



April 19, 2013

THE SARASOTA

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

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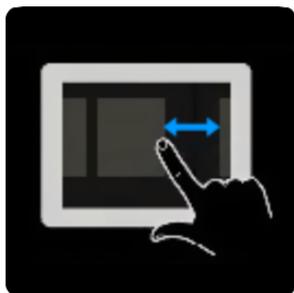
MORE NOISE OVER SOUND

THE SURVEY SAYS ...

Inside

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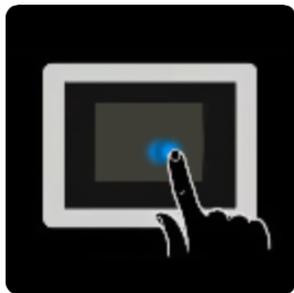
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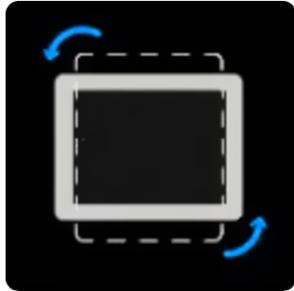
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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

The national focus has been on the tragedy in Boston this week, but locally, the news just did not seem to stop flowing.

Stan Zimmerman probably will need a really restful weekend to catch up after the loooooong City Commission meeting Monday, but Stan sure had plenty of fodder from the hours he invested in the afternoon and evening sessions.

Cooper Levey-Baker had a very long day himself on Wednesday, when the North Port City and Sarasota County commissions gathered for mediation over the future of Warm Mineral Springs. Then, just as Cooper was putting the finishing touches on that story, breaking news forced him into rewrite mode.

Scott Proffitt soon will be our resident expert on the Sarasota County School Board's finances, after another budget workshop this week.

And I spent Tuesday afternoon listening to a wide array of topics on the agenda for the joint Sarasota County/Manatee County commissions meeting.

Add in Cooper's report regarding new statistics on the homeless population along with some noteworthy tidbits I had left over from the County Commission meetings last week, and you will find plenty of in-depth news to occupy your time.

On another front this week: In our Opinion section, we are delighted to welcome a person very well known in this area — Waldo Proffitt. Having been at the helm of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* for many years, then a columnist for that publication, he has his own invaluable insights into what makes this community tick.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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Front cover: *Selby Gardens Sentinel* - Robert Hackney
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FLIP-FLOP

Chairs line the banks of the springs at Warm Mineral Springs. Photo courtesy City of North Port

COMMISSIONER'S CHANGE OF MIND ELIMINATES TENTATIVE WARM MINERAL SPRINGS DEAL

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

County Commissioner Carolyn Mason compared the meeting to a root canal — “painful,” but cathartic. It might have also been pointless.

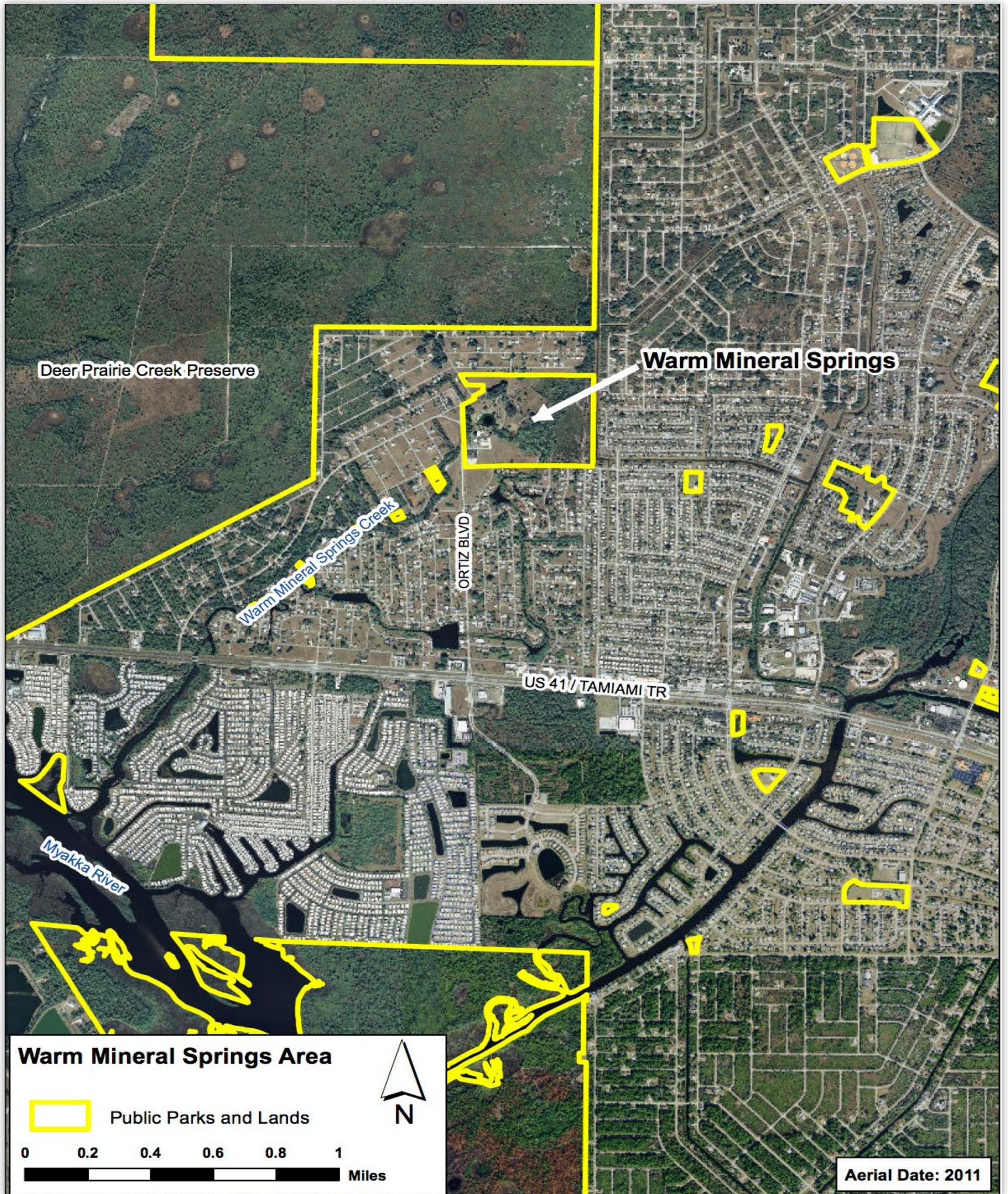
The Sarasota County Commission and the North Port City Commission spent eight hours Wednesday debating the future of Warm Mineral Springs, eventually coming to some agreement about how the two boards should manage the

property they jointly purchased in 2010. But an email sent early Thursday morning, April 18, by North Port City Commissioner Rhonda DiFranco might have killed any hope of a way forward.

“*This was an agreement that we came together to shake hands on, and we gave a little in the discussions, so I expect the City of North Port to honor that handshake.*”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

“After careful consideration,” she wrote, “I determined that I can not support the [Invitation to Negotiate] process that was proposed at the joint mediation meeting. Please notify the County Commission



A graphic shows the location of Warm Mineral Springs near North Port. Image courtesy Sarasota County

of my decision so that no further time and resources are committed to develop an ITN.”

Those sentences switched a 3-2 city majority in favor of soliciting ideas for how to develop Warm Mineral Springs to a 2-3 minority, essentially leaving the long-range process hammered out Wednesday DOA.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson says the move surprised her. “This was not an à la carte agreement,” she tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. “This was an agreement that we came together to shake hands on, and we gave a little in the discussions, so I expect the City of North Port to honor that handshake.”

That “handshake” agreement arrived late Wednesday, after hours of discussion.

One early surprise was the appearance of North Port Commissioner Tom Jones, who participated in his first public hearing since suffering a stroke in early January. He joined his four fellow city commissioners, the county board, the county administrator, the city manager, city and county lawyers and mediator Steve Seibert — all seated around a square of tables on the floor of the County Commission Chambers in Sarasota.

The commissions spent the morning airing all the questions that have popped up in recent months (Does the city still want to sell its 50 percent share of the springs? Might the county cede control to the city?), then got down to brass tacks in the afternoon, when Seibert directly asked whether North Port was willing to revisit the process to solicit private sector proposals for the property.

The North Port commission scuttled the original ITN last fall, after the election of Commis-



Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson. Photo by Rachel Hackney

sioners DiFranco and Cheryl Cook provided two “No” votes.

Much of the debate Wednesday centered on how open-ended the ITN process was. North Port Mayor Linda Yates said she hoped for a “meeting of the minds” on how Warm Mineral Springs will be developed (or not) in the coming years, arguing the boards should select a “concept” they want to pursue. Ideas have ranged from a full-service hotel and spa to a park-like preserve with no business activity.

The county has largely been open to commercial development, while North Port has been skeptical of the plan.

Cook asked why she should support any ITN, even a narrowly defined one, if she doesn't want anything built on the property.

"There will be building on the property if I have anything to do with it," countered County Commissioner Joe Barbetta.

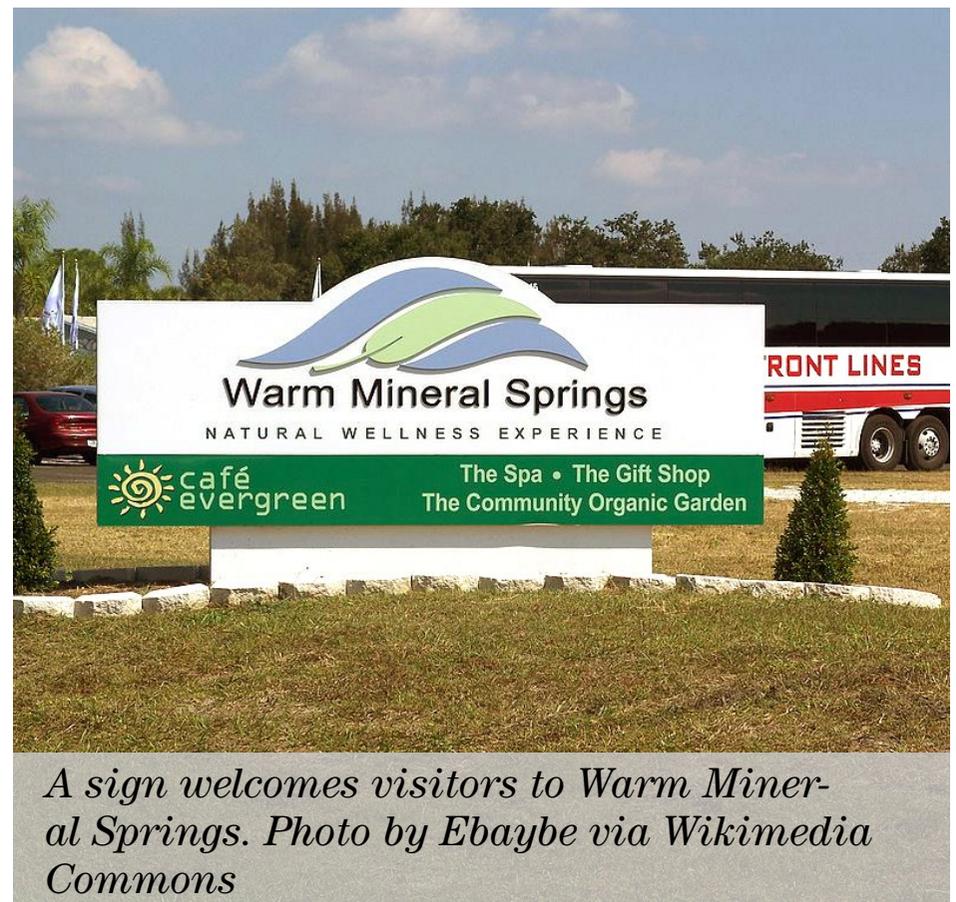
His fellow county board members were less adamant that something be built, but they said they wanted to review any and all proposals to imagine possibilities.

A majority on the North Port commission, after a long extended, protracted debate, eventually embraced an ITN-like process, but with an expansive list of stipulations.

All that work was undone when DiFranco sent her email at 5:33 a.m. the next morning. She did not respond to a *News Leader* call and email, nor did she inform county commissioners why she changed her mind. "You have what I have," Robinson tells the *News Leader*. "I have nothing else."

Barbetta tells the *News Leader* DiFranco's reversal "pretty much" eliminates any chance of a deal. Shortly after Wednesday's meeting began, Barbetta asked the North Port reps if there was any will to accept new construction on the property. If not, he said, there was no point in continuing the discussion.

Barbetta sees few options besides litigation at this point. "It doesn't seem like there's any alternative," he says, "because meeting with them doesn't accomplish anything."



A sign welcomes visitors to Warm Mineral Springs. Photo by Ebaybe via Wikimedia Commons

County Administrator Randy Reid tells the *News Leader* his staff will continue working on the details of a short-term lease to keep the springs open after the current contract with the management company runs out June 30. But he's not even sure a short-term lease would find support with the North Port commission.

"I don't know how we can proceed," Reid says.

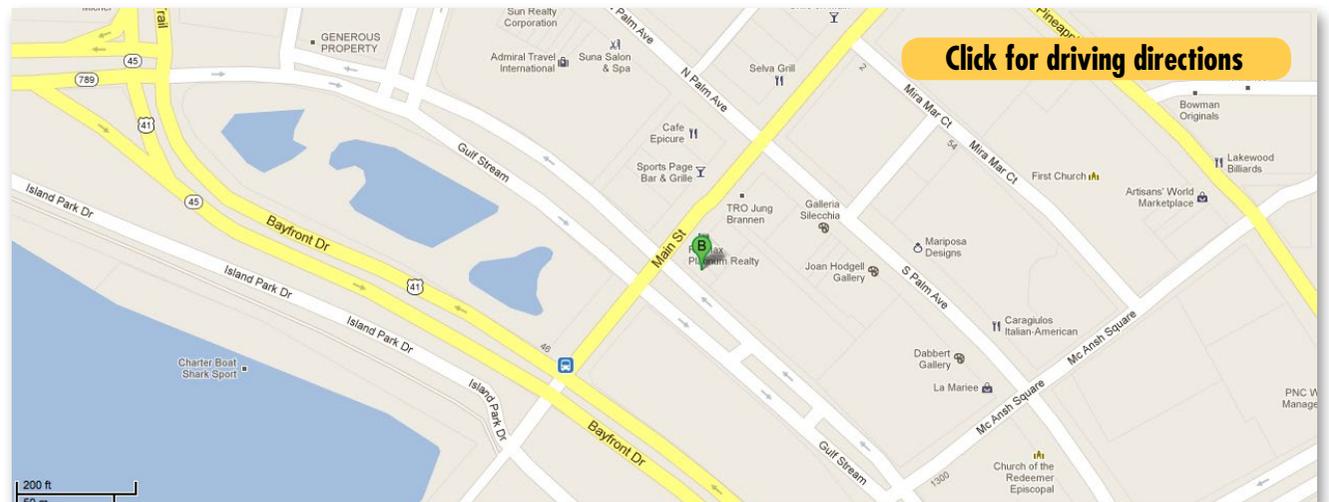
The county, at Barbetta's request, will tackle next steps at its meeting on Tuesday, April 23, in Sarasota.

Near the end of Wednesday's meeting, County Commissioner Carolyn Mason thanked the North Port officials for their patience and open-mindedness. "This has been painful for some of us," she said, "but it was really necessary to have this conversation so we could get to where we are now, and we can move forward. So I want to thank you all for this root canal exercise."

"Painful," yes. And maybe futile. 

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MORE NOISE OVER SOUND

The owner of the Gator Club says he has filed foreclosure papers because of nonpayment of a second mortgage. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY COMMISSION WRESTLES AGAIN WITH CONTROLLING NOISE DOWNTOWN, SEEKING A MORATORIUM ON NEW BARS, AMONG OTHER MEASURES

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The issue of downtown sound keeps widening as pressures multiply. First it was musicians and entertainers asking to play a little longer. Then there was a backlash from downtown residents who claimed existing ordinances are not enforced.

When city staffers promised heightened attention to amplified music, civil libertarians stepped in. Then the argument morphed to one about noise in the streets when the downtown bars close at 2 a.m.

The Sarasota City Commission has waded into the fray three times in the past six weeks, and the members have reversed themselves twice. They earlier accepted the offer of City Manager Tom Barwin to put together an advisory panel, then killed the idea. On Monday, April 15, they approved Barwin's proposal. The five members presumably are still standing by.

“*We have a problem with six bars generating noise, and a seventh has been proposed. Unless we get this under control, we'll wake up and find we have 10 bars downtown.*”

Terry Turner
Commissioner
City of Sarasota

Meanwhile, the drumbeat of public testimony has continued. Nine people trooped to the microphone on Monday afternoon — downtown residents all — to decry lack of action on the part of



Residents of the 100 Central condominium complex have been among those most vocally opposed to loud music in downtown Sarasota at night. Photo by Norman Schimmel

the city. The current Sound Control Ordinance (better known as the “Noise Ordinance”) dates to 2003, when the Lemon Coast Grill began blasting live music at downtown’s new condominiums — intentionally.

“The impetus was music venues being bad neighbors,” Dennis Adams told the commissioners. “Now there are more neighbors: 1350 Main; Rivo on Ringling; Plaza at Five Points; 100 Central. There are lots more people with skin in the game now.”

LAND USE OR LOUDNESS?

One of those “lots more people” is Barwin himself, who moved here in January to take the job. “I live downtown and can relate a whole lot to what was said today,” he told the commission. “At 2 a.m. when the bars close, it’s a big issue, often the busiest time for our police department.”

Barwin put the Sarasota Police Department on the case in March, increasing the number of officers trained to use sound meters. Now 17 people — up from two — are qualified. And Barwin told the force to get pro-active instead of waiting for a complaint. One of the many

issues with the current ordinance is the fact that callers may remain anonymous when alleging violations.

The perceived lack of enforcement was what led Commissioner Paul Caragiulo to back off establishment of an *ad hoc* sound committee on March 18. During the commission’s March 4 meeting, Caragiulo said, “You need to look at it as a land-use issue and a planning issue.”

The Downtown Improvement District weighed in later that month. “We need to decide what we want to be when we grow up,” said district member Dr. Mark Kaufman. “An entertainment district? A shopping district? I think the residents here have a real problem.”

One of the tools the city has used in the past is a zoning code provision banning outdoor amplified music. But that tool was broken by the threat of a constitutional challenge; now it hangs in limbo. Restoring it would require a rewriting of that element of the zoning code.

The “Noise Ordinance” is the second tool. It limits the strength of outdoor sound to 75 decibels. The level is measured by police officers with sound meters.



City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo (right) and City Clerk Pam Nadalini listen to City Attorney Robert Fournier during a regular commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

FORCES TO GATHER

The commission wrestled with how to move ahead. A motion by Caragiulo to instruct the city attorney to prepare by May 20 a memo reviewing the situation, to be followed by consideration of forming an *ad hoc* committee, died for lack of a second.

A motion by Commissioner Terry Turner to convene the *ad hoc* committee and conduct a legal review of the ordinance also died for lack of a second.

A third try by Commissioner Shannon Snyder directed the city attorney to report back in two weeks (April 29). His motion also called for the city manager to “put together an *ad hoc* committee for study of long-term issues,” with the committee members to begin working after the city clerk has educated them about the state’s public meetings laws. He further asked Barwin to bring back a resolution establishing the committee “by the next meeting,” which would be on May 6.

That motion passed unanimously.

Turner said, “I support accelerating the city attorney’s report. These people are losing sleep every night.”

Caragiulo had a larger aim. “The purpose of starting out is looking at land use to see what downtown is going to look like.”

Finally, Turner proposed a three-fold strike against noise offenders: “enforcement of the zoning code’s amplified music ban, a moratorium on conditional use permits for noise and new applications for bars downtown.” That motion passed unanimously. With that, the mayor closed the afternoon session of the meeting.

Turner’s moratorium motion and the entire issue came up again late in the evening as the commissioners were struggling to adjourn by

midnight. “We have a problem with six bars generating noise, and a seventh has been proposed,” said Turner. “Unless we get this under control, we’ll wake up and find we have 10 bars downtown.”

City Attorney Bob Fournier said the moratorium motion would need to be fleshed out. “Some applications may have already been filed. What’s the geography of the moratorium? Downtown? The downtown core? Is this for establishments with live music or just [those that] serve alcohol without live music? You need a resolution with reasons and a duration,” he said.

City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini then told the commission, “I was going to ask for a clarification of your motion.”

Turner moved to reconsider his afternoon action. Once that passed, he moved to replace the motion with direction to the city attorney to “brief us at our special meeting on Tuesday [April 23] on actions we can take to prevent the proliferation of bars on Main Street.” Without objection, the motion passed unanimously.

Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown says three applications are on file for alcohol-serving establishments. “Two are restaurants expanding, and one is a bar without [live] music,” he reported.

The operators of the former Sports Page on lower Main Street are looking at the space previously occupied by the vitamins and supplements store in the 1400 block, across from Smokin’ Joe’s, and they would like to open up another package store.

Yet another establishment may be changing hands. Ernie Ritz told *The Sarasota News Leader* he has filed foreclosure papers on the Gator Club for nonpayment of a second mortgage. 

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THE SURVEY SAYS ...

A homeless person sleeps on the ground in Five Points Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

REPORT SHOWS SPIKE IN NUMBER OF SUNCOAST HOMELESS

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

The unemployment rate may be down and the housing market might be rebounding, but that doesn't mean there are fewer homeless in the area. In fact, the opposite is true.

A new report issued by the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness shows a 65 percent increase in Sarasota and Manatee counties' homeless population since 2011 — including a 10-fold increase in the number of homeless children.

Those numbers sound shocking, but the spike is due at least in part to shifting definitions of homelessness, as well as more

refined survey techniques, according to Partnership Executive Director Leslie Loveless. Overall, the Partnership's 2011 "Homeless Census" showed 1,242 homeless, while this year's "Point-in-Time Count" identified 2,054 homeless. The number of homeless kids grew from 44 to 444 — a figure Loveless calls "heart-breaking."

What's worse: Those new numbers are probably on the low end.

"It certainly is representative of the homeless population in the community, but that doesn't mean we were

“If you don't have housing, then you can't get your shower and get your clean clothes and get to work on time.”

Leslie Loveless
Executive Director
Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness



able to capture interviews with everyone,” says Loveless.

The increase in the number of homeless children in part reflects better reporting, including cooperation with the schools and the YMCA, according to Loveless. But still, bottom line, we have a “substantial” number of homeless.

Another troubling number: 9 percent of the area’s homeless are between the ages of 18 and 24. That suggests a growing number of young people are leaving school and unable to afford a place to live, says Loveless. A full quarter of the homeless who responded to the Partnership’s survey said they had been homeless longer than a year, and 41 percent said they had lived in the area for more than a year before becoming homeless.

Even as the economy slowly rebounds and the unemployment rate drops, homelessness is a “vicious cycle,” Loveless says. “If you don’t have housing, then you can’t get your shower and get your clean clothes and get to work on time.”

Even for people who have jobs, the area lacks affordable housing for those who earn around the minimum wage.

So what’s the Partnership’s plan of attack? “What we’re looking to do is develop goals and plans to move people from homelessness into housing,” says Loveless. And while the new report will help the Partnership tailor those programs, there’s a long way to go: “We’ve still got a lot of work to do.” 



Even though the City of Sarasota removed the benches from Five Points Park, homeless people continue to gather there. Photo by Norman Schimmel



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GOVERNING A CITY

At the intersection of Gulfstream Avenue and U.S. 41 on a recent afternoon, people stand with signs in the medians, seeking handouts. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CITY COMMISSION TACKLES 'GOLDEN EGGS,' OIL SPILL DAMAGES, VAGRANTS AND MORE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

A disputed election was upheld, a tax was increased, a class-action lawsuit was joined, a hotel was delayed and “sign flying” took a hit. It was a busy meeting on Monday, April 15, for the Sarasota City Commission.

BUSINESS MATTERS

The ongoing drama of the St. Armands Business Improvement District election came to a close. An election to determine if property owners wanted to continue taxing them-

selves 2 mills to make physical and social improvements to the shopping Mecca ended with a surprising 65 percent to 35 percent level of rejection as the ballots were tallied.

Marty Rappaport, chairman of the district, raised objections. He suggested the ballots were mailed to the wrong addresses, because more than half the electors did not bother to

return their ballots. A mailing from the district to the same voters to explain the reason for the election had a significant number “returned to sender” by the post office.

“Please don't kill the Golden Gate goose that lays the Golden Gate eggs.”

Cathy Antunes
Resident
Golden Gate Point



But City Attorney Bob Fournier said at Monday's meeting the ballots went to the correct addresses, and none of the actual ballots was marked "return to sender."

Rappaport and district supporters are now trying to determine whether a second election can be held, and, if so, how. The recent vote means the district will go out of business on Sept. 30, even though an audit indicates it will still owe \$150,000 to the city on a line of credit to Bank of America.

In other business matters, the City Commission voted to bump up the old occupational license fee — now called the business tax — by 5 percent.

"If you want economic development, increasing taxes on business is no way to get it," said City Commissioner Terry Turner. He and Commissioner Shannon Staub voted against the tax hike, but it passed 3-2.

GROUNDING 'SIGN FLIERS'

"When there's no enforcement, word does get around," said Fournier, talking about the revocation of an ordinance in January banning panhandling from city roadways. Suddenly, "flying a sign" in the median became a "cash cow" for Sarasota's homeless and vagrants.

The commissioners approved a new ordinance Monday, making panhandling illegal again, but this time using language Fournier thinks will pass court scrutiny. The old ordinance, he feared, was constitutionally indefensible on First Amendment grounds.

"Writing it was a challenge," he said of the new law. "Asking for money or begging is expressive conduct and protected by the First Amendment."

The new ordinance uses traffic safety as its thrust. The commissioners passed it unanimously on a first reading. It is scheduled to go before the commission again on Tuesday, April 23, during a special meeting before the commission begins a budget workshop.

The ordinance could go into effect before May 1.

DOWNTOWN HOTEL PLANS PUSHED BACK

Fournier was busy Monday, explaining why a lingering lawsuit will delay the development of a new downtown hotel by as much as a year. Construction was supposed to start early next year.

"My best guess, it would take a year or two to solve these problems because of the Buck/Leiter lawsuit," said Fournier. The Leiter Group/John Buck Co. wanted to build a hotel with retail area and a 400-space parking lot on Palm Avenue near Main Street. But the deal fell through July 17, 2008 on a 3-2 vote by the City Commission. It was the fifth attempt to put together a public-private partnership on the city-owned land.

The deal collapsed as the economy began to founder. The developers filed a suit in court that effectively has tied up the city's use or transfer of the property.

Meanwhile, a new developer, Angus Rogers, has reached a deal to erect a Floridays hotel at the intersection of Cocoanut and Palm avenues. He has signed a "purchase and sale agreement" with the city, and both entities are under a deadline to sign two additional agreements on parking and redevelopment.

However, the lawsuit is a significant legal impediment to completing the agreements because the suit is considered a “title defect” on the city’s unencumbered ownership of the property.

Rogers told the commissioners Monday, “We are very frustrated the project is stymied by forces beyond our control. But we will end up with a wonderful hotel we’ll all be proud of.”

Rogers’ lawyer, Brenda Patten, added, “I’ve read all the Buck/Leiter material, and a lot of it is just posturing to get a settlement from the city. We want to stick with this.”

The commission approved an addendum to its agreement with Rogers, keeping the deal intact and allowing Fournier a free hand to defend against the lawsuit.

ROLLING AND PARKING

Vehicles are never far removed from the urban planning process. They came up twice Monday.

City staffers received approval to start talking with their counterparts in the county about changing the “road impact fee” into a “mobility fee.” City Engineer Alexandria Davis-Shaw urged the move, because it will allow the money to be used for pedestrian, bicycle and transit use — not just the construction of more roads.

The impact fee is paid by developers to soften the cost of road improvements necessitated by increased usage. Mayor Suzanne Atwell noted several other places in Florida are looking to switch to mobility fees, including Lee



A lawsuit will delay construction of the new Floridays hotel next to the Palm Avenue parking garage in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

County and the City of Jacksonville. “We need to take advantage of this,” she said.

The measure passed 4-1, with Commissioner Turner in the minority.

For residents of Golden Gate Point on the southern side of the Ringling Causeway, a figuratively bumpy road came to an end. They have been protesting a proposal to authorize “tandem parking” throughout the city. They were not concerned about the city, though, just their cul-de-sac.

They have taxed themselves and spent almost \$6 million beautifying that cul-de-sac. But plans to allow tandem parking — nose-to-tail storage in stalls — in a new condominium

complex raised fears that a buyer of one of those new units would simply park one vehicle in the stall and the other on the street.

“Tandem parking is flawed,” said resident Alan Porter. Several others echoed his sentiment.

In what was probably the quote of the evening, resident Cathy Antunes referred to the increasing property values in the area and said, “Please don’t kill the Golden Gate goose that lays the Golden Gate eggs.”

When the testimony ended, Turner made a motion, which was approved, to approve tandem parking everywhere in the city except at Golden Gate Point.



The City Commission ruled out ‘tandem parking’ for Golden Gate Point residents. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ANOTHER 'GOLDEN EGG' BECKONS

The City of Sarasota has held back from trying to get a piece of the potential cash bonanza from class-action lawsuits seeking damages as a result of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010.

But on Monday, the commissioners heard the figurative siren's song and submitted to the process. The "siren" was Bill Robertson with the Kirk-Pinkerton legal firm, who said the city had only until April 19 to get on the "gravity train."

"There's a three-year statute of limitations," he said. "You have until next Friday or Saturday

to present estimated damage claims to BP and allow us to join the class action."

The city's beaches were untouched by the spilled oil, but Robertson reminded the commission, "We had seven months when people just didn't come here."

The law firm will take one-third of any settlement if the city wins funds. "We wouldn't be taking this on contingency if we didn't believe there were recoverable damages," said Robertson. He noted Longboat Key is asking for \$6 million and Clearwater, \$20 million.

The commissioners approved Robertson's pitch unanimously. They instructed staff to get busy calculating any and all damages they could think of. 



Oil from the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico reached the Pensacola beaches in 2010. Photo by Ebaybe via Wikimedia Commons

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

This may take a while.

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AVOIDING ANOTHER MOWING FIASCO

Sarasota County used about 1.7 million gallons of fuel for its vehicles in the 2012 fiscal year, staff says. Photo by Derek Jensen via Wikimedia Commons

THE COUNTY COMMISSION CONTINUES A VOTE TO AWARD A NEW FLEET FUEL CONTRACT AFTER QUESTIONS ARISE OVER BIG DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BIDS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In an effort to prevent a recurrence of roadside mowing problems that have haunted them since last year, the Sarasota County Commissioners on April 23 will consider again the awarding of a new county fuel contract that raised questions on April 9.

The staff recommendation called for the three-year contract to go to Mansfield Oil Co. of Gainesville Inc., with automatic renewal for two additional one-

year terms. A companion item put an upper limit on the contract of \$8 million per fiscal year.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta pulled the item for discussion on April 9 at the board's meeting in Venice, pointing to what he called "a pretty substantial discrepancy" between the bid from Mansfield and those from the other two companies seeking the contract.

“ This parallels exactly what I saw with mowing. We had one extremely low bid, and the next two were much higher, and Mr. Thiele stood up there and said, ‘Responsible company. These guys are great,’ and five months later, nonperformance.

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

According to a memo from the county's Pro-

curement Department, Mansfield's bid was \$91.62 for a unit price, while J. H. Williams Oil Co. of Bradenton put in a bid of \$225.25 and Petroleum Traders Corp. of Fort Wayne in Allen County offered a bid of \$307.43.

The Procurement memo says, "A bid multiplier of \$100.00 has been included on the bid form for the calculation with the markup/discount rate (+/-) as bid. Bidders will be considered non-responsive if they do not bid all items. Prices shall be exclusive of Federal Excise Tax."

The contract is for gasoline, biodiesel and diesel motor fuel.

"I need a better comfort level," Barbetta said as he pointed to the differences between the bids.

Ed Gable, director of the General Services Office for the county, explained that one major consideration with the bids was whether the companies were willing to assure county staff they could provide fuel in the event of a hurricane at no extra charge. "That made a big difference [in the amounts]," Gable added. "There was a considerable spread there ..."

2012 SARASOTA COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

FY2012 Actual Operating Expenditures



This chart reflects Fiscal Year 2012 actual operating expenditures.

Operations and Maintenance \$55,779,184

Fleet	\$17,076,554
Facilities	\$11,446,441
Field Services	\$18,638,429
Horticulture	\$8,617,760

A pie chart shows the amount and percentage of operating expenses for the county's fleet as part of the Operations and Maintenance Department budget in the 2012 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County



The County Commission meets in regular session earlier this year. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“Which worries me even more,” Barbetta responded. “This is an \$8 million contract, so I don’t want to get into this thing and find out they can’t perform,” he continued. “We’ve had this happen before. It happened with mowing.”

In January 2012, then Procurement Official Mark Thiele recommended the board award a mowing contract for all three county zones to Bloomings Landscape and Turf Management Inc. of Sarasota, whose bid was about half what the second-lowest bidder in each zone had proposed.

Although commissioners — including Barbetta — questioned the differences in the bid amounts, Thiele said, “We have all the confidence that this particular vendor, who has been doing most of the [mowing] work for the last six years [in the county] can continue doing the work.”

On May 22, 2012, Thiele appeared before the commissioners to tell them the county would be dismissing Bloomings because it was unable to perform the work as expected.

Commissioner Nora Patterson told members of the Siesta Key Association during their annual meeting this year on March 23, “In the middle of the summer, in the rainy season, you couldn’t go anywhere in the county and see anything that wasn’t just a disgrace in terms of grass that was ... high, weeds all over the place ... It was *the* single most embarrassing thing that has happened to me since I was in office.”

It took months for the county to get contracts in place for all the zones, and staff had to assist with some of the backlog while commissioners fielded numerous complaints through phone calls and emails.



Commissioner Joe Barbetta. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE QUESTIONING

Referring to the comments about Bloomings and its mowing bid in January 2012, Barbetta told Gable on April 9 that Thiele had said the company was “‘great, cheap, no problem.’ Five months later we got hammered, and we’re still trying to recover from that.”

Gable said of Mansfield, “They’re a very legitimate company,” adding that documentation employees had provided to the county showed it could supply the fuel at the price it had bid.

“We’re comfortable with it, although it is a substantial spread,” Gable noted again of the bids.

Then Greg Morris, the county’s fleet manager, stepped to the podium. “I, too, was concerned” about the bids, he told the board. When he looked into Mansfield’s background, he continued, he learned it is a Fortune 500

company. "They are supplying Hillsborough County and many others with fuel," Morris added. "I feel very confident. ... I think they will serve us extremely well ..."

He pointed out that Mansfield is "one of the top [fuel] companies. If I could buy stock in 'em, I would."

Barbetta reiterated, "Again, this parallels exactly what I saw with mowing. We had one extremely low bid, and the next two were much higher, and Mr. Thiele stood up there and said, 'Responsible company. These guys are great,' and five months later, nonperformance. ... I can't support this unless you give me something really good to hang my hat on here."

Barbetta also pointed out that Hillsborough County is closer to Gainesville than Sarasota County.

Morris said the savings between the Mansfield bid and that of J.H. Williams was only \$10,744. "I'm not totally sure what you're looking at," he told Barbetta.

"I'm looking at your chart [in the agenda material]," Barbetta replied.

Then Karen Yeo of Fleet Services told the commissioners, "We didn't have hurricane preparedness in the last [fuel] bid and we thought that it was very necessary this time, and the other companies bid a lot higher on that ... Mansfield is giving this service to us at no price."

Moreover, she said, "We have dealt with Mansfield in the past and they have been an excellent vendor."

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh suggested that someone explain to the board how the

multiplier referenced in the agenda material was used to arrive at the bid totals. "Is there another way to look at this?" he asked.

All county departments together purchase about 1.7 million gallons of fuel a year, Yeo replied. "But [no amounts] are guaranteed to the vendor."

Based on the 2012 fiscal year fuel purchases, she continued, staff estimated that Mansfield would be paid about \$4,558,000 a year, while the figure for J.H. Williams would be \$4,580,000. The bid for Petroleum Traders would be \$4,570,000, she said. However, the Procurement memo regarding the bid award notes that Petroleum Traders was deemed ineligible for the contract because it did not supply requested information, including copies of active fuel supply contracts.

"This makes no sense," Patterson said of the figures Yeo mentioned. Barbetta concurred.

When Barbetta asked whether the ability of the other two companies to supply fuel following a hurricane raised their bids that much higher than Mansfield's, Yeo said, "Depending on how many hurricanes we have."

"I have a feeling the problem is in what you presented to us [in the agenda material]," Patterson told Yeo and Morris, "because it doesn't jive at all with what you guys are saying."

"We can get additional information to you," Yeo said.

Barbetta made the motion to continue the item to the board's April 23 consent agenda, allowing time for staff to provide that extra material for the board to review. 



A REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION OUTLOOK

Orlando has a bus rapid transit system in place. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE SARASOTA AND MANATEE COUNTY COMMISSIONS AGREE TO PURSUE A BUS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM ALONG U.S. 41 AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HIRING A PRIVATE OPERATOR FOR REGULAR BUS SERVICE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The Sarasota and Manatee county commissions not only are looking at regional cooperation on a bus rapid transit system, but this week they also approved an interlocal agreement to explore jointly hiring a private firm to operate their existing bus systems.

During their combined meeting on April 16 in Sarasota, the focus remained on the U.S. 41 corridor for a bus rapid transit (BRT) sys-

tem — the plan to which the Sarasota board committed earlier this year.

Manatee County Administrator Ed Hunzeker said he would like to talk with City of Bradenton and City of Palmetto officials, so they can weigh in as well on planning for a BRT system.

Jonathan Paul, Sarasota County's interim transportation planning director, pointed

“*We're starting to put together a puzzle here to actually show what you have in place today could work.*”

Jonathan Paul
Interim Director
Transportation Planning
Sarasota County



out that in recent discussions with City of Sarasota staff, he had learned current zoning along U.S. 41 allows for sufficient land-use planning to make a BRT system feasible. "There is a higher density than what was expected on that corridor," he told the two county commissions.

While that density is roughly seven to 10 units per acre in the city of Sarasota along U.S. 41, Paul noted, an overlay district allows for up to 33 units per acre. "The current densities along that corridor are probably some of the highest in the community," he said.

The City of Sarasota has hired a consultant to look at the levels of density, he continued. Sarasota County also is examining zoning allowances along U.S. 301 in Manatee and Sarasota counties, Paul added.



*Manatee County Commissioner Betsy Benac.
Photo by Rachel Hackney*



Manatee County Commissioner John Chappie and Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson consider a matter during the boards' joint meeting April 16. Photo by Rachel Hackney

A report on all the findings should be ready in late May or June, Paul said.

Regardless of the positive aspects of the city of Sarasota's density levels, Paul explained, parking and other issues will have to be addressed.

Commissioner Nora Patterson — who served on the City Commission before running for County Commission — pointed out that while the density levels may be sufficient, parcels along U.S. 41 “are very shallow. ... If your parcel is only 150 feet deep, there's not that much potential for development.”

“You raise very good concerns,” Paul told her. Still, he said, the number of destinations along the U.S. 41 corridor — such as Ringling College of Art and Design and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota — also make that route more attractive for a BRT system. Moreover, he said, “There are a number of people that could easily walk a quarter of a mile to U.S. 41” to catch a bus.

During presentations to the County and City commissions in January and February, Paul pointed out studies have shown that a quarter of a mile is the maximum distance people in Florida's weather can be expected to walk to catch a bus.

Paul also said staff is looking at nine potential stops for a BRT system in Sarasota County, noting that some townhouse and duplex de-

velopments are within a quarter of a mile of each of those potential stops.

“We're starting to put together a puzzle here to actually show what you have in place today could work,” he told the boards. “That's not to say that there aren't more changes that are needed.”

Then Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson pointed out the major concern that arose from the board's joint meeting with the Sarasota City Commission on Feb. 5 was whether “there [was] the political will to make those [land-use] decisions that have to happen” for a BRT system to be successful.

City commissioners could not answer that question, she said.

“I'm not sure that we have any other ... information that really makes this [discussion] any different than when we last met with the City Commission,” Robinson added.

“You are correct,” Paul told her. However, he said, the analysis that is due by June should have the necessary information from the City of Sarasota about whether it is interested in redevelopment along the U.S. 41 corridor, to make a BRT system more viable.

As he had noted during the joint meeting with the City Commission, Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta said he is a city resident. “I'm concerned about the fiscal survival

I hope it's something ... that we all have the political fortitude to do.

Betsy Benac
Commissioner
Manatee County

of the city of Sarasota. ... Redevelopment is the only way they're going to survive."

Barbetta added that a focus on North Tamiami Trail improvements is one of the keys to improving the city's financial health. "I hope we can get them to the table to get this thing moving," he said of the City commissioners and the BRT proposal.

Manatee Commissioner Betsy Benac told her fellow board members, "I'm excited about the opportunity to look for redevelopment. ... I was very excited about the [[Urban Land Institute](#)] saying U.S. 41 should be our spine."

(The Manatee Commission is awaiting a report from the institute on May 14 regarding

the future of its U.S. 41 corridor, Hunzeker said.)

"I hope it's something ... that we all have the political fortitude to do," Benac continued of redeveloping that route. "It's been proven if you can get [transit waits] under 30 minutes, you can increase your ridership."

Manatee Commissioner Michael Gallen added that he hoped his board could meet with city officials from Palmetto and Bradenton, and maybe even the State College of Florida and [IMG Sports Academy](#) in Bradenton, to discuss how a BRT system could benefit all of them.

When she heard that U.S. 41 was Sarasota County's focus for a BRT system, Manatee



A Sarasota County Area Transit bus makes a stop at Westfield Southgate Mall in Sarasota. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Commissioner Robin DiSabatino said, “It was music to my ears, because [that corridor] has been left behind.”

DiSabatino pointed out that U.S 301 in Manatee County has much less density than it does in Sarasota County.

BUS SYSTEMS

During a discussion about the Sarasota County and Manatee County bus systems, Hunzeker pointed out that some economic efficiencies probably could be gained if the two counties hired one private firm to operate both bus systems.

The counties would continue to own and pay for the systems, he said.

In an earlier career, Hunzeker noted, he spent 10 years with an authority in the St. Louis area that contracted out the operation of bus services in six counties across two states, “and it was quite successful.”

Hunzeker pointed out that an interlocal agreement would be necessary for the county staffs to proceed on a regional proposal.

When Manatee Commissioner Benac asked whether the counties would be better positioned to gain federal funding — which pays for much of their bus system costs — if they had one operator, Hunzeker replied, “I think we would like to think so.” Usually federal *and* state officials are more amenable to funding regional systems, he noted.

Sarasota Commissioner Barbetta pointed out that a regional approach probably would make it easier for the counties to continue to obtain federal grants.

When Manatee Commissioner DiSabatino asked whether he had any private firms in mind, Hunzeker responded that he did not. If the two boards approved an interlocal agreement, he said, one of the counties would have its procurement office prepare a request for proposals to seek a firm.

“The question is who would submit the best proposal for this region and how it fits within the boards’ needs and the [counties’] needs,” Hunzeker added.

Sarasota Chairwoman Carolyn Mason asked, “At what point do we go to the community and say, ‘Hey, this is what we’re talking about’? This isn’t the way that the public should find out about it,” she pointed out. “I think it’s just really important that the public be brought in on the front end than from the middle or the back.”

Many opportunities exist for bringing the public into the discussion, Hunzeker told her, especially in regard to proposals for expanding the bus systems, use of passes and fees. “Those are all questions that we should seek public input on as we go down the path.”

Manatee Commissioner Vanessa Baugh noted that news media coverage of the meeting would alert the public to the discussion.

Barbetta made the motion to have Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid work with Hunzeker on the interlocal agreement, which would lead to the request for proposals for a private firm to operate the systems.

Manatee Commissioner John R. Chappie made the motion for his board. Both motions won unanimous approval. 



ON THE WAY OUT

Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner discusses budget matters with the School Board in November 2012. Photo by Scott Proffitt

THE ATTEMPT TO SAVE MEDIA SPECIALISTS' JOBS APPEARS TO HAVE FAILED AS THE SCHOOL BOARD FACES MORE RED INK

By Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer

Because of the need to maintain a level of 7.5 percent in its reserve fund, the Sarasota County School Board members agreed during a meeting on Tuesday, April 16, that they would have to cut media specialists' positions in district middle and high schools next year.

Those specialists will be replaced by paraprofessional aides at a savings of \$595,086, according to budget projections.

During an hour-long budget presentation to the board, Deputy

Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner noted that spending for the next several years would continue to outpace income. While the district has reserves, Weidner pointed out that because funding comes into the district early each fiscal year, by summer, schools often have to resort to reserves for their operating costs.

The fiscal year starts on Oct. 1.

"If we have no, or limited, reserves we have to borrow money, costing us even more," Weidner said.

“*We're looking at a \$9 million hole.*”

Frank Kovach
Member
Sarasota County School Board

According to state law, the school district has to maintain a reserve, or rainy day fund, equal to at least 3 percent of its budget. However, district policy calls for that reserve not to drop below 7.5 percent. Though that fund is approximately at the 8 percent level now, at this time two years ago, it was close to 15 percent, Weidner said.

The estimated reserve balance projected as of June 30 would represent 10.5 percent of appropriations, according to the financial report provided to the School Board for its April 16 meeting. The figure is based on operations through Feb. 28.

The School Board is awaiting the final state budget from the Legislature, at which time it will know exactly how much

state revenue to expect for the next school year. Weidner pointed out that the current difference in education funding between the House and the Senate budgets is only about 4 percent.

“We’re looking at a \$9 million hole,” said School Board member Frank Kovach. Board

member Caroline Zucker referred to the situation as “a budget crisis.”

Additionally, the increased cost of health insurance for employees has risen over time, and it appears the 2013-14 fiscal year will see no exception, Weidner said, adding he anticipates the cost to continue to go up over the next few years.

Mitsi Corcoran, the district’s chief financial officer, told *The Sarasota News Leader* that the bud-

The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida 2012-2013 General Fund Budget

Appropriations

Appropriations for the 2012-2013 fiscal year are increasing \$10,442,862 or 2.86%. The majority of the increase is related to the negotiated salary agreement that had the impact of giving employees a 2.2% bonus and an increase in the number of students attending charter schools. In Appendix “A” is a listing of all budget reductions that have been made since the economic downturn of 2007.

Description	Unaudited 2011-2012	Budget 2012-2013	Increase (Decrease)	Percentage Change
Salaries (The budget increase is due to the impact of the negotiated salary agreement.)	\$222,439,168	\$226,318,715	\$3,879,547	1.74%
Employee Benefits (The budget increase includes the retirement rate increase of .27% and an estimated health insurance rate increase of 5%.)	\$60,166,687	\$61,115,337	\$946,650	1.57%
Purchased Services (The budget increase is due to an increase in students attending charter schools.)	\$58,205,200	\$63,622,685	\$5,417,485	9.31%
Energy Services (The budget decrease is due to anticipated energy savings.)	\$10,932,264	\$10,898,571	(\$33,693)	(.31%)
Materials and Supplies (The budget decrease is related to consumable supply purchases.)	\$10,526,975	\$10,409,320	(\$117,655)	(11.18%)
Capital Outlay (The budget increase is due to anticipated replacement of out dated library books at the media centers of Booker and Venice High.)	\$1,532,171	\$1,883,855	\$351,684	22.95%
Other Expenses	\$581,489	\$578,333	(\$3,156)	(.54%)
Transfer to the Self Insurance Fund	\$550,279	\$550,279	\$0	0%
Total Appropriations	\$364,934,233	\$375,377,095	\$10,442,862	2.86%

A chart from the adopted School Board budget for the current fiscal year shows the changes in appropriations. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools.

get for the 2014 fiscal year calls for a 4 percent increase in employee health insurance premiums. She pointed out that the estimate “was based on our claims experience which is the normal factor used to determine changes in premiums from one year to the next,” along with anticipated impacts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Corcoran added in an email, “We have received some preliminary estimates from our health insurance carrier that we should expect about a 3.8% increase from just fees and taxes associated with the ACA.”

That would amount to about \$1.5 million more annually beginning in January 2014, she pointed out.

Moreover, Corcoran wrote, the ACA requires that the district provide health insurance to any worker — whether appointed by the School Board, a substitute or a contract worker — if the person works an average of 30 hours or more per week. Therefore, she said, the annual impact of that change will be about \$2.6 million “over and above any premium changes associated with our claims history. The additional impact has not yet been included in the budget because the implementation guidance is still being interpreted and is constantly changing.”

The Sarasota district has cut its budget by 30 percent since 2007, Weidner noted during the workshop.

Superintendent Lori White, who is responsible for presenting options to the board for trimming spending, added that the suggestions she poses are “decisions made to stop the bleeding, not choices I would make if I saw another way.”



Superintendent Lori White. File photo

As for the media specialists’ situation: Claire Miller, a visiting instructor librarian from the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, addressed the board Tuesday about research focusing on students who attended a school with a media specialist compared to those who went to schools without the positions. According to Miller, “In every case across the board, students’ educational outcomes in college were improved by the presence of a media specialist in high school.”

Donna Heath, a district media specialist, pointed out that the charter schools and private schools in the county still will have media specialists if the board cuts the positions in the other public schools.

“The district has spent millions of dollars on several campuses to build new media centers that will now be managed by staff without media specialist qualifications,” she added.

Media specialists already have been eliminated in the district elementary schools.

The board members nonetheless indicated the position is likely to disappear in the middle and high schools so the district can save more than half a million dollars. 



BUMBLING FORWARD AS USUAL

Chalk Festival founder Denise Kowal poses with artwork from the 2012 event. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE LATEST CHALK FESTIVAL REQUEST FOR FEE WAIVERS LEADS TO A PROPOSAL FOR A CITY POLICY DISCUSSION ABOUT SUCH EVENTS

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

The readers of *SRQ Magazine* rate the Sarasota Chalk Festival as their favorite outdoor event. But for city and county commissioners and their staffers, it may rate as their No. 1 nightmare — a highly popular event that never follows the rules.

It was no different Monday, April 15, when organizer Denise Kowal came before the Sarasota City Commission to ask for funding support once again. It is understandable that the commissioners

were leery. Last year, she did not tell them it was a 10-day festival. This year, she was clear that it will last six days.

“We’re entering our sixth season. We’re the only international [chalk] festival in the U.S.

We are the chalk of the world, with the most debuts of new techniques. We receive more than 500 applications from around the world to participate, at no transportation cost to us,” she told the commission.

“We’re the only international [chalk] festival in the U.S. We are the chalk of the world, with the most debuts of new techniques.”

Denise Kowal
Founder
Sarasota Chalk Festival

“This year the theme is honoring veterans; we call it the *Legacy of Valor*. Freedom is not free, and neither is the chalk festival. It needs \$1.2 million every year,” she said.

Kowal has left bewildered and befuddled officials in her wake for five years, while picking up funding that nobody else would dare seek.

Monday, she came to seek a waiver of undefined and uncounted fees, even though her application for the November event was incomplete — or as City Manager Tom Barwin put it, “The application is in the process of being completed.” Among the missing elements is proof of insurance, for example.

While Kowal was looking for fee waivers, what she actually needed were grants. Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown explained, “Any

fee waived, we have to make the department whole. The event area fee is \$1,650, and we have to give [that amount] back to make them whole.”

Commissioner Terry Turner noted the city does not have a grant budget or policy that applies to the situation. “We decided not to have a grant program,” he said. “It would be helpful when we have a policy not to bring us stuff that is inconsistent with policy. We don’t have a grant program downtown.”

Brown defensively said, “We brought this forward at the specific request of the festival. We don’t stop anybody from coming before the commission.”

Commissioner Paul Caragiulo joined in Turner’s high curmudgeon. “People overwhelm-



High Wire was among the circus-themed entries in the 2012 Chalk Festival. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ingly want to see this happen. But it seems like on the staff side there is a huge disconnection,” he said. “It’s [like] Groundhog Day trying to get through this every year.”

Commissioner Shannon Snyder joined in. “Last year it was a 10-day festival, but we were never told that. Every year we’re having to discuss this. At some point we should have this down by now. Every year is the last minute. Every year is something else.”

Not to be left out, Commissioner Willie Shaw added, “And the application is not complete.”

Looking ahead Caragiulo said, “I don’t want to be here again doing the same thing. Predictability, predictability, predictability.”

To which Barwin replied, “We will be here next year unless we get some direction.”

“Then we should sit here now and give some guidance,” said Turner. “I see four problems: The length of the event. Affected parties — who are they? Grant policy. And noise. Let’s have a discussion and give concrete guidance.”

At that point the issue had moved far beyond the agenda item of Kowal’s request for fee waivers. City Clerk and Auditor Pam Nadalini intervened. “I would recommend you bring this item back,” she said. “Because you really haven’t noticed this item. I can put it on the next regular meeting.”

Snyder moved to do that, specifically mentioning in his motion Turner’s four policy objectives. The motion passed unanimously. Once again, Kowal and the Chalk Festival had thrown local government into a tizzy. 



Artist Truman incorporated a 3D effect in his work in 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel



CASTING FATE TO THE COUNTY

Future extra funding for downtown Sarasota remains in question as a committee prepares to re-view the Community Redevelopment Agency. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ANALYSIS: CITY APPEARS POISED TO OPT OUT OF FUTURE CRA PLANS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota city commissioners hurled a curve ball at the Sarasota County Commission Monday, April 15.

They had agreed earlier to empanel an 11-person committee to evaluate the future of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), which is set to expire in 2016.

On Monday, by a 4-1 vote, they said the city “will not be financially participating.”

Commissioner Willie Shaw was the lone vote against the new policy.

THE ‘SNEAKY GOLD MINE’

The CRA is a legislative creation, giving cities and counties a way to earmark property taxes for long-range goals without dipping into their general revenues every year.

It uses a clever trick to raise the money. Back

when the CRA was established in 1986, it “froze” the property tax income to the city and county from the properties in the specified area. Any increase in revenue since then has gone to the CRA.

“*Before this committee marches on, assuming there will be money coming from us, there needs to be a different way of doing this.*”

Shannon Snyder
Commissioner
City of Sarasota



For the first year, of course, the amount was zero. This year it is \$6,981,172.

Theoretically, this is money neither the city nor the county would miss, because it is all “new money” from rising property values. That was the whole idea. CRAs would fight “slum and blight” by allowing cities and counties to pour money into areas that needed help.

Sarasota’s CRA was set up for a defined area around downtown. And over the years, it has poured millions into downtown, with the tax differential supporting bond issues for large public projects as well as for additional services such as heightened police protection.

Sarasota County has been a passive player, relinquishing the money (this year, \$3.5 million) and watching the city spend it. That fact has produced some sour grapes at times, but county commissioners over the decades realized that if the city failed, the situation would drag down the county, too.

Every city success reflected well on the county. The city is not only the county seat but also the area’s center of arts, commerce, finance and entertainment.

Both city and county governments are eyeing the CRA money. County commissioners have already plugged their contribution into predictions of future budgets. When 2016 arrives, their \$3.5 million will help plug a long-running deficit, with reserves having been used in past years to make up the loss of property tax income as a result of the Great Depression. The city could use its \$3.2 million portion to pay for other projects or necessities beyond downtown.

When the two commissions sat down in a joint meeting on Feb. 5, they instructed City Manager Tom Barwin and County Administrator Randall Reid to devise a plan to address the post-CRA environment. Barwin and Reid came up with the 11-person committee.



The city and county commissions meet together on Feb. 5. Photo by Norman Schimmel

RAPIDS AHEAD!

Even before their first meeting, the committee's ride is appearing to be bumpy. And the city commissioners keep adding bumps. Two weeks ago, City Commissioner Terry Turner raised the idea that the city should stop participating in the CRA after 2016. He said the city contribution could and should be used to help out other areas of town. He cited the need for a parking garage on St. Armands and another near Hillview Street, with its popular Southside shopping and dining district.

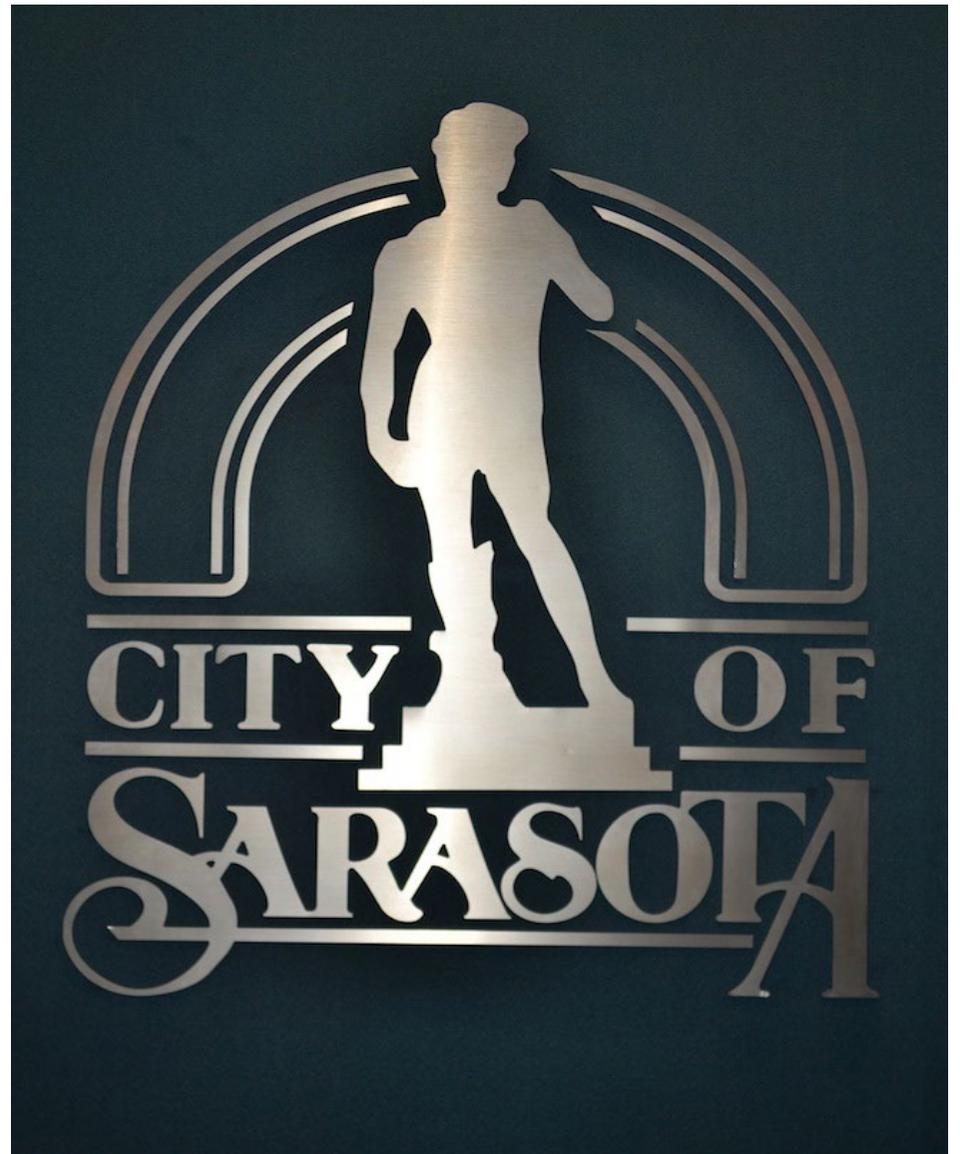
And he raised the fear that any post-2016 scheme could have an unelected body deciding how to spend the CRA money, saying that was unacceptable. The remainder of the commission was cool to his analysis, but two weeks later, others clearly had given the matter some thought.

"We can no longer afford to participate financially," said Commissioner Shannon Snyder. "Before this committee marches on, assuming there will be money coming from us, there needs to be a different way of doing this."

Commissioner Paul Caragiulo seemed to agree. "This is what the committee is supposed to do — to find alternative modes to do things."

Snyder suggested staff provide the county with a list of projects needed in the city. "We'll switch roles and let the county decide what gets funded," he said. The money would come from the county, he added, because, "I don't see how we can afford to do the CRA anymore."

With the county already counting on the money in its future budgets, the 11-person com-



The City of Sarasota has relied on CRA funds to pay for some expenses observers say its general fund should have covered. Photo by Norman Schimmel

mittee will have a "hard sell" convincing the county commissioners to open a multi-million-dollar pipeline to fund city projects. Venice, Longboat and North Port would not be far behind Sarasota; they have argued for CRAs for years, but the county has blocked them.

Nonetheless, Snyder's motion was explicit: "As we move forward with the CRA extension committee, the city will not be financially participating."

The motion passed, with Shaw casting the only "No" vote.

At least two commissioners later were uncertain about the consequences of their afternoon decision. As the evening session moved

past 11 p.m., Shaw asked, “On the CRA, did we kill it?”

Snyder said, “The motion I made is we are not going to financially participate in it. Leave the money in general revenue.”

“Are we just opting out?” asked Caragiulo.

Snyder replied, “We need to get out of it and stop playing these shell games.”

Attorney Fournier stepped in before the confusion spread: “We’ll put it on the next agenda.”

DUAL TAXATION REDUX

The CRA has been a visible and tangible way for the county to fight the city’s arguments about dual taxation, with city residents paying county property taxes but saying they get nothing in return. This is a perennial hot topic in Florida.

If the CRA sunsets, and the county takes its contribution out of the city, it is likely a dual taxation lawsuit will not be far away. There is now sufficient case law and legislation that the legal battle could be extensive. The county finance staff for years has prepared for another round of dual-taxation litigation, keeping a set of books showing how the county showers benefits on its other municipalities.

If the CRA is extended, will it use the 1986 “baseline” to calculate the county contribution? Or will the baseline be reset to 2016, starting the cycle anew? And who will decide where and how the money will be spent? If the city makes no contributions, should it be calling the shots? Or would an “unelected and independent body” be responsible for them,



Vice Mayor Willie Shaw. Photo by Norman Schimmel

as at least one county commissioner has suggested?

The 11-member committee’s role will be complicated further by the close observation of its political masters, as well as by the other cities in the county. If Sarasota County opts to provide capital funding for city projects, Longboat, Venice and North Port will be standing with their hands out, as well.

Government throughout the ages has been primarily a matter of allocation of resources — who gets what from whom and how much. A despot can take all the resources and let people starve; governments have evolved from that starting point until today, when they have to live with dual taxation and CRA funding schemes.

This new 11-member group will be one committee well worth watching. 

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME



Sarasota and Manatee county commissioners meet in the Think Tank at the County Administration Center in Sarasota on April 16. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A MANATEE COUNTY EXPERT ON NEW EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY SAYS PROBLEMS CAN BE AVOIDED BY MAKING THE NECESSARY INVESTMENT AT THE OUTSET

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Most of the problems U.S. metropolitan areas have encountered with a new type of emergency communications equipment have resulted from insufficient investment in the systems, Manatee County's public safety radio communications director explained in a joint meeting April 16 of the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions.

Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson raised the

concerns on April 10 prior to her board's 3-2 vote to proceed with implementing a P25 system in Sarasota County. Robinson and Commissioner Nora Patterson were in the minority on that vote.

“ We need to build it the right way the first time. We cannot spend more money by putting patches here, putting patches there. ”

Willie Miranda
Director, Public Safety Radio Communications
Manatee County

Referring to problems Robinson had uncovered in a 15-minute Internet search, Willie Miranda explained of the systems, “They were underfunded and therefore underbuilt, and that’s a very im-



Sarasota County Fire Chief Mike Tobias addresses the two boards. Photo by Norman Schimmel

portant term here. ... If you under-build, you will have problems.”

Sarasota County is working with Manatee County on implementing a regional P25 system. “We need to build it the right way the first time,” Miranda continued. “We cannot spend more money by putting patches here, putting patches there.”

The cost of the new system for Sarasota County will be about \$18.5 million, Miranda told the boards; for Manatee, it will be about \$15 million.

Sarasota County Fire Chief and Emergency Services Director Mike Tobias explained at the outset of the presentation on April 16 that all the stakeholders in the two counties are meeting every two weeks “and making sure everybody has a chance to be heard.”

One subcommittee, Tobias added, is working on policies, procedures and the scope of the systems, while another is focusing on the technology itself. Miranda is heading up that second group, Tobias noted.

“This is a mission critical radio network,” Miranda told the boards, “and we need to keep it as reliable as possible.”

When Robinson pressed him regarding articles she had read about hacking into the P25 systems and encryption issues, Miranda told her that hacking problems did arise with the earliest P25 equipment. However, he pointed out, no Compliance Assessment Program (CAP) was in place nationally to ensure all the P25 systems could communicate with each other. In the early stages, he said, manufacturers were trying to create their own niches in the market, resulting in a number of problems. “That’s wiped away with the CAP program,” he pointed out.

As for encryption concerns: “The [U.S.] Department of Homeland Security has issued guidelines specifically to address [that],” Miranda added. “It’s a matter of using [the technology] properly ...”

Robinson said she was concerned that none of the staff making the presentation to the Sarasota County Commission last week had done research similar to what she had pursued. “I’m surprised that both of these teams didn’t have any of that before we stepped into this,” she said.

However, Bill Hutchison, the former Manatee County public safety director who is working as a private consultant to that county, explained that Miranda was supposed to have been present for the Sarasota County discus-

sion last week; he was unable to attend because of a death in the family.

Miranda is “a true expert” on the technology, Hutchison added. “He’s the ‘propeller head’ in our group. ... He would have been able to answer [questions] unprompted and unscripted ... on the fly at that meeting.”

Nonetheless, Robinson told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the April 16 discussion that she still is concerned none of the other

team members was familiar with the points she raised last week. “It bothers me that there was no team discussion on these issues,” she said.

During the April 16 discussion, Patterson pointed out that she cast the other “No” vote regarding pursuit of the new system.

She added that she was thinking back to the year 2000, “when Emergency Management said that the world was going to come to an



Manatee County Commissioner Robin DiSabatino. Photo by Norman Schimmel

end when we switched centuries and that we wouldn't be able to communicate with anybody, [that] all our systems would fail unless we spent several million dollars to do upgrades. ... Lo and behold, those who didn't spend several million dollars — the world didn't come to an end for them. ... There wasn't even a hiccup.”

She also was surprised last week when staff could not answer Robinson's questions, Patterson continued. She asked staff for a report on the responses to Robinson's questions, including details about when staff did its research.

“There is some hesitancy in buying into a technology that's new,” she pointed out.

When the Charlotte County commissioners told the Sarasota County commissioners in a joint meeting last month that they had decided to spend several million dollars on an emergency communications system upgrade that would last for several more years, “that sounded kind of appealing,” she added. “We are *really* going to struggle a bit in order to be able to make this happen, especially with buying new radios.”



Radio System Replacement Steps Moving Forward

- Advertise radio consultant RFP, select consultant and execute contract (2nd Quarter 2013)
- Partner counties work with consultant to finalize system specifications and solicit qualified vendors (4th Quarter 2013)
- Select vendor and begin implementing radio system upgrade (2nd Quarter 2014)

COSTS AND SAVINGS

Tobias told the Sarasota commissioners last week that the \$18.5 million estimate for the system covers the infrastructure only. Approximately \$13 million will have to be spent on new radios to work with it.

Nonetheless, Patterson said, “The presentation that we had today makes me feel more secure about where we’re going on it ... and I absolutely do think a multi-county approach ... makes all the sense in the world.”

Ed Hunzeker, the Manatee County administrator, promised to provide a written report to both commissions regarding Miranda’s answers to Robinson’s questions.

When Manatee Commissioner Betsy Benac asked whether the counties working together would save money, Miranda replied, “Definitely. Yes.”

He told the board that only one network, “the brains of the entire system,” would be necessary, “and that’s an expensive piece of equipment.”

Moreover, Miranda said, the most significant savings would come through efficiencies in operating costs. Instead of two maintenance contracts, for example, only one will be necessary, he pointed out.

Manatee Commissioner Carol Whitmore said, “It just never made sense” that the two counties were not using a regional system, noting that Emergency Services personnel cannot communicate directly with each other.

“Our two counties working together [on the regional infrastructure], it makes absolute sense,” said Sarasota Commissioner Charles Hines. “Both of our systems are coming toward failure at the same time. It’s a unique opportunity to take advantage of all of this.”

Miranda pointed out that 17 Florida counties — including Pinellas, Hardee, Alachua, Duval and Orange — already have P25 systems in place, but none of them is cooperating on a regional basis. “Hopefully, we’ll be the lead on that,” he added.

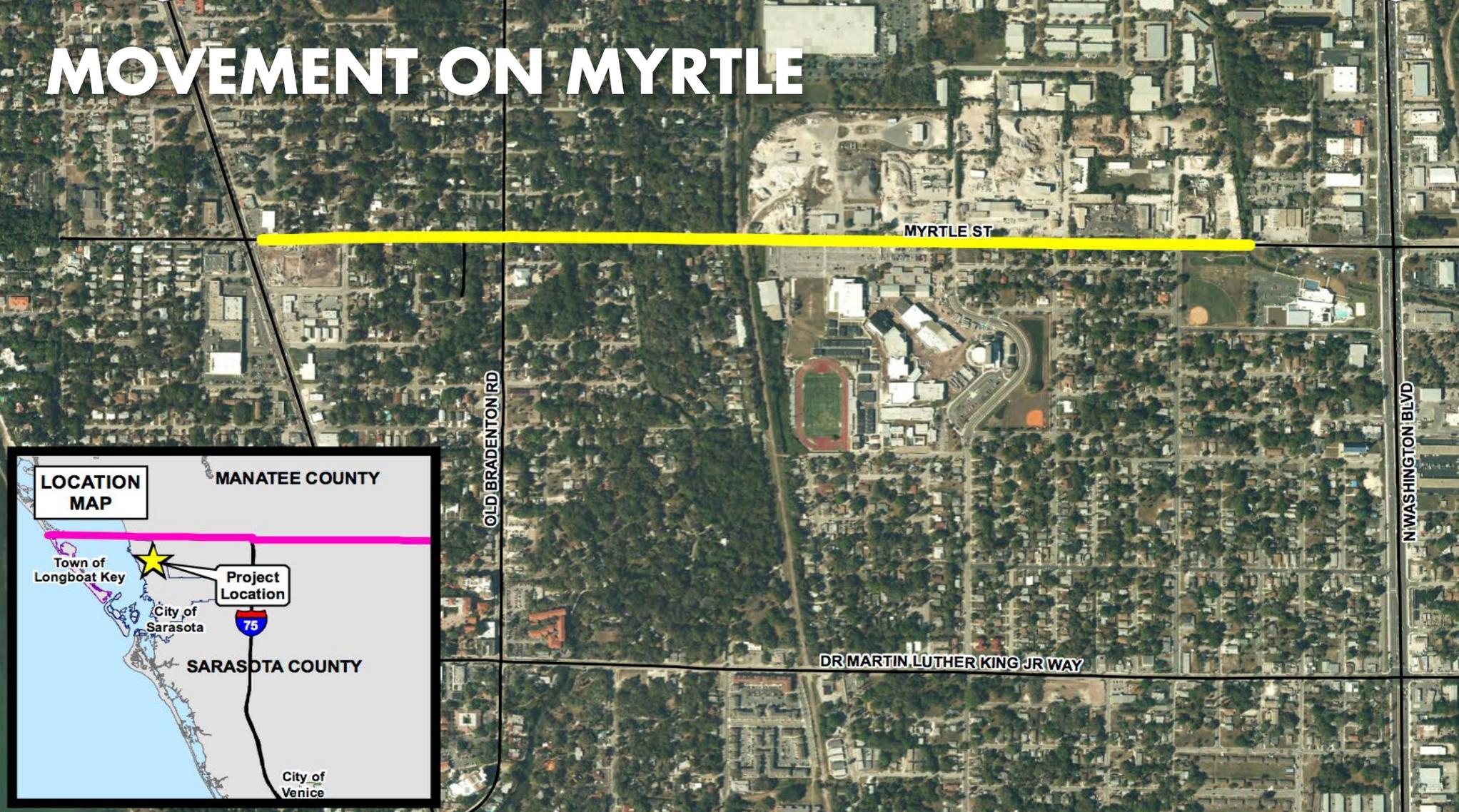
When Manatee Commissioner Robin DiSabato asked about the timeline for putting in the new system, Miranda said the Sarasota infrastructure needs to be replaced as soon as possible.

Tobias explained that the Procurement Department is finalizing a request for proposals (RFP) for a consultant to help the team choose the best type of system. A PowerPoint presentation provided to the boards shows the projected timeline calling for vendor bids to be solicited in the fourth quarter of this year, with a bid award and implementation of the new equipment beginning in the second quarter of 2014.

Manatee County is almost at the point where a replacement system is necessary, Miranda added. “I have been doing some audits of the system, and I’m not that comfortable with it on the reliability part ... We’re basically working on Band-Aids.”

Tobias said that it would take about 18 months to install the new equipment once it is purchased. 

MOVEMENT ON MYRTLE



A graphic shows the area for the planned improvements along Myrtle Street in Sarasota. Image courtesy Sarasota County

COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES DESIGN OF NEXT PHASE OF IMPROVEMENTS

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

With few comments last week, the Sarasota County Commission unanimously approved a \$499,496 contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. for the design of the Myrtle Street Improvement Project from U.S. 41 to west of U.S. 301.

The design, which should be completed in March 2014, according to an April 10 memo to the commissioners, is for the widening of the existing two-lane street with shoulders, bicycle lanes, closed drainage, sidewalks and street lighting. These features will be

along about 1.25 miles of Myrtle, the memo notes.

Thai Tran, a program manager in the Public Works Department, pointed out to the commissioners during their regular meeting on April 10 in Sarasota that Phase I of the Myrtle Street project — including a turn lane and sidewalk improvements at the U.S. 301 in-

tersection — is in the final stage of design. Construction bids will be sought this summer, he added.

“*We’ve been begging for something to be done to that road.*”

Barbara Langston
Liaison
Amaryllis Park Neighborhood

During an April 17, 2012 joint meeting of

the Sarasota City Commission and the County Commission, the boards approved Phase 2 with sidewalks on both the north and south sides of the street.

During that joint meeting, Barbara Langston, a liaison from the Amaryllis Park Neighborhood, chastised the commissioners for not moving faster on the project. “We’ve been begging for something to be done to that road,” she said of residents. “Really, that road is very dangerous,” she added. “At night, you can hardly see on it.”

Moreover, Langston told the boards, when that area gets heavy rain, “[The road] is totally flooded.”

Langston also pointed out that with the rebuilding of Booker High School scheduled to

be completed this year, it was vital the street improvements be completed in a timely manner. Referring to Myrtle, she said, “That road serves that school only. ... You need to be seriously looking at getting as much of that road [work] constructed [as possible] ... by 2013.”

She added, “My biggest anger right now is that you all are raising Cain” over funding sources for the project.

A presentation Tran made to the County Commission on April 10 showed the funding for the design work would be coming from county and city Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) monies — \$272,936 from the county and \$226,560 from the city.

Funding for the construction will be divided up as follows, Tran added: \$2,324,798 from

Project Background

- **March 2011** – Cost estimates for several options for Myrtle Street Improvements - US 41 to west of US 301
- **April 1, 2012** – Start Phase 1 of Myrtle Street Improvements including turn lane and sidewalk improvements at the US 301 intersection
- **April 17, 2012** – Joint City/County Commission approved Phase 2 of Myrtle Street Improvements including Design of Option 3B – sidewalks on north and south sides, closed drainage, bicycle lanes, and lighting
Interim construction of Option 1B – sidewalks on south side, closed drainage, and lighting

various city and county sources and another \$800,000 in county CDBG funds that will be available in October 2015.

Chairwoman Carolyn Mason told Tran, “I would like to see a one-page document — ’cause this is a hot topic in Newtown — ... that clearly says what Phase I is and [what is in Phase II] and that it’s fully funded or how the funding is broken down ... Is that possible?”

Commissioner Joe Barbetta suggested the fact sheet also contain the timeline for the work.

“Sure,” Tran responded. “I will send it out to you,” he told Mason.

Tran then explained that the design of Phase II should be complete in 2014; the right of way acquisition is scheduled for 2014-2015; and construction is set for 2015-2016, with the latter matched to that last portion of CDBG funding for the work.

“I think it gives people an idea of what to expect when,” Mason replied.

Barbetta asked why the timeframe was so long for right of way acquisition, adding he thought the city own most of the property.

Tran responded that the city and county together do own the right of way.

Therefore, Barbetta continued, the acquisition should take little time.

“Absolutely correct,” Tran said.



Commissioner Carolyn Mason. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“It should be 30 days,” Barbetta told him.

Staff will try to expedite that process, Tran responded, adding that staff had talked with its consultant about speeding up the design and right of way acquisition “so that we can put the project under construction as soon as possible.”

Commissioner Christine Robinson suggested noting a season for the right of way acquisition would be a better indicator of the time involved, as in “fall of this year,” adding, “It’ll probably make the timeline a little more understandable.”

Then Mason passed the gavel to Vice Chairman Charles Hines so she could make the motion to approve the contract with Kimley-Horn. Robinson seconded it. 

The Sarasota News Leader

No-Nonsense Reporting



ANOTHER EMBARRASSMENT

Only a few of the light strands are working in Five Points Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT MEMBERS DEBATE THE FUTURE OF LIGHTS AFTER NUMEROUS PROBLEMS IN FIVE POINTS PARK

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Five Points Park is high ground in Sarasota. Perhaps before the white men came, it was sacred ground — possibly a burial or flensing site. But in the early 21st century, it seemed a great hex began to emanate from the park.

It devoured artwork used to decorate the park. It devoured the benches used to rest the tired. It devoured the sleep of residents who live in towers nearby. It even devoured the lights in the trees.

Two years ago, as one of the earliest projects of the Downtown Improvement District (DID), color-changing lights were installed in the trees of Five Points Park. “When we started, we had five

companies and we were excited about it and said, ‘Let’s go all-out,’” said district Operations Manager John Moran during the regular DID meeting on Tuesday, April 16.

“The system is costing a lot more than expected while under warranty, and a lot more when it comes off warranty,” he added. “At an annualized rate, you could be looking at \$35,000 to \$40,000 annual maintenance for those light strands.”

Right now, three strands are working. The other 28 are dead. “In the latest report of failure, 28 strands failed due to tree growth or rodents,” said Moran. “Our three-year warranty ends in less than a year,” he told the district members.

“People are going to say we blew \$90,000.”

Ernie Ritz
Chairman
Downtown Improvement District

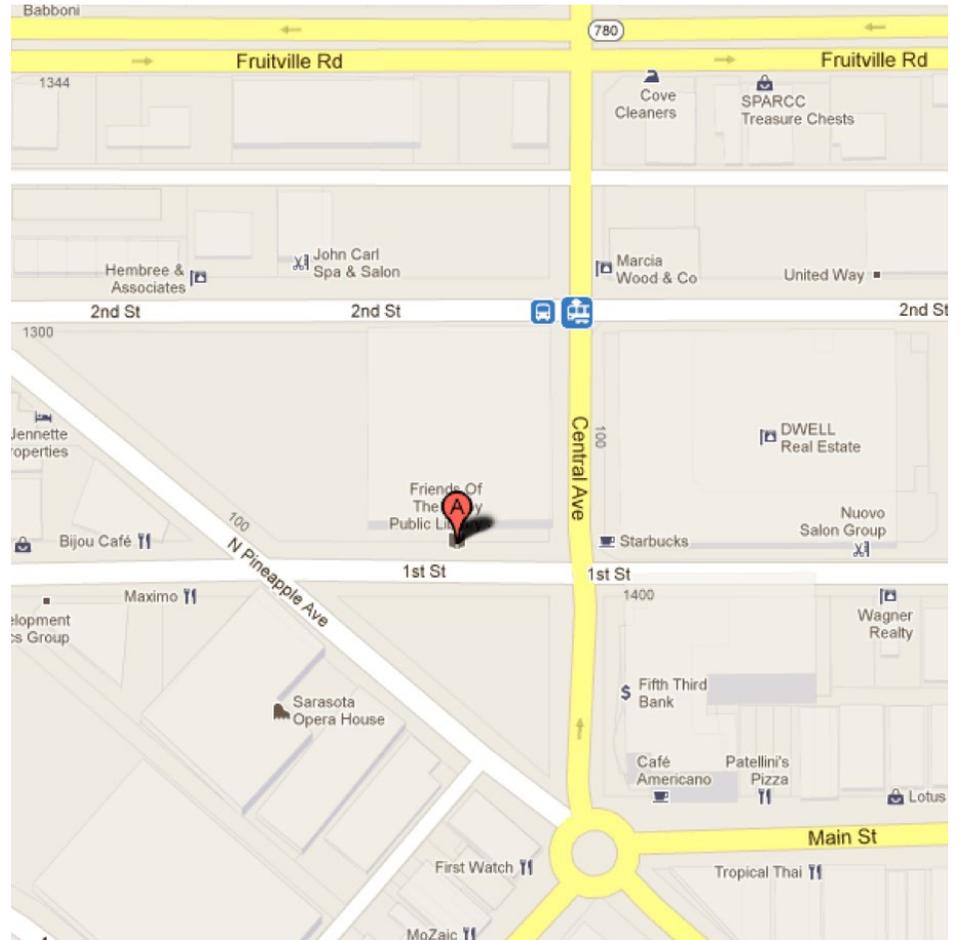


The lights cost \$81,000 to install, but the warranty does not include issues such as tree growth, vandalism or acts of God (which includes His lowly creatures such as squirrels and rats). The district has already spent \$18,000 in repairs. Moran contacted three other lighting firms. "They said it wasn't for them," he reported.

"People are going to say we blew \$90,000," said district Chairman Ernie Ritz. "Should we protect ourselves by taking them down and cutting our losses?"

Those "losses" include one outstanding invoice to be paid for \$8,203 for repairs not covered by warranty and three others at \$400 each for monthly service. "That's more than \$10,000," said Ritz. "Should we invite them to the next meeting and cut the cord right now?" he asked, referring to Synergy Lighting Supply of Bradenton, which installed the lights.

Last November the district approved a \$400 per month contract to keep the lights working. It declined to pay the latest bills until it hears from Synergy, extending the reach of the hex all the way to Bradenton. 



A map shows the area of Five Points Park bordered by First Street, Central Avenue and North Pineapple Avenue in downtown Sarasota. Image courtesy Google Maps

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(From left) Sarasota County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Manatee County Commission Chairman Larry Bustle present a proclamation on April 16 to the International Rowing Federation (FISA) team visiting the area: Matt Smith, the executive director of FISA; Svetla Otzeto-va, the events director and a world champion rower; and Andy Couper, the sports marketing specialist. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ROWING APPRECIATION DAY PROCLAIMED BY COUNTIES

At the opening of a joint meeting of the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions, the respective chairmen — Carolyn Mason and Larry Bustle — proclaimed April 16 Rowing Appreciation Day.

The two elected officials addressed a team from the International Federation of Rowing (FISA), which visited the area this week to inspect facilities at Fort Hamer Park near Parrish, Bay Preserve at Osprey and Nathan Benderson Park in conjunction with the counties' bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships.

Reading first from the proclamation, Mason noted the two counties had partnered to make the region “a worldwide competitive rowing

destination,” with their efforts focused on seeing Benderson Park — off University Parkway — become “the premier aquatic facility in the world.”

She added to the FISA group, “We want to thank you for coming and gracing our community with your presence ... and please don't be strangers,” drawing laughter from the packed audience in the Think Tank in the county's Administration Center in Sarasota.

While the counties had partnered on many projects in the past, Bustle continued, “This one tops the scale [in] importance ... and you folks hold the secret to that.”

Matt Smith, the executive director of FISA, drew more laughter when he responded, “We

didn't know that [this was Rowing Appreciation Day] when we booked the flights."

He pointed out that 2017 will mark the 55th year of the World Rowing Championships. FISA, he added, is the oldest international sports federation in the world.

His team will report its findings from the inspection visit at a meeting of the FISA Council on July 14 in Lucerne, Switzerland, Smith added. The bid will be announced on Sept. 2 in South Korea.

In late February, the Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Association (SANCA), on behalf of Benderson Park, submitted its preliminary bid for the 2017 event. The final bid is due in May, along with a fee of \$26,000, according to material supplied earlier this year to both county commissions. SANCA has estimated that holding the World Rowing Championships would have an economic impact on the region of about \$24.6 million.

Rachel Brown Hackney

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE COMES OUT IN FAVOR OF 2050 OVERHAUL

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce has come out in favor of overhauling the county's Sarasota 2050 plan, and the organization's president and CEO will be on hand to defend that position at a forum held next Tuesday evening, April 23.

Chamber board Chairman Nick Gladding wrote to county staff and commissioners on April 2 that the Chamber's board had voted unanimously to encourage the commission to "reopen" the 2050 plan, arguing that "no new construction has begun" under the plan, that "jobs have gone elsewhere" as a result and that, bottom line, "times have changed." Gladding added that revamping 2050 is one of the Chamber's "key priorities."

Those issues will all come up at next week's debate, which will feature Control Growth Now President Dan Lobeck squaring off against Chamber President and CEO Steve Queior. Lobeck has been one of the most outspoken critics of the County Commission's plan to reevaluate 2050, the detailed land-use plan created a decade ago to encourage en-

vironmentally friendly, village-style development east of Interstate 75.

The Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) has already come out swinging at the Chamber's position, arguing that 2050 projects are indeed under way and that one of the recession's important lessons is that "overdevelopment can damage a community."

"There is a counter-offer by the [Public Interest Coalition] that states if the County reopens 2050, they should consider more, not fewer, protections of the environment and neighborhoods," CONA President Lourdes Ramirez wrote in a release this week.

"In the end, the 'winners' will probably be just the print shops and newspapers with all of the advertising dollars that will be spent by opposing groups," Ramirez concluded. Let's hope by "newspapers" she means digital weeklies.

The Sarasota 2050 forum will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 23, at the Waldemere Fire Station, 2070 Waldemere St., Sarasota.

Cooper Levey-Baker

LUNCHEON TO EQUIP FAITH-BASED GROUPS FOR HURRICANE SEASON

A luncheon meeting designed to equip faith-based organizations for the upcoming hurricane season will take place on Wednesday, April 24, from 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Sarasota County Administration Center in the Emergency Operations Command Center on the sixth floor, the county has announced.

The Administration Center is located at 1660 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota. There is no charge for the event; registration will begin at 11:30 a.m., a news release notes.

“A group of local experts will present the most current strategies for emergency preparedness to help ensure that churches, synagogues and other faith-based organizations have an effective response for their communities,” the release adds.

Sarasota County Emergency Management Chief Ed McCrane will provide an overview of

his department along with “a glimpse into this coming hurricane season,” which officially begins on June 1, the release notes. Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino will discuss security and community safety; the Rev. Marion R. Sortore of Charlotte Harbor Trinity United Methodist Church will speak about the importance of identifying roles of volunteers, based on her experiences during a flood event that impacted her church community; and Mindi Rohan of Volunteer Community Connections and Daniel Compana of Face Ministries will discuss how people in the community can get involved, the release notes.

Volunteer Community Connections is the lead organizer of this event.

The Sarasota Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) is a network of groups working together “to promote the efficient,



Sarasota County Emergency Management Chief Ed McCrane (left) addresses the County Commission about Tropical Storm Isaac in August 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel

streamlined service delivery and coordination throughout the four phases of disaster: preparation, response, recovery and mitigation,” the release says. “The Sarasota COAD continually prepares for any type of hazard response,” which may include pandemics, terrorism, natural disasters and mass casualties, the release points out.

The COAD was created after Sarasota County participated in the response and recovery effort following Hurricane Charley, it notes. “The COAD member organizations engage community leaders in discussions to document the lessons learned,” it says. “They also look for ways to foster partnerships and

streamline response and recovery processes to support Sarasota County Emergency Management if — and when — a weather-related or other type of disaster hits Sarasota County.”

To register for the April 24 meeting or for more information about disaster volunteer needs, call Volunteer Community Connections at 953-5965 or email info@vccflorida.org by Monday, April 21.

For more information about the Sarasota COAD, visit the organization’s website at www.sarasotacoad.org.

TRAIL SAFETY DAY TO BE HELD AT OSPREY JUNCTION TRAILHEAD

Sarasota County Parks and Recreation and the Friends of The Legacy Trail will host an open house celebration and Trail Safety Day from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, April 20, at the new Osprey Junction Trailhead, 939 East Bay St., Osprey, the county has announced.

Osprey Junction Trailhead is at the east end of Bay Street at The Legacy Trail. Sarasota County purchased the 10-acre property in late 2008 with funds from the Neighborhood Parkland Acquisition Program, a county news release says. The new park is one of seven trailheads for The Legacy Trail.

The dog-friendly neighborhood park provides picnicking opportunities and parking for access to The Legacy Trail, the release adds. The park hours will be 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. from April through October and 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. November through March.

“Sarasota County Parks and Recreation, the Friends of The Legacy Trail and the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office are working together to educate the public about safe and courteous use of nonmotorized, multiuse trails,” the release notes. Safety displays and educational materials will be available at the open house, it says.

Free drawstring backpacks and bicycle bells will be given out — while supplies last — to those people who arrive by bicycle or on foot and are willing to sign a pledge to follow safety and courtesy guidelines, the release notes. Free bicycle helmets for children also will be provided.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 (TTY: 711) or visit the Sarasota County website at www.sc.gov.net.

TRIBUTE PLANNED APRIL 19 FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

The Sarasota County Victim Advisory Council will host its annual Victim Tribute on Friday, April 19, at the Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) Conference Center, 4748 Beneva Road, Sarasota, at 6:30 p.m., the organization has announced.

This year's theme, *New Challenges. New Solutions*, "celebrates the spirit that advances the progress of crime victims' rights in this community and across the country," a news release says. The tribute will also launch Na-

tional Crime Victims' Rights Week, which is April 21-27.

The public is invited to attend the vigil and learn more about available community resources, the release says. The keynote speaker will be Mandy O'Malley of the Child Protection Center.

The council includes representatives from the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, Sarasota Police Department, State Attorney's Office, Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS TO HOST STUDENT-PARENT INFORMATION NIGHTS

Sarasota, Suncoast Polytechnical and North Port high schools will host Student-Parent Information Nights (SPIN) in April and May, the school district has announced.

Suncoast Polytechnical High School will host SPIN Night from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 25, in the school's cafeteria, a news release says.

A technology magnet high school whose students come from throughout the county, SPHS features a college-preparatory curriculum integrated within an economics and business core, the release notes. Twenty-first century workplace skills are taught and assessed in all classes. Instruction for every student includes one-to-one computer access, ePortfolios, alternative assessments and business and industry involvement, the release adds.

More information about SPIN Night is available by calling Suncoast Polytechnical High at 921-3981 or by visiting www.SarasotaCounty-Schools.net/suncoastpolytechnical.



Sarasota High School will host Student-Parent Information Night on April 30. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Suncoast Polytechnical High is located at 4650 Beneva Road, Sarasota.

Sarasota High School will host SPIN Night from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 30, in the auditorium and east cafeteria. The event will include information about courses and programs, including the Advanced International Certificate of Education, or AICE, and the Math, Science and Technology Institute (MaST), the release points out.

More information is available by calling Sarasota High at 955-0181 or by visiting the SHS website at www.SarasotaCountySchools.net/schools/sarasotahigh.

Sarasota High is located at 1000 S. School Ave., Sarasota.

North Port High School will host SPIN night from 6 to 7:30 p.m., Thursday, May 2. The event will begin with a presentation in the Performing Arts Center about graduation requirements, courses and programs, including the Advanced International Certificate of Ed-

ucation, or AICE — new to NPHS in 2013-14, the release notes.

Following the presentation, parents are encouraged to visit information stations in the courtyard to learn about athletics, clubs, departments and activities.

More information is available by calling North Port High at 423-8558 or by visiting the NPHS website at www.SarasotaCountySchools.net/schools/northporthigh.

North Port High is located at 6400 W. Price Blvd., North Port.

SARASOTA COUNTY TO HOST 2014 NATIONAL BIG IDEAS CONFERENCE

In Atlanta on April 13, the [Alliance for Innovation](#) announced it had selected Sarasota County to host the 2014 National Big Ideas Conference, County Administrator Randall Reid informed the County Commission this week.

The event probably will be held in October or November, Reid added in an email.

This is an invitation-only event for “thought leaders” from the public and private sectors, as well as nonprofit organizations, who can have an impact on communities, he added. “A theme based upon community assets and na-

tional issues will be developed to create the assembly of guests and insure provocative and insightful dialogue.”

The 2013 conference is being held in West Hollywood in November, he noted.

According to its website, the Alliance for Innovation “works to transform local government and advance community excellence through the discovery and application of leading ideas and practices.”

Rachel Brown Hackney

COUNTY TO CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY WITH EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

Sarasota County and the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension (UF/IFAS) will celebrate Arbor Day 2013 with two educational events, the county has announced.

Pruning for Tree Health will be held for homeowners from 10 to 11 a.m. on Saturday, April 27, and a *Tree School*, focusing on best practices and proper tree care for commercial

audiences, will be held from 8 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, April 30, according to a county news release. (Continuing education units will be available: ISA, FNGLA). Both classes will be held at the UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County offices at Twin Lakes Park, 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota.

“Trees are an important part of our environment and improve our quality of life here in

Sarasota County,” said County Commissioner Christine Robinson in the release. “This is a day to recognize the importance of trees and to learn about how we as citizens can come together and beautify our community.”

“In the spirit of Arbor Day, these educational programs will extend beyond simply planting trees to teaching people how to care for trees after planting to maximize their health, life span and impact on the environment,” the release points out. “Properly managed tree canopies provide shade and wildlife habitat and help reduce stormwater runoff,” it notes. “In addition, trees significantly increase the value of homes and properties.”

The homeowner program will focus on proper pruning techniques to maintain healthy, well-structured trees, the release says. The program for commercial audiences will cover pruning, planting and establishment; selection of tree species; and disease and pest management.

For registration, visit sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu, or call 861-5000.

For more information about planting and caring for trees, visit UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County at sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu or Florida Forest Service at www.floridaforestservice.com.

For more information on Arbor Day celebrations, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000.



Sarasota prides itself on its Canopy Roads. Photo by Rachel Hackney

DISTRICT ORIENTATION SESSION SET FOR CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICANTS

The Sarasota County School District will host an informational meeting and orientation session on April 24 for anyone interested in opening a new charter school in the 2014-2015 school year, the district has announced.

The session will be held from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 24, at the district's administrative offices, 1980 Landings Blvd. (brown awning building), rooms A and B. "Attendance is recommended for all potential charter school applicants," a news release says. "Registration for the session is encouraged."

School district representatives will present information on charter school legislation, application procedures, review and approval processes and timelines, the release notes. After the presentation, staff will answer questions from the applicants and arrange for technical assistance.

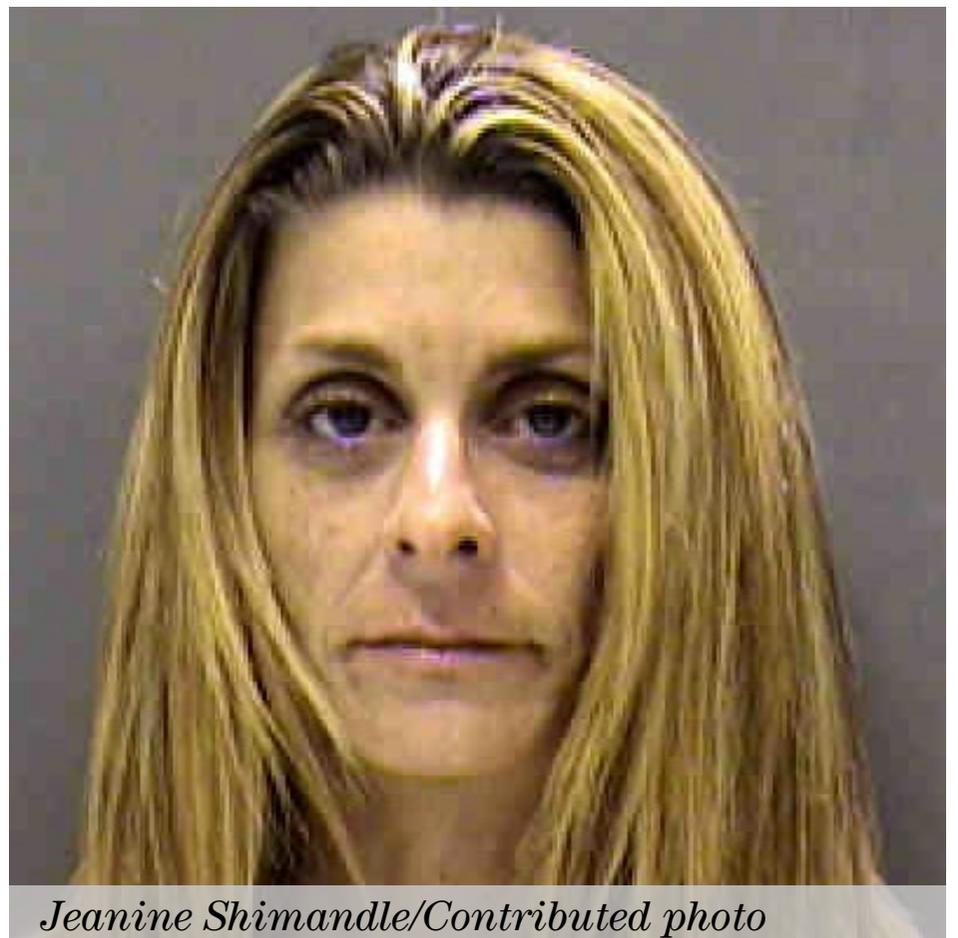
Proposals for new charter schools may be made by individuals or groups, teachers, parents, municipalities or legal entities organized under the laws of the state of Florida, the release points out. As the sponsor of all charter schools in the district, the School Board of Sarasota County monitors and reviews each charter school's compliance with Florida Department of Education requirements and the achievement of student performance goals established in the charter school contract.

Applications for new charter schools for the 2014-2015 school year will be accepted until 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 1, the release adds. Application submission requirements are posted at www.tinyurl.com/7663sdr. The applications may be submitted in person or by mail to Charter Schools Supervisor Katrina Ward, 1960 Landings Blvd., Sarasota, 34231. Anyone with questions may call 927-9000, ext. 32171.

WOMAN ARRESTED FOR HAVING SEX IN FRONT OF TEENS

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office arrested a 42-year-old woman this week who witnesses say had sex with two teens over spring break while others watched.

Special Victims Unit detectives arrested Jeanine Shimandle of 6406 First Avenue W., Bradenton, after hearing reports she had sexual relations with 13- and 17-year-old boys on March 11 at a Sarasota home where she was house-sitting, according to the Sheriff's Office. Another male and two female teenagers who were also there listened to and, at times, watched the sex acts take place, the report says.



Jeanine Shimandle/Contributed photo

One time during the evening, the report says, “one of the boys ... came out of the bedroom without a shirt on and sat down on the couch. A little while later both [Shimandle] (wearing a towel) and [another boy] came out of the room and went outside to have cigarettes.”

The report says one teen told an investigating officer that Shimandle also stopped at a shop that sells alcohol around 9:45 p.m. “and bought two bottles of Vodka, one flavored ‘Cookie Dough’ and the other flavored ‘Cake.’”

As of April 15, Shimandle had been charged with four counts of Lewd and Lascivious Ex-

hibition and two counts of Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor, but the investigation was continuing, the report notes; additional charges were pending.

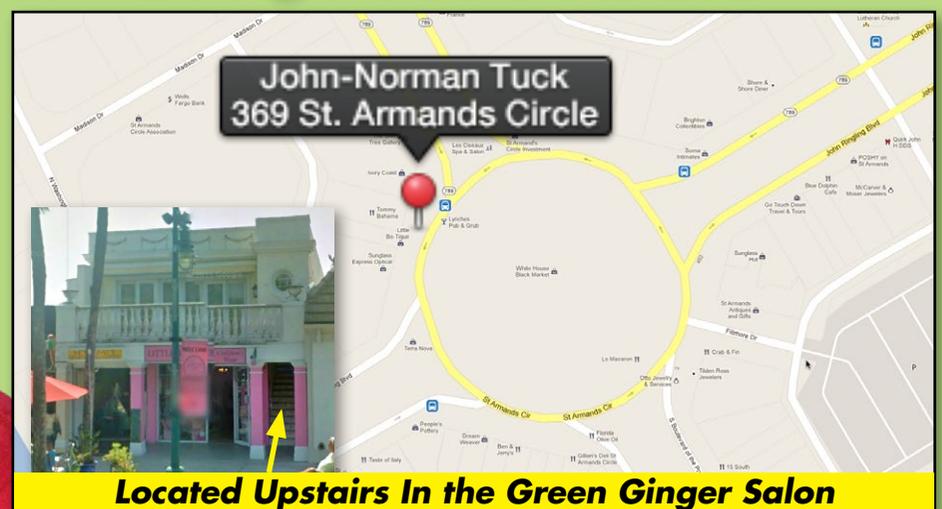
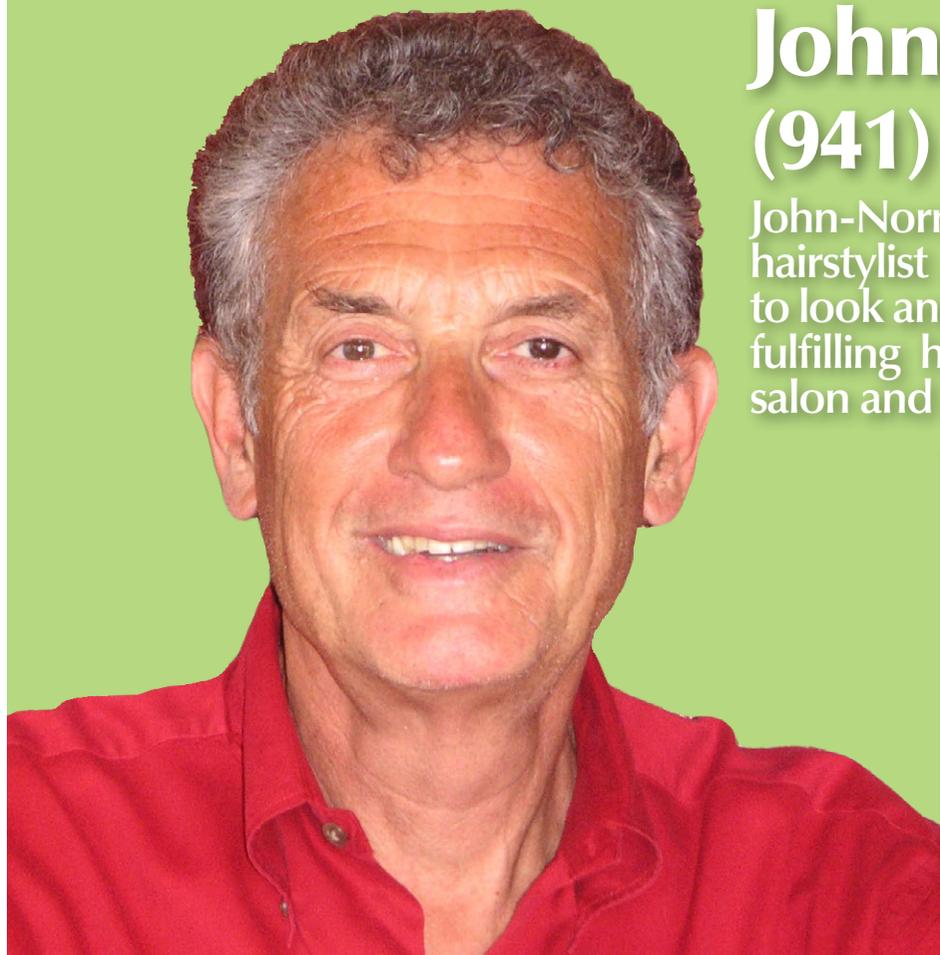
Anyone with more information is encouraged to call Criminal Investigations at 861-4900 or leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477), going online at www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com or sending a text message by texting TIP109 plus a message to CRIMES (274637). 

“Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than polish.” — *Anne Bradstreet, poet*

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OPINION



THE UNITED STATES OF REVULSION

EDITORIAL

Nothing demonstrates the contentious nature of the national political discourse quite like the lull that follows a national tragedy. Suddenly, all of the invidious backbiting is forgotten, if only for a while, as the nation comes together to mourn the dead, care about the injured and survivors, and search for meaning on occasions devoid of meaning. For a moment, the country truly is the United States, even if it is the United States of Revulsion.

Whether it is a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina or Superstorm Sandy, an act of terror such as visited upon the country on 9/11, or the actions of

a madman, such as the killers in Aurora, CO, or Newtown, CT, the nation finds its soul in such moments of despair. The people's deep wellspring of kinship and caritas is tapped, as unity trumps division and compassion replaces enmity.

So it is that we find ourselves yet again in the midst of tragedy. Two bombs were detonated on April 15 near the conclusion of the legendary Boston Marathon, killing at least three persons, wounding scores of others and leaving

millions of Americans once again to ponder, "Why?"

Yet even in the midst of the mayhem and gore, our spirits were lifted by selfless acts

“*The blissful innocence of never contemplating an attack is the precious thing first stolen from us in the aftermath of a massacre.*”

OPINION

of heroism, as spectators and first responders immediately set about caring for the victims, disregarding their own peril; as runners who had completed the course reportedly continued running to the hospital to give blood; or as dozens of Bostonians opened their homes to race participants needing meals or a place to spend the night.

For those of us viewing photographs and videos of the attack and its aftermath, images of this courageous corps provide an enduring affirmation of, as Abraham Lincoln termed it, “the better angels of our nature.”

Our collective awe at those on the scene who risked their lives to help the victims, and our sympathy for the victims and their families, does not blunt the incipient rage at yet another affront to a freedom all hold dear — freedom from fear.

In every earlier example of an attack on innocent civilians, whether by a lone perpetrator or a malevolent organization, we all have suffered a loss of our sense of security. The blissful innocence of never contemplating an attack is the precious thing first stolen from us in the aftermath of a massacre. It is tragically the bell that can never be un-rung in the national psyche.

To salve our anxiety and sorrow, we look to the exposing of those responsible for the attacks, and the reasons for it. In the identification of the killers, and their eventual punishment for the crime, we regain a small sense of control over the uncontrollable. We console

ourselves with the steadfast belief that certain justice might act as a deterrent in the future.

Sometimes that retribution is swift, as in the quick apprehension and punishment of the Oklahoma City bombers. Sometimes it comes after years of effort, as in the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan almost 10 years after the destruction of the World Trade Centers and the attack on the Pentagon. With the villains brought to account, the inevitability of retribution provides us with a sense of closure for events that we will never forget.

Before the smoke cleared on Monday, members of the law enforcement community already were launching an investigation into what happened and who was responsible. In the hours that followed, the scope of that investigation widened to include officials at the local, state and federal level. The combined might of that investigative effort will provide us all with explanations of the who, how and why, even if the answers do not come quickly.

The tragedy that likely will become known as the Boston Marathon Bombing has been etched in the national consciousness, its impact a permanent part of how we think of ourselves and the world around us. But in the courage of those who responded heroically in the first moments, in the stoicism of the survivors and victims’ families and in the dedication and zeal of those who seek the identification and punishment of the offenders, we find the greatest measure of ourselves. And we find hope. 

OPINION

FORMER MARATHONER REFLECTS ON THE BOSTON BOMBINGS

By Norman Schimmel

Contributing Writer

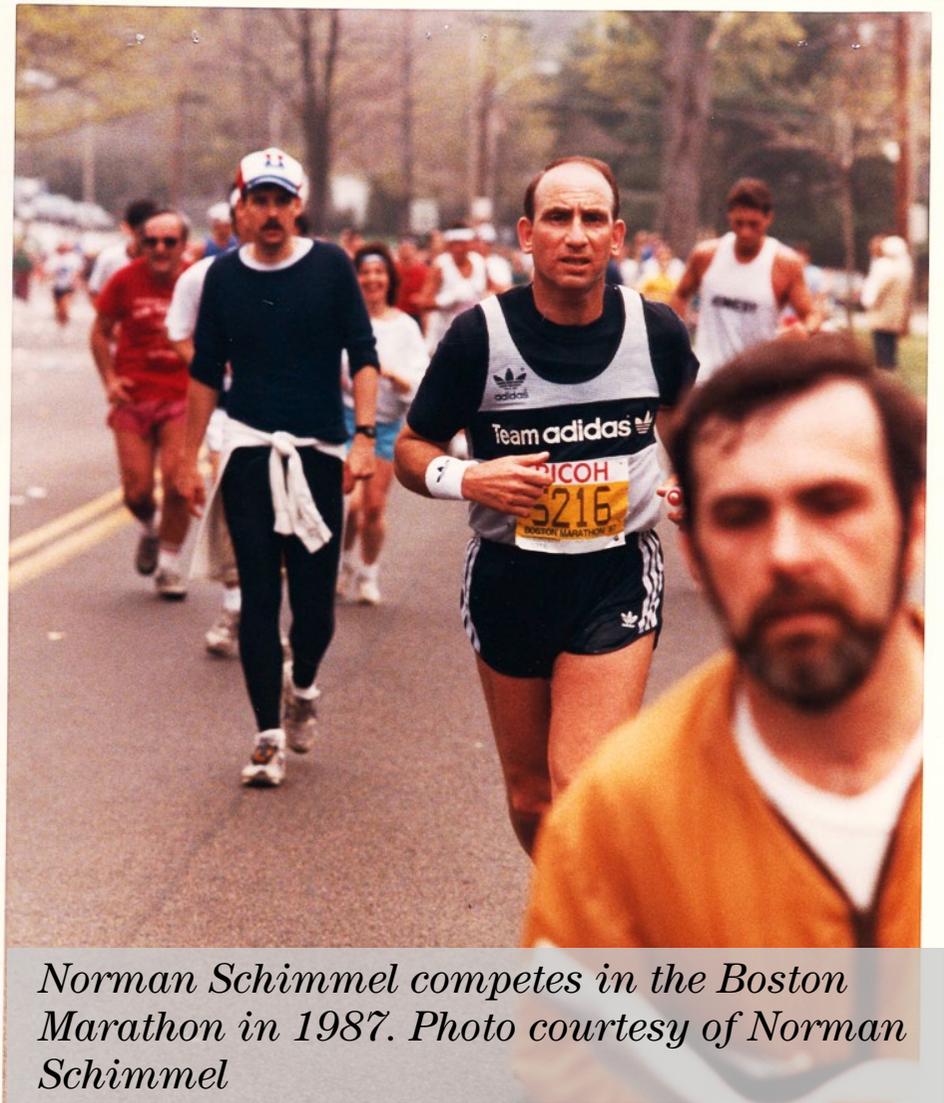
COMMENTARY

Newspaper and television analysts have offered their insights into the horror that rose out of the 2013 Boston Marathon. As a distance runner and former Manhattan resident who lived through 9/11, I truly understand how devastating terrorist activities are to a community, state and country.

The timing of the Patriots Day blasts in Boston has been fully explained: If you want to make a statement to America, you choose a target or time that has historical merit.

For marathoners, it was especially devastating.

Many new runners are very satisfied with a morning outing or work on a treadmill. Others choose to become road racers, regardless of the age when they start. Running is the only sport I know in which professionals and amateurs are on the field at the same time. You see world-class runners turning in five-minute miles and winning races and prizes. This is their living. Following them — occasionally at times twice theirs or even higher — are the amateur runners. Everyone who enters a race wins when he or she finishes. It is that type of



Norman Schimmel competes in the Boston Marathon in 1987. Photo courtesy of Norman Schimmel

BOSTON MARATHON
April 20, 1897

comradeship and enjoyment of sport — and maybe a cold beer afterwards — that makes competing so worthwhile and almost an addiction.

The rule generally is if you can run 6.2 miles (a 10K race), you have the capability to train and run a marathon. Many who start running claim they have no such goal — only to catch the fever and start striving for the marathon distance. There are even a few who go beyond

OPINION

that, the ones called ultra marathoners or endurance athletes.

All marathons present the lure of glorious completion. Only one necessitates a runner qualify for it: the Boston Marathon. It is probably the dream of almost every marathoner to “run Boston.” Qualifying times are weighted by age, so people train to achieve their necessary goal. Most never reach it.

Patriots weekend in Boston is very festive. Family and friends can come to the Expo, where you purchase Boston Marathon clothing and mementos. The “[Carbo Up](#),” held prior to the race, is never to be forgotten. It is usually held near the site of the Boston Tea Party.

On the day of the marathon, runners are assigned starting positions according to their speed, with the pros in the front “pigpen” in Hopkinton.

Understanding how that positioning works makes it plain that the terrorists’ action was not designed to kill runners. It was planned to kill spectators. The winning runners typically finish in 2:10 to 2:25. Most of the runners arrive at the finish line around 4 hours or later. That means the greatest number of spectators will be on the streets, all around the finish line and along the route closest to it, later in the race. On Monday, these spectators and family members were the targets.

There are runners who will never qualify for the most treasured road race in the world but still want to feel as though they are participating. They can contribute to the Dana Farber Cancer Fund and get a running number. They also are near the finish line at about the same time — with their families awaiting them. Their loved ones represented even more targets on Monday.

On April 15, the day all marathon people dream of turned into a nightmare.

In New York after 9/11, the running community staged a “United We Stand” series of races. It included an event that passed Ground Zero in the third mile, just three months after the tragedy. It is the only road race I ever ran in which everyone stopped running at that point, said a prayer, then continued the race.

The American spirit and our way of life — our love of freedom — will never be broken by anyone. Next year in Boston, that statement will be made loud and clear, just as it was in New York in 2001.

Editor’s note: Norman Schimmel of Sarasota ran 1,000 road races between 1982 and 2002, including 40 half marathons and 21 marathons. 

OPINION

WALMART MAY NEVER BUILD THERE, BUT OTHER POSSIBILITIES EXIST FOR THE RINGLING SHOPPING CENTER SITE



By Waldo Proffitt
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

There is an Old Saying: “All politics is local.” Like most Old Sayings, this one is not entirely true. It would be more accurate to say that much politics is local.

But in a respectful gesture to Old Sayings, I will begin my first submission to *The Sarasota News Leader* with a column about an episode in local politics — the dispute over the future of the about-to-be-defunct Ringling Shopping Center.

You may recall that Walmart wanted to put a new store in the old center and went before the Sarasota City Commission to seek final approval for its plan. Residents living close to the proposed Walmart rose up in vehement and vocal protest.

This brought about a classic situation — very familiar to members of elected bodies at every level of government — where you find a relatively small group of highly motivated people (the neighbors) on one side and a large group of people (most city residents) on the other

side but not really excited about the issue and not likely to remember it at the next election.

The commission voted not to allow the Walmart.

I would like to be able to say, “That’s that.” But it isn’t. The Ringling center is a very valuable piece of property, well located, lending itself to use by many kinds of profit-making enterprises, some of which might be acceptable to the neighbors and some of which might not, but many of which might be accomplished with no need for commission approval of any zoning changes.

Sooner or later, something could be built that would be less attractive to the neighbors than a Walmart.

I can see one simple way to avert that outcome: for the city or county to acquire the property. That is not a bad idea in any case. The same factors that make it attractive for private users make it attractive for public use, plus the added consideration that it is adjacent to the county courthouse.

OPINION

The county is always looking for more space. Indeed, as I write this, Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight is looking for a spot to house more of his personnel in one place.

Or, if that cannot be worked out, the Ringling center could be converted into a public park. You could put in benches, swings, wading pools and lots of flowers and make it a place for children to play and office workers to come for lunch.

For such uses and others you might come up with, I would be willing to give up the tax revenue the Ringling center pays under private ownership.

Waldo Proffitt was managing editor or editor of the Sarasota Herald-Tribune from 1961 to 1998, and he wrote a weekly column for the paper for 15 years after his retirement. He was born in Texas, grew up in Oklahoma, graduated from Harvard College and worked for newspapers in Maine, North Carolina, and Ohio before moving to Sarasota.

He served in the Army Air Force in Italy during World War II and was recalled to active duty during the Korean War, when he worked in the Pentagon in the office of the Chief Scientist of the Air Force.

He was married to the late Anne Proffitt for 47 years. He has five children, two of whom, Geoffrey and Scott, live in Sarasota. 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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Leisure

A BIG SPLASH
ON THE EVE OF INVASION: PART III

Inside



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SARASOTA MAGAZINE





A BIG SPLASH

*The party following the 2013 Sarasota Film Festival's opening night screening of *Blackfish* took place on the ground floor of the Van Wezel on April 5. All photos by Arielle Scherr*

BLACKFISH MAKES WAVES AT THE 2013 SARASOTA FILM FESTIVAL'S OPENING NIGHT

By Tyler Whitson
Staff Writer

The forces behind the 15th annual Sarasota Film Festival (SFF) demonstrated to audiences this year that contemporary filmmakers are not afraid to intellectually stimulate and challenge viewers, despite what seems to have become the norm in Hollywood.

The SFF staff and Board of Directors worked to drive the point home from the very start of the program — which kicked off on April 5 — by choosing the provocative documentary *Blackfish* as the opening night film.

In a short interview with *The Sarasota News Leader* a few minutes before *Blackfish* was

screened at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota, SFF Director Tom Hall expressed his excitement about the audience turnout before explaining he trusted the attendees would appreciate the film. “It’s not a conventional choice, I think, for opening night,” he said. “When people see the movie, I think they’ll understand why we did it.”

BLACKFISH

Blackfish — which was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival — is an emotional film about orcas, or “killer whales,” cap-

tured in the wild by hired hunters and shipped to water-theme animal entertainment parks in North America and Europe. There, the mammals have been trained to perform tricks. They also have been bred, sold and traded among parks.

The documentary combines professional and amateur footage and interviews with former SeaWorld trainers, marine biologists, theme park attendees and others to examine the tensions many believe have resulted from practices employed by some of the sea parks. Throughout the film, the clear assertion is that restricting the intelligent, emotionally developed orcas to artificial and cramped habitats with other somewhat arbitrarily selected whales deprives them of innate physical, psychological and social needs, causing them to become unusually aggressive to each other and to humans.

Although *Blackfish* documents numerous cases of orcas in theme parks harming or killing

their trainers, it focuses on the fatal attack by notorious orca Tilikum on experienced SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau in 2010. The film challenges SeaWorld's official account of the events leading to Brancheau's death, contending that Tilikum did not pull her into his tank by her ponytail — which she was supposed to have tied up in a bun — but that he dragged her into the pool by her arm.

Blackfish also dives into a six-month U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigation following Brancheau's death, which resulted in a May 2012 ruling by an administrative law judge that SeaWorld trainers must be separated from orcas by a protective physical barrier during performances.

Brancheau's death is not the only aspect of Tilikum's life noted in the film, however. *Blackfish* follows Tilikum from the time he was captured near Iceland in 1983 at two or three years of age to his current life in captivity at



Former SeaWorld trainers Jeff Ventre, Samantha Berg, John Jett and John Hargrove answer questions from Sarasota Film Festival Director Tom Hall and audience members on April 5.

SeaWorld Orlando, where he still performs occasionally, though the film contends he spends the majority of his time in isolation. The film also notes that, despite Tilikum's having been involved in the deaths of three people over the span of two decades, the whale's sperm has been used in the artificial insemination of numerous female orcas, resulting in the breeding of many offspring at SeaWorld.

Q&A

It was clear from the applause resounding through the crowded theater when the final credits began to roll that the audience was very impressed with the film.

After the house lights came up, Hall was joined on stage for a Q&A session by *Blackfish* Director Gabriela Cowperthwaite, Producer Manu-

el Oteyza and four former SeaWorld trainers prominently featured in the film: Jeff Ventre, Samantha Berg, John Jett and John Hargrove.

Hall proceeded to ask Cowperthwaite what inspired her to present the story of Tilikum and other captive orcas and how the process began. She explained that "in a past life" she occasionally brought her two young sons to SeaWorld San Diego, where she felt something was not quite right.

"I would look around me at the crowd and think to myself, 'How could a place that makes so many people laugh and so many people smile be really bad?'" Cowperthwaite said.

These feelings transformed into something more profound when news of Brancheau's death began to spread, Cowperthwaite add-



(From left) *Lay Me in the River* (short) Directors and Screenwriters Ashley Lynn Bonn and Allison Morton pose for a photo prior to the screening of *Blackfish* on April 5.

ed. “I started researching it, trying to understand what had happened there, and the more I peeled back the onion the more I found and the more shocked I became.”

Hall then asked the former SeaWorld trainers to explain how they became involved in the production. The first to answer, Ventre, offered a response that could have represented his entire group: “I think we’re kind of here by default, because most of the people that still work in the marine park industry were unwilling to come out and say anything.”

Berg said many current sea park employees who feel critical of the industry are unwilling or afraid to voice their opinions. “When you’re

in the animal entertainment industry, it’s very hard to get a job once you leave, if you say anything,” she pointed out.

She went on to admit that she was still nervous and hesitant when she finally voiced her opinions about six months after Brancheau’s death. “Even though I was 17 or 18 years out [of the industry], there was still part of me that felt like I was betraying my colleagues by talking.”

Jett, an outspoken critic of SeaWorld and other sea parks, said trainers have doubted the industry for decades. “This conversation actually began when Jeff [Ventre] and I worked together at Shamu Stadium 20 years ago,” he



Blackfish Director Gabriela Cowperthwaite.

told the audience. “Even then we were saying, ‘If the public ever really knows the truth, this whole thing is going to fall apart.’”

Hargrove, the most recent former SeaWorld trainer to come out against orca captivity, explained that SeaWorld’s official responses to the deaths of Brancheau and other trainers began to disenchant him with the theme park: “I always believed that SeaWorld would stand by me and protect me and support me for taking the amount of risk that I took at my job every single day.”

Hargrove went on to express disbelief about events that have taken place in the past four years, including Brancheau’s death and the

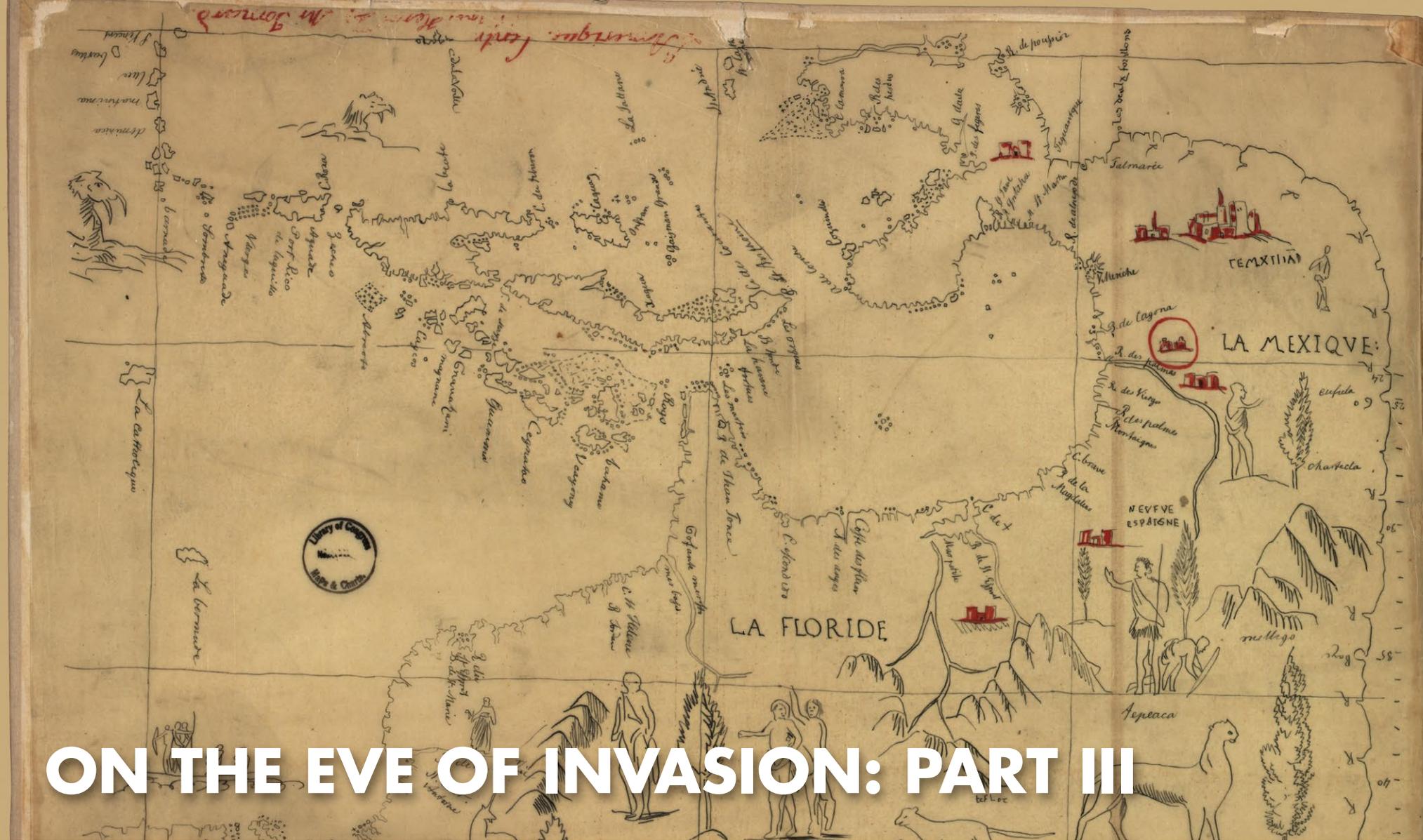
OSHA hearing. “It just showed me that they weren’t going to do that, that they were going to not protect me and blame me just like they’ve always blamed every one of us who have been in a major incident with one of the whales.”

MORE PROVOCATIVE FILMS

Blackfish, of course, was not the only provocative or challenging film that was shown at the SFF this year. Check in with the *News Leader* next week for more coverage of the festival, which will include details about films honored at the SFF’s closing night Filmmaker Tribute Awards on April 13. 



Maria the Korean Bride (documentary feature) Director, Producer, Screenwriter and star Maria Yoon prior to the screening of Blackfish on April 5.



ON THE EVE OF INVASION: PART III

This map is 'upside down' with north at the bottom. It is dated 1542, and it would have benefitted from the first three Spanish excursions into Florida. The details are surprising, considering Columbus' first voyage was only 50 years earlier. Image courtesy U.S. Library of Congress

THE MEN WHO 'OWNED' FLORIDA WERE DEFEATED BY IT

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

*Editor's note: In this third installment from City Editor Stan Zimmerman's forthcoming book, *Maritime History of Florida*, Ponce de León becomes the first — but not the last — unsuccessful conqueror of Florida. This year is the 500th anniversary of the first arrival of Europeans in Florida.*

After "discovering" Florida in 1513, Ponce de León went back to Spain, renewed his license as an Adelantado — a governor in a Spanish colony — in 1514 and came back to the New World the following year. His return to Florida, however, was delayed for seven years, to satisfy a royal command to pacify the fierce and cannibal Caribs, who were preying on

Spanish and indigenous peoples in the Caribbean.

His navigator, Anton de Alaminos, remained busy between the two voyages of Ponce de León. In 1517, he led the ships of Hernandez de Cordoba into San Carlos Bay near Sanibel for refuge during a storm. The ships were returning to Cuba after the discovery of the Yucatan peninsula.

Alaminos' most timely and economic feat of navigation came in 1519. After Hernan Cortés subdued and subjugated the Aztec Empire, he sent back what would be the first treasure fleet from the New World.

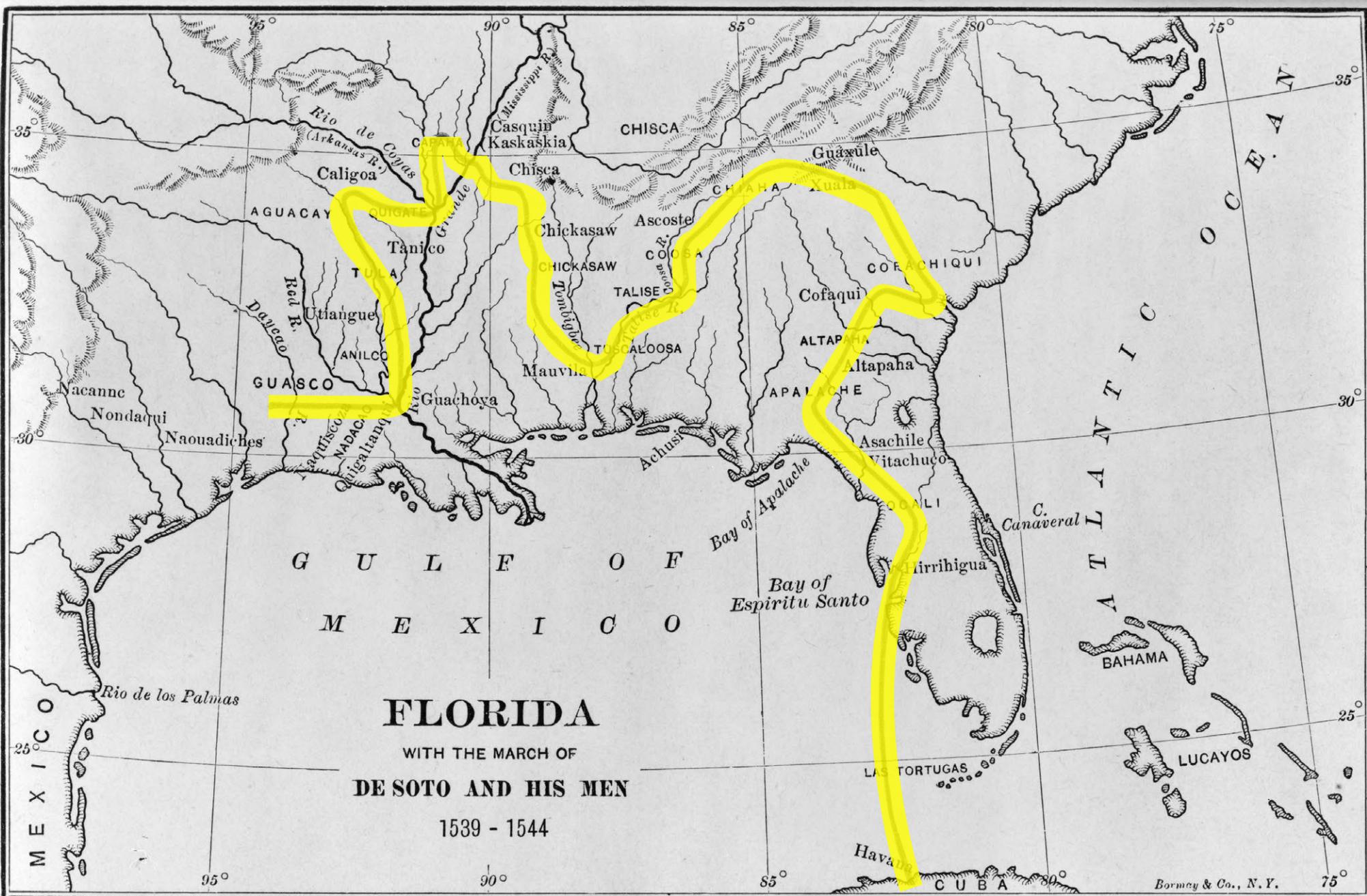
Cortez appointed Alaminos as the pilot. “Alaminos took the then unused and untried route north along the Florida coast to take advantage of the strong current he had experienced earlier on his voyage with Ponce de León. He then discovered that this current was not confined to Florida [waters] but continued for thousands of miles bending eastward and carried him in record time three-quarters of the way across the sea to Spain,” wrote Douglas Peck in *Ponce de Leon and the Discovery of Florida*.

By 1521, Ponce was an experienced leader, explorer and conquistador of both Puerto Rico

and the Caribbean Islands. On his second voyage to Florida, Ponce would attempt to establish a colony.

“He sailed from Puerto Rico on February 26, 1521 in two ships loaded with settlers and supporting gear necessary to establish a permanent Spanish town and fort on the shores of La Florida,” wrote Peck. The two-ship fleet carried “200 men, Catholic clergymen, seed for planting crops, 50 horses, and other livestock including cows, sheep and goats,” added Peck. Sanibel Island was the target.

Having sparred with the Calusa Indians on his first voyage, Ponce believed the island was de-



This is the ‘official’ route of DeSoto’s campaign through the southeastern United States. It remains a mystery why — after all the time and great expense preparing to found a colony in Florida — DeSoto marched away from a great harbor into the wilderness. Image courtesy U.S. Library of Congress

where between Tampa and Clearwater and then marched north into utter ruin.

The third man to try was Don Hernando de Soto, a soldier's soldier, a Knight Commander of the noble Order of Santiago. He won experience with intrigue, plunder and slaving while riding with Pizarro in the conquest of the Incan empire. When de Soto went back to Spain with riches, glory and fame at the age of 37, his king — Charles V, grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella — proclaimed De Soto the Adelantado of all the lands he could conquer. De Soto picked Florida as a starting point.

He landed in 1539 somewhere between Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. The officially proclaimed landing site is in Manatee County near the mouth of the Manatee River. He planned to colonize the area, but he succumbed to the yearning for gold and marched north for plunder.

As native guides led him through every swamp and bog and around every village, his 750 men helped spread the diseases that would eventually destroy the indigenous population and their societies. An adult male infected with measles becomes sterile, for example, and will produce no further children. The native Floridians had no defense against the host of diseases introduced and disseminated by DeSoto's march through Florida.

DeSoto eventually trekked off into Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee and died in Arkansas in 1541. Florida had expelled another Adelantado and claimed all but a handful of his followers. Astounded that the peninsula had consumed three well-prepared expeditions, Charles V banned further exploration of Florida.

CHANGE OF VENUE

A decade later, the new Spanish king, Philip II, called on Don Tristán de Luna y Arellano to establish a colony in the Florida Panhandle. He arrived in 1559 at the height of hurricane season, accompanied by 1,000 colonists and 500 soldiers.

To celebrate their safe arrival, Don Tristán called for celebrations and sports, with boat and horse racing along the beach. Supplies were left aboard 13 ships. On Aug. 20, a tropical storm whipped through Pensacola Bay and nine ships sank at anchor. Remaining supplies were quickly used up. Soldiers foraged for food, but the decimated indigenous population was too small to offer much help.

A relief fleet appeared on April 1, 1561 with supplies and a new governor. The Pensacola colony was abandoned. Philip II decided Florida was hopeless and — like his father, Charles V — banned any further Spanish exploration of the peninsula.

Only Florida would defeat and expel the Spanish invaders of the New World. Three of the four Adelantados — De León, De Soto and Narváez — were experienced conquistadors, with conquests under their belts. The Spanish plundered and enslaved the Aztec and Incan civilizations with single incursions (in Spanish, *entradas*). In the southwestern North America, native resistance was negligible. Across the Caribbean, resistance was crushed. Only Florida prevailed against the alien invasions, all four of them. 



I like to take my time.

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

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

You have a whole week.

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ASK OTUS

OTUS ON LEAVE TO PLAY HOST

Staff Reports

The Sarasota News Leader's resident wildlife expert, Otus Rufous, has found himself hosting relatives and friends who wanted to wait until *after* spring break was over to visit Siesta Key and other parts of Sarasota County.

All of us who have entertained houseguests know it is a time-consuming process.

Otus sends his apologies and says he will return to his writing responsibilities as soon as all of his guests have exhausted themselves — and him! — on vacation and flown back home. In the meantime Otus suggests exploring some of the past installments of *Ask Otus*.



HOW BIRDS DO IT ...



FLYING PENGUINS?



LEAPIN' LIZARDS



ZEBRA LONGWING BUTTERFLIES



RED TIDE

MR. SQUIRREL



The South Florida Museum is located in Bradenton. Photo by Ebaybe via Wikimedia Commons

SOUTH FLORIDA MUSEUM TO PRESENT OUTER SPACE SERIES

The South Florida Museum (SFM) will kick off a new *Film Fridays* series, *They Came From Outer Space*, on Friday, April 19, at 6 p.m. in the Bishop Planetarium Theater.

“Flying saucers, UFOs, aliens and creepy creatures abound throughout this survey of the history of space invaders on film,” a news release says. “Join in the fun as SFM explores how filmmakers have depicted the threat of little green men over the decades.”

All *Film Fridays* screenings will begin at 6 p.m. in the museum’s Bishop Planetarium The-

ater, an all-digital, multipurpose, domed facility incorporating unidirectional stadium-style seating, high-definition DVD projection and a digital 25,000 watt Dolby 5.1 surround sound system, the release adds. It is located at 201 10th Street W. in downtown Bradenton.

The film on April 19 will be *It Came From Outer Space*, released in 1953.

Among the upcoming features will be the 1953 version of *The War of the Worlds*; *It: The Terror From Beyond Space* and the 1986 film *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Film Fridays is a year-round South Florida Museum program showcasing films and documentaries that focus on varied cultural, social and scientific topics, the release notes.

All screenings take place in the Bishop Planetarium Theater.

Tickets to each film are \$5 per person for general admission, with discounted rates of \$3 per person available for museum members. Group rates are also offered for parties of 15 or more people.

The museum offers concessions, too, including beer, wine, soft drinks and snacks. Seating is limited, so reservations are strongly recommended, the release points out. Sweaters or jackets are suggested, as the theater may be cold, it adds.

For reservations and additional information about *They Came From Outer Space* and other *Film Fridays* offerings, call 746-4131 or visit www.southfloridamuseum.org.

WBTT BUYS THEATER, SECURING A HOME AT LAST

Julie Leach, chairwoman of the board of trustees, has announced that the Westcoast Black Theater Troupe (WBTT) has purchased the site where it has been performing for the past three years.

The site consists of two acres and two buildings, a news release says. The theater building has 15,250 square feet, and the Binz building offers an additional 11,632 square feet. "After 14 seasons on the move, WBTT has a permanent home located at 1646 10th Way [in Sarasota]," a news release says.

"In four short years, we have gone from living season to season and not knowing what tomorrow would bring," says founder and Artistic Director Nate Jacobs, "to having one place to call home and being able to own it. WBTT can now grow its roots among the giants in the Sarasota cultural community," he adds in the release.

WBTT uses only one-third of the theater building, the release notes. Plans are to use the Binz structure for set construction, rehearsals

and storage for costumes and scenery. "Eventually the combined space will also house educational program space and administrative offices," the release says.

"We have so many wonderful opportunities now that we own the buildings and know that our location is secure," says CEO Christine Jennings in the release. "We will announce a capital campaign in the fall to help with building improvements, education and endowment. Over time, we plan to enhance the WBTT theater experience by making improvements inside and out. There'll be lots to do and we'll need the continued help of our supporters, who have been and we hope will continue to be, such a big part of our story."

Jacobs founded the WBTT in December 1999. It is the only professional black theater company on Florida's West Coast.

For more information on WBTT, visit the website at www.wbtttroupe.org, follow it on Facebook or call 366-1505.

BOTANIST/ARTIST FEATURED AT ART UPTOWN ON EARTH DAY

Art Uptown, Sarasota's oldest, continuously operating fine art cooperative gallery, will host artist and botanist Karen J. Schunk in a special Earth Day Awareness exhibit on April 22 from 6 to 8 p.m., the gallery has announced.

Schunk's paintings will be featured in the gallery's front window during that week.

Schunk holds a master's degree in botany from Miami University in Oxford, OH, and she attended the Art Academy of Cincinnati, a news release notes. "Her expressive botanical paintings reflect her intense interest in both art and botanical conservation," it adds.

Schunk will display literature, photos and paintings that relate to local and global plant

conservation efforts with which she has been involved over the years, the release says. "She looks forward to discussing her work with attendees," it adds.

Her recent botanical images were inspired by her work with the plant collections at Sarasota's Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, the release continues. "Since moving to Sarasota in 2000, Karen has assisted with herbarium projects at Selby, as a staff member and longtime volunteer," it notes.

A Signature Member of the Ohio Watercolor Society and Cincinnati Art Club, Schunk's works are in corporate and private collections, the release says.



Karen Schunk's painting of a Florida Clamshell Orchid, which is on the Endangered Species list, will be part of her exhibit at Art Uptown gallery on April 22. Contributed photo

WBTT TO PRESENT A RAISIN IN THE SUN ON MERTZ STAGE

A staged reading of Lorraine Hansberry's American classic, *A Raisin in the Sun*, will be performed by members of the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe at 7 p.m. on Monday, April 22, in the Mertz Theatre at the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts in Sarasota.

"Since [the Asolo Repertory Theatre production of] *Clybourne Park* takes its cues from the discussions about race and real estate originally set forth in *A Raisin in the Sun*,

Asolo Rep is partnering with WBTT to offer audiences the rare opportunity to travel on the journey that unfolds over the course of these two remarkable plays," a news release notes.

Jim Weaver will direct this production, which was originally presented by WBTT in January and February 2012.

A Q&A session and a champagne toast with the cast will follow the reading, the release adds.

The Mertz Theatre is located at 5555 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.

Tickets are \$15 to \$20 for the reading, Q&A and champagne toast (or just \$5 if purchased together with a ticket for *Clybourne Park*). A \$35 ticket includes the reading and a pre-performance reception beginning at 6 p.m.

Tickets are available at the Asolo Rep box office; they can only be purchased in person or by phone at 351-8000, the release notes.



(From left) Will Little, Alice Gatling and Dkakeria Cunningham will present a staged reading of *A Raisin in the Sun* on April 22 at the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. Photo courtesy of Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

50 SHADES: THE MUSICAL COMING TO SARASOTA

With the feature film not due out until the summer of 2014, the legions of diehard *50 Shades of Grey* book series fans are chomping at the bit for their next installment of Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele, a news release says. “Enter, *50 Shades: The Musical* parody!” the release adds.

Appearing at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall on April 23, “this hilarious portrayal of a women’s book club which decides to take on the risqué book series is a laugh-out-loud romp through the group’s various interpretations of the book’s erotic love story,” the release notes. “The show comes complete with witty songs, fun dance sequences and a satir-

ical cast featuring a more ‘realistic’ embodiment of Christian and Anastasia,” the release adds. “A perfect ‘ladies night out’ or even ‘date night,’ the show does a wonderful job of making light of an uncomfortable topic and leaves the viewer aching from nonstop belly laughter,” the release says.

Like the book series, *50 Shades: The Musical* is not for those under the age of 18, but it does not cross boundaries that would make general audiences squirm, the release notes.

Tickets are priced from \$10 to \$40. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org.



Who needs the book? The musical version of *50 Shades of Grey* will hit the Van Wezel stage this month. Contributed photo

RAIN TO PERFORM THE MUSIC OF THE BEATLES ON APRIL 26

Widely regarded as the most significant contributing band to pop/rock music, “The Beatles touched millions of lives through their poetic lyrics and their incredible musicality,” a news release says.

At the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota on April 26, Experience The Beatles with Rain will take the audience “back to that glorious time when the British Invasion was in full swing, and The Beatles ruled the airwaves,” the release says. “Rain has mastered every song, movement and nuance that made The

Beatles into an international powerhouse,” the release adds.

At this throwback performance, you can expect to hear all-time favorites such as *I Want To Hold Your Hand*, *Hard Day’s Night* and *Hey Jude*, the release notes. “Additionally, you will be privileged to hear some of The Beatles’ more complex songs,” which were never heard outside a recording studio, it adds.

Tickets are priced from \$30 to \$65. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org.



Rain will pay tribute to the Beatles at the Van Wezel on April 26. Contributed photo

ARIEL QUARTET TO PERFORM FREE CONCERTS

The Perlman Music Program/Suncoast (PMP/Suncoast) has announced that the acclaimed Ariel Quartet will be in schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties May 1-7 as part of The Perlman Music Program/Suncoast's *Education Outreach Program*.

Now in its fourth year, the outreach program brings Perlman Music Program alumni into area schools as professional teaching artists for three weeks on an annual basis to present interactive performances and hands-on training for music students and their teachers, a news release notes. In May, the Ariel Quartet will visit Johnson Middle School, Southeast High School and Manatee School for the Arts in Manatee County; and McIntosh Middle School and Laurel Nokomis School in Sarasota County.

As part of PMP/Suncoast's *Emerging Artists Performance Series*, the Ariel Quartet will perform a free concert on May 4 at 7 p.m. at Venice Church of the Nazarene, 1535 E. Venice Ave., Venice, the release says. For early admission seating (with a \$5 surcharge), visit <http://www.perlmanmusicprogramsuncoast.org/Venue/12/Details/>.

The Ariel Quartet will also perform an interactive chamber music concert on May 6 from 7 to 8 p.m. at the Polo Grill & Bar, 10670 Boardwalk Loop, in Lakewood Ranch. This free performance, presented in collaboration with the Polo Grill & Bar, is sponsored by the Lakewood Ranch Rotary Club.

"This concert offers area audiences a unique opportunity to experience the Ariel Quartet's in-school interactive presentations," explains Elizabeth Power, executive director of PMP/



(From left) The Ariel Quartet comprises Alexandra Kazovsky, Gershon Gerchikov, Amit Even-Tov and Jan Grüning. Photo courtesy of the Ariel Quarter

Suncoast, in the release. "Audiences can listen to inspired chamber music in a non-traditional setting and, at the same time, learn what to listen for and what makes the musical selections special."

Power adds in the release that the performance will include an informal conversation about the music and the composers, offering opportunities for the audience to ask questions.

"A vital part of our mission is to create unique, non-traditional ways to bring classical music alive for audiences," says Power. "We break down the barriers between artist and audience so audiences see that classical music is a living creation happening now, not a museum piece from the past," Power points out.

The May 6 performance is free with seating on a first-come basis; doors will open at 6:30 p.m. A cash bar will be available. For more information about this event, visit www.PMPSuncoast.org or contact Power at 955-4942. 



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

19
APRIL

Toby Twining Music Artist Conversation

April 19, 3:30 p.m. [Mildred Sainer Pavilion, 5313 Bay Shore Road](#), New College of Florida, Sarasota — part of the New Music New College series. Free and open to the public; no reservations necessary. For more information, call 487-4888 or visit [newmusicnewcollege.org](#).

19+
APRIL

FST Improv presents April Fools

April 19, 20, 26 & 27, 8:30 p.m., John C. Court Cabaret, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$12; 366-9000 or [FloridaStudioTheatre.org](#).

19+
APRIL

Venus in Fur (for mature audiences)

Through April 28, 8 p.m. and some matinees; Historic Asolo Theater, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail. Tickets: \$25 to \$40; purchase at 351-8000 or [AsoloRep.org](#).

19+
APRIL

Dabbert Gallery presents *Lasting Impressions*, featuring five local artists

Through April 29, Dabbert Gallery, 76 S. Palm Ave. Free admission. Visit [DabbertGallery.com](#).

20
APRIL

WSLR presents Aztec Two Step

April 20, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court. Admission: \$20 in advance; \$25 at door. Buy tickets at [WSLR.org](#).

22
APRIL

The Addams Family

April 22, 8 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail. Tickets: \$30 to 75; 953-3368 or [VanWezel.org](#).

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



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SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

**AH, WHAT A GREAT DAY
FOR SOME SUNBATHING**

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.