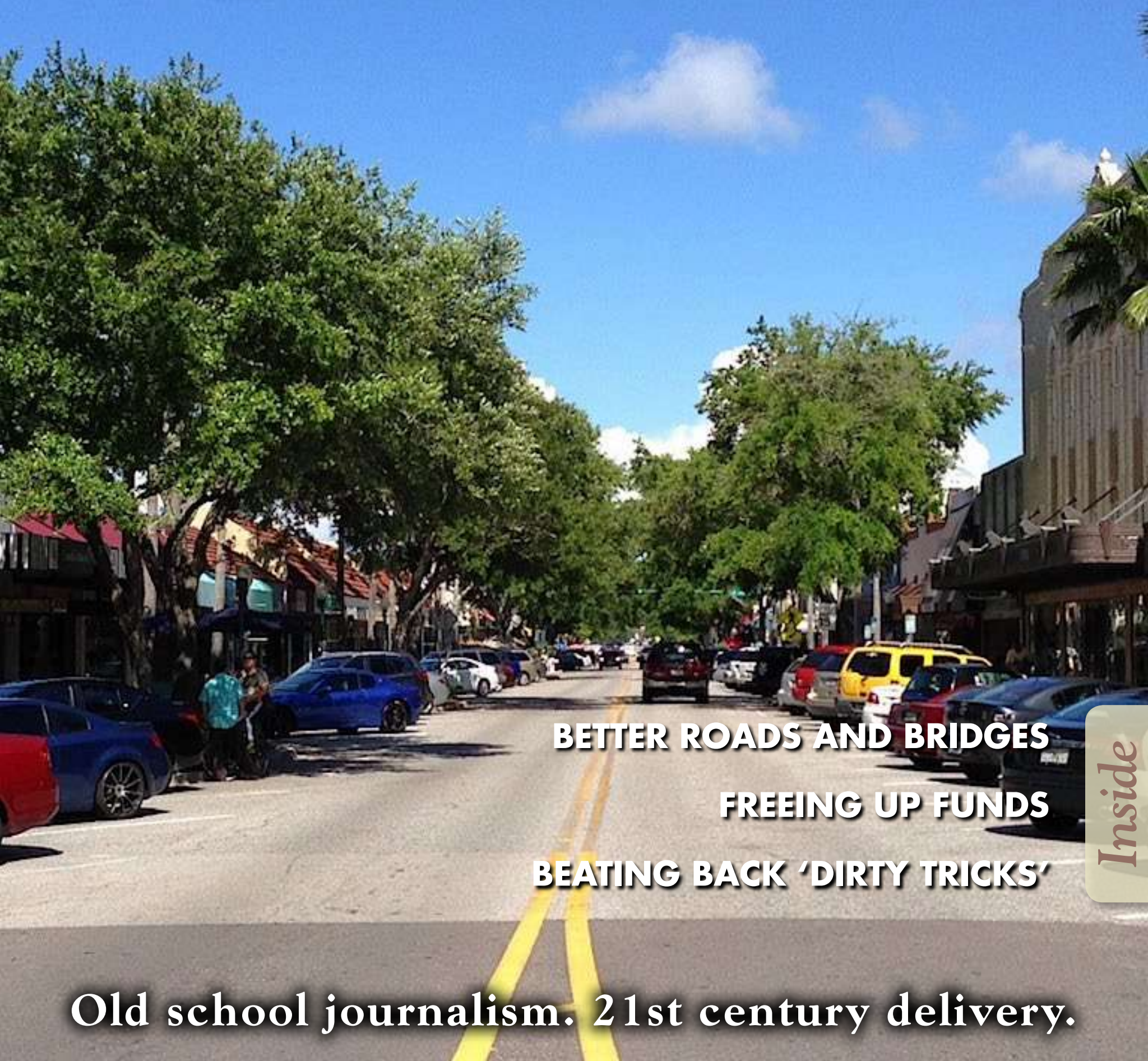


THE SARASOTA

No. 35 — May 17, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



BETTER ROADS AND BRIDGES

FREEING UP FUNDS

BEATING BACK 'DIRTY TRICKS'

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Welcome

Another week, another Sarasota County Commission meeting. If it seems to you that board meets a *lot*, do not feel alone in your observation.

Even a more recently elected county commissioner remarked on that fact when the board was updating its session schedule a few weeks ago. A longer-serving member retorted that the current schedule is nothing compared to what it was at the height of the building boom, when commissioners were dealing with far more requests.

And if you also wonder why I would bother to mention any of that, it is because right now, the *News Leader* is the only publication in north Sarasota County that is reporting regularly on what transpires at those County Commission meetings. Given our stated goal at the outset — to provide you as much in-depth news as possible about what is going on in this community — it remains a point of pride that we are doing our best to stay on top of what the County Commission is doing.

You need not fret that this week's issue is all County Commission news, however. Cooper Levey-Baker and Stan Zimmerman both have been busy, with Cooper delving not only into the work of the new political action committee seeking non-partisan countywide elections but also a look at the Harvey Milk Festival. Stan made it to both meetings of the city's "alphabet" boards this week — the BID and the DID — and has plenty to report from them, along with previewing Monday's City Commission meeting.

Otus offers us the real story about Cattle Egrets — and excellent photos, of course. And there is no dearth of news from Siesta Key.

As always, please do not hesitate to tell us what you think about what you read!

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher





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BETTER ROADS AND BRIDGES

(From left) Chief Financial Planning Officer Steve Botelho and County Administrator Randall Reid listen as Capital Projects Director Isaac Brownman explains priorities on the Capital Improvements Program list. Photo by Rachel Hackney

THE COUNTY COMMISSION SPLITS ON VOTES TO ADD MORE FUNDING TO ROAD RESURFACING AND BRIDGE REPAIRS OVER THE NEXT FIVE FISCAL YEARS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

More money will be going to road resurfacing and bridge repairs over the next five years, thanks to two split votes of the Sarasota County Commission during its May 14 budget workshop.

With Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Vice Chairman Charles Hines in the minority, the board approved allocating an extra \$10 million to road repaving and about \$4.1 million to the bridge work.

Since the board's last budget workshop, on April 30, staff had reprioritized projects in the county's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for Fiscal Years 2014-2018. The work left the commissioners with about \$14.1 million in surtax — sales tax — revenue to allocate to unfunded initiatives.

“If you’ve ever gone to a city that hasn’t kept up with its road repaving, the message is loud and clear: This community is not doing well.”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

During the staff presentation on May 14, Commissioner Christine Robinson questioned James K. Harriott Jr., the county's chief engineer, about comments he had

made on April 30 regarding road resurfacing. Harriott confirmed that it would take about \$10 million per year to keep no more than 40 percent of the county's roads from falling below a rating of 60. When a road drops below that level, Harriott explained, the commissioners and staff begin to hear complaints from drivers.

The proposed CIP list called for the county to spend about \$4.5 million per year on road resurfacing for FY 2014-18.

"My feeling is we need to [increase the funding], however we figure it out," Commissioner Nora Patterson said. "To let things get worse is not a very good investment for the future."

When Patterson then asked for confirmation that repairs become more expensive later

if resurfacing is not undertaken in a timely fashion, County Administrator Randall Reid responded, "Correct. If you don't resurface, then it becomes reconstruction ... and [the cost] keeps going up."

Robinson also questioned Harriott about whether unfunded bridge repair projects could become critical ones over the next five years.

Changes can occur "almost overnight" with bridges, Harriott responded.

Earlier, Harriott pointed out that in 2010, staff believed the Myakka Road Bridge had sustained damage when a vehicle with too heavy a load traveled across it. During the annual inspection of the bridge in November 2010, he said, staff found a beam crack that had ne-



Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. (left) confers with County Administrator Randall Reid. Photo by Rachel Hackney

cessitated putting the bridge at the top of the list for county repair projects, at a projected cost of \$4,246,000.

However, Harriott explained, unlike the case with bridges, decline in the condition of road pavement “tends to be more gradual. You can see it coming ... So I wouldn’t expect huge changes over the course of one fiscal year” in priorities for resurfacing.

In response to another question from Robinson, Harriott said staff does not undertake annual inspections of roads. “I wish it were every year,” he added. Spot checks are made when residents, commissioners or county employees note deterioration in specific roads, Harriott pointed out.

Barbetta agreed that more funding should be allocated to resurfacing. He made a motion calling for an extra \$5 million to be spent on that work over the next five fiscal years, suggesting more of those funds be utilized in the first year or two. “We’ve got to chip away at it somehow.”

After she seconded the motion for discussion purposes, Patterson said, “I would actually do more.” She proposed an amendment calling for an allocation of an extra \$7 million for FY 2014 through FY 2018.

Robinson seconded that motion, also for discussion. She added that she would increase the amount to \$10 million.

Patterson agreed to the suggestion as a substitute motion.



A slide shows a crack in the beam of the Myakka Road Bridge. Photo by Rachel Hackney

“That’s *half* of what we will need” over the next five fiscal years, Robinson pointed out, referring to the PowerPoint presentation provided by staff. “That’s basically a quality of life [issue],” she noted.

“I can’t support it,” Barbetta replied. “I realize it’s a critical need, but the way you address [that] is you give it some money upfront ... and utilize your other money that gives you a return on investment, so you’ll have addition-

al funds to catch up. ... You have to increase your tax base. You have to bring in additional sales tax ...”

“If you’ve ever gone to a city that hasn’t kept up with its road repaving, the message is loud and clear: This community is not doing well,” Patterson countered.

“I think we have made huge commitments, invested in our future,” Patterson added, pointing to the [Impact Report](#) Sarasota County

Roadway Resurfacing

Roadway Resurfacing FY14 - FY18 Programmed = \$20.5 Million

Priority	Project Name	Estimated Cost
1	Knight's Trail Rd	\$ 475,000
2	Cattlemen Rd Area	\$ 1,400,000
3	Uplands Sub and Ridgewood Estates	\$ 1,000,000
4	Englewood Area	\$ 2,500,000
5	Venice City Area	\$ 500,000
6	Jacaranda Blvd	\$ 1,750,000
7	Center Rd Area	\$ 2,500,000
8	Laurel Rd	\$ 3,300,000
9	Beneva Rd	\$ 2,100,000
10	Sarasota Golf Club and Colonial Oaks	\$ 3,000,000
11	Casey Key Area	\$ 2,000,000

Critical
\$20,525,000

Roadway Resurfacing Additional Funding Needed = \$30.0 Million

Priority	Project Name	Estimated Cost
1	PCSSR Area N Ph. 1	\$ 1,250,000
2	PCSSR Area N Ph. 2	\$ 1,600,000
3	PCSSR Area N Ph. 3	\$ 800,000
4	PCSSR Area O	\$ 2,200,000
5	PCSSR Area P	\$ 1,250,000
6	Northgate Center Area	\$ 6,500,000
7	Green Manor Estates Area	\$ 7,500,000
8	Venice Palms Area	\$ 5,700,000
9	South Venice	\$ 3,200,000

Critical
\$7,100,000

Important
\$22,900,000

\$10M is available to fund critical needs from non-surtax funds

A chart shows road resurfacing priorities for the next five fiscal years in Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Clerk of Court Karen Rushing released this year regarding the county's accomplishments in 2012.

When Harriott pointed out that the extra \$10 million would not cover the next two projects on the unfunded but "Important" list for road resurfacing — the Northgate Center Area, at \$6.5 million; and Green Manor Estates Area, at \$7.5 million, Patterson noted the funds would allow the county to undertake the Northgate

project and the resurfacing of the South Venice Area roads, estimated at \$3.2 million.

"I would leave it up to the staff to figure out how to do it," Patterson added of adjusting the priorities on the "Important" list.

Barbetta protested that allocating the \$10 million to roads would leave the board only about \$4.1 million for other projects — if it approved the rest of the priorities listed by staff as critical needs.

Bridge Program

Priority	Project Name	Estimated Cost	
1	Myakka Road Bridge	\$ 4,246,000	Critical \$8,632,000
2	Albee Movable Bridge	\$ 1,300,000	
3	Manasota Movable Bridge	\$ 1,326,000	
4	Oak Street Bridge	\$ 1,500,000	
5	Blackburn Point Road	\$ 260,000	
6	Brookside Drive Bridge	\$ 300,000	Important \$7,876,000
7	Venice Ave.	\$ 1,050,000	
8	Ortiz Blvd. Bridge	\$ 300,000	
9	Leonard Reid Avenue Bridge	\$ 300,000	
10	Baffin Drive Bridge	\$ 628,000	
11	Trionfo Ave Bridge	\$ 1,314,000	
12	Beneva Road	\$ 654,000	
13	River Ridge Way	\$ 1,188,000	
14	Brink Avenue Bridge	\$ 300,000	
15	27th Parkway	\$ 503,000	
16	South River Road	\$ 567,000	
17	South Gondola Drive	\$ 772,000	

FY14-FY18 Programmed = \$4,100,000

FY14-FY18 Additional Funding Needed = \$12,200,000

Nonetheless, Mason voted with Robinson and Patterson for the \$10 million.

THE BRIDGES

Patterson then questioned Harriott about the bridge projects for which the county had no funding.

“I don’t want to say they’re not critical, but they may turn to be critical in the next five years, much like Myakka Bridge did to us,” Harriott replied.

Patterson made a motion to allocate the remaining \$4.1 million in surtax revenue to bridge repair and rehabilitation “as needed.” She told Harriott, “I’m putting a lot of trust in you.”

Referring to the first project on the unfunded list as an example, Harriott explained that the Brookside Drive Bridge — with repair costs estimated at \$300,000 — has cracks on the underside of its deck and vertical and diagonal cracks in its abutments. If no funds were available for repairs, Harriott said, “We [would] nurse [it] along ...”

Mason seconded Patterson’s motion.

Barbetta objected again. Referring to Patterson’s earlier comments about the appearance of roads in a community, he added that, except in regard to a couple of roads, he had not heard a lot of complaints from residents. “You could use that same argument on ball fields,” he continued. “People aren’t going to move



Riders compete in a BMX event at the county’s 17th Street Park complex. Image courtesy Sarasota County

here if we don't have safe ball fields for their kids to play on."

When Robinson asked Barbetta where he would use the remaining \$4.1 million, he suggested the money could be spent on the [BMX facility on 17th Street](#). "We could generate tournaments and revenue almost instantly," he pointed out.

According to material presented to the board, that project includes a new 5-meter ramp and the addition of an 8-meter ramp, as well as reconfiguration of the track. The description notes continue, "The 8 meter ramp, only the second such permanent structure in the USA, would allow Sarasota County to host a myriad of national events while also providing a training venue to BMX Olympians."

Hines pointed out that he had voted "No" on the \$10 million for road resurfacing because

"I just thought it was too much to tie up today." He felt the same about the motion for the bridges, he added. "I would like to have some flexibility."

The motion passed 3-2, with Barbetta and Hines in the minority.

At Reid's request, Mason then called for a vote on the remaining priority allocations, as indicated by staff.

Again, because of their earlier votes, Barbetta and Hines were in the minority on the 3-2 result.

"I really think that the staff did an excellent job on this," Patterson said of the priority lists. "I have a hard time arguing with most of what they did."

The other commissioners concurred with her. 

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FREEING UP FUNDS

Chairwoman Carolyn Mason confers with Vice Chairman Charles Hines before the May 14 budget workshop begins. Photo by Rachel Hackney

THE COUNTY COMMISSION SPLITS ON A VOTE TO MODIFY ITS RESERVES POLICY, ELECTING TO GO WITH A 75-DAY PERIOD FOR ITS EMERGENCY FUND INSTEAD OF 90

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

On a split vote May 14, the Sarasota County Commission modified its reserves policy to require the county to maintain a fund equal to 75 days of operating expenses instead of 90. The action freed up \$8,131,269 for the coming fiscal year that the commission agreed for the time being not to commit to specific uses.

County Administrator Randall Reid indicated the board would be hearing a number of public requests for assistance as it continues to work on the county's 2014 fiscal year budget.

The 3-2 vote on reserves came during the commission's May 14 budget workshop in Sarasota.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta made the motion for the change. He was supported by Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Vice Chairman Charles Hines.

“We’re forgetting the fact that we have to look at things that can produce additional revenue for us. We’re too dependent on property tax revenue.”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

“We’re forgetting the fact that we have to look at things that can produce additional revenue for us. We’re too dependent on property tax revenue,” Barbetta said, arguing that the extra

\$8 million could be used for unfunded capital projects that would give the county a return on investment.

During the board's April 30 budget workshop, staff identified projects costing approximately \$67.5 million for which the county has no money.

Commissioners Nora Patterson and Christine Robinson opposed the policy change. Patterson pointed to the work staff undertook during the Great Recession to pull together about \$140 million in reserve funds, which have enabled the county to afford services that otherwise would have not been possible.

A report presented by Suzanne Gable, strategic and financial planning director in the county's Office of Financial Planning, showed the county had \$32,525,075 in its reserve fund for budget stabilization and economic uncertainty at the start of the current fiscal year; that money represents 60 days of operating expenses. The fund for contingencies/emergencies/disaster relief had \$48,787,612 at the start of the fiscal year; that represented 90 days of operating expenses.

Gable added that projections indicated all the \$32,525,075 would be spent by the 2017 fiscal year if the board continued to use reserves to plug budget holes as it has been doing since the recession began.

Patterson told her fellow board members, "I can assure you \$48 million *ain't much* if you have a hurricane and you're waiting for [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] two years later to reimburse you."



*Commissioner Joe Barbetta listens to a staff member's comments during the workshop.
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

She added of Barbetta's motion, "I think it's really not responsible budgeting ..."

BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER COUNTIES

Gable presented slides to the board showing the Government Finance Officers Association "recommends, at a minimum, that general purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain a reserve in their general fund of no less than two months of regular general fund operating revenues or regular general fund operating expenditures." (The emphasis was part of Gable's report.)

In a survey of peer counties, Gable continued, she found reserve fund amounts ranging between 3 percent and 25 percent of operating expenditures.

Sarasota County has 25 percent, she added.

When Patterson asked for details on which counties have what levels, Gable noted

I think it's really not responsible budgeting ...

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

that Manatee County keeps a reserve of 20 percent; Charlotte, 15 percent; Pinellas, a flat \$20 million in reserves (Gable noted its budget is slightly bigger than Sarasota County's); Hardee, 3.5 percent; and Leon, 3 percent to 8 percent.

When Patterson questioned whether those figures were current, Gable responded, "I was under the impression that this was what they were maintaining," though she said she would verify the numbers.

In response to a question from Robinson, Steve Botelho, the county's chief financial planning officer, reminded the commissioners the reserves policy was adopted in 2007 and last updated in 2011.

PROS AND CONS

"I guess one of the reasons I felt comfortable in using reserves to keep our services going ... [is] that we would leave the board with ample

reserves in 2017 in case of a problem," Patterson said.

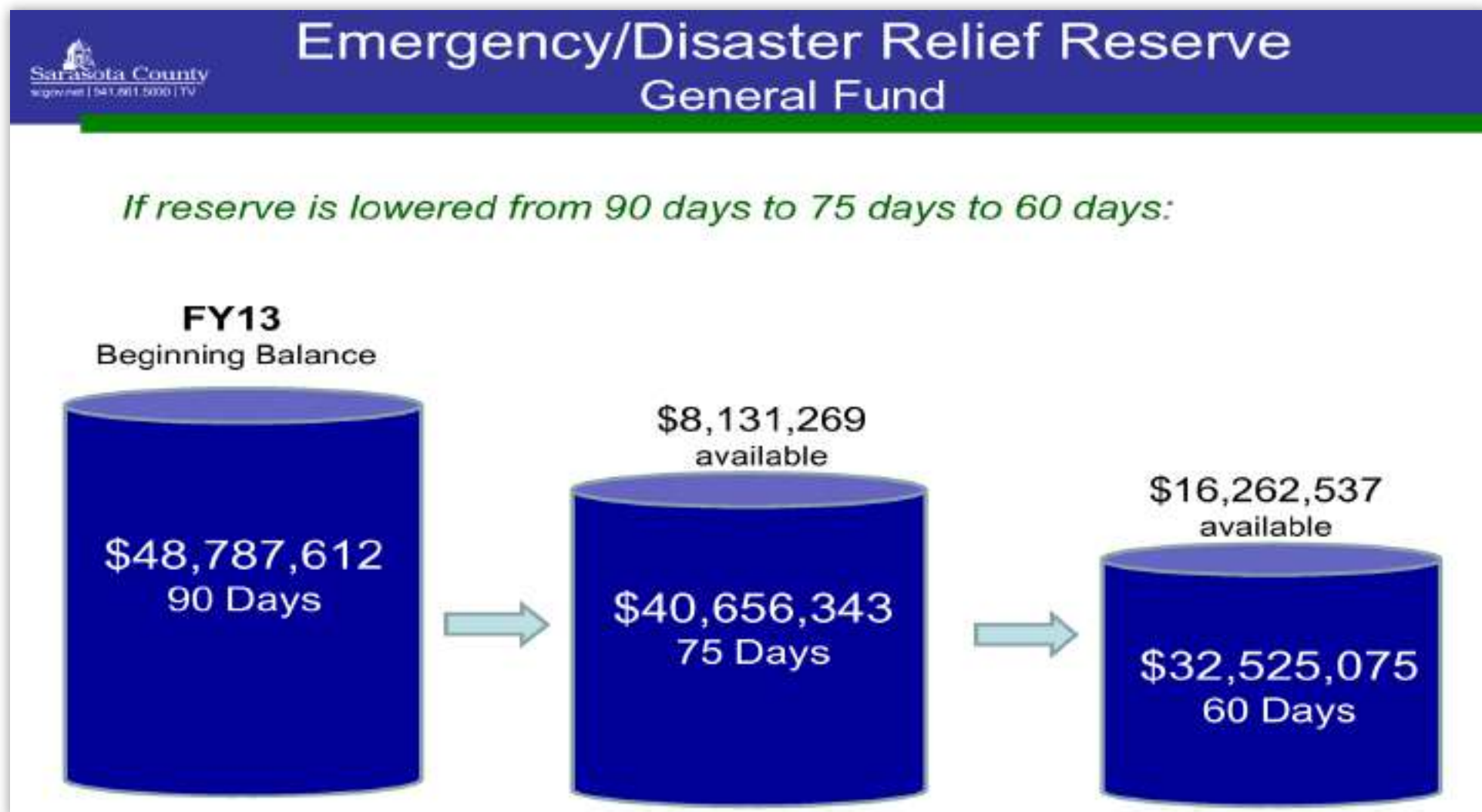
Staff projections also have shown the economy picking back up that year.

Pointing to the \$8 million the policy change would free up, she added, "It is not sufficient to really change the day."

Moreover, Patterson said she believed other counties with lower reserves are not in as good financial shape as Sarasota County.

Robinson told her fellow board members, "The time to decide whether you have adequate reserves is not when you are in need of money." She added of the extra money that could be freed up, "It's too tempting; it's just way too tempting."

She noted that the primary purpose of the May 14 workshop was to provide direction to staff



A chart presented to the County Commission May 14 shows the reserves available — and money freed up for other uses — if the county moved to a 75-day or 60-day policy. Image courtesy Sarasota County

on what capital projects should be funded for the next five fiscal years.

After Robinson remarked, “Believe me, I’ve been sweating the whole weekend” over the county’s five-year unfunded Capital Improvements Projects (CIP) list, Barbetta said, “I was looking forward to today. That’s what we’re elected to do, to make tough decisions ...”

If the County Commission waited until 2017, as Patterson suggested, to make a new policy decision on reserves, the \$8 million would be worth only about 55 percent to 60 percent of its value today, Barbetta added. “We can’t just keep sitting with a doomsday scenario and say, ‘Well, it’s going to be bad until 2017, so we should wait.’”

He continued, “We just keep parking money in places ... We need to build a tax base [or] we’re never going to grow.”

Hines then qualified his support for changing the reserve policy, saying that while he was comfortable with a 75-day reserve, “that doesn’t mean I want to take that \$8 million ... and just throw it into a spreadsheet and just do whatever’s on there.”

He did concur with Barbetta that the commission needed to decide what it could and could not afford in terms of capital projects even though “we will take the political heat publicly if we have to postpone somebody’s want on this list.”

Patterson countered that the county had invested millions in upgrades at Ed Smith Stadium, where the Baltimore Orioles hold spring training, and \$20 million in Nathan Bender-son Park, which is trying to win a bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships. That money could have been used for other projects, she pointed out.



Suzanne Gable awaits the resumption of the budget workshop on May 14. Photo by Rachel Hackney

She also voiced concern about whether the shift in the reserve policy could affect the county’s AAA bond rating.

After the vote, Robinson asked staff whether Patterson was correct in her last point.

Gable responded that it was not likely the policy change would affect the county’s bond rating.

However, when Robinson then asked whether staff had foreseen the reduction in the county’s bond rating for its Environmentally Sensitive Lands fund a couple of years ago, Botelho pointed out that the rating agencies were not fully aware of all the facts related to that account when they acted to lower the rating.

Still, Robinson said, staff had not anticipated that action on the part of the agencies ... and then [the lower rating] hit us over the head like a brick.”

“Correct,” Botelho said of her assessment. 



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BEATING BACK 'DIRTY TRICKS'

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A new political action committee wants to make county races nonpartisan. File photo

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NON-PARTISAN COUNTY ELECTIONS

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

The campaign to make all countywide races nonpartisan [became official](#) this week, with the launch of Open Our Elections, a new PAC dedicated to promoting the cause and placing the issue on the ballot. Intended to beat back some of “the recent manipulations, abuses and dirty tricks” employed by local political parties, the effort has already found “broad support,” according to Open Our Elections chairwoman and former Venice City Councilwoman Sue Long.

But how would it work? And how would it affect the political process? That’s what we’re

going to explore in this comprehensive guide to the movement. Strap on your seatbelts ... it’s “explainer” time!

What is Open Our Elections?

Open Our Elections is a newly formed political action committee (PAC) dedicated to putting the issue of nonpartisan county elections in front of voters. An outgrowth of the Public Interest Coalition, which is made up of groups such as the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club, Open Our Elections is led by Long. Its treasurer is Bill Zoller,

the president of Citizens for Sensible Growth in Sarasota County.

What is it trying to do?

Open Our Elections wants to make all county-wide races nonpartisan. That includes campaigns for seats such as tax collector, supervisor of elections and even the board of county commissioners.

OK, OK, but what does “nonpartisan” actually mean?

Good question! If approved by Sarasota County voters, the ballot measure would bar candidates from identifying themselves as members of a particular party. So when you went to vote, you would not see that little “D” or “R” next to a candidate’s name.

Sure, but would that really stop the parties from being involved?

No. As City of Sarasota voters have learned over the last couple months, just because a race is nonpartisan doesn’t mean the parties aren’t involved. They can still run get-out-the-vote operations on behalf of candidates, and campaign fundraising would remain unchanged.

So what’s the big deal, then?

The major goal is to empower all voters to be able to vote for *someone* in every race. Florida has what is known as a limited open primary system, which means that primary elections are closed to members of a particular party (e.g., only Democrats can vote in a Democratic primary), *unless* all the candidates in a given race belong to the same party. The basic concept is that all voters should have the right



to have a say in who their elected officials are at some point in the process — whether that’s in the general election or in the primary.

But a loophole in state election rules (written under the leadership of former Secretary of State Katherine Harris) currently allows write-in candidates to close primaries that would otherwise be open. Write-in candidates are not required to pay a filing fee or gather signatures, and their names do not appear on the ballot.

Both Democratic and Republican parties exploit this loophole by encouraging fake write-in candidacies. Last year, Vickie Brill, the daughter of a GOP fundraiser, filed as a write-in candidate for supervisor of elections. Even though she immediately acknowledged she wasn’t actually running for office, the move closed the supervisor of elections primary

between Republicans Jon Thaxton and Kathy Dent. Since only Republicans could vote in that race, more than 150,000 registered voters were prevented from having a say in who their supervisor of elections is. Dent won that campaign by earning the support of just 7.8 percent of county voters.

This angered many, and it was an inspiration for the launch of Open Our Elections. Nonpartisan elections would eliminate the loophole exploited by Brill and the Republican Party last year.

If independents and Democrats want a say, why don't they just run candidates of their own?

Another good question! Has anyone told you how smart you are? And handsome!

Open Our Elections argues that all voters should have a voice in every race and that that right shouldn't be subject to the whims of the parties.

Why don't area independents and Democrats just register as Republicans?

Some did! Last year, Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office records showed that [288](#) Democrats flipped their party registration to Republican between June 1 (the day Brill filed her paperwork) and July 16 (the deadline to register for the primary). Of course there's no way of knowing how many did so just to vote in the Thaxton-Dent race, but a decent-sized chunk of that number probably did. But then they couldn't vote in any Democratic primaries!

Republican Party of Sarasota County Chairman Joe Gruters [told the News Leader last](#)



Jon Thaxton. Photo by Norman Schimmel

[month](#) that independents “take themselves out of the primary” and are then “stuck with the results.” His advice? “Don't register as independent.”

“We'd be happy to register people over,” he said.

So how would nonpartisan elections function?

The calendar would remain the same, with a first round of voting in August. Every registered voter could participate. If no one wins a majority, then a runoff is held between the top two vote-getters in November.

Who else has nonpartisan elections?

According to Open Our Elections, Leon, Orange, Columbia, Volusia and Miami-Dade

counties all have nonpartisan elections. The group modeled its proposal on the systems in those areas. Sarasota attorney Dan Lobeck, a supporter of the movement, says state statutes dictate how nonpartisan elections are carried out.

Would this actually improve local government?

Maybe. Maybe not. Just because more people could vote, that doesn't mean the candidates will automatically get better.

When will I get to vote on this?

Open Our Elections has started collecting petitions (click [here](#) to read or download one). It needs to sign up almost 14,000 folks. Assuming that happens, a special election will then be held. Open Our Elections is hoping to have

the new process in place for the 2014 election cycle.

Who is opposed to this?

Since the campaign is fairly young, it's tough to say. But certainly Gruters is a foe. He argued that, if approved, the measure would just lead to parties making decisions "in secret and behind closed doors. ... Anybody that votes for nonpartisan races is a fool," he said.

Zoller presented the campaign to the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations at its Monday meeting, and he mentioned that quote. "We're going to count up how many fools there are," he said.

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THE PARK, HOMELESS AND CRA

Homeless people sit on the sidewalk outside the fenced-off Five Points Park on May 11. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CITY MANAGER PRESENTS A DOWNTOWN UPDATE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

On Tuesday, May 14, Sarasota City Manager Tom Barwin gave the Downtown Improvement District (DID) members a brief update on some of the downtown issues he is facing, and where they stand.

“The City Commission is reviewing special events policies and [is] focusing on events with road closures beyond two to three days,” he said. “Those will need commission approval following a

public hearing. If the DID wants to have input, better do it soon.”

Barwin also noted the annual jam in the City Auditor and Clerk’s Office when taxi licenses are renewed. “We’re looking at a more regional approach,” he said. “And the county is open to looking at the same issue, but they’d like input from all four cities.”

“*The most difficult issue — stating the obvious — appears to be the folks having serious substance [abuse] and mental health issues. And it seems to go on and on for years.*”

Tom Barwin
City Manager
Sarasota





People browse booths at a downtown arts fair in October 2012. The City Commission plans to set new guidelines for some special events. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The orange construction fencing at Five Points Park will be coming down Saturday, May 18, to make way for a special weekend event. (See the story in this issue on the Harvey Milk Festival.) He noted the area had been re-sodded recently, “but it was getting tamped down with sleeping bags and blankets,” he added. The fencing was temporary, to allow the grass to recover.

Barwin said the City Commission will be asked during a special meeting on May 29 to allow staff to proceed with an update to zoning codes for the entire city except for downtown. “Over the next 24 to 30 months, we hope to have as much community response as possible,” said Barwin. “We will be planning for the next 25 years.”

“We need more density,” responded DID Chairman Ernie Ritz. “We need more income to solve the budget problems.”

“Land use is what planning is all about,” said Barwin. “What is the value that we add to keep our residents here and attract new ones? How can we continue to polish the gem?”

He added that he expects “a lot of conversation about form-based codes.”


Of great interest to the DID is the fate of the Community Redevelopment Agency. Although the district has no direct influence on the expenditure of CRA monies, the members are beneficiaries of the tax-increment-financing projects. Barwin said the members of the committee that will study the future of the CRA after its statutory retirement in 2016 have been appointed, but no date has been set yet for their first meeting.



City Manager Tom Barwin. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Barwin then turned to what has become his thorniest problem, what he called “the challenge of the street people.”

He said, “The most difficult issue — stating the obvious — appears to be the folks having serious substance [abuse] and mental health issues. And it seems to go on and on for years. Some [people] I’ve observed as delusional ... but with no way to get them help. There’s a huge gap in the system.

“Ultimately, mental health responsibilities fall to the [county] Health Department. We’re trying to focus with them to get this to become a priority,” Barwin added. “I think we can make great progress. I’m setting up meetings with judges and mental health practitioners. There is some talk about a strategic plan. Work should begin this summer.” 

This may take a while.

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MAJOR FUNDRAISING AHEAD



Improvements reportedly are ahead of schedule at Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE PRIVATE GROUP ESTABLISHED TO MANAGE EVENTS AT NATHAN BENDERSON PARK SOON WILL LAUNCH A DRIVE TO PAY FOR EQUIPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE ROWING VENUE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The discussion was supposed to be about launches used to ferry referees and safety teams at rowing competitions. Instead, it ended up being about the launch of a major fundraising drive.

A few weeks ago, Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta requested staff schedule a board discussion about whether the county could purchase

a number of vessels needed during rowing competitions at Nathan Benderson Park off University Parkway.



I don't want to add some 'Grinchiness' to this, but the bottom line is ... obviously we're hoping for large corporate sponsors ...

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



A staff memo prepared for the commission's regular meeting on May 7 says, "Typically, eight referee vessels, six safety boats and two workboats are desirable. Presently, the course is operat-

ing with a total of 13 vessels, all of which are borrowed.”

The memo adds, “It requires 8 – 15 vessels to put on an event at Nathan Benderson Park.” Ten jon boats are used courtesy of Manatee County, one is provided by a local rowing club and three are loaned by private individuals. With two to four volunteers or county staff members having to make two to four trips to transport those vessels, the total time invested for an event adds up to 27 man-hours, the report says.

To purchase the vessels, cost estimates range up to \$244,000 if jon boats are used as referee vessels and up to \$372,000 if catamarans serve that purpose, the memo notes.

When it was time for the discussion item on the May 7 commission agenda, Paul Blackketter, president of the SunCoast Aquatic Nature Center Association (SANCA), came to the podium to ask that the matter be postponed.

SANCA is the private group established to manage Benderson Park “as well as the associated rowing and water-related programs in the future,” the staff memo points out.

SANCA already is working with Sarasota and Manatee counties in a partnership to win a bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Benderson Park.

Thanks to the successful regatta season the park experienced this year, Blackketter told the commissioners, SANCA members have be-



The extension of North Cattleman Road improves access to Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

gun talking with private individuals interested in contributing to park improvements.

He soon would appear before the commission again, he said, with a business plan “[to] show you exactly how we are going to move forward and deliver these launches.”

When Barbetta asked for confirmation that the park needs to purchase the vessels before it hosts the USRowing Masters National Championships in mid-August, Blackketter said that was correct. Blackketter added that SANCA is doing “due diligence” to determine the best type of boats to buy.

Commissioner Nora Patterson said of the park, “It’s a terrific venue. ... However, it cannot be supported entirely by government, and I really am hoping to start seeing the recruitment of contributions.”

She added, “It’s going to be a real problem if we can’t crank up that show of local and regional support.”

Blackketter responded, “We’re actually looking to hire a fundraising team” to pay for the infrastructure and equipment the park needs.

Additionally, the Gulf Coast Community Foundation has given SANCA a grant to help it develop a marketing program, Blackketter noted. “You’ll see a very active and robust campaign ... in the very near future.”

“I don’t want to add some ‘Grinch-iness’ to this,” Patterson added, “but the bottom line is ... obviously we’re hoping for large corporate sponsors,” especially to help pay for some of the equipment and structures expected by the International Rowing Federation (FISA).



Paul Blackketter. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A FISA team visited the park last month in conjunction with the bid for the World Championships. The site inspection was designed to provide recommendations to SANCA and staff from Sarasota and Manatee counties about what has to be done for the facility to win the bid.

Regarding construction, Blackketter reported on May 7, “We’re ahead of schedule.”

STATE SUPPORT

During Blackketter’s appearance, commissioners also took the opportunity to express their thanks to members of the Sarasota County Legislative Delegation, which helped secure another \$5 million in state funding this year for improvements at Benderson Park.

Blackketter told members of the Tourist Development Council on Jan. 17 that \$5 million would pay for the infrastructure most needed to host the World Championships. Among those facilities are the starting tower, timing huts, installation of audio/visual systems and the “regatta navy” to transport referees and provide safety support to the rowing teams.

Commissioner Christine Robinson specifically expressed her gratitude to Sen. Nancy Detert of Venice and Rep. Doug Holder of Sarasota, calling Holder “a huge unsung hero in this whole thing.”

Blackketter said of Detert: “She worked this thing all the way through to the end.”

Barbetta also noted that former state Sen. Mike Bennett of Bradenton worked behind

the scenes to ensure that the money was in the final budget.

The park received \$5 million in state funds from the Legislature in 2012 as well.

NORTH CATTLEMEN ROAD

On May 24, county officials will celebrate the completion of another facet of infrastructure planned to enhance the use of Benderson Park for rowing regattas and other events, including triathlons.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony will mark the end of a two-year construction project to extend and improve North Cattlemen Road from Richardson to DeSoto roads, the county has announced. The ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. May 24 at the western bridge to Regatta



A small jon boat sits in the bed of a pickup truck. Photo by Joyce Godsey from Wikimedia Commons via Flickr


Island in Benderson Park. People who wish to attend the ceremony must enter from the north via University Parkway, a news release says.

“The approximately 2.75-mile-long extension of North Cattlemen Road provides motorists with a new north-south alternative to Interstate 75 (I-75) from University Parkway to Fruitville Road, connecting Sarasota and Manatee counties,” the release says.

“The improvements include four 12-foot-wide travel lanes, 4-foot-wide bicycle lanes and 10- to 15-foot-wide sidewalks along the west side of the roadway. Also constructed were two fixed-span bridges, streetlights, landscaped medians, concrete curbs and gutters,

stormwater pipes, inlet structures, stormwater ponds and water and sewer transmission pipes to enhance the county’s utility network,” the release notes.

“The \$15.7 million road project provided the foundation for the Nathan Benderson Park improvements ... by furnishing the missing roadway link connecting University Parkway to the north and Fruitville Road to the south,” the release continues.

The improvements were paid for in part by a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) grant, a contribution from Benderson Development Co. and a county utility revenue bond, the release adds. 

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TAKING A BREATHER



Boaters have continued to use the bayfront mooring field in spite of having to pay for it. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CITY COMMISSION LOOKING AT 'AGENDA LITE' FOR MAY 20

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota City commissioners should be able to leave their NoDoz behind for the Monday, May 20, meeting. The consent agenda is sparse, there are no public hearings and only four presentations are planned.

The perennial winner of the “Leakiest Roof in the City Contest” comes before the commission with a request to spend \$150,000 to fix the roof again. The Gulfcoast Wonder and Imagination Zone (GWIZ) needs city permission to make the improvement to its leasehold

in the former city library at the western terminus of the Boulevard of the Arts.

The building is an architectural marvel, but the roof has leaked from the day the building's doors opened. After the library was moved closer to downtown, GWIZ took over the facility to create a children's science museum. The roof repairs require a lease amendment with the city — the building's eighth.

The amendment would also allow the installation of photovoltaic cells, paid for by Florida

Power and Light. The solar cells will augment the museum's use of city electricity and serve as an educational tool.

The \$150,000 for repairs is but one part of an ambitious \$1.2 million campaign for new exhibits, expansion of the fabrication laboratory and "a public-private collaboration to offer a waterfront restaurant featuring organic fare," according to a summary of the plans by GWIZ Chief Executive Officer Sara Rankin.

"Food service facilities are necessary for the large number of school field trips, and the ability to attract the general population to the waterfront greatly expands the population that will use the parcel," the summary states.

The statement also takes a dig at the previous administration of the center. "In 2012 the Executive Officer and Board of Directors were replaced, due to poor practices of former staff leadership and lack of Board responsibility," it says.



GWIZ, the downtown science museum, needs a new roof, its board says. Photo by Ebaybe via Wikimedia Commons

BRT ALIGNMENT

Another out-with-the-old move will be made Monday when the City Commission is asked to approve U.S. 41 as the preferred alignment of a proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. The multi-million dollar plan originally was proposed for the Seminole Gulf Railroad alignment through Newtown to downtown.

However, county officials do not believe that route offers enough development and rede-

velopment opportunities, and they are willing to pay \$800,000 to conduct a new feasibility study of either U.S. 41 or U.S. 301. City staff is firmly behind the Tamiami Trail alternative, and it will present its recommendation on May 20. The county will make the final (virtually pre-ordained) decision and notify the Federal Transportation Administration this summer.

The FTA paid for the first study, which identified the railroad corridor, but it will not pay for a second study.



The City Commission is expected to take the next step in a joint effort with the county regarding a bus rapid transit system in Sarasota, similar to one in Orlando. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

THE ART OF PUBLIC ART

A film producer will open the evening commission session with something a little different than the usual presentation of the “Employee of the Month Award.” Ted Gola’s project, originally titled, *Art Honesty*, examines several controversial issues concerning Sarasota’s public art scene. At its heart, his film looks at “a community where art is invested to be consumed but not so much nurtured to grow locally,” he explains in a statement.

“The overarching conflict is that of art versus money. Younger artists as well as minority groups struggle to have a share in the city’s decision-making process regarding public art due to the lack of money,” the statement continues. “Art has become business; in our documentary we are exploring the intricate interrelationship and conflict between the two, using multiple case studies that include public art and recent developments.”

The item was placed on the agenda at the request of Commissioner Shannon Snyder, and it does not call for any specific action.

GET IT BEFORE IT’S GONE


Under New Business at the end of the meeting comes a request for guidance by city staffers on how to proceed with the next phase of the downtown bayfront mooring field. The first

phase of 35 moorings was opened for use last November, and commissioners told staff to wait a year to see how it was working before committing to putting in another 35 in Phase Two.

The cost of the next set of moorings is estimated at \$218,000, and it will be funded by a grant from the West Coast Inland Navigation District. The WCIND also footed the cost of the first phase. However, construction delays in Phase One pushed back the use of the grant for Phase Two, which is set to expire on Sept. 30.

If the city does not push ahead with Phase Two, the money could be lost. The staff memo says, “Noting the funding shortfall being experienced by the WCIND, staff is concerned that if the city does not move forward with Phase 2 construction before the expiration of the existing grant that funding for Phase 3 may also be in jeopardy.”

In other words, staff is saying if the commission waits as it wants — to see a full year’s set of books — it may lose the WCIND grants to finish the project.

The mooring field is operated by Jack Graham Inc. as a franchise for the city. If the mooring field loses money, the city is obligated to cover a majority of those losses by paying Jack Graham Inc. 

HANDLING THE FISH KILLS



Blind Pass Beach is strewn with fish killed by red tide in December. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

A NEW SARASOTA COUNTY POLICY WILL ENABLE STAFF TO OBTAIN PERMISSION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS TO CLEAR DEAD FISH AND SEAWEED UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

After dealing with scores of complaints last year — even in December — about dead fish and seaweed accumulating on the county's beaches, the Sarasota County Commission has unanimously approved a new measure to enable staff to pick up dead fish, seaweed and debris from areas previously not covered by county policy.

The new initiative will be applied only under special circumstances, according to the action of the County

Commission on May 7 during its regular meeting in Venice.

“Let's hope we don't have to pull this out too often,” Commissioner Christine Robinson said after the board's vote.

In a presentation to the commission, Carolyn Brown, director of the Parks and Recreation Department, pointed out, “This past December, we had a significant fish kill event.” Many of the deceased creatures “washed

“*Let's hope we don't have to pull this out too often.*”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



ashore on privately owned beaches,” Brown noted, prompting “a lot of phone calls” from those property owners.

However, Brown said, existing county policy prevented staff from responding.

A memo Brown provided to the commission notes that in 1995, the board adopted a Beach Cleaning Policy, which it amended in 1997. That policy did “not clearly or adequately address the use of public funds for the removal of dead fish or seaweed on private property,” the memo says. “In fact, aspects of the language are inconsistent with the Florida Statutes and/or case law as it relates to public beaches and the public use of private property.”

The memo also points to the importance of the beaches to the county’s economy and notes that Parks and Recreation uses the

Tourist Development Tax (TDT) Emergency Fund to pay for beach cleaning under special conditions “at County-owned public beaches, beach accesses and certain areas seaward of the mean high water line,” which is specified in Florida common law.

Brown told the commission that special conditions cleaning costs from that TDT fund had ranged from \$408,403 in 2007 to zero in 2009. The cost for 2012 was \$122,680.

The memo points out that each year about \$200,000 is budgeted in the TDT emergency fund for beach cleaning under special circumstances.

County staff met with administrative staff, representatives of the County Attorney’s Office and the county’s Natural Resources, Operations and Maintenance and Health de-



Red drift algae abounds on Crescent Beach on Siesta Key in August 2012. File photo

partments to discuss the 1995 beach cleaning policy, the memo continues. The resulting determination was the need to improve the policy's language, including a clarification of "what areas of the beach are or could be considered 'public' or customarily used by the public for consistency with the law."

The discussions resulted in agreement that the county could spend taxpayers' dollars to clean private beaches if the following conditions were met:

- The beach is in close proximity to a county-owned beach or access that has been customarily crossed or used by the public.
- A public purpose can be established.
- "The area to be cleaned is landward of the approximate mean high water line and seaward of any pronounced escarpment, dune, vegetated area, access bridge or stairs or

shore protection structure such as a revetment or seawall ..."

- The owners or designated representatives provide written permission to the county that also acknowledges "the historic customary use of the beach or access by the public."

The form for that written permission will be available online, the memo notes; it can be submitted to Parks and Recreation electronically or in person, "even to staff on the beach."

Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, voiced concerns that the form is "pretty vague. It doesn't exactly conform to what you said in your report," she told Brown.

The County Attorney's Office staff wrote it, Brown replied.

"Then I'll say nothing," Patterson responded.



A county crew loads seaweed into a truck for removal from a beach. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh explained, “The intention is not to create an easement” or any legal interest in the property. The form was designed solely to get the permission of the owner to allow cleaning on that part of the beach under special circumstances, he added.

“I understand that,” Patterson told him. “It’s a little hard if the public’s being run off your beach to ask the public to clean your beach,” she added. Patterson was referring to incidents that sprang up again on Siesta Key last summer, with owners of resort condominium complexes posting signs to warn anyone who was not a guest to stay off the areas of the beach closest to those complexes.

DeMarsh reiterated that the new policy applies to areas of the beach shown to have a connection to a public or tourism-related use.

“And we think this accomplishes that,” he added of the proposed procedures.

Most of the owners of the big condominium complexes “do clean their own beaches up to a point,” Patterson replied.

The memo also notes that the new draft policy was shared with representatives of the Barrier Island Group, which includes the Siesta Key, North Manasota Key, Manasota Key and Casey Key associations. A few clarifications to the policy were made after they reviewed it, the memo says.

Robinson thanked Brown for discussing it with representatives of the Barrier Island Group. “I think that was an important step in the whole process,” she added.

“They were very helpful,” Brown said. 

BEACH CLEANING AUTHORIZATION

Property

Address: _____

I am either the owner of, or the authorized representative of the owner of, the property described above. I authorize Sarasota County to remove dead fish, seaweed or debris from the portion of the beach lying landward of the high tide line and seaward of any escarpment, dune, vegetated area, or shore protection structure. I acknowledge that the area to be cleaned has been crossed by the public and may be considered a customary beach. I may revoke this authorization at any time by written notice sent to Parks and Recreation, Sarasota County Government.

Owner or Authorized Representative

Date: _____

Private property owners can sign a form to permit the county to clean up their beaches under special circumstances. Image courtesy Sarasota County



Shoppers abound on St. Armands Circle during the height of season. Photo by Rachel Hackney

ST. ARMANDS BID WANTS A VOTE DO-OVER ON ITS SPECIAL TAX

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Only 65 entities — people, trusts or corporations — own all the commercial property on St. Armands Circle. They charge high rents, and very often their commercial tenants pay the property taxes, too.

A decade ago, the owners decided to impose an extra assessment on themselves of 2 mills to cover the cost of improvements to the public property in the district.

But last month, the same 65 decided not to continue the 10-year experiment; by a winning margin of almost two-thirds, they voted to discontinue that extra assessment.

The St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID) raised about \$220,000 per year to beautify the shopping destination and provide enhanced maintenance. Now the chairman of the about-to-be-defunct special taxing district wants another vote. On Monday, May 20, he plans to explain to the Sarasota City Commission how that should be done.

AND A PECULIAR VOTE IT IS

Under the established procedure, a St. Armands Circle property owner would receive a ballot in the mail; then, he could vote “No” in one of two ways: either mark the ballot and

return it or simply refuse to mail it back. To vote “Yes,” an owner had to mark the ballot and return it.

Oddity No. 2: The more property you own, the more powerful your vote. Two acres counts twice as much as one acre.

On April 3, the city auditor and clerk, city attorney and BID Chairman Marty Rappaport sat down to count the ballots. Of the 65 mailed, only 33 were returned. Only 35 percent (weighted by property values) supported another 10-year tax hitch.

The nearly two-thirds majority either voted “No” or did not return their ballots. Of the 33 valid returns, only five voted against the proposal, but all five were in the million-dollar-plus property value range.

Rappaport believes the district’s pro-renewal campaign information was mailed improperly in March, and he even admits he was the one who handled it wrongly without thinking it through: “[The material] was mailed to the storefront and not the owner,” he said. “I put the labels on myself.”


TIGHT TIMETABLE

On the advice of the city attorney, Rappaport will appear before the City Commission Monday to seek permission to hold another poll. He will be equipped with a sufficient number of petitions signed by property owners, he says, to make his case. Having been through a canvassing board on Thursday, May 16, to verify the City Commission runoff of May 14, the commissioners will be fully aware of the rights and duties of electors.



Sarasota City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini counts the St. Armands Business District ballots in April. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Rappaport says that if the commissioners agree to a revote, the ballots must be mailed no later than Aug. 20. And those ballots must be received at City Hall (or not) by Sept. 17. He says he will ask that the ballots be sent “return receipt requested” this time to show the “No-but-not-returned” ballots were actually received by electors.

The district faces dissolution on Sept. 30 if it is not renewed by the special election. Preparing for another worst-case outcome, Rappaport has cancelled two long-standing contracts. One is with the Muzak Corp., which pipes outdoor background music around the circle. The other is with J. Mar Cleaning, which has provided enhanced sprucing up of the sidewalk and trash pickup for years. 



The Business Improvement District assessment has allowed property owners to pay for enhanced upkeep on St. Armands Circle. Photo by Norman Schimmel



A Hands Across the Sand event will be held on Saturday at Siesta Public Beach. Image courtesy of Hands Across the Sand's [Facebook page](#)

HANDS ACROSS THE SAND SET FOR SATURDAY ON SIESTA BEACH

On Saturday, May 18, from 10 a.m. to noon, area residents are encouraged to show their support for the protection of coastal economies, the oceans, marine wildlife and fisheries by participating in Hands Across the Sand.

A news release notes that Hands Across the Sand is a movement of people from all walks of life. “It is not about politics. ... It’s about preserving our precious drinking water, air and food. The damage that continues to happen due to offshore oil drilling accidents, hydraulic fracturing, the Alberta tar sands, mountain top removal mining and the continuing proliferation of coal-fired power plants [is] a threat to us all.”

The release adds, “Embracing a clean energy future now is the path to a sustainable planet. It’s a path to ending global warming and climate change. It’s a path to a better future for our children and grandchildren.”

Interested people are invited to meet at 10 a.m. near the northwest corner of the parking lot at Westfield Southgate Mall, located at

the intersection of U.S. 41 and Siesta Drive in Sarasota (3501 S. Tamiami Trail). Free bagels and coffee will be available for event participants, the release says, and Sarasota County Area Transit “will be handing out free round-trip bus passes.”

At 10:30 a.m., a “Low-Carbon Caravan” will begin. The release encourages participants to “Ride your bike, board the bus or join an electric vehicle parade to the beach.”

At 11 a.m., everyone will meet on Siesta Public Beach. A tent will be set up in the shade about 100 yards east of the Pavilion, the release adds. There, people can pick up informational materials and learn from a variety of speakers what they can do to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

At 11:30 a.m., participants will join hands with each other “for a few minutes at the shoreline as a symbolic act of resistance against offshore oil drilling and in protection of our most treasured natural resource,” the release continues.

ATWELL, CHAPMAN WIN CITY COMMISSION SEATS

Suzanne Atwell won re-election and attorney Susan Chapman won the second at-large City Commission seat up for grabs in the runoff on May 14, according to official votes tabulated by the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections (SOE) Office.

Both women were elected to four-year terms.

Atwell received 4,575 votes; Chapman, 3,880; and candidate Richard Dorfman, 3,433, according to the tallies.

The SOE website says that 7,102 people, or 19.94 percent of the city's 35,681 registered voters, cast ballots in the runoff.

During the March 12 election, which had six candidates vying for the two seats, the turnout was 6,153 voters, or 17.34 percent of the 35,480 who were registered at the time, according to the SOE website.

During the March 2011 city election, when candidates were running in districts, the turnout was 5,693 voters, or 17.78 percent of the 32,019 who were registered. The runoff in May that year pitted current Vice Mayor Willie Shaw against Linda Holland, with Shaw winning 735 votes and Holland taking 499.

Atwell and Chapman will be sworn into office during a City Commission meeting at noon on Friday, May 17, in the Commission Chambers at City Hall, 1565 First St.

The ceremony will follow the presentation of the State of the City Address, a city news release notes. The new City Commission will then select a mayor and vice mayor to serve for the next year, the release adds.

Rachel Brown Hackney



Suzanne Atwell. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Susan Chapman. Photo courtesy of Richard Clapp

SARASOTA STUDENTS HEADED TO NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

After winning honors at the Florida History Fair this month, students from Pine View School will be representing the state at the National History Day event June 9-13, the Sarasota County Schools District has announced.

The Pine View students joined youth from Booker Middle School, Heron Creek Middle School and Sarasota Virtual Academy in earning recognition at the state History Fair, held May 6 at Tallahassee Community College, a news release notes.

In their documentaries, websites, exhibits and research papers, the students explored *Turning Points in History: People, Ideas, Events*, the theme of National History Day for 2012-13, a news release says.

Pine View student Oliver Gray took second place in the Senior Individual Documentary category for his production, *The Cuyahoga River: A Turning Point for the Environmental Movement*. The documentary also received an Outstanding County Award, the release continues.

Pine View students Richard Ehlers and Thomas Kelly took second place in the Senior Group Documentary category for *Turning Point in History: The Dropping of the Atomic Bomb*.

Oliver, Richard and Thomas will be participating in the National History Day at the University of Maryland in College Park, the release notes.

Grace Gerdes, Kaliyah Newell and Brionna Newell of Booker Middle School placed third in the Junior Group Performance category for *Brown v. Board of Education*. James Niffenegger of Pine View School placed third



Booker Middle School Principal LaShawn Houston, (second from left) celebrates with students Brionna Newell (left), Grace Gerdes and Kaliyah Newell (right) on their Florida History Fair award in the Junior Group Performance Category for Brown v. Board of Education. Contributed photo

in the Senior Individual Website category for *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Turning Point for Diplomacy*. "These students may compete at National History Day if first-place and second-place winners in their categories are unable to attend," the release points out.

The following finalists also placed in the top 10 in their categories at the Florida History Fair: Ashley Marceus of Sarasota Virtual Academy was recognized for her Senior Historical Paper, *Brown v. Board of Education: Implementing a Dream*; and Kasi Beauchamp, Yuliya Fateyeva and Jenna Gonzalez of Heron Creek Middle School were honored for their Junior Group Exhibit, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Turning Point for Women's Rights*.

The Florida History Fair is an annual statewide activity that enhances the teaching and learning of history, the news release notes.

HIGH FIVE EVENT CELEBRATES EDEXPLORESRQ

On May 10, several hundred pioneers and supporters of EdExploreSRQ came together for *High Five: Hands Up for Hands-On Learning* at Riverview High School, an event that celebrated the successful launch of the next chapter of EdExploreSRQ.

The initiative provides students with exposure to arts, science and culture through “explorations,” in-classroom and off-campus experiences offered by 36 partner organizations, a news release points out.

In this 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 of Sarasota County,

the Education Foundation of Sarasota County and The Patterson Foundation have made a commitment to sustain and expand EdExploreSRQ (resources for teachers, parents and potential funders may be found at www.EdExploreSRQ.com) for the benefit of all Sarasota County students, the release notes.

During the celebration, new funding streams for student explorations were announced: The Community Foundation has committed \$500,000 over five years for explorations. Additionally, the Community Foundation and The Patterson Foundation are creating an EdExploreSRQ Endowment Fund to increase awareness and financial support, the release says. The Patterson Foundation will designate up to \$3 million in matching funds for the Ex-



*Students from Mrs. Deming's gifted fourth-grade class, led by teaching artist Bob Fieberts (far left), perform on 'Amigos,' one-stringed guitars they built and learned to play through an exploration.
Photo by Cliff Roles*

plorations endowment fund, matching dollar for dollar the Community Foundation's investment and providing a 2:1 match for all donations for existing and future explorations, the release adds.

Among other event highlights:

- The school district's Fine Arts Program specialist, Angela Hartvigsen, announced the EdExploreSRQ 2.0 website upgrade.
- Book illustrator, writer and art educator Patrice Kennedy was honored with the Arts Education Leadership Award.
- The Patterson Foundation gave out *Pay it Forward Awards*, cash presented to schools and partner organizations to fund student explorations or create new or enhanced explorations for the 2013-14 school year.



Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance, who served as emcee for the program, with Sarasota County Schools Superintendent Lori White. Photo by Cliff Roles



(From left) Sarasota County Schools Fine Arts Program Specialist Angela Hartvigsen; Patrice Kennedy, the Cindy Ballestreri Arts Education Leadership Award winner; and Arts Education Task Force member Nancy Roucher. Photo by Cliff Roles

PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAM OF 1954-1960 FEATURED IN EXHIBIT

An exhibit featuring the people, events and architecture that shaped the Sarasota Public School Program from 1954 to 1960 is on view at the Sarasota County Visitor Information Center and History Center Museum, 701 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, the county has announced.

It is a collaborative effort of Sarasota County Historical Resources and the University of Florida Historic Preservation Program, a news release notes.

Called *The Building Itself Teaches*, the exhibit tells the story of how five new buildings and four additions constructed from 1954-1960 — collectively known as the Sarasota Public School Program — “dramatically transformed

the public educational environment of Sarasota County, and offered a new precedent for school design across postwar America,” the release adds.

The initiative was launched by Phillip Hanson Hiss III, who relocated to Sarasota from the Northeast in 1948. He later was elected to the Board of Public Instruction, forerunner of the Sarasota County School Board.

“In a 1958 interview with *Time* magazine,” the release continues, “Hiss described his dissatisfaction with the physical state and outdated pedagogy of public schools in the area: ‘When I got the facts I went wild. Some of the schools were downright unsanitary. The restrooms were so bad the students wouldn’t even go to



The Sarasota County Visitor Information Center and History Center Museum is located at 701 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

the bathroom. And the curriculum was just as bad,' he told the magazine."

Brookside Middle School, the first new school completed under the supervision of Hiss, in 1955, was recognized for its design and low cost, about \$40,000 under budget, the release points out. "After the success of the Brookside project, he promoted the economic efficiency of modern school architecture and campaigned for a \$4.4 million school bond," which was overwhelmingly approved by county residents, the release says.

"With the funding in place, Hiss took steps to realize his vision: innovative and modern design that facilitated and inspired alternative and progressive approaches to education," it adds. The designs for the new schools were created by a group of local architects whose collective work is now referred to as the Sarasota School of Architecture. In designing the

schools, architects such as Paul Rudolph, Victor Lundy and Jack West "continued their experimentation with materials and technology and integration of passive means of cooling and controlling natural light, reflecting an overall spirit of democratic and design freedom, as urged by Hiss," the release notes.

The Sarasota County Visitor Information Center and History Center Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays. There is no admission charge.

The exhibit is expected to be on view until March 2014. It is sponsored by the Friends of the Sarasota County History Center, the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation and the University of Florida Historic Preservation Program.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 (TTY: 7-1-1).

BLOCK PARTY TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELLNESS SERVICES

Five north Sarasota and Newtown-area churches are joining together for the Gospel Explosion Block Party, promoting community health and wellness services on Saturday, May 18, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Sarasota County Housing Authority's The Courts apartment complex on the corner of Orange Avenue and 21st Street, Sarasota County has announced.

"This is going to be an exciting community affair. I've wanted to see our community embrace this type of event and now we are seeing this dream come together with these churches," said Bill Carter in a news release.

Carter works for Genesis Health Services and First Step of Sarasota as a case manager.

"All of the churches will have choirs performing inspiring and uplifting songs of joy and hope that carry a positive message," he added in the release. "We are also offering a variety of health screenings and education services, so come on out and join us."

The event will feature live musical performances by the choirs of five local churches: Bethlehem Baptist Church, Harvest Tabernacle, Trinity Christian Fellowship Center, New Bethel Missionary Baptist and Truvine Missionary Baptist Church, the release notes. Local health care agencies will be present to distribute information about minority health issues, and HIV and STD testing will be available at no cost through a mobile unit operated

by the Community AIDS Network, the release says.

Attendees also will be able to view The Florida Department of Health's mobile exhibit, *Faces of HIV*, which uses art to examine the stigma, personal relationships and medical care issues connected to HIV, the release adds.

Free refreshments will be provided.

For more information, call 256-6620 or visit www.hivsarasota.org. For information about health initiatives in the Newtown Community, visit the Community Health Improvement Partnership website, www.Chip4health.org.

APPLICANTS SOUGHT FOR REVITALIZED NUISANCE ABATEMENT BOARD

"As the Sarasota Police Department implements a fresh partnership policing strategy throughout the City of Sarasota," a city news release says, "the Nuisance Abatement Board is being revitalized to handle complaints about nuisance properties."

Two seats are open on the board, the release adds. City residents with an interest in ridding neighborhoods of crime are encouraged to apply.

The Nuisance Abatement Board, comprising seven city residents, hears cases concerning properties deemed public nuisances because of "the use or sale of illegal drugs, prostitution, street gang activity and/or stolen property," the release explains. The board can impose fines on property owners and seek to collect payments to cover the cost of investigations conducted by law enforcement officers, the release notes.

"The Nuisance Abatement Board is an excellent tool to help our residents and police officers make our neighborhoods safer," said City Manager Tom Barwin in the release. "The board needs to be revitalized and used effectively. We're looking for residents who want to be part of our new collaborative partnership policing effort and will dedicate a few hours each month to hearing cases and making determinations about problem properties," he added in the release.

Nuisance Abatement Board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at City Hall, 1565 First St. The board has been unable to take action on complaints since December 2012 because of the lack of a quorum, the release points out. Although a quorum now exists, two seats still remain vacant.

"We need a fully appointed Nuisance Abatement Board," said Police Chief Bernadette DiPino in the release. "A citizens board like this is part of community policing," she added. "[The Sarasota Police Department] can't do it alone. The board is already established. We just need individuals who are interested in taking back their neighborhoods to serve."

To submit an application online [click here](#). To download an application, [click here](#).

For more information about the Nuisance Abatement Board or any of the city's advisory boards, contact the Office of the City Auditor and Clerk at 954-4160.

CORRECTION

Because of an editing error, a letter to the editor from Paul Cajka in the May 10 issue referred to the Council of Neighborhood Associations. The writer actually was referring to CCNA, the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations.

NEW PRINCIPAL NAMED FOR BAY HAVEN SCHOOL OF BASICS PLUS

Sarasota County School District Superintendent Lori White has announced that she will recommend Chad A. Erickson of Altoona, WI, to succeed Betsy Asheim as principal of Bay Haven School of Basics Plus in Sarasota.

The appointment is scheduled to be considered by the School Board during its May 21 meeting.

Erickson, 40, has served as principal of Sherman Elementary School in the Eau Claire Area School District in Wisconsin since 2001, a news release notes. Sherman was named one of the six Healthiest Schools in America by Family Circle Magazine in 2009.

He also has served as a fourth-grade teacher, a high school coach and a middle school assistant principal, the release adds. He holds a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Wisconsin. Additionally, he has studied educational policy at the University of Minnesota and astrophysics methodology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the release notes.

"I am extremely excited to begin working with the Bay Haven staff and to be part of the high achieving School District of Sarasota County," Erickson said in the release. "My wife and three young children are equally as excited to make the transition from Wisconsin to Florida."

Bay Haven School of Basics Plus is a magnet school designated as a national Blue Ribbon School and a state Five Star School, the release adds. It is Sarasota County's only magnet elementary school. The program emphasizes a back-to-basics curriculum with strong



Chad Erickson/Contributed photo

discipline and contracts for parents, students and staff, the release notes.

Asheim has served as Bay Haven principal since 2007. She announced her retirement earlier this year to pursue other professional and personal opportunities, the release says.

Erickson is scheduled to assume his duties at Bay Haven on July 1.

VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY NAMES WINNERS OF TOURISM WEEK AWARDS

Visit Sarasota County announced the recipients of the 2013 National Tourism Week Awards during a breakfast ceremony held at Westfield Southgate Mall on May 9. All the winners listed below were nominated by their peers, a news release notes. Each then was voted on by a selection panel comprising members of the hospitality industry, the release adds. Both nominees and winners were recognized at the event.



The winners follow:

- Guest Service Excellence-Management: Kate Hedding at Crow's Nest Marina Restaurant.
- Guest Service Excellence-Front Line: Barbara Slater of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.
- Guest Service Excellence-Heart of House: Kevin Greene of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.
- Guest Service Excellence-Lodging: Carol Clark of Holiday Inn Lido Beach.
- Guest Service Excellence-Volunteer: Barbara and Ian McKenzie of Doctors Hospital of Sarasota and Tommy Vaughan-Birch of Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium.



Sarasota aerialist Nik Wallenda, with wife Erendira, was honored as the 2013 Voice of Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SARASOTA YOUTH INVITED TO DRIVE, CHIP & PUTT COMPETITION

Youngsters ages 7 through 15 are invited to participate in the nationwide inaugural Drive, Chip and Putt Championship, which will be held at Bobby Jones Golf Club in Sarasota.

Participants will have an opportunity to compete in the finale at Augusta National Golf Club, home of the Masters Tournament, a city news release says.

Bobby Jones is one of just 10 courses in the region to be selected "for this fun, competitive youth program," the release adds. Local qualifying will take place at Bobby Jones Golf Club on Saturday, June 29.

The Drive, Chip and Putt Championship is free and open to boys and girls of all skill levels. Players will compete based on gender and four age categories: 7-9, 10-11, 12-13 and 14-15, the release notes.

Participants will accumulate points with each skill: driving, chipping and putting. Three

shots will be taken per skill, with a potential total of 25 points per shot, the release says. The top two overall point earners in each of the boys' and girls' age divisions will advance to the regional qualifying round, it adds.

The champion from each division will win a free trip to play in the finals at Augusta National Golf Club on Sunday, April 6, 2014, just prior to the Masters, the release notes.

Drive, Chip and Putt is sponsored by the Masters Tournament Foundation, PGA and USGA.

Bobby Jones Golf Club, 1000 Circus Blvd., is owned and operated by the City of Sarasota; it offers three courses with a total of 45-holes.

For more information about the Drive, Chip and Putt Championship visit www.DriveChipandPutt.com or contact Christian Martin, Bobby Jones Golf Club Assistant Manager: 365-2200, Ext. 5801.

COUNTY ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO SKIP LAWN MAINTENANCE

Sarasota County officials are encouraging residents to protect the bay by not using fertilizer products containing nitrogen and phosphorus.


Stormwater washes excess fertilizer into storm drains, transporting the nitrogen and phosphorus into the bay, a news release notes. Those elements can fuel excessive growth of algae, which smothers natural vegetation. Nitrogen and phosphorus can also cause invasive weeds to flourish, changing Florida's natural plant communities, a news release notes.

"People should be able to enjoy their summer by heading to the beach, going fishing or boating," Sarasota County Environmental Specialist Amanda Dominguez said in the release. "No one wants to be doing yard work in the summer, and the great news is you don't need to use fertilizer in order to have a healthy yard."

From June 1 through Sept. 30, no fertilizer containing nitrogen or phosphorous may be

used on lawns or plants in unincorporated Sarasota County, according to a county ordinance. Homeowners should follow the tips below, the release adds, to maintain healthy lawns while protecting the bay:

- Mow grass as high as possible with a mulching mower.
- Don't over-water turf and plants.
- Install a soil moisture sensor to determine when to water.
- Keep fertilizer at least 10 feet from the edge of any body of water.
- Create a low-maintenance zone of landscape plants near the water's edge to prevent fertilizer runoff.

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

Teen Crime Trio

28 Vehicle Burglaries

2 Grand Theft Auto

2 Fraudulent Use of a Credit Card



Whitfield



Radkey



Johnson

Ron Johnson, Tyler Radkey and Shawn Whitfield were linked to at least 32 crimes in Operation Red Flag, according to the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office. Contributed image

53 ARRESTED IN OPERATION RED FLAG IN NORTH SARASOTA COUNTY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office on May 15 announced the results of Operation Red Flag, a crime reduction initiative designed to enhance the safety of local residents.

Using Intelligence to Action (I2A), the agency's intelligence-led policing model, "deputies developed a proactive plan to deter crime in north Sarasota County, particularly near 17th Street and Lockwood Ridge Road north to University Parkway and unincorporated

areas to the west, where a number of burglaries were occurring," the office reported.

The operation included the arrest of three teenagers, who upon further investigation, were ultimately connected to at least 28 vehicle burglaries, two auto thefts and two cases involving the fraudulent use of a credit card, the report adds.

Those men are Ron Johnson, 17; Tyler Radkey, 19; and Shawn Whitfield, 19, according to the report.

In all, the results of Operation Red Flag included the following:

- 53 arrests.
- 126 criminal charges (76 felonies and 50 misdemeanors).
- 249 traffic citations.
- Eight notices to appear in court.

“The 53 people arrested have 418 prior felony charges and 487 misdemeanors” on their records, the report continues. “Only a quarter of those cases resulted in convictions, and while some of these subjects served jail time, only eight of the 53 people arrested have ever been

sentenced to state prison for their crimes,” it points out.

“Our system of intelligence gathering and data analysis gives us the ability to rapidly respond to an increase in reported crimes,” said Sheriff Tom Knight in the report.

“Because crime is transitory in nature, we will continue to use special operations, directed patrols and community-oriented policing to deter or displace high-risk individuals and prolific offenders where and when the need arises to keep the citizens of Sarasota County safe and preserve the quality of life they expect,” he added.

TWO ARRESTS MADE IN BEATING AT SIESTA PUBLIC BEACH

The Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office has arrested two Sarasota teenagers for allegedly beating a third teen at Siesta Key Public Beach just after midnight on May 6, the office has reported.

Witnesses say Devin Roman, 18, of 6051 McKown Road, Sarasota, and a 15-year-old boy attacked 17-year-old Chance Prater, also of Sarasota, near the Pavilion after Prater tried to intervene when the two threatened to beat up Prater’s friend, according to the report.

Roman and his co-defendant reportedly punched Prater several times and ultimately rendered him unconscious, a news release says. They also allegedly kicked Prater after he was unconscious, according to the report.

Prater suffered a broken jaw and hearing loss, the report says. He was transported to Blake Medical Center via Bayflight.



Devin Roman/Contributed photo

“Witnesses also reported that the 15-year-old suspect ordered them not to assist the victim,” the news release adds.

During the investigation, detectives learned that Roman and his co-defendant were at Walgreens about an hour after the crime and were overheard discussing the attack, the report says. A Walgreens clerk told deputies he heard the younger teen say to Roman, "Thanks for doing that for me. Thanks for f---ing that kid up."

The 15-year-old had blood on his hands and the two paid with a blood-stained \$5 bill, the report notes.

The co-defendants were seen on store surveillance, the report continues. Two witnesses who viewed the video positively identified them as the people who struck Prater, the report adds.

Roman and his co-defendant are charged with one count each of misdemeanor Battery. It is the first arrest for both teens, the report says.

Detectives would still like to speak with anyone who has additional information about this case, the news release notes. People are asked to contact Det. Kim McGath at 861-4928.

WAITRESS ALLEGEDLY POCKETED MORE THAN \$800 AT RESTAURANT

A former waitress at Turtles Restaurant on Siesta Key has been charged with voiding cash transactions and pocketing about \$800, according to a Sarasota County Sheriff's Office report.

Melissa T. Finnerty, 19, who was listed as homeless in court records, was arrested by a deputy on May 5 and charged with a felony count of Scheming to Defraud. She was placed under a \$20,000 bond, according to the arrest report.

The incidents with which Finnerty is charged allegedly occurred over a four-month period, the report says. About 11:45 p.m. on March 11, Turtles manager Kenneth Idsardi came to the Sheriff's Office to file a complaint about Finnerty, the report says. He told a detective that during the previous four months he had employed Finnerty at the south Siesta Key restaurant and that he noticed some discrepancies with the number of cash payment voids she had made, the report says. Idsardi explained to the detective that managers have



Melissa Finnerty/Contributed photo

a pin number they use to void a transaction, the report notes.

On March 3, Idsardi said, he left the restaurant about 7:30 p.m. and did not return that evening, but the register printouts showed Finnerty had used his pin 18 times to void out cash sales between 7:49 and 8:24 p.m. The sales totaled about \$100, the report continues.

When Idsardi went through his records, he told the deputy, he noticed a pattern dating back to Jan. 18; the total amount of the voids was about \$700, the report adds.

Following Idsardi's check of those records, the report notes, the restaurant's general manager confronted Finnerty, who did not return to work afterward.

Finnerty was arrested about 4 p.m. on May 5 near Countrywood Drive, southwest of the intersection of Webber Street and Cattlemen Road, the report notes. She was granted supervised pretrial release on bond on May 6, according to records in the 12th Judicial Clerk of Court's Office. Her arraignment is scheduled for May 31. **SNL**

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OPINION



COUNTY COMMISSION SHOULD DITCH 'LOW TAX' POSTURING

EDITORIAL

In 2007, the effects of the Great Recession lowered the boom on local real estate values. Silent phones and empty streets replaced the bidding wars that had broken out in the front yards of houses for sale. Sky-high property values went into a free fall.

Banks, which had relentlessly marketed mortgages to anyone and everyone who would sit through a pitch, suddenly found themselves with loan portfolios that far exceeded the market values of the properties that secured those loans. Even more than the Realtors and tourism

officials, banks were the principal proselytes of the never-ending upward spiral of real estate values ... and the unthinkable was happening.

As market values fell, pressure built on the Sarasota County property appraiser to lower taxable values commensurately. While the Save Our Homes exemption — which limited increases in taxable value to the lesser of inflation or 3 percent — had spared permanent

To simply dismiss out of hand the idea of offsetting a 40 percent decline in assessed property values by increasing the tax rate is a failure to properly serve the citizens of the county.

residents much of the burden of the boom in values, part-time residents and commercial property owners began shouldering an increasingly heavy burden.

OPINION

The property appraiser resisted initially, knowing what a wholesale reduction in values would do to local government budgets. When he finally started slashing values, it was too late: He was ousted in the next election.

For the past six years, property tax values have continued to fall in Sarasota County. In 2007, they peaked at \$86 billion. By 2012, those values had plummeted to slightly more than \$51 billion, a decline of 40 percent. And the effect on local governments was no different. Sarasota County, for example, saw a comparable decline in property tax revenue during that period.

The County Commission has strived to maintain most services during those years, but it has been relying on its reserve fund to avoid draconian cuts in those services. Tax increases have largely been ignored as a counter to the drop in property values. And there is the rub.

Whatever one might say about the effects of the Great Recession, those most impacted were at the lower echelons of the economy. The well-off generally have been affected by low interest rates on demand deposits and debentures, or an inability to recoup an investment in the event that a property was sold. When all has been said and done, county property owners actually received a gift from the property appraiser — in collaboration with

the County Commission — in the form of a 40 percent cut in ad valorem taxes.

As the economies for the State of Florida and Sarasota County have been more clearly moving along the road to recovery, there has been a strange reluctance by the County Commission to translate that recovery into meaningful support for county government and the essential programs and services it provides.

Too often during the past six years, the automatic response to any suggestion that tax rates should be adjusted upward has been similar to Commissioner Joe Barbetta's statement at an April 30 budget workshop: "From my perspective, [tax increases] are off the table."

Perhaps that is the curse of having an all-Republican County Commission: No one wants to even have a conversation about increasing tax rates to offset the dramatic decline in property values since 2007. It is as if the 40 percent tax cut county residents have enjoyed was a present from the economic gods, and the commissioners are powerless to take any of it back in the form of higher millage rates.

However, as Barbetta also is fond of saying, commissioners are elected to make the hard decisions. That should not mean deciding only what programs and services to cut in a time when declining property values have reduced ad valorem revenue. It also should mean mak-


OPINION

ing up some of that decline by an upward adjustment of the millage rate, so less strain is placed on the county budget and less reliance is put on the reserve fund.

To simply dismiss out of hand the idea of offsetting a 40 percent decline in assessed property values by increasing the tax rate is a failure to properly serve the citizens of the county. Their party ideological dogma aside, commissioners are not elected just to preside over the shrinking of county government. They are put into office to preside over the efficient but *effective* functioning of that government. They lost a large chunk of annual operating revenue because of the collapse of the real estate market. But their inaction in responding to that loss has been, to put it delicately, inadequate.

A rational and mature conversation by the county commissioners on offsetting some or all of the property value decline by increasing taxes could have led to a realistic assessment of the impact of the decline on county residents. Perhaps the vast majority of residents have needed that decline to weather the economic storms. Or perhaps a 20 percent reduction in taxes would have sufficed. No one knows, because no one in a position of authority had the courage to even explore the situation.

The time to put an end to that head-in-the-sand mentality is now. The real estate market is recovering, and with it, the local and state economies. Reduced property values will not recover as quickly because, in the case of permanent residents, increases are limited by the Save Our Homes exemption. The county is confronting a shortfall in revenue of more than \$82 million compared to what it had in the 2007 fiscal year. Even a small adjustment in the millage rate would ameliorate some of the pressure to triage the funding of programs and infrastructure. A reasonable adjustment would give the county much needed income while still leaving county taxpayers with a significant reduction in their property taxes compared to what they paid six years ago.

Barbetta is wrong: The matter of increasing property tax rates is not “off the table.” If the county commissioners are to do the job they were elected to do, tax rates should be carefully reviewed and adjusted accordingly. After all, the five commissioners were elected to make the hard decisions. It is about time they did exactly that and ensured that county government, with the essential programs and services citizens depend upon, is properly funded. 

The Sarasota News Leader
No-Nonsense Reporting

OPINION

THE TAO OF BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA



By David Staats
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

Among other things, Taoism instructs us that creatures of the natural world move in perfect harmony with the Tao, or path of belief, and the greater universe. Taoism also teaches us the virtues of *wu wei*, or “doing nothing,” in order to prevent disruption of the perfect universal harmony of the Tao.

Foreign policy has been an especially fertile field for the Obama Administration to cultivate the art of doing nothing. A prominent example is the administration’s blanket fiction hung over the murders in Benghazi, a blanket that is now rapidly unraveling.

On the night of Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2012, members of *Ansar al-Sharia*, a known terrorist organization with links to *al-Qaida*, attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya. U.S. Ambassador to Libya John Christopher [Stevens](#) and three other American officials were killed during the attack. Other Americans were injured.

Information on the attacks was immediately demanded. Accordingly, talking points on the incident were drafted for officials briefing members of Congress, the news media and the public. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney announced that the talking points had

been drafted by the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies and that they represented the best analysis by the intelligence community of what had happened in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012.

What Carney failed to disclose, however, was that between Friday, Sept. 14, and Saturday, Sept. 15, the talking points had undergone as many as [12 separate revisions](#) by the White House and the State Department before they were released for use.

The CIA’s Office of Terrorism Analysis originally wrote that, based on electronic intercepts and reliable eyewitness reporting, the attack had been planned and carried out by *Ansar al-Sharia* and other terrorist groups allied with *al-Qaida*. The revised document, however, fraudulently shifted responsibility for the attack from *Ansar al-Sharia* to a mob reportedly incited to violence by a crudely made anti-Islamic film posted on YouTube.

On Sunday, Sept. 15, 2012, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, who had no direct knowledge of the incident, went on five different national television news shows to claim that the Benghazi attack was not premeditated by terrorists. Appearing on ABC’s *This Week*, Rice said that “our current best

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assessment, based on the information that we have at present, is that, in fact, what this began as, it was a spontaneous — not a premeditated — response to what had transpired in Cairo,” where a mob stormed the U.S. embassy, breached the walls and tore down the American flag. The cause of the Cairo violence actually was the YouTube video. One size fits all.

Libyan President Muhammad Yusuf al-Magari-af wasted no time disassociating himself from Rice’s bogus comments. The attack on the consulate, he said to CBS News, “was planned, definitely, it was planned by foreigners, by people who entered the country a few months ago, and they were planning this criminal act since their arrival.”

The Obama Administration could not muzzle the Libyan president, but it could express its great displeasure in practical ways to U.S. officials unwilling to support the official fiction.

In May 2013, whistleblower Gregory Hicks, a fluent Arabic speaker who served as the deputy chief of mission under Ambassador Stevens — and the number two U.S. diplomat in Libya on Sept. 11, 2012 — testified before the U.S. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that his public questioning of Rice’s characterization of the attack as a spontaneous act by Libyans upset with the YouTube video had earned him an “effective demotion” after receiving a negative fitness report. Earlier he had received [written com-](#)

[mendations](#) from President Obama, Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and other senior officials for his handling of the post-attack situation in Libya.

State Department officers who are not promoted after a certain number of review cycles are retired: up or out. Hicks, a 22-year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, has been reassigned as a Foreign Affairs officer: a desk officer who will not serve abroad again.

Testifying before Congress in January 2013, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that whether the deadly attack was provoked by a film or by hardened terrorists was completely irrelevant. “What difference, at this point, does it make?” she said, adding, “It is our job to figure out what happened and do everything we can to prevent it from ever happening again.”

Improving security at the facility would have been a good start. In October 2012, State Department security officials and military officers testified before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about the deaf ears in Washington on which their urgent pleas for additional security personnel ultimately had fallen.

Eric Nordstrom, the State Department’s RSO (Regional Security Officer) for Libya, described the worsening security situation in eastern Libya. He said that “the takeaway ... for me and my staff was abundantly clear — we were not going to get resources until the aftermath of an incident.” Nordstrom added,

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“And the question that we would ask is: How thin does the ice have to get before someone falls through?”

Congressional Democrats saw the testimony as a partisan attack. Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-SC), the ranking member on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, denounced the committee’s hearings as politically biased. The hearings’ aim, he said, was to hurt Hillary Clinton’s chances of running for president in 2016.

The State Department withheld the requested security enhancements because it wished to maintain the level of diplomatic security in Libya at an “artificially low” level, according to internal State Department memoranda, as reported by *The Hill* on Oct. 10, 2012.

This type of reasoning is known as false cause fallacy: Only U.S. diplomatic posts exposed to a high level of terrorist threat receive security enhancements. If U.S. diplomatic posts in Libya do not receive security enhancements, then they are not exposed to a high level of terrorist threat.

In the unclassified version of its [report](#), the Department of State’s Accountability Review Board, in part, concluded that the attack was not carried out by protesters, as Ambassador Rice had insisted; the Special Mission security posture in Benghazi was inadequate as the result of systemic failures created by two bureaus of the Department of State, as well as by U.S. Embassy Tripoli; the Libyan Govern-


ment’s response to the attack was profoundly lacking; U.S. intelligence agencies provided no tactical warning of the impending attack; and no individual U.S. official could be held personally responsible for the consequences of the attack.

In the wake of Sept. 11, 2012, President Obama focused his attention on re-election, not on the murders in Benghazi. The latter would have required him to take action. Even the Tao requires something from each of us: Philosophers contemplate; leaders lead.

From his point of view, doing nothing was the expedient path. It was the path of his Tao; the murders were just an unfortunate and unpredictable hit-and-run accident, an unhappy event along the path back to the White House. Honest Muslims, his U.N. ambassador counseled, were provoked beyond the limit of all reasonable endurance by a vile hate film (that no one in Libya had ever seen) and they gave full vent to their anger.

And after all, as White House Press Secretary Jim Carney said on May 1, 2013, “Benghazi happened a long time ago.”

The president did nothing — again.

Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon and Syria’s use of chemical weapons against its civilian population stirred him to do nothing. He did win re-election. Good for him. It is doubtful, however, that the record of his performance in the field of foreign relations will appear even as a footnote in the next edition of *Profiles in Courage*. 

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CITY SHOULD STOP DEAL WITH BENDERSON DEVELOPMENT

To the Editor:

I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the City of Sarasota's proposed sale of 11 acres of city land at the busy Fruitville/Beneva intersection to Benderson Development Co. for less than the land's appraised value.

According to reports, the property was never offered for sale publicly, was never the subject of a request for proposals and the negotiations between city staff and Benderson were essentially done in secret over the course of two years.

Whose "back-room" deal was this? And why did Commissioners Terry Turner, Paul Caragiulo and Suzanne Atwell vote for it?

Currently, the land is a useful, "tree-scaped" open space. Benderson's plan may necessitate building a huge concrete box culvert over the Phillippi Creek drainage system, which bisects the property.

A recent traffic study said that the busy intersection is failing even without the proposed development. The study concluded that the land sale to Benderson would require more than \$17 million in roadway improvements,

with the city liable for \$15.4 million of the total.

City voters: Please ask your sitting commissioners to urgently find a way to put this "deal" on ice!

And to the staff of Benderson Development Co.: Please renounce this deal immediately, so that the monstrous prospect of even-worse traffic jams at this critical intersection can't materialize. Otherwise, future traffic gridlock ensnaring residents and workday commuters might deservedly be blamed on you.

Jason Boehk
Sarasota



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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PHOTO BY FRANKATURA





The Harvey Milk Festival website encourages people to follow the event on Twitter. Image courtesy harveymilkfestival.com

THE HARVEY MILK FESTIVAL WANTS TO CONNECT YOU WITH YOUR 'INNER ACTIVIST'

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

This week's [Harvey Milk Festival](#) might sound like any other arts and culture get-together. The event started with a film screening Thursday, rolls on with an art show Friday and concludes with stacked music lineup Saturday.

But that doesn't quite tell the whole story. The festival, now in its fourth year, honors the life and work of its namesake, Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California. In doing so, it is trying to force a new generation to stand up to support marriage equality and shout down intolerance.

"This is a call to action," says festival President Shannon Fortner. "This is the movement that's happening right now." Even as state af-

ter state approves marriage equality, LGBT friends and allies can't grow complacent. "We can't rely on, 'Well, so-and-so's got it,'" Fortner points out. "It should be everyone coming together and saying, 'We got this.'"

One art installation Saturday will give festival attendees that opportunity. Fortner calls it the "soapbox project." Participants will watch and listen to classic Milk speeches, then "connect with their inner activist" and step onto a literal soapbox to speak their minds. The results will be videotaped and compiled later.

The festival also wants supporters to contact Congress. As Washington starts negotiating the details of comprehensive immigration re-

form, the festival is urging folks to press elected officials to include protections for LGBT relationships in any law passed. The issue is an under-reported one, and it directly affects Fortner, whose wife lives in the U.K. and can only stay in the States for 90 days at a time.

Right now, all the money generated by the festival — which has broken even each year — is plowed back into the free event, but, having won 501(c)(3) status last year, the all-volunteer festival board wants to expand its involvement with other local nonprofits. The organization won \$5,000 from Visit Sarasota County, and it has teamed up with groups such as ALSO Out Youth and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. Fortner floats the idea of an LGBT scholarship program as one possible future endeavor.

“We keep trying to grow,” says Fortner. Indeed what was once a gathering in a vacant lot in the Rosemary District has moved up in the world, to Five Points Park, with the film screening held at Burns Court Cinema and the art show at MillerBrady Fine Art. Fortner adds that the festival will always “keep evolving.”

Saturday’s music bonanza remains the cornerstone of the event, with nine acts scheduled to perform. Some are local (such as the band Fortner fronts, MeteorEYES), some are from the Tampa area and some are from as far away as Brooklyn and Tennessee. The show kicks off at 4 p.m. and runs till midnight. In between acts, guest speakers will step on-stage, and there will be a candlelight vigil in honor of Milk at 8:30 p.m. Fortner says that moment is



Harvey Milk Festival President Shannon Fortner with the band she fronts, MeteorEYES. Photo courtesy of harveymilkfestival.com

intended as a reminder that yes, we're here to have fun, but there's a bigger purpose, too.

One of the festival's big needs going forward? Year-round leadership. The small board has built a thriving annual event, but Fortner wants more people involved. Her big message to attendees this year: "We need your help."

She's here to recruit you.

The Harvey Milk Festival runs through Saturday:

- 7-11 p.m. Friday, May 17: *Beyond Bullying* art show, MillerBrady Fine Art, 614 Florida Ave., Sarasota; free.
- 4 p.m. to midnight Saturday, May 18: *Music festival*, Five Points Park, North Pineapple Avenue and First Street, Sarasota; free.

Visit harveymilkfestival.com for all the details. 



The poster (above) and festival website spotlight other musical acts that will perform on May 18. Image courtesy harveymilkfestival.com



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 STORY OF CATTLE EGRETS IS MORE COMPLEX THAN THEIR COMMON APPEARANCE WITH BOVINES MIGHT SUGGEST

Dear Otus,

I am eager to have you weigh in on whether something I heard many years ago is fact or fiction: Is it true that Egrets hang out with cattle to eat bugs off the backs of the bovines?

I have noticed quite a few Egrets in pastures with cattle during my outings in the eastern part of our county in recent weeks. Of course, when I finally remembered to take the "good" camera with me, this Egret refused to pose

once I had exited my car to get a better shot. Thus, I am left with just this picture and its intrusion of the barbed-wire fencing.

I am very eager to hear your response.

And thank you for the *lovely* Hawk photos with your May 10 column. As you know, I have quite an affection for those creatures.

*Very kindly yours,
Alexis*



A Cattle Egret sits on a cow in a Singletary Road pasture. Contributed photo

Dear Alexis,

Thank you for remembering to take the “good” camera and getting this delightfully iconic photo of the Cattle Egret on its traditional perch.

John James Audubon noted the curious relationship between this bird and our American Buffalo in his *Ornithological Biography*, or, *An account of the habits of the birds of the United States of America*. He wrote the following:

“My astonishment upon first witnessing this herd of American bison engulfed in a glowing white halo of these birds was only surpassed by my amazement while observing their bold, fleet, fluttering forays into the stampeding bison’s trail of dust as these birds rapaciously devoured flies of all nature and species as well as crickets, grasshoppers and all insects dwelling on the Plains.”

Well, actually, I wrote that. You see, Audubon never encountered these birds. He died in

1851. The Cattle Egret only introduced itself to the continental United States in 1941. By 1953, this gregarious bird, which nests in colonies and gets along very well with our Heron and Egret populations, had established its presence to the point where within 50 years it had become one of the most abundant and common of all the Herons in the Americas. Its U.S. range is from Florida through Alaska.

Does the Cattle Egret mingle among the cattle to eat insects off bovine backs? The answer is Yes and No. The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), which is actually a species of Heron (*Ardeidae* family), rests on a supine bovine and snacks on flies, ticks and fleas. Its truly satisfying meals are eaten while it follows in the wake of large animals and farming machinery. Threshers, tractors, horses and cattle stir up the insects in the grasses, and the Cattle Egret takes advantage of the tiny creatures’ flight from danger. Around here, the supine bovine is a safe perch for the bird during its afternoon siesta.



An Indian Pond-Heron perched on the nose of a water buffalo. Photo courtesy of Rick Greenspun

In its native Africa and India, the swarms of flies that plague livestock and other grazing beasts can be so incredibly thick around the animals that the birds do feast and gorge themselves while perched on the beasts. Once again, Rick Greenspun has kindly provided us with a superb iconic photo, this one taken during a birding trip to Sri Lanka. He explains to us that “The poor water buffalo would submerge themselves down to their nostrils to escape the swarms of flies. Since there were no bushes around to perch on, the Indian Pond-Herons would avail themselves of the best spot around and in return, keep the flies off their noses. An unintended but mutual symbiosis.”

An opportunistic eater — as most bird species are — “The Cattle Egret occasionally adds


birds to its diet,” the Cornell Lab of Ornithology writes. “At Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Florida, migrating Cattle Egrets land on the large green lawn inside the fort, probably hoping for some nice grasshoppers. Because no insects are there to be had, the egrets try to catch the migrating warblers that also have stopped on the tiny island.”

In other words, they are not fussy eaters, and that is why people will often spot them in less pastoral settings such as around dumpsters, parks, sports fields and even in Siesta Key Village, where I saw one perched on the roof of a car. Not finding many ticks on this particular vehicle model, this Cattle Egret flew off, presumably to forage flies in the dusty wake of a passing car or to check out a dumpster.




File photo



A photograph of a Cattle Egret in full breeding plumage. The bird is white with a distinctive reddish buff crown and breast feathers. It has a long, yellow beak and a yellow eye. The bird is standing in a grassy field, looking to the left.

I am including two photos of the Cattle Egret in almost full breeding plumage so you see the bird's attractive reddish buff crown- and breast-feathers. One thing that delights me about these birds is their demeanor. Their stance and that look in their eyes always suggest to me such keen concentration as well as an "attitude" — not a querulous or hostile mien, just a delightfully feisty one!

A close-up photograph of a white egret standing in a grassy field. The bird has a distinctive pinkish-tinged crest and a yellow beak. It is looking down and slightly to the left. The background is a soft-focus green field.


Alexis, thank you for your photo and question. And, yes! I certainly remember your and Eric's fondness for hawks. As long as we're on that subject ... I happen to know of a certain immature Red-shouldered Hawk on south Siesta Key that is "Free to Good Backyard." Kindly let me know if you are interested!

Otus

File photo



And speaking of Hawks: Otus has provided us with the identities of those Mystery Hawks whose photos he included with his May 10 column.

Were you as successful in your research as Otus was? 



A Cooper's Hawk. File photo



I like to take my time.

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

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

You have a whole week.

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IMAGINATIVE GARDENING



This Florida yard features tier planting. Contributed photo

WHY NOT TRY TIER PLANTING?

By Rick Wielgorecki

Contributing Writer

One of the least imaginative ways of laying out plants is installing them in a straight line. A rigid row of like cultivars stretched out along a foundation or border is sure to elicit yawns. That is why when I am enhancing a landscape I try to create design displays that combine different colors, textures, sizes and shapes to encourage the viewers' eye to roam.

Any interesting plan will include what I call "flow." I want to take the observer on a little trip — lead him to the entryway or along the lines of the home's footprint or into a special corner, where the mind can find peace and repose.

One way to generate interest is through tier planting. By way of musical metaphor, the

conductor or choir director will use the tools available — musical instruments or voices — to evoke a mood or express an idea. Horticultural tiers need not be arranged formally in straight rows ascending upward — one, two, three. Plants can be arranged along curves or staggered to break up linear arrangements and challenge the viewer to look deeper into the design.

In the accompanying photo of one of my projects, the fifth and tallest tier already existed: the palm trees and East Palatka holly. The object was to lead the eye inward and upward, beginning with the small colorful crotons in the foreground. Next, green and yellow, variegated arboricola make their appearance.

Deeper inward, Red Sister ti plants and snow-bush interject their bright, blush tones. They give way to the taller variegated ginger and thryallis. Finally, the eye is led up to the design climax: the graceful palms and the large lush holly.

Next time you are planning a project, try to depart from linear planting and employ a variety of colors and forms. If you do, your garden will play and sing the songs of spring!

PLANT OF THE MONTH

A couple of autumns ago, I began to plant impatiens as I have for years to give my clients a blast of cool season color. By early February 2012, most of them had succumbed to a devastating outbreak of powdery mildew.

That disappointment led me to conduct a highly unscientific experiment to see if I could find another annual that I might use as a substitute

for the impatiens. I bought eight cool season annuals that I had never before planted as a trial to see how they would fare. The results, I must admit, were not encouraging. Slowly each of my choices descended from “greenhouse beautiful” into a swoon — all except one, that is: *Mona Lavender*.

Whether you utilize it as a subject for a pot, hanging basket or bedding plant *Plectranthus* can maintain its deep green foliage and bright, spiked purple flowers through the cool of winter and the hot moist summer of central Florida.

This South African hybrid will grow into an attractive, compact shrub 2 feet in height and breadth. It also “plays nicely” with my cobalt blue birdbath, red geraniums and purple snapdragons.

Contact Rick Wielgorecki at 362-0600 or wielgo@hotmail.com. 



Mona lavender maintains its good looks in both cool and hot weather. Contributed photo



VILLAGE BUSINESSES INVITED TO A CODE ENFORCEMENT INFORMATIONAL MEETING ON MAY 21; NOISE ISSUES REMAIN A SEPARATE FOCUS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

At the request of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA), Sarasota County staff will hold a workshop at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, May 21, to educate business owners and managers about the specifics of the Siesta Key Overlay District, the county zoning code that applies to the Village.

The session, which will be informational and educational only, SKVA members stress, will be held in the Parish Hall at St. Boniface Episcopal Church, 5615 Midnight Pass Road on Siesta Key.

Kay Kouvatsos, the new SKVA vice president, explained at the May 7 SKVA meeting that



Siesta Key's primary Code Enforcement officer says he rarely receives complaints about music at The Beach Club, because bands play indoors there. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Siesta Seen

Jane Grogg, manager of Sarasota County's Neighborhood Services office, will facilitate the discussion.

Among other county staff members who will be present will be Donna Thompson, the assistant zoning administrator; Sandra Jones, manager of the Code Enforcement department; and Code Enforcement Officers John Lally and Kevin Burns.

It has been a long time since such a discussion has been held, Kouvatsos added. It will be designed to help new business owners in the Village learn what is and is not allowed, and it will refresh the memories of owners and managers who have been working in the Village for some time, Kouvatsos pointed out. "Siesta Key businesses are governed by a set of regulations that in some ways [differ] from the general Sarasota County Code," says a flyer about the meeting that was distributed to businesses. The flyer notes the Siesta Key Overlay District (SKOD) was established in 2001, "after years of workshops with public and county input. It was updated in 2008 and 2011."

SKVA officers and board members have been working since February to organize the meeting.

The flyer adds, "We feel this is an ideal way to inform everyone concerned [about] the guidelines of our Zoning Code."

A question-and-answer period will be conducted after the presentation of information about the code, the flyer continues. "By educating

ourselves, we are hoping that enforcement in the future by John Lally ... will be effortless and well understood."

Lally, the long-time Code Enforcement officer in the Village, was out on medical leave for the first three months of this year. Members of both the Siesta Key Association and the SKVA welcomed him back at their regular meetings early this month.

"These county workshops have worked well for us," outgoing SKVA President Russell Matthes told members on May 7. The focus, he emphasized, will be "little things," such as when garbage is picked up in the Village and the fact that vendors should make every effort not to park in front of businesses when they make deliveries.

"It's not going to be an open complaint session," Kouvatsos added. The goal is to help business people understand "you can't be doing things that make [the Village] look like the Jersey Shore."

THE NOISE

Although the county's noise ordinance will not be addressed at the May 21 meeting, Matthes pointed out on May 7 that it has been on the SKVA's monthly agenda "ever since I can remember ... and I think it always will be."

John Lally, who was present for the meeting, said county staff members have begun holding neighborhood workshops on the noise ordinance as planned after the County Commission voted on Sept. 25, 2012 to extend the sun-

Siesta Seen

set of the ordinance until Nov. 18. A big part of the reasoning behind that vote was to allow plenty of opportunity for public comments on whether the ordinance should be modified.

As he had told the Siesta Key Association members on May 2, Lally reported to the SKVA that neighborhood association workshops already have been held in Gulf Gate and Englewood. Based on comments at those meetings, the attendees saw no need for changes in the ordinance, Lally added.

However, regarding Siesta Village, Lally said, "The noise level needs to be the same for every business; one set of standards."

Whenever a new Sarasota County Sheriff's deputy is assigned to Siesta Key, Lally told both the SKA and SKVA members, it is very difficult for the deputy to get a quick handle on what businesses have which special exceptions. The latter "need to be addressed, and I'm not getting a lot of help in getting that taken care of," he told the SKA members on May 2, "so I'll leave that to you."

"We're working on it, John," SKA President Catherine Luckner responded.

One reason noise is such a big issue in the Village, Lally told the SKA members, is because so many of the restaurants and bars are open, allowing the sound to travel.

Very few complaints come in about The Beach Club or the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar, he pointed out, because both those establishments are enclosed.



Mark Smith. File photo

During the SKVA meeting, Lally said he had been talking with Peter van Roekens, the SKA secretary and a Terrace East condominium complex representative at the SKVA meetings, about whether the SKOD should have a noise ordinance all its own.

PAYING THE BILLS

Although Sarasota County has a new Procurement Code in effect as of this spring, apparently some issues remain to be resolved with the Procurement Department itself.

That is the assessment of Mark Smith, past president of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce. During the May 7 SKVA meeting, Smith brought up a situation he has been trying to remedy regarding Championship Landscape Maintenance Professionals of Fort Myers, which handles the maintenance in the Village.

Siesta Seen

Smith told the SKVA members, “There are delays in Championship getting their money. ... Procurement in Sarasota County is still an adventure. If you’re a vendor, it can take two or three months to get paid.”

Fortunately, he added, “Championship’s been real troopers. ... They haven’t delayed anything because of [slow] payments.”

Moreover, he said, “I think they’re almost caught up” with payments.

However, Smith pointed out, he has not been asking the firm to undertake extra work until the situation with the bills is a thing of the

past. For example: “That’s why the dumpster in the [municipal] parking lot doesn’t have a fence around it yet,” Smith told the SKVA members.

Championship won the Village maintenance contract in August 2012.

When Matthes asked him whether he thought Championship would bid again on the contract, Smith replied, “I will tell you they’re not interested in pursuing any other county work” beyond the Village upkeep.

“They’re doing an amazing job,” Kouvatsos said.



*Plans call for putting a fence around the dumpster in the municipal parking lot in Siesta Village.
File photo*

Siesta Seen

Smith told me later on May 7 that it made no sense to him why one Championship invoice might be paid promptly, then “all of a sudden, there’s a backup and a problem.”

ROAD ADOPTERS WELCOME

An Adopt-A-Road pickup for Siesta Key will be held on Saturday, June 1, sponsored by the SKA and SKVA, Michael Shay, organizer of the effort, has announced.

Shay is vice president of the SKA.

Anyone interested in participating is welcome to come to Village Café on Ocean Boulevard

at 8 a.m. that day for a free breakfast provided by co-owners Tom and Kay Kouvatsos, Shay pointed out, adding that heavy tipping is encouraged for the wait staff.

The trash pickup will start at 9 a.m., covering Ocean Boulevard as well as Higel Avenue and Siesta Drive up to the north Siesta Bridge. SKA members will work up to the “humpback bridge,” and Bay Island Association members will take care of the rest of the stretch to the north Bridge.

As usual grabbers, gloves and trash bags will be provided, Shay reports.



Village Café will serve a free breakfast to all volunteers in the June 1 Adopt-A-Road cleanup on the key. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Siesta Seen

A HAND IN HELPING THE CHAMBER

The Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce has announced its Second Annual Poker Tournament will be held in partnership with the Sarasota Kennel Club at 7 p.m. on June 6.

Proceeds will benefit both Siesta Key's July Fourth fireworks celebration and the Chamber.

Prior to the tournament, dinner and beverages will be offered between 6 and 7 p.m.


"Pre-register to receive complimentary beer, soft drinks and a dinner buffet with two en-

tree choices, appetizers, salad and dessert," a news release notes.

The tournament will be held in the [Sarasota Kennel Club's One Eyed Jack's Poker Room](#), located at 5400 Bradenton Road, Sarasota.

The cost of the buy-in is \$70, with \$10 for a one-time add-on and an extra \$70 for a "re-buy," which will be available during the first hour of the tournament.

Payouts will go to the top six players, the release says. The winner will receive \$2,000 if the event is sold out.

For more information, contact the Chamber by phone at 349-3800 or by email. 

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Cutline: The Sarasota High School Chamber Choir celebrates high marks at a state assessment performance. Contributed photo

SARASOTA HIGH CHAMBER CHOIRS RECEIVE *SUPERIOR* RANKINGS

The Sarasota High School Girl's Chorale received the highest rating, *Superior*, in all categories in which it competed in the Florida Vocal Association State Concert Performance Assessment April 25, the Sarasota County Schools has announced.

The full SHS Singing Sailors Chamber Choir received one *Superior* and two *Excellent* ratings during the event, which was held at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, a news release says.

Music professors from Florida State University, University of Central Florida, University of North Florida, University of South Carolina, Southeastern University and Seminole State College judged the performances, the release adds.

"The Singing Sailors has a rich tradition in the history of Sarasota High School," said Choral Director Kirby Sanders in the release. "The Chamber Choir is the highest level of Singing Sailors; students must audition to be considered for this honor. We're very proud of their performances in Lakeland."

In the competition, the Girl's Chorale performed *I'll Give My Love an Apple* by Eleanor Daley, *Weep No More* by David Dickau and *This Little Babe* by Benjamin Britten, the release notes. The full Chamber Choir sang *Innisfree* by Gerald Custer, *Prayer of the Children* by Kurt Bestor and *Tambourines* (from *Harlem Songs*) by Gwyneth Walker.

HERMITAGE ARTISTS TO PRESENT 'INSIDER' STORIES AT SUNSET

On Friday, May 17, internationally acclaimed artists will entertain the public on the Hermitage Artist Retreat beach with behind-the-scenes stories from some of the world's most well known venues for orchestras, operas and other performing arts experiences.

Visual artist and set designer Anne Patterson; conductor, composer and director Robert Spano; and English composer Julian Grant will present insider information about colorful experiences they have had and share their music on the beach in front of the Hermitage Artist Retreat, the Hermitage has announced. The program will begin at 6 p.m. with tours of the historic Hermitage House and an open studio with Patterson. At 7 p.m., the beach entertainment will begin. The grand finale will

be "Mother Nature's sunset at 8:15," a news release says.

The event is free; visitors are encouraged to bring their beach chairs and refreshments, the release adds.

"Our beach readings have become popular events that draw from all around our region," Bruce E. Rodgers, executive director for the Hermitage Artist Retreat, says in the release.

Spano is the music director of the Atlanta Symphony and the Aspen Music Festival and School. He is also a Fellow of the Aspen Institute as part of the Harman-Eisner Artist in Residence Program. He "has appeared with some of the greatest orchestras in the world and has been called one of the brightest and



Anne Patterson/Contributed photo

most imaginative conductors of his generation,” the release notes.

“Patterson is an artist who works with America’s great orchestras and operas,” the release continues. “She hears color and sees sound. She explains that this gift, the synthesis of the visual and the auditory, allows for a personal connection as her paintings and design immerse the audience’s senses,” the release adds. “It’s no wonder her work is in demand by some of the most important directors, playwrights, conductors and composers working in America today.”

Grant specializes in writing for musical theatre and opera in the United Kingdom. He has produced compositions for BBC2’s *Culture*

Show, the English National Opera, Almeida Opera, Mecklenburgh Opera and the Royal Opera House Garden. Additionally, he has won the Opera Association of America’s biennial chamber opera competition and has been nominated for an Olivier Award, the release says.

The Hermitage is a not-for-profit artist retreat located at 6660 Manasota Key Road in Englewood, the release points out. “It brings accomplished painters, sculptors, writers, playwrights, poets, composers and other artists from all over the world for extended stays on its 8.5-acre campus.” For more information, call 475-2098 or visit the website at www.HermitageArtistRetreat.org.



Robert Spano/Contributed photo

SARASOTA OPERA ANNOUNCES ITS 2013-14 SEASON

Sarasota Opera has announced that its 2013-2014 fall and winter programming will include the return of some of its most acclaimed productions as well as the Sarasota Opera premiere of Verdi's *Jérusalem*.

"This will be a season of celebration," says Richard Russell, executive director, in a news release. "Not only will Sarasota Opera be marking the company's 55th consecutive season, we will be commemorating the anniversaries of the birth of three of opera's most significant composers through our programming: Wagner, Britten, and, of course, Verdi."

The following operas have been scheduled:

- *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss Jr. will open on Nov. 1. "As the plot unfolds, an elab-

orate scheme is hatched to expose the womanizing ways of the wealthy Eisenstein as he attempts to enjoy a night of frivolity at an elaborate Viennese ball before going to jail. Hidden identities and amorous intrigues mixed with a splash of mistaken identity make for a night of unwieldy delight in this charming story where champagne reigns as king," the release notes

Baritone Sean Anderson (*Of Mice and Men*, *Otello*) will return to reprise the role of the scheming Eisenstein. Soprano Danielle Walker (*A King for a Day*, *Carmen*) will sing the role of his wife, Rosalinda. Rounding out the cast will be soprano Angela Mortellaro. This production will be sung in English with translation by Marcie Stapp.



Performers with the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh present a scene from *Die Fledermaus* in 2006. Sarasota Opera will perform its version of the opera during the 2013-14 season. Photo by OperaVictoria via Wikimedia Commons

- *Little Sweep* by Benjamin Britten will be presented Nov. 9-10 by the Sarasota Youth Opera. In this story, “A group of children, with the help of a kind nursery maid, work to free a young chimney sweep apprentice from his cruel master,” the release continues. The adult roles will be performed by members of the Sarasota Opera Apprentice Program, the release notes.

- *Il trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi will open the Winter Opera Festival on Feb. 8, 2014. Not seen in Sarasota since 1993, “*Il trovatore* tells the story of a troubadour’s quest for love, a soldier’s lust and a daughter’s undying thirst for vengeance,” the release notes. It features operatic favorites such as the *Anvil Chorus* and *Di quella pira*.

Two rising stars of the opera world will make their Sarasota Opera debut in this production: Baritone David Pershall, who joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera this past season, will portray Count di Luna, the jealous commander of the Aragon troops. Mezzo-soprano Margaret Mezzacappa, who was the Grand Prize winner at the 2012 Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition, will sing the role of the vengeful Azucena, the release points out.

- *The Barber of Seville* by Gioachino Rossini will open on Feb. 15. “Determined to win the heart of the beautiful Rosina with charm and wit, rather than money, Count Almaviva enlists the help of Figaro, the barber of Seville, to steal her away from her guardian, Dr. Bartolo,” the release continues.

Baritone Marco Nisticò, who sang the title role in last season’s production of *Rigoletto*

— which was followed by his performances of *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera — will sing the role of Figaro. Bass Young Bok Kim, who was heard last season as both Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* and Timur in *Turandot*, will reprise his role of Basilio.

- *The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner will open on March 1, 2014. It “tells the tale of a cursed sea captain forced to wander the world, ultimately finding redemption in the selfless gift of a woman’s love. The unbridled weight and force of Wagner’s work will enthrall audiences as they voyage through this mystical world,” the release says.

Three members of last season’s critically acclaimed production of Carlisle Floyd’s *Of Mice and Men* will return for this opera: tenor Michael Hendrick, who performed the role of Lennie, has been cast as the huntsman Erik; tenor Jon Jurgens, who sang the role of Curley, will be the Steersman; and maestro David Neely, a specialist of the German repertoire, will conduct the opera, the release continues.

- *Jérusalem* by Giuseppe Verdi will open on March 8, 2014. It is “an epic tale of warriors, family rivalry and jealousy that evolves into a story of forgiveness. Based on [Verdi’s] earlier opera, *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* ... [it] abounds with rousing choruses, beautiful ensembles and exciting arias,” the release notes.

This new production of *Jérusalem* will mark the 30th operatic installment of the Verdi Cycle at Sarasota Opera.

The four winter productions will run in rotation from Feb. 8 through March 23, 2014, the release points out.

ASOLO REP THEATRE TO WELCOME SONG AND DANCE OF *PULSE*

“Extending this season’s hot streak of productions that make bold artistic statements, Asolo Repertory Theatre is thrilled to present Noah Racey’s *Pulse*,” the theatre has announced.

“A song and dance celebration that harkens back to the golden age of hoofing, *Pulse* is written, conceived and choreographed by Broadway song and dance man Noah Racey in collaboration with Broadway director and two-time Tony Award nominee Jeff Calhoun,” a news release notes. *Pulse* opens on Thursday, May 23, with an 8 p.m. curtain. Opening night will be preceded by two preview performances — on Tuesday, May 21, at 7:30 p.m. and May 22 at 8 p.m., the release notes. The show will run through June 16 in Asolo Rep’s Mertz Theatre, located in The Florida State

University Center for the Performing Arts at 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.

“I believe that *Pulse* is one of the most electrifying projects to ever appear on the American musical stage, and everyone at this theatre is so incredibly excited to be having its world premiere at Asolo Rep,” said Michael Donald Edwards, Asolo Repertory Theatre’s producing artistic director, in the release.

Not only is Racey an award-winning Broadway actor, singer and dancer, he also is a director, choreographer, musician and songwriter, the release points out. His Broadway career was launched in 2001 with a revival of *Follies*, and his work as an associate choreographer on *Thoroughly Modern Millie* led to a



Tony Award for choreographer Rob Ashford. For 10 years, Racey has served as the resident director/choreographer of the critically acclaimed *Broadway by the Year* series, the release continues.

“All the people in the world understand the universal language of song and dance,” said Racey in the release. “*Pulse* explores a wide range of dance styles in American culture, using rhythm as a common denominator,”

he adds. It “melds classic hoofing and Broadway-style vocals with a modern approach to the presentation of song and dance. The result is an entirely new style of performance.”

Tickets for all performances range from \$20 to \$72. They may be purchased at the Asolo Repertory Theatre box office in person or by calling 351-8000. Tickets can also be purchased online at www.asolorep.org.

SARASOTA HIGH CHORAL DEPARTMENT SETS *FINAL BOW* CONCERT

The Sarasota High School Choral Department will present its 2013 *Final Bow* end-of-the-year concert at 7 p.m., Thursday, May 23, in the school auditorium.

The concert will feature a wide variety of music and will showcase the Singing Sailors, the Chamber Choir, the Women’s Chorale and stu-

dent soloists, a news release notes. The program will conclude with a salute to the graduating seniors of 2013 as they take their “final bow,” the release adds.

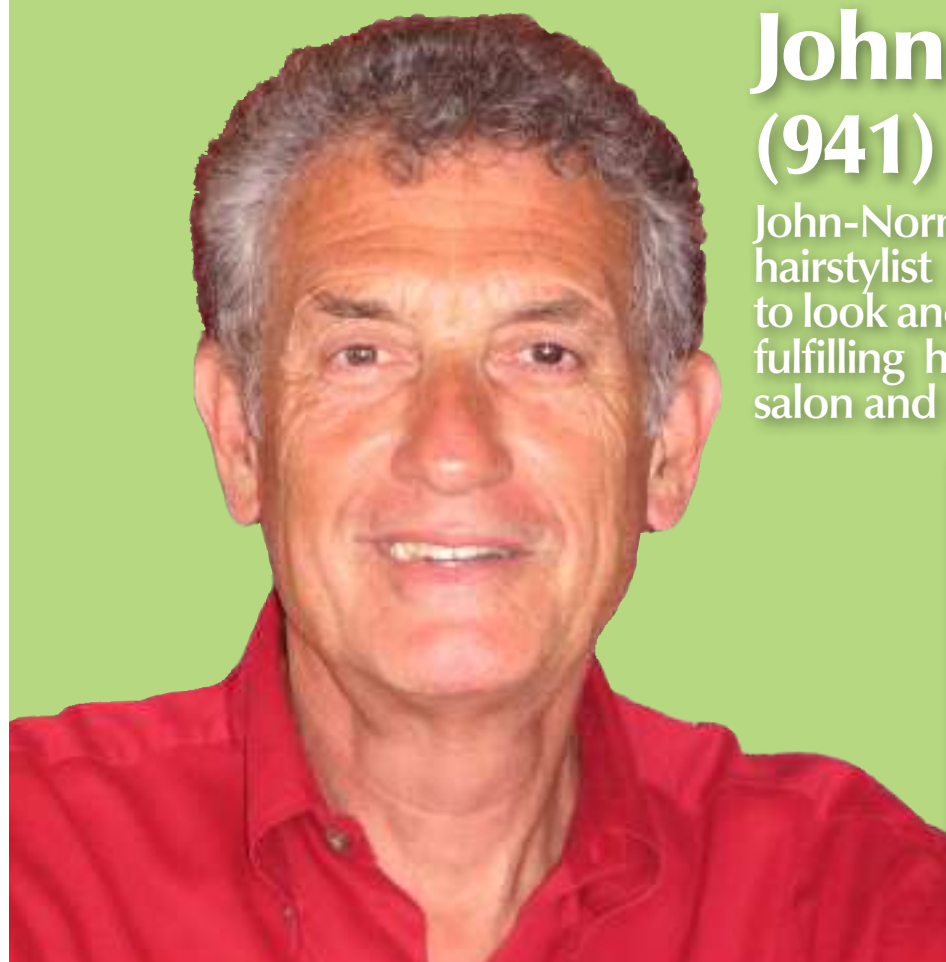
The concert is free and open to the public.

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

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



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Temple Emanu-El children (from left) Emanuela Reich, Juliana Reich and Sasha Drapkin display the cookies they decorated for Sarasota County firefighters during Mitzvah Day. Contributed photo

MITZVAH DAY DRAWS 300 FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

More than 300 Temple Emanu-El members and guests completed 20 different hands-on community service projects at the synagogue's seventh annual Mitzvah Day on April 28.

Fulfilling the meaning of the Hebrew word “mitzvah” — which means “commandment” but also connotes “good deed” — volunteers of all ages signed up for projects including hosting an art and manicure party for homeless families; sorting and packing food; planting seeds and picking up litter; wrapping books for needy children; preparing lunches for the homeless; assembling folders for men-

tors of at-risk teenagers; aiding animal shelters; performing at a nursing home; creating cards for soldiers serving overseas; decorating cookies for firefighters; and knitting and crafting for charitable agencies, a Temple news release says.

Mitzvah Day participants also donated food, toiletries, books and clothing for the less fortunate and took part in a blood drive. Finally, the Temple's Brotherhood held a pizza sale that raised \$275 for All Faiths Food Bank, the release adds.

Local groups benefitting from Temple Emanu-El's Mitzvah Day were the Salvation Army, SPARCC, Community Haven, Suncoast Communities Blood Bank, Jewish Family & Children's Service, A Million Thanks, Cat Depot, Honor Animal Sanctuary, Sarasota County Animal Shelter, Take Stock in Children, Manatee County Schools, Manatee County Department of Children and Families, Sarasota County Fire Department, Mothers Helping Mothers, Anchin Pavilion, Manasota BUDS and All Faiths Food Bank.

Temple Emanu-El holds Mitzvah Day every spring. It welcomes suggestions for new community service projects and new charitable agencies with whom to partner, the release notes. To make a suggestion or to learn more about Mitzvah Day, call 379-1997.



Animal Sanctuary staffer Jeanie Keyso introduced Temple Emanu-El Mitzvah Day Steering Committee member Alla Barwick to a homeless puppy. Contributed photo



Temple Emanu-El members Debby Solomon, Alice Cotman and Marion Goldsmith gift-wrapped children's books to be presented to disadvantaged elementary school students. Contributed photo

TEMPLE SINAI PRESCHOOL HOLDS MDA HOP-A-THON

The students attending The Gan preschool at Temple Sinai recently participated in their annual Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Hop-a-Thon. While it was a fundraising effort, it was also a disability awareness, acceptance and education program for the youngsters, the Temple has announced.

Laura Freedman, director of early childhood education, said in a news release, "Preschool-age kids learn by doing. The boys and girls of our school learn about hopping for those who cannot hop for themselves."

On Wednesday, May 8, all of the students engaged in this popular event, the release notes. They rotated to different stations, where they hopped like rabbits, frogs and kangaroos.

This is the second Mitzvah project of The Gan this school year; the students also annually hold a Trike-a-Thon fundraiser for St. Jude's Children's Hospital, the release says. "It is part of the mission of the school to teach youth about doing good deeds in the community and the world at large," the release adds.

The Gan at Temple Sinai is the only preschool in the area involved in the MDA program, the release points out. "MDA provides a curriculum that teachers may use to teach the core values of awareness, acceptance and assistance for people with muscle diseases," it says.

For more information about the school, contact Laura Freedman at 926-9462. 



(From left) Cara Sheyner, Alexander Nir and Ynes Juravin hop through a 'field of carrots.' Contributed photo



(From left) Ana, Kirra, Alex and Tara hop like kangaroos. Contributed photo



Riley Edbrooke is poised to jump. Contributed photo



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

17
MAY

Spring concert at Riverview High School

May 17, 7 p.m., Riverview High School choirs will perform a variety of choral music with a Motown finale in the Performing Arts Center, 1 Ram Way, off Proctor Road, Sarasota. Donation: \$5 at the door.

17+
MAY

Echoes of Spring

Through May 31, at Dabbert Gallery, 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota, featuring the works of 10 artists. For more information, visit www.dabbertgallery.com.

17+
MAY

Landscapes, Mindscapes and Dreamscapes

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

23
MAY

Disney's Beauty and the Beast Junior

May 23, 6:30 p.m., 70 students at Ashton Elementary School in Sarasota will perform the children's version of the Broadway musical; free admission. School located at 5110 Ashton Road.

23+
MAY

Noah Racey's Pulse

May 23, 8 p.m. (and various times through June 16), FSU Performing Arts Center, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail. Tickets: \$20 to \$72 Information: 351-8000 or Asolo.org.

29+
MAY

Florida Studio Theatre presents *The World Goes 'Round*

May 29 to June 23 (times vary), Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$18 to \$42 Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.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

LIKE A HERON CAUGHT IN HEADLIGHTS



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.