

THE SARASOTA

No. 33 — May 3, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



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LOOKING BACK ON FOUR MONTHS

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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

As we were completing this week's issue, one point that stood out for us — which we should tout more often, I might add! — is the flexibility we have in a digital format that is not available in print publications.

For example, Norman Schimmel's butterfly photo on our cover simply would not look nearly as gorgeous in any newspaper I ever have seen — *National Geographic*, yes, but not newsprint.

Otus also has provided us with more magnificent examples this week from Rick Greenspun and from his own files. They would be far less enchanting without the quality digital publishing makes possible.

Along with our being able to present such quality in artwork, we relish the fact that we do not have to “squeeze” stories into specific holes — “all the news that's print to fit,” my husband likes to say.

Stan Zimmerman has used that lack of writing constraint to great advantage again this week for his interview with Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino. You would miss out on a lot of interesting information if we had to chop it down to fit a standard newspaper block. The only way we could run the entire article “the old-fashioned way” would be to provide it in parts, and that disruption of continuity is a great distraction.

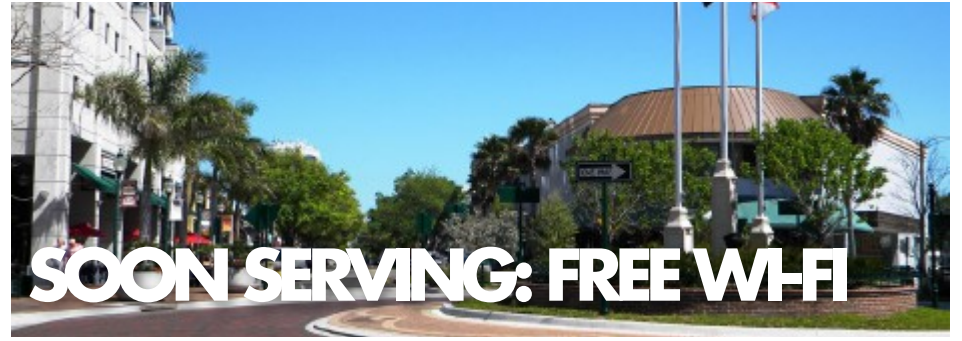
Stan's interview with the chief is not the only article that is more expansive this week. A couple of weeks ago, Harriet Burns Stieff, the delightful daughter of one of Sarasota's most prominent developers — Owen Burns — graciously allowed me to talk with her about some of her favorite experiences. It would have been a tragedy to “shoehorn” that story into a newsprint slot.

By all means, do take your time reading the issue this week. And, as always, we welcome your comments.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher





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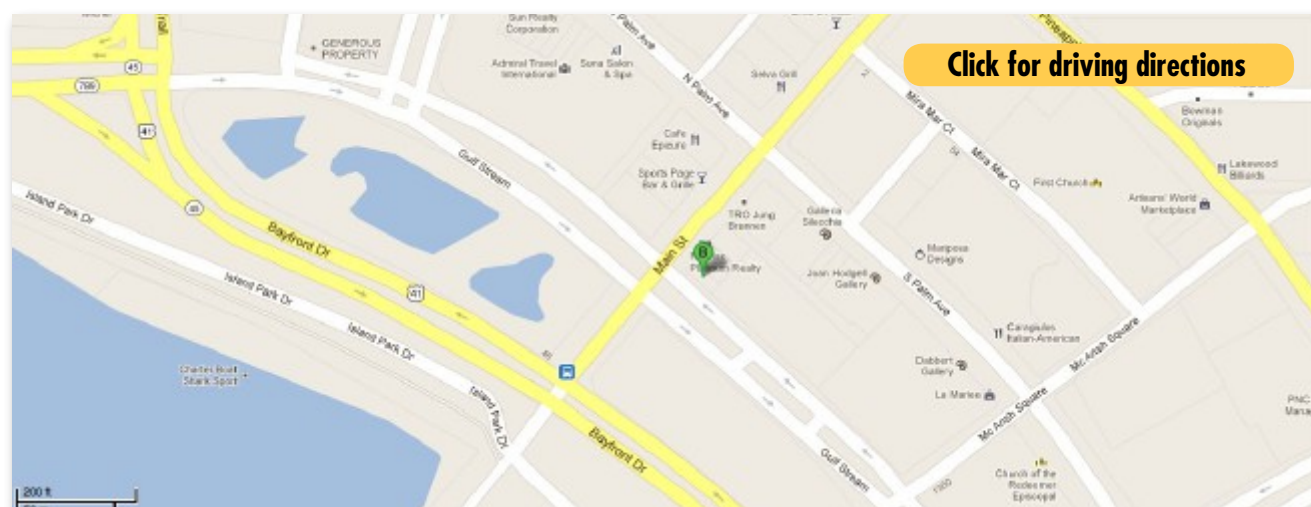
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NO NEW TAXES

The County Commission meets with staff during an April 30 budget workshop in the Think Tank in the Administration Center in Sarasota. Photo by Rachel Hackney

FACED WITH NEW NEEDS AND A BACKLOG OF MAINTENANCE PROJECTS — AND NO MONEY FOR THEM — THE COUNTY COMMISSION SEEKS MORE INFORMATION BEFORE SETTING PRIORITIES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Affirming they have no plans to raise taxes, the Sarasota County commissioners this week nonetheless delayed decisions on how to fund capital projects over the next five years until they obtain more detailed information about their options.

Among the projects covered during an April 30 budget workshop were \$30 million in road resurfacing needs, \$12.2 million in bridge repair and renovation projects and \$8.3 million in athletic field improvements for which no funding is available for Fiscal Years 2014 through 2018.

Commissioner Christine Robinson said of the road situation, “It just takes my breath away.”

County Administrator Randall Reid called it a “shocking figure,” but he pointed out that other counties are in much worse situations. Some are looking at \$500 million in road project backlogs as a result of less revenue and tighter budgets resulting from the recession.

Still, when Reid suggested options such as a transportation surtax or an increase in the general operating millage rate, Commissioner Joe Barbetta responded, “From my perspec-

tive [those] are off the table ... Additional revenue sources need to come from economic development, increasing our tax base and streamlining our organization.”

“We’re faced with terrible, terrible numbers right now.”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



Barbetta added, “We can’t go back to the public for any more taxes.”

“Second,” Robinson said.

“Third,” Chairwoman Carolyn Mason chimed in.

In its final action of the day — on a motion by Robinson — the board voted 4-1 to direct staff to do the following:

- Examine whether funding other than sales tax revenue could be used to pay for 1,300 wastewater connections in the next segment of the Phillippi Creek Septic System Replacement Program.
- Provide a more detailed explanation of Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects already scheduled to be paid for by sales tax revenue through Fiscal Year 2024.
- Provide an analysis of how much money would be freed up if the commission maintained a 60-day or 75-day reserve fund instead of the 90-day reserve dictated by county policy.

Barbetta voted “No,” saying, “I have enough faith in staff that they found all the money out there that they didn’t think was already committed.”

Another budget workshop is set for May 14.

BUSES AND ROADS

Among the decisions the County Commission did make on April 30, it unanimously directed Sarasota County Area Transit Manager Glama Carter to purchase only clean diesel buses instead of hybrids over the next five years.

Carter noted in her presentation that the clean diesel models cost about \$400,000, while the



*Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr.
Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*Chief Financial Planning Officer Steve Botelho.
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

hybrids are about \$680,000 each. After questioning by Robinson made it clear the hybrids were not being considered for efficiency but as a commitment to improve the environment, Commissioner Nora Patterson pointed out that providing a bus service — to encourage residents not to drive — already is a commitment to a better environment.

Moreover, Carter said it takes the county about 20 years to recoup the investment on a hybrid bus, but the bus itself generally cannot be used longer than 12 years.

If revenue projections were as strong as they were before the recession, Robinson said, she would be happy to approve the mix of buses suggested for the fleet, “but we’re faced with terrible, terrible numbers right now.”

“She took the words right out of my mouth,” Patterson said.

During a discussion of road resurfacing projects, the board also voted unanimously to approve the resurfacing of a section of Webber Street that had been cut apart during a Phillippi Creek Septic System Replacement Project. That cost was put at \$2.5 million in the current fiscal year.

The motion further called for staff to schedule the resurfacing of Verna and Singletary roads in the eastern part of the county as soon as possible after the start of the 2014 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1. The latter project’s cost is estimated at \$1.5 million.

James K. Harriott Jr., the county’s chief engineer, pointed out that Verna and Singletary roads have “high-speed” traffic, with a 55 mph posted speed limit. Both have potholes, some rutting and “spot base failures.”



Major Revenue Comparison

	FY07	FY14	Difference	
	Actual Revenue	Forecast	(FY07 - FY14)	
Property Taxes (county-wide)	\$210,349,236	\$127,700,468	(\$82,648,768)	-39.3%
Infrastructure Sales Surtax	\$31,719,886	\$28,571,004	(\$3,148,882)	-9.9%
Half-Cent Sales Tax	\$27,509,334	\$23,408,569	(\$4,100,765)	-14.9%
Gas Taxes	\$18,817,891	\$15,672,913	(\$3,144,978)	-16.7%
FP&L Franchise Fee	\$17,752,108	\$16,012,346	(\$1,739,762)	-9.8%
Tourist Development Tax*	\$8,513,024	\$14,216,766	\$5,703,742	67.0%
Communications Services Tax	\$11,352,852	\$9,823,640	(\$1,529,212)	-13.5%
State Revenue Sharing	\$9,180,257	\$7,591,397	(\$1,588,860)	-17.3%
Impact Fees	\$20,998,664	\$9,704,561	(\$11,294,103)	-53.8%
	\$356,193,252	\$252,701,664	(\$103,491,588)	-29.1%

*Levy increased 2% between FY13 and FY07

A chart compares major revenue sources for Sarasota County in the 2007 fiscal year to the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County

RESURFACING NEEDS

During the discussion of the county’s road re-surfacing program, Harriott referred the commissioners to information they already had discussed during their Feb. 8 budget workshop.

The current CIP calls for the county to spend \$20.5 million on resurfacing for the next five fiscal years.

“What would we need [to pay] to at least not [let the roads] deteriorate further?” Patterson asked.


Another \$6 million per year allocated to the work — for an annual total of \$10 million — would enable the county to make sure no more than 40 percent of the roads are rated

below the level where they begin to produce driver complaints, Harriott said. He confirmed for Patterson that at that level, the county continues to fall below the standard it had maintained before the recession.

In 2005 and 2006, Harriott continued, “Asphalt was a lot less expensive.” The price in 2007 was about \$70 a ton, compared to \$97 a ton today, he added, “and it tracks roughly what the gasoline price at the pump has been.”

The gas price was about \$2.13 a gallon in 2007, Harriott pointed out.

Reid compared lack of maintenance for roads to poor health care, noting that costs are much higher after situations become critical. “You end up having to rebuild [the roads] and [the expense] gets astronomical.”



Bridge Repair & Renovation

FY14-FY18 Programmed Funding: \$4.1 million

Myakka Road Bridge	Construction	\$2,000,000
Ortiz Blvd. Bridge	Design/Construction	\$300,000
Brookside Drive Bridge	Design/Construction	\$300,000
Leonard Reid Avenue Bridge	Design/Construction	\$300,000
Brink Avenue Bridge	Design/Construction	\$300,000
Baffin Drive Bridge	Design/Construction	\$550,000
Oak Street Bridge	Design/Construction	\$275,000
Trionfo Ave Bridge*	Design	\$200,000
River Ridge Way*	Design	\$150,000
Albee Movable Bridge*	Design	\$200,000
Manasota Movable Bridge*	Design	\$200,000
Minor Bridge Repair	Construction	\$600,000
Blackburn Point Road	Construction	\$260,000

Assumes available fund balance from FY13 of \$1,544,000

* Construction funding is part of the FY14-FY18 Additional Needs

A chart shows the bridge repair and renovation projects slated for the next five fiscal years. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Barbetta responded that it was just as important to maintain and improve the county's athletic fields, because they are related to residents' quality of life as well.

"We can do both [roads and athletic fields]," Barbetta said. "We need to suck it up and figure out how to do it. ... We have surplus property that we need to sell that we don't use which will generate *millions* of dollars and put dents in these [capital improvement] programs."

Reid also pointed out that the commission can forgo some projects it has discussed, such as a bus rapid transit system, to free up funds for projects it feels are more important.

Both Robinson and Patterson voiced concern about leaving future commissions in difficult positions if the current board does not take care of some of the needs staff indicated.

"It's going to be after Commissioner [Charles] Hines' tenure is up that it's really going to hit really hard, and we're going to start feeling the effects," Robinson said.

Hines was elected to his first term in November 2012. By law, he is able to serve two terms. Barbetta and Patterson will leave the board in 2014 because of term limits, while Mason and Robinson will have to give up their seats in 2016 for the same reason.



Athletic Field Improvements

• FY14 – FY18 Additional Funding Needs: \$8.3 million

Twin Lakes Baseball Adult	New lighting systems	\$950,000
Youth Athletic Complex	Replacement lighting systems, irrigation system replacement	\$986,000
Twin Lakes Youth Baseball Fields	Replacement lighting systems	\$670,000
Misc Emergency Repairs	Annual repairs	\$1,250,000
Englewood Sports Complex (ESC) Senior Baseball	Replacement lighting systems	\$250,000
ESC Soccer Field #3	New lighting system	\$230,000
17th Street Soccer/MSS	Artificial turf, irrigation system replacement	\$1,750,000
Twin Lakes Football/Lacrosse	Artificial turf	\$1,100,000
ESC Soccer Field	Artificial turf	\$1,100,000

A chart shows unfunded athletic field needs for the next five fiscal years. Image courtesy Sarasota County

NEW FIRE STATIONS

Although they took no formal vote, the commissioners on April 30 also gave their consensus for the construction of four new fire/EMS stations in the following locations:

- Twin Lakes Park in Sarasota, to replace a station in a repurposed 1970s house.
- North Cattlemen Road at University Parkway, where the station is operating out of a mobile home with a canvas carport for the fire truck.
- Just south of Westfield Sarasota Square Mall, where the current facility is a metal warehouse dating to 1980.
- Bee Ridge Road, where the current station is a structure completed in 1968.

Fire/rescue/EMS impact fees would cover part of the construction cost, Steve Botelho, the county's chief financial planning officer, explained.

The county is planning to borrow \$8,754,098 to pay for the new facilities, he added, but the availability of impact fee revenue could reduce that figure.

GENERAL OUTLOOK

During his presentation to the board at the opening of the workshop, Reid pointed out that county building permit applications were up 45 percent from March 2012 to March of

this year and the Tourist Development Tax revenue has continued to surpass figures for the previous fiscal year.

“We need to suck it up and figure out how to do it. ... We have surplus property that we need to sell that we don't use which will generate millions of dollars and put dents in these [capital improvement] programs.”


Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

Still, he said, “It's going to be hard to get back to the way we were in 2007.”

He noted that he and his staff had built a 3 percent increase in employee compensation into the 2014 fiscal year budget, but almost all of that would be “eaten up” by in-

creases in healthcare benefits and Florida Legislature action calling for higher employee payments into the Florida Retirement System.

In an April 26 email to the commissioners that served as a preview of the workshop, Reid wrote, “Our community has been fortunate to have the benefit of a sales surtax dedicated to capital projects funding major improvements and expansions of our County infrastructure. This budget year, capital project planning will be a little more difficult than in the past as we ‘reconcile’ what we said we had hoped to accomplish with what we can accomplish in this era of far slower growing revenues.”

He added, “‘Level is the new up’ is a phrase now making the management circles about our stabilizing revenue outlook for the near future. Sarasota County remains in a strong financial condition and has adequate fiscal reserves. The economy is fragile but beginning to grow again from our indicators.” 

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LOOKING BACK ON FOUR MONTHS

Police Chief Bernadette DiPino accepts a congratulatory handshake from City Manager Tom Barwin after her swearing-in in January. Photo courtesy City of Sarasota

SARASOTA POLICE CHIEF BERNADETTE DIPINO REFLECTS ON THE JOB SO FAR AND THE FUTURE FOR THE FORCE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Editor's note: Bernadette DiPino is starting her fifth month as chief of the Sarasota Police Department. She is the former chief of the Ocean City, MD, police, and is the first female chief in Sarasota history. City Editor Stan Zimmerman sat down with her to discuss her first 120 days on her new job as well as the days ahead.

Is this a bigger job than you first thought it would be?

“There’s a lot of challenges in this job that I anticipated, so it isn’t a surprise. There are a number of things I see that need to be done. But I was aware of them before I came in.

“Some of the challenges we’re dealing with — for instance the homeless in the community

and the gun violence in the community — and there are some cultural changes that need to take place within the police organization — those things are a little bit new.

“Every police organization is a little bit different. Their histories are different. I’m very happy with the officers that are here, and I think there is a lot of really great raw material to work with. And with the transition of people being in the DROP [deferred retirement program], it’s going to allow for an opportunity to make some of these sweeping changes that I see will benefit the department and the community.”

That segues into another question I have. Since you joined the department, it has lost the equivalent of almost a century of experience.

“Not as a result of me coming. They were in the DROP and ready to go.”

How do you envision replacing that?

“You can’t really replace the history. What you do is tap into it and make sure you understand it before the people leave. And you make sure you have good people around you that do have that history. I’ve been getting as much ‘intel’ as I can to know about it.

“As opposed to replacing it, you look at developing leadership and having them step

into those shoes and grow into those shoes along the way. Their own training and knowledge will help them become the future leaders of the organization.”

How do you distinguish between training leaders and training micro-managers?

“I really don’t like micromanagement, because then you don’t develop leaders. That doesn’t mean you don’t guide and mentor people, to point them in the right direction.

“The way I like to lead and the way I like to train leaders is give them a task, tell them what the goal is and not care how they get to the goal as long as it’s legal, moral and ethical. They’ll make mistakes along the way, and that’s where you guide them and pick them up — just as long as they are not doing something that gets you in a huge liability. And that goes throughout the entire Police Department; not just the captains, lieutenants, sergeants, but all your officers.

“That’s one of the things I’m finding within this organization. I think a lot of officers feel they can’t go out and make decisions on their own, without going, ‘What’s the book say? How do I follow this exact procedure?’ That’s not being smart and that’s not being a good leader.

“I need people to go out and make decisions based on experience, based on be-



Chief Bernadette DiPino. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ing at the scene and using good judgment and their knowledge of the law to be leaders. That's the difference, I think, between micro-managing and mentoring.

"Mentoring — you just guide them along the way and catch them before they go over the cliff. You let them go out there and make mistakes, and they are going to make mistakes. Mistakes are OK. I've learned more from the mistakes I've made than any success I've ever had. And any successes I've had were based

on the mistakes I've made. I learned from those mistakes.

"In our job it's very rare you can make huge mistakes because then you end up on the front page of the newspaper; you end up in a lawsuit; you end up doing things that are going to hurt people and the community. So you let people make mistakes, but you let them make mistakes on the small stuff.

"When it comes to the big stuff, that's when you are there to mentor to make sure it doesn't cause the city or the officers any problem."



Mayor Suzanne Atwell (left) listens as City Manager Tom Barwin introduces Bernadette DiPino as the new police chief. Photo by Norman Schimmel

And that is why there is a ‘book.’

“Right. Very few people that I’ve come into contact with are very good tacticians and know how to fight a war in the long run, for lack of a better word. I’ve had commanders who worked for me in the past ... but they don’t know how to attack a problem. It’s almost like a chess game. You have to be thinking a bunch of steps ahead of time.

“You don’t just move the pawn [thinking], ‘That gets me into a good position, but what’s the next move?’

You have to think not even days or weeks; you have to think years in advance from a position of leadership. You have to think, ‘How’s this going to impact the officers and community and everything you do?’

“I like games. I like chess. I like card games. I think that way. It’s a blessing, because sometimes I get to a scene where things are chaotic, and everybody’s like, ‘Oh, what to do?’ and I can see so clearly the bigger picture with so many things that need to be done and how to do it and keep people moving. It’s tough to teach that.”

What’s been your biggest constraint? People? Money? Is it equipment or talent?

“Probably right now there are two things that are challenging me. One is my ability to manage the Police Department. There’s already a lot of restraints on what I can and can’t do,

and that’s already written up in a [union] contract that’s beyond my ability to control.


“But I think overall: changing a cultural belief. There’s a history; this organization has had a long history of police work. And people are used to doing things a certain way.

To come in from a different state with a different perspective on policing, even though it’s similar in a lot of ways — our policing styles were different in Maryland compared to Sarasota.

“Getting officers to understand and then get the buy-in: As soon as they get it, it’ll be like a ‘click.’ ‘I get it. That makes sense; this is going to work. It’s going to make my life easier, make me safer and the community safer, too.’ But getting them to understand it, to make it ‘click,’ that’s going to be the biggest challenge because everybody — especially police — everybody has a hard time with change.

“It takes a little bit of time to win over the confidence and the trust. And as soon as you have little small successes and people get to know you more — it’s about developing those relationships.

“And of course, money is always going to be a challenge. In the last seven years, I’ve seen in law enforcement across the country money and budgets and pensions and anything dealing with money is a super-heightened challenge.

 *I need people to go out and make decisions based on experience, based on being at the scene and using good judgment and their knowledge of the law to be leaders.*

Bernadette DiPino
Chief of Police
Sarasota

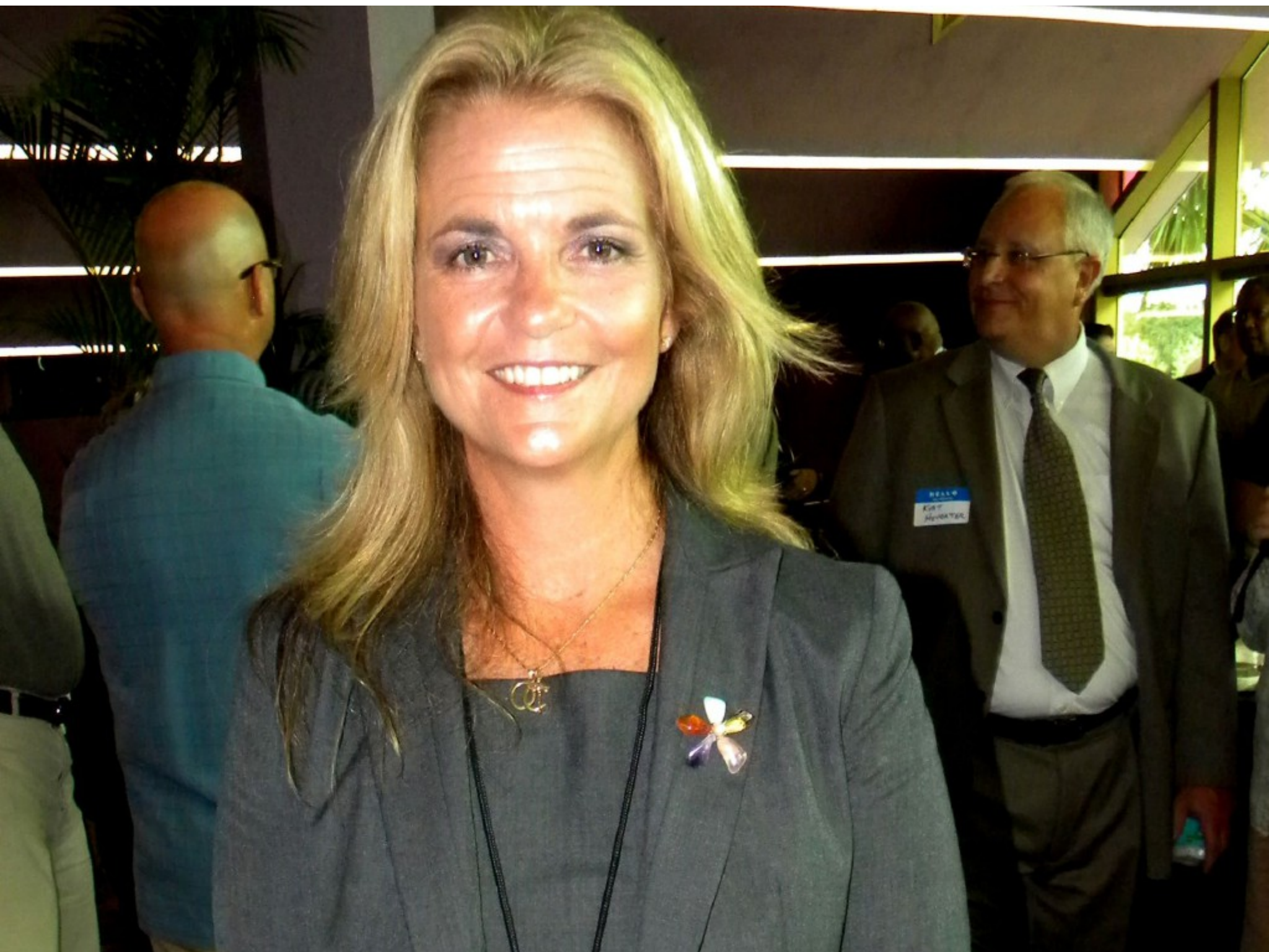


“Government wants to do a better job of accountability and holding the taxpayers’ money at a good level while law enforcement still needs to fight crime and have the personnel and the resources and tools to do it. And the citizens still want the police to do it, but they are not sure they want to pay a whole lot of money to do it. Money is always going to be out there as a challenge.

“But I’ve got a lot of ideas on how to overcome that: grants; forfeiture money; make sure officers are trained on forfeiture and seizing

money, cars and property. Plus I’m looking at trying to develop a foundation for the Police Department that will give citizens who want [the ability] to support police outside of the budget process. Money for training and equipment — that’s really tough to get in today’s environment.

“Our budget is more than 80 percent personnel. Add cars and guns and ammo, and you’re done. That’s it. So you have to think of ways to get training, which is so important. How do I get equipment for the officers? That’s im-



Bernadette DiPino attends an October 2012 reception for the finalists for new police chief. Photo by Norman Schimmel

portant. And everyday things: We want to do a reach-out to the kids. We'd like to give them a cup or something, but where do we get the money from? A foundation would help us.

"It would be a civilian board, raising money for the Police Department. We could come up with a list of items and come before the board for review. They could say, 'That doesn't seem reasonable.' Or they could say, 'Yes, I can see where you could use that training.'"

You are one of a number of new senior managers in the city. In the past few months, we have seen a new finance director, utilities director, information technology director, human resources director and city manager. Do you sense an appetite or willingness to try new things?

"Absolutely. Tom Barwin is a great city manager and I'm so happy to be working with him. He's visionary and innovative in his thought processes and very methodical in what he does.

"We're all looking at it with a fresh new set of eyes. It's good, because if you have something that goes a long time without somebody outside looking at it and saying, 'Why do we do this? How do we do this?' sometimes people get a little prickly about it: 'Why are you asking me?'"

"I'll say I'm not necessarily trying to change things. I'm trying to understand how and why we do things. It could be the best way. But there might be a better way. You have to have a fresh set of eyes every once in a while. It will only make things better. To me, that's the American way. We're always pragmatic in adapting and changing.

"It's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. You still have the history, with the people, the employ-

ees that are there. They'll bring with them what worked really well, the legacy stuff. And then you have the new people, maybe with different ideas, concepts and philosophies, best practices from where they came from."

One of your predecessors, Chief [Francis] Scott, once told me, "The worst mistake I ever made was putting air conditioning in the cars." Have you spotted any "worst mistakes" you would like to correct?

"I wish I could get the officers out of the cars more and walking and riding bikes more. We're working on that. A lot of them like it and enjoy it and will enjoy it.

"The 12-hour shifts is something [else]. I just don't see the officers seeing each other. I think there's a disconnect in the department right now, with this building — six different floors — and everybody disconnected with each other. And working shifts where they're 12 here and there is little overlap. There's no time. They're communicating like the modern era with texting or emails. I think that camaraderie, that family-type of feel, the importance of one-on-one contact with other police officers [is important]. Reading it in an email is not the same.

"Those are the things I see that I'd like to have the opportunity to look at and examine. Is this the best way?"

"I want officers to work the same sector all the time. We really need to get officers back into ownership. When I worked a sector in Baltimore County when I first started [as a rookie police officer], if somebody else had to take a call in my sector, I was so upset. If there was a crime in my sector, I took it personally. I didn't even live there, but it was mine. I had a sense of personal pride about that area. They were my people, my citizens, my businesses.

“I want that same thing here. And a lot of officers do think that way. But I want ‘Newtown is mine,’ and ‘This community is mine.’ I want every single community within our larger community to feel that same way, that somebody cares about them.”

Your best achievement of the past 120 days?

“The outreach to the citizens in the community. I think I’ve been able to establish some trust within the community. I’ve been so welcomed by the citizens that I have met.

“Because of the interaction I’ve had with members of different [segments] of the community, we were able to bring in a shooting suspect, an attempted murder suspect, without any incident. And that’s because members of the community called me and said, ‘Hey, this person wants to turn themselves in.’ That’s a huge success to me.

“That means the community trusts and is buying into the Police Department.”

Conversely, what would you consider your worst mistake of the past 120 days?

“Not having enough time, wishing I had more time to do ride-alongs with the police officers and engage with them more.

“More than three weeks were spent going through the accreditation process. I wish I had that time back. I needed to get my [Florida police officer] certification, but I could be three weeks ahead or four weeks ahead of where I am right now.

“And I forgot about this [as an achievement] — I taught the community policing class to every officer within the organization. I was real-

ly happy about that. I’m pleased we were able to get everybody training on that in a short period of time.”


In this short period of time, have you found what you might call a personal favorite? A restaurant, a book, a vista — anything in the community you made a connection with?

“Yes. The [Ringling] bridge and Lido Beach. I often will take my poodle and put her in my bike and ride up to the bridge. We’ll walk around the bridge. It’s so beautiful and peaceful and serene there. And then I’ll get back on the bike and ride out to Lido Beach and look at the area, maybe grab something to eat at St. Armands Circle. I’m a water-beach person so that’s my favorite thing so far.”

Have you had an enduring moment, something that really touched you personally, emotionally?

“Yes. I went to visit the Boys and Girls Club. [County Commission Chairwoman] Carolyn Mason invited me out. There were a lot of young kids, and I was being myself: ‘Hey, how are you?’

“The kids at first were wary; the girls were really tentative. At one point after I was there a couple of minutes talking to them, they felt so comfortable, they came and surrounded me. They were touching my vest and wanting to hold my hand. They all surrounded me, and Carolyn Mason took a picture of me with the girls.

“My heart just beamed. I was so happy about that because they felt so comfortable. That was an endearing moment. It was amazing.” 



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Neal Communities has been among the proponents of changes in the 2050 Plan. Image from Neal Communities [website](#)

THE COUNTY COMMISSION ON MAY 8 WILL DISCUSS CHANGES DEVELOPERS HAVE PROPOSED REGARDING ITS LANDMARK PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR AREAS EAST OF I-75

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

The debate over whether to monkey with [Sarasota 2050](#) is scheduled to get louder next Wednesday, May 8, when the Sarasota County Commission will discuss a list of changes proposed by developers, as well as community comments that have come flooding in. One of the central points of discussion: fiscal neutrality.

2050 was added to the county's Comprehensive Plan a decade ago, with the intent to encourage the con-

struction of new walkable, mixed-use communities and the preservation of open space and environmentally sensitive land. But critics say 2050 has instead stifled development and that the plan should be loosened up to give developers broader freedom to build as they please.

More than 7,000 new units have been approved under 2050 guidelines, but only one project — Neal Communities' Grand Palm — has gotten off the ground.



If you approve the whole thing upfront and then it turns out to be not so, the county hasn't got any recourse.

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



Beginning last fall, the commission asked county staff to meet with development firms such as Neal and Schroeder-Manatee — the company that won approval for the Villages of Lakewood Ranch South — to hear their concerns. At the top of the eventual list of “2050 Policy & Regulation” issues? Fiscal neutrality, a rule designed to ensure that “no additional costs” for county infrastructure “are borne by those other than the residents” of the new neighborhoods, in the words of county Long-Range Planning Manager Allen Parsons.

That means a new development, through impact fees and eventual sales and property taxes, should cover any costs the county will incur by offering services to the community. That list of services ranges from roads and sidewalks to public transportation, schools,

water supply, stormwater management, courts, jails and more. Even new costs to libraries are factored in.

“Fiscal neutrality analysis is kind of the first step,” says Parsons. “Take a look at the development and estimate what the impacts will be on the cost side and then on the revenue side.” Developers are required to provide the county with a fiscal neutrality report at each phase of a project; that report is then reviewed by the county and by an independent analyst. Each new report looks forward and backward, says Parsons, to make sure that projections used in earlier analyses were accurate.

One example: a 2010 fiscal neutrality report submitted for the Neal project that would become Grand Palm. The report estimated future household numbers, tax rates and more,



The 2050 Plan was designed to govern development east of Interstate 75, where scattered cattle and horse farms create a pastoral scene. Photo by Rachel Hackney

all the way out to 2035. A contemporary analysis by the county noted that while the report was “professionally prepared” and “adequate in its general approach, findings and conclusions,” there were questions about the “validity of the data” in one particular table.

“This table shows total impact fee revenues exactly equaling the capital expenditures for the respective services,” the review staff wrote. “From real-world experience of our capital budget, our impact fee revenues are generally lower than our corresponding capital expenditures, particularly when it comes to roads.” (Emphasis in the original.)

Commissioner Nora Patterson says any estimates of future costs are “going to be ballpark,” but over the long run, it should “work

out that this will either cost the community or be fiscally neutral.”

Under 2050, Neal Communities will be required to submit another fiscal neutrality analysis “at their next phase of development,” says Parsons. Uncertainties in earlier reports might then be resolved.

‘AN ISSUE’

But the rule requiring phase-by-phase fiscal neutrality reports is one identified as an “issue” by developers hoping to alter 2050.

The zoning code “should be amended to eliminate having to revisit fiscal neutrality [for] every phase of a development or on an annual or bi-annual basis,” reads the recommendation from the developers. “This is because of the



Commissioner Nora Patterson. Photo by Norman Schimmel

uncertainty that it creates for the financing of a project, which is especially impactful in light of the lending environment today (post 2007) having more emphasis on predictability.”

According to staff notes, fiscal neutrality was on the list of issues raised by almost every developer consulted last fall: Hi Hat Ranch, Palmer Ranch, Rod Krebs, Neal and Schroeder-Manatee.

Patterson says “maybe there’s a compromise” between phase-by-phase approval and giving the OK to a “whole chunk” all at once. “If you approve the whole thing upfront and then it turns out to be not so,” she adds, “the county hasn’t got any recourse.”

TAKING SIDES

The builders’ complaints have been amplified by local business interests such as [The Argus Foundation](#), the “business leadership” group that issued a 2050 “Call to Action.” They cited declining property values and argued that the only way to expand the county’s tax base is to encourage “responsible development.” Others calling on the county to “reopen” the 2050 debate include the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce and the county Economic Development Corp., as well as representatives of Gecko’s, Williams Parker Harrison Dietz & Getzen, Githler Development and WWSB-TV, among others.

Those opposing the proposed changes include environmental groups such as Sustainable Floridians, Control Growth Now, the Audubon Society, the local Sierra Club, Manasota-88, Citizens for Responsible Government and Citizens for Sensible Growth, as well as

community organizations such as the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations and the Southwest County Alliance of Homeowners Associations.

The county has been deluged by public comments, submitted via letters, at events and on the county’s website. One anonymous comment card in support of altering 2050 reads simply: “Please bring the 2050 plan back to update Needs to be more user friendly Plan makes it very difficult for developers to secure financing. Fiscal neutrality (sic).” (Emphasis in the original.)

A website comment, meanwhile, argues that “Sarasota 2050 looks like so many other 2050 plans which all stem from the UN,” part of a far-right conspiracy theory involving Agenda 21.

John Saputo, the president and owner of Gold Coast Eagle Distributing, even blames 2050 for slowing beer sales:

“When Anheuser-Busch assigned me to the Manatee/Sarasota County territory for my primary franchise territory in 1996, our Brewery economists and computer model estimated that Sarasota County had a potential to generate over 5 million cases of AB product sales. ... Since the inception of the ‘2050 Plan’ the economist and model now predicts that my potential for Sarasota County will max out at maybe 3 million cases. ... [T]he ‘2050 Plan’ took away over 2 million cases in potential sales.”

In support of 2050, Tony Stefan, the chairman of the Myakka River Branch of the United States Green Building Council, argues that climate change considerations should come first:

“Land use planning is a powerful tool that we have to consciously reduce our reliance on cars. The last 60-70 years of land use planning in the United States have institutionalized our reliance on cars, and have increased the risks of climate change. The 2050 plan is a major break from traditional land use planning. It is designed to promote compact, mixed-use development, and is an affirmative step toward more efficient use of cars.”

Other opponents of the changes say it's premature to overhaul a plan conceived to guide development till 2050. “Immediate economic concerns,” such as tighter bank lending practices, “are not justifications to change our long range plan,” writes one website commenter. “Short term gains also are not justifications to reduce requirements for infrastructure, traffic management, and urban services.”

Jody Jorgensen of Sustainable Floridians says the fiscal neutrality changes are too important to be lumped in with the other alterations: “We propose additional focus on the fiscal neutrality amendments,” she writes. “We ask you to consider a separate public hearing regarding these amendments.”

In short, Wednesday afternoon's discussion should prove interesting, wide-ranging and important. According to Parsons, the commission has three major options: Leave 2050 alone, ask staff to continue to research the developers' recommendations or recommend that staff develop alternatives to 2050.

At the very least, you can count on a healthy debate. Parsons says development questions like 2050 have long inspired strong feelings: “It's definitely an issue that people care about passionately.” 

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SOON SERVING: FREE WI-FI



Residents and visitors alike soon will have access to free wi-fi in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A GROUP WORKING IN DOWNTOWN SARASOTA HOPES TO SEE THE AREA WIRED FOR SERVICE BY LATE SUMMER

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sure you can pop into a café or coffee shop for a “cuppa” and a quick hit on the Internet. But what if you are on the street, trying to find a specific place or waiting for an email or Tweet?

Later this summer, Sarasota may have free wi-fi on downtown streets from the old courthouse to the bayfront.

A local consortium called Digital WiFi Solutions LLC is wire-

lessly wiring up downtown with wi-fi repeaters on store roofs. If you look at the top of Epicure restaurant at the corner of Palm Avenue and Main Street, you will see a wee gray dome. And if you fire up your smart phone or wi-fi tablet, you will already see a signal called Digital Sarasota or Free Hotspot.

“*Right now it’s a work in progress, an early beta. We’re still designing software. Right now it’s just a taste of what’s to come.*”

John Moran
Operations Manager
Downtown Improvement District

Several notable locals are involved in the initiative. Tony Driscoll, Peter Fanning, John Moran, Rich Swier Jr. and Jesse Biter are all working to get the op-

eration running. But this will entail more than just a large-area wi-fi hotspot.


The group plans to install 12 touchscreens downtown to help people find their way to local businesses such as shops and restaurants. The system can guide them to use a web browser that will allow them to see menus or news of special sales, for example, and maybe even download coupons.

“Imagine the owner of the Epicure sees it is a slow evening,” said Moran, operations manager of the Downtown Improvement District. “He can quickly put a coupon on the system: ‘First drink is free tonight only.’” The offer would appear on the touchscreens and also

on the digitalsarasota.com website that is the system’s backbone.

The wi-fi signal will not penetrate into buildings, so downtown residents will still have to maintain their own paths to the Internet. But they will have access to the wayfinding and special deals via the website.

While the transponders are going up, there will be dead zones downtown.

“Our best guess is mid-August” for full operation, Moran told members of the Downtown Improvement District this week. “Right now it’s a work in progress, an early beta. We’re still designing software. Right now it’s just a taste of what’s to come.” 



Downtown businesses will be able to advertise special deals through the new wi-fi service. Photo by Norman Schimmel



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THE COUNTY AND THE REGISTRY QUESTION

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

THE COUNTY COMMISSION NEXT WEEK IS EXPECTED ONCE AGAIN TO DISCUSS WHETHER IT WANTS TO CREATE A DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

With Sarasota County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh having delivered to the County Commission a memo outlining his staff's research on domestic partnership registries, Chairwoman Carolyn Mason says she expects to initiate another discussion on the topic next week.

The commission will hold regular meetings on May 7 in Venice and on May 8 in Sarasota.

On Jan. 8, the board agreed to hold off on any formal action re-

garding a countywide registry until it saw how a bill for a state registry fared during the 2013 session of the Florida Legislature. Ken Shelin, a former Sarasota city commissioner who has been championing domestic partnership registries, told *The Sarasota News Leader* on May 2 he is doubtful a Florida Senate bill will win

approval at this point, with the session winding down.

THE ANALYSIS

In his April 23 memo, DeMarsh wrote that "approximately 19 ju-

“There is very little published law in Florida regarding domestic partnerships.”

Stephen DeMarsh
County Attorney
April 23 Memo To the County Commission



risdictions in the state have established domestic partnership registries in an inclusive non-gender-based manner. ... A survey of the various jurisdictions indicates significant variations in the scope of rights asserted but most ordinances include provisions regarding emergency notifications, spousal equivalent rights at health care and correctional facilities, health care and burial decisions, and pre-need guardianships.”

He added, “Some ordinances also have provisions regarding employee benefits, educational decisions, and procurement preferences for governmental contractors that offer domestic partnership benefits to their employees. All of the ordinances contain mechanisms for establishing, amending, and terminating domestic partnership registries. The ordinances typically do not include any residency requirements for registration.”

DeMarsh further noted, “Several jurisdictions recognize partnerships formed in other jurisdictions that have not been revoked as a form of reciprocity. Some ordinances limit reciprocity to jurisdictions within the State of Florida. All of the ordinances state that any rights conferred are to the extent not otherwise in conflict with state or federal law. Enforcement modalities vary by jurisdiction.”

He continued, “State and local laws establishing domestic partnership rights must not conflict with ... statutory state constitutional provisions.” DeMarsh points to the fact that, in 1997, the Florida Legislature amended the state statutes in response to the passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which prohibits same-sex marriages. Then in 2006, the Florida Constitution was amended after voters passed a DOMA-based initiative that says, “Inasmuch as marriage is the legal



The Sarasota County Commission meets in session in January. Photo by Norman Schimmel

union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife, no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized.”

DOMA has been challenged on federal constitutional grounds, DeMarsh added, with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling expected this summer.

He also noted, “There is very little published law in Florida regarding domestic partnerships.” The lead case is a 2000 Fourth District Court of Appeal decision challenging the constitutionality of a Broward County domestic partnership ordinance passed in 1999. The Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the county, though it did find fault with one provision of the registry regarding healthcare decisions to the extent the ordinance would override the provisions of a state statute, DeMarsh added.

Although that decision preceded the 2006 state constitutional amendment, DeMarsh pointed out, “the reasoning of the Court suggests that these ordinances are not likely to be invalidated on a constitutional basis.”

He continued, “No other published Florida cases could be found,” and successful challenges in other states focused on ordinances that included procurement preferences for companies extending domestic partner benefits to employees. “This is not a common element to Florida’s ordinances,” DeMarsh wrote.

Both the City of Sarasota and the City of Venice have implemented registries. DeMarsh provided an analysis of Sarasota’s ordinance in his memo and included a list of Frequently Asked Questions about it, adding that they may be found on the city’s [website](#).



County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Shelin pointed out to the *News Leader* on May 2 that the Sarasota ordinance “is the result of a series of refinements through the experience of several jurisdictions and is probably the best model to use.”

At the *News Leader*’s request, Jan Thornburg, Sarasota’s public information officer, checked on May 2 and found that 143 couples have registered with the city since Nov. 6, 2012, when the ordinance went into effect.

According to the [City of Venice’s website](#), six couples have registered there since mid-

April, after that municipality's ordinance was approved.

Among the other local government entities that have implemented such ordinances are Orange, Volusia, Pinellas, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties as well as the cities of Gainesville, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Orlando, Miami Beach and Key West.

DeMarsh concluded his report by writing, "Given the legal intricacies of these ordinances and lack of case law guidance at the present time," he recommended a more expansive disclaimer than some local governments provide, "so registrants understand that the ordinance is not a substitute for estate planning or other legal counsel."

THE STATE BILL

Regarding the legislative action this year, DeMarsh noted that Senate Bill 196, which sought to establish a statewide registry, would not preempt local governments from enacting their own ordinances as long as the laws were not in conflict with state law.


Shelin, who reviewed DeMarsh's memo at the request of the *News Leader*, said the only flaw he found was in DeMarsh's information about the state bill: It was not up-to-date.

"The Senate version [of the bill] he mentions was substantially rewritten after the ... Families, Elder Affairs and Children Committee refused to consider the bill [when it first was scheduled for a hearing] because it was 'overly broad,'" Shelin wrote in an email.

"The bill was substantially revised and the resulting revision looked a lot like the local



ordinances with just about 7-8 very narrow rights included. That version received a 5-4 favorable vote out of the committee, but has not been considered by the full Senate and likely won't as the session winds down. The House version was never revised and was never considered in committee."

Shelin was pleased to learn that Mason is planning to bring up DeMarsh's memo for discussion next week. He was hopeful he could be present at that time, he added. 



REVISITING THE BEACH PROJECT

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A graphic shows the Siesta Beach Park improvements plan as of December 2012, with some optional items listed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

AFTER INDICATING USE OF BOND MONEY MIGHT STILL BE UP FOR DEBATE, COUNTY COMMISSIONERS RENEW A FOCUS ON CONTAINING THE COST OF THE SIESTA BEACH PARK IMPROVEMENTS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

On Dec. 11, 2012, the Sarasota County Commission reaffirmed support for using bond money to pay for improvements to be undertaken in one continuous period at Siesta Public Beach.

During a budget workshop on Tuesday, April 30, Commissioner

Nora Patterson — who lives on Siesta Key — and Commissioner Charles Hines appeared to question whether bond money still should be used.

“It’s a project I want to get done, but I’m not and never really have been supportive of that price.”

Nora Patterson
 Commissioner
 Sarasota County

However, Commissioner Christine Robinson — who cast the only “No” vote in December regarding the

bond money — made it clear that revisiting that action was not part of the motion she eventually made — which won support from all her colleagues except Commissioner Joe Barbetta.

“My concern,” Barbetta said, “is we’ve had several meetings on this and the last thing I want to do is redesign [the Siesta Beach improvements] now. I thought we were pretty much there, and now it’s a case of getting it out to bid as quickly as possible.”

Robinson requested more detailed information from staff to help the board decide how it best can utilize future revenue to pay for a wide variety of capital improvement projects. (See the related story in this issue.)



Commissioner Nora Patterson peruses the Fiscal Year 2014 budget workbook. Photo by Rachel Hackney



Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson listen to discussion during the April 30 budget workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Still, before the vote on the motion, Chairwoman Carolyn Mason asked Robinson to clarify whether it meant revisiting the bond vote for the Siesta Public Beach project and the board's April 2012 decision to accelerate construction of Bee Ridge Road improvements through use of bond revenue.

"It does not," Robinson replied.

During a morning staff presentation, Steve Botelho, the county's chief financial planning officer, reported that the board would be asked to vote on May 7 on a Procurement Department recommendation that the John F. Swift firm of Sarasota be hired as the construction manager at risk (CM at risk) for the Siesta Beach improvements. The board had agreed at its December 2012 meeting to pursue the CM at risk option, to try to bring the project in below the staff estimate of \$16.7 million.

Botelho noted construction is expected to start in 2014 and take 24 months to complete.

A CM at risk works with subcontractors to make certain costs do not exceed the budget set for a project.

QUESTIONING THE EXPENSE

When Patterson asked what happened to a list of optional items that had been part of the original list of Siesta Beach Park improvements, Carolyn Eastwood, the program manager for the project, responded that staff felt once the CM at risk was on board, the firm

would be able to produce a more reliable estimate for the total cost of the work. If the figure was below \$16.7 million, Eastwood indicated, some of those options could be added back in. Staff would come back to the commission

with a report on that, Eastwood added, as the decision on what to include would be up to the commission.

"But that would be after we sign ... [a contract]?" Patterson asked.

No, Eastwood told her. The discussion would

take place before the board committed itself to the final contract for the project.

Then Hines reported that he had driven through the beach park over the weekend, trying to weigh the costs of improvements there against the replacement of the county's emergency communications system and the cost of the new Emergency Operations/911 Center.

The park "looked OK in my opinion," Hines said, indicating the need for improving the restrooms was greater than that for new picnic tables or tennis courts, for example.

With a discussion at hand regarding the board's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Fiscal Years 2014 to 2018 — part of the process for preparing the FY 2014 budget — he added, "I'm wavering a little bit" on the plan for Siesta Public Beach.

Returning to the mention of the extra options, Patterson said, "I think the overall estimates without those items — many of which were

"I believe Siesta Key Beach needs to be improved, but I believe we have to phase it because of other outstanding needs ... This is a want, as far as I see it right now."

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

contemplated in the design — is too high a cost ... I would fall in the same category [with Hines].”

Patterson added, “It’s a project I want to get done, but I’m not and never really have been supportive of that price.”

Still, she said, “I can’t imagine anything worse than over a period of, say, 10 years, constantly coming back to this asset and tearing it up.”

Patterson continued, “If I were asked tomorrow to appropriate the necessary [bond sale] for a \$16.7 million-plus project, I’m not giving you an opinion that I would say, ‘Yes.’”

That was why staff planned to work with the CM at risk, Eastwood responded, to try to develop “a much higher confidence level in pricing.”

With both the Siesta and Bee Ridge projects, Barbetta said, “We’ve missed great opportunities with lower pricing on both projects. The delays are costing us a lot of money.”

If the board continued to delay those projects, Barbetta continued, or chose to tackle them on a piecemeal basis, “They’re going to cost even more.”



Commissioner Charles Hines. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Regarding Siesta Public Beach, he added, “We haven’t put any money in that place in I don’t know how long, and it’s a huge revenue generator for us. ... The last thing I want is for staff to invest a lot of time, and the public expects something, and then we start picking it apart again.”

Botelho said he felt Barbetta and Patterson both would have their concerns alleviated once the CM at risk was on board.

Robinson pointed out that she had voted against bonding the beach project because she knew the commission was going to be considering how to pay for a number of other infrastructure projects as well as overdue maintenance. “I believe Siesta Key Beach needs to be improved,” she added, “but I believe we have to phase it because of other outstanding needs ... This is a want, as far as I see it right now.”

Patterson told her colleagues, “I’ve been consistently saying it sounds like an awful lot of money for this project. That’s not a new objection on my part at all. I went ahead [with the bond vote] on the assumption that somehow ... we were going to get a lower price, and I don’t believe this commission has delayed [the project]. It seems as though it has been delayed ... I couldn’t tell you what has delayed it.”


(Discussion last year about delays in completing the design focused on a report that staff suggestions for extra features had caused the estimate to balloon. To keep the cost at the level the commission had approved, Capital Projects staff had to ask the design team to remove some of those later additions.)

County Administrator Randall Reid pointed out to Patterson that the board can set the budget for any project and specify the cost will not exceed that figure.

Finally, Patterson said, “I think we all want to get to the same point ultimately, but it’s a bit of a struggle at this price.”

During the afternoon discussion, prior to the vote on direction for staff, Robinson said, “I think we need to look at Siesta Key, but I was on the losing end of that [bond] vote.”

“I don’t know that you were on the losing end of the Siesta Key thing,” Patterson told her. “There were three people who have reservations.”

If the price could be reduced, Patterson added, “then you would have some dollars for other things.” 

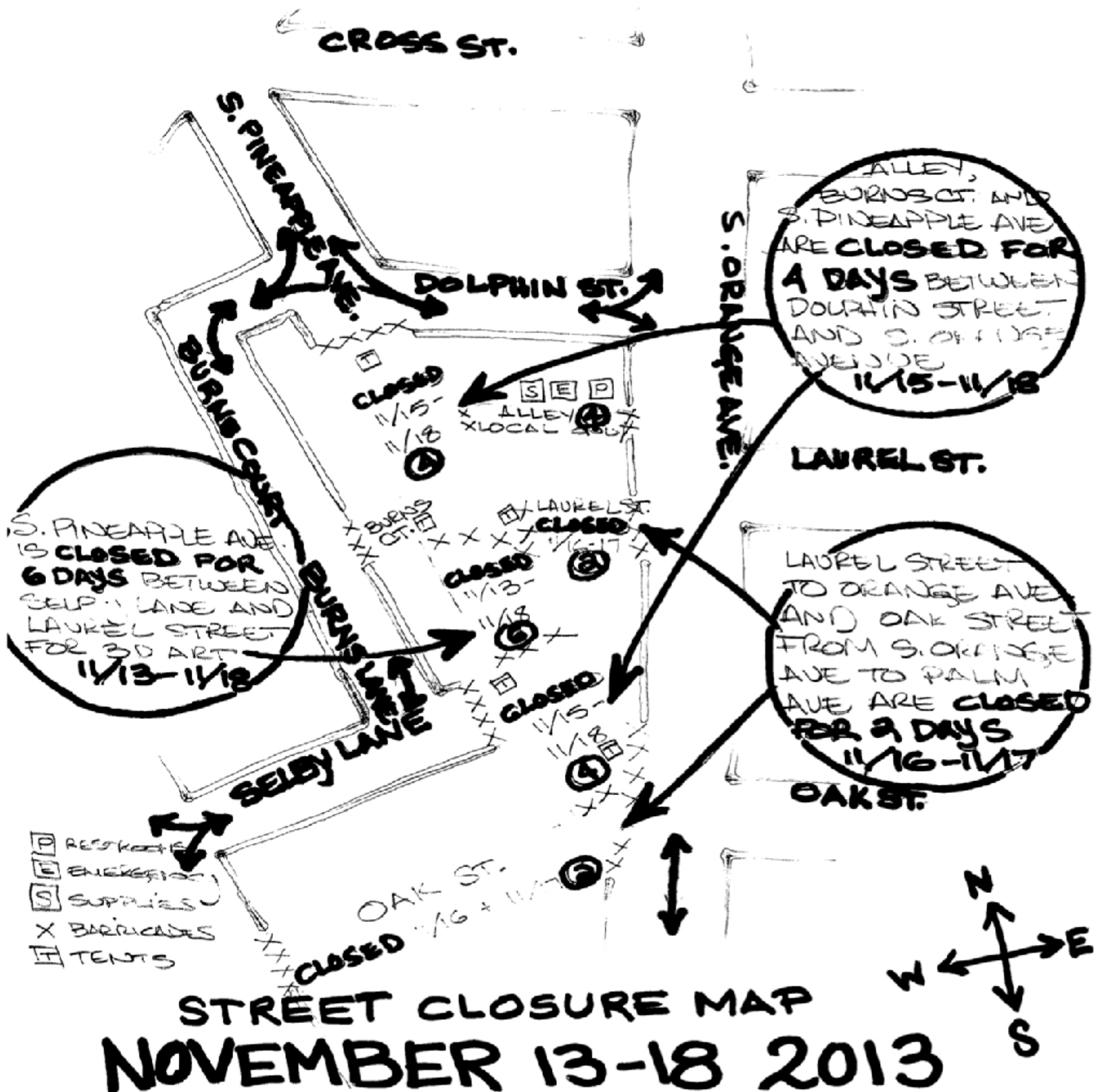
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SARASOTA CHALK FESTIVAL



Sometimes the city's permit requirements can lead to confusion. Here is the street closure plan submitted for this year's Chalk Festival. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

SOUND, SPECIAL EVENTS AND THE CRA ON TAP FOR THE CITY COMMISSION

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota city commissioners on Monday, May 6, have an agenda full of controversy. The sound ordinance, untangling the Community Redevelopment Agency's future and the special events policy are up for debate and possible decisions.

The last item in the afternoon session is a report by the Sarasota Police Department on the results of recent actions to enforce the current sound ordinance. Chief Bernadette DiPino will discuss that over the past 12 months, police officers have issued 14 citations for violation of the sound ordinance along with five warnings.

In the same period, the police have made 38 arrests for disorderly conduct, intoxication and drugs and 42 arrests for assault, battery and fighting. They have issued 11 citations for trespass and eight traffic citations.

Over the three-day weekend of April 19-22, the police gave warnings to the Five O'clock Club on Hillview Street and the Floribbean on Main Street. DiPino's report says, "The following establishments were found in compliance: Tequila Cantina, Smokin' Joe's, Ivory Lounge, Gator Club, 15 South, Dred Mart, Mattison's and Salvatore's. The effort took 24 man-hours."



In late April, city police warned Floribbean about violating the sound ordinance. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The following three-day weekend, April 26-29, city police issued warnings to the Gator Club, Smokin' Joe's, the Ivory Lounge and the Tequila Cantina. That time the effort took 34 man-hours. The report notes police officers were diverted from their regular duties to downtown more than 60 nights in an unspecified time period.

DiPino's report also notes the sound ordinance specifications for St. Petersburg, Boca Raton; Myrtle Beach, S.C.; New York City; and Daytona Beach for comparison.

The city attorney is sure to weigh in on any proposed changes to the sound ordinance because of First Amendment conflicts. And the public — especially downtown residents — are expected to vent their concerns over noise they consider too loud and occurring too late at night.

CRA FUTURE

Another piece of unfinished business will make an afternoon appearance — establishment of an 11-member *ad hoc* committee to examine the feasibility of extending the tax-increment financing district that funds the downtown

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). The effort expires in 2016.

The financing scheme generates about \$6 million per year in city and county property taxes. The money must be spent within the geographic boundaries of the district.

Recent City Commission discussion resulted in an directive for the yet-to-be-established *ad hoc* committee that the city will no longer consider the district's funds to be encumbered. If the county wants to continue the effort, the city would be happy to get the money, but the city's share could be spent anywhere in the city, not just in the downtown area.

The *ad hoc* committee would report to both the city manager and the county administrator, and it would have seven months to finish its job. Proposed members are Michael Beaumier, Frank Carol, Craig Colburn, Andrew Dorr, Ernest DuBose, Joel Freedman, Chris Gallagher, Katie Leonard, David Merrill, William Russell and Mark Huey.

Its recommendations could range from shutting down the CRA in 2016 to extending it another 30 years with the same guidelines under which it has existed. However,



City Commissioner Shannon Snyder. Photo by Norman Schimmel

the city's decision to opt out financially puts a crimp on the committee's latitude of action.

That latter issue — the earlier decision — comes up for reconsideration under New Business late in the evening session of the City Commission meeting. Commissioner Paul Caragiulo voted in favor of the opt-out guidance, but he put the matter back on the agenda for reconsideration.

So in the afternoon, the commissioners decide if they will create the committee, and in the evening they will decide if the committee should be given free rein or hobbled.

SPECIAL EVENTS EYED

After three public hearings in the evening, the City Commission will give guidance and direction to city staff over the regulation of special events. About 100 such activities are held in the city every year, and each requires a permit and coordination with a number of city departments.

The agenda item originated with an April 15 appeal by the Chalk Festival for the city to waive as much as \$13,000 in fees. The commissioners agreed at that time that more uniformity was needed in their special events policies. They will discuss noise, grant policies, affected parties and length of events. It is almost certain other issues will arise during that discussion Monday evening.

Regarding the "Timing Is Everything Department": After the commission wraps up its special events discussion, the next item it will take up will be Denise Kowal's repeated request for the Chalk Festival fees waiver.


POINTS OF PRIVILEGE

Not just anybody can add an item to the City Commission's agenda. The commissioners can, of course, and they recently have become more active in exercising the ability. On Monday evening under New Business, three commissioners are introducing items for discussion.

Commissioner Shannon Snyder is playing his cards close to the vest, asking only for a "direction re: rules of procedure for city commission meetings." The backup material for the item includes a copy of the City Commission's adopted rules for running its meetings.

Commissioner Terry Turner, in one of his final meetings, wants a discussion on options concerning future city budgets. Turner is a former economics professor who is comfortable with city finances.

A pair of tables he will introduce shows an interesting anomaly: Between 2007 and 2013 ("the bust years"), city revenues declined 27 percent while salaries and wages declined 10 percent, but benefits increased 31 percent.

Commissioner Caragiulo, as mentioned earlier, will propose reconsideration (i.e., a revote) on a motion passed earlier to instruct the *ad hoc* CRA committee to take the position that the city will not contribute to any tax-increment financing plan for downtown after 2016. If the motion is overturned, it will lift a restriction on the *ad hoc* committee's deliberations. 



PONDERING ROUTES AND COSTS

The Portland, OR, bus rapid transit system is reportedly one of the best in the nation in terms of services and equipment. Image courtesy Sarasota County

A BUS RAPID TRANSIT PLAN FOR SARASOTA COUNTY MAY NEED CITY MONEY

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

During a Monday, April 29, community meeting, the Sarasota County interim transportation planning director said a bus rapid transit (BRT) system connecting the airport to downtown likely will require city financial participation.

Jonathan Paul said, “By August we must have a fairly good idea of how this will be paid for.” He suggested a city-county interlocal agreement or a special taxing district to share the estimated \$2.5 million annual cost.

The county is pondering whether it wants to pay \$800,000 to fund a study required by the federal government to examine a new route for a BRT system. Buses would run at 10-minute intervals and use dedicated or priority lanes along either U.S. 41, U.S. 301 or Old Bradenton Road to downtown.

“*By August we must have a fairly good idea of how this will be paid for.*”

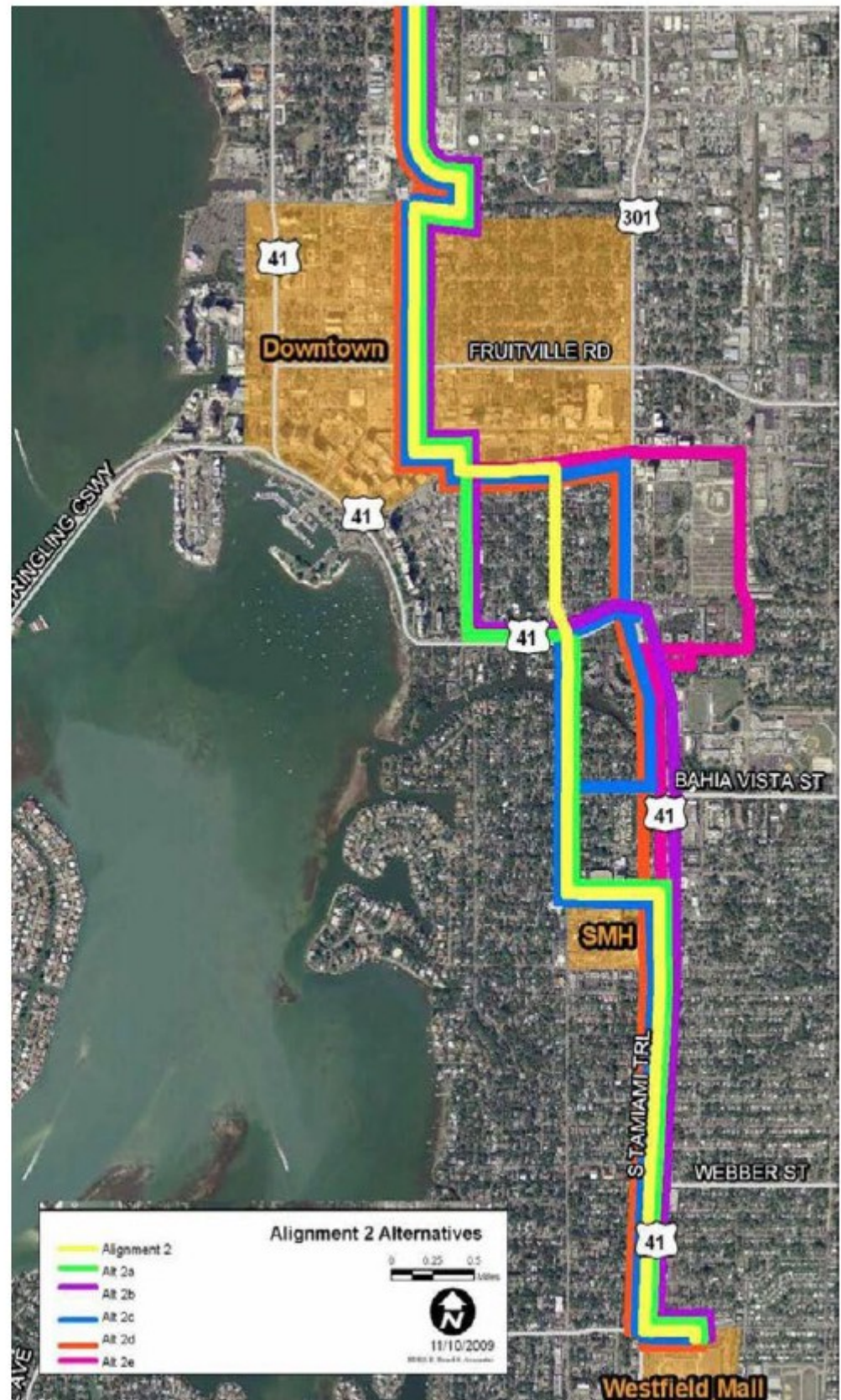
Jonathan Paul
Interim director
Transportation Planning
Sarasota County

The Seaboard Coastline/Seminole Gulf Railroad line through the city was selected as the preferred route earlier, under a study paid for by the feds.

But the price tag to acquire the roadbed and build the pavement approached \$100 million for a service that would cut through the city's poorest neighborhood. "It had the least land use to support transit," said Paul.

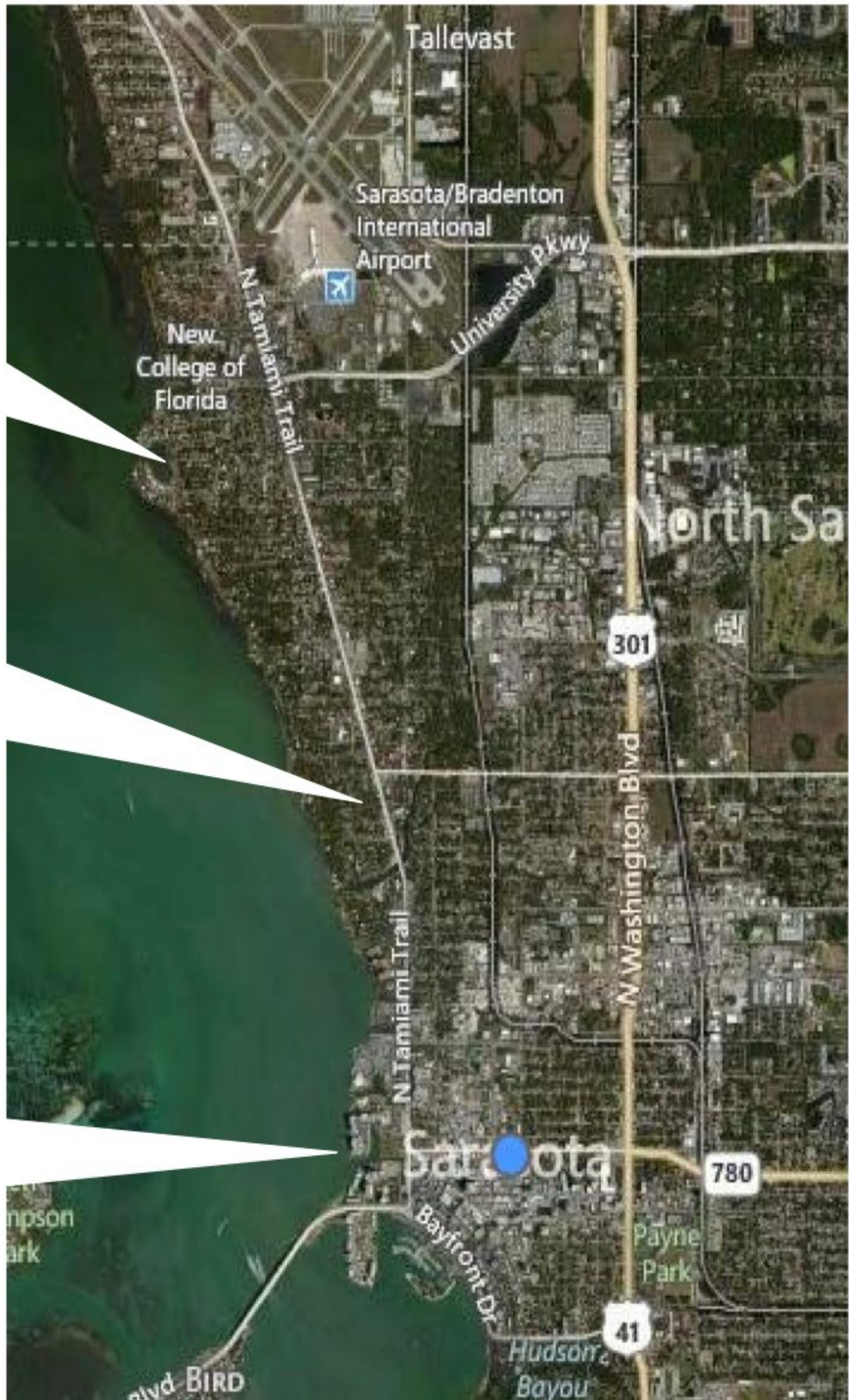
A look at the three alternatives — U.S. 301, U.S. 41 or Old Bradenton Road — must be

paid for locally, since the federal government paid for the first study. The Monday meeting was advertised to seek community guidance, but community presence was thin. The city's new downtown economic coordinator attended, and he said he counted 20 people, of which 12 considered themselves "regulars" at public meetings.



Graphics show proposed bus rapid transit corridors in Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Connecting Destinations



Sarasota County's interim transportation planning director says the U.S. 41 corridor is more attractive for a bus rapid transit system because of the number of destinations it has. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The County Commission is leaning heavily towards the U.S. 41 corridor because it contains more destinations and offers greater redevelopment potential than U.S. 301, which fronts few residential areas. One objective of the proposed BRT is to further development and redevelopment along the corridor by allowing people to use convenient public transit instead of their cars.

“The idea is, it’s frequent and attractive enough to attract people as an alternative to the car,” said Paul.

“Everything points to U.S. 41,” said Senior City Planner Ryan Chapdelain: “the number of destinations and attractions, and no land-use changes are required.”

One important factor for picking the route is population density. Chapdelain said the North Tamiami Trail area is zoned for 35 units per acre (second only to downtown’s 50 units per acre) and has an average of 23 units per acre.

The focus now is on the airport-to-downtown leg of the BRT. The service would then go to Sarasota Memorial Hospital and further south to the Southgate Mall at Siesta Drive. However, the route of the southern portion has proved contentious in the past. Laurel Park residents expressed concern about a proposed leg along their neighborhood’s narrow section of Osprey Avenue.

The route was changed to Orange Avenue through Laurel Park, but Chapdelain suggested the new route might run from the airport down U.S. 41 to Fruitville Road, then to Lemon Avenue, then along Ringling Boulevard to

U.S. 301. That would skip Laurel Park completely.


“The Board of County Commissioners needs to make a decision by this summer to restart the alternatives analysis,” said Chapdelain.

There may be a need to educate the County Commission before the decision. “The [Board of County Commissioners] believes wholesale land-use changes are needed on U.S. 41,” said Paul. “I do believe you have the densities to support BRT on the U.S. 41 corridor.”

The BRT will be expensive to establish and to operate. The county now pays \$18.2 million from the general fund to run 45 buses on Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) routes. Should a BRT system be installed, the operational expenses could jump another \$2.5 million per year.

The federal government will pay up to 80 percent of the BRT’s capital costs — new buses, shelters, right of way alterations and signs. But local government will be required to pay for the \$2.5 million in annual operations.

Paul suggested the cost could be shared between the city and county using an interlocal agreement or another funding source. Voters in other Florida communities have approved a “transit tax” to pay for mass transit operations, for example.

The county has until mid-September to let the Federal Transportation Administration know if it will fund another study of alternative routes and how it plans to pay for ongoing operations. 



GRASPING THE GAS BID

Staff projects Sarasota County will use about \$7.7 million in fuel for the 2014 fiscal year. Photo by Unisouth via Wikimedia Commons

THE COUNTY COMMISSION FINALLY AGREES TO APPROVE A BID IT ORIGINALLY HAD LIKENED TO THE START OF THE ‘MOWING DEBACLE’

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

It took another two sessions of questions, but the Sarasota County Commission finally gave unanimous approval to a three-year contract with Mansfield Oil Co. of Gainesville Inc. to supply gasoline, diesel motor fuel and biodiesel fuels to the county at a cost not to exceed \$8 million a year.

Ted Coyman, the county’s procurement official, assured the commission on April 24 that Mansfield not only has its own fleet of 34 18-wheelers to use in transporting fuel, it

also has its own “tank farm” in Tampa, where it stores supplies.

He added that staff had verified with company representatives that no mistake had been made in the bid’s notation that the firm would not charge extra to deliver fuel within

24 hours during a state of emergency, such as the aftermath of a hurricane, instead of the standard 48-hour period.

Further, Coyman said, “They have established

“ *On top of their low price they’re going to throw in hurricane preparedness at no charge? It’s just a red flag to me.*

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County



supply contracts in place with Citgo and Chevron.”

At the request of Commissioner Charles Hines, staff also had double-checked the firm’s references with Florida local governments with which it has had contracts: Orange and Hillsborough counties as well as the City of Jacksonville.

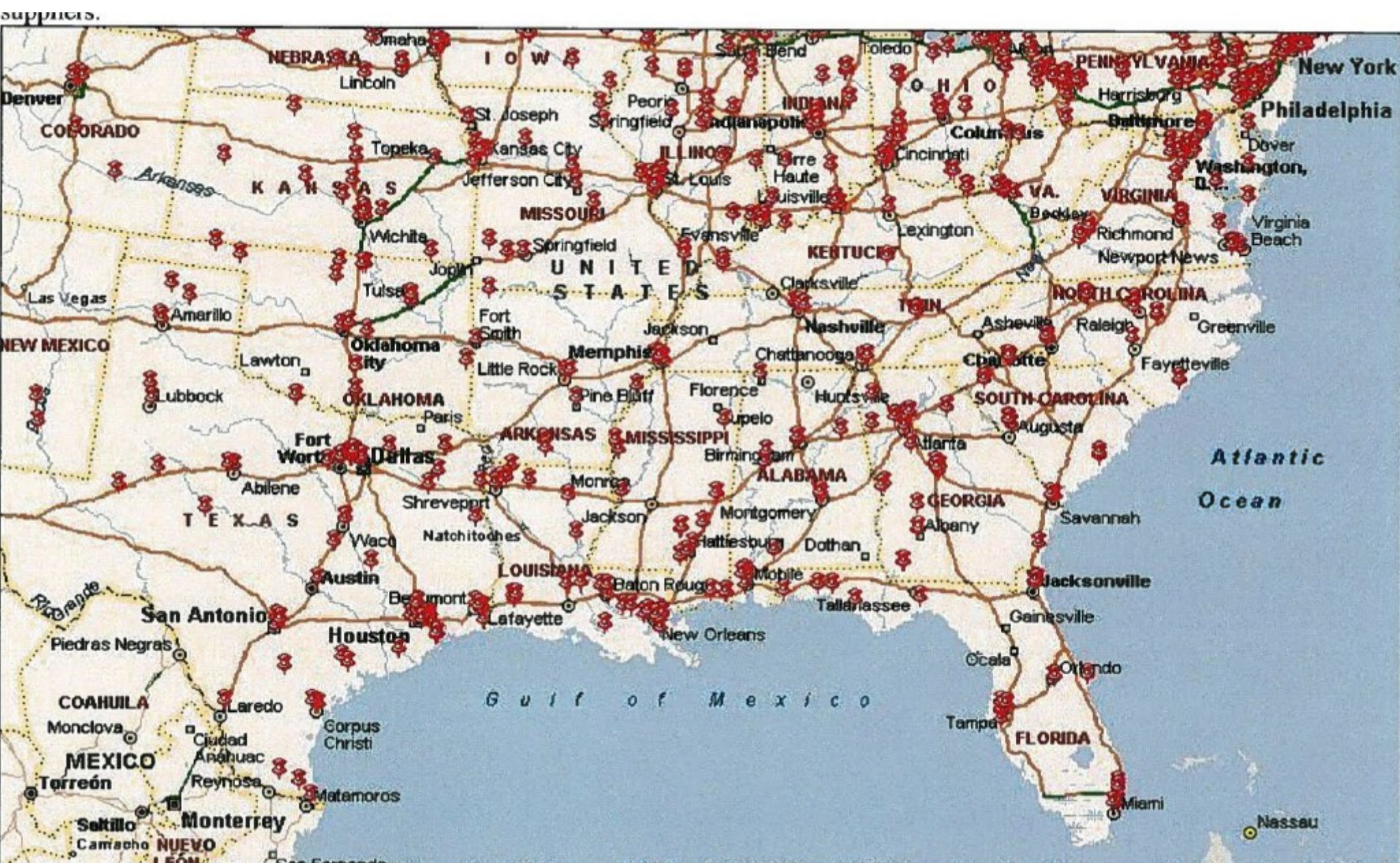
The April 24 action followed the airing of board concerns on April 9, when Commissioner Joe Barbetta first suggested the proposed bid award was reminiscent of the situation that began more than a year-long process to rectify a backlog of roadside mowing.

Although the county Procurement Department had recommended the fuel contract go

to Mansfield, commissioners questioned why the firm was not asking for any extra money to supply the county in the event of an emergency.

When the commissioners also questioned staff on April 9 about the amounts of the three bids the county had received for the fuel contract, resulting confusion about the figures prompted them to ask for the matter to be brought back on April 23.

Figures provided to the board on April 9 showed a unit price of \$91.62 for Mansfield, compared to the \$225.25 bid of J. H. Williams Oil Co. of Bradenton and a bid of \$307.43 from Petroleum Traders Corp. of Fort Wayne in Allen County.



A map shows Mansfield Oil Co.’s access to suppliers in the Southeastern United States. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Barbetta told Ed Gable, the county's director of general services, "This is an \$8 million contract, so I don't want to get into this thing and find out they can't perform. We've had this happen before. It happened with mowing."

In January 2012, the board awarded 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 questioned the differences in the bid amounts, then Procurement Official Mark 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.

MORE DETAILS

On April 23, when the fuel contract reappeared on the commission's Consent Agenda, Barbetta pulled it for discussion, just as he had on April 9.

Gable explained that staff had requested that all bidders supply their markups per gallon for each of 11 categories of fuel. The base price of fuel is established daily by the Oil Price Information Services, a national organization, he added.

Staff also asked what each bidder would charge to supply fuel within 24 hours in an

FUEL CONTRACT SUMMARY SOLICITATION # 111470TM TERM CONTRACT PROJECTED CALCULATION

ATTACHMENT "B"

Vendor Markup comparison using FY14 projected quantities for Fleet, Facilities, Utilities and Fire.				
FY14 PROJECTED *	PROJECTED # OF GALLONS	MARKUP	EXTENDED PRICE - Markup only	Total Gasoline and Diesel per vendor
MANSFIELD				
Gasoline	365,219	\$ 0.0314	\$ 11,468	
Diesel	1,342,058	\$ 0.0663	\$ 88,978	\$ 100,446
JH WILLIAMS				
Gasoline	365,219	\$ 0.0475	\$ 17,348	
Diesel	1,342,058	\$ 0.0800	\$ 107,365	\$ 124,713
SAVINGS FROM MANSFIELD OIL OF GAINESVILLE, INC.				\$ 24,266

Total fuel FY14 projected gallons and costs including Mansfield Oil vendor markup				
FY14 Projection *	Projected # of Gallons	Projected Cost/Gallon **	Extended Price	Projected Cost **
Gasoline	365,219	\$ 4.29	\$ 1,566,790	
Diesel	1,342,058	\$ 4.64	\$ 6,227,149	
Total	1,707,277			\$ 7,793,939

* Utilities, Facilities and Fire quantities were not included in FY12 or FY13 projection or actual quantities or costs. Their projected quantities are included in the FY14 projection for use of this contract.

** Projected costs include markup costs.

FY14 Projected Board of County Commissioners

Usage - Utilizing County Fuel Sites ONLY

Board of County Commissioners	43%
Sarasota County Area Transit	44%
Sarasota County Emergency Services	10%
Elected Officers	3%

Charts show bid details for a Sarasota County fuel contract and projected county usage in the next fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County

emergency situation. While Mansfield indicated it would not charge extra, J.H. Williams had a \$75 delivery charge and Petroleum Traders had a \$200 charge.

Once the Procurement Department staff analyzed the bids, Gable continued, the difference between Mansfield's and that of J.H. Williams was only about \$24,000 in regard to the price mark-up.

When Commissioner Charles Hines asked if anyone on staff had checked into whether Mansfield always complied with its contracts, Gable said he was unaware of any problems that had arisen with the company.

"My concern is that we haven't dealt with them before," Barbetta said, pointing out that Williams is a Manatee County company.

"On top of their low price they're going to throw in hurricane preparedness at no charge? It's just a red flag to me," he added. "I need much more assurance to justify dealing with a firm in Gainesville versus a firm in Bradenton," he pointed out.

Hines concurred with Barbetta.

In response to a question, Gable said Petroleum Traders has been the county's fuel supplier. However, it was disqualified in the latest bid process because it did not provide all the required information.

Gable also told the board the new contract estimated the county would use 365,000 gallons of gasoline per year and 1.3 million gallons of diesel for the next three years, with a projected annual cost of \$7.7 million.

For the current fiscal year, the county's fuel expense is estimated to be \$5.4 million, he added.



Commissioners Charles Hines and Nora Patterson consider a matter during a meeting earlier this year. File photo

"We feel like consumption is going up considerably," Gable said.

Commissioner Nora Patterson noted the county has been adding Sarasota County Area Transit routes.


Finally, the commissioners asked Gable and Coyman to double-check the firm's references from Florida local governments with which it has done business. "It doesn't seem like that would be huge research to do," Patterson said.

Coyman replied that all the reference checks had been positive. However, he added that his staff "can certainly provide additional reference checks."

County Administrator Randall Reid suggested that information could be discussed the following day.

After Gable affirmed to the board on April 24 that Mansfield has "a pretty good track record," Hines thanked him.

"The comments that we gave weren't directed personally at you," Hines added. "We've had some bad experiences."

Hines continued, "There's no guarantee ... of what's going to happen in the future, [but] we can say we did our due diligence." 



The City of Sarasota runoff election will be May 14, but early voting begins May 4. Photo by Americanspirit | Dreamstime.com

EARLY VOTING FOR CITY OF SARASOTA RUNOFF STARTS MAY 4

Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent will offer early voting for City of Sarasota residents in the city's May 14 runoff election beginning Saturday, May 4, and continuing through Saturday, May 11, Dent has announced.

During that period, eligible voters may cast their ballots at the Supervisor of Elections Office in the Terrace Building, 2001 Adams Lane, Sarasota, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. daily.

Florida Law requires voters to present photo and signature ID upon entering the polling place and prior to voting. A voter who appears at the polls without photo and signature ID will be allowed to cast a provisional ballot, a news release says.

Eligible voters may also request a mail (absentee) ballot by calling the Supervisor of Elections Office at 861-8618, emailing absentee@sarasotavotes.com or by visiting the SOE website at www.SarasotaVotes.com and completing an online request.

Voters who wish to request that an absentee ballot to be mailed to them must do so no later than 5 p.m., Wednesday, May 8, the news release notes.

Absentee ballots must be returned to the SOE office no later than 7 p.m. on election night to be counted.

Voters who have questions may contact the Supervisor of Elections Office at 861-8600 or visit the SOE website.

SWFWMD BOARD DELAYS SIESTA STORMWATER PROJECT DISCUSSION

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Governing Board did not discuss additional grant funding for the Siesta Beach stormwater project when it met this week, *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned.

“The additional funding request by Sarasota County was not presented at the Governing Board’s April meeting because staff was still gathering information to fully evaluate the request,” Public Information Officer Susanna Martinez Tarokh told the *News Leader* by email on May 1.

When the County Commission voted on April 23 to award the \$4,550,683.28 project to Forsberg Construction Inc. of Punta Gordon, Program Manager Carolyn Eastwood said staff was working with SWFWMD to increase the grant funding the organization already had committed.

Because of consultants’ errors in estimating the cost of the project, the bid award was about \$3 million above the projected expense of \$1.5 million, staff has explained.

SWFWMD had committed up to \$975,000 for the work, which is designed to treat storm-

water before it is discharged into the Gulf of Mexico. The goal of the initiative is to prevent future “No Swimming” postings at the beach as a result of unhealthy levels of bacteria linked to stormwater runoff.

Eastwood told the commission on April 23, “So far, the discussions have been positive” with SWFWMD staff about increasing the amount of the grant. Eastwood said she expected the request to be addressed when the Governing Board met on April 30.

Tarokh added in her email, “The District now has all necessary information and we are coordinating with the County to determine if this will be an item for the governing board to consider in May.”

That meeting will be held Tuesday, May 21, Tarokh noted.

Rachel Brown Hackney



The County Commission is hopeful it will get extra grant funding to pay for a new stormwater project to prevent any closure of Siesta Public Beach to swimming in the future. Photo by Rachel Hackney

COUNTY OFFERS NEW FEATURE FOR BUILDING PERMIT APPLICANTS

As part of its continuing efforts to enhance building and permitting services for customers, Sarasota County Planning and Development Services began offering a new feature as of May 1.

The county will send an email to an applicant when the requested building permit is ready to be issued, a news release says. "The email also will list the amount due and a reminder to bring the Notice of Commencement and other forms, if applicable, to the permitting office at either the Sarasota County Operations Center, 1001 Sarasota Center Blvd., Sarasota, or

the Robert L. Anderson Administration Center, 4000 S. Tamiami Trail, Venice," the release adds.

Applicants may make payments through the county's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system by calling 861-6441 or going online if they are registered users of the county's permitting web page.

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

THREE COUNTY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS WIN AWARDS

Two Sarasota County capital improvement projects have garnered statewide awards and a third has won national recognition, the county has reported.

The Honore Avenue improvements project and the installation of a water main connection between south Siesta Key and Casey Key each won statewide American Public Works Association (APWA) Project of the Year Awards. The recognition came on April 26 during the Florida APWA Chapter Annual Conference in Jacksonville, a county news release says.

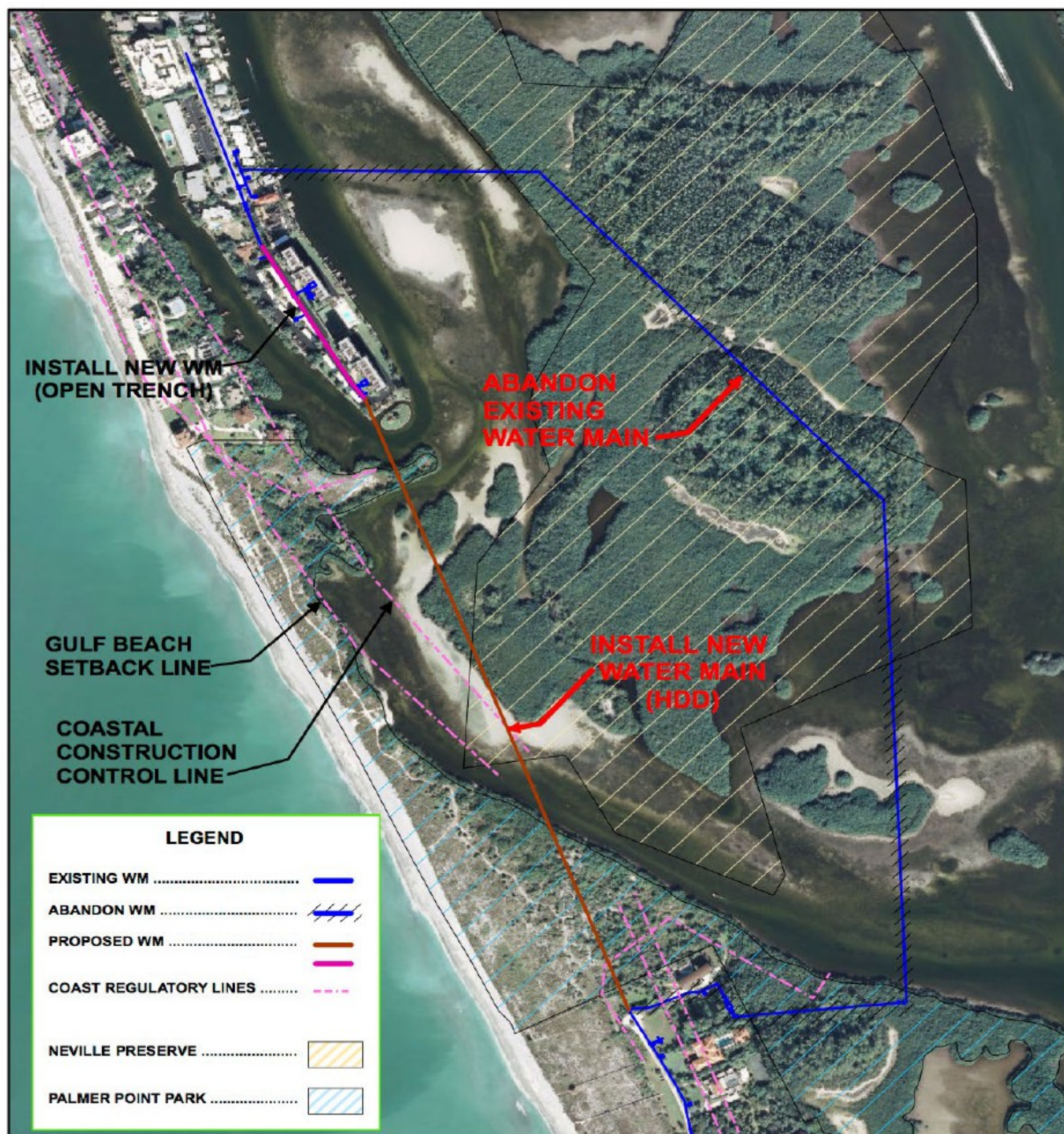
Capital Assets staff in the Sarasota County Public Works Department accepted the awards on behalf of the county, the release notes.

Additionally, the Celery Fields Regional Stormwater Facility Phase 3 project won an Environmental Excellence Award in the Conservation category from the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP). It was presented at the joint conference of the

NAEP and the Association of Environmental Professionals, held in Los Angeles, the news release says. That award, for which the county was nominated by Stanley Consultants of Sarasota — the county's construction, engineering and inspection firm on the project — was given on April 2 to representatives of Stanley Consultants and Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc., the permitting and design firm that worked on the project.

The approximately \$18 million Honore Avenue project extended the road from Fruitville to Bee Ridge roads. "The 2.7-mile-long [segment] was a critical missing link in one of the major north-south county thoroughfares," the release points out. "The project was designed to protect the neighborhood character with minimal intrusion, yet provide greater mobility for residents and visitors by constructing an appealing two-lane divided roadway with sustainable, environmentally friendly features, including Florida-friendly landscaping, bio-

SIESTA KEY/CASEY KEY WATER MAIN



0 250 500 Feet

Aerial Imagery Provided by PhotoScience:
Sarasota County, FL
December 2009 to January 2010
1" Resolution
N.A.D. 1983 HARN State Plane Florida West FIPS 0902
(U.S. Survey Feet)



CIP PROJECT#:55935

This map is produced from Sarasota County GIS and is representative information only, not survey information.

The County does not warrant, guarantee, or assume any responsibility for geographic information completeness and/or accuracy.

This map should not be used as a guide for navigation.

Copyright © SCGIS 2011

A graphic shows the location of the new water main connection between Siesta and Casey keys, which was put in during the fall of 2012. Image courtesy Sarasota County

swales and rain gardens to treat stormwater runoff and vegetative buffers.”

The \$1.1 million Siesta/Casey keys water main project replaced a leaking pipeline serving both barrier islands, the release continues. “Since the location crossed sensitive marine habitats and a marine preserve, it required extensive permitting and coordination with regulatory authorities, as well as innovative construction techniques involving a horizontal directional bore under environmentally sensitive areas,” the release adds. “The new water-main significantly improved water reliability and increased fire flow availability from 470 gallons per minute (GPM) to more than 840 GPM,” the release notes.

The \$7.2 million Celery Fields project was built on an approximately 450-acre site formerly used to grow celery, the release points out. “The stormwater project provides flood protection, floodplain storage, water quality improvements and wetland restoration habitat,” the release says. “[The Celery Fields is] also a passive recreational site, with walking trails around the perimeter of the facility, an improved walking and bicycle trail on the 75-foot-tall Observation Mound, sidewalks and a parking area at the gazebo,” the release continues. “It has become a major site for bird watching, with at least 216 species identified. The grand opening of the facility was celebrated in April 2011.”



An observation deck at the Celery Fields looks out over marsh that teems with wildlife, especially during heavy migration periods. Photo by Rachel Hackney

FIREFIGHTERS' DESCENDANTS ELIGIBLE FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Direct descendants of City of Sarasota firefighters are eligible for a scholarship to attend the State College of Florida thanks to the generosity of a Florida-based law firm, the City of Sarasota has announced.

The \$25,000 scholarship is funded by Sugarman & Susskind P.A. in Miami, which provides legal counsel for the City of Sarasota Firefighters' Pension Fund, a news release notes.

Eligible recipients must be directly related to either a retired City of Sarasota firefighter who is receiving a pension from the City of Sarasota Firefighters' Pension Fund or one who is employed by the Sarasota County Fire De-

partment and is a member of the city pension fund, the release notes. The city Fire Department consolidated with county department in 1996.

Students accepted into or enrolled in a firefighter or paramedic certification program also will be eligible for the scholarship, the release adds. The primary criterion for the award is a demonstration of financial need, it notes.

To receive an application, contact Allison Nash, coordinator of the State College of Florida Foundation Scholarship, at nasha@scf.edu or 752-5390. Applications must be received by May 15.

DIRECTOR OF EQUALITY FLORIDA TO SPEAK AT GAIN PROGRAM

The Gulfcoast Affirming Interfaith Network (GAIN) is inviting all members of the public to its free, annual Spring Service to hear remarks by Nadine Smith, executive director of Equality Florida, and the Rev. Roger Fritts, senior pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota.

The program will be held on Thursday, May 9, at 7 p.m. at St. Andrew Church, 6908 Beneva Road, Sarasota.

Smith "has been an outspoken advocate" for legislation targeting hate crimes and bullying, a news release notes. She won awards for in-

vestigative reporting in her former career as an investigative journalist, working for radio station WUSF and The Tampa Bay Times, the release adds.

Fritts has served as a minister in South Australia, New Zealand and Scotland. He also led one of the largest congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association — in Bethesda, MD — before coming to Sarasota, the release notes.

Music during the program will be presented by the Interfaith Chorus and Diverse Experience. A reception will follow the program.

The Sarasota News Leader
No-Nonsense Reporting

MAY 4 IS FREE COMIC BOOK DAY AT SARASOTA COUNTY LIBRARIES

Sarasota County libraries will provide an “entertaining escape” into the world of superheroes, villains and other characters brought to life on the pages of comic books with Free Comic Book Day on Saturday, May 4, the county has announced.

Free Comic Book Day will begin at 10 a.m. Every child who visits a county library that day may choose a free comic book while supplies last, a county news release says.

“The event has grown so popular that all nine libraries will be offering free comic books this year,” said Holly Anderson, Sarasota County Libraries youth services coordinator, in the release. “Comic books represent an original American art form with wide appeal for young readers,” she added. “Hosting the event in the libraries also gives us an opportunity to con-

nect fans of the genre with the collections of comic books and graphic novels available right on the library shelves.”

“Created in the early 1930s, the modern comic book featuring superheroes has expanded into a wide range of storylines and characters, making the genre more popular than ever,” the release notes. “Among the storylines currently published are fantasy, action, drama, science fiction and history. Comic books are big business, generating more than \$700 million in sales in North America alone last year,” it adds.

For more information on this event, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 (TTY 7-1-1) or visit the Sarasota County Library System website at www.scgov.net/library.



Gulf Gate Library's temporary location, in Westfield Sarasota Square Mall, includes a children's area. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MOCK DISASTER EXERCISE PLANNED FOR MAY 8

Volunteer Community Connections will conduct its annual mock Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) disaster exercise at Colonial Oaks Park, 5300 Colonial Oaks Blvd., Sarasota, from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 8, Sarasota County has announced.

“The purpose of the training exercise is to create a mock volunteer reception center and have participants walk through the steps of registering unaffiliated volunteers, including area residents and out-of-town people who are offering their help following a disaster,” a county news release says.

“It’s very important to have trained volunteers who can help operate a volunteer reception center in the event of a disaster,” said Mindi Rohan, executive director of Volunteer Community Connections, in the release. “This exercise is largely intended to allow disaster volunteers the opportunity to practice the process.”

The volunteer reception center would open at the direction of Sarasota County Emergency

Operations Center officials after the “all clear” notice was given following a natural or man-made disaster, the release adds. Unaffiliated volunteers would perform such duties as water and ice distribution, tree and limb removal, information hotline answering services and meal delivery.

Volunteer Community Connections’ mission is to provide members of the community “meaningful ways to connect to nonprofit, civic and service organizations,” the release notes.

“A volunteer registry is available that will allow you to identify your areas of interest before a disaster and secure the needed training to be effective in your volunteer role,” said Rohan in the release.

For more information about disaster volunteer needs or to register for this exercise, call Volunteer Community Connections at 953-5965 or email info@vccflorida.org.



Tropical Storm Debby produced neighborhood flooding in Venice in June 2012. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

INITIATIVE TO INCREASE STUDENT ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Exciting changes are in store for EdExploreSRQ, an initiative that provides students with valuable exposure to arts, science and culture through “explorations,” both in-classroom and off-campus experiences offered by 36 partner organizations, The Community Foundation of Sarasota County has announced.

In a unique arrangement, the Sarasota County Schools, the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County, the Science and Environment Council of Southwest Florida, The Community Foundation, the Education Foundation of Sarasota County and The Patterson Foundation have committed to sustain and broaden EdExploreSRQ for the benefit of all Sarasota County students, a news release says. The school district acted on the EdExploreSRQ Community Partnership Agreement at its April 16 meeting; the other partner boards had already adopted it, the release notes.

“This exciting collaboration will leverage many of our most powerful community resources to support the efforts of our teachers and help ensure that the needs of every child are being met,” explained Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance, in the news release.

The Community Foundation has committed \$500,000 over five years for explorations. Additionally, it and The Patterson Foundation are creating an EdExploreSRQ Endowment Fund to increase awareness and funding, the release notes. The Patterson Foundation will designate up to \$3 million in matching funds to go into that endowment fund, matching dollar for dollar the Community Foundation’s \$500,000 investment as well as providing a 2:1 match for all donations for existing and future explorations, the release adds.



Florida Studio Theatre acting apprentice Anthony Rockford leads students during Youth ArtsFest 2012. Photo by Danae DeShazer

The Community Foundation will set up a rolling application process that enables teachers to apply for exploration funding throughout the year, the release continues. “This ‘just in time’ feature allows teachers to maximize the learning connections between an exploration and student lessons,” the release adds.

“Knowing how EdExplore opportunities enrich a student’s perspective, encourage creative thinking and problem-solving skills, and tap into the amazing cultural and environmental resources in our community, the Community Foundation is proud to be a partner in this exciting collaboration,” said Roxie Jerde, president and CEO of the Community Foundation, in the release. “Ensuring resources are available for explorations will allow the Sarasota County School District to continue to be a shining star of all Florida school districts with its focus on students and experiential learning opportunities.”

Sarasota County Schools will take on the responsibility of redesigning and maintaining EdExploreSRQ.com, a publicly accessible website designed to give teachers, principals

and parents information and access to explorations, the release notes. “It has also committed to a concerted push to engage teachers and encourage them to apply for explorations to benefit and inspire their students,” the release adds.

To date, 36 organizations (with participation by 25 teaching artists) have posted 160 explorations that have been vetted by district curriculum leaders and linked to standards, the release continues.

“These activities are essential for a complete education,” said schools Superintendent Lori White in the release. “Hearing an inspired violinist or watching a dedicated marine biologist at work might be the spark that ignites a passion for learning or inspires a career. Experiential learning provides context for academic work. Explorations create lifelong memories and improve retention across all subject areas.”

To make a donation and support explorations for Sarasota County students, call the Community Foundation at 955-3000 and ask for Dannie Sherrill or Jocelyn Stevens.



SBEP ANNOUNCES 2013 BLUE DOLPHIN AWARD WINNERS

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) has announced the 2013 winners of Blue Dolphin Awards, which acknowledge local champions of Sarasota Bay.

The recipients are Don and Denise Elliott with Sunbow Bay Condominium Association on Anna Maria Island, Sean Russell with the Stow It Don't Throw It Project and Lee Fox with Save Our Seabirds Inc., a news release says.

The Elliotts are being acknowledged "for their efforts to create a Bay-friendly demonstration garden at Sunbow Bay," which is located on Anna Maria Island, the release adds. SBEP provided Bay Partner Grants to support the multi-year project.

Russell, a Sarasota resident who attends the University of Florida, has helped raise awareness about preventing marine debris and supporting ocean conservation through the Stow It Don't Throw It Project, a nonprofit organization he founded, the release continues. He also helps organize the annual Youth Ocean Conservation Summit held at Mote Marine Laboratory, the release notes.

Fox manages the popular bird hospital for Save Our Seabirds, also located in Sarasota, the release adds.

The SBEP Blue Dolphin Awards program was launched in 2012. The inaugural winners were Jack Merriam, the former environmental manager for Sarasota County; Martha B. King Middle School in Bradenton; AMI Turtle Watch and Shorebird Monitoring; Raindrop Cisterns, a company focused on rainwater harvesting; and Charles Edwards, a long-term volunteer with the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee, the release points out.

Members of the SBEP Policy Board presented those awards during a ceremony held at Powel Crosley Estate in Manatee County, the release continues. The program attracted more than 150 local professionals focused on the welfare of Sarasota Bay, it adds.

The 2013 awards will be presented during events throughout the year, the release says. The first award was given to the Elliotts this week at the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee meeting.



Denise and Don Elliott receive their Blue Dolphin Award from Mark Alderson and Sara Kane with the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program. Contributed photo

ORIOLES HONORED FOR BREAKING ATTENDANCE RECORD

The Sarasota County Commission on April 24 recognized the Baltimore Orioles for a record-breaking spring training season this year.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta, whom Chairwoman Carolyn Mason said she was going to call the board's "Baltimore Orioles ambassador," read a proclamation that pointed out the team drew more than 120,000 fans to Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota for 17 home games. The number is an Orioles record for spring training attendance and a record for the city, which has hosted spring training since 1924, Barbetta said.

The commission also presented the team a framed photo of the stadium at night, taken by Sarasota resident Norman Schimmel, whom Barbetta called "a photographic artist."

David Rovine, vice president for Orioles-Sarasota, told the board and audience, "It is in



(From left) David Rovine, Bird, Trevor Markham and Judi Linnell of the Baltimore Orioles operation in Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Commissioner Joe Barbetta (with microphone) reads a proclamation for the Baltimore Orioles as his fellow commissioners and Orioles staff listen on April 24. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

fact customer service that we are so very, very proud of. We always tell our staff that we cannot affect the outcome on the field. We can, however, affect the customer experience when they come to Ed Smith Stadium and enjoy a Baltimore Orioles game. “

“We’d like to believe that’s part of what set our record,” Rovine added.

Rovine was joined for the presentation by Trevor Markham, manager of ticket operations in Sarasota; Judi Linnell, manager of fan services; and the team’s mascot, Bird.

With Bird whistling and nodding approval, the commissioners then donned Baltimore Orioles caps.

Rachel Brown Hackney

ORIOLES BOOK SIX YOUTH BASEBALL TOURNAMENTS

The Baltimore Orioles have booked six youth baseball tournaments through June that are expected to attract more than 18,000 athletes, coaches and family members to Sarasota County’s Ed Smith Stadium and the Buck O’Neil Baseball Complex (BOBC), the team has announced.

In addition, the Orioles continue to host local teams and leagues for games on Major League-quality fields at both locations, a news release says.

Prospect Wire will again host its Florida state finals for four age groups of high school baseball players at both Ed Smith Stadium and BOBC, the release says. The dates for the finals are June 8-12. “The tournament is designed to showcase the players’ abilities for consideration by college and pro scouts,” the release notes. The event is expected to include a total of 2,000 participants and 1,000 spectators per day, the release adds.

“We are thrilled to bring the tournament back to Sarasota and the Orioles’ facilities,” said Matt Bomeisl with Prospect Wire in the re-

lease. “This is the largest amateur state championship in summer baseball. With that distinction comes the need for enough fields to host a tournament of this size. Between the Buck O’Neil complex and the Ed Smith complex, Sarasota is a great location. The Orioles have first-class venues that help us draw additional teams from out of the area,” he added in the release.

Two Suncoast Baseball Tournaments, scheduled this month and in June, are expected to attract up to 20 teams each with more than 500 total participants and hundreds of spectators, the release continues.

“Each year, youth tournaments generate thousands of room nights for local accommodations, plus spending at area restaurants and retail establishments,” said David Rovine, vice president for Orioles-Sarasota, in the release. “Working with partners like Visit Sarasota County, we will continue to build this type of business and provide an economic boost to the community. We also are diligently working to attract events other than baseball to Ed Smith Stadium.” 



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OPINION



TIME HAS ARRIVED FOR REALISTIC DECISIONS TO ADDRESS SIESTA KEY PARKING PROBLEMS

EDITORIAL

What happens if a tourist destination becomes too popular? That is the question the County Commission was able to defer in regard to Siesta Key as a result of the Great Recession. Now, with overflowing seasonal visitors — as clearly evidenced by the rise in tourist development tax revenue — the time is readily drawing nigh when the commission is going to have to address the dreaded “P” word on Siesta: parking.

The board will have its first shot at it on May 21, when residents of Avenida de Mayo air complaints about how their street has

become the *de facto* overflow area for the municipal parking lot, which has one access point on their road.

Marlene Merkle, who has lived on Avenida de Mayo for 25 years, and her neighbors brought their case to the Siesta Key Association last month; it has promised support for encouraging county officials to protect residential areas.

“ Could postings on Facebook or Twitter, fueled by angry drivers, start warning people away from Siesta Key because there is no place to park? ”

During that SKA meeting, Diane Erne, an Avenida Messina resident, also repeated a complaint she has aired in the past: Delivery trucks bringing supplies to restau-

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rants on her street often keep the travel lanes blocked up for overly long periods, creating headaches for residents trying to reach their homes.

Both Merkle and Erne spoke about the dangerous conditions traffic has created for people who call Siesta home.

Yet other residents have complained about neighbors “selling” spaces in yards for \$10 or more, even though that is a violation of the county code.

For that matter, one long-time resident of Siesta recently told *The Sarasota News Leader* that during season, he stopped driving into Siesta Village from his home in a condominium complex on Midnight Pass Road. He feared he would be unable to find a “safe” parking place — in other words, he did not want to have his evening ruined by finding his vehicle had been towed.

In the years right before the recession hit, it seemed the local news media was awash with stories about cars being towed away from businesses in Siesta Village, even when shops were closed and spaces sat empty at night. Obviously, those towing fears have been fully revived with the influx of folks this season.

Yet, in times past, regular attendees at Siesta Key Association meetings will recall that Commissioner Nora Patterson — who lives on the island — has shot down ideas about the county’s building a parking deck on the outskirts of Siesta Village: Too expensive, she has maintained.

Furthermore, when one of the more recent suggestions focused on the lot for sale at the intersection of Treasure Boat Way and Ocean Boulevard — on the north end of the Village — residents of that neighborhood warned they would fight any move to place a county-owned parking facility there: Too much noise, they said.

And as the County Commission this week waded through a long list of unfunded projects, it is quite clear it does not have a few extra tens of millions of dollars lying around to buy a parcel on the island and put up a parking garage.

Patterson also has never hesitated to shoot down the idea of the county’s charging people to park at Siesta Public Beach, to raise funds that could pay for the purchase and construction of a parking deck somewhere on the island.

Our belief, though, is that the parking issue has come to the proverbial point of “critical mass.” This, after all, is the age of social media. Could postings on Facebook or Twitter, fueled by angry drivers, start warning people away from Siesta Key because there is no place to park?

Yes, it has been lovely to use the Siesta Public Beach lot for free — when you could find a space. Just last week, the County Commission approved a change in an ordinance to make it illegal for a person to block a vehicle from entering a parking space in a county park in an effort to save the space for friends or family members. The Sarasota County Sheriff’s

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Office had requested the change, pointing to the number of altercations its deputies have to break up — especially at the Siesta Beach Park — over saved spaces.

St. Boniface Episcopal Church, which is practically right around the corner from the public beach, sells spaces in its parking lot for \$10 during season and finds drivers more than delighted to pay the fee. Although the money goes into a fund for the church's youth mission trips, a church spokeswoman this week recounted a story of one couple this season who came into the office to pay. "Give her another \$10," the woman said. "She just saved a marriage."

No doubt, the spokeswoman said, they had been driving for what seemed an interminable amount of time, hoping for a space to open up at the beach.


We believe the time has come for the County Commission to direct staff to start holding community meetings for a serious discussion about the future of parking on Siesta Key. Beyond that, we are going to take the bold step of suggesting that the commission needs to start working on a plan to charge people to park at the beach, with the option for year-

round residents to purchase passes at a highly reduced rate. The funds raised would go into an account to pay for a site with a parking deck.

In fact, we suggest the county work on a concurrent plan to buy property and build a deck. (That lot is still for sale on Treasure Boat Way, last time we checked, and that would be a very convenient location.)

People also would be charged to park in the deck. To make the situation a more attractive one, though, we propose that a free trolley travel a route encompassing the parking garage, the public beach and stops in Siesta Village. That should prove a boon to businesses, too.

We daresay very few people would balk at having to pay for a parking space, knowing their vehicles would be there when they returned.

We also daresay that the county commissioners might be quite surprised to find widespread enthusiastic support for these measures. They would ease the stress of visitors and residents alike on an island that is a major tourism moneymaker for Sarasota County. 

The Sarasota News Leader
No-Nonsense Reporting

OPINION

TEXAS EXPLOSION OFFERS A NUMBER OF LESSONS



By Waldo Proffitt
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

The news in this country in the third week of April was dominated by events in Massachusetts and Texas.

The first, a pair of explosions near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, took place in front of a bevy of reporters and photographers gathered to cover the finish of the Patriots Day race. Newspapers and television treated it like a candidate for top story of the year, which it may well prove to be. With the thousands of men and women running in the marathon and with perpetrators and victims offering up an interesting cast of characters and President Obama becoming a commentator, newspapers and television had no problem figuring out their top news day after day.

The second story was an explosion in a fertilizer factory in a Texas town named West. It was a large explosion in a small town and it took a heavy toll — 14 dead and more than 200 injured. The Insurance Council of Texas estimates the damage to surrounding homes and businesses will exceed \$100 million.

There were 270 tons of ammonium nitrate stored on the site.

There is little regulation of the chemical, because, if stored properly, it is not considered high-risk.

Federal investigators have not determined the cause of the horrific fire and explosion at the plant as of this writing, but the main suspect is a loosely reg-

ulated fertilizer that is seen less and less in farms across the USA.

“They had 270 tons of ammonium nitrate stored on that site,” says Bryan Haywood, who runs Safety Engineering Network, a consulting group in Milford, OH. “That’s why there’s a 93-foot-wide crater there now. There is nothing else in their reporting that has the potential for such a detonation,” he says of factory data.

Ammonium nitrate is explosive under the right conditions. Mixed with something flammable and exposed to flame, it can explode. Timothy McVeigh used two tons of ammonium nitrate mixed with fuel oil to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, in 1995. But it is not a danger that exists in many places. That is because the chemical, once a popular fertilizer, is rarely used these days.


There are more than 6,000 fertilizer facilities in the United States, but few of them stock ammonium nitrate and the number has been falling steadily, says Kathy Mathers of the Fertilizer Institute, a trade group in Washington, D.C. In 2010, the last year for which figures were available, only 2 percent of the nitrogen fertilizer sold in the United States was ammonium nitrate. That is down from 5 percent 15 years ago, Mathers says. It is applied mostly to vegetable fields, citrus orchards and some pasture and hayfields.

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There is not a hell of a lot to be learned from the Boston explosion. It was a unique event — we hope — and the investigation was led in a very efficient way by law enforcement officials.

There is much to be learned from the Texas event. The first is that fertilizer plants should not be located smack up against residences or commercial areas. Those that are should be moved, and others should not be allowed.

And such plants should be regularly and rigorously inspected by the federal government. If they do not pass muster, they should be closed until they comply with strong safety rules.

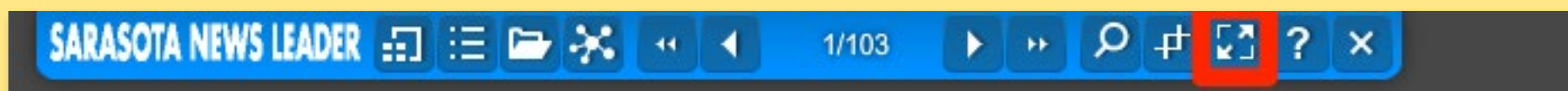
That seems pretty obvious to me, and while we are at it, we should take a close look around for other industries that have been overlooked. To paraphrase an old saying: If we don't learn from our mistakes, we will repeat them. 




LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

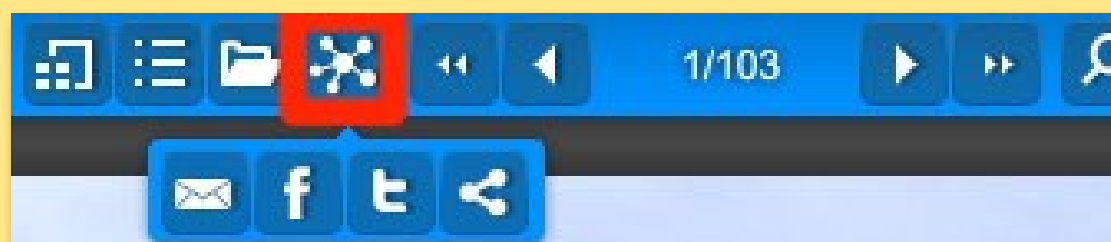
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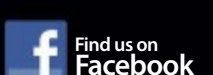
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A BERTH ON THE BAY

Harriett Stieff. Photo by Rachel Hackney

OWEN BURNS' LAST SURVIVING CHILD TALKS OF THE JOYS OF A CHILDHOOD SPENT LARGELY OUTDOORS ALONG WITH HER RELISH FOR FAMILY LORE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

As the child of one of Sarasota's most prominent early developers — Owen Burns — Harriet Burns Stieff enjoys vivid recollections of a bay brimming with fish, school out of doors and accompanying her father around town as much as possible.

“Being the youngest, I was the tagalong,” she says with a chuckle. “Dad was considerably older than my mother,” she points out, “so Mother liked to have somebody with him.”

Burns was 43 when New York debutante Vernona Freeman came to Sarasota on vacation

with her family in 1912. The couple married in June of that year, according to Sarasota County historian Jeff LaHurd, and eventually had five children. Harriet actually made her own debut in New York, where Vernona was visiting family at the time of her due date.

Still, Stieff says, “I consider myself a native.”

After all, she was only four or six weeks old when she arrived in Sarasota.

With her 92nd birthday coming up in July, Stieff recently sat down with *The Sarasota News Leader* to recount some of her fondest mem-

ories of life in this city that she has seen transformed over the decades.

“I lived at the edge of the sea [as a child],” she says. The waterfront was only about 30 feet in front of her home, The Halton, on Gulfstream Avenue.

“That end of town was my playground,” she adds.

Like her dad, she loved to fish. “In those days, you could just lean over and pick a big snail off the [sea] wall,” put it on a hook, “and you were good for the morning.”

In the summers, Stieff continues, her father had permission from what was then The Out-of-Door School (now The Out-of-Door Acade-

my) to fish off its dock. He would come home from work and pick her up first. “I was the official bait-getter,” she adds.

“I was allowed to scamper down and scare the [smaller] fish into the net,” Stieff continues. Then those fish were used for bait. “In those days, there were a lot of fish in the bay,” she points out.

Her dad’s favorite was red fish. And while her mother “*loved* fish,” Stieff points out, “she didn’t like ’em five days a week,” nor did she enjoy having to clean them.

Stieff recalls her mother standing on the back porch as Stieff and her dad were leaving, with Vernona calling out to them, “Don’t bring home any fish!”



The Burns’ home, The Halton, in the 1910s. Photo courtesy Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources



Vernona Freeman at the time of her 1912 wedding to Owen Burns. Photo courtesy Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

Her father did have a ready welcome for any fish he did not want to take home, Stieff points out. During the Depression, especially, the family felt almost an obligation to give some of the catch to families in Overtown — now the site of the Rosemary District — where the African-American residents predominantly lived, she points out.

Fishing, in fact, was one of the big lures for her dad to move to a new community, Stieff notes.

Burns was working in Chicago when the internationally prominent resident of that city, Bertha Palmer, returned from her first trip to Sarasota and talked of the town to the local newspapers. Palmer “described this paradise and that the fishing was so good,” Stieff says.

If the town was good enough for Bertha Palmer and the fish were that bountiful, Stieff says, her father felt he had to give it a look.

Burns ended up buying out the Florida Mortgage and Investment Co. from the scion of one of the founding families, John Hamilton Gillespie. Burns later was a business partner of another prominent figure in Sarasota’s history — circus entrepreneur John Ringling — but Stieff says she never really knew Ringling.

SCHOOL DAYS

With her own love of the outdoors, Stieff has warm memories of The Out-of-Door School, which was founded in 1924 by Fanneal Harrison and Catherine Gavin — Gabby and Nena, everyone called them, she points out. “Wonderful, wonderful women,” she adds.

Stieff began attending the school when she was 4. Then the preschool and kindergarten

classes were held in a building in McClellan Park. “You didn’t have grades,” she notes. Instead, the students met in groups, and each group had its own cabin.

“Anybody you ever run into that went to that school in those days will tell you it was different from any other school they went to, and they *loved* it,” Stieff says.

The school also had a number of boarders, and Harrison and Gavin liked to keep them happy after the regular school week ended, Stieff says. Therefore, “if you were good, you could go back to school” on the weekends to play with the boarders.

Each year, she continues, the school saw changes in its routine. However, a typical day would find the students gathering for a meeting first thing. Around 10:45 a.m., a bell would ring and the students would enjoy a snack of milk and crackers. “Then you could play for 15 minutes,” she says.

At noon, the students would wend their way along a path through the woods to go swimming in the bay for half an hour. “Then you had a hot dinner.”

Each child was allowed to request small portions, she points out, “but you were to eat everything on our plate. No exceptions.”

After all, she said, Harrison and Gavin impressed upon the students that people truly were starving in other places.

After lunch, the children went outside, where they could sleep on mats or listen to a teacher read to them for 30 minutes.

Regular classes ended at 3 p.m. each day, she says, but lessons in extracurricular activities

such as music, dance and arts and crafts followed.

Stieff's favorite part of school came at 4 p.m.: Sports Hour. It was "the highlight of the day as far as I was concerned," she says.

Then, at 4:45 p.m., everyone boarded a bus to return home.

Stieff also smiles broadly when recollecting that the students were fitted for "rhythm sandals," which the children wore as protection from sand spurs. The latter, she says, "were a major problem in Florida."

The thinking also went that the sandals made those young feet stronger, she points out.

FAMILY LORE

Although Stieff takes great delight in talking about her immediate family, she also points to her interest in genealogy. Decades before her own father came to Sarasota, she notes, her grandfather reportedly was a blockade-runner during the Civil War.

The story goes that after he was captured by the Union Army, Stieff's grandmother — whose family was in Baltimore — was able to make it out of Fernandina Beach on the train just before the federal troops captured the town.

Once she was back in Baltimore, Stieff says, her grandmother decided to personally peti-



Owen Burns built the El Vernona luxury hotel in the 1920s and named it for his wife. It stood where the Ritz-Carlton is located today. Photo courtesy Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

tion Abraham Lincoln for the release of Harriet's grandfather, and her grandmother reportedly walked to the White House to make that plea.

Lincoln felt so sorry for her grandmother — she had nine children and her husband was locked up — that he agreed to release Burns if he promised not to take up arms again against the Union, Stieff says.

Moreover, the family legend goes, Lincoln felt so sorry for her grandmother that he sent the woman back to Baltimore in his own coach.

THAT PAINTING

The family tale of her grandmother and Lincoln is not the only one Stieff obviously takes great joy in recounting. In fact, a more recent incident brings a big smile to her face. “A fun, fun, fun story,” she calls it.

After the death of John Jacob Astor IV on the Titanic, Harriet's father and John Ringling — both of whom were art collectors — went to an auction in New York City to purchase some of the Astor art collection.

One painting, *L'Enfant Malade* by Venezuelan artist Arturo Michelena, depicted a doctor attending a sick child. Her dad hung it in the hotel he had built and named for her mother, El Vernona, Stieff says.

After the hotel went into foreclosure during the Great Depression, her mother refused to have the painting moved into their house. It did not matter a whit that the painting had won a gold medal in a competition in Paris in 1887.

Not only was it large, Stieff points out — about 6 feet by 8 feet — but it reminded her mother of how Stieff nearly lost her leg as a child.

After school one day, Stieff, who was 4 at the time, went to the park at the site where the Church of the Redeemer stands today on South Palm Avenue. The big sandbox was a favorite of the town's children, Stieff points out.

“I remember bumping my leg as I went in the door” when she returned home that evening, she adds. The leg swelled significantly overnight, prompting the family doctor to recommend the services of a bone specialist in Venice. When Owen Burns located the doctor, he learned the physician had an appointment in New York City that week that he had to keep. When the train stopped in Sarasota, her father arranged for it to wait so the physician could come to the house to treat her, Stieff says. As soon as the doctor saw her leg, he told the family he needed to operate immediately, with more surgery necessary in six weeks.

After that initial operation, Burns drove the doctor back to the train station and the train resumed its journey north.

“Can you imagine that happening today?” Stieff asks. “But that was Sarasota in those days, a friendly, caring place.”

Stieff ended up having to spend part of the following summer at the children's hospital at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, to ensure her leg healed properly.

Therefore, with her mother and Stieff adamantly opposed to reliving those memories by having to look at that painting every day in their house, Burns “farmed it out” to the library, Stieff continues, which was where Florida Studio Theatre stands today on Palm Avenue.

After her father died and her mother moved away, Stieff says she recalls her mother receiving a letter from a prominent woman in Sarasota, asking about what to do with the painting. It seemed the library collection was being moved to another building. She had forgotten about that letter until her brother, Leonard, brought it up “a thousand years later,” when she and Leonard again were in Sarasota.

Stieff made a few attempts to find the painting, with no success. “End of chapter,” she told him.

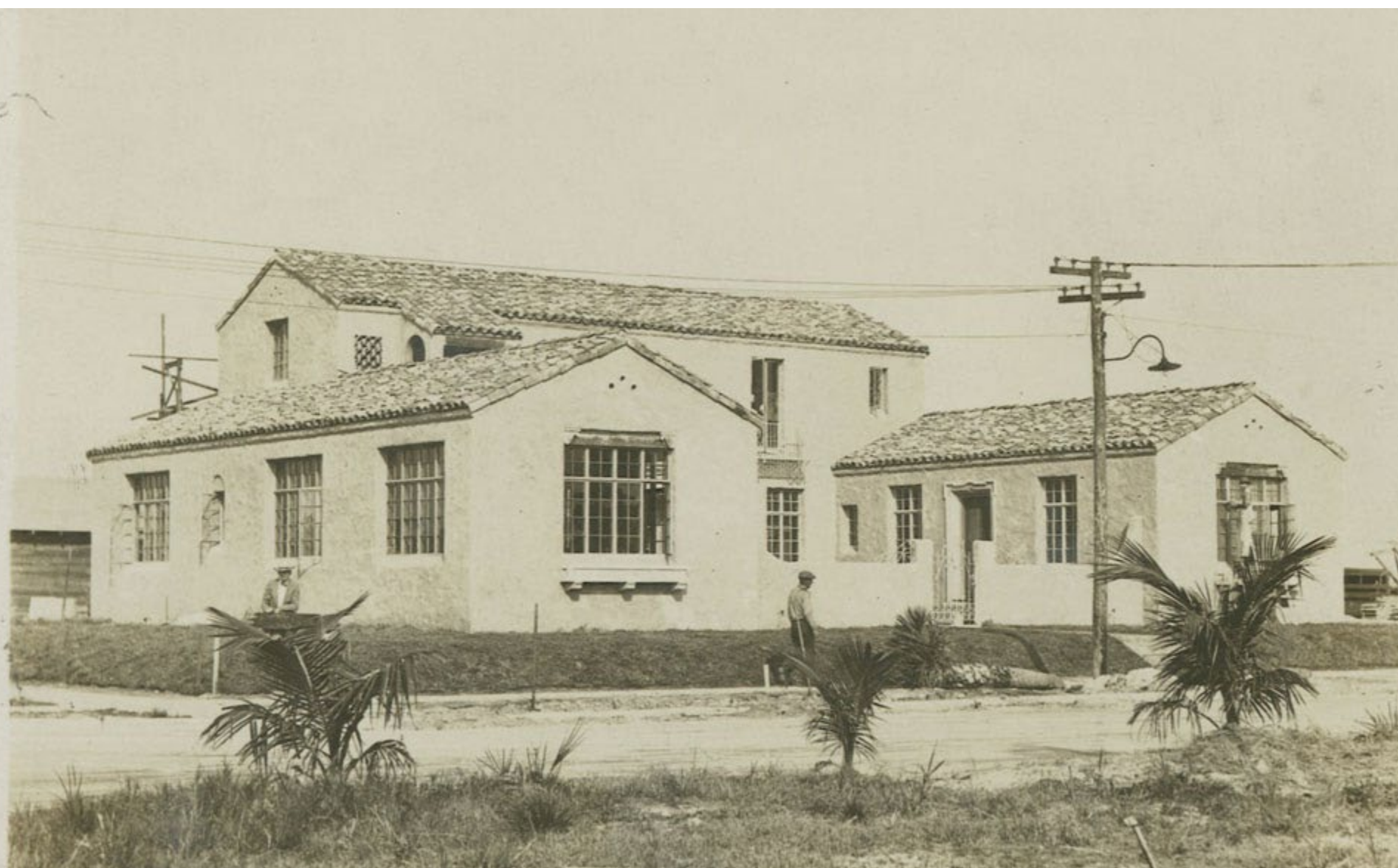
However, after Stieff’s older sister, Lillian, moved back to Sarasota, Lillian began collecting memorabilia about the community. Deborah Walk, a curator at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, “ran into Lil one day,”

Stieff says, and, in the course of conversation, ended up offering to help with sorting through what had become an enormous collection of material.

In the process, Walk and Lillian found a photo of *L’Enfant Malade*. Recognizing it as fine art, Walk then began trying to track it down, Stieff says.

Some time later, Stieff continues, Aaron De Groft, the deputy director of the museum, received a call from a person on staff at Sotheby’s in Miami; the man was seeking the same painting. Records indicated it was in the collection of Owen Burns of Sarasota, the man reported.

De Groft called Walk to his office, Stieff continues, telling her about the “weird call” he



Owen Burns' office was on Broadway. Photo courtesy Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

had received. “Debbie said she got laughing so hysterically,” Stieff adds. When Walk asked him when the call came in, De Groft replied that he received it that morning.

Then Walk told him a staff member had called her that same morning, reminding her about a painting she had asked about months ago. It turned out the staff member had found the painting in the basement of the museum, Stieff says, laughing at the coincidence. “This very same day,” she adds for emphasis.

“So Debbie goes over, and sure enough, there it was, down in the basement, leaning against the wall with a lot of other pictures,” Stieff says.

De Groft soon arranged to take Stieff on a tour of the Ringling mansion, the Ca d’Zan, which was being readied to open to the public. Stieff adds that he casually mentioned the museum staff might have found something that belonged to her father.

After consulting again with the man at Sotheby’s, De Groft suggested he and the museum staff consult with legal counsel and Stieff do the same, though he stressed, she says, “Let’s keep this all friendly.”

No one wanted to pursue litigation, she points out.

Ultimately, Stieff says, because no one in the family wanted the painting, the decision was reached for the family to make a donation to the museum, because it had stored the painting all those years. Then, when a Sotheby’s representative came to Sarasota to examine it, another decision was made to allow Sotheby’s

to partially restore the painting — which, she notes, was not in the best shape. The work would be covered out of proceeds from its sale at auction.

In the interim, she notes, “We had to go through 13 wills” from family members, to try to untangle how the proceeds would be divvied up.

Sotheby’s staff projected the sale price at \$250,000, Stieff says, and the Miami office shipped the painting to New York for sale. However, her son suggested a higher reserve for it than Sotheby’s had proposed, she notes. The firm agreed. “I should have gotten suspicious then,” she adds, “but I didn’t.”

With her husband, Lorin, hospitalized as a result of illness, Sotheby’s arranged for her to listen to the 2004 auction on the phone. After the reserve level was reached, Stieff said she was relieved. But the auction went “on and on,” and by that time, she had moved from a chair in the hospital room to the bed with Lorin, who was holding up the phone in the air.

When the gavel came down, the price was more than \$1 million. (According to The Associated Press, the sale price was \$1.2 million; the painting went to an anonymous buyer.)

“I never say, ‘Wow!’” Stieff points out. But she turned to Lorin and let out a “WOW!”

MODERN SARASOTA

From her condominium high in a building overlooking Sarasota Bay, Stieff remarks on how much the waterfront has changed. The bay was once much bigger, she points out.



Owen Burns circa 1925. Photo courtesy Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

Still, she says, “I think Sarasota developed magnificently until the last [real estate] bubble.”

“I know we have to have a thriving community,” she adds, but the emphasis seems to have turned more to glitz and grandeur.

“My mother used to say, ‘Sarasota was a small town, but it never was a hick town,’” she continues. “It always had a certain cultural emphasis.”

And that is the emphasis she hopes to see winning out in the long run.

“I’m probably the only one in Sarasota who feels that,” Stieff adds.

Then again, how many other Sarasotans can say they have watched the city so closely for almost 92 years. 

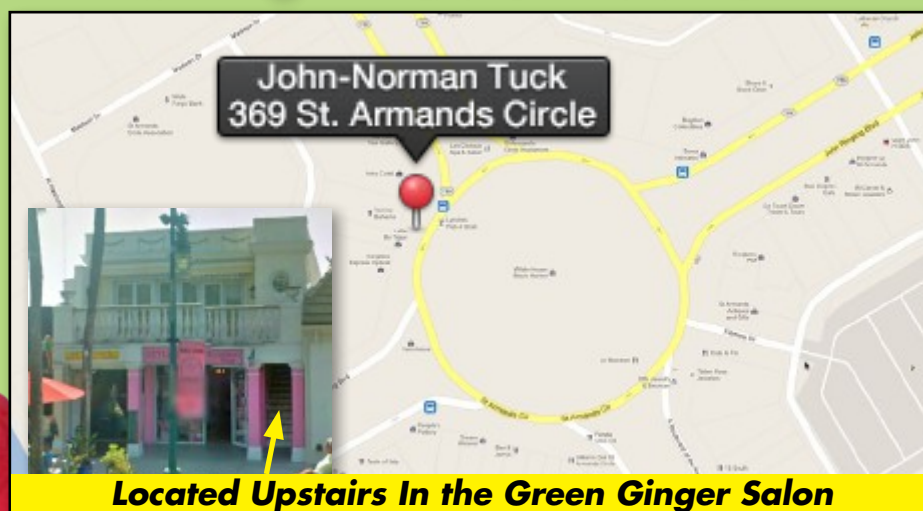
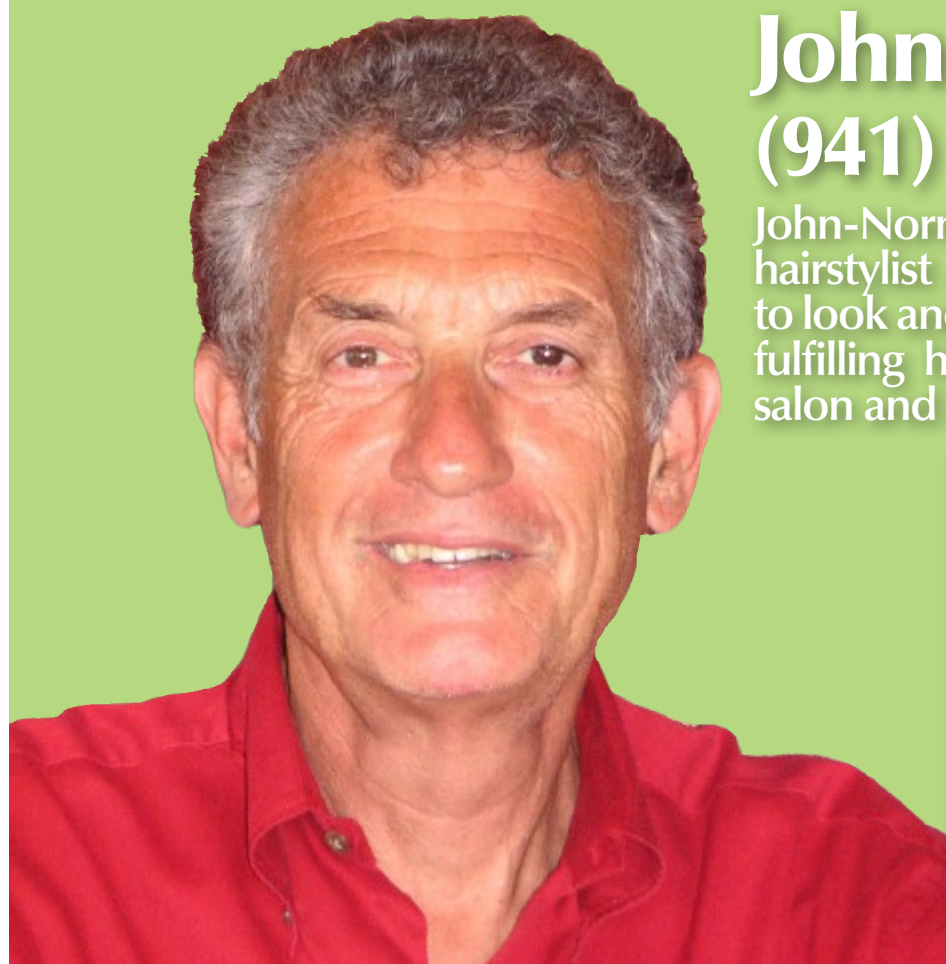


L'Enfant Malade by Arturo Michelena. Courtesy image

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ASK OTUS

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

THE ENDANGERED FLORIDA WOOD STORK IS AN EYE-CATCHING BIRD

Dear Readers,

Over the past several weeks I have been asked to identify a mystery bird based solely on vague descriptions by Siesta Key residents and visitors. This bird has been spotted wading during low tide in Little Sarasota Bay, in ponds and at our lagoon. It is consistently described as huge and white with a strange black head and enormous curved beak.

Elementary, my dear readers! It is the fabled Roc (or *rukḥ* in Persian), which appears throughout *The Arabian Nights* — the very same bird that destroyed Sinbad the Sailor's ship and carried him off to exotic strange lands.

In the 13th century, it was described more accurately by Marco Polo in his travel accounts



The fabled Roc destroyed Sinbad's ship. Photo by Caltrop via Wikimedia Commons

as being so enormous that its feathers measured 12 paces long. It also was reported to be so strong that it could grasp an elephant in its talons, carry the animal to the heavens and then drop it onto a rocky surface, where it smashed the elephant into gory fragments. Afterward the Roc would devour it in a leisurely fashion.

Well, this is Siesta Key and stranger things have happened around here! Just as I was about to present you with positive proof of this legendary creature's existence, the fabled Roc, I received a photo from a fisherman who had seen it at the bay's edge during low tide. He wrote, "This is a bad photo but can you identify this bird?"

First, let me say it was not a *bad* photo; it was a *dreadful* photo! Second, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being top marks), I rate it a 12! You see, identification is not about pretty photos, it is about identifying and, in this case, solving a mystery; thus preventing an Eastern Screech-Owl (that's me!) from appearing overly imaginative. If it were all about pretty photos, then every passport office and department of motor vehicles facility would require

Photoshop experts on staff to tweak people's photographic likenesses into something more pleasingly human. Readers, please, do not ever apologize: Just take that photo and send it in with your questions!

The Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) is a tall (36 inches to 45 inches) white-feathered Florida native who fishes in shallow brackish swamps and wetlands. Highly gregarious creatures, Wood Storks feed in flocks and nest in huge rookeries, usually with several pairs occupying a single tree. They are the only storks to breed Florida, particularly in our Florida Everglades. And if you learn nothing else from this column but this one fact I will be delighted, for reasons I shall explain later.

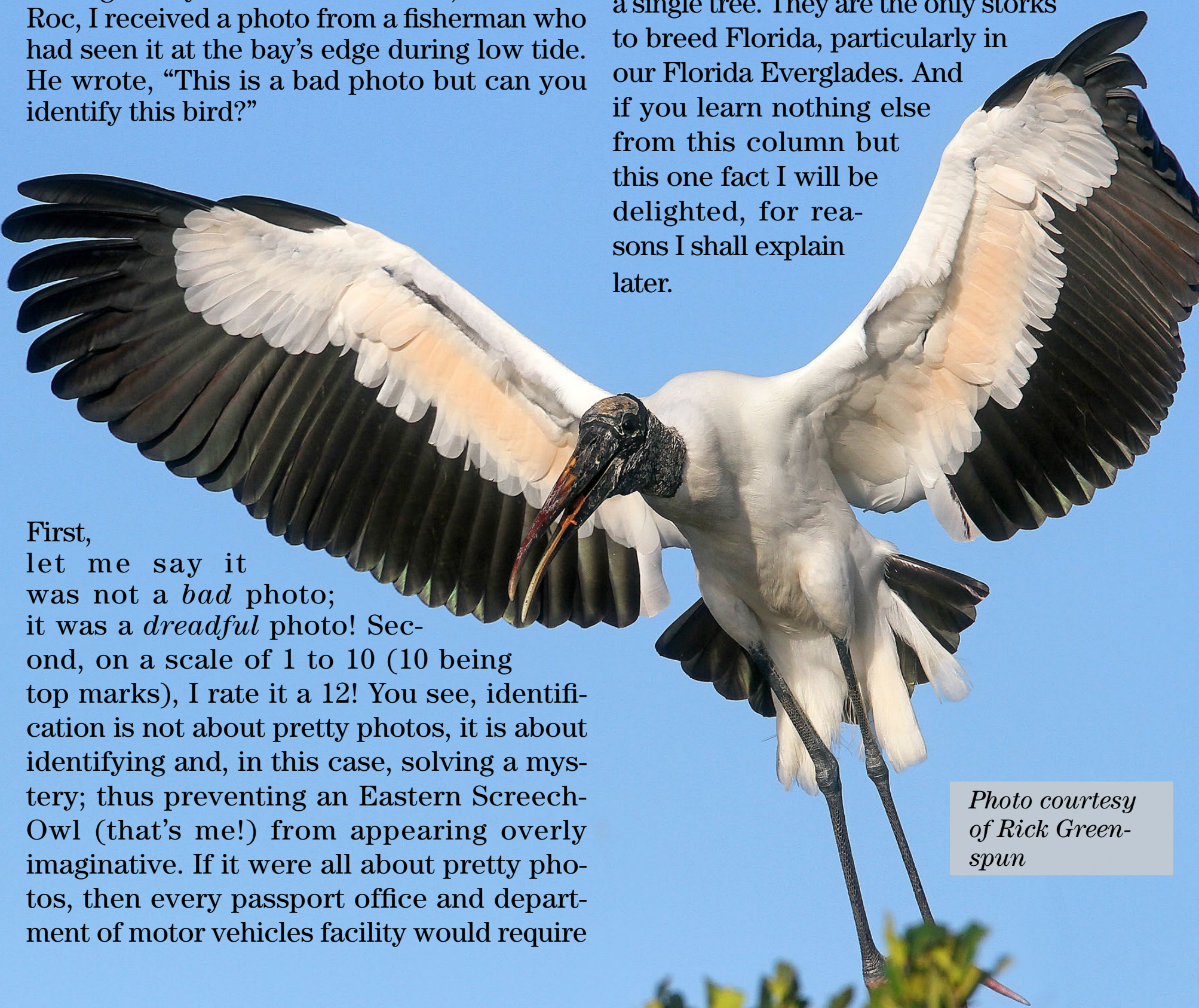


Photo courtesy
of Rick Green-
spun

One of the first things that leap out at you when you sight a Wood Stork (other than the fact you have not the foggiest idea what it is) is its grayish, dark-brown bald head. Why the bald head? For a long time, the Wood Stork was called a “Wood Ibis.” John J. Audubon also subtitled it so. And the two types of birds do share common features — the black-tipped white feathers, long bill and the bald head.

However, recent DNA testing has shown that the Wood Stork is most closely related to the vulture. Vultures require bald heads so that after thrusting them deep into an animal carcass, the tiny bits of decaying flesh do not stick to head feathers and contaminate the bird with bacterial diseases. The Wood Stork does not eat carrion. Its diet consists primarily of minnows, which he catches in a totally

unusual way, by “tactile location.” He wades into shallow waters, opens his bill and sticks it into the water. When he feels the fish touching it, he snaps his bill shut “in as little as 25 milliseconds — an incredibly quick reaction time matched by few other vertebrates.” This quotation is from *National Geographic*. It is an awesome factoid, but I am not too impressed, as I have seen females of the human species chomp on a chocolate bonbon in less time.

“Ironhead,” as the Wood Stork is often called, does not need that bare skin protection from disease, as it does not consume carrion. Neither does our native American Turkey. In the case of the Turkey, the brightly colored and patriotic red, white and blue skin patches on a male during breeding season are ornamental and terribly sexy to the female of the species.



The Wood Stork's black-tipped white feathers are distinctive. File photo

I speculate that the Wood Stork's ancestors, who evolved during the Eocene Epoch, may have been sticking their heads into rotting whale carcasses. However, over the next 50 million years, although the physique of this bird has hardly changed at all, its diet did, and in breeding season its subtle skin and beak color changes are found wildly attractive by the female Wood Stork.

I have asked our eminent Sarasota amateur ornithologist Rick Greenspun about breeding and brooding season around Sarasota. He reports, "The nearest rookery that I know of is on the Bradenton River about three miles east of [U.S.] 41. They are on nests now and will have the young ones screaming for food by May."

As you will probably never see nesting Wood Storks, unless you travel up the Bradenton River or journey to the Everglades, Rick kindly provided us with beautiful photos. Please note a couple things when looking at them. All the descriptions I have read refer to their wings as "white with black flight feathers." Those black tips are actually tinged with an iridescent emerald shade. Very pretty! Also note their huge, pink wading feet and the babies' fluffy white-feathered heads and huge hungry mouths. I am particularly fond of the photo of proud Mama or Papa (oh, dear, another bird which does not display sexual dimorphism!) with chick. Thanks to the species' dignified and stately demeanor, people have also called Wood Storks "Preacherbirds."



Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun



Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun

I also love the part about “screaming for food,” because Wood Storks only eat very small fish, and the average nesting Mama and Papa, with just two chicks (they can have up to four chicks), will require 400 pounds of fish just for a three-month period. That is a phenomenal amount of fish.

A parent must regularly fly anywhere from 5 to 12 miles from the nest to forage for fish — during a sudden drought, even further. One Papa Stork was documented flying 75 miles (one-way!) and not returning until the next day. An overnight fishing trip is very stressful

for the nesting Mama bird, who is not certain that her mate will safely return with food, or return at all.

The Florida Wood Stork is still considered an endangered species. Let me explain why this has happened. Wood Storks mature — i.e., are able to breed — by their third to fourth year. In Florida, they can only mate and begin nesting during our dry season, so they can capture fish in shrinking pools of water. They appear able to refrain from breeding in Florida if our dry season has been unseasonably rainy and the level of their wading waters too high for





optimal fishing. If they do not have the right conditions, they will not nest here. So, that is one thing they have going against them.

The second, of course, is man's encroachment on the boundaries of their nesting sites. For example, when man dams up grasslands for agricultural use, these birds can no longer fish or nest nearby. When he builds an artificial body of water, it will be too deep for their fishing.

The encouraging news is that through years of dedicated work by conservationists and cooperation from farmers, ranchers and developers, the number of breeding pairs has dramatically risen from 2,000 to 9,000.

I have always found statistics a dry boring lot unless there is a story to accompany them. Here it is:

The presence of healthy birds and fish in our environment reflects upon the health and well being of the human inhabitants. Increased sightings of the endangered Florida Wood Stork attest to a fine balance here between nature and people, one that is vitally important to all.

You see, Storks deliver bundles of joy to human homes. Unlike the European white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), who simply drops babies down the chimney, the Florida Wood Stork carefully wraps babies in fluffy flannel blanket



Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun

packages and gently deposits them in cradles. This is the correct method, because adorable human babies are born Level 1a altricial (i.e., even more helpless than ludicrously adorable Eastern-Screech Owlets) and need very gentle handling. Also, because human babies display sexual dimorphism, the Wood Stork thoughtfully bundles them in blue for boys and pink for girls. Charming!

Readers, please, the next time you count your blessings, do not forget to count our very own Florida Wood Stork!

Otus 

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A REQUEST FOR A BENCH IN FRONT OF BIG OLAF'S SPARKS COUNTY COMMISSION COMMENTS ABOUT FOLLOWING 'THE PROCESS'; THE SIESTA KEY ASSOCIATION SEEKS TO AMELIORATE PARKING ISSUES



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

A request to the County Commission last week from representatives of two Siesta Key organizations resulted in a bit of lively discussion amid regular agenda items.

After the board wrapped up two matters on April 24 that had been postponed from April 23, it heard from Commissioner Nora Patterson that the Siesta Key Village Association had sent her an email saying it would like to

pursue putting a bench in front of Big Olaf's ice cream shop in Siesta Village, located at 5208 Ocean Blvd.

"I'm told they can't get anything to grow in front of [the shop] because the place is always mobbed with children," Patterson added.

"I realize there's a process to follow, but I think it would be helpful if the commission would take a vote to support the location of



A photo shows the area in front of Big Olaf's where organizations on Siesta Key would like to see a bench placed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

the bench, provided it doesn't obstruct any pedestrian traffic," she continued, adding she would make a motion to that effect.

"I don't think we can do that in advance" of a permit being issued for the bench in the right of way, Commissioner Joe Barbetta responded.

What she intended, Patterson said, was a motion asking staff to work on the request with the Siesta Key Village Association and the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp.

"That's staff's obligation," Barbetta told her, adding he was not certain why the matter had come to the commission first.

Patterson had no answer.

"They just came straight to us, figuring it was a shortcut," Barbetta said. Instead, he pointed out, the organizations need to go through the process for obtaining a permit to put the bench in the right of way, "and [the request will] come before us."

Patterson responded that she felt the request had been made because the County Commission was responsible for the beautification of Siesta Village, which was completed in early 2009.

When Barbetta sought clarification from Paula Wiggins, the county's transportation planning



Benches like this one in front of the Daiquiri Deck were placed in Siesta Village during the beautification project several years ago. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Siesta Seen

manager, regarding the process such a request should follow, Wiggins said a permit would be needed to put the bench in the location the groups had suggested.

"I'll relay that back to them," Patterson said.

Later, before the board broke for lunch, Patterson revived the matter, saying she had emailed Russell Matthes, the SKVA president, and Mark Smith, who heads up the Maintenance Corp., to tell them what the board had decided earlier. Their response, she continued, was that they wanted permission to cover the expense for the bench out of the assessments property owners pay for Village maintenance. They added, Patterson noted, that they would be happy to follow the appropriate process to request the bench's placement in the right of way.

Then Commissioner Christine Robinson said she had emailed them back to ask why they were seeking to buy the bench before the right of way use was granted.

Patterson responded that she thought they needed County Commission permission to purchase the bench out of the assessment funds.

"We'll be happy to look into this and report on it," County Administrator Randall Reid told the board.

"They should consider trying to do this through staff," Robinson added, noting that handling the matter through emails without all the pertinent information could be problematic.

Then Patterson said she understood a county staff member had suggested they bring their request about the purchase of the bench to the County Commission. "I don't think they're asking to buy the bench before they have permission to put it out," she added.

At that point, James K. Harriott Jr., the county's chief engineer, stepped to the podium to clarify that if the ordinance for the Village upkeep does not specifically say assessments will pay for a certain item, the County Commission has to give its approval for the payment to come out of the assessments.

"Again, there's a process," Barbetta said. "It shouldn't be an email to one commissioner."

Patterson reiterated that Matthes and Smith were acting on information given to them by a county employee in the Public Works Department.

She added, "Remember, lots of things come through one commissioner to the table ..."

An email from Reid to Patterson on April 24 repeated that staff was checking on the matter and "will address it appropriately."

Reid also wrote, "Emails sent to meetings for reactions by Commissioners never seem to go well. The right staff needs to be involved for proper resolution. I will keep you posted."

In the interim, Mark Smith had emailed Patterson to say, "We really need to modify the ordinance [for the Village upkeep] to add little improvements to the Village without making it a [County Commission] issue."

Siesta Seen

PARKING ENFORCEMENT

The Siesta Key Association is lending its support to residents seeking County Commission approval of parking restrictions on Avenida de Mayo.

SKA President Catherine Luckner told me recently that the organization hopes to win the commission's approval for designating portions of the street as a "No Parking" zone, with signs alerting drivers of the potential for towing if violations occur.

During the SKA's April 4 meeting, Marlene Merkle and other Avenida de Mayo residents addressed the issues they first brought to the attention of county officials last year: Over-



A map shows the intersections of Avenida Messina, Columbus Boulevard and Avenida Navarra on Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps



A photo taken in March by Marlene Merkle shows cars parked on the grass along Avenida de Mayo. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

flow parking in their neighborhood creates congestion and the potential for accidents; it also is an impediment to any emergency vehicles that need to use the road.

Merkle, who has lived on the street for 25 years, petitioned the county's Traffic Advisory Council (TAC) to prohibit parking on one side of the street. After a tie vote on March 11, TAC Chairman Frank Domingo suggested the matter would end up in front of the County Commission, even though a tie vote usually meant the end of a matter.

That County Commission discussion is set for May 21.

Beforehand, SKA representatives plan to meet with county Traffic/Mobility Office staff and review the material from the TAC meeting before drafting a letter to the County Commission, Luckner told me.

SKA Vice President Michael Shay, who introduced the Avenida de Mayo group at the April SKA meeting, pointed out that their street is one with private homes. Yet, on a daily basis, the residents contend with vehicles parked on both sides of the street.

Siesta Village's municipal parking lot has one entrance/exit on Avenida de Mayo.



Another photo taken by Marlene Merkle shows cars double-parked along Avenida de Mayo. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

Shay said he had seen the photos Merkle provided to the TAC, which showed vehicles parked in the street and on the right of way.

John Lally, the key's primary Sarasota County Code Enforcement officer, was out of work for about four months because of health problems, Luckner pointed out. When she asked whether Merkle had talked with Lally since he had returned to his job, Merkle replied that she had. "He's a nice guy," Merkle added.

"Enforcement takes people," SKA board member Deet Jonker said, "[and] the county's not excited about putting more people on enforcement." (An SKA request last year for more full-time Code Enforcement staffing failed to gain sufficient County Commission support.)

Diane Erne, who lives in a condominium in the vicinity of restaurants on Avenida Messina in Siesta Village, pointed out that delivery trucks also create problems for residents. "You cannot drive down Messina much of the time," she said.

The intersection near Avenida Messina and Avenida Navarra is particularly bad, she pointed out. "And these are huge semis ... [but] I've never seen anyone given a ticket."

Luckner responded that the SKA would check with Code Enforcement staff about that situation as well. There are unwritten rules allowing drivers to leave trucks in "No Parking" zones for a certain period of time as the


drivers make deliveries, Luckner continued, but she was unsure what length of time is generally allowed.

When Luckner told Merkle the board would work on a letter of support for her and other Avenida de Mayo residents in their quest for parking restrictions, Merkle responded, "That would be wonderful. ... Any kind of formal support [from a group such as the SKA] is very important. It really is."

"We're here to help," Jonker added.

When SKA board member Helen Clifford asked how the organization could ameliorate the situation Erne had described, Erne told her "No Parking" and "Parking by Permit Only" signs seem to have no effect because of the expansion of businesses in that part of the Village.

The letter the SKA would prepare regarding the de Mayo problems would consider traffic impacts on all residents, not just on those on that street, Luckner noted. "I think one of the issues we have talked about is ... there may be a necessary moratorium at some point on [any new Siesta business] that requires new parking ..."

Luckner cautioned that the environment that brings people to Siesta Key in the first place could be irreparably damaged without sufficient traffic and parking enforcement. 



Ricki Bertoni's Too Hip To Be Square was a hit during the 2012 Theatre of Dreams. Contributed photo by Frank Atura

PHOTO BY FRANK ATURA

THEATRE OF DREAMS TO CLOSE OUT SARASOTA BALLET SEASON

Theatre of Dreams, an opportunity for audience members to view original works choreographed by company members of The Sarasota Ballet, will run May 3-5 at the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, the Ballet has announced.

With performances choreographed by principal dancers Kate Honea, Ricardo Graziano and Logan Learned, along with offerings by soloist Ricki Bertoni and coryphee member Jamie Carter, "Program Seven is a unique and creative showcase of the vast talent and style found within the Company," a news release notes.

For the very first time, the *Theatre of Dreams* program will be set to live music, the release adds. Each of the five choreographers was charged by Ballet Director Iain Webb "to craft

a piece that not only highlighted their vision, but encompassed the presence of instruments on stage," the release notes. With each choreographer having the freedom to choose the music, instrumentation will range from a jazz band to a cello, the release says.

"It's amazing what can be created in such a small period of time," Carter, whose work will be featured in the *Theatre of Dreams* program for the third time, notes in the release. "It's about work ethic, creativity and passion. My favorite thing about being allowed to choreograph for the company is having the chance to give something back."

Carter's work, titled *Concordium*, a Latin word meaning *harmoniously*, will be performed to the music of 20th century American composer George Rochberg.

Honea, has choreographed twice before for *Theatre of Dreams*. This year, she created *Broke & Blues*, a piece that includes 14 dancers and music from Claude Bolling, a jazz pianist. “My piece is a jazzy take on classical,” said Honea in the release.

Set to a grand piano playing the music of Franz Schubert, Graziano’s piece is “far different than *Symphony of Sorrows*, his 2012 *Theatre of Dreams* creation,” the release notes. Titled, *Valsinhas*, his new work “is lighthearted and playful,” the release adds.

“People’s natural reaction to music is to dance. This piece is going to illuminate that fact and show people being drawn towards the piano,” Graziano says in the release.

Bertoni’s piece, which also features just a piano, uses two compositions from ragtime composer Scott Joplin. Bertoni adds that he found his inspiration for the 10-minute piece from American actor, dancer and musical theater choreographer Bob Fosse.

Making his *Theatre of Dreams* debut, Learned will put seven dancers on stage for his comedic *Scenes De Ballet*, the release continues. It is a farce “inspired by the multitude of ballet rehearsals Learned has attended over the years,” the release says.

Tickets may be purchased [online](#) 24 hours a day, seven days a week with Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover. The box office may be contacted by calling 359-0099, Ext. 101.



Ricardo Graziano performs in his work, *Symphony of Sorrows*, in 2012. Photo by Frank Atura

SARASOTA HIGH GROUPS PLAN PERFORMANCES FOR MAY 4, 23

The Sarasota High School Choral Department will present the Sixth Annual Singing Sailors Spring Cabaret and Silent Auction from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, May 4, at the Bethel Mennonite Church in Sarasota.

The theme of the after-dinner dessert event fundraiser will be *New York, New York*, a news release says. "Guests are encouraged to have dinner before they arrive; light refreshments and delicious desserts will be served," the release adds.

Sarasota High School choirs and soloists will perform. Guests are encouraged to dress to reflect the Manhattan/Broadway theme, the release notes. Mother's Day gifts and other items will be included in a silent auction.

Tickets are \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door, \$10 for students and \$12 each for groups of 10 or more. Tickets may be purchased at Sarasota High School with cash or with checks made

out to SHS Chorus Boosters. Payment at the door may be made with a credit card. More information is available at 955-0181, Ext. 64599, between 7:30 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Bethel Mennonite Church is located at 2985 Bethel Lane, Sarasota, off Fruitville Road (east of I-75).

Additionally, the Sarasota High School Choral Department will present the 2013 Final Bow End of the Year Concert at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 23, in the school auditorium. This concert will feature a wide variety of music, showcasing the Singing Sailors, the Chamber Choir, the Women's Chorale and student soloists, the release points out. The program will conclude with a salute to the graduating seniors of 2013 as they take their "final bow," the release adds.

The concert is free and open to the public.

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



(From left) Four members of the Sarasota High School Singing Sailors take a break from a performance with Kirby Sanders, the group's choral director: Jacob Brown, James Hyde, Sanders, Grady Griffin and Garrett Bryant. Contributed photo

AUNT RUDELE TO MAKE WBTT APPEARANCES MAY 16-19

The Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe (WBTT) has announced that WBTT Artistic Director Nate Jacobs' favorite relative, Aunt Rudele, will visit Sarasota again in a four-performance engagement, May 16-19, at the WBTT Theater, 1646 10th Way, Sarasota.

Aunt Rudele's Family Reunion will be offered at 8 p.m. on those dates with a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m., a news release says. Tickets, which are \$29.50, may be purchased online at www.wbttstrq.org or by calling the box office at 366-1505.

"I created Aunt Rudele by combining the personalities of many women in my life," Jacobs explains in the release, "but especially my mother and my grandmother. When I was a student at Florida A&M University, we were all asked to perform something on the spot. No one could believe I had just made her up."

When Jacobs appears in *Aunt Rudele's Family Reunion*, "everyone relates because she is a character everyone knows and loves," the release adds. "She's the righteous and meddling relative who has no boundaries. She's funny, flirtatious and not afraid to speak her mind."

Aunt Rudele's Family Reunion has only been seen twice in Sarasota: in Florida Studio Theatre's Cabaret and at the Historic Asolo Theater during WBTT's 2007-08 season, the release notes.

"*Aunt Rudele* is a very fun character and we are very pleased to bring her to life again in our own theater," Jacobs continues in the release. "Sorry to say, she can't stay too long, but I guarantee it will be fun while it lasts."



Aunt Rudele will return to the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe stage this month. Contributed photo

RIVERVIEW WIND ENSEMBLE TAKES FIRST PLACE AT MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Riverview High School Wind Ensemble finished first in its category at the Smoky Mountain Music Festival on Saturday, April 20, in Gatlinburg, TN, outscoring high school teams from Fairfax, VA, and Savannah, GA, the Sarasota County Schools have announced.

Certificates of Excellence for Outstanding Performance were awarded to Ensemble soloists Henry Nguyen, clarinet; Ian Holst, oboe; Philip Carallo, alto sax; Sarah Morich, flute; first flute section members Megan Dutreil, Jennifer Girma, Selena Heard, Sarah Morich and Carlo Saluta; and trombone section members Austin

Canon, Judsen Cressey, Danny Gardi, Dennis Luong, David Spreen and Zack Vagn.

The Ensemble is conducted by RHS Music Director Mark Spreen, a news release notes.

The Smoky Mountain Music Festival was established in 1983, the release says. More than 6,500 groups from 28 states and Canada have participated in choral, band and orchestra events. Professional musicians and music educators serve as judges, the release adds.

Riverview High School is located at 1 Ram Way, Sarasota.


CELTIC THUNDER RETURNING TO SARASOTA ON MYTHOLOGY TOUR

Celtic Thunder will return to the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota on Nov. 15 with its new *Mythology* tour, the hall has announced.

The world-renowned group — comprising vocalists Emmet Cahill, Keith Harkin, Ryan Kelly, George Donaldson, Neil Byrne and Colm Keegan — “continues to astonish audiences, traveling as easily across the genres of folk, traditional Irish, adult contemporary, rock and classical cross-over, as [it travels] the world, performing for an ever-growing number of fans,” a news release says.

“Celtic Thunder: *Mythology* presents the perfect blend of entertainment, ideology and Gaelic spirituality, providing a modern twist on the old Celtic storytelling tradition,” the release adds. In addition to the six main vocalists, the tour will feature strings, gui-

tar, percussion, whistles, pipes, guitars and more in the eight-piece Celtic Thunder band, the release notes.

Tickets are priced from \$35 to \$85. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org. 



Celtic Thunder will return to the Van Wezel in November. Contributed photo



Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood Interfaith Tea Co-Chairwomen Dorothy Quint and Aida Florsheim. Contributed photo

SISTERHOOD INTERFAITH TEA TO BE HELD MAY 8

The Sisterhood Interfaith Tea will return to Temple Emanu-El, 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, on Wednesday, May 8, from 1:30 to 4 p.m., the Temple has announced.

“This unique event is an afternoon of learning, celebrating, and building bridges with old and new friends of various faiths,” a news release says.

The Tea will begin with a panel discussion about arts, music, dance and food “and how these elements are woven into the traditions and celebrations of different religions,” the release adds. Panelists will be female religious leaders and laypeople representing Judaism, trans-denominational Christianity, Hinduism and Greek Orthodoxy. A question-and-answer period will follow.

The event will conclude with casual socializing, the release notes.

Tea and sweets will be served, and attendees of different faiths will be encouraged to sit together to foster friendship and understanding, it says.

The Sisterhood Interfaith Tea is chaired by Dorothy Quint and Aida Florsheim. The cost is \$5; reservations are appreciated, the release adds.

Attendees are also asked to bring at least one nonperishable food item for All Faiths Food Bank.

For more information, call Dorothy Quint at 359-9417 or Aida Florsheim at 922-5711.

SHABBAT ALIVE! RETURNS TO TEMPLE EMANU-EL MAY 10

Emanu-El, 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, will host another installment of its popular *Shabbat Alive!* worship service on Friday, May 10, at 7:30 p.m.

Now in their fourth year, Temple Emanu-El's *Shabbat Alive!* services are all-musical celebrations of Shabbat featuring arrangements of the traditional prayers "that range from serene and contemplative to stirring and inspiring to wild and exultant," a news release says. "A full band of professional and volunteer musicians and vocalists join Rabbi Brenner Glickman on

the pulpit to bring this worship experience to life." Among the composers whose works will be performed are Debbie Friedman, Cantor Lisa Levine, Louis Lewandowski, Rick Recht and Craig Taubman.

The *Shabbat Alive!* service will be preceded by a 6 p.m. Shabbat dinner; for dinner reservations, call 388-7899.

The service is free with no reservations required.

For more information, call 371-2788. 



Temple Emanu-El Shabbat Alive! leaders are (front row, from left) Dan Cartlidge, Joe Bruno, Cynthia Roberts-Greene, Stuart Miller, Deborah Cameron, (back row, from left) Rachel Nelson-Assi, Sam Silverberg and Rabbi Brenner Glickman. Contributed photo



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

03
MAY

Echoes of Spring, featuring the work of 10 artists

May 3, 6 to 9 p.m., Dabbert Gallery, 76 S. Palm Ave. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

04+
MAY

Bill Russell's Side Show

May 4, 2 and 7:30 p.m.; May 5, 2 p.m.; The Players Theatre, 838 N. Tamiami Trail. Tickets: \$25; 365-2494 or ThePlayers.org.

05
MAY

Selby Spring Music Series presents Latin Rendezvous

May 5, 1 to 3 p.m., Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, 811 S. Palm Ave. Free with garden admission. Members & children under 12 admitted free; members' guests: \$5; all others pay \$17. Information at Selby.org.

09+
MAY

Landscapes, Mindscapes and Dreamscapes

May 9 through July 20, Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art Gallery, 1288 N. Palm Ave. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or AllynGallup.com.

11
MAY

Third Annual Rose Festival

May 11, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Phillippi Estate Mansion and Rose Gardens, 5500 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, featuring rose displays by the Bradenton-Sarasota Rose Society, classes and sales of roses. For info: 358-6991 or www.b-srs.org.

11
MAY

WSLR presents the Whitney James Jazz Quintet

May 11, 7:30 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$12 in advance; \$15 at the door; 894-6469 or WSLR.org.

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



thisweekin
SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR

'BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY!'



**SCHIMMEL
SIGHTINGS**



Each week, Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel searches Sarasota County for iconic shots that underscore why the community is a favorite with residents and tourists alike.