

THE SARASOTA

No. 45 — July 26, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher

Rachel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

Cooper@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Stan@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Roger Drouin

County Editor

Roger@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Norman Schimmel

Staff Photographer

NSchimmel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Fran Palmeri

Contributing Writer

FPalmeri@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Harriet Cuthbert

Contributing Writer

HCuthbert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Elinor Rogosin

A&E Writer

ERogosin@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

John Riley

Editorial Cartoonist

Riley@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Vicki Chatley

Copy Editor

Vicki@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Letters To the Editor

Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cleve Posey

Production Manager / Graphic Designer

Cleve@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Robert S. Hackney

Opinion Editor / General Manager

Robert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Advertising Sales

Sales@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Subscription Services

Subs@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Press Releases & News Tips

News@SarasotaNewsLeader.com



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Welcome

The sure sign it is summer is the difficulty in tracking down sources.

Fortunately, though, plenty of news was happening so we could work around the people who were out of town on vacation or otherwise just too busy to respond.

I do not know how Stan Zimmerman manages to attend so many meetings each week, but in that process, he picks up all sorts of what I call “tasty tidbits.” This week he not only offers more news about the potential return of parking meters, he also has quite an interesting story about the complaint filed by the city’s public information officer about the working environment she has dealt with in the City Auditor and Clerk’s Office.

Cooper Levey-Baker put in a lot of legwork last weekend, enabling him to provide a powerful perspective this week on the Trayvon Martin rallies in the community.

And Roger Drouin has been trekking through Red Bug Slough and all around the Fruitville Road interchange area to offer updates on two significant county initiatives.

I covered the least territory of all our staff this week, though the time I spent at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex was the most fun I have had covering a story in some time. You will see what I mean in Sarasota Leisure.

Finally, I have to put in a plug for our News Briefs this week. Not only did Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel do some trekking of his own — to Snooty’s birthday party — but we have several other noteworthy staff stories in that section.

Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor and Publisher





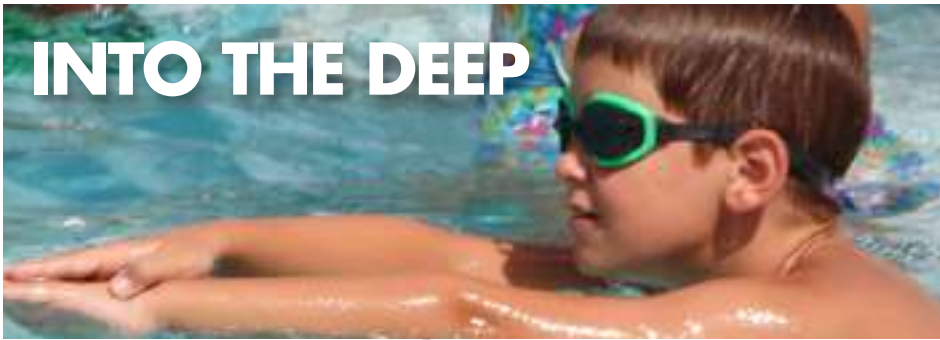
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Sarasota Leisure: *Boats at the ready* - Norman Schimmel



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BABY STEPS BACK

A person preparing to put money in a parking meter on Main Street in May 2011 chats with a volunteer parking assistant. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SIGNS CONTINUE TO BUILD THAT THE CITY OF SARASOTA WILL HAVE TO PUT PARKING METERS BACK ON THE STREETS TO GENERATE REVENUE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sarasota's despised, satirized and ultimately uprooted parking meters are gathering dust in a warehouse. But like the marching brooms of Disney's *Fantasia*, they may be on their way back.

Unless every man, woman and child in the city wants to kick in \$10 every year, only meters can avoid crushing debts and deficits at City Hall. This year the city's Parking Division — normally a profit-making en-

terprise in American cities — is running a \$500,000 deficit.

And next year, no change is expected. While the City Commission in its budget workshops earlier this month called for the Parking Division to raise \$250,000 more in the next fis-

cal year than it has this year, heads were scratched at City Hall on how to do that. The plan city commissioners approved is counter-intuitive. Why

“If you want a parking garage, you're gonna have to swallow the meters.”

Marty Rappaport
Chairman
St. Armands Business Improvement District



would you pay to park in a garage when the street spaces are free?

Meanwhile, parking conditions continue to deteriorate not just in downtown Sarasota but in many other areas of the city, as is documented in a recently released \$47,000 parking study.

The city's finance director says the \$500,000 Parking Division deficit will be plugged with money from the general fund. But the general fund this year is getting a \$1 million infusion from the city's reserves, its "rainy-day fund." So in reality, the City of Sarasota is paying for parking from its last-ditch savings — this year and next year too.

THE CHALLENGE

About a year ago, Parking Director Mark Lyons set up a committee to advise him. It has a member from each of the city's high-use parking areas, including St. Armands, Hillview Street/Southside Village, Lido Beach and downtown. It has been working on a strategic plan, but on Wednesday, July 24, its members were asked to think tactically when Lyons' boss showed up.

City Manager Tom Barwin asked them off the bat, "Have you set up an incentive to move into a paid parking strategy?"

Lyons chided his boss. "Paid parking is not really our [e.g. the committee's] interest. Our



The results of a new parking study commissioned by the City of Sarasota underscore the need for more parking spaces during the height of season on St. Armands. File photo



Parking meter stumps remain to be pulled out in September 2012 after the City Commission agreed to cease the paid parking program in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

goal is to create a system that makes sense, whether it is paid or not.”

This is Barwin’s second plunge into parking hell. At his previous job, in Oak Park, IL, he struggled with a \$10 million deficit in the parking department. “We began to show progress when we created a parking benefits district. By the time I left, after three years of the district assisting in rates and planning, the deficit was down to \$3 million,” he said.

In other words, Oak Park was able to chop \$7 million from its parking deficit in four years. “We weren’t striving to be a massive cash cow, but that’s what parking garages are in private hands,” said Barwin.

For a city, he added, “The profits can be plowed back into the district with landscaping or marketing. I’m thinking this may be something we might want to talk about, maybe run it by the City Commission.”

Free parking on city streets in America is not just rare, it is an anomaly. “I go all over the state in my business,” said committee member Carl Shoffstall of Lido Key. “You pay for parking everywhere.”

Barwin left the meeting, much as he had entered it, with a message. “You know what the goal is. We’re losing \$500,000 a year downtown.”

THE STUDY

Even without meters — with parking free everywhere, public garages included — the city still has non-budgetary parking problems. Earlier this month, city staff received a study conducted by Walker Parking Consultants; it pinpointed several hotspots. And not all were linked to the tourist season.

Parking is an arcane topic unless you are looking for a spot. When 99 percent of the spots are taken on a Friday between 11 a.m. and 2

p.m., and 98 percent are taken between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., arcana morphs into maddening frustration. That is the status of St. Armands Circle in the peak season, according to the Walker report.

The St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID) has commissioned a study specifically for the island to determine if a parking garage is needed. But the district’s chairman, Marty Rappaport, already knows the issue is not just about a garage. “If you want a parking garage, you’re gonna have to swallow the meters.”

And since downtown Sarasota already has two garages — with a third coming at State Street — there is some “swallowing” coming to Main Street, too.

For two areas of the city, the peak demand comes during the city’s “off-season.” Evening diners and strollers take up 91 percent of the spots on the city’s bayfront parking areas, according to Walker. And during lunchtime on Fridays (11 a.m. to 2 p.m.) a whopping 97 percent of spots are occupied in Southside Village along Hillview Street. During the same hours in the peak season, 75 percent of the spots are taken.

Anything above 85 percent occupancy means desperate drivers looking for spaces.

“The three highest occupancy levels are not downtown,” said Lyons. “They are at St. Armands, Southside Village and Marina Jack” — or, as the report says, “Taken as a whole, St. Armands, South Village [sic] and the Marina Districts experienced parking deficits, with St. Armands experiencing a significant parking deficit.”

The advisory committee will review the Walker report’s recommendations at its next meeting, on Aug. 28 at 3 p.m. in City Hall. The public is welcome. 

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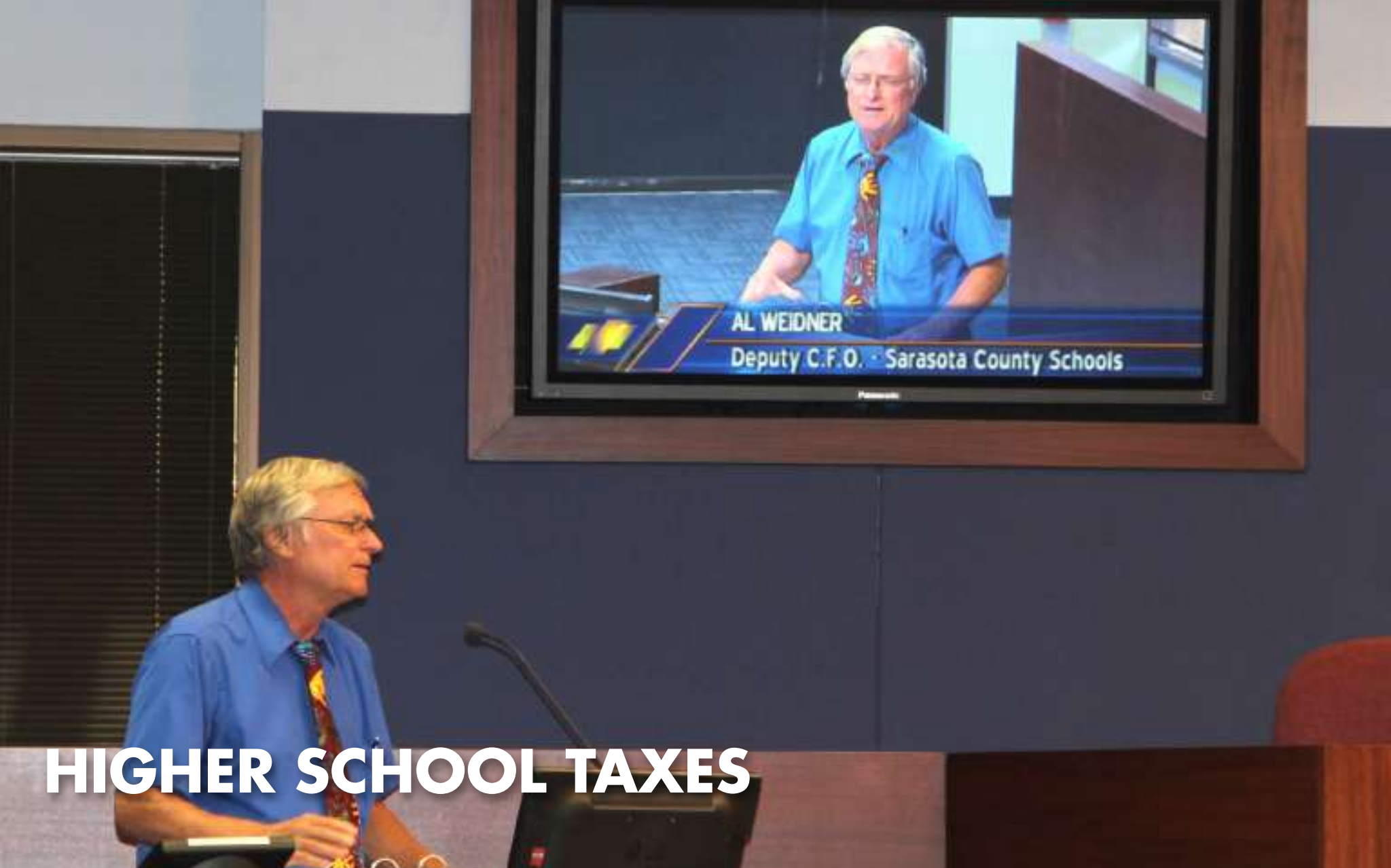
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HIGHER SCHOOL TAXES

Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner addresses the School Board on July 23. Photo by Rachel Hackney

LARGELY BECAUSE OF SALARY INCREASES APPROVED — BUT MOSTLY UNFUNDED — BY THE LEGISLATURE, THE SCHOOL BOARD TENTATIVELY HAS APPROVED A HIGHER MILLAGE RATE FOR THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The Sarasota County School Board voted unanimously on July 23 — with member Carol Todd absent — to advertise a total tentative millage rate of 7.970 mills for its 2014 fiscal year.

That is an increase from the total rate of 7.816 for the current fiscal year.

A person with a house valued at \$200,000 will pay an extra \$30.80 in school district taxes,

Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner noted.

The district will use almost \$12.9 million from its reserve fund to balance the new budget, Chairwoman Jane Goodwin pointed out. Because the district will continue to use reserve funds to balance the budget, Weidner said, the projection is that by June 30, 2014, the fund will represent the minimum level allowed by its policy —

“*I don't see anywhere else we can cut.*”

Al Weidner
Deputy Chief Financial Officer
Sarasota County Schools

7.5 percent of its budget. (The upper limit is 10 percent.)

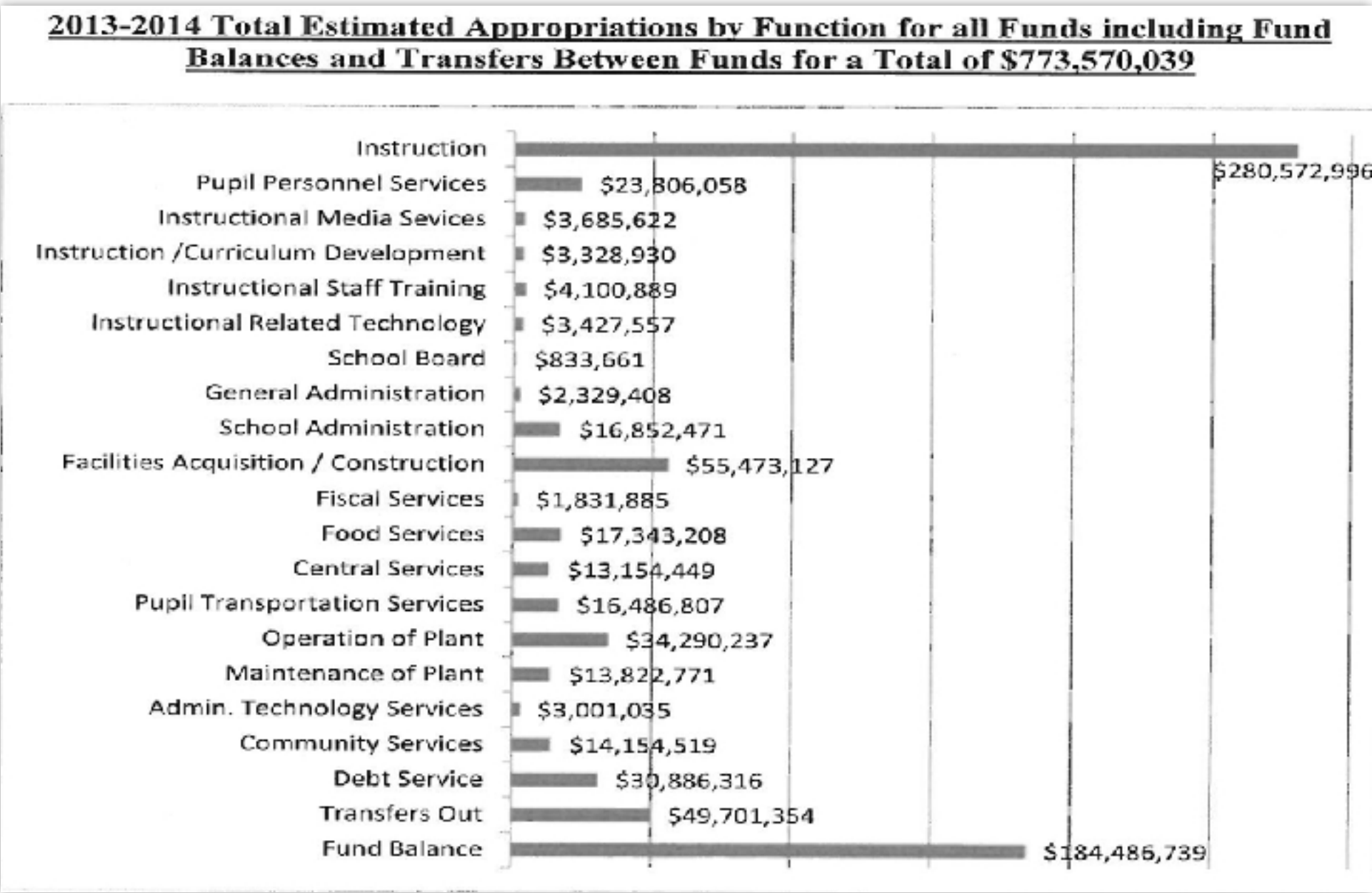
The Florida Legislature is requiring a local millage rate of 4.722 in Sarasota County to provide sufficient operating expenses in FY 2014, under a complicated state formula. That is up from 4.568 mills in the current fiscal year.

The budget will include \$7.3 million in salary increases approved by the Legislature this year — not just for teachers but also for employees who are part of the local union, the Sarasota Classified/Teachers Association, Weidner said.

“The local property taxes are paying for the salary increases,” board member Caroline



School Board member Shirley Brown comments on the budget. Photo by Rachel Hackney



A Sarasota County Schools chart shows estimated appropriations for the 2014 fiscal year budget. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools

Zucker noted. “[The money is] not coming from the state; it’s coming from our local community.”

The majority of that increase “is coming from our local property taxpayers,” Weidner concurred.

SC/TA negotiations are not completed yet, board Vice Chairwoman Shirley Brown pointed out.

Moreover, the district will see its contribution to the Florida Retirement System (FRS) go up by about \$4 million, a 17 percent hike over the amount the district is paying in the current fiscal year, Brown added.

Almost all the increases in the budget for the FY 2014 fiscal year are related to legislative mandates, Weidner said.

The Legislature gave the School Board “the ability for our local taxpayers to pay a little more” to cover the additional expenses, Brown noted. “On the one hand, I want to sit there and shake their hands,” she continued, referring to the legislators. On the other hand, the legislators did not give the district sufficient money for those increases. “They allowed us to get it from our taxpayers,” Brown summed it up.

Along with the salary negotiations, Weidner continued, district administrative staff still is uncertain about how much healthcare coverage will cost in the future. Early this month, the White House announced that it was postponing enforcement of the “employer mandate” until 2015, after the congressional elections. Under the Affordable Healthcare Act, companies with 50 or more workers face a fine of as much as \$3,000 per employee if they do not offer affordable insurance.



School Board member Caroline Zucker (left) and Chairwoman Jane Goodwin peruse agenda material. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Originally, district finance officials were told to expect an increase of up to 12 percent in healthcare coverage expenses as a result of that, Weidner explained.

CONTINUED CUTTING

Before the vote, Goodwin asked Weidner to provide details about the cuts the district has suffered over the past several years.

Noting that he was presenting his 31st proposed budget in the district, Weidner explained that the board started out \$3.8 million in the hole with its first workshop on the new spending plan, held last October.

Since the 2007-08 school year, he said, when the economic downturn began in earnest, the district has cut more than \$124 million and 651 positions.

Budget documents show a total of 5,197 positions in FY 2014.

Weidner said one of the most difficult decisions the School Board faced this year was the necessity to cut media specialists’ positions in district middle and high schools starting in the next school year.

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

Eliminating those positions, he said, “was something we did not want to do because those people were doing an excellent job.”

At one time, Weidner added, the district had a media specialist in every school, and some of those staff members even had aides to assist them.

Among other staff reductions in recent years, he noted, were data coaches, who had assisted teachers in determining which students needed extra attention, and reading coaches, who provided that one-on-one time with the youngsters.

Among the positive notes for the next fiscal year, Weidner said the Sarasota County Property Appraiser’s Office had certified the county tax roll at a value representing a 4.86 percent increase from 2012. That was the first time the county’s property tax roll had grown since 2007, he told the board.

Additionally, he said, when he attended a state educational conference about a month ago, he heard predictions that the Legislature could provide as much as 5 percent more in funding for school districts during its 2014 session.

Weidner was hopeful, he said, that the School Board would not have to end up finding ways to cut more than \$2 million from its FY 2015 budget, based on preliminary projections.

However, he told the board earlier, “I don’t see anywhere else we can cut.”

The School Board will hold a public hearing on the tentative budget at 5:15 p.m. on Tues-

day, July 30, in its chambers at The Landings, 1980 Landings Blvd. in Sarasota.

The final budget will be adopted after a second public hearing on Sept. 10.

BUDGET DETAILS

For the 2013-14 school year, the total estimated appropriations for the Sarasota district are \$773,570,039, up 4.54 percent. Salaries are expected to account for \$258,000,345 of that amount.

Employee benefits are estimated to cost \$73,419,978, with health insurance expenses up a projected 10 percent.


General fund revenues for FY 2014 are put at \$359,474,094, an 11.5 percent decrease from the \$406,123,710 figure in FY 2008.

The projected capital revenue amount for FY 2014 is \$83,823,851, a decline of 49.3 percent from FY 2008.

The district is rebuilding Booker High School and the Sarasota County Technical Institute, both in Sarasota, as well as Venice High School in Venice. It is just starting a rebuilding of Sarasota High School.

District enrollment is projected at 42,266 for the next school year, up from the 41,092 figure it reported during its last official count of the 2012-13 school year, on May 2.

The Executive Summary for the FY 2014 budget notes that the base student allocation the Legislature set for the 2013-14 school year “has been reduced to very close to the 2005-2006 level. This represents an 8% decrease since 2007-2008.”

That amount for the next school year is \$3,752; in 2005-06, it was \$3,742. 



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ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL?



(From left) City Attorney Robert Fournier, City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini and City Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Willie Shaw. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ALLEGING HARASSMENT IN THE AUDITOR AND CLERK'S OFFICE, THE CITY'S PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER IS RELOCATING TO THE CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The City of Sarasota's public information officer tried quietly to get herself transferred out of the Auditor and Clerk's Office earlier this month. But the plan went public at the City Commission budget workshops on July 16 and 17.

The Sarasota News Leader requested a copy of a letter sent on behalf of Jan Thornburg to all five city commissioners, claiming "a hostile work environment" worsened her "various medical

conditions." She hired Tampa labor law attorney Janet Wise to handle her case.

A redacted copy of Wise's letter was provided on July 23, with sections concerning the medical condition blacked

“Under Ms. Nadalini's management, Ms. Thornburg has been repeatedly undermined and harassed in what appears to be an attempt to push Ms. Thornburg out of the workplace.”

Janet Wise
Attorney

ical condition blacked out to preserve Thornburg's confidentiality under federal medical privacy rules. The letter requested "reasonable accommodation" under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The reassignment was unopposed by City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini. She was planning to get rid of Thornburg anyway. That matter rose to public attention when City Manager Tom Barwin suggested Thornburg “be put in [the] position of communications coordinator in my budget.”

“I planned to cut the PIO position next year,” said Nadalini. “Frankly the Clerk’s Office paid that salary for quite some time. And based on the letter from the attorney, that individual [Thornburg] uses 95 percent of their time for the City Manager’s Office. The clerk eliminated a position years ago to create the PIO position because the city did not have one.”

The position is budgeted for \$116,000, which Nadalini wanted to retain in her spending plan so she could hire a third auditor.

“As for the letter, the city attorney plans to address it in his reply,” Nadalini said.

THE RESPONSE

“Pamela Nadalini has created a hostile work environment in which Ms. Thornburg has been required to work. Under Ms. Nadalini’s management, Ms. Thornburg has been repeatedly undermined and harassed in what appears to be an attempt to push Ms. Thornburg out of the workplace,” Wise’s letter says.

City Attorney Bob Fournier responded on July 23. He noted the City Commission approved the transfer of the public information officer to the City Manager’s Office from the Office of the City Auditor and Clerk as part of next fiscal year’s budget.



(From left) John Nopper, Jan Thornburg and Miles Larsen celebrate awards they received in 2007 for their work to promote the city. Image courtesy City of Sarasota



Sarasota City Hall. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“Effective October 1, 2013, Ms. Thornburg will report to the city manager,” Fournier’s letter said. “Because the reassignment was the only reasonable accommodation you sought on behalf of Ms. Thornburg (and because Ms. Thornburg indicated to Human Resources that she did not wish to discuss any other accommodations), we will consider the ADA accommodation issue raised in your letter to be resolved.”

As for the work environment, “Nothing in your letter suggests that Ms. Thornburg was subjected to a hostile work environment because of her disability. In fact neither the clerk nor her supervisors were aware that Ms. Thornburg suffered from any medical conditions,” the letter said.

“Additionally while you allege in your letter that Ms. Thornburg was ‘repeatedly undermined and harassed’ while ‘(u)nder Ms. Nadalini’s management,’ you provide no facts that would support this allegation,” the letter continued.

“There is no evidence that Ms. Nadalini or any other city employee ‘undermined,’ ‘harassed’ or in any way discriminated against Ms. Thornburg on the basis of disability,” Fournier wrote. “Because we have concluded our investigation into your allegations of discriminatory treatment and have found no basis for the allegations, we are closing this matter.”

A survey of 16 other cities similar in size to Sarasota found most employ a public information officer, and all of those positions reported the city manager or executive mayor.


Thornburg was hired by former City Auditor and Clerk Billy Robinson in 2004 to be the



City Manager Tom Barwin stands outside City Hall this spring. Photo by Norman Schimmel

city’s first public information officer. Thornburg and the city have won multiple awards for her video productions.

She is on vacation and could not be reached for comment.

As for the \$116,000, Nadalini kept it in her budget to hire a third auditor for her department. Barwin will fund that position with transfers from the general fund (25 percent of the cost), solid waste (25 percent) and water and sewer (50 percent). 

This may take a while.

Some things are just hard to resist. Like *The Sarasota News Leader*. It's a feast of in-depth local news, delightful and entertaining features, and — thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota* — access to the best community calendar available.

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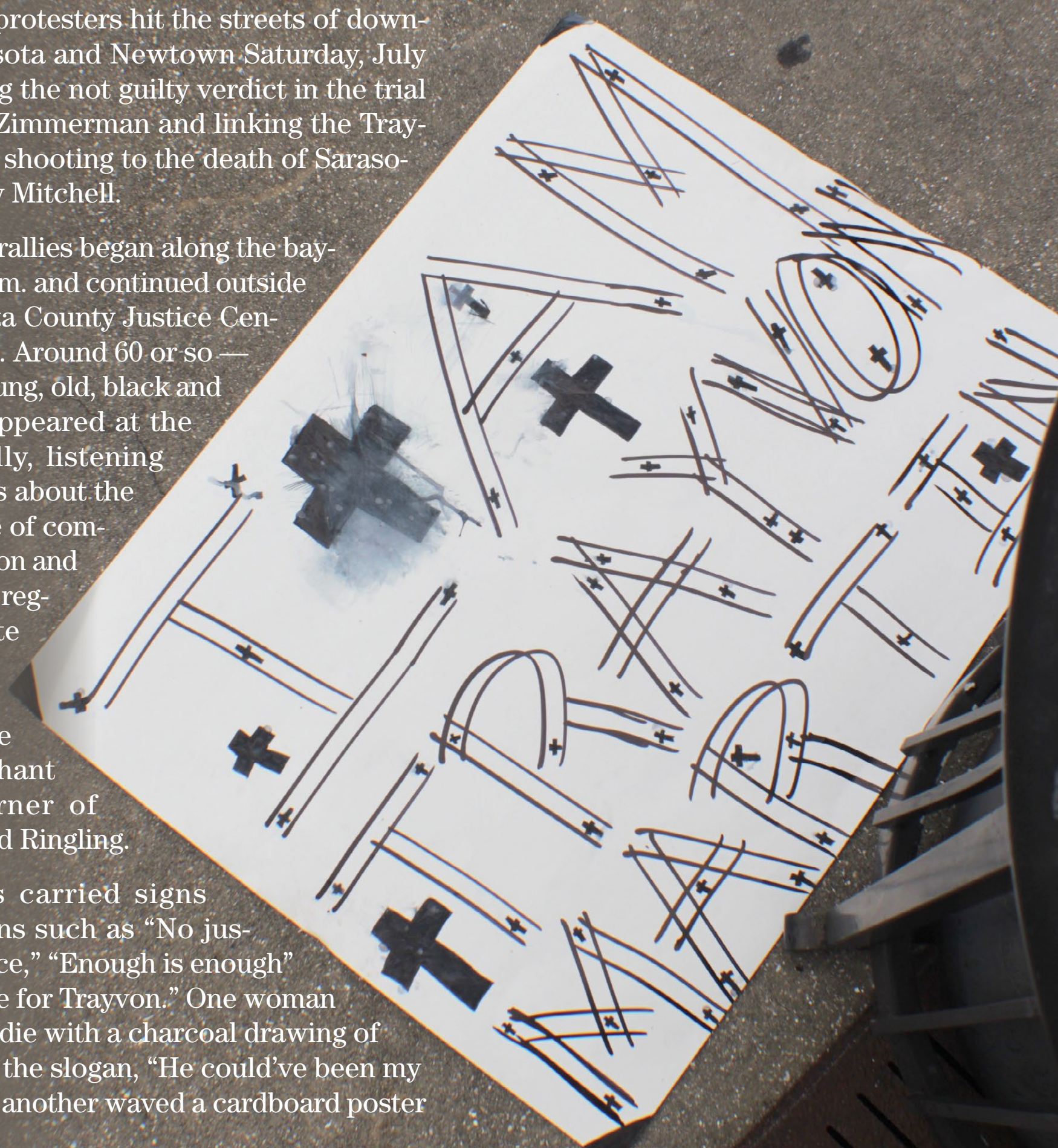
'THERE'S A TRAYVON MARTIN RIGHT HERE IN SARASOTA'

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

Dozens of protesters hit the streets of downtown Sarasota and Newtown Saturday, July 20, decrying the not guilty verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman and linking the Trayvon Martin shooting to the death of Sarasota's Rodney Mitchell.

The day of rallies began along the bayfront at 9 a.m. and continued outside the Sarasota County Justice Center at 1 p.m. Around 60 or so — a mix of young, old, black and white — appeared at the second rally, listening to speeches about the importance of community action and the need to register to vote before moving down the street to chant at the corner of U.S. 301 and Ringling.

Protesters carried signs with slogans such as "No justice no peace," "Enough is enough" and "Justice for Trayvon." One woman wore a hoodie with a charcoal drawing of Martin and the slogan, "He could've been my son," while another waved a cardboard poster



A poster from one of Saturday's rallies lies on the ground after the event. Photo by Cooper Levey-Baker

with an empty box of Skittles and the image of a bottle of iced tea affixed to it.

The candy and drink, as well as the hoodie, have become iconic symbols of Martin's death. The 17-year-old was unarmed when Zimmerman killed him on Feb. 26, 2012, in Sanford, FL. Zimmerman, not originally charged in the case, was eventually put on trial for second-degree murder. He was acquitted two weeks ago.

Public outrage about the case has been fierce, exposing deep-seated fears of racial profiling, as well as anger about what critics say are overly loose self-defense laws. President Barack Obama addressed the controversy the day before Saturday's rallies, which took place all around the country, as well as in Sarasota. He discussed how experience with racial

profiling "inform[s] how the African-American community interprets what happened one night in Florida."

"Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago," Obama said. "And when you think about why, in the African-American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African-American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away."

"There are very few African-American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me," Obama said. "The African-American community is also knowledgeable that there is a history of racial disparities in the application of our



Justice. That's it.

Immanuel Dent



The modern courthouse in downtown Sarasota is part of the county's Justice Center. Photo by Norman Schimmel

criminal laws — everything from the death penalty to enforcement of our drug laws. And that ends up having an impact in terms of how people interpret the case.”

Immanuel Dent told *The Sarasota News Leader* he organized the 1 p.m. rally on July 20 to draw attention to deaths like Martin’s that go unexamined. “There’s a Trayvon Martin right here in Sarasota, FL, and his name is Rodney Mitchell,” said Dent.

Mitchell was shot by Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office deputies during a traffic stop last June. His mother, Natasha Clemons, participated in Saturday’s rallies, and told the *News Leader* she’s still fighting to get answers about her son’s death. The office of then-State Attorney Earl Moreland called Mitchell’s shooting a “justifiable use of deadly force” made during “rapidly unfolding and unexpected circumstances” after a traffic stop for what deputies said was a “seat belt violation.” Like Martin, Mitchell was unarmed.

Supporters of Mitchell’s family passed around a flyer with details about the case, as well as a postcard with images of a smiling Mitchell next to the famous photo of Martin in his hoodie. A third rally took place Saturday afternoon, near the site of Mitchell’s death.

“They won’t do anything,” said Clemons, referring to investigators. “If it was justified, I need to know how it was justified.”

Dent told the *News Leader* he himself was a “victim of racial profiling” and that he was beaten up by police officers during his time in Sarasota. He said both the Martin and Mitchell cases are personal to him because he has a 6-month-old son. He added that the mission



George Zimmerman’s mug shot was released by Seminole County after he was arrested in connection with Trayvon Martin’s 2012 death. Image from Seminole County via Wikimedia Commons

of Saturday’s rally was “no violence, nothing of that sort.”

“Justice,” he said. “That’s it.”

As the rally moved from the Justice Center to U.S. 301, the crowd shouted call-and-response chants. “Fired up! Ready to go!” “Trayvon! Martin!” “No justice! No peace!”

Isolated honks blared from passing cars. Rain began falling, but the crowd stayed put as drops splattered on their homemade signs, smearing the ink.

“Justice!” the ralliers shouted. “Now!”



CRITICAL COMMENTS

Superintendent Lori White and School Board member Frank Kovach listen to comments during the July 23 meeting. Photo by Rachel Hackney

THE SCHOOL BOARD APPROVES NEW CONTRACTS THIS WEEK FOR SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS, BUT MEMBERS LAMENT THE LACK OF FUNDING SUPPORT FROM THE CITY OF SARASOTA

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In the end, the votes were unanimous, but not without Sarasota County School Board members venting.

During its regular meeting on July 23, the board approved four contracts totaling \$1,317,608.29 to provide school resource officers (SROs) in its middle schools and high schools for the 2013-14 school year. The total number of officers will drop from 21 to 18, with the sheriff removing six SROs from Sarasota city schools.

However, board members lamented not only Sheriff Tom

Knight's decision to put his officers only in county schools as of next year, they also criticized the City of Sarasota for not offering to cover part of the cost of SROs in its jurisdiction.

According to the new contracts, the School Board will cover the total cost of the SROs in the city of Sarasota, which is \$312,248. The

Sarasota Police Department has agreed to provide one SRO at each of the following schools: Booker and Sarasota high schools and Brookside Middle School. The contract

I share Mr. Kovach's frustration and difficulty in expressing that politically correctly.

Shirley Brown
Member
Sarasota County School Board

also calls for the Police Department to assign a supervisor to oversee the SROs in the city.

While the district has a partnership with the Cities of North Port and Venice as well as the Sheriff's Office for SROs, School Board member Frank Kovach told his colleagues, "I would not define our relationship with the City of Sarasota as a partnership."

Referring to the city commissioners and the Sarasota Police Department, he noted during the July 23 meeting, "To basically throw up their hands and say, 'I'm not going to participate in the cost of SROs in the city of Sarasota, I find disappointing.'"

"As I do," responded Darryl Reyka, the district's director of safety and security. Of the Police Department, he added, "We certainly want to work with their leadership. We want to work with their new chief ... with their deputy chief. ... I think they're open to working with us."

White told the board members she had had the opportunity earlier that day to watch a video of Police Chief Bernadette DiPino's budget presentation to the City Commission last week, "and they certainly have some budget challenges, primarily due to their pension costs."

During a July 8 budget workshop, Sarasota City Manager Tom Barwin pointed out that 80 percent of the city's payroll obligations in the 2014 fiscal year would go to pensions.

"I share Mr. Kovach's frustration and difficulty in expressing that politically correctly," Vice Chairwoman Shirley Brown said.

The School Board's original understanding, she added, was that the sheriff had worked out matters with the municipalities to provide those officers. "Then we found out, nope, [all the] cities hadn't worked that out, and it's very frustrating that the [Sheriff's Office] dropped the service but yet the [City of Sarasota] didn't pick [up any of the cost]."



The rebuilding of Booker High has included measures to make the campus more secure, school and law enforcement officials say. Photo by Norman Schimmel

KNIGHT'S ACTIONS

Knight met with Superintendent Lori White on Feb. 20 “to make her aware of our decision to keep deputies only in schools in unincorporated areas of the county, and allow the cities to staff schools in their jurisdictions,” Wendy Rose, the community affairs manager for the Sheriff’s Office, told *The Sarasota News Leader* on July 24. “He sent her a formal letter on March 15” to that effect, Rose added.

In an email to the *News Leader*, Rose also pointed out that Knight had met “with each affected police chief and their city manager together (Sarasota, March 6; Venice, March 11) and all chiefs eagerly accepted the opportunity to fulfill their roles and be more closely connected to the youth of their community.”

THE EXPENSE

During the July 23 School Board meeting, Brown noted that relationships built between school resource officers and students “go beyond what happens on the school grounds.” Because of the bonds created, she said, students “may be more likely to contact the police if there’s been a problem.”

She continued, “At a time when everyone is looking at school safety and security ... it’s just so frustrating — [with] some people saying we need more security on campuses — that our law enforcement agencies have pulled back on us. We can’t keep picking up this cost.”

Brown said she was hopeful the Florida Legislature might provide more funding assistance in the future, “but I don’t know that that will happen.”



Sheriff Tom Knight. Photo courtesy of the Sheriff's Office

White told the board members and audience that the Legislature did increase funding for school security for the next school year. The Sarasota County Schools will get roughly \$30,000 more, she added. “Every bit of that is going to the SRO program, and it is not sufficient.”

When board member Caroline Zucker asked Reyka about the “big difference in cost” for SROs at the schools in Sarasota compared to the costs the School Board will cover in the Cities of Venice and North Port, Reyka noted that a supervisor would be overseeing the Sarasota SROs.

“It is still dramatically high compared to other areas,” Zucker responded.

The cost to the board for two SROs in Venice is \$126,141. Reyka said the district would split that 50/50 with the city.

North Port will provide four officers at a cost of \$262,116.79.

The School Board will have to use about \$97,000 from its general operating fund to sustain the SRO program, White pointed out.

“So I don’t believe in our current [budget] climate ... that that is sustainable over time,” White noted. “My fear is those costs are going to increase.”


Therefore, she said, she had charged Reyka with looking at alternatives the School Board could consider. “We will look at a lot of different options. But I felt to go into a different model takes planning and care. We need time and we’re going to work with others, both in and out of law enforcement,” White said.

“From the time we found out what was happening with the SRO program, there was no way that we had any time” to find an alternative for next year, Zucker pointed out.

“I for one want to see more SROs,” Chairwoman Jane Goodwin said. “Safety and security is of the utmost importance.”

Goodwin added, “It just takes one incident in this county, and then everybody would be up in arms for [all cities] not participating in helping us out.”

Referencing the 26 victims shot at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut last December, Goodwin said she also wanted a review of the types of policies and procedures needed at each district school.

Rose in the Sheriff’s Office pointed out to the *News Leader* that schools such as Venice High and Riverview High “have recently undergone environmental design changes to enhance security and limit access to the campus.” 

D. Duties of School Resource Officers

1. Instructional responsibilities of the SROs at the schools:

- a. The SRO shall act as an instructor for specialized short-term programs at the middle and high schools, when invited to do so by the principal or member of the faculty.
- b. The SRO at the high schools shall be available to teach students a variety of law related presentations to include a Drug Education Program as a guest speaker. The Principal or a member of the faculty shall make the request of the SRO,
- c. Any exceptions to the above must be mutually agreed upon by the City Manager of the City of Sarasota, the Superintendent of Schools and the individual school principal.



RENEWED FOCUS

Land to the east of Coburn Road falls within the boundaries of the proposed Fruitville Initiative. All photos by Roger Drouin

COUNTY PLANNERS AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM SWEET SPARKMAN ARCHITECTS WILL PRESENT AN UPDATE ON THE FRUITVILLE INITIATIVE AT THE AUG. 28 COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Round Two of the Fruitville Initiative has begun.

A plan to rezone 320 acres of vacant land along Fruitville Road east of Interstate 75 and create a mixed-use “gateway village” has re-emerged three years after an initial part of the proposal was first approved, in 2010.

County planners and representatives from Sweet Sparkman Architects will present

an update on the public-private Fruitville Initiative at the Aug. 28 County Commission meeting.

If the plan comes to fruition, proponents say the large-scale, New Urbanist development would bring jobs, additional property taxes and new vibrancy to the southern edge of the growing I-75 corridor that has seen newer developments such as the Shoppes at University Center,

“*This is the gateway to Sarasota. If we screw this up, it will have an impact for years.*”

John Krotec
Community Liaison
2010 Fruitville Initiative Committee



along with proposed projects such as the Nathan Benderson Park rowing facility, the University Town Center mall and The Venue at Lakewood Ranch townhomes.

But residents who live in four rural home communities near the project want to see buffers created to separate them from traffic and other impacts resulting from the proposed increase in residential density and possible commercial buildings and hotels.

“We feel we are in a good place to get things rolling again,” John Krotec, who served as community liaison on the 2010 Fruitville Initiative Committee, said about the renewed focus on the plan.

Krotec envisions “something different” out of this planning process, which involves

residents, business owners, developers and county officials. A veteran who owns the Enviro-neers gear and clothing store, Krotec would like to see the project include not just residences and businesses, but also perhaps a rehabilitation clinic for wounded veterans suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder.

“This is the gateway to Sarasota,” Krotec said. “If we screw this up, it will have an impact for years.”

The Fruitville Initiative encompasses several vacant properties east of I-75. Among the owners are the county, which has a public library and 42 acres within the development area, and Fox Creek Holdings; Glenn D. and Margaret E. Walters; Luella M. and Bryan E. Crofut; Sarasota Business Plaza; and Thomas F. Kelly.



Land directly to the west of Coburn Road also falls within the proposed Fruitville Initiative.

In October, 2010, the County Commission approved changes to the comprehensive plan for the Fruitville Initiative, but the plan was never fully implemented. That, however, could change soon.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL INTERCHANGE DEVELOPMENT

In May, Sarasota County entered into a contract with Sweet Sparkman Architects for Phase One of planning for the Fruitville Initiative. The firm will work with the county on revisions to the transportation scope for the project, development of a community-engagement plan and identifying themes discussed in the 2010 Fruitville Initiative Plan, said Sarasota County Senior Planner Beth Rozansky.

Since 2010, the county and private property owners have been working towards the implementation of the policies in the comprehensive plan, Rozansky said.

Factors such as smart growth and mixed-use principles, interconnectivity, walkability, mixed uses and low-impact environmental design will all be considered in the next phases of the process.

The Fruitville Initiative area is not part of the Sarasota 2050 Plan, Rozansky pointed out.

“It is going to be more of a development strategy for a special planning area,” said Rozansky, the county’s project manager on the Initiative. She described a more walkable environment, with public spaces and small businesses and shops close to residences, as well as environ-



Private land and county-owned property within the area totals 300 acres.

mentally friendly, low-impact stormwater design. It could also become an economic generator for the area.

When it comes to design, the aim is to create a long-term concept that is dramatically different from those usually seen at interchanges. “It is not intended to be developed as a typical big-box ... area,” Rozansky said.

At the Aug. 28 meeting, the county commissioners will discuss the specific type of zoning that would be appropriate for the area. All but one southeastern tract of the 320 acres is within the county’s Urban Services Boundary.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Krotec said the community engagement part of the planning process is vital.

Controlled-growth advocates and many residents of rural neighborhoods northeast of the site, along East Richardson Road, met with county officials back in 2010 to try to establish guidelines for buffers to protect the established homeowners from the proposed large-scale development.

Krotec said those residents need to be included in upcoming talks and workshops.

“We want to do this in a way that we can preserve the rural character of the East Richardson Road homes,” Krotec added. One option, Krotec noted, is to plan entrances and exits into the proposed development so traffic is diverted away from East Richardson Road.

After learning about the Aug. 28 County Commission meeting during an interview this week



Coburn Road cuts through the Fruitville Initiative area.

with *The Sarasota News Leader*, Bill Earl, a board member of both the Richardson Road East Neighborhood and Citizens for Sensible Growth associations, said he will attend the session. He lives north of the Fruitville Initiative area.

“We are right in the impact area,” Earl pointed out.


“The rural neighborhoods worked with the county very hard last time to try and get some protections, and we hope that will influence what they are talking about now,” Earl said. “We hope those guiding principles protect the neighborhoods.”

Proponents of the Fruitville Initiative already have been meeting with Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid. “I see Mr. Reid as an administrator with global vision,” Krotec said.

Reid also wants to see community residents involved in the process, Krotec noted.

Rozansky said the plan needs to be “cautiously integrated into the rural neighborhood to the east of the property.”

Additionally, architects with Sweet Sparkman Architects have been working on plans they will present at the August County Commission meeting. However, architect Jerry Sparkman, a member of the project team, declined through an office representative to comment at this time.

In addition to rezoning land — a change that could result in an increase in residential density — the Fruitville Initiative could alter the I-75 interchange, according to a June 20 email update from Rozansky to county administrative staff. Traffic engineering firm Tindale Oliver and Associates is studying possible modifications to the interchange. 



Fox Creek is one of the residential communities on Richardson Road, to the northeast of the project area.

BACK TO ITS ROOTS



In segment B of the project, crews are creating a new forested swamp that will become home to 200 new pop ash trees, 50 Florida elms and 50 swamp tupelo trees. All photos by Roger Drouin

THE NOW HALFWAY-COMPLETED RED BUG SLOUGH WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECT IS DESIGNED TO NATURALLY FILTER POLLUTANTS FROM RAINWATER AT THE 'OASIS' PRESERVE

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Paul Semenec, a project planner with Sarasota County, stopped to hold a long blade of invasive Cogongrass as he hiked through a soggy Red Bug Slough last week.

The grass that has earned a spot on Florida's "noxious weed" list grows rapidly, choking out native grasses and discouraging birds and other wildlife that rely on the natural vegetation.

As part of a \$1 million wetland restoration at the 72-acre natural preserve nestled between suburban developments surrounding Clark and Beneva Roads, bulldozers have dug up

“I would hope in the plans they have a mechanism for controlling invasives in the future. Very often these places can revert to weeds.

Jeanne Dubi
President
Sarasota Audubon



and removed much of the Cogongrass from canal banks and wetlands. The just-bulldozed canal banks are being reshaped into gently sloping “littoral shelves,” where hundreds of native wetland plants such as

pickerelweed and arrowhead will soon filter nutrient-rich rainwater.

While the restoration project will not remove all of the Cogongrass at Red Bug Slough, it will make a big difference.

The project — which is about halfway complete and slated for a December completion — will bring improvements to three different segments of the preserve, restoring more than 4 acres of wetlands.

The main goal of the initiative is to improve the water quality in the waterways and swamps flowing through the preserve and then into Phillippi Creek and eventually Roberts Bay. The project will reshape much of the preserve's wetlands and replace invasive vegetation with native aquatic plants that filter

rainwater pollutants — such as nitrogen and phosphorus (phosphates), which have been connected to elevated levels of *Karenia brevis*, the organism that causes red tide. The effort will restore a 1-acre forested swamp, adding trees such as pop ash and Florida elm, and a 1.5-acre wetlands area bordering Proctor Road.

Altogether, the contractor, Fort Myers-based Ecosystem Technologies Inc. (ETI), will plant 23,225 native plants and trees, said Kathy Meaux, environmental specialist with Sarasota County Water Resources.

“Wildlife is going to love this,” Semenec added.

Among its diverse wildlife, the preserve provides habitat for marsh rabbits, a family of ot-



The new forested swamp in segment B will encompass an acre.

ters that can sometimes be seen early in the morning and a pair of nesting prairie warblers that are listed as a Species of Concern in Florida.

The restoration project is one of the county's largest wetland restorations to take place over recent years. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) is funding about half of the project's cost, with the remaining expense borrowed against county penny sales tax revenue.

Sarasota County also recently completed waterway improvements at Alligator Creek and Phillippi Creek. In an upcoming project, the county will work with Sarasota Audubon to plant native vegetation at the Celery Fields preserve and stormwater collection area east of Interstate 75.

A WELCOME IMPROVEMENT

The project will restore the land at Red Bug Slough to a state approximating its original habitat and water flow.

Sarasota Audubon President Jeanne Dubi said the project would be a welcome improvement at a preserve that is home to many butterflies and dragonflies and 96 species of breeding and migratory birds.

The local Audubon chapter alternates two-year bird counts at parks throughout the county. During a recent count at Red Bug Slough, volunteers spotted red-shouldered hawks, barred owls, Copper's hawks, pileated woodpeckers and red-bellied woodpeckers all nesting in the preserve, as well as a pair of the nesting prairie warblers found only in Flori-



Paul Semenec, project planner with Sarasota County, points out the invasive Cogongrass.



A new canal bank will be replanted with native vegetation that will filter pollutants and provide natural habitat. In total, the contractor will plant 23,225 new native plants and trees in the preserve.



Water will flow better through a canal that feeds the lake in the slough.

da — which came as a surprise to Audubon members.

“They are a bird in terrible decline in Florida,” Dubi said of the warblers found nesting near the preserve’s lake. The Florida subspecies of the yellow and olive green warbler is listed as a Species of Concern because of its dwindling numbers.

The preserve’s otters, meanwhile, have been spotted during construction work, said Meaux.

Restoring the 2-acre wetland forest, along with the addition of native vegetation throughout the preserve, will be good for birds and other wildlife, Dubi said. “It is a nice park, and it will be even better with this restoration,” she added.

The local Audubon president has one concern, however. Whenever restoration projects are completed, it is important that a maintenance plan be put in place, to control the future spread of invasive species, such as Cogongrass, and to maintain the area in its new condition.

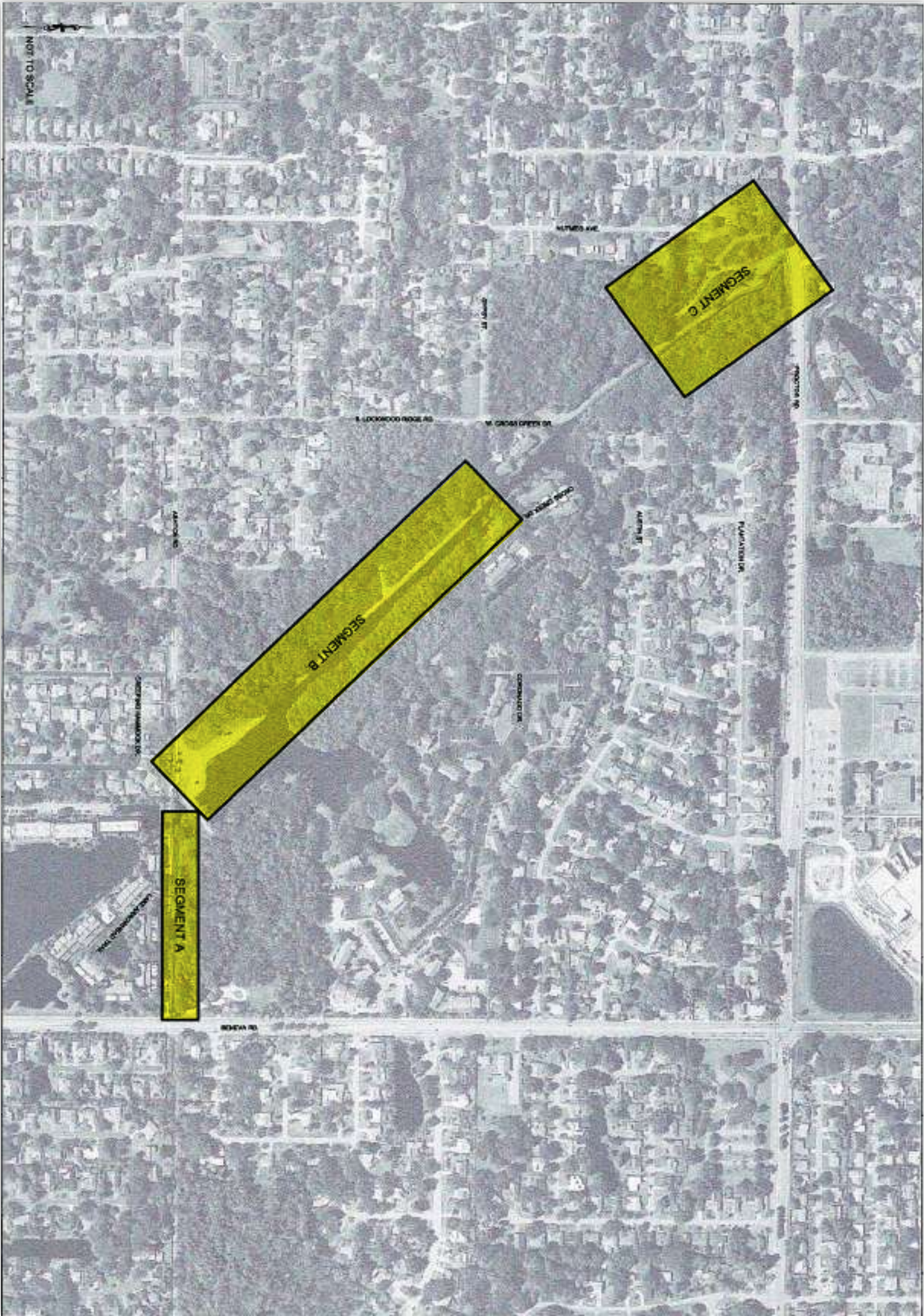
“I would hope in the plans they have a mechanism for controlling invasives in the future,” Dubi said. “Very often these places can revert to weeds.”

FILTERING STORMWATER

In the first section (Segment A) of improvements, crews have begun to reshape the bank of a canal that runs perpendicular to Beneva Road, along the southern boundary of the



A pipe that drains stormwater into the wetland will be replaced in Segment B.



An engineering diagram shows the plans for Red Bug Slough. Image courtesy Sarasota County

preserve. Stormwater flows through the canal into the preserve, which empties into Phillippi Creek. The new littoral shelf will allow water to filter through native vegetation, such as pickerelweed and arrowhead, which will replace the removed Cogongrass.

In Segment B, the project will restore a 1-acre tract of forested swamp that had been dried out and mostly overgrown with another invasive species — Brazilian peppers.

Two hundred pop ash trees, along with 50 Florida elms and 50 swamp tupelo trees, will replace the Brazilian peppers. An old half-rusted drainage pipe will be removed; in its place, workers will install a pipe designed to allow rainwater to flow better into the restored forested swamp. Crews will also construct another littoral shelf designed to filter nutrients from rainwater.

In Segment C, crews will restore 1.5-acres of wetlands in the northern stretch of the preserve, near Proctor Road, and add two footbridges for park goers to traverse. Crews will reshape the terrain so water moves slowly, allowing additional filtration of pollutants before rainwater flows into Phillippi Creek.

The longer water stays in the wetlands system, the more pollutants are filtered out naturally, said Meaux, with Sarasota County Water Resources.

Even though it is only halfway completed, the project already appeared to be altering the water flow after recent heavy rains, Semenec said.

“You could see it was working, slowing down stormwater as it headed downstream,” Semenec noted.



A family of otters living in the park has been spotted during construction work.

Meaux called Red Bug Slough “an oasis” amid development. The preserve was purchased in 2000 and 2001 through the county’s Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program, with funding assistance provided by Florida Communities Trust. The preserve includes habitats such as prairie and hydric hammock, mesic flatwoods, hardwood basin swamps and waterways.

After the restoration, the preserve is “going to be a lot better,” Meaux said.

Additional work, however, will still be necessary, because the project is not designed to remove all the invasive vegetation in the park. 



'IT'S ALL SUBJECTIVE'

Eight of the nine members of the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area Extension Study Committee prepare to receive documents from Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown (center-left). Photo by Stan Zimmerman

OUT OF 208 COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCIES CREATED IN THE STATE, ONLY SIX HAVE EXTENDED THEIR TERMS OF OPERATION, A LOCAL COMMITTEE LEARNS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The committee pondering the fate of the city-county Community Redevelopment Agency began to wrap up its research phase on Wednesday evening, July 24. During its fourth of 14 planned meetings, it heard from Carol Westmoreland, the director of the Florida Redevelopment Association.

The organization, an offshoot of the Florida League of Cities, is composed of the 208 CRAs in the state. Of that total, she said,

only six have extended their terms of operation.

The local committee is charged with giving advice to the Sarasota City and County commissions about the future of their tax-increment-funded district. In 1986, the two local government entities agreed to freeze property taxes and devote all city and county property tax revenue above the 1986 base level to fight “slum and

“ *It's about the money.*

Carol Westmoreland
Director
Florida Redevelopment Association



blight” in a defined area of downtown Sarasota. Much later, they added the Newtown area to the CRA.

Each year as property values grow, the difference between the 1986 tax revenue and current revenue grows as well. For the current fiscal year, the county is contributing \$3.5 million, and the city is kicking in \$3.1 million.

The deal has produced \$76 million over the past 27 years. In the early days, fully 95 percent of the money went into “bricks and mortar” infrastructure. Today about half is used

for projects. The rest ostensibly goes toward city operations in the district — such as police protection. But in reality, that \$2.6 million is put back into the city’s general fund.

In 2004, the City Commission decided unilaterally to use CRA money to fund operations of the Police Department and landscaping crews. Several county commissioners are concerned about how the city is running the CRA.

The original agreement was good for 30 years; it expires in 2016. The committee is tasked with making recommendations about the



In 2003, city officials worked with representatives of Whole Foods, whose headquarters is in Austin, TX, to open a store in downtown Sarasota. Photo by LoneStarMike via Wikimedia Commons

CRA's future. Should it be extended? Modified? How should it be governed?

With Westmoreland's appearance, the Downtown Community Redevelopment Agency Area Extension Study Committee was able to find out how the other 207 CRAs in Florida are governed and how they spend their money.

THE VERY FLEXIBLE CRA

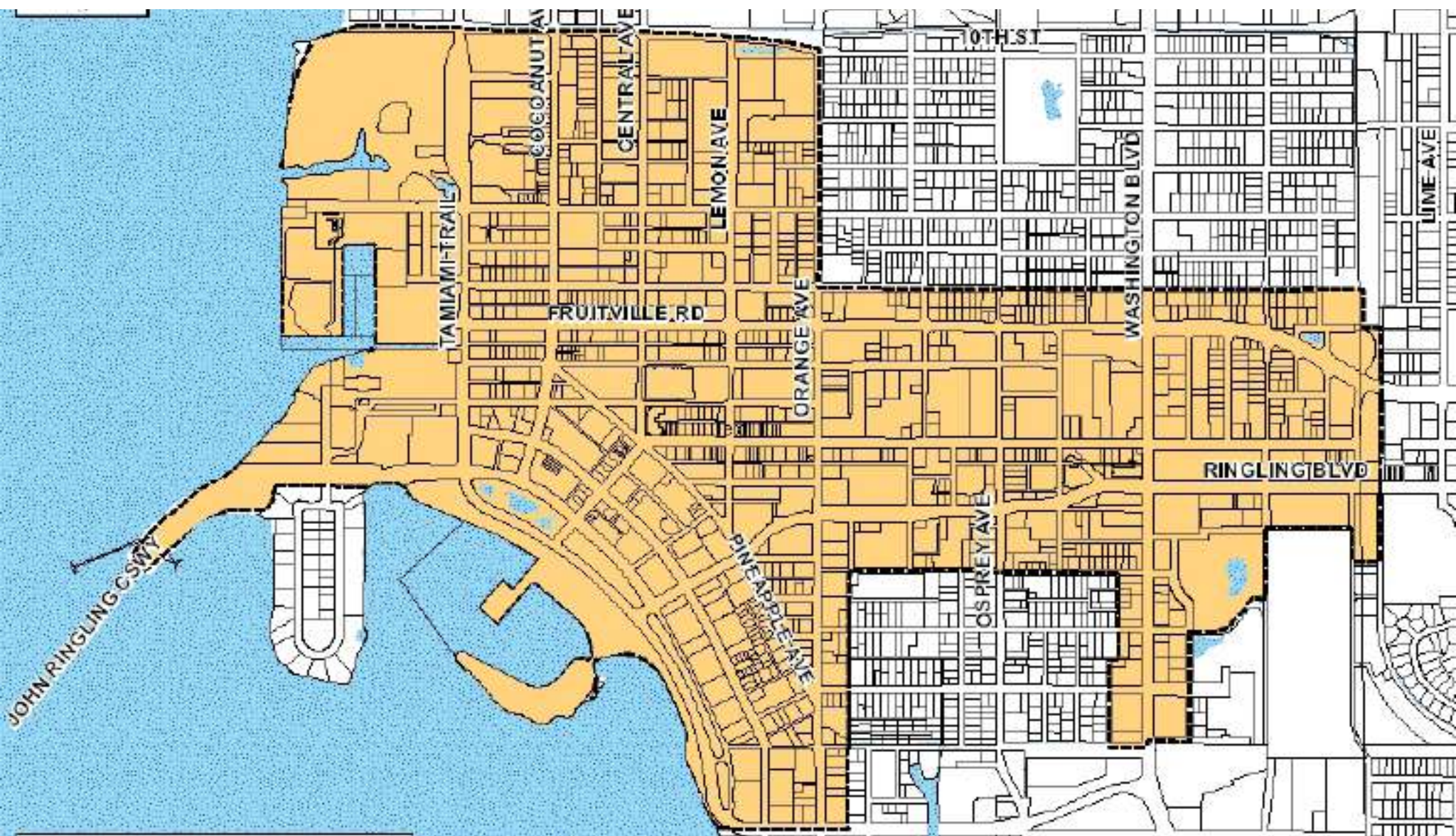
Westmoreland said that while a state statute enabled the creation of CRAs, the agencies are not bound by tight regulation or decisions in multiple court cases. "Flexibility is a blessing of the statute," she said. "Court cases are few and interpretation is based on your past experience."

However, past experience might not help the local committee members find an answer to

their first and biggest question: Should the Sarasota CRA be extended? Only six CRAs statewide have lengthened their terms, including those in Bradenton and Palmetto, said Westmoreland. Most CRAs were created later; therefore, they have not yet bumped up against expiration dates.

Committee member Michael Beaumier asked, "Of the six who extended, what was their plan?"

"Basically, you need a new plan when you restart — a plan for what will happen over the duration," replied Westmoreland. Then she touched on a second issue that lingers over the local CRA. State law says a major CRA function is to fight "slum and blight." But few people today would say, after the injection of



A map shows the boundaries of the downtown Sarasota CRA. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

\$76 million, that downtown Sarasota suffers from “slum and blight.”

“It is not the Webster’s dictionary definition of ‘blight,’” she added. “It is the statutory definition of ‘blight.’”

“I’ve had one county commissioner say, ‘I would have to get past telling people downtown Sarasota is blighted with a straight face before I could vote for it,’” said Committee Chairman David Merrill, a former Sarasota mayor.

“If you cannot passionately defend [the CRA], maybe it shouldn’t be in the area,” Westmoreland responded. “You have to prove it; you have to do a study. Crime, parking, flooding, vacancies: These all can be used to demonstrate blight. It is all subjective.”

GETTING TO THE ROOT

“It’s about the money. And more [communities] are using the money for operations because cities and counties are hurting,” Westmoreland continued. “But you can get into legal trouble if you do not fund what you promised to fund. The mantra for spending should be, it’s in the plan and it’s in the district.”

“Where most CRAs get into trouble is fighting over control of the money. Who do you want to control the money?” she asked. “Independent boards are few; you can count them on the fingers of one hand. The fact is, 95 percent are elected [officials]. Maybe that’s the trend; maybe that’s a best practice.”

Westmoreland returned time and again to the fundamental role of the CRA, one the committee has heard again and again. “The mission


of the CRA is to sustain and improve the tax base. Every expenditure should be an investment with an expected ROI [return on investment].”

The best way to do that, she said, is partnering with non-government entities. “When will private industry want to invest in the area? The CRA gives an incentive, based on a commitment to a plan. It gives additional certainty to developers. What are the chances the private sector will want to be your partner?”

While the CRA investment may be a one-time boost to a developer, the CRA will reap the benefits of increased tax revenue year after year. Last month, the committee heard the example of the downtown Whole Foods grocery store. In 2003, the CRA provided almost \$5 million to bring the company to downtown Sarasota.

The year the deal was cut, the property was assessed for tax purposes at \$3.2 million. Today it is on the books for \$57.4 million, and Whole Foods has paid \$6.6 million in property taxes. In this case, it is a 2:1 return-on-investment ratio, plus the city has a share of the store’s parking garage.

Westmoreland says her organization regularly sees 14:1 rates of return on CRA partnerships with private industry. If the CRA is not extended, she added, “You lose the investment from the private sector.”

At its first meeting, the committee decided to divide its time into thirds: one-third research, one-third deliberation and one-third to draft a report. Westmoreland’s visit was the fourth of 14 planned meetings. The next one is scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 13, at 5:30 p.m. in Sarasota City Hall. It is open to the public. 



GRANTED, WITH PLEASURE

“We’re known all over the
country and all over the world.”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

Sarasota County students perform a trapeze act during a Sailor Circus show this spring. Photo by Norman Schimmel

UNLIKE THE SITUATION IN 2012, THE COUNTY COMMISSION READILY APPROVES FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARTS PROGRAMS IN THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

After just a few questions about meetings involving representatives from South County, Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson joined her colleagues this summer in approving recommended cultural and arts grants for the next fiscal year.

The \$1,533,965 in funding from Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue will go to 34 organizations, with 8 percent of it allocated to three South County entities, according to Fern Tavalin, grants director for the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County.

Two other grants recipients plan performances in South County, Tavalin added in her July 9 presentation to the County Commission: Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota and Coexistence Inc., which holds the annual *Embracing*

Our Differences competition and displays the resulting artwork. The latter plans to showcase the winners for a month at North Port High School in addition to hosting its annual display in the city of Sarasota's Bayfront Park.

Because of those plans, Tavalin noted, a total of 9.4 percent of the grants funding will be allocated toward South County events.

In July 2012, Robinson cast the solitary "No" vote on the annual awarding of the arts and cultural grants, which are designed to spur tourism. During a June 2012 appearance before the County Commission, Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance, was unable to provide all the information Robinson had requested regarding his efforts to encourage more South County organizations to apply for the funding.



The Sarasota Ballet has made a national name for itself in performing works by Sir Frederick Ashton. The company presented Les Rendezvous during the 2012-13 season. Photo by Frank Atura



Artists collaborate on artwork during the 2012 Sarasota Chalk Festival. Photo by Norman Schimmel

During his subsequent appearance before the board on July 11, 2012, Shirley still did not have all the documentation Robinson had sought.

At that time, Robinson also pointed to her concern that although the Alliance's grants panel had recommended funding for three South County organizations in the 2013 fiscal year, the total was almost \$4,500 less than the single grant that went to a South County applicant in FY 2012.

On July 9, Robinson asked Shirley about a detailed list of meetings he had conducted, which included the notation that he had met with representatives of 16 county schools at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota.

That reflected a luncheon the Arts and Cultural Alliance holds each year for principals from all the county's schools, Shirley responded. "Those principals have a lot of influence" related to the arts in their communities, he added.

When Robinson said she did not see any meetings listed that involved representatives from arts and cultural groups in Englewood, Shirley told her he had had five or six conversations with individuals from that community; he must have accidentally omitted them from his list.

"I just wanted to make sure that they were included ... in case I'm asked," Robinson told him.

She represents South County communities on the County Commission.



De'zhon Fields will reprise his role as Sammy Davis Jr. for Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe performances Aug. 21 through Sept. 1. Contributed photo

STATISTICS

During her presentation, Tavalin pointed out that the benchmark for a cultural event's success in drawing tourists — set by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies — is to find 30 percent of the attendees are from out of town. "That's really good," she said.

Yet, the applications for the FY 2014 grants projected average tourist attendance of 53 percent, she noted.

Among the applications seeking funding support for the next fiscal year, she continued, only one was not recommended for an award, she continued. The reason was that its application was incomplete.

"We don't decide this capriciously," Tavalin added.

Any organization that submits an incomplete application is provided an opportunity to remedy the problems.

The criteria used to evaluate the applications are as follows, she said: artistic/cultural purpose; tourist appeal; and administrative competence of the organization seeking funding.

More weight is given to the first two factors, Tavalin noted.

This year, she continued, the scores for the funding requests ranged from 89 to 100, adding, "These are the highest quality applications to date."


In making the motion to approve the funding requests, Commissioner Joe Barbetta noted "the incredible economic impact" arts and cultural events have in the county. "We're known all over the country and all over the world," he added.

"Ditto," said Commissioner Nora Patterson, who is chairwoman of the county's Tourist Development Council. She noted that that advisory committee unanimously had recommended approval of the FY 2014 grants.

GRANT RECIPIENTS

The following is a list of the FY 2014 grant awards:

- Art Center Sarasota Inc., *Incredible Journey*, in the amount of \$36,773.
- Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota Inc., Season 18, in the amount of \$38,810.
- Asolo Theatre Inc., *The American Character, Year Two*, in the amount of \$88,397.
- Avenida de Colores Inc., Sarasota Chalk Festival, in the amount of \$49,471.
- Banyan Theatre Company Inc., Banyan Theater's 2014 Summer Season of Diversity, in the amount of \$17,909.
- Circus Sarasota Inc., Winter Production, in the amount of \$66,614.
- Circus Sarasota Inc., Sailor Circus Holiday Spectacular Show Series and Sailor Circus Spring Show Series, in the amount of \$22,555.
- Coexistence Inc., *Embracing Our Differences*, in the amount of \$32,970.
- Florida State University on behalf of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation Inc., *Intent to Deceive: Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World*, in the amount of \$75,509.

- Florida Studio Theatre Inc., 2014 New Play Festival, in the amount of \$44,654.
- Florida Studio Theatre Inc., Summerfest 2014, in the amount of \$44,654.
- Florida West Coast Symphony Inc., dba Sarasota Orchestra, Sarasota Orchestra 2013-14 Season Programming, in the amount of \$91,131.
- Fuzión Dance Artists Inc., Fuzión Dance Artists' *Eighth Season Concert*, in the amount of \$4,523.
- Gloria Musicae Inc., *Voices of the Holocaust*, in the amount of \$10,489.
- Jazz Club of Sarasota Inc., 34th Annual Sarasota Jazz Festival, in the amount of \$12,704.
- Key Chorale Inc., *On the Edge of Tomorrow*, in the amount of \$17,379.
- La Musica di Asolo Inc., *Moving Music*, in the amount of \$17,927.
- Marie Selby Botanical Gardens Inc., *The Year of The Rainforest* – Cultural Programming, in the amount of \$91,131.
- Mote Marine Laboratory Inc., *Beautiful but Deadly*, in the amount of \$87,486.
- New College Foundation Inc., New Music New College: National and International Visiting Artists 2013–2014, in the amount of \$17,646.
- Sarasota Ballet of Florida Inc., 23rd Season and The Sir Frederick Ashton Festival, in the amount of \$89,309.
- Sarasota Dance Festival Inc. dba Sarasota International Dance Festival, *Mythical Women of Ancient Greece*, in the amount of \$23,434.
- Sarasota Film Festival Inc., 16th Annual Sarasota Film Festival, in the amount of \$90,220.
- Sarasota Opera Association Inc., Opera Lovers Weekend 2014, in the amount of \$90,220.
- Sarasota Pops Orchestra Inc., The Pops 2013-14 Season, in the amount of \$4,993.
- Sarasota Season of Sculpture Inc., Season VII, in the amount of \$7,381.
- The Perlman Music Program/Suncoast Inc., *Itzhak Perlman and The Perlman Music Program/Suncoast Celebrates Israel @ 65*, in the amount of \$39,160.
- The Players Inc., Broadway Theatre Series, in the amount of \$41,243.
- The Players Inc., Summer Sizzler Series, in the amount of \$10,311.
- The Venice Symphony Inc., *Reel Classics*, in the amount of \$7,733.
- Van Wezel Foundation Inc., World Class Entertainment, in the amount of \$91,131.
- Venice Art Center Inc., Venice Art Center 2013-2014 Exhibits, in the amount of \$30,797.
- Venice Little Theatre Inc., Shoulder to Summer 2013-14, in the amount of \$89,309.
- Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe of Florida Inc., *Rhythms of Change* Shoulder Season, in the amount of \$49,992. 



Valerie Guillory organizes a prayer brunch each Friday in the homeless community she has created on 10th Street in Sarasota. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

COUNTY SEEKING \$40,000 FROM CITIES FOR HOMELESSNESS STUDY

An associate Sarasota County administrator sent an email this week to the managers in all the county's municipalities, asking them to determine whether their boards would be willing to contribute to the estimated \$40,000 expense of having a nationally known expert on homelessness develop a plan of action for the county.

The expense to each of the municipalities, Assistant Administrator Lee Ann Lowery wrote, would be \$8,000, if all participated.

She sent her email on July 24 to Dave Bullock in the Town of Longboat Key, Jonathan Lewis in the City of North Port, Edward F. Lavallee in the City of Venice and Marlon Brown, deputy city manager for the City of Sarasota.

Later that day, County Administrator Randall Reid notified Lowery that he already had spo-

ken with Tom Barwin, city manager in Sarasota. Referring to Barwin and his staff, Reid wrote, "[T]hey are prepared to advance a joint agreement to their Commission. I advised him we were giving the other cities an opportunity to join [the] process."

In her email to the city managers, Lowery wrote, "As you know, the Gulf Coast Foundation and the Community Foundation [of Sarasota County] brought Dr. [Robert] Marbut to Sarasota County last week for a look at the homeless issue in our community. Dr. Marbut also shared his expertise with us and made some initial recommendations, particularly as it relates to the need for shelters for families in north and south Sarasota County and a shelter for the chronically homeless in the City of Sarasota."

She continued, “The City of Sarasota and Sarasota County are interested in bringing Dr. Marbut to our community to develop a Strategic Action Plan to address homelessness. Since this is a community-wide issue and a community plan, we are asking if your city is willing to participate in bringing Dr. Marbut here, hopefully very soon.”

Marbut’s fee for consulting services is \$5,732 per month for three months, she added, and he has agreed to offer a fourth month pro bono. “In addition to his consulting fee,” Lowery continued, “we would be responsible for travel expenses, including air fare, hotel, per diem, airport parking and car rental, as applicable.”

According to the Marbut Consulting [website](#), Marbut has worked on homelessness issues for more than 30 years.

“In 2007, frustrated by the lack of real improvement ... Dr. Marbut conducted a nationwide best practices study of homeless services,” the website notes. “After personally visiting 237 homeless service facilities, in 12 states and the District of Columbia, he developed *The Seven Guiding Principles of Transformation*.”

When Barwin announced late this spring that Marbut would be visiting Sarasota, Barwin pointed out that Marbut had helped establish facilities for the homeless in Pinellas County.

Marbut has visited a total of 531 operations in 19 states, plus Washington, D.C., and Mexico, his website adds. He utilizes his *Seven Guiding Principles of Transformation* in all aspects of his work, the website points out, “to create holistic, transformative environments in order to reduce homelessness,” the website says.

Rachel Brown Hackney

DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT SUNSHINE LAWSUIT SETTLED

When Downtown Improvement District (DID) members Dr. Mark Kaufman and William Pettey last year mentioned during a meeting that they had erased emails concerning DID business, it was only a matter of time before somebody brought them to task.

That “someone” was Sarasota paralegal Michael Barfield, who sued the city, Kaufman and Pettey to recover the missing emails. Such series of correspondence are considered public records under state law, and while it is legal to have them on a personal computer, the records must be produced on demand. Erasure is not a legal option.

City Attorney Bob Fournier and Barfield’s attorney asked a judge for permission to search

the member’s computer hard drives for the missing emails. “We recovered some of them,” said Fournier. He called that “Phase One.”

However, Barfield then expanded his search to the now-dismissed city Charter Review Committee as well as the still-functioning Sarasota Planning Board. He suggested there was a “pervasive practice” of sending emails about city business from private accounts. Fournier called that “Phase Two.”

Barfield asked for an injunction requiring all city advisory boards to use city Internet accounts and turn over all emails. “I said you don’t have standing to ask for an injunction,” Fournier recalls telling Barfield. Later Barfield came back to suggest both sides voluntarily dismiss the suit.

The cost of the legal work for the Kaufman and Pettey email issues in “Phase One” will be \$8,300.

Kaufman maintained his innocence. “There were no emails deleted in the period [Barfield] requested,” Kaufman said during the July 23 DID meeting. “And I was given no instruction from the city about this [Sunshine Law] issue.”

Fournier pointed out that the \$8,300 will be levied against the DID’s budget account, similar to the process utilized for other city departments needing legal work.

“And if you get another request [for records], make me aware of it and the [City of Sarasota Auditor and] Clerk’s Office, too,” he told DID members this week.

Stan Zimmerman



Members of city advisory committees — including the Downtown Improvement District — are obligated to abide by state Sunshine laws. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SCHOOL AVENUE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY PROJECT UNDER WAY

On July 22, the City of Sarasota began a pedestrian safety enhancement project that includes new crosswalks, curbs and ramps at the intersections of Novus Street, Wood Street and Bay Street along School Avenue.

The work is expected to continue for about two more weeks, with completion planned before the Sarasota County schools reopen for the 2013-14 school year, a city news release says.

Depending upon the weather, the schedule called for School Avenue to be closed at the intersection of Novus Street until July 27. A detour has been directing northbound traffic on School Avenue to Shade Avenue and from there to Ringling Boulevard back to School Avenue, the release notes. Another detour directs southbound traffic on School Avenue to Shade Avenue and from there to Hatton Street and back to School Avenue.

School Avenue is expected to be closed at the intersection of Wood Street (east) from July 29 to Aug. 3. A detour will direct northbound traffic on School Avenue to Shade Avenue and from there to Ringling Boulevard back to School Avenue. Southbound traffic on School Avenue will be directed to Shade Avenue and from there to Hatton Street back to School Avenue, the release says.

Wood Street (west) will be closed near School Avenue from Aug. 5-9, weather permitting, the release adds. A detour will direct northbound traffic on U.S. 301/U.S. 41 at Wood Street to Ringling Boulevard then to School Avenue; southbound traffic on U.S. 301/U.S. 41 will be directed to Bahia Vista Street then to School Avenue, the release notes.



A crew works this week at the intersection of School Avenue and Novus Street. Photo by Rachel Hackney

DROUIN TAKES THIRD-PLACE HONORS IN STATEWIDE CONTEST

Roger Drouin, county editor of *The Sarasota News Leader*, has won a third-place award in the 2012 Better Weekly Newspaper contest sponsored by the Florida Press Association.

Drouin was honored for his reporting on the efforts to restore Sarasota County's Red Bug Slough. An update on that project appears in the *News Leader* this week.

The winning article appeared last year in both the *Sarasota Observer* and the *Pelican Press*. It was honored in the Agricultural & Environmental reporting category.

Staff Reports



Roger Drouin. Contributed photo

THOUSANDS TURN OUT TO CELEBRATE SNOOTY'S BIRTHDAY

The South Florida Museum in Bradenton recorded 2,300 paid admissions inside the museum on July 20 for the 65th birthday celebration of its resident celebrity manatee, Snooty.

Jessica Schubick, the museum's communications manager, said staff conservatively estimated about 6,000 people participated in the festival. "Big turnout this year!" she added in an email to *The Sarasota News Leader*.

"Snooty™ is an extra-special manatee who sets records every day for how long we know manatees can live," a museum news release added.

Children's games and activities, entertainment and wildlife awareness opportunities were among the other events held Saturday — along with Snooty's numerous appearances on the surface of his pool, so he could accept green leafy birthday treats.

Snooty was born on July 21, 1948 at the Miami Aquarium and Tackle Co., which no longer

exists, according to a fact sheet the museum provided to visitors. He was brought to Bradenton as part of the 1949 DeSoto Celebration. Since then, the fact sheet says, he has greeted more than 2 million visitors.

At 9 feet 8 inches in length, Snooty weighs about 1,020 pounds, the sheet adds. His girth is 89 inches.

An herbivore, he consumes about 70 pounds of food each day — mostly romaine lettuce, though he also eats carrots, kale, cabbage, collards, bok choy, broccoli and apples. He gets vitamin supplements, too.

Brynne Anne Besio, executive director of the South Florida Museum, says in a news release that Snooty "provides valuable insight into the health and life cycle of all manatees. Researchers are able to work with Snooty in a hands-on manner that is not permissible for the wild, endangered manatee population."

Staff Reports



Snooty gets another treat for his 65th birthday. Photo by Norman Schimmel



In view from below the surface, Snooty munches on some greens for his birthday. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Visitors flock to the South Florida Museum in Bradenton to wish Snooty 'Happy birthday.' Photo by Norman Schimmel

MASTER GARDENERS GIVE BACK TO SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

The Sarasota County Master Gardeners, a volunteer group working through Sarasota County Extension, has completed a beautification project at the Oak Park School, 7285 Proctor Road in Sarasota, the county has announced.

Oak Park School serves more than 300 special needs students.

To improve the landscaping at the school's entrance and bus drop-off sites, the Master Gardeners put in four large urns filled with snowbush and impatiens as well as a 48-foot-long picket fence backed by podocarpus bushes and fronted with knockout rose bushes, a news release says. Another entrance has been lined with areca palms.

The project was completed by Master Gardener Bonnie Feise and her husband, George, with help from Oak Park School teacher Carol Wojtyna. The Feises have a grandson "who is challenged with Asperger's syndrome," the release notes, and Wojtyna's daughter is a graduate of the school.

The project received support from a Sarasota County Master Gardener grant, as well as contributions from community leaders and local businesses, including Lowe's, Home Depot, Walmart, Troy's Nursery, Albritton's Nursery, Treasure Cove Statuary and St. Thomas More Catholic Church, the release says.

POLICE DEPARTMENT HONORED IN STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGE

The Sarasota Police Department won several awards in its size category during the Florida Law Enforcement Challenge 2012, the department has announced.

This is the first time the agency has placed since it began reporting statistics, a news release says. The department was honored during a ceremony on July 19 in Orlando.

The Police Department received second- and third-place honors in the Click It or Ticket category; it was competing against 38 other law enforcement agencies with 151 to 250 officers each, the release notes.

By developing comprehensive programs and taking part in traffic and safety events such as Click It or Ticket and Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over, "the Sarasota Police Department is making significant and positive impacts" in the community, the release continues, as it is

reducing traffic-related crashes, injuries and fatalities.

As part of those initiatives, the department's traffic officers have developed a zone system, the release continues. When a complaint comes in, the officer responsible for the zone in question "conducts a study of the area to find out if other traffic officers need to be involved," the release notes. Statistics show a reduction in the number of complaints being received because of that action, the release points out.

Chief Bernadette DiPino added in the release, "Traffic safety is public safety! I am so proud of our officers, especially our Traffic Unit, under the leadership of Sgt. Robert Resch. It was a great honor to receive these awards in the presence of a room full of our peers. Officer Tim Bales, Sgt. Resch and I proudly accepted the Eagle trophies on behalf of the Sarasota Police Department."



Officer Tim Bales (left) and Sgt. Robert Resch hold their Florida Law Enforcement Challenge award. Contributed photo

SHERIFF'S OFFICE TRAFFIC UNIT WINS STATE AWARD

Sheriff Tom Knight has announced that the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Traffic Unit was awarded second place last week in the Florida Law Enforcement Challenge (FLEC) in Orlando.

FLEC is sponsored by the Florida Law Enforcement Liaison Program and is funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a news release says. "FLEC rewards the best overall traffic safety programs in Florida based on efforts to enforce laws and educate the public about occupant protection, impaired driving and other areas of traffic safety," the release notes.

Each competing agency submits an application that documents its efforts and effectiveness in these areas, the release adds. For the Sheriff's Office, the application reflected an increase in traffic safety initiatives over the previous year, the release says.

CLARIFICATION

An editor's inclusion of a photo with the *Going native* article in the July 19 issue indicated that hibiscus plants are native to Florida. However, the hibiscus most people are familiar with, *Rosa sinensis*, is a native of Asia. The edible hibiscus, *Hibiscus acetosella*, actually comes from Africa. It has deep purple foliage and a carmine bloom.



(From left) Deputy Mike Feltovic, Deputy Simon Franks, Sgt. Darrell Seckendorf and Deputy Chris Butler. Contributed photo

LIBRARIES INVITE PEOPLE TO PACK THE VIVA FLORIDA TIME CAPSULE

Sarasota County libraries and the Sarasota County Historical Commission want to know what people think life will be like in Sarasota County in the year 2071.

Some of the most creative visions will be included in a time capsule that will be buried Dec. 14 at a site near the Osprey Library at Historic Spanish Point in Osprey, a county news release says.


Residents are invited to submit one-page essays, drawings or black-and-white photos describing what life is like in 2013 Sarasota County or what they think life will be like in 2071, the release adds. Collection boxes will be available at any of the nine Sarasota County libraries. The deadline for submissions is Sept. 1.

All material offered should include the name, age, address and phone number of the person submitting it, the release notes. A panel of judges will review the material and notify

participants of winning entries, the release points out.

“The time capsule promotion is a part of the Florida Department of State’s Viva Florida 500 campaign celebrating the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Florida by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce De León in 1513,” the release says. The capsule will be opened in 2071, in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Sarasota County.

All submissions become the property of Sarasota County; they may be used in promotions and articles about the project, the release notes. Employees of the Sarasota County Libraries and a subcommittee of the Sarasota County Historical Commission will choose the contents of the capsule, the release adds. Unused items will not be returned.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 (TTY 7-1-1) or visit www.scgov.net. 

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream, Discover. — *Mark Twain*

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CRIME BLOTTER

SARASOTA SHERIFF'S



Sheriff Tom Knight announced the arrest of a Bradenton man for the death of Andrew Tian in a press conference on July 24. (Inset) Juan De Deios Rodriguez/Contributed photo

BRADENTON MAN CHARGED IN RESTAURANT OWNER'S DEATH

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has charged a known gang member from Bradenton in connection with the death of popular restaurant manager Taian "Andrew" Tian, Sheriff Tom Knight announced on July 24.

As a result of witness statements and investigative work, a Sheriff's Office report says, detectives were able to identify the three men who left the New Dynasty restaurant on July 14 without paying for their \$35 meal. In speaking with two of the men, the report continues, detectives learned that Juan De Dios Rodriguez, 20, of 2313 52nd Avenue East in Bradenton, "threw the punch that knocked Tian to the ground and caused the serious head trauma that led to his death," a news release adds.

Rodriguez is also the man witnesses described as having a Rosary tattoo on his hand, the re-

port notes. The other two men are considered witnesses in the case, Knight said during a press conference.

Rodriguez struck Tian because Rodriguez "did not want to pay a \$35.31 bill at the restaurant," Knight added.

"Rodriguez is a documented gang member with a violent history that includes several weapons charges," the news release points out. However, Knight made the point during the press conference that the incident at the restaurant was not considered gang-related.

Rodriguez was taken into custody on July 23 and charged with Manslaughter. He is being held in the Sarasota County Jail without bond.

Knight thanked the Manatee County Sheriff's Office for its assistance in making the arrest possible.

“This crime is a senseless tragedy,” said Knight in the release. “It began with a bad decision to commit a ‘dine and dash’ prank and led to a far worse choice that resulted in the death of a much loved man. We are committed to making sure that Rodriguez is held responsible for his decisions and actions.”

Knight also pointed out during the press conference that Crime Stoppers received about 40 tips in the case. Crime Stoppers initially offered a reward of \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest of the persons involved in the restaurant owner’s assault, Knight said. That reward rose eventually to \$6,000.

Tian’s girlfriend, MaryLou Anderson, appeared with Knight at the press conference to express her appreciation to him and his officers. “They have been diligent and they have been tender to me at this most difficult time,” she said.



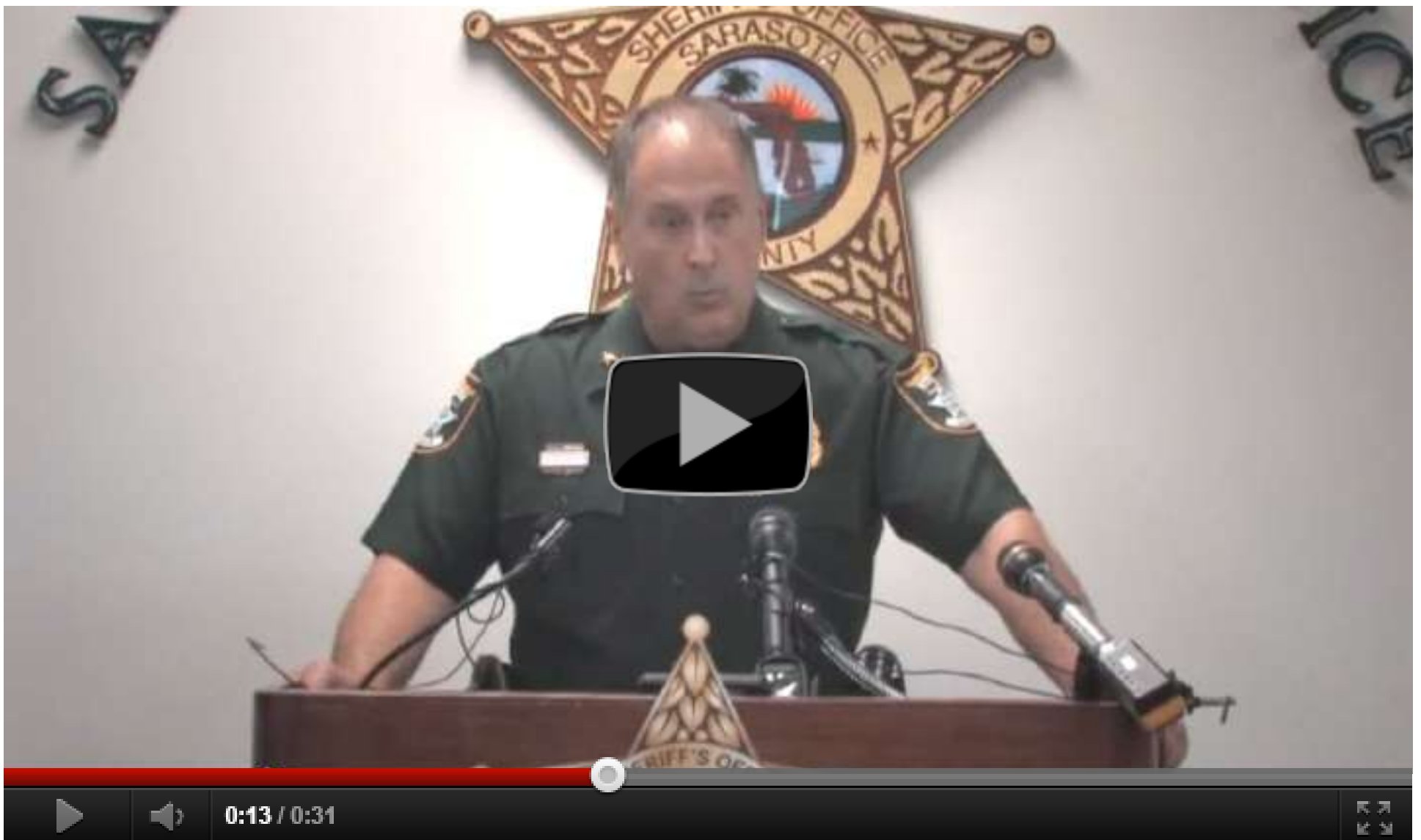
Simply put, Crime Stoppers relies upon the cooperation between the police the media and the community to provide a flow of information about crime and criminals.

Call: (941) 366-TIPS (8477)

Click: SarasotaCrimeStoppers.com

Text: Text "TIP109" plus your message to CRIMES (274637)

All submitted tips are secure and anonymous



TWO MEN ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH AN ARMED ROBBERY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested two men for allegedly committing an armed robbery during "a drug deal gone bad," the office has announced.

Early Saturday morning, July 20, a man reported that he and a friend were robbed at gunpoint by two men who were supposed to sell them a significant amount of prescription drugs, according to the report. The person told Sheriff's Office personnel that the plan called for Arnold to come to his residence so he and his friend could purchase 50 Dilaudid pills for \$1,020, the report says. Once inside the house, Arnold brandished a semi-automatic handgun and demanded the money, the report continues.

A short time after the Sheriff's Office received the call about the incident, deputies spotted a vehicle matching the description of the suspects' car at Cattlemen Road and Center Pointe Drive and attempted to conduct a traffic stop, the report adds. The vehicle initially

took off but was stopped less than a quarter of a mile away. The suspects were arrested, and deputies recovered a stolen Taurus 9mm handgun and \$900 cash, according to the report.

The firearm was found to have been stolen from the Sarasota Police Department, the report notes.

Both the man who called the Sheriff's Office about the incident and his friend were able to identify the suspects, the report adds.

Earnest Arnold, 17, of 1850 21st St., Sarasota, was charged with two counts each of Robbery with a Firearm and Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon. "He has a lengthy criminal history and is currently being held by the Department of Juvenile Justice," a news release says.

Robert Rutledge, 22, of 1927 33rd St., Sarasota, was charged with two counts of Robbery with a Firearm, Fleeing to Elude and Driving with a Revoked License.



Earnest Arnold/Contributed photo



Robert Rutledge/Contributed photo

SOUTH FLORIDA MEN CHARGED WITH FURNITURE THEFT

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested two south Florida men caught trying to scam a local store out of a truckload of furniture with a bad check, the office has reported.

Employees at Kane's Furniture, located at 5252 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, contacted the Sheriff's Office just after 5 p.m. on July 18 when sales people became suspicious of a pending transaction, according to the report. "Customers had arrived in a U-Haul truck, acted like they were in a hurry and tried to rush the purchase of more than \$3,000 worth of furniture," a news release says.

The store recently has experienced problems with people either stealing property from employees or committing fraud and/or theft of furniture through fraudulent practices, such as buying furniture with checks for which insufficient funds were available to cover the purchases, the report notes.

After separating the men for questioning, deputies determined their stories did not match and that they barely knew each other, the release adds. Jamael Jackson admitted he had only \$100 in the bank and that William Simmons had forged Jackson's name on the check.

Simmons, 52, of 1408 Seventh St., West Palm Beach, was charged with Attempted Grand Theft, Forgery and Conspiracy to Commit Grand Theft. Jackson, 40, of 1148 W. 33rd St., Riviera Beach, was charged with Attempted Grand Theft and Conspiracy to Commit Grand Theft, the report says.

Three female suspects left the store prior to the deputies arriving; the report adds; the investigation is continuing as detectives attempt to identify them.

Detectives caution business owners to remain vigilant and cautious of similar activity.



Jamael Jackson/Contributed photo



William Simmons/Contributed photo

MAN ARRESTED FOR STEALING FROM SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a former member of the Englewood Masonic Lodge for allegedly stealing more than \$90,000 from the group's scholarship fund.

The investigation began in May when Michael Cripps, 59, of 6463 Facet Lane, Port Charlotte, contacted the Sheriff's Office to report himself for the ongoing crime, a report says. "Detectives contacted the Lodge and learned Cripps was the sole person with access to the account," a news release says. "Financial records showed that since July 2007, Cripps has cashed checks and made unauthorized personal purchases totaling \$92,563.70," the release adds.


In one instance, according to the report, Cripps cashed an \$8,000 check he had made out to himself. Additionally, it says Cripps opened a bank account in Punta Gorda, where he also deposited Lodge funds. He received a debit card for that account, the report notes, and used it on 386 occasions to charge \$38,729.84 for gas, groceries and other items, including merchandise he purchased from Amazon.

Cripps turned himself in on the morning of July 18. He was charged with felony Scheme




Michael Cripps/Contributed photo

to Defraud and is being held on \$50,000 bond, the release notes.

This is at least the fourth arrest this year of someone who stole a significant amount of money from an employer, church or organization, the release points out. "We continue to warn business owners to institute procedures as simple as requiring two signatures on checks and ensuring monthly financial statements are reviewed by more than just the person responsible for those funds," the release says. 

QUICK TIP



For the best viewing experience on a computer click the  icon in the menubar to zoom to fullscreen mode.

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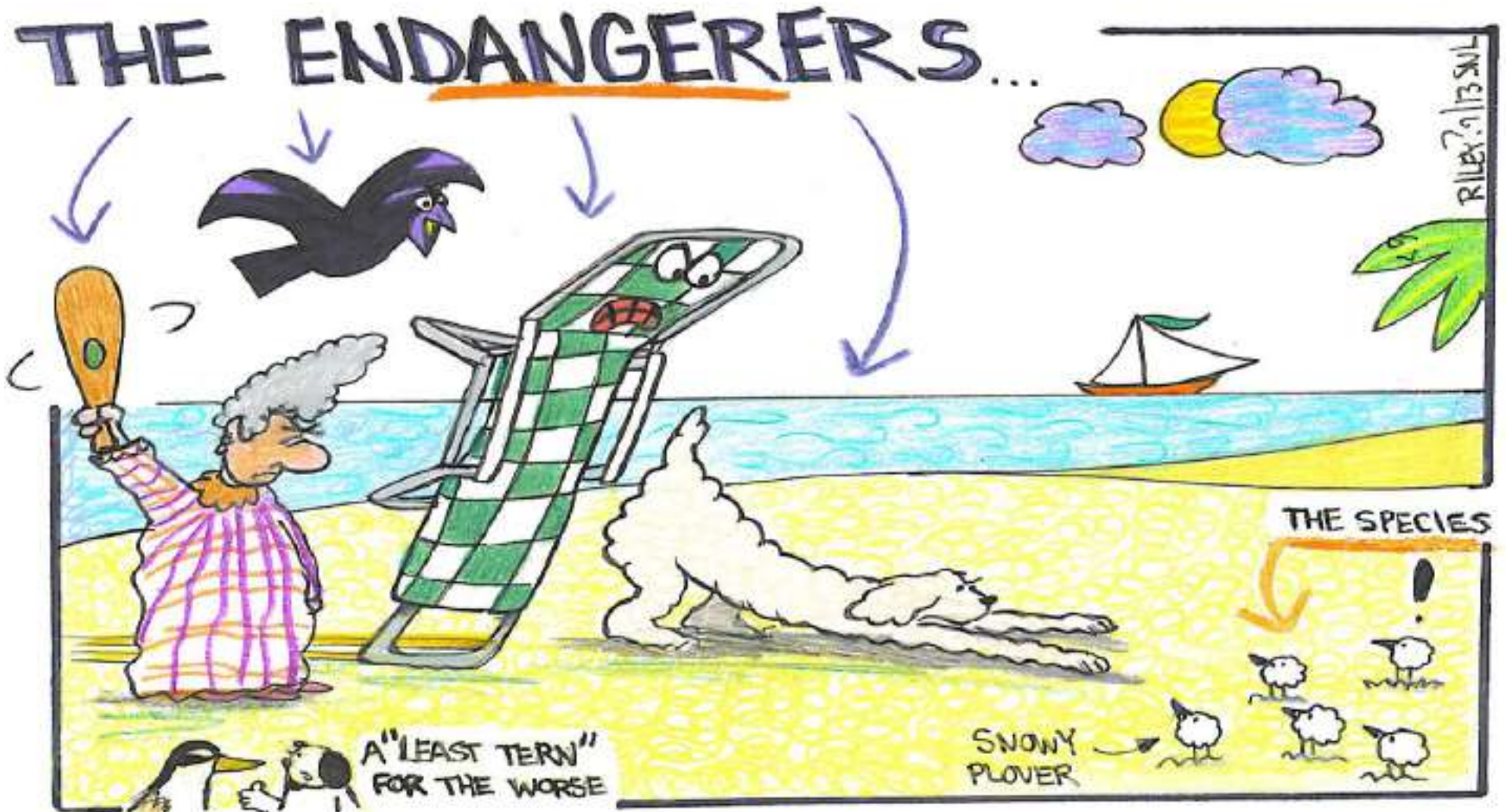


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OPINION



'ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL'

EDITORIAL

There is a saying popular with cynics: Surrounding every silver lining is a dark cloud.

After several years in the top five of Dr. Beach's famed list, Siesta Key Public Beach became the No. 1 beach in the country. And the multitudes came to visit. That is the silver lining.

The dark cloud is that not everyone who came deserved to be here or was fit to visit our beautiful but delicate shores.

Long before human beings strolled the snowy white sands, there were others: creatures of every description and size,

creatures that slithered, gamboled, swam and soared.

For most of the last few millennia, humans and the rest of nature existed together in relative harmony. It only has been in recent decades that the crush of people migrating to the coast has been to the detriment of all other living things.

Governments have attempted to provide safeguards to minimize the friction between

humankind and wildlife, as more and more habitat is lost to development. And those efforts have been reasonably successful, to the extent that most people honored those protections. Sadly, it

Some heartless person has demonstrated that having the most beautiful beach also means attracting those who not only cannot fully appreciate its beauty, but who also seek to diminish it.

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always seems to be a tiny minority who creates the most damage.

Two bird species that like to call Siesta Public Beach home much of the year — Least Terns and Snowy Plovers — are considered endangered. Their natural habitat is becoming more and more limited.

Their tiny size and nesting habits, which amount to little more than laying eggs in a depression in open sand or grass on the beach, make them especially vulnerable to the destructive power of human carelessness ... or malice.

As a consequence, buffer areas are clearly marked on the beaches of Siesta Key, warning beachgoers to avoid these areas because they are popular with the increasingly rare birds.

The Sarasota Audubon Society annually mobilizes a small army of volunteers who guard the patches of beach and dunes that make up the birds' diminishing nesting grounds. The volunteers celebrate each year the few nestlings that hatch and grow into self-sufficient adults. And they mourn the losses to the birds' natural predators, mostly crows.

But more than mourning is called for when the nests are destroyed by humans. There are laws and ordinances in place to protect and encourage these tiny creatures to propagate, and those people who do them harm are in violation of those laws and should be justly penalized.


So far this year, there have been two blatant examples of vandalism in the buffer areas, where signs and marking boundaries were torn down. There even was a fire set to the brush in one buffer spot.

Earlier this month, Audubon volunteers found that someone had dragged a heavy chaise lounge through the buffer areas near Beach Accesses 3 and 4, creating deep tracks that also destroyed many nests. One would hope that it was absent-mindedness that was the cause of this vandalism, but the buffer areas are so clearly marked and awareness of the birds' special needs so well known that a more likely reason is crass hostility. Some heartless person has demonstrated that having the most beautiful beach also means attracting those who not only cannot fully appreciate its beauty, but who also seek to diminish it.

When humanity was given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over ... all the wild animals of the earth," it surely was with the expectation that such dominion would be that of a benevolent monarch, not a tyrannical despot.

Humanity's evolution as a species no longer can be considered to involve survival only at the expense of many other life forms. Rather, humanity's survival depends on how well it minimizes its impact on the rest of creation. An enlightened consciousness of this reality is the best indication that our species truly is "evolving."

Albert Einstein once wrote, "If a man aspires towards a righteous life, his first act of abstinence is from injury to animals."

Humanity was gifted with dominion over the earth by the Creator, not as owners but as stewards. Every pristine land destroyed, every species driven into extinction, is an abject breach of that trust. The divine retribution that forces our species down the same path to oblivion likely will be the planet becoming too hostile for our survival ... and a fate of our own making. 

OPINION

THE YIN AND YANG OF REAL ESTATE — SARASOTA STYLE



By Rodger Skidmore

Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

Every day one reads that prices on homes are reaching a new high in Sarasota, and each day we read that this is bad. Are both parts of this sentence true? And if not, what might be the truth?

Some underlying facts:

- The bursting of the real estate bubble a few years back knocked down the prices of homes throughout the country, with Sarasota being one of the epicenters. How did we know that the bubble had burst? Prices for existing homes stopped going up. People who bought homes for \$400,000, with the expectation that they would be able to sell them for \$450,000 a month later, found no one was making them offers at those prices.

Subsequently, of course, they were not even offered the amount they had originally paid. Once prices stopped rising, the bottom literally dropped out of the market.

- This drop in prices meant that an individual homeowner who thought he/she owned a house valued at \$400,000 now owned a house valued at, for example, \$200,000. When a homeowner owes more money than the house is worth, the house is said to be underwater.

- The drop in prices also meant that the values of the homes in which banks and firms had invested had fallen. A bank or investment firm's portfolio (the homes in which it had invested) that had been worth \$400 million was now worth, for example, only \$200 million. When the portfolio is worth less than the total value of the loans made to the homeowners, it is said to be underfunded.

At this point in the analysis, it seems the banks and the homeowners are in the same boat (the yin and the yang): Each has lost 50 percent of his investment.

If the homeowner continues to make payments and does not try to sell the house, there is no problem (other than psychological). However, a problem arises if the owner must move and is offered less than the amount he/she needs to pay off the outstanding mortgage. If the homeowner must leave the house and cannot sell it at a high enough price to cover the debt, it makes economic sense to stop paying money that he/she will not be able to recover and to just leave. If the homeowners do so, they are abandoning their homes; they are in default and the bank forecloses on them.

A different problem also arose when the bubble first burst. People seeing that they no lon-

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ger owned a \$400,000 house, but instead a \$200,000 home, thought they had lost \$200,000 and stopped spending. When some people stop buying, that means others stop selling (again, the yin and the yang). And then others stop distributing and still others stop manufacturing — which means people are laid off and then they really do not have money to spend.

In actuality, the homeowners never owned a \$400,000 house; they maybe owned \$30,000 (their down payment) of that \$400,000 residence, and the difference between owning \$30,000 of a \$400,000 home versus owning \$30,000 of a \$200,000 residence is minimal. No matter the supposed value of the house, they only owned a \$30,000 stake in it. Unfortunately, the psychological aspects were not minimal: People stopped spending, the domino theory came into play and, as a result, they lost their jobs. Not having a job meant no income, which meant not being able to make their mortgage payments. They found themselves in the same fix as those who had to move and could not. The houses were underwater and the homeowners were drowning — and their homes went into foreclosure.

The portion of the house they owned was the original down payment plus all subsequent payments of principal minus the amount that was taken out in equity loans. Most homeowners, when they make payments, think they are increasing their ownership in their home — paying down the principal. Actually, they are simply paying the banks the interest on their mortgage loans, as most mortgages require

the payment of a great deal of the interest before even a small amount of the payments are applied as increases to the principal values for the homeowners (decreases to the principals of the loans from the bank).

There really should be a new word, other than “homeowner,” to describe the people who think they own a house when they are simply the tenants of some bank. They are tenants because, if they stop making payments (call it a mortgage payment or call it rent; it comes to the same thing), they can be evicted.

If someone in this predicament does not have enough money coming in to cover mortgage payments, the only solutions are to lose the home to foreclosure or to try to stay in the house until the value increases to the point where the person can sell it, pay off the bank and have enough left over to buy a less expensive home.

ANOTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

The situation was different for banks: No matter who was to blame, they were considered too big to fail. How much of that view was based on PR hype, how much was brought on by the banks’ own actions — by knowingly issuing bad loans — and how much was a result of the gutting of banking regulations (paid for by campaign contributions from the banks) over the past few years or by bank lobbyists making hay while the sun was not shining, is open to question. Ignoring Wall Street, no one on Main Street questions the fact that the banks bore a great deal of the blame (as did,

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to a lesser extent, the flippers — those who borrowed too much against the phantom equity of their homes and other houses they had bought).

What solutions were open to the banks to cure their underfunded portfolios? One was what they had been doing all along: increasing profits by selling shares in bundles of bad mortgages to pension funds around the world. Another, as stated above, was to pay their lobbyists to get the federal government to bail them out with billions of dollars and low interest rates (low, as in zero). A third approach was to foreclose on the non-performing loans.

The problem with the first approach was that it should have been illegal. The problem with the second was that the money given to the banks in the bailout was supposed to be loaned to companies — so they could continue to operate or to expand — or to potential homeowners in the form of mortgages. Instead, the banks kept the money to prop up their reserves. Too bad Congress never put into writing the stipulation that the banks were supposed to loan the money. When new mortgages failed to materialize out of the bailout funds, the low interest rates the Federal Reserve charged the banks were supposed to do the trick. However, once again, that never was put into any law.

The problem with the third solution — foreclosing on homeowners — was that a lot of homeowners wound up on the street. Further, banks — not being property managers — failed to maintain the houses that became

empty. The result was that, instead of owning good properties (they were good while they were being maintained by the homeowners), the banks owned abandoned properties subject to mold, theft of copper pipes, unkempt yards, etc.: a real downer for the community and nearby property owners.

CONSEQUENCES

So, where do we stand?

From when the bubble burst until now, hardly anyone had been buying homes. In fact, for most of the time after the start of the recession, an inventory of multiple years worth of homes was available for sale and just sat with no takers. Why? Houses were cheaper after all; this should have been a great time to buy.

A major problem is, and has been, that banks have not been making mortgage loans; or, if they said they were, they were asking for much higher down payments along with many other restrictions, which blocked sales.

Many articles that have appeared since the start of the recession have been about banks not following through on the short sales of distressed homes. These were homes that the banks said they would allow to be sold for an amount below what the sellers owed on the mortgages. However, the banks repeatedly reneged on such sales just before closings. This practice became so widespread that many people wanting homes just stopped looking for bargains.

With banks not giving mortgages to buyers and not offering loans to developers or con-

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tractors, and with many of those wanting to buy homes out of work, it is also understandable that new houses were not being built.

NEW ECONOMIC FORCES

This year, with unemployment down and the economy picking up, it is natural that homes have finally started to sell — market forces have prevailed. The inventory of existing homes available on the market has been reduced. While the news media says there was a four-year inventory of homes for sale (it would take four years to sell all the houses listed) and there is now only a three-and-a-half-month inventory, the change is not as dramatic as it seems. If you have 120 houses listed and you sell one this month, it is considered that you have a 10-year inventory. If you sell one extra house, you have only a five-year inventory. Seemingly small changes have great effects.

Evidence of the turnaround, in one form or another, has been in the news media almost daily. Unemployment is down; consumer confidence is up; home prices are up; hedge funds are buying up homes to rent (to people who have lost their homes); new hotels are planned; the stock market is hitting all-time highs; condos are being built in Sarasota; apartment complexes are being sold to new owners; multi-lot tracts of land are changing hands — the list goes on.

Yet, during the 2013 legislative session the Florida Senate and House passed a bill, which Gov. Rick Scott signed, with the aim of speed-

ing up the process of completing the foreclosures that are already in the courts. Their stated reason was that there was a logjam of foreclosures clogging our courts.

There is no question that the Florida judicial system has a large buildup of unresolved foreclosure cases. However, questions might be asked about that: Does this buildup reduce the supply of homes for sale; does it slow down the sale of homes; does it raise the specter of a new housing bubble with higher and higher prices; and finally, in summary, is this backlog a good or a bad thing?

The buildup of foreclosures in the courts did not reduce the supply of homes for sale. Homes were not on the market because banks were not loaning money to developers; banks were not giving mortgages to potential buyers; banks were not following through on short sales; and many people were unemployed and could not afford to purchase homes. With the upturn in the economy, developers are now moving from the planning to the construction phase. The lead-time from designing to building has nothing to do with the foreclosures still in dispute.

In fact, the delay in processing foreclosures means that those homeowners marginally underwater can now, thanks to the simple passage of time, sell their homes without losing money. This increases the supply of homes for sale and reduces the backlog in the courts.

The buildup of foreclosures in the courts does not slow down the sale of homes. Recent articles have stated there are thousands of homes

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for which foreclosure has been completed, with those houses not listed by the banks as being for sale. One conclusion is that the banks are stockpiling homes so when prices have gone up even further, they can then put the residences on the market and make even more money. As the rebound in the economy continues, more and more homeowners will put their houses on the market — and a greater and greater number of them will be underwater homeowners.

The buildup of foreclosures in the courts also does not raise the specter of a new housing bubble with higher and higher prices. Yes, prices are rising, but they are rising only relative to the extremely low prices that resulted from the recession. As the prices of homes approach their properly appraised market levels, the rise will level off. If prices are inflated beyond their proper value, banks can simply not provide the potential buyers with mortgages — a common sense approach that banks did not follow when there was a real bubble building.

Is the backlog in the courts a good or a bad thing? It is a good thing (within reason), as it gives hundreds of thousands of homeowners the breathing room necessary to get out of their difficulties without losing everything. This is not an easy task; unfortunately, it takes a great deal of time.

That being said, there are situations when the foreclosure process should be accelerated. It is true that there were thousands of homes abandoned by owners who stopped making

mortgage payments. If the residences are vacant, the foreclosures should be expedited.

If the owners are in residence and maintaining the homes, the economy, with its attendant higher real estate prices, should be able to solve the problems of unclogging the courts. When the country has recovered, the foreclosure problem will have, to a great extent, resolved itself.

REAPING THE REWARDS

Who benefits from the short supply of homes in Sarasota County?

For the most part, it is residents of Sarasota who are putting their homes up for sale, regardless of whether the houses are in the process of foreclosure. The homeowners will receive more money and will therefore have more financial wherewithal to pay their bills, including what they owe to banks.

The City and County of Sarasota also benefit. The higher the values of the recorded sales, the higher the property taxes that will be paid.

The banks win in this situation, too, because they have an inventory of homes they have not yet sold and they will receive more money for those residences. Additionally, if homeowners in foreclosure get more money, they will be able to pay the banks more of what they owe.

It should also be noted that the homeowners who are in residence and keeping up their properties have been subsidizing the banks.

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With homeowners in residence while the economy recovers, more homes will be maintained, thus keeping up the property values in communities within the county.

Developers, having recently purchased large tracts of land, now have an incentive to build.

Who benefits from eliminating the backlog in the courts? They are as follows:

- The banks. If they had taken possession of all houses as soon as owners stopped making their mortgage payments, they would have owned more houses than they could handle administratively; the houses would have had low market values, which the banks would have had to carry for a very long time (basically until now, when they can start getting a decent return); and the banks would have had to deal with either high maintenance costs for a long time, or, if the houses were not maintained, an even greater lowering of the values of the homes.

The net result would have been to put the banks back into a crisis and, perhaps, another bailout situation.

Based on the above points, it is obvious that the banks have benefited from the delay in completing foreclosures and now will benefit even more from speeding them up.

- The real estate industry. With the long drought in home sales there has been a big shakeout in this business. Simply put, the mom and pop agents who dabbled in the market are gone, leaving the bigger, more consol-

idated firms. And these firms are once again making good money now that sales are being made.

Quickly processing the foreclosures still in the courts will dump a great number of homes on the market all at once. This will depress prices quite a bit once again and reduce the amount of money that homeowners receive from sales. This also will reduce the property taxes for decades into the future, as these houses will be homesteaded at lower values.

Further, this will mean less incentive for developers, again reducing jobs within the county. And, with the banks forcing out residents, the situation will again create attractive nuisances, which will bring back the vandals. But, with a greater volume of sales, the agents will receive more in commissions than they would have earned from selling fewer residences, even if the latter were of higher value.


- The senators and representatives of the state of Florida. It is unfortunate that political campaigns cost so much to run, as campaign contributions have become a destabilizing force in every state in the U.S., with Florida being no exception.

The banking and real estate industries have given large amounts of money to the key players in the Florida House and Senate. This, coupled with no requirement for legislators whose day jobs are in banking or real estate to recuse themselves from addressing bills related to their work, has created a law which only hurts, and does not help, the most vulnera-

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ble in Florida — those in danger of losing all they possess.

Taking the above into consideration, it seems that speeding up the takeover of more homes by banks will have less of a beneficial effect than proposed. Actually, it will have an adverse effect, certainly on the thousands of Floridians forced out of their houses and in those homeowners' communities, where a new round of bank-owned blighted residences will appear.

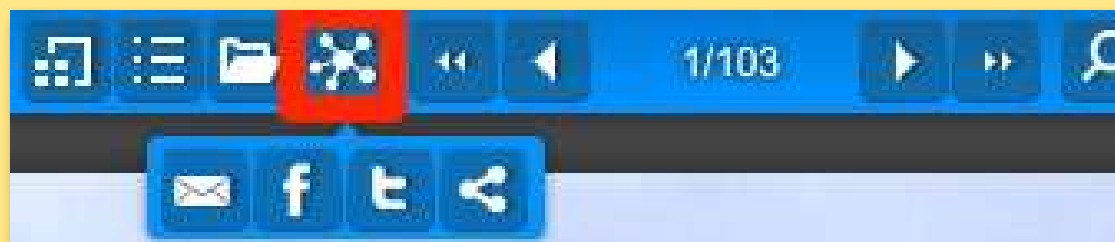
The State of Florida and the citizens of Florida should not be in adversarial roles; instead they should be working together harmoniously, for the good of all: a true yin and yang relationship. 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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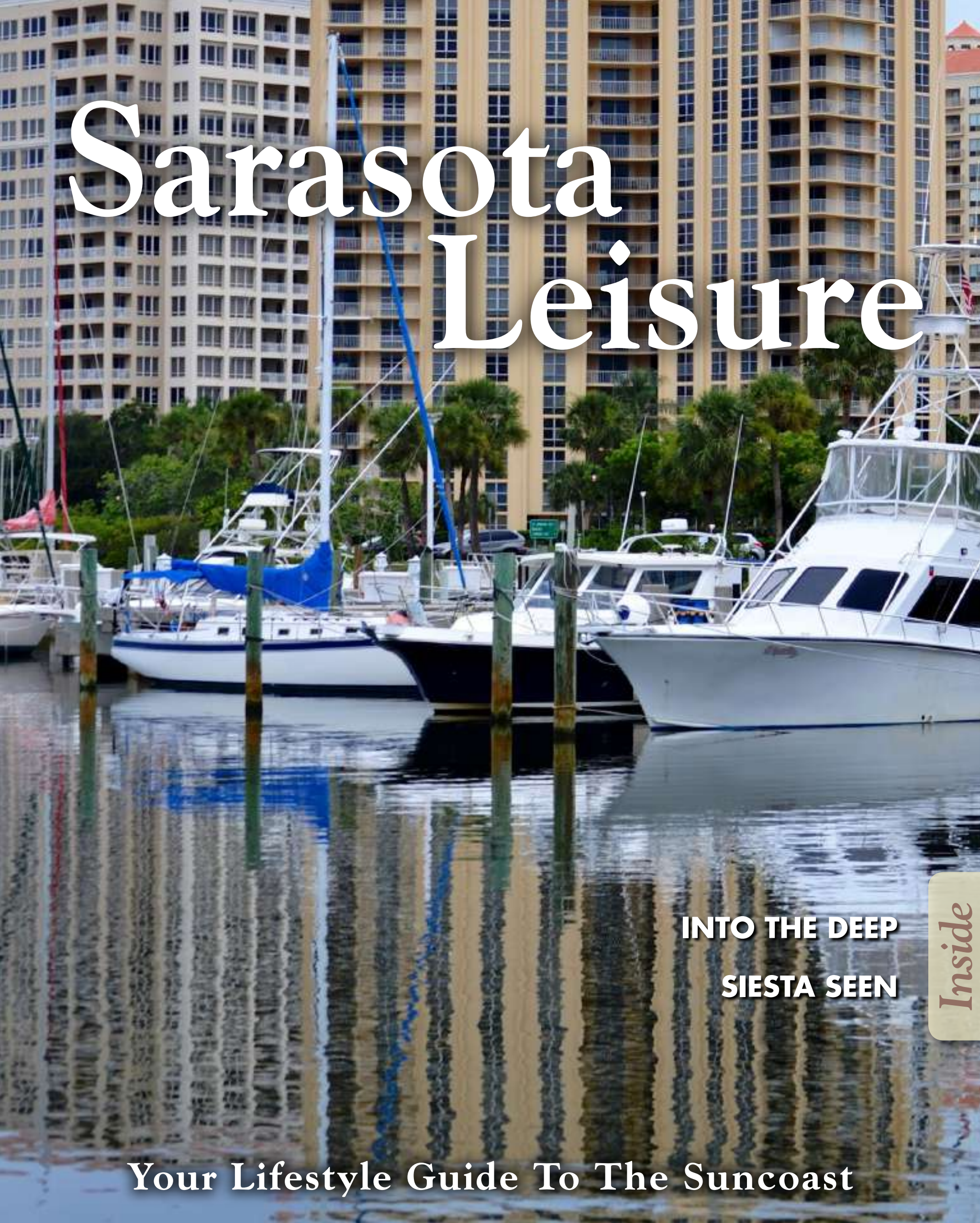
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INTO THE DEEP

Garrett Lathan practices his floating as Melon Dash watches. All photos by Rachel Hackney

FREE SWIMMING LESSONS AT THE ROBERT L. TAYLOR COMMUNITY COMPLEX HAVE BEEN A HIT THIS SUMMER WITH CHILDREN AND STAFF

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Ten-year-old Garrett Lathan jumped off the ledge of the pool at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex in Newtown and swooped through a hoop held in the water by his swimming instructor, Melon Dash.

“A-MAY-zing,” Garrett sang out when Dash asked how that felt.

In a space of about 50 minutes on the morning of July 23, Garrett had gained more and

more confidence as he first floated then swam — even in the deep section of the pool.

“I found out I can float no matter where I go,” he said. “Now I’m not afraid of 5 feet.”

“*They taught me to swim, how to float. They taught me everything. I’ve been able to do stuff I’d never been able to do.*”

Lucinda Louis

Garrett was fearful of even putting his face in the water when he began the free lessons Dash and her 21st Century Swimming Lessons team began offer-

ing at the center in late June, Dash told *The Sarasota News Leader*.

Kairan Jackson and Dustin Reed, both also 10, were working with assistants P.J. Keller and Molly Spencer in the deep end before the July 23 lesson was even half over.

Dustin “high-fived” Keller at one point after swimming his farthest stretch yet across the pool.

Kairan also began venturing further and further out as he worked with Spencer. “The kid’s got such a good kick,” Keller noted as he watched.

“Oh, yeah! That just happened,” Garrett called out after successfully completing two laps under Dash’s supervision.

After Dash encouraged the three boys at one point to practice a modified version of the breaststroke — emphasizing the sweep of the water with their palms — she praised Garrett for his efforts: “Those pulls were very good.”

And Garrett shortly realized that swimming is not just fun; it is, in fact, an athletic endeavor. “I know it, because my arms are hurting,” he told Dash after several more laps.

“You’re doing great,” she responded.

On the other side of the pool, Assistant Annie O’Connor — a licensed 21st Swimming Lessons instructor — and camp counselor Lucinda Louis, 17, were working with a youngster who had shown up for the first time that day.



Dustin Reed (right) prepares to try a new stroke as Kairan Jackson watches with Molly Spencer in the background.

Like Garrett, Lucinda told the *News Leader*, she was reluctant to put her face in the water when she first offered to help with the lessons this summer. Her parents were a bit wary, too, of her decision to volunteer, she added, because no one in her family could swim.

But with a new swim cap to keep her long braids dry, Lucinda began taking lessons. “They taught me to swim, how to float. They taught me everything,” she said. “I’ve been able to do stuff I’d never been able to do.”

She is hopeful, she continued, that she can convince her mother to allow her three siblings to learn to swim as well.

This is the third summer Dash has held the free lessons, thanks to a number of benefactors who believe in the value of children learn-

ing to swim. “We do it as many weeks as we can get,” she told the *News Leader*.

The lessons have been available to children between the ages of 5 and 18, Dash said. She has utilized a number of means to let youngsters and parents know about the opportunity — from flyers to word of mouth.

It is the first summer for the Taylor Complex to host the sessions. Manager Jerry Fogle pointed out to the *News Leader*, “One of the most important things you can ever do for a child ... is to teach them how to swim,” and Dash’s students “are having a blast ... They are just loving life.”

This summer, the schedule concluded on July 25; in 2014, Dash is hopeful she can stretch it to seven weeks.



Kairan Jackson displays his ease in swimming through a hoop with P.J. Keller beside him.

Fogle said he definitely would like to work with Dash about continuing the program, because it had been such a positive experience for the children. He has enjoyed watching them show up for classes, hurrying into the complex to make sure they did not miss a minute in the water. "It's so cool to see," Fogle said.

One incentive youngsters had to take classes this summer, he pointed out, was the rule that anyone who wants to go down the 15-foot slide in the pool has to demonstrate swimming capability. Children previously not allowed on the slide "just can't wait to be able to go down [it]," he added, since they have worked with Dash and her instructors.

MIRACLE SWIMMING INSTITUTE

Dash is nationally known as the founder of [Miracle Swimming](#), a teaching method that enables even those who are terribly frightened in the water to overcome those fears and enjoy swimming and the wide array of water-related activities.

As Dash worked one-on-one with Garrett on July 23, her method was very much in evidence.

While Dustin and Kairan were eager to move into the deep end, Dash encouraged Garrett to be comfortable at each point in the process.

As they progressed gradually from the shallow area to the deeper one, Garrett continued



Lucinda Louis relaxes in the water.



Garrett Lathan is delighted with his progress.

swimming out to Dash and back to the wall. At one point, he spotted the marker for the depth: “Oh, man. This is 5 feet!”

“I can just see your confidence growing,” Dash told him.

He readily had her move further away from him into the center of the pool — making his laps longer. After one burst of strong strokes, she told him with a laugh, “That [distance] was almost too short, wasn’t it?”

“I am king of the water,” he replied, then took a deep breath as he prepared to launch himself away from the wall once again.

“What I love is they say what their concerns are,” Dash told the *News Leader* after the lesson. “It’s just so precious to watch these children.”

She added, “We want the parents in here; we want the [Taylor Complex] staff in here. We want to set up a program year-round” to teach swimming to children and adults at the facility.

Fogle told the *News Leader* he had been impressed with the “positive energy” emanating from Dash and her instructors. “They are outstanding,” he added.

FUNDING FOR A STUDY

Although Dash has been utilizing her Miracle Swimming method for more than 30 years, she finally has been able to fund an independent study that will compare her system to others.

Michelle Tichy, professor of educational psychology at the University of Northern Iowa and chairwoman of the Holistic Learning Special Interest Group for the American Educa-



Garrett Lathan takes a deep breath as he starts to the side of the pool, with Dustin Reed already headed that way.

tional Research Association — with a small team of researchers — will examine “the major Learn-to-Swim (LTS) systems used for adults in the United States” to identify best practices in teaching adults, Dash announced last week.

“By assembling a full list of best practices,” a news release says, “the research can help develop a new national curriculum for adults to learn to swim.”

Very few dedicated adult learn-to-swim curricula are available in the United States, the release points out. Most adults who take swimming lessons progress through “the same steps and sequence” as those used in children’s lessons, the release adds.


However, Dash has found that a different approach works best with adults, especially those who are fearful in the water.

“By comparing the major LTS systems and culling the best practices among them, we can build a curriculum that succeeds with ev-

ery single adult by meeting them at their level no matter what they can or cannot do,” Dash says in the release. “The system will be able to advance them through the stages of LTS until they achieve goals they’ve had their entire lives such as lap swimming, playing with children and grandchildren in the pool and SCUBA diving. Many adults would say it’s enough just to know they won’t drown,” Dash added.

Twenty-first Century Swimming received a \$10,000 grant last year from the National Swimming Pool Foundation to help create one million new swimmers by 2022. Dash won the grant after making a presentation at a national conference in Norfolk, VA.

The LTS systems that have been invited to participate in the study with Miracle Swimming are those of the American Red Cross, YMCA, Swim America, Starfish Aquatics and Total Immersion.

With permission of each organization whose practices are determined to be the best, the release notes, the results will be published. 



(From left in foreground) Garrett Lathan, Kairan Jackson and Dustin Reed practice swimming out to (from left) Melon Dash, Molly Spencer and P.J. Keller.



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.

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THE COUNTY IS EXPLORING TAKING OVER STATE ROAD 758 IN AN EXCHANGE INVOLVING RIVER ROAD; LIGHT UP THE VILLAGE PLANNING IS UNDER WAY; AND THE SABAL DRIVE LEGAL COMPLAINT HAS SOME INTERESTING DETAILS



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Although Commissioner Nora Patterson in the past has voiced reluctance about having the county take control of State Road 758 — Bee Ridge Road/Stickney Point Road/Midnight Pass Road/Higel Avenue/Siesta Drive (including the bridge infrastructure) —from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), a new initiative is afoot involving a trade of that stretch for River Road.

The county's chief engineer, James K. Harriott Jr., reported to the County Commission recently that staff had met with FDOT officials in Bartow on July 2. "FDOT is open to the idea of a transfer," he wrote in an email, with the condition that it be an equitable one.

In a July 3 email, Harriott pointed out that staff had discussed the idea with Randell Prescott, operations director for FDOT's District 1. "Mr.



Even with no rain that afternoon, a rainbow appeared over Siesta Village on July 20. Photo courtesy of Peter van Roekens

Siesta Seen

Prescott's department handles such exchanges for District 1," Harriott added, "and has been assigned by [District 1] Secretary [Billy] Hattaway to work with the County on this proposal."

Based on the discussion, Harriott continued, state representatives "wanted to make it clear that any transfer of maintenance responsibility" would include the fact that project priority considerations for River Road would go through the [Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) (MPO).

Furthermore, Harriott wrote, "based on their preliminary review of current conditions, the state sees River Road as two distinctly different segments. The northern segment from Interstate 75 to US 41 is regional in nature and provides connectivity within the State roadway network. In the state's opinion, the southern segment from US 41 to State Road 776 is primarily rural, with the southernmost section (Dearborn Street) being more locally oriented. The state objective is always to maintain a state highway network. Therefore, the segments for transfer would need to terminate at another state facility, which is the reason for including Dearborn Street in the exchange."

He added that FDOT proposed trading the northern section of River Road, from I-75 to U.S. 41, for State Road 758 from U.S. 41 to U.S. 41 "(basically Siesta Key and the approaches)." This section of State Road 758 is commonly known as Stickney Point Road/Midnight Pass Road/Higel Avenue/Siesta Drive, Harriott wrote. The segment includes the Stickney Point Road and Siesta Drive bridges.



A map shows part of State Road 758, including a section along Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps

"All of these bridges would transfer to County for maintenance and operations responsibilities," Harriott noted.

"In exchange for the southern section of River Road, from US 41 to State Road 776," Harriott continued, "the State proposed to transfer State Road 758 (Bee Ridge Road) from US 41 to just east of Interstate 75."

That section varies between seven and four lanes in width, he noted, and includes one fixed-span bridge. Although FDOT "does not see a rationale to transfer the southern section of River Road (US 41 to State Road 776)

Siesta Seen

due to the rural nature of the corridor,” Harriott added, “that would be a point of future discussions and negotiations.”

In regard to the next steps, Harriott wrote, “A present value analysis of future capital needs and ongoing maintenance costs over a

set period of time for each facility is a logical first step. ... Based on County operations of moveable bridges, [the Stickney Point Road and Siesta Drive bridges] alone will likely add \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 per year in operating and maintenance costs (which does not include periodic overhauls).”



Siesta resident Peter van Roekens, who took this photo, suggested a headline for it: ‘Bandit strikes Siesta Beach.’ It is not every day that a sailboat ends up on the shore. The sailor(s) on Bandit — the name of the boat — must have not been very alert or very adept at setting an anchor.

Siesta Seen

In some cases, he continued, FDOT has required that a facility be brought up to state standards prior to a transfer. “For River Road, this requirement could result in widening to four lanes or improving the existing two lanes to improve drainage and pave shoulders. It should be noted that in the discussion ... FDOT was not stipulating that River Road be brought up to standards,” Harriott added.

FDOT representatives also pointed out that, regardless of maintenance responsibilities, “future funding and prioritization would come through the local Metropolitan Planning Organization. Generally, the FDOT looks to the local governments for project priorities and allocates those funds within the work program, subject to approval by the Metropolitan Planning Organization. ... In other words,” Harriott pointed out, “State funding for River Road will be the same, based on the MPO prioritization process, regardless of whether the facility is maintained by the County or by the State.”

Harriott concluded with a recommendation that county staff proceed with the analysis of future capital costs and ongoing maintenance and operating costs, as indicated above.

Patterson has pointed out on a number of occasions over the past couple of years that she has had requests from Siesta residents wanting the county to take over State Road 758 so it could reduce the speed limit in places on Siesta Key. Resident efforts to get FDOT to lower the limit from 35 mph to 30 mph on the portion of Midnight Pass Road between Beach

Road and the Stickney Point Road intersection have been unsuccessful.

However, Patterson always pointed to her concerns about the county having to assume the costs of the road’s maintenance. The proposed exchange puts that in a different light, of course.

Patterson has been out of town since shortly after the County Commission went on its summer break early this month, so I was unable to reach her this week for a comment.

THE SABAL DRIVE MATTER

After we “went to press” with our July 19 issue, I had the opportunity to spend some time reading through the complaint Sarasota County has filed against the property owners of a house located at [6537 Sabal Drive on Siesta Key](#).

Among the questions raised in the complaint is exactly what role Dr. Craig Siegel, a Sarasota chiropractor, plays in this whole matter. The complaint states that Siesta Resorts LLC is the trustee of the land trust that owns the house.

The complaint notes that on Dec. 31, 2012, Siegel, acting individually as trustee, executed and recorded a “Grant of Possessory Right and Beneficial Interest” in county records. That instrument purports to convey from Siegel, as trustee of Land Trust Agreement 11142 — dated Dec. 31, 2012 — to Siegel individually, “the possessory right and beneficial interest” in the property, the complaint says. However, “A search of the Official Records does

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not find any recorded instrument transferring ownership of the subject property from Siesta Resorts to Siegel as Trustee.”

Moreover, the complaint notes, a search of official county records could not locate any recorded instruments for the Land Trust Agreement numbered 11142.

Further, because of the numerous county and Federal Emergency Management Agency code violations cited at the Sabal Drive property, the complaint points out, “Money damages will not prevent Defendants from further

violations.” County officials want to see all code violations remedied.

The complaint adds, “Allowing the unpermitted work, including electrical and plumbing, constitutes a life, health and safety risk to Defendants and any of their tenants.”

CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Siesta Key Village Association members already have held their first meeting of the year to plan their biggest annual event, Light Up the Village, which kicks off the holiday season.



The Siesta Key Association fire truck joins the Holiday Parade during Light Up the Village festivities in November 2012. Photo courtesy of Peter van Roekens

Siesta Seen

The date for this year is Nov. 30, with the festivities scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m.

During the July 2 SKVA meeting, some concern arose that members needed to hasten to hold that first planning session, because it takes quite a lot of people and work behind the scenes to ensure Light Up the Village goes off with no — or as few as possible — hitches.

I recall one year when an SKVA director began fretting because Santa Claus had not appeared at the expected time for Light Up the Village. When she called to check in with him, it turned out he had been a bit late leaving the North Pole, shall we say, and was stuck in traffic on the Sunshine Skyway Bridge outside Tampa. (Needless to say, he was using land transportation that day.)

On July 2, Broken Egg restaurant co-owner Bob Kirscher assured everyone he had been in communication with Santa and all was good on that end for the 2013 Light Up the Village planning.

In fact, Kirscher said, “Santa’s had his last beard cut for the year,” a remark that evoked some laughter.


“You talked to him, huh?” past SKVA President Russell Matthes asked.

“You have connections,” Vice President Kay Kouvatsos said, chuckling as she looked at Kirscher.

By the way, President Cheryl Gaddie pointed out that new volunteers always are welcome for Light Up the Village and the other events the SKVA sponsors each year to draw more people to Siesta Village. It would be really great, Gaddie added, “to get some stronger committees formed and take some of that responsibility.”

Along with Light Up the Village, the SKVA puts on the Valentine Stroll, the Easter Egg Hunt and two annual arts and crafts shows.

Gaddie noted that she and Kouvatsos had compiled a two-page list of all the activities the organization undertakes to promote the Village.

To volunteer or for more information, visit the SKVA’s [website](#). 

Someone you know needs Planned Parenthood

- Lifesaving cancer screenings
- Parent & teen education
- Annual GYN exams
- Birth control





Fuzión Dance Artists perform during Voices of Fuzión during December 2012 in New College's Black Box Theater. Contributed photo

FUZIÓN DANCE ARTISTS ANNOUNCES SUMMER PERFORMANCES

Fuzión Dance Artists, Sarasota's modern dance company, invites the public to attend several events this summer.

In early August, the company will present *In the Round*, "a performance in the intimate setting of the New College of Florida Black Box Theater," located on the college's Pei (east) campus, on Gen. Dougher Place, a news release says. Choreographers will have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the audience and receive feedback using a modified version of the Critical Response model de-

signed by the Liz Lerman Exchange, the release adds.

The performances are scheduled at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 2, and Saturday, Aug. 3, and at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 4. Tickets will be \$10 at the door.

Additionally, the company is offering a free series titled, *Behind the Curtain*, a look at "the rehearsal process of new works being created by accomplished choreographers for the Fuzión dancers," the release notes. Events

GOCIO ELEMENTARY RECOGNIZED FOR BEING EXEMPLARY IN ARTS

The Florida Alliance for Arts Education (FAAE) has announced that Gocio Elementary School has received a three-year renewal of its designation as an Arts Achieve! Model School, the Sarasota County Schools have announced.

Gocio has been identified as an exemplary school in the four basic arts disciplines: theatre, music, dance and visual arts, the school district has announced. Eight of Florida's 1,976 elementary schools have been recognized as Arts Achieve! Model Schools.

"The effective integration of the arts into instruction at Gocio was evaluated through a rigorous application process and an on-site

visit by a team of recognized statewide leaders in the arts," a news release says. The evaluation process rates schools on arts instruction, school support, community outreach and administrative support, the release adds.

Recipients of the *Arts Achieve! Model School* designation were recognized in June at an FAAE meeting in Tampa.

Gocio Principal Pamela Buchanan said of the award in the release: "It has been noted in the *Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* that the future success of America in the global economy will depend upon creativity and innovation. The arts education program at Gocio Elementary



Allison Demint (left) plays a dalmatian and Sharkiya Robinson portrays Cruella de Vil in Gocio Elementary's May 2012 staging of Disney's *101 Dalmatians Kids*. Contributed photo

School truly promotes an environment that develops creativity, judgment, and discipline in our students.”

Gocio and Southside elementary schools in Sarasota offer music, visual art, dance and drama, the release points out. Gocio received the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network’s 2006-07 Creative Ticket National Schools of Distinction Award, it adds. “That award also recognizes schools that have done an outstanding job of making the arts an essential part of the education of their students,” the release notes.

Gocio is one of only five U.S. schools to receive the National Schools of Distinction Award.



Gocio Elementary also received the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network’s 2006-07 Creative Ticket National Schools of Distinction Award. Photo by Farragutful via Wikimedia Commons

THE UNDERPANTS HAS BEEN HELD OVER AGAIN AT FST

Florida Studio Theatre has announced a second extension of *The Underpants* by Steve Martin, adapted from original work by Carl Sternheim.


“The show has been a hit to critics and audiences alike, combining Martin’s wacky sense of humor with intelligent insight into human nature,” a news release says.

“Some lives are shaped by tragedy, some by art, and others by underpants falling down in public,” the release continues. “This play spins the farcical tale of five lives reborn from one accidental act of indecency.”

Now extended through Sunday, Aug. 11, *The Underpants* features returning company members Gil Brady and Daryl Embry, the release notes. Brady last appeared in FST’s Cabaret production of *Reel Music* and Embry returned after last appearing in *Perfect Wedding*. Making their FST debut have been com-

pany members Jennifer Joan Thompson, Mary Ann Conk, Danny Bernardy and Chet Carlin. Directing the show is Bruce Jordan, returning to FST after last summer’s *Perfect Wedding*. Jordan is also the original co-producer and director of the national hit, *Shear Madness*, the release points out.

“I am thrilled to be going into a second week of extensions of Bruce Jordan’s production, simply because the play is so much fun to execute, every time,” Bernardy, who plays the role of Frank Versati, says in the release. “Sarasota audiences have been a dream to play for ... a community that is both playful and sophisticated; a perfect fit for a Steve Martin show!”

Single Tickets for *The Underpants* range from \$18 to \$34 and will be on sale through Aug. 11. They may be purchased by phone at 366-9000, online at FloridaStudioTheatre.org or by visiting the box office at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota. 



(From left) Danny Bernardy, Jennifer Joan Thompson and Mary Ann Conk in The Underpants at Florida Studio Theatre. Photo courtesy of Maria Lyle Photography

The Church of the Redeemer is located in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

REGISTRATION UNDER WAY FOR REDEEMER'S VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

The Church of the Redeemer, located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in the heart of downtown Sarasota, invites parents of all faiths to register their children to attend the parish's annual Vacation Bible School, Aug. 12-16.

This year's theme is *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, a news release says. Among the activities will be Bible study, painting, singing, outdoor play and a food drive and backpack project for the Alta Vista Elementary School and neighborhood, the release notes. The Bible School will run Monday through Friday, beginning at 9 a.m. and ending at noon.

Registration is open to children from age 4 (by Sept. 1) to those in fifth grade, and it may be made online at redeemersarasota.org, or by contacting the church's parish office at 955-4263. The cost is \$10 per child; some scholarships are available, the release adds.

"Redeemer focuses its curriculum on teaching the young Vacation Bible School (VBS) students about the importance of helping others," the release continues. "Each year, the children are engaged in a hands-on project to help others locally, elsewhere in the U.S. and across the globe."

This year's outreach program, developed by 2013 VBS Director Cathy Brush, partners the parish with Alta Vista Elementary.


According to Alta Vista Principal Barbara Shirley, 93 percent of Alta Vista students qualify for free-or-reduced price lunches, the release points out. Redeemer's VBS participants will learn the basics of leading a food drive and will fill and deliver "First Friday" school backpacks for Alta Vista families who would

otherwise be in need over the weekend, the release adds. Surplus food will help stock Alta Vista's food pantry, which supplies food to the school's community, it notes.

"Each year, we intentionally focus our young Bible School students on experiencing their first taste of being Christ's light in the world," said Jacki Boedecker, director of Children's Christian Formation, in the release. "It's a tangible way of instilling an early ability to recognize need and to share blessings."

Past VBS projects have included building porch benches for Habitat for Humanity, sewing blankets for a local pregnancy center and crafting storytelling sets that illustrate Bible lessons and sending them to children and churches in foreign countries.

On Aug. 18 — after Vacation Bible School concludes — VBS attendees and their families are invited to attend VBS Celebration Sunday, which will involve the children in the presentation of the anthem during the 9 a.m. Mass, the release says. All children are also encouraged to bring their school backpacks to church that Sunday, when Redeemer's rector, the Rev. Fredrick A. Robinson, will offer a special blessing for the children as they prepare to begin a new academic year. He will lead the congregation in a *Blessing of the Backpacks*, the release adds.

The service will be followed by a *Sundaes on Sunday* celebration in Gillespie Hall, "with a delicious smorgasbord of ice creams and toppings for the children to enjoy," the release notes. 



Redeemer Vacation Bible School youth aide Caroline Devitt works with young children on craft projects in 2011. Contributed photo



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

26+
JULY

WBTT presents *The Best of Stevie Wonder*

July 26-28 (times vary), Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, 1626 10th Way. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or online at WBTTSRQ.org.

26+
JULY

Banyan Theater presents *Heroes*

July 26 to Aug. 4 (times vary), Jane B. Cook Theatre, FSU Center for the Performing Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail. Tickets: \$28.50. Information: 351-2808 or BanyanTheaterCompany.com.

26+
JULY

Florida Studio Theatre presents *The Underpants*

Through Aug. 11 (times vary), Keating Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$18 to \$42. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

26+
JULY

FST Summer Improv

Through Aug. 24, 8:30 p.m., John C. Court Cabaret, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$12. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

26+
JULY

Dabbert Gallery presents *Summer Showcase*

Through Sept. 30, 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Admission: free. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

11
AUGUST

WSLR presents the Fifth Annual Very Merry Jerry Day, featuring Florida Mountain Boys, Ship of Fools, Kettle of Fish and Schmitz Bros. Band

Aug. 11, 3:30 to 9 p.m., 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10. Information: 894-6469 or WSLR.org.

16
AUGUST

Friday Fest at the Van Wezel, featuring Impulse

Aug. 16, 5 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail. Admission: Free. Information: 953-3368 or VanWezel.org.



PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

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.