advertising and promotion and was responsible for attracting and coordinating concerts and other non-racing events, the release adds.

SISTER CITIES TO PRESENT ONE WORLD AWARD DURING GALA

The Sister Cities Association of Sarasota (SCAS) will kick off its golden anniversary year Sunday, March 3, at the Sarasota Bay Club, 1301 N. Tamiami Trail, by honoring five-time Sarasota Mayor Lou Ann Palmer and the Sarasota Christian School with its One World Award, the City of Sarasota has announced.

The gala is open to all who wish to honor the 2013 award winners, a news release says. Tickets are \$125 per person and available in advance.

The SCAS annually presents its One World Award to a remarkable Sarasota individual or organization that has “enhanced world understanding and respect” through extraordinary international work, volunteer service or philanthropy, the release points out.

Palmer will be recognized “as the ‘gold standard’ for city mayors (2,500 worldwide) connecting in a significant way with their overseas sister cities, as she traveled, at her own expense, to four of Sarasota’s eight sister cities during her tenure as a city commissioner,” the release notes.

The Sarasota Christian School is being honored for the student relationships it carries out in each grade, K-12, with students in 13 different countries, including Iraq, Palestine, Cambodia and other troubled areas of the world, the release adds.

Former One World Award winners include Robert Roskamp, “Nick” Bollettieri and ORT, the worldwide Jewish educational organization.

Other major events during SCAS’ golden anniversary year include the La Musica Cele-

bration Concert, directed by Artistic Director Bruno Giuranna at the Sarasota Opera House on April 14; and the Florida Studio Theatre’s Young Playwrights Festival on May 11, the release adds.

In addition, the SCAS will host the Florida Sister Cities State Conference at the Helmsley Sandcastle Resort May 2-4 for Florida’s 70 sister cities associations. It also will host a “Sustainability Through Renewable Energy and Aquaculture” conference Nov. 13-15 in cooperation with the University of South Florida-Sarasota Manatee.

“The Sister Cities program of citizen diplomacy continues to be a community asset which encourages international visitors to learn firsthand about Sarasota and the Cultural Coast,” the release continues.

“These visitors, welcomed as individuals or delegations, can be counted on to return again and again following discovery of our diverse cultural offerings and our bounty of climate, beaches and friendliness,” SCAS President Tom Halbert says in the release. He also notes in the release that Sarasota’s volunteer citizen diplomats “create a truly robust marketing campaign to promote our region in meaningful international markets.”

Sarasota’s eight sister cities are Dunfermline, Scotland; Hamilton, Ontario, Canada; Merida, Mexico; Perpignan, France; Siming (Xiamen), China; Tel Mond, Israel; Treviso, Italy; and Vladimir, Russia.

For more information about the One World Award gala and Sister Cities call 378-0085 or visit SarasotaSisterCities.org.

COUNTY COMMISSION RENAMES BUILDING IN LITTLE'S HONOR

The Sarasota County commissioners, acting on the recommendation of County Administrator Randall H. Reid, honored Deputy County Administrator Bill Little Feb. 26 upon Little's retirement after 44 years of public service.

The commission unanimously voted to rename the Health & Human Services building at 2200 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota, as the "William L. Little Health & Human Services Center."

During the past 18 years, Little served as director of health and human services and as deputy county administrator.

The commission also issued a proclamation declaring Feb. 26 "Bill Little Day" in Sarasota County. The proclamation cited Little's experience in health services, policy development, fiscal planning and disaster response, along with his extensive involvement in community organizations, a news release pointed out.

"Sarasota County is a better place to live as a result of Bill's vision, knowledge and dedication," Reid said. "Naming the Health & Human Services building after him is an appropriate

acknowledgement of Bill's leadership and stewardship.

"Bill has made significant contributions to health and human services in our community, implementing innovative and systemic solutions by recognizing and promoting collective partnerships," Reid added.

"Bill's career of public service has spanned an exceptional range of public health service where he identified and developed programs to meet community health needs," Reid continued. "He also has served as a principled leader, policy advisor and mentor to county staff in his public service to the county and as deputy county administrator."

Little was a founding member of the Community Alliance of Sarasota County, the Behavioral Health Stakeholders Consortium, the Criminal Justice Commission, the Family Safety Alliance, Community Organizations Active in Disasters, the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, the Healthy Start Coalition and the Health Provocateur Project, a county news release pointed out.



Sarasota County Administrator Randall H. Reid thanks Deputy County Administrator Bill Little (center) for his years of public service during a retirement ceremony at the beginning of the Feb. 26 County Commission meeting in Sarasota. Little's wife, Barbara, joined him for the ceremony. Contributed photo

WOODEN RACQUET TOURNAMENT RAISES FUNDS FOR CANCER SOCIETY

The Great Gatsby Wooden Racquet Tennis Tournament held at the Serendipity Racquet Club Feb. 16 raised funds for the American Cancer Society and offered participants a good time, participants have announced in a news release.

“I felt like Paul Bunyan with a log in my hand,” says one of the players in the release. “New polymer racquets make this game easy. The wooden racquets have a sweet spot the size of a raisin. You can truly imagine the greatness of Bjorn Borg and the others,” the player adds.

The tournament had three unique features besides the wooden racquets. All participants wore long white pants or skirts: classic 1930s tennis attire. They also played with white balls. Additionally, \$5 donations to the Cancer Society gave players “do-overs.”

At the conclusion of the tournament, John Parsons — who was born in England but is now a U.S. citizen — was presented an award for most games won, the release adds.

Bill Hitchcock, originator of the event, won an award for best classic tennis attire. “He even wore argyle socks and drank Pimm’s Cup after the tennis,” the release notes.

Of the women players, Haunani Wallace won doubles honors and the awards for most games won and best female attire.

American Cancer Society representatives Collette Russell, Maria Lanzillotti and Patti Westheimer say they enjoyed the fun and appreciated the fundraising. “We look forward to doing it again next year,” says Russell in the release. 



Participants in the recent Wooden Racquet Tennis Tournament enjoyed raising money for the American Cancer Society, they say. Photo by Kathy Myerburg

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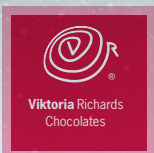
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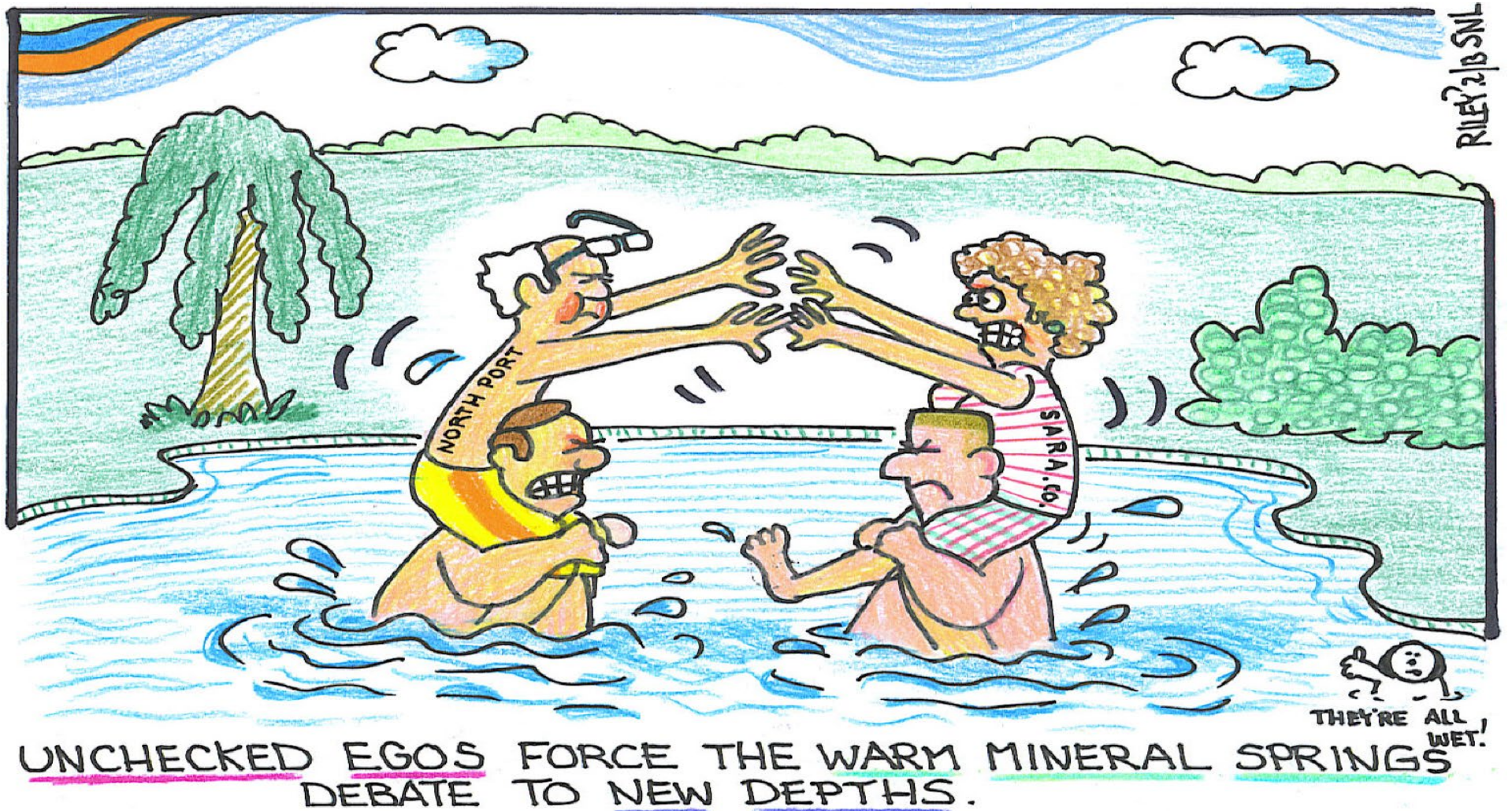
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OPINION



'WE GET THE GOVERNMENT WE DESERVE'

EDITORIAL

The current imbroglio between Sarasota County and the North

Port City Commission over the future of Warm Mineral Springs is a cautionary tale for voters in the City of Sarasota, as they approach the election of two at-large commissioners on March 12.

In a long ago age of comity (December 2010), the City of North Port and Sarasota County jointly purchased Warm Mineral Springs for \$5.5 million, with the intention of preserving the site and using it for economic development.

All of that changed following the November 2012 election, which saw two challengers — Cheryl Cook and Rhonda DiFranco — defeat incumbents David Garofalo and Michael Treubert. The two women, to the extent that they were open about their intentions once

elected, campaigned on a platform of fiscal responsibility.

The two candidates provided scant detail about what they considered that to mean during the campaign, and they avoided most of the candidate forums, preventing voters from forming an accurate opinion of the kind of commissioners they would be if elected.

In fact, it was something of a surprise when they won their primaries in August, but then only about 12 percent of registered voters in the city actually bothered to go to the polls.

Turnout was considerably higher in the general election, but most voters knew very little about the two challengers. Their election perhaps could be ascribed to anti-incumbent sentiment among voters.

Regardless, after taking office, the two commissioners wasted no time in staking out just

OPINION

how fiscally “responsible” they were prepared to be. At a meeting of the city commission on Dec. 18, Cook made a motion to sell the city’s interest in Warm Mineral Springs.

Although she later backtracked on her stated intentions at that meeting, she made it clear then that she preferred for the county to join the city in selling Warm Mineral Springs to a private developer.

Her fellow freshman commissioner, Rhonda DiFranco, seconded the motion to divest the springs.

Mayor Linda Yates from one side of her mouth expressed surprise that such a move would even be contemplated. But, moments later, the other side of her mouth uttered the tie-breaking vote to sell Warm Mineral Springs.

Afterward, the county commissioners offered to buy North Port’s share of the springs for \$2 million, an offer roundly rejected by the City Commission with no counteroffer.

Now the matter appears headed to some sort of mediation, as part of a state requirement for conflict resolution before either party can turn to the courts for relief. And almost everyone expects the matter to wind up in the courts eventually.

However North Port voters might feel about this expression of “fiscal responsibility,” neither candidate gave much indication during the campaign that it was afoot. Nor does it appear that either commissioner is now inclined toward meaningful discussion or compromise, especially since the mayor has provided them her vote to create the necessary majority. Such unrepentant dogmatism does not bode well for balanced government in North Port, or for amicable relations with the County Commission or other governmental


entities. And that is what should be raising the eyebrows of Sarasota city voters.

For several years, the City Commission in Sarasota has been noted more for how many different directions the individual commissioners can pursue at once than for any meaningful coalition working for progress and the betterment of the community. The election of two new at-large commissioners has the potential to change that.

That potential will evaporate, however, if 85 percent of the city’s voters once again cannot be troubled to cast a ballot on March 12. Moreover, a vote for a “stealth” candidate, such as the two enigmata elected in North Port, has the real possibility of producing a cure that is far worse than the ailment.

Sarasota voters have a duty to inform themselves about the true nature of the six candidates seeking office. We have done our part by conducting in-depth interviews with all of them, asking them the same questions. If a candidate’s answers seem evasive or dissembling, voters should assume the worst should that candidate be elected. If the answers seem thoughtful and earnest, perhaps that candidate is one truly interested in what is best for the city.

Electing the wrong two candidates on March 12 could put the city in a precarious position going forward, with something even worse than the “every man for himself” ethos with which we have lived. It could produce a coalition bent on dismantling the city in the name of “fiscal responsibility.”

To paraphrase the observation of Alexis de Tocqueville almost two centuries ago, if voters fail to make the right decisions, they will deserve the suffering that comes as a consequence of their wrong decisions. 

OPINION

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS



By Rodger Skidmore
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

With the U.S. knee-deep in bad news, from the debt crisis to sequestration, it was great to receive some good financial news this past week: too bad it did not come from Washington.

No, the really good news of the year is from that country far to the north — maybe not far to the north of Maine, but certainly far to the north of Washington D.C. and Florida. Yes, Canada is retiring its penny.

For years penny-pinchers in America have been talking about doing the same thing here. Besides the fact that penny candy now costs a dime, it is costing us 2 cents to make each U.S. 1-cent piece. When economists start talking about needing to mint a trillion dollar coin to get us past the debt crisis, you know that the penny really is insignificant.


Why is Canada's move good for us? Because, once Canadian banks stop distributing Canadian pennies, that country will be, so to speak, awash in them. Just think: millions of Canadian pennies that no Canadian will want. And what happens in the free market when there is no demand for a product? The value drops. And to what level does the value drop, if the highest value it ever had was 1 cent? How about zero?

If the U.S. government buys all the Canadian pennies for a half a cent each, Canada will have no storage costs and will recoup some of its original investment. And America will be

getting slightly used pennies at one quarter of the amount it takes to mint a new one: a win/win situation for both countries.

Now comes the tricky part: We need to get Congress to pass a law (and these days getting Congress to pass any law has been a real problem). The law would simply be to authorize the Department of the Treasury to make the Canadian penny legal tender in the U.S. of A.

The only other problem is that the U.S. penny is made of zinc. The reason that we have not dropped the use of our 1-cent piece years ago is that zinc industry lobbyists have been making payments to our congressmen — and those payments have not just been in pennies — to keep the zinc mines open and the profits of one particular company high.

But perhaps, with all the talk about saving money without increasing taxes, this plan just might work. 



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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À LA RECHERCHE DE PROUST

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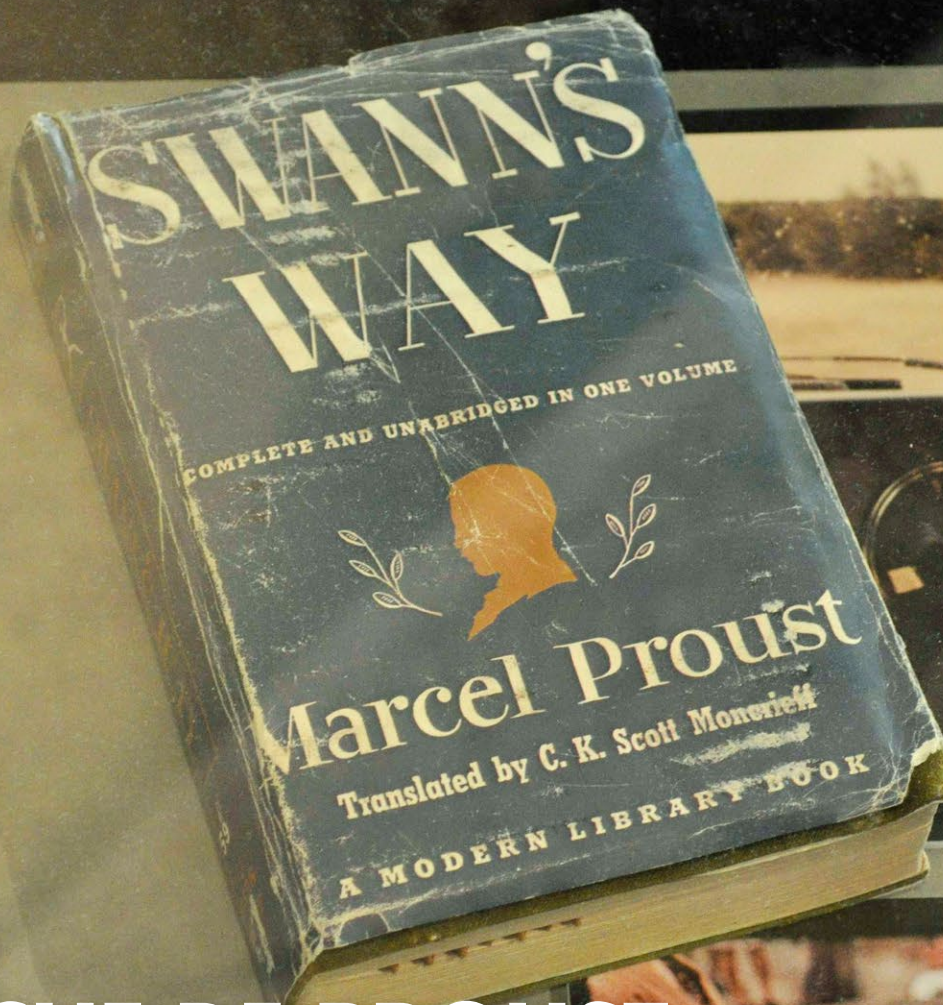
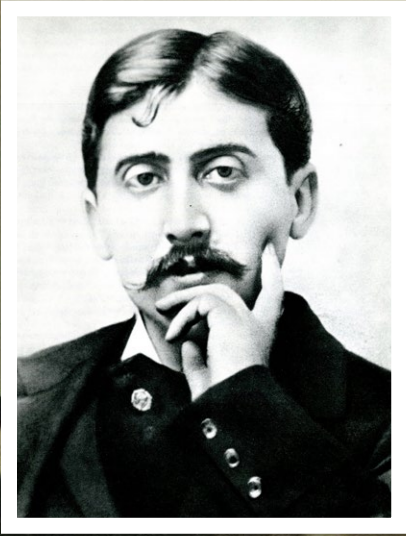
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À LA RECHERCHE DE PROUST

A copy of Swann's Way appears in a French film, Sur la route de Walter Salle (2012). Photo by Prosopee via Wikipedia Commons. Inset: Marcel Proust/Contributed photo

EVENTS TO HONOR THE RENOWNED AUTHOR, 100 YEARS AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF SWANN'S WAY

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

"For a long time I used to go to bed early."

With that simple sentence, Marcel Proust kicked off one of the 20th century's greatest literary works, the six-book, 3,120-page masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu* — *In Search of Lost Time*. The first volume of that novel, *Swann's Way*, turns 100 this year, and as part of the global celebration of Proustiana, a handful of Sarasota organizations are coming together for a series of lectures devoted to the man and his novel.

For Elyane Dezon-Jones, the chief organizer behind the events, the reason to celebrate Proust is self-evident. "It's for Proust, you know?" she says.

Dezon-Jones, who now splits her time between Paris and Sarasota, first read *À la recherche* during a break between high school and college, and fell in love.

"I thought it was really an amazing text," she says, "like no other. It's so rich."

She spent a year reading the entire book, as well as the handful of other published Proust works and translations. It changed her life. "When it was time for me to pick a subject for my Ph.D., I chose to work on Proust. Voilà. And I have not stopped."

During the '90s, Dezon-Jones was part of a team of researchers given access to Proust's original manuscripts. The author's pen-and-


ink writing was difficult to decipher, and many mistakes had made their way into previous editions. Dezon-Jones' team worked to correct those.

Inspired by the surge of centennial honors in France, Dezon-Jones "thought it would be nice to have a little celebration" here in Sarasota, and she reached out to Sarasota County libraries, New College, the Alliance Française and Bookstore1Sarasota on Main Street in Sarasota. Her original plan quickly mushroomed into a major event. "It started as a little project," she says. "Let's invite one or two speakers.' And then it grew. Voilà."

The events — eight in total — run all March long. They range from lectures to book discussions to film screenings. Topics include the life of Proust's mother, Proust's reception in the English-speaking world and even the

intersection between *À la recherche* and neuroscience. Be warned: Two of the events will be conducted entirely in French.

The good news: Everything is free. Dezon-Jones says that, quite contrary to *À la recherche's* reputation as an arduous read, "Proust himself said that he wanted to write for everybody," and keeping things free fits with that philosophy.

Even when she is not writing academically about Proust, Dezon-Jones is always trying to help readers "enter" his work. She knows how intimidating books with "difficult" reputations can be. She felt it herself when she read *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. So years ago, she crafted a mystery novel under the pen name Estelle Monbrun. The translated title? *Murder Chez Proust*. All she can say is, "I'm a teacher." 

CALENDAR OF EVENTS — March 2013

PROUST PROJECT SARASOTA *Swann's Way: a Hundredth Birthday Celebration*

March 5 - LECTURE (7 pm, Mildred Sainer Pavilion - New College of Florida)
Opening remarks by Donal O'Shea, President of New College of Florida, followed by a presentation by William C. Carter, PhD, University of Alabama Birmingham.
"Proust: A Centenary tribute".

March 7 - FILM SCREENING (2 pm, Geldbart Auditorium - Selby Public Library)
Screening of documentary *Marcel Proust: A Writer's Life*. (USA, 60m, 1992). A discussion led by William C. Carter, PhD, co-producer of the film, will follow.

March 8 - BOOK DISCUSSION (10 am, Conference Room - Alliance Française de Sarasota)
Alliance Française Book Club - Emile Langlois, PhD, Sweet Briar College, leads a book discussion in French on "Combray" (*Swann's Way* - section one). Limited seating. Registration required by calling (941) 955-0700.

March 9 - FILM SCREENING (2 pm, Geldbart Auditorium - Selby Public Library)
Screening of film adaptation of *Swann's Way* starring Jeremy Irons and Ornella Muti. (France, 110m, 1984). A discussion led by Martine Benjamin, PhD, Princeton University, will follow.

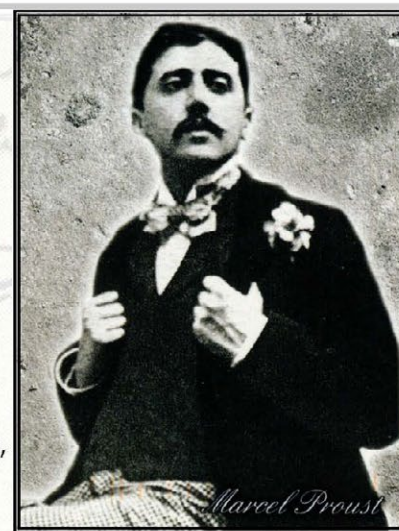
March 11 - BOOK DISCUSSION (10:30 am, Conference Room - Selby Public Library)
Cirque D'Book - Librarian Charlotte Thompson leads a book discussion group on *Swann's Way*. Limited seating.

March 12 - LECTURE (7 pm, Mildred Sainer Pavilion - New College of Florida)
Evelyne Bloch-Dano, PhD, Université Populaire de Caen.
"Madame Proust". Lecture will be conducted in French. Book sale and signing will follow.

March 19 - LECTURE (7 pm, Mildred Sainer Pavilion - New College of Florida)
David R. Ellison, PhD, University of Miami.
"Proust's Reception in the Anglo American World".
Book sale (*A Reader's Guide to Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time'*) and signing will follow.

March 26 - LECTURE (7 pm, Mildred Sainer Pavilion - New College of Florida)
Inge Wimmers, PhD, Brown University.
"Proust, the Arts, and Neuroscience".
Closing remarks by Elyane Dezon-Jones, PhD, Washington University in St. Louis.
"Reading Proust Tomorrow".

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REFLECTING IDENTITIES

Robert Stackhouse's Blue Flyer (2000), on display at the Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art gallery, is the only piece in the show that was not created collaboratively. Gallery owner Allyn Gallup points out that it shows the difference between Stackhouse's previous works and those he created with Carol Mickett. All photos by Arielle Scherr

VISUAL ARTISTS CAROL MICKETT AND ROBERT STACKHOUSE DISCUSS THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AT THEIR CURRENT *TIDAL WORKS* EXHIBITION DOWNTOWN

By Tyler Whitson
Staff Writer

On Thursday, Feb. 14, the Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art gallery in downtown Sarasota unveiled *Tidal Works*, an exhibition of visual artwork by the married team of Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse.

The following day, during a reception, the artists offered comments on both the show and their 12 years of collaboration.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Stackhouse is a veteran visual artist whose works have been collected by a number of prestigious institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern

Art, the Indianapolis Art Center and the National Gallery of Australia. He is retired from the academic world, but he has held endowed chairs at Hartford University, the University of Denver and the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia. He also is professor emeritus of the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., and is the recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts individual artist grants.

Mickett has a diverse arts background that — in addition to her experience as a visual artist — includes earning a doctorate in philosophy and more than 10 years of academic work in

the field. She also has experience as a writer, director, journalist, producer and host for television, film and radio, particularly programs pertaining to art.

Her work, which includes essays, interviews and poems, has appeared in various publications, and she has received a number of grants for her projects. She is the host and creator of the series *Our Town* at the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg and sits on the arts advisory committee for the city of St. Petersburg.

TIDAL WORKS

Aside from the print *Blue Flyer* (2000), which Stackhouse completed while still on his own, all of the works on display in the Gallup exhibition are collaborative compositions from 2001 to 2013 that focus on ideas of structure

or identity, most of them conceptually involving water or the moon.

Tidal Works, the artists explained, combines pieces from various series that focus on the two distinct subjects, which share a strong relationship with one another.

“It was a move from talking about water and then to the relationship of the moon to water and the tidal connection,” Mickett said of the exhibition’s title during the artists’ presentation.

The visual differences between the paintings in the series — as well as the artistic shifts that occurred during their creation — were strikingly apparent to those in attendance. While pieces dealing with water from the previous decade, such as *Molecular Water* (2008)



(Foreground, from left): Carol Mickett, Robert Stackhouse and Duncan McClellon's *Icondance Plate* (2011) and *Asteroid Plate* (2011) on display at the Gallup gallery: These pieces are made from hand-carved, etched, hand-blown glass.



Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse pose in front of Third Moon (2013) during the Tidal Works exhibition reception at the Gallup gallery on the evening of Feb. 15. During the artists' presentation, Stackhouse explained that both he and Mickett contribute in equal ways to all of their pieces. In comparing this work to one from the Aspects of Identity series (2011), Stackhouse said, 'The blue is no more representative of Carol, because she's wearing blue, than the white is of me because I'm wearing black.'



Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse's Painting for Architected Water (2008) on display at the Gallup gallery. During the artists' presentation Feb. 15, Mickett and Stackhouse explained their fascination with the structure of water, particularly because they feel it is often taken for granted as something simple. They point out that it can be seen as quite complicated and anomalous.

and *Painting for Architected Water* (2008), are relatively liberal in their use of color, many of those on the same subject created in 2011 as part of the *Aspects of Identity* series incorporate very bold shades of just one or two colors — usually with some variation of blue — though some pieces were composed monochromatically.

Stackhouse commented on this aesthetic shift during the artists' presentation at the reception: "Our way of working sort of evolved over a period of time, and we came through this through different ways of doing things," he said. "You can see how we kind of saturate color in a way," he continued. "When we decide we're going to do blue, we do blue and there's nothing else involved in it."

In works produced this year — when the focus shifted from water to the moon — the conservative use of color is even more apparent. Many pieces, such as *Third Moon* and *Fourth Moon*, incorporate shades of white.

"If you noticed, the moon isn't very detailed," Stackhouse said of those works. "And we purposely chose not to detail the moon. What we're trying to do is to see the moon as the naked eye sees it, possibly during the day."

Even a piece that does not directly address the moon, such as last year's acrylic painting *Chrysanthemum* — which portrays a large-scale sculpture produced by the artists — employs a similar color scheme: variations of an off-white hue.

COLLABORATION AND CONCEPTS

Mickett and Stackhouse explained that the inspiration for the pieces in *Tidal Works* came from their shared fascination with the subject matter as well as from the collaborative process itself.

In an interview with *The Sarasota News Leader* during the reception, Mickett talked about how water can be seen as a metaphor for a joint creation of people who might otherwise consider themselves to be rigid producers. When collaboration occurs, Mickett said, "We find out that we're much more like water that changes and moves all of the time, and that's affected by many things. We're a combination of things," she continued, "so in that way our identity is influenced by lots of people."

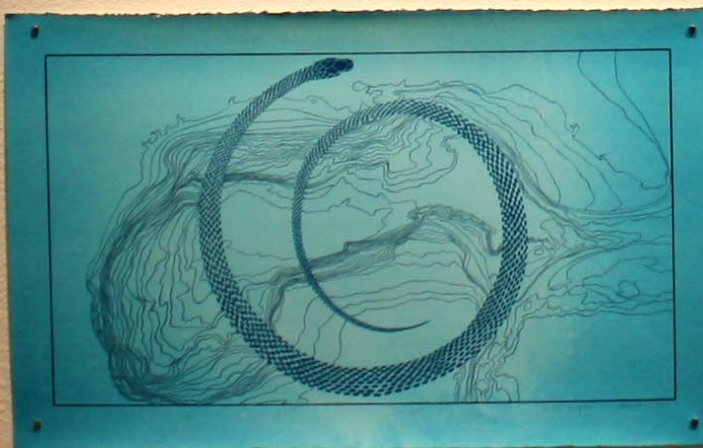
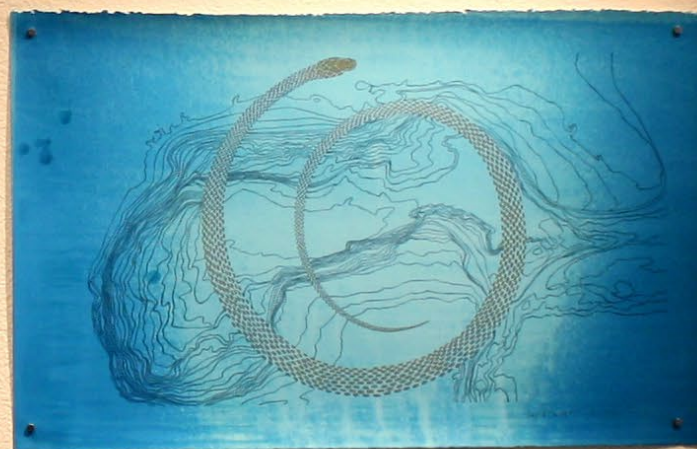
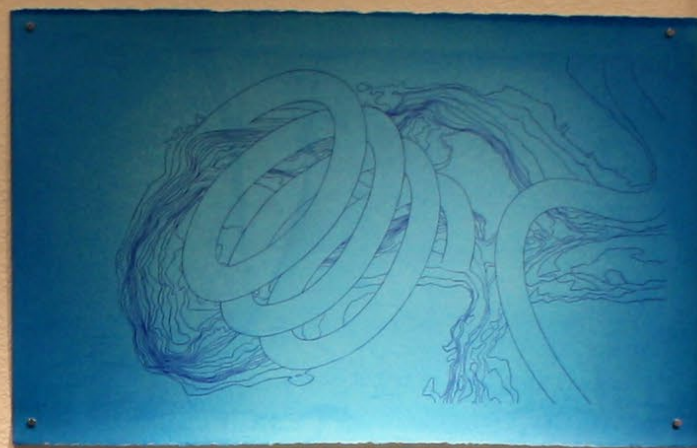
Later, during the artists' presentation, Mickett explained how the moon relates to this concept as well: "The moon is something that you see because of the light of the sun," she said. "And the moon's always been something that's been identified with women. That, I have to say, always bugged me," she continued. "But then I realized that, really, the way we see the sunlight is through the moon."

She added that this point of view helps to balance out the metaphor.

"It's really about collaboration," she said. "All of us trade off on being a moon and a sun, and in collaboration it's very much like that. We reflect each other and the way we are in the world as a result of how we each reflect each other and the communities we live in," she continued. "So, the moon's become this very important icon for us about collaboration and just about being in the world."

AUDIENCE DISCUSSION

After their presentation, the artists welcomed a more casual Q-&-A session, with members of the audience asking about specific pieces and experiences the artists have had together. Many audience members expressed an admiration for the artists' collaborative process and an appreciation of the resulting work.



Various screen prints from Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse's Aspects of Identity series (2011) on display during the Tidal Works exhibition reception at the Gallup gallery: Unlike the larger pieces on display from this series, some of these prints are not monochromatic.

After the Q-and-A session, the *News Leader* spoke with audience member Charles Perret, who had not been familiar with either artist prior to the exhibit.

“What first attracted me was the color and then the subject matter,” he said. “I’m very attached to blue.”

Perret added that his favorite piece was *Painting for Architected Water*, partially because he has an affinity for architecture and partly because he appreciated the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of the piece.

“It really impressed me as being something that was not only very beautiful but it had meaning,” he said. “You see the color of the sea and the color of the sky. It’s sort of like they combine ... and flow from one part of nature to another and create a new reality of the sky and the sea.”

COLLABORATION AND CONFLICTS

During both their presentation and the Q-&-A session, Mickett and Stackhouse were open to discussing the fact that, in spite of their prolific output, they do run into conflicts.

“We get divorced every week!” Mickett said jokingly, eliciting a lighthearted nod of agreement from Stackhouse.

They then related an anecdote from their experiences working in Cortona, Italy, during the early part of their collaboration.

“We had some doozy Italian fights,” Stackhouse said.

“I was so mad at him,” Mickett added. “I had a Kleenex in my hand and I threw it with all of my might.”


She imitated with a fluttering motion of her hand the trajectory of the tissue as it drifted gently in the air. “We just burst out laughing,” she said with a smile.

In spite of the occasional conflict, the artists pointed out, they are able to collaborate because they work in a similar manner. “We’re both process people, so when we start something, we aren’t fixed on what the outcome’s going to be; we allow the process to take us where we want to go,” Mickett explained.

“When you have two very strong people, we’re both right and we both like it our way,” Mickett continued. “But we also both know that working together takes us to places we would not go on our own and that we make choices and end up doing things that are very risky but have always turned out to really pay off,” she said.

Stackhouse then explained the practical aspects of the collaboration. “What happens with our art is we mesh it,” he said. “We both work on the drawings; we both work on the color; we both work on concept,” he continued. “I guess, technically, you could say we’re a team,” he concluded.

Mickett and Stackhouse offered no indication during the reception for *Tidal Works* that their future plans call for anything other than continuing that collaboration.

Tidal Works is on display Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art, 1288 N. Palm Ave. in Sarasota. Monday hours are not posted, but they can be obtained by calling 366-2454. The exhibition concludes on Saturday, March 23. 



ASK OTUS

MR. SQUIRREL GOES TO WASHINGTON

Dear Readers,

My contemplations this quiet, clear, starlit night focus on one of nature's most controversial figures; one that has the love and hate of hoi polloi as well as those sentiments of our nation's highest authorities, our U.S. presidents; and one that has caused people to spend untold dollars in advocating or eradicating it, thereby overfilling the coffers of industries devoted to its nourishment or its eradication.

Is it a D.C. lobbyist? Well, no. But it is every bit as squirrely as one. In fact, it is the flea-infested tree rat, aka the Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), which has left its imprint over urban and suburban Florida. *Sciurus c.* is a rambunctious arboreal rodent that tears up and down tree limbs, thoughtlessly knocking over anything in its path (including Eastern Screech Owls), all in hot pursuit of a female in heat with which it can mate and breed twice a year and produce lots more rambunctious flea-infested tree rodents.

In determining its popularity or unpopularity, I shall rely on John Q. Public's opinion here. As squirrels fall under the aegis of powerful politicians, I shall tread carefully and compose a fair questionnaire.



A Painted Bunting. Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun

The following poll is a non-partisan, fair, neutral and balanced effort to elicit readers' unbiased opinions. Only registered readers are allowed to vote and they must vote for one candidate only:

1) Which would you rather see feasting at your squirrel-proof bird feeder?

a) A gaily colored Painted Bunting, whose sweetly ariose songs evoke memories of halcyon spring days filled with flowering dogwoods, perfumed narcissus and shy wild violets; or

b) A squirrel?

2) Which would you rather see digging in your garden?

a) A professional Florida garden landscaper planting a graceful Hong Kong Orchid tree, *Candida* variety, which bursts into exquisite white blooms from January to May; or

b) A squirrel?

Oh dear! *Sciurus c.* is not doing very well in the polls and I am beginning to feel sorry for him. Let us help him win some votes with this final question:

3) When you wake up one sunny morning and enter your lovingly tended-to landscaped garden to check on your Have-a-Heart trap, which would you rather see in it?

a) A forlorn mother opossum, North America's only marsupial, with sad brown eyes, quivering pink, moist nose and a passel of naked, helpless, innocent babies (called Joeys)



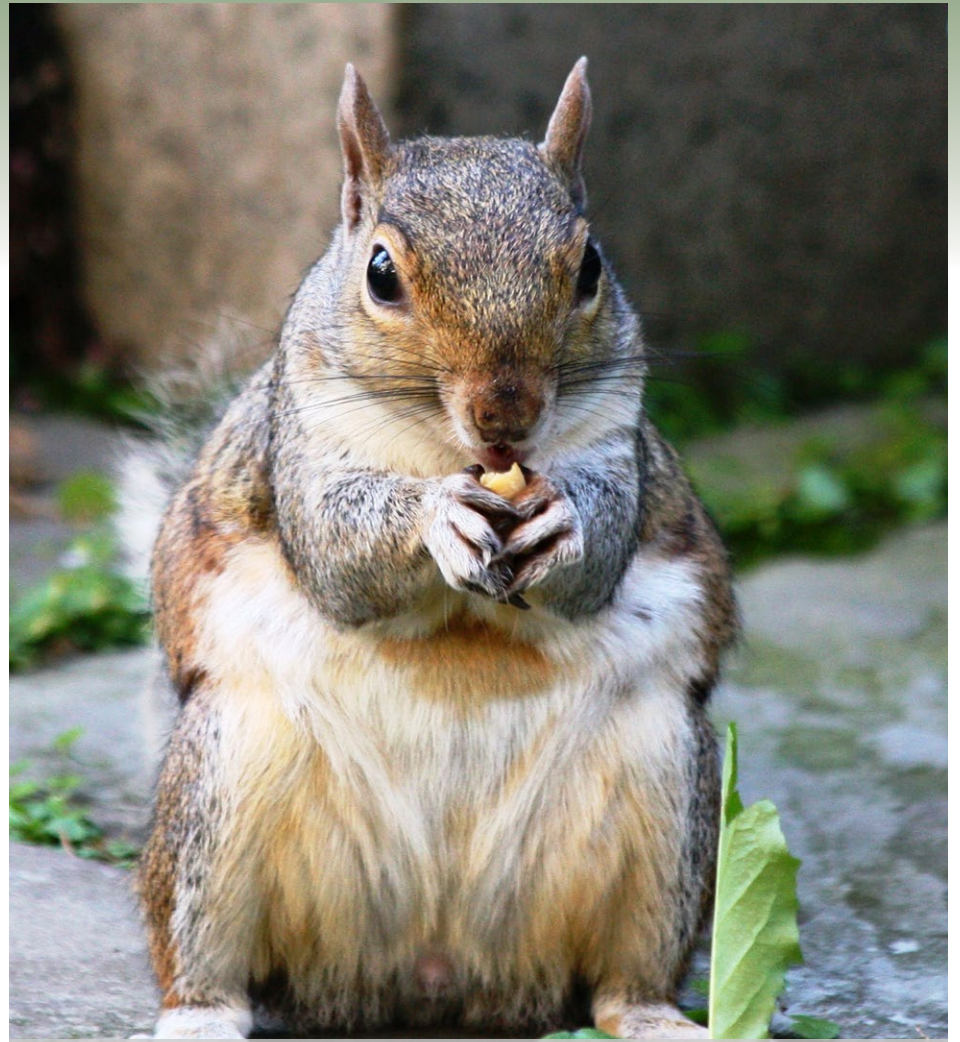
A Hong Kong Orchid tree. File photo

asleep in their Mama's pouch; a creature that rids your landscaped garden of vermin-infested mice and rats, and disease-bearing insects; or

b) A squirrel?

Now that *Sciurus c.* has soared ahead in the polls, I will curry favor by praising his virtues and highlighting his species' unique talents. Other than the fact that squirrels can strike winsome and adorably cute poses, they actually do have many positive attributes:

1. *Sciurus c.* is the only mammal in all of North America that can descend a tree headfirst — an awesome talent, if you think about it long enough.
2. As an acrobat, he outperforms all the Walendas. You see, the female squirrel has a very brief estrous cycle. The male immediately



A Gray Squirrel looks cute with a nut in its mouth. File photo



Mother Opossum has been caught in a trap. File photo

picks up her scent and tries to court her. She is as coy and coquettish as any nymphet Lolita and will lead the chattering male on a merry chase over tree branches —up and down, all around — it is enough to make one seasick. She abruptly stops, turns around to make certain he is keeping up with her; and Humbert Humbert crashes into her. He loses his footing, falls out of the tree and plummets to earth; but he always gracefully lands on his feet!

Squirrel mating facts: The female can have as many as 10 to 30 males in hot pursuit, and the ratio of males to females is equal. If you do the math on that, it all adds up to a lot of squirrels falling onto people's picnic tables or the hamburger platter on its way to the grill. I once witnessed the latter. I would like to write that the man's response was "What graceful precision!"; but that would be untrue.

This wild behavior lasts only a couple of weeks, twice a year, and when the female

does select her one and only true love, he is remarkably gentle and quiet when they mate.

3. Squirrels are natural-born aerators. They have very sharp claws and teeth. When they are not using them to scratch and bite at their fleas, they are employing them to aerate flower beds, planting pots, lawns, watering hoses, attic insulation and electrical wiring. You name it and the squirrel will aerate it!

Because squirrels do not hibernate, they must store vast amounts of food, mostly seeds and nuts, to survive the winter; even in Florida, when the dry season is upon us and food is scarce. The Gray Squirrel is a [scatter-hoarder](#); it hoards food in numerous small caches for later recovery. Some caches are quite temporary and will be reburied and reburied at more secure sites. It is estimated that one squirrel digs several thousand caches each season. That is a lot of aeration on your property!



Squirrels mate on a tree branch. File photo

Contrary to popular belief, squirrels are not so dumb that they forget where they buried their food. They have excellent [spatial memory](#) for the locations of their caches and use landmarks to retrieve them. Squirrels will also pretend to bury their food if they feel that they are being watched. They do this by digging up the spots as they usually would and pretending to cache the acorns, while actually keeping the nuts hidden in their mouths. They then cover up the “caches” as if they had really buried the acorns.

To understand squirrel holes (aeration) in man-made objects, let me add that squirrels practice good dental hygiene. As with many rodents, the squirrel’s teeth are also highly

specialized and designed for the kind of food he eats. He has two incisors in the upper jaw and two in the lower. (“Incisor” comes from Latin “to cut,” as through nutshells and electrical insulation). These teeth never stop growing. Only constant use keeps them short and sharp. If a squirrel is deprived of hard nuts (or attic insulation) its teeth will grow to the point where it cannot eat and it will starve. That is why pet owners must have their pet squirrel’s teeth trimmed.

And that is why you always see squirrels with something in their mouths; it is usually a nut being munched on, a body part being rid of fleas or a section of your new garden hose being aerated.



A Squirrel bites its arm fleas. File photo

4. When squirrels cross a road in their eccentric zigzag stop-and-go manner, they are great entertainers and slapstick comedians, as well as supporters of law enforcement authorities in the War on Crime. For example, in Wauwatosa, WI, a driver swerved to avoid hitting a squirrel. The driver slammed into a parked car, causing it to go airborne and crash into a house, making a huge hole in the front parlor wall (I told you squirrels are natural-born aerators). The driver was taken to the hospital for minor injuries and “was cited for failing to keep a vehicle under control, driving with suspended registration and driving without proof of insurance.” Had it not been for the squirrel, the perp would never have been caught and cited.

With all these inherent “good-old boy” characteristics — the back-scratching, the secret cached-in-the-dirt reserves, the ability to aerate people’s pockets and wallets and the knack for landing on one’s feet after a fall from grace — it is not surprising that this toothy-grinned, tail-chasing Lothario jumped out of a stew pot in the [White House Mess](#) and landed smack in the Oval Office.

I am writing a book on the subject — *Mr. Squirrel Goes to Washington: A Brief History of Sciurus carolinensis as an Agent of Influence in White House Domestic Politics and International Relations*, by Otus Rufous. Copies of my book are free to all SNL subscribers. (Dan Brown, eat your heart out! My conspiracy theory aerates your Da Vinci Code theory!)

Introduction: On Feb. 16, 2011, President Barack Obama addressed the nation on America’s Great Outdoors Initiative and humorous-

ly acknowledged the squirrel’s power and influence in our nation’s capital. He began his delightfully informative speech on the history of conservation in our country by noting “that the White House is actually inside an 82-acre national park — including an area once found to have the ‘densest squirrel population known to science.’ This is true. So we’ve got that going for us.”

On Monday, Jan. 21, 2013, which is National Squirrel Appreciation Day, President Obama was publicly sworn into office for a second term.

Hmm ...

Chapter I. *Cherchez la femme!* The history of White House first families and their delightful pets begins with President George Washington’s pet, Polly the Parrot. Abraham Lincoln had a pet white bunny wabbit.

True squirrel appreciation in the White House only began with amazing First Lady Florence Harding. An extraordinary woman, whom historians generally overlook, she was an ardent feminist and animal rights champion. Alongside Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Teddy R.’s daughter, she helped found the Humane Society. Mrs. Harding also protected the squirrels aerating the White House grounds.

President Harding adopted “Pete,” a squirrel who waylaid cabinet officers on their way into the White House. If promptly fed, Pete would allow them to meet with the president. Pete was documented on film accepting a handful of nuts from U.S. Navy Secretary Edwin Denby. Pete greedily devoured the nuts and Denby got his audience with the president.

The squirrel's rise to absolute power had just begun.

Chapter II. President Truman frequently dined *alfresco* at the White House. He always hand-fed the squirrels visiting his table. Although relations between President Truman and the Secret Service were never comfortable, the Secret Service had no problems with the squirrels, as they are quite gentle around people, very rarely scratch or bite anyone feeding them and they do not carry rabies.

"Pete," so named by members of the White House Press Corps in remembrance of "Pete" Harding, accompanied President Truman on many of his walks between Lafayette Square and Blair House, where the first family stayed while the White House was under renovation. Yes, even First Families are inconvenienced when they move into a "fixer-upper." Pete was also known by reporters as their "inside source." He only stood some 6½ inches tall, but the shadow he cast was immeasurable.

Chapter III. President Dwight Eisenhower tried unsuccessfully to "putt" an end to the influence *Sciurus c.* had over the White House. Eisenhower was an avid golfer and was often criticized for his passion for the sport, although he and his doctor readily defended the habit as good for his health, which had suffered during his presidency. The White House Putting Green lies a short walk outside the Oval Office door to the southeast; it was installed by President Eisenhower in 1954, with financial help from the United States Professional Golf Association as well as private donations. Ike had difficulty keeping the squirrels (which Harry Truman had nearly tamed by hand-feeding) from burying nuts in the green and aerating it to the point where it was rather cratered. He declared war on squirrels and had groundskeepers trap and relocate them.

Ike had also joked to the Secret Service that they should shoot the squirrels — a statement most likely leaked to the press through aerated water hoses and one that caused Ike's popularity to soar with his opponents and plummet with his supporters. The Gray Squirrel won that round.

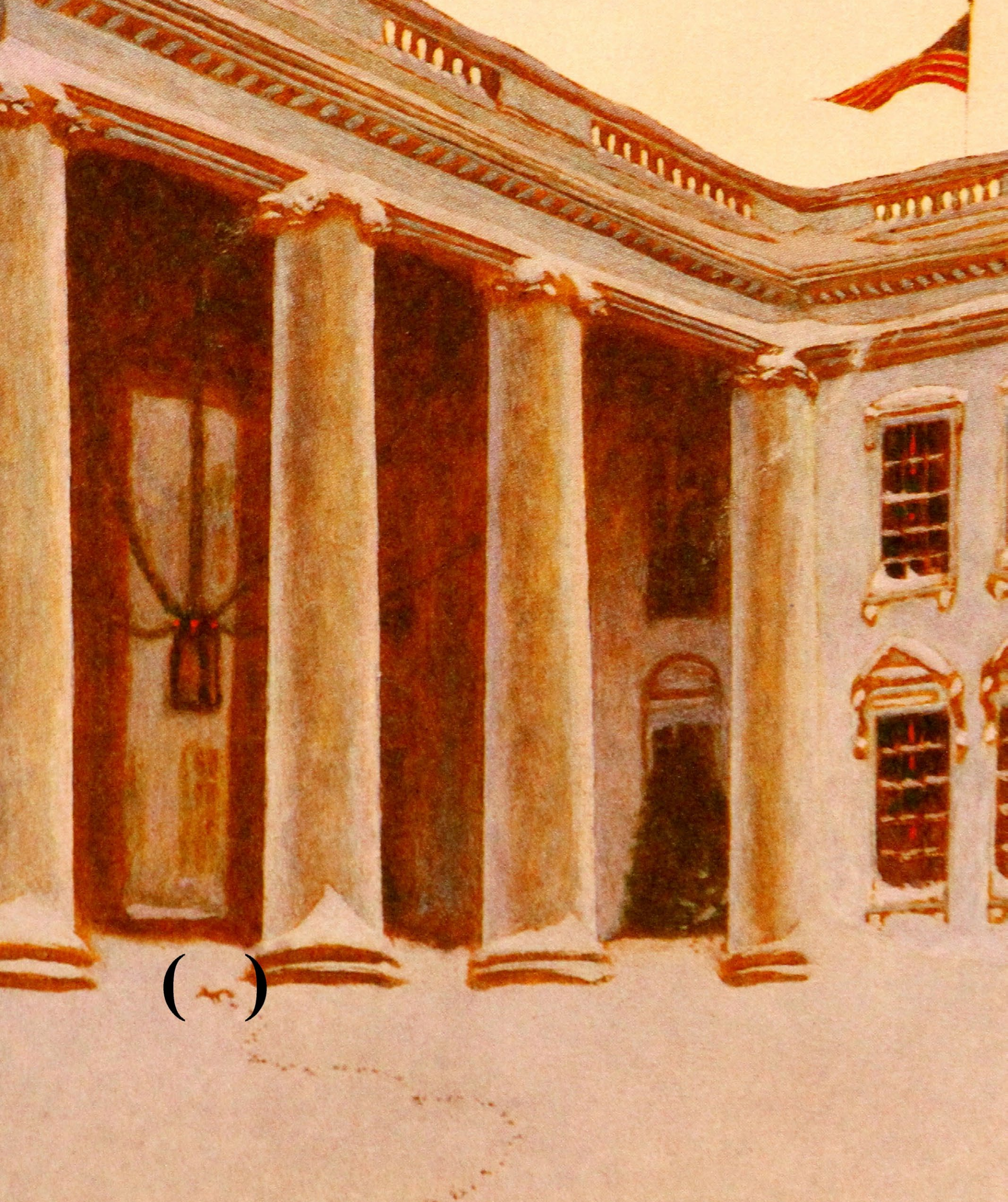
Chapters IV-V. I did not feel like writing them.

Chapter VI. This is where it gets really squirrelly.

President Ronald Reagan kept his jacket and trouser pockets full of acorns so he could feed the White House squirrels. We have all read charming accounts of squirrels actually pressing their noses against a window of the Oval Office when he was late feeding them.

The most extraordinary squirrel tale from Reagan's term in office occurred in winter of 1984. President Reagan, during his sojourns at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland's countryside, always collected bags of acorns to bring back to his beloved White House squirrels. Well, the winter of 1984 was one of D.C.'s mildest in decades, and the acorns buried in the White House lawn began to sprout much earlier than usual. Squirrels cannot digest cellulose; when an acorn begins to sprout a squirrel cannot eat it without becoming sick. (A word of advice: If you feed squirrels peanuts, it is important that the legumes be roasted, not raw.)

One December morning, a squirrel, on behalf of all the White House squirrels, scurried up to the Executive Mansion to explain the sprouting acorn problem to the president. This historic moment was captured on canvas when the Reagans commissioned Jamie Wyeth's *Christmas Morning at the White House* for



A White House Christmas card shows a squirrel (marked in parentheses) running up to the front door of the mansion. File photo

the family Christmas card that year. It suddenly became imperative that the president get to Camp David immediately and start collecting acorns.

But Dec. 21 proved a long and busy day, and by day's end, the weather had turned so bad that Marine One could not copter him to Camp David. "Then we drove all the way to Camp D. because of fog & rain." That is President Reagan's diary entry. I can almost picture the throngs of squirrels surrounding his motorcade — only it was night and the squirrels were sleeping the sleep of the righteous, secure in the knowledge that their reign was now assured.

Oh! My publisher has just advised me that *The New York Times Book Review* will not even consider my book "unless it contains footnotes," and not the sort left by a squirrel making tracks in the snow! In order to be termed a scholar rather than a sciolist, it appears footnotes must be arcane and undecipherable.

So, here goes!

Footnote. When you visit our National Zoo in Washington, D.C., to your left, just inside the main entrance off Connecticut Avenue, you will see an inscribed bronze plaque commemorating the gift by the Department of Crown Lands of Ontario of 18 black squirrels to the United States during President Theodore Roosevelt's administration. The story of Washington's black squirrel, a melanistic form of the gray squirrel, is still to be written. No one really knows what the U.S. did to Canada to have deserved this. Even Smithsonian Institution researchers and scholars are at a loss to explain the mystery, but they do point out that in the aftermath of that gift, the squirrel population in the U.S. has exploded.

My footnote answers one question and raises another.

Canada dumped its unwanted flea-infested tree rats on our nation's capital because Canada did not want them!

The real question is, "Why did the U.S. not declare war on Canada for that dastardly deed"? Well, my research on this topic concludes with proof that we were indeed very close to declaring war on our dear neighbor over this insult until President Theodore Roosevelt met with his cabinet and a certain secretary of war (I shan't name names, but it was not Elihu Root) pointed out that that if the U.S. were to lose the war, U.S. citizens would be subjected to Canada's constitutionally mandated bilingualism. That means we all would have to learn French irregular verbs, which by definition are "any verb you need to use."

As we live in a squirrely world, I am taking precautions in case we do go to war. I have been studying French at L'Académie Moulin Rouge, a YouTube video link. I think if you watch Christina Aguilera's tutorial on the French language, you will hope the U.S. goes to war with Canada and loses BIG time! Her Québécois accent is to die for! See for yourself in [Lady Marmalade](#).

Otus (English)

Otus (French)

Megascops asio (English)

Megascops asio (French) 

ABOUT OTUS

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



I like to take my time.

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

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

You have a whole week.

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The stage version of Les Miserables is coming to Sarasota March 5-10. Contributed photo

NEW PRODUCTION OF *LES MISERABLES* COMING TO VAN WEZEL

Cameron Mackintosh will present a brand new 25th anniversary production of Boublil & Schönberg's legendary musical *Les Miserables* March 5-10 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota, "with glorious new staging and dazzlingly reimagined scenery inspired by the paintings of Victor Hugo," the Van Wezel has announced.

This new production has been acclaimed by critics, fans and new audiences and is breaking box office records wherever it goes, a news release says.

The New York Times calls this "an unquestionably spectacular production from start to

finish," according to the release. *The London Times* hails the new show "a five star hit, astonishingly powerful," the release adds.

Based on Hugo's classic novel, *Les Misérables* "is an epic and uplifting story about the survival of the human spirit," the release points out. The magnificent score of *Les Miserables* includes the songs *I Dreamed a Dream*, *On My Own*, *Stars*, and *Bring Him Home*.

Tickets are priced from \$30 to \$90. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org.

WILDLIFE ART FESTIVAL AND SYMPOSIUM PLANNED

The Rotary Club of Sarasota will present the first Sarasota Wildlife Art Festival and Wildlife Symposium on Saturday and Sunday, March 2 and 3, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Ken Thompson Park, 1700 Ken Thompson Parkway, City Island, Sarasota.

The event will feature a juried exhibition of wildlife-inspired art and fine crafts by more than 25 painters, sculptors, photographers, jewelers and other craftspeople, a news release says. The works, which will be for sale, were juried by Ringling College of Art and Design instructors.

The event will include a symposium “with prominent speakers in the field of wildlife rehabilitation and other environmental topics,” the release adds. Among the speakers will be Kevin Carroll and Dan Strzempka, two prosthetic experts known for their work with the development of prosthetic tails for dolphins,

including the one worn by Winter, the aquatic star of the movie *Dolphin Tale*, the release notes. Other speakers will be Dr. James “Buddy” Powell, executive director of Sea to Shore Alliance; Sara Kane, public outreach manager for the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program; and Dr. Jay Leverone, a senior environmental scientist for the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.

Tickets are \$5 for adults; children age 12 and under will be admitted free. Admission entitles guests to free entry to the adjacent Save Our Seabirds wildlife sanctuary and a \$5 discount on admission to Mote Marine during the festival, the release points out.

Food and beverages will be available for purchase. Proceeds from the festival will benefit Save Our Seabirds and the Rotary Club of Sarasota, the release notes. For information, call 840-1193 or visit www.sarasotawildlifefest.com.

SARASOTA COMPOSER/CONDUCTOR MOE TO BE HONORED

The Church of the Redeemer invites the public to a Friday, March 8, memorial concert honoring the late Dr. Daniel T. Moe, Redeemer’s longtime composer-in-residence and well-known area conductor.

The concert will begin at 8 p.m., with a wine and cheese reception for concertgoers immediately following it in Gillespie Hall, a news release says.

Performing in the concert will be Ned Tipton, minister of music at St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral in Los Angeles. Tipton was a student of Moe’s at Oberlin College in Ohio, where Moe taught at the Conservatory of Music from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, the re-

lease notes. After earning his choral directing degree in 1981, Tipton moved to France, where he was the organist and choirmaster at the American Cathedral in Paris for 20 years, the release points out.

Moe and his wife, Ann Stephenson-Moe, who is the organist/choirmaster at Redeemer, had seen Tipton perform in Paris several times, and student and teacher had stayed in touch over the years, the release continues. Tipton played the organ at Moe’s requiem in 2012, and he has performed widely across the United States and Europe.

During his career, Moe was hailed by *New Yorker* music critic Andrew Porter as the

“Dean of choral conductors.” In more than 40 years of choral conducting, “Moe brought nearly every landmark choral-orchestral work in the repertoire to performance, ranging from Bach’s *Passion According to St. John* to the Britten *War Requiem*,” the release points out. His work drew him into the nation’s great concert venues, including Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, the Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center, where he twice served as consulting conductor for the International University Choral Festival, the release notes.

In Sarasota, Moe was the much-beloved music director for Key Chorale — the official chorus of the Florida West Coast — and he also served as adjunct professor of music at New College in Sarasota, where he conducted the choirs, the release adds.

“He loved his musicians. He loved his choirs. He loved his people,” said Redeemer’s associate rector, the Rev. Richard C. Marsden, in the

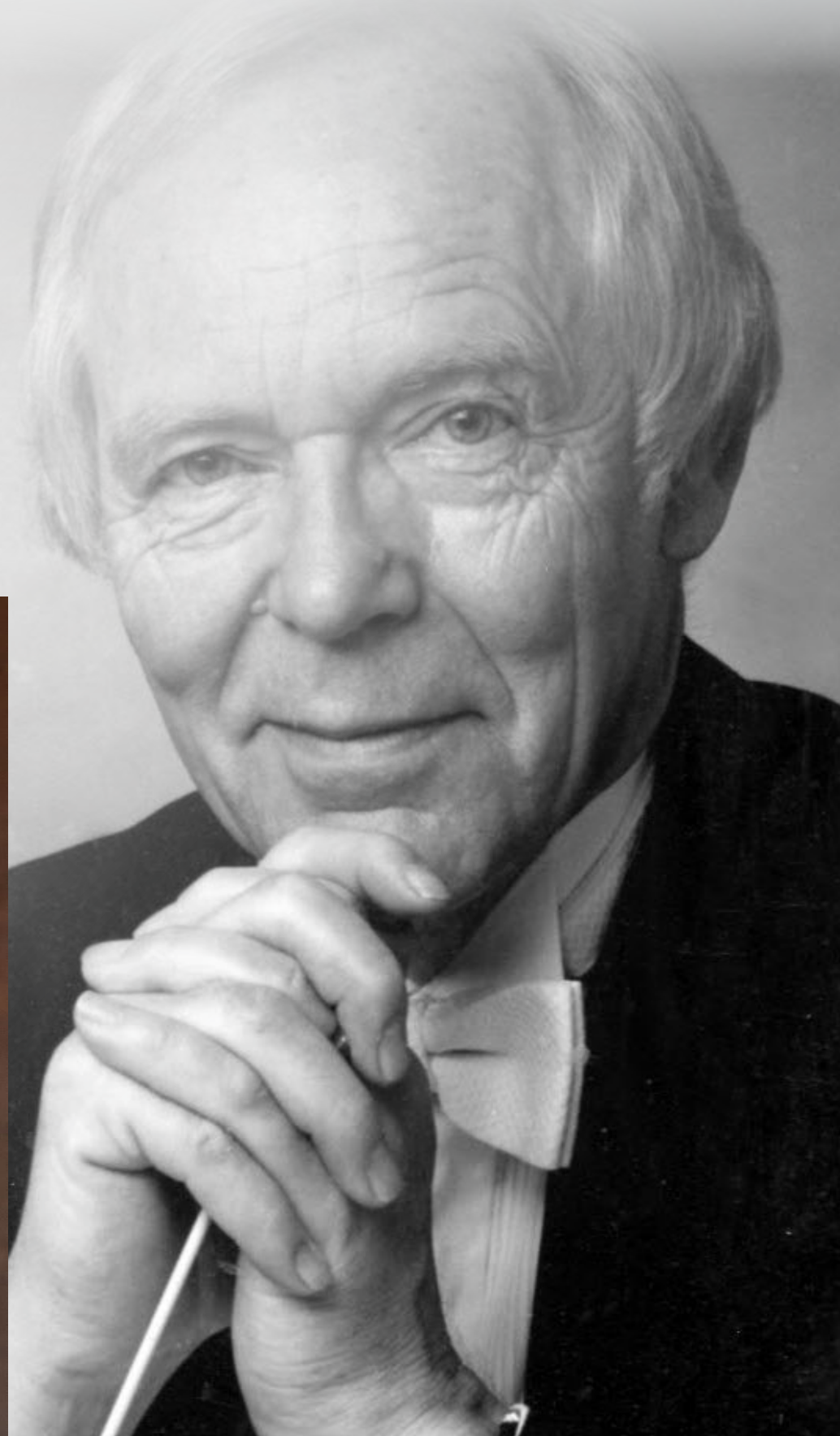
release. “And he found absolute joy in praising God with his music.”

A \$15 ticket donation (\$10 for students) is suggested. Tickets may be reserved online at redeemersarasota.org or by calling the parish office at 955-4263.

The Church of the Redeemer is located at 222 S. Palm Ave., in the heart of downtown Sarasota.



Ned Tipton/Contributed photo



Daniel Moe/Contributed photo

HISTORY CENTER MUSEUM TO HOST FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

An exhibit of fine art photography will be on view from March 1 through April 10 at the Sarasota County Visitor Information Center and History Center Museum, 701 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, Sarasota County has announced.

An opening reception will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 1. The public is invited.

Titled, *Florida in Context*, the exhibit “captures images of old Florida buildings and abandoned factories,” as well as still lifes and vistas, including relics of boom-and-bust development, a news release says. It will feature the work of fine art photographers Virginia Hoffman, Matt Allison, Salvatore Brancifort, Brian Braun, Dale Ann Clancy and Richard Porter, the release adds.

The exhibit is part of the county’s participation in the statewide Viva Florida 500 celebration to promote Florida’s history: its people, places and cultural achievements, the release points out. This year is the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Ponce de Leon to “La Florida” in 1513.

The Sarasota County Visitor Information Center and History Center Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sundays. There is no admission charge.

A portion of the proceeds from photography sales will go to the Friends of the Sarasota County History Center, the release notes.

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

SARASOTA OPERA ANNOUNCES ITS NEWEST STAR

After holding auditions Feb. 5 for a dog needed in its upcoming production of the opera *Of Mice and Men*, Sarasota Opera has announced the chosen canine is Pede, a 13-year-old Border collie mix owned by Jean Smith of Arcadia.

The canine character in the opera is described as a “good herding dog,” a news release points out. The dog is also referred to as “old, ragged and slow,” the release adds. In the opera, the dog belongs to the character of “Candy,” who will be sung by bass Andrew Gangestad, the release notes.

As the Act I synopsis reads: “A furor erupts in the bunkhouse over Candy’s old smelly dog, with Carlson and the ranch-hands demanding that the dog be shot rather than remain in the bunkhouse. Candy protests, but is eventually overwhelmed by the shouts of the men, and Carlson takes the dog outside and shoots him.”

Pede has already joined the rehearsal process and, according to stage manager Francesca MacBeth, “is doing a fantastic job!” the release says.

Performances for Carlisle Floyd’s *Of Mice and Men* begin on March 9 and run through March 23. Tickets are available online at www.sarasotaopera.org or by calling the Sarasota Opera box office at 328-1300.



Pede will play the role of ‘Candy’s dog’ in Sarasota Opera’s production of Carlisle Floyd’s Of Mice and Men. Contributed photo

ASOLO REP TO PRESENT PULITZER PRIZE WINNER *CLYBOURNE PARK*

The Asolo Repertory Theatre is leading off its spring season with the comedy *Clybourne Park*, “the razor-sharp Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning play about race, real estate and urban revitalization,” the theater has announced.


Written by playwright Bruce Norris, *Clybourne Park* tells the story of the same suburban Chicago home and its inhabitants that are at the center of Lorraine Hansberry’s classic drama, *A Raisin in the Sun*, a news release notes. The first act takes place in 1959, when a white family agrees to sell its Clybourne Park home to an African-American family, “much to the mortification of the neighborhood’s all-white residents,” the release adds.

Act Two fast-forwards to 2009 and examines the decision to re-sell the house to a white family moving into what has now become a predominantly black

neighborhood, this time with plans for demolition, the release notes.

“Bruce Norris’ writing is funny, poetic, biting satire and tremendously thought-provoking,” the release says. “The play’s lightning-quick repartee will leave the audience reeling with laughter, in shock and reconsidering what it means to call a place home,” it continues.

Clybourne Park opens on Friday, March 15, with an 8 p.m. curtain. Michael Donald Edwards, producing artistic director for Asolo Rep — now in his seventh season — will direct the show, which will run through May 2, the release notes.

Clybourne Park premiered Off Broadway on Feb. 21, 2010 to critical acclaim at Playwrights Horizon in New York City and was followed by stagings at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Co. in Washington. 



Clybourne Park will open March 15 at the Asolo Repertory Theatre. Contributed photo



The Church of the Redeemer in downtown Sarasota will host a concert March 3 in tribute to the late Patricia Stenberg. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MARCH 3 CONCERT TO BE HELD IN MEMORY OF STENBERG

The Church of the Redeemer in downtown Sarasota will host a memorial concert as a tribute to Patricia Stenberg, former principal oboe for the Sarasota Orchestra, on Sunday, March 3, at 4 p.m.

Stenberg passed away in 2002. Each year, the Sarasota-Manatee Alumnae chapter of Sigma Alpha Iota (SAI), an international women's music fraternity, presents a concert in her name to raise funds for local music education efforts a news release points out. Stenberg served as both local chapter president and national president of the fraternity, the release adds.

“Patricia Stenberg was a musician’s musician and an outstanding player,” said Redeemer organist and choirmaster Ann Stephenson-Moe in the release. “This concert, which raises

money to help aspiring musicians, is a fitting tribute to her passion for music.”

Stenberg also served as a conductor with the Sarasota Pops Orchestra.

Founded in 1903, SAI works to bring together women who are interested in music on college campuses around the world, the release notes. The fraternity works to encourage female musicians of all ages, races and nationalities while cultivating excellence in music performance, the release says.

Tickets are \$10 in advance; \$12 the day of the concert. All proceeds go to area music organizations.

The Church of the Redeemer is located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota. For ticket information and to purchase tickets, visit redeemersarasota.org or call 955-4263.

MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES MARK PURIM AT TEMPLE EMANU-EL

Temple Emanu-El celebrated the joyful holiday of Purim with an original play, song session, megillah reading, costume parade and lively carnival on Feb. 24, according to a news release.

Titled, *Purim Pandemonium*, the event was hosted by the religious school and chaired by Anne Steinbach, the release notes.

More than 300 Temple Emanu-El members and guests of all ages enjoyed the celebration, the release says. The morning began with a Purim family service conducted by Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman and song leader Amber Ikeman; it featured the religious school's seventh-grade class performing a play written by Director of Education Sabrina Silverberg. The festivities continued with games, a dunk tank, giant slide, obstacle course, bounce house, a bake sale with plenty of hamantashen and car-

nival foods, including hamburgers, hot dogs, snow cones, cotton candy, funnel cakes and lemonade, the release continues.

Proceeds benefitted Temple Emanu-El Religious School.

"Purim Pandemonium was one of the most fun, enjoyable and exciting religious events that I have ever experienced!" a fourth-grader enthused, according to the release "You got to hang out with friends, have fun, win prizes and overall have an awesome time there. It was a wonderful way to celebrate Purim with friends, family, and your temple."

For more information about family holiday celebrations at Temple Emanu-El, call 371-2788.



The Schlosberg family enjoys "Purim Pandemonium" at Temple Emanu-El. Contributed photo



Temple Emanu-El Religious School students Eitan and Jonah cooled off with snow cones. Contributed photo



Temple Emanu-El Religious School kindergartener Rocco Rell. Contributed photo

FRITTS TO BE GUEST SPEAKER AT CHJ PROGRAM

The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) will present the Rev. Roger Fritts, minister of the Sarasota Unitarian Universalist Church, to speak about his favorite philosopher during a 10:30 a.m. program on March 2, the Congregation has announced.

Prior to his Sarasota arrival in 2011, Fritts served in Bethesda, MD, which has one of the 10 largest congregations in the Unitarian Association, and in South Australia, New Zealand and Scotland, a news release says.

The choir of the Unitarian Universalist Church, directed by Robert Lischetti, will participate in the March 2 Shabbat service.

The following day, March 3, the Humanaires, the CHJ chorus, under the direction of David Berman, will sing at the Unitarian Universalist Church's 11 a.m. service, the release adds.

CHJ meets at Unity, located at 3023 Proctor Road in Sarasota.

Everyone is welcome; there is no charge, the release points out.

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



Roger Fritts/Contributed

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

01
MAR

Budweiser Clydesdales visit Siesta Village

March 1, 5 p.m., on Ocean Boulevard, Siesta Key. The horses are expected to arrive between 3:30 and 4 p.m. behind Circle K, where the public can see them harnessed and prepared for their parade. For details, visit www.siestakeyvillage.org.

01
MAR

WSLR presents Richard Price and Beth Wood

March 1, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Art Center, 525 Kumquat Court
Tickets: \$10 advance, \$12 at door; WSLR.org.

01+
MAR

WBTT presents *Soul Crooners 2*

March 1-24, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50; 366-1505 or wbttstrq.org.

01+
MAR

Art Uptown presents *Around Here*, a one-woman exhibition by artist Rita Rust

March 1-30, 1367 Main St., Sarasota.
Free admission; 955-5409 or ArtUptown.com.

07+
MAR

A Tribal Collection: Rainforest Masks of Costa Rica

March 7, 5:30-7:30 p.m., opening reception; March 8 to April 19, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, 900 S. Palm Ave. Exhibit free to members and children under age 6; free with regular admission: non-member adults, \$17; children ages 6-11, \$6.
Information: 366-5731 or Selby.org.

10
MAR

Paul Duffy, Michial Hickmott and Greg Holt in

A Tribute to St. Patrick's Day

March 10, 4 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 3975 Fruitville Road. Admission: \$15, includes wine and cheese reception. Information: 371-4974 or uusarasota.org/concerts.

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



thisweekin
SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

**'JUST HOW LONG IS THAT
SHARK GONNA HANG AROUND?'**

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.