

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 2 — September 27, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

GOING LIVE

FLOODING AND INSURANCE

NOT JUST PICNIC TABLES

Inside

Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.

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show/hide on-screen controls



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Move:
When zoomed-in, move around the page

Toolbar Options



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Search by keywords



Open/close the mini carousel of pages



View the table of contents



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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

As I write this, I feel I am “channeling” the guy in that old FedEx commercial who talked so fast it was almost hard to understand him. I believe I would have to spit out the words just as quickly if I wanted to announce all of this week’s headlines in a 60-second spot.

Not only do we have a *lot* of news, we also have multiple feature stories, thanks to City Editor Stan Zimmerman, our beloved contributor Fran Palmeri and gardening guru Rick Wielgorecki.

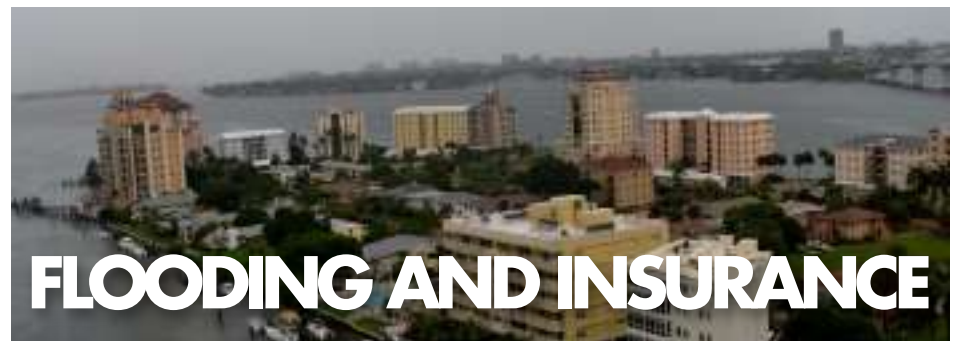
Every week the County Commission meets, I think the discussions will be bound to generate fewer stories than the previous sessions did. There is that law of averages, after all. Nevertheless, County Editor Roger Drouin and I continue to find plenty of fodder. And there was a considerable degree of diversity in those deliberations this week.

Although Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker was all prepared to weigh in with his own County Commission story regarding the 2050 Plan, he felt the simple vote to advertise a public hearing on proposed changes did not yield enough new news. Instead, he concentrated primarily on one of the top hot-button issues in the country — ObamaCare. For Cooper, that also meant trying to dispel many myths.

Among all the news we offer this week, we are proud again to include a number of stories I have not seen in any other publication. It may take some time for you to peruse all this news, but we feel you will have a very good idea of what transpired in Sarasota County this week if you do.

Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor and Publisher





 [Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article](#) 

NEWS & COMMENTARY

GOING LIVE

9

With the government's new online health insurance marketplace set to open Oct. 1, locals are working hard to spread the word — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

FLOODING AND INSURANCE

14

During a week of torrential rain, the County Commission learns Sarasota County homeowners will still get discounts on flood insurance, in spite of coming changes to a federal program — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

NOT JUST PICNIC TABLES

22

County commissioners agree to set aside a portion of the voter-approved park lands tax to make newly acquired property accessible to the public — *Roger Drouin*

WHOSE SAY-SO?

26

A county commissioner has asked for a legal opinion on whether his board can move the date of the next referendum on a special 1 mill school tax — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

WATER WORRIES

30

A county commissioner asks for frequent updates on the Siesta Key stormwater project and says she hopes the county will help restore the beach in front of one condominium complex to its pre-project condition — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

UNDER FIRE

36

County commissioners criticize actions of the chairman of the Community Redevelopment Agency Extension Committee — *Stan Zimmerman*

OPENING SOON

40

With the short-term operator's background checks all clear, the county and the City of North Port are working to get Warm Mineral Springs ready again for visitors — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

AN AIRING OF FRUSTRATIONS

47

County Commissioner Christine Robinson renews her efforts to help South County organizations win arts and cultural grants — *Rachel Brown Hackney*



PHOTO CREDITS

Front cover: *Evening Glow* - Norman Schimmel
Sarasota Leisure: *At Anchor* - Norman Schimmel



Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article



\$5,000 MORE

53

Former Sarasota Republican chairman fined again — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

A WATER WISH LIST

55

The County Commission approves a priority list for SWFWMD grants that could fund projects to filter nutrients from rainwater before they wash into area waterways — *Roger Drouin*

NO PASSAGE

60

A sidewalk waiver request related to the redevelopment of Pelican Plaza spurs disagreement on the County Commission — *Roger Drouin*

TWO MORE YEARS

64

The schedule calls for new Lift Station 87 in Sarasota to be operational by August 2015 — *Stan Zimmerman*

LOTS OF POTENTIAL

66

The county's Tourist Development Council gives its 'blessing' to a funding strategy for the planned BMX track improvements — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

NO SURPRISES

72

The City and County of Sarasota approved their fiscal year 2014 budgets this week with no changes in board members' earlier votes — *Stan Zimmerman and Rachel Hackney*

NEWS BRIEFS

75

CRIME BLOTTER

83

OPINION

EDITORIAL

89

Three Sarasota commissioners stand their ground

COMMENTARY

91

The modern phenomenon of 'E-Buds' — *Harriet Cuthbert*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

92

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Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article



SARASOTA LEISURE

CELEBRATING A CENTURY

95

Sarasota High School has called a number of buildings home over the years, but the Mighty Sailor spirit roars on — *Stan Zimmerman*

RAIN

100

All the precipitation this summer has replenished the aquifers and resulted in very happy creatures — *Fran Palmeri*

FRIEND OR FOE?

106

People remain divided in their views of Australian pines — *Rick Wielgorecki*

SIESTA SEEN

109

Gidget's Coastal Provisions gets its construction permit; the county seeks state funding for more facilities at Turtle Beach Park; the Village Association will get an update on the Siesta Public Beach project — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

A&E BRIEFS

118

RELIGION BRIEFS

128

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

132

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

133



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GOING LIVE

President Barack Obama. Photo by Pete Souza via Flickr

WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW ONLINE HEALTH INSURANCE MARKETPLACE SET TO OPEN OCT. 1, LOCALS ARE WORKING HARD TO SPREAD THE WORD

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

After a tooth-and-nail fight in Congress, a dramatic Christmas Eve Senate vote and a climactic Supreme Court battle, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is about to hit another milestone: rollout.

Next Tuesday, Oct. 1, Americans will finally be able to log on to HealthCare.gov to compare and purchase health insurance plans and to find out if they're eligible for expanded programs such

as Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. While some ObamaCare provisions — including the one that allows young adults to stay on their parents' plans till age 26 — have been in place for years, new coverage won't actually kick in till Jan. 1. Next week's launch represents the biggest step yet in the implementation of the law.

“*They will give anybody the amount of help that they request.*”

Linda Stone
CEO
Community Health Center of North Port

But misinformation runs rampant, fueled by both the law's complex mechanisms and a concerted effort on

the part of conservative lawmakers and activists to discourage Americans from participating in the new marketplaces. One already notorious ad, featuring a man in a menacing Uncle Sam costume, playing gynecologist, explicitly encourages young Americans not to use the new online marketplaces. The organization running the clip, Generation Opportunity, received \$5 million from a group with ties to the [Koch brothers](#).

To counter all that, healthcare organizations are hitting the pavement, hoping to educate Americans face-to-face about what the law actually does and how they can go about researching their options. But with 3.8 million uninsured Floridians out there — the third highest total in the nation — that's an enormous undertaking.

In August, the University of South Florida (USF) won a one-year \$4.2 million federal grant to oversee outreach in large swaths of the state, the largest total in Florida and the second largest nationwide. The college won't be directly hiring "navigators," the term for specialists trained to help Americans understand ObamaCare, but it will be working with consortium partners around the state to do so.

Here in Sarasota County, the Health Planning Council of Southwest Florida will be implementing the USF grant, hiring navigators and putting them to work. The Planning Council is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting efficient and cost-effective health services in a seven-county area from Sarasota south to Collier and east to Glades and Hendry.

But they're not alone. The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County also received a \$171,544 grant to run outreach programs. The

department has hired three outreach and enrollment experts who will fan out around the county to "spread the word," says Linda Stone, the CEO of the Community Health Center of North Port.

Those advisors will answer questions about the ObamaCare application, and they are trained to help applicants figure out the form to file. "They will give anybody the amount of help that they request," Stone says. She calls each employee "an office on wheels," equipped with computer, printer, scanner, etc., to expedite the process. The organization also will have a presence in county libraries, the Glasser Schoenbaum Human Services Center in Sarasota, Goodwill, the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex in Newtown and more places.

"It's important to underscore that people's privacy is of the utmost importance, and our employees have been vetted through the Department of Health — they've been fingerprinted," Stone says. Applicants will need to supply personal information such as a Social Security number and W-2 data, but none of that will be stored by navigators. "We will keep no identifying information at all," Stone points out. And contrary to rumors (floated even by elected officials), personal health information, including preexisting conditions, will not be collected at all.

In addition to outreach, the county Health Department is conducting "inreach," Stone says, training staffers to become application counselors. They must pass tests to receive that certification.

While the state Department of Health has specifically banned navigators from setting foot



Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and President Barack Obama. Photo by Pete Souza via Flickr

on the grounds of county health departments, that directive won't affect efforts in Sarasota County because of the local office's federal grant. Critics have charged that the state department's actions are an attempt to intimidate and frustrate those tasked with helping uninsured Floridians sign up through the marketplace, another example of the state's hostility toward the healthcare reform law. The Florida Legislature declined to create its own state-level insurance marketplace, which led to the federal government stepping in, and the Legislature rejected tens of billions of federal dollars to expand Medicaid through ObamaCare.

Caitlyn Miller, grassroots outreach manager with Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida, says the decision to reject Medicaid leaves 1.2 million Floridians without access to healthcare. She joined representatives from Sarasota County government, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, [First Step, Healthy Start](#) and the League of Women Voters at a meeting last week to call on local lawmakers to support expanding Medicaid.

Planned Parenthood doesn't have navigators or certified application counselors, but the organization is working hard to contact the "newly eligible," Miller points out. That includes phone banks and foot canvasses targeted at populations with a high percentage of the uninsured. "People are largely aware that something is going to happen, but they're not sure how it's going to affect them," Miller says.


Of course, till next Tuesday, some of those questions are unanswerable. The federal government released a report this week showing that estimated insurance premiums available through the marketplace will be cheaper in



The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was designed to expand healthcare insurance coverage in the United States. Image from the National Cancer Institute via Wikimedia Commons

Florida than previously thought, but those numbers remain preliminary. Once the actual rates are released, Miller continues, Planned Parenthood volunteers will be able to give Floridians a more specific overview of the system.

The marketplace's open enrollment period for 2014 runs from Oct. 1 through March 31; groups will be rushing to help as many residents as possible during that six-month window.

"It is definitely a sprint," says Stone, "but the people that we're working with are up to the challenge." 

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FLOODING AND INSURANCE

Rain-laden clouds loom over Golden Gate Point in Sarasota on the morning of Sept. 25. Photo by Norman Schimmel

DURING A WEEK OF TORRENTIAL RAIN, THE COUNTY COMMISSION LEARNS SARASOTA COUNTY HOMEOWNERS WILL STILL GET DISCOUNTS ON FLOOD INSURANCE, IN SPITE OF COMING CHANGES TO A FEDERAL PROGRAM

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Because Sarasota County has been a participant in a flood insurance rating initiative since 1992, homeowners will still receive a discount of up to 25 percent on National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies, regardless of federal efforts to eliminate subsidies in the NFIP, the Sarasota County Commission learned this week.

In an example provided by Desiree Companion of the county's Environmental Utilities Department, one Sarasota resident who owns a house built in the 1970s that is 1.9 feet below base flood elevation has been paying \$1,500

a year for an NFIP policy. The homeowner has received a \$418 discount because of the county's participation in the Community Rating System (CRS), Companion said in a Sept. 25 presentation to the commission.

Even if the resident's flood insurance bill goes up to \$3,000 a year under the [Biggert-Waters Act](#), the homeowner still would enjoy savings, Companion pointed out.

"So that discount actually becomes more meaningful," said Commissioner Nora Patterson.

"Absolutely," Companion replied.

The Community Rating System (CRS) program, Companion continued, is similar to one for fire insurance, with homeowners eligible for discounts because of the best practices pursued in the county since it became part of the national initiative. Among those measures are protecting new buildings beyond minimum NFIP levels; preserving and/or restoring natural functions of floodplains; and helping people obtain flood insurance, according to a Sept. 25 memo to the commission from the Environmental Utilities Department.

However, Companion told the board the county's 25 percent CRS discount likely could fall to 20 percent because of federal changes to the NFIP. Still, she said, she was hopeful the county could meet the new requirements and maintain the higher level.

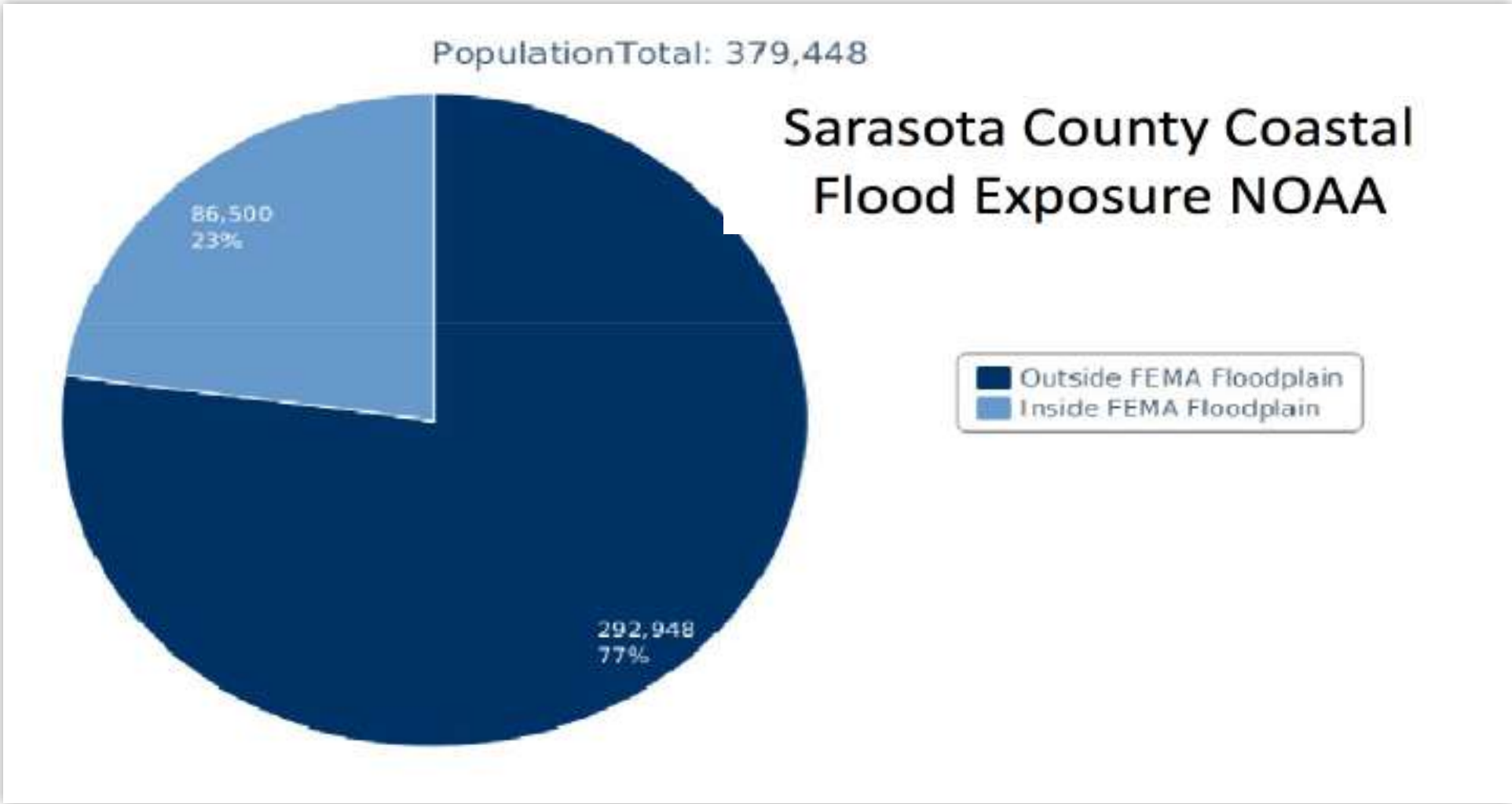
Patterson had asked about the effect on local NFIP policies as a result of the Biggert-Waters Act, which was signed into law in 2012. According to national news accounts, Louisiana's congressional delegation has been leading the charge to at least delay the implementation of the act, which calls for flood insurance rates to rise 20 percent a year over five years to eliminate the federal subsidy.

At the outset of her annual Floodplain Management Report for the board, Companion explained that Sarasota County "was part of an elite group" of only 20,000 communities that voluntarily joined the NFIP in 1971.

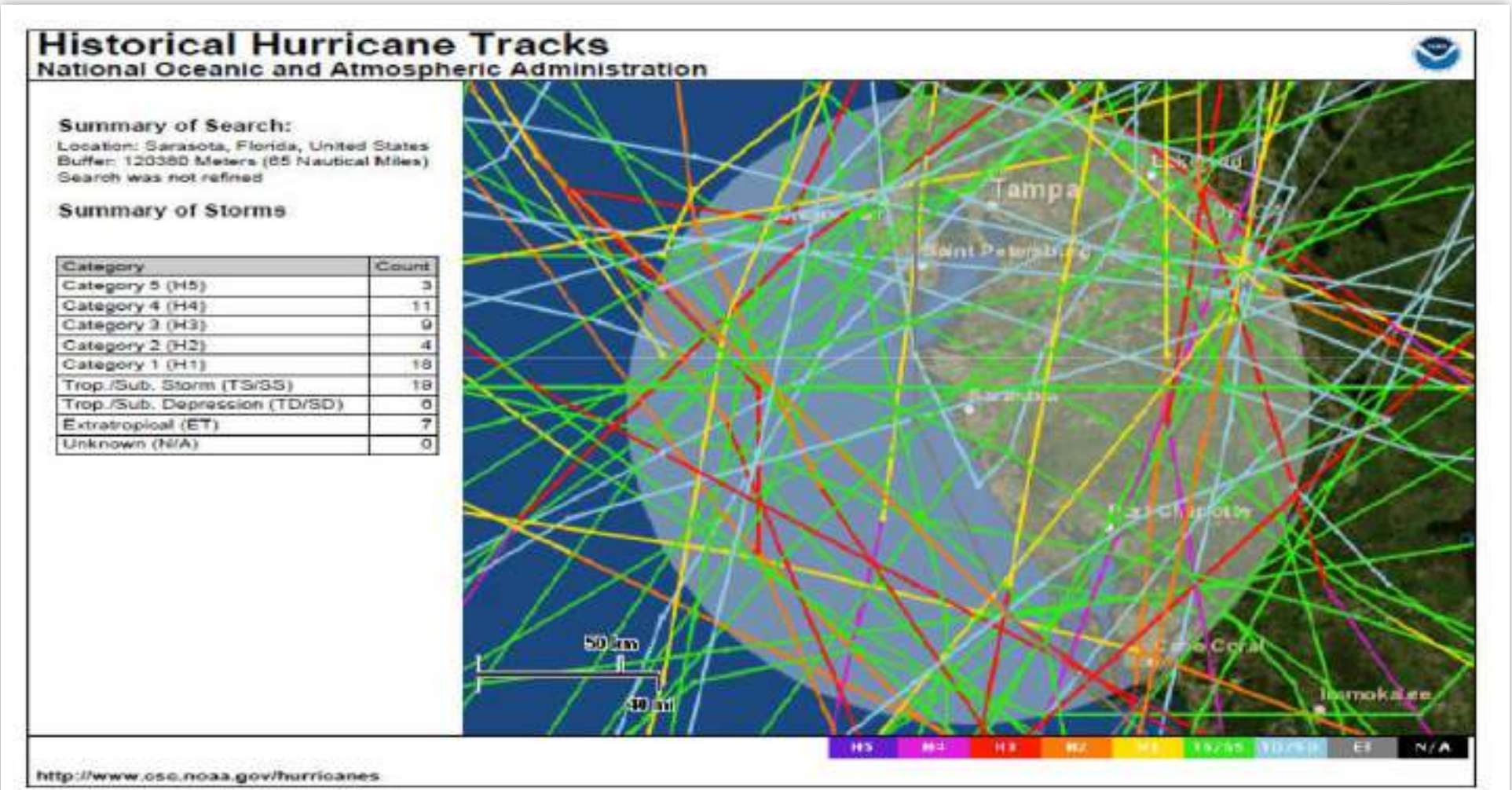
As a result, Companion pointed out, homeowners in the county received \$7.1 million in discounts this year. Moreover, for every dollar



A graphic shows the value of coverage for homes insured under the National Flood Insurance Program, divided by Sarasota County Commission district. Image courtesy Sarasota County



A graphic shows the percentage of Sarasota County residents living in the floodplain. Image courtesy Sarasota County



A chart shows hurricane tracks over the past 77 years. Image from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

they spent on flood insurance, she said, statistics showed they saved \$4.

During her presentation, Companion showed the board a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) map marking hurricane landfalls in the area since 1946. Some of the 77 storms had no names, she pointed out, but a number of them came within 65 miles of Sarasota County.

Still, hurricanes are not the only source of flooding, she noted. “As we are quite aware — and especially this week — duration/saturation [linked to rainfall] can make quite a difference.”

Patterson also asked Companion a question about storm surge coverage. A person purporting to be knowledgeable about the NFIP told her “it is only marginally useful in Florida because so much of the damage occurs from

storm surge, and the policies actually don’t cover storm surge,” Patterson said.

“That’s incorrect,” Companion responded. Although she is not an insurance agent, Companion continued, she could reassure the board that flood damage covered by the program “can be from either a rainfall source or storm surge.”

ABOUT THAT RAIN ...

While Companion was making her remarks to the County Commission on Sept. 25, both City and County of Sarasota workers were dealing with problems related to the rainfall that began Monday.

According to NOAA observations at the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, from Monday through 4:53 p.m. on Sept. 25, 6.9 inches of rainfall was recorded.



The site of the proposed new Westin hotel and condos at the corner of Gulfstream and U.S. 41 in downtown Sarasota is soggy on Sept. 25. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Southside Elementary School's landscaping is drinking up the rainfall on Sept. 24. Photo by Cleve Posey

The Southwest Florida Water Management District reports that the historic rainfall average for September in its South District, which includes Sarasota County, is 7.53 inches. That area recorded 4.92 inches of rain from Sept. 1 to Sept. 18.

City utilities crews worked throughout the day on Sept. 25, as they did the previous night, to relieve pressure from the wastewater system, which continued “to experience an unusually high flow rate due to the excessive heavy rainfall,” a city news release said. Pumper trucks were diverting wastewater from the sanitary system under the streets to minimize overflows, the release noted.

Typically, the city’s wastewater flow rate is 5 to 6 million gallons per day, the release said. The rain elevated that to approximately 27 million gallons on the morning of Sept 24.

“We’re better off this morning than we were [Tuesday],” Utilities Director Mitt Tidwell added in the release. “Our flow rate dropped approximately 2 million gallons, from 27 yesterday to 25 million this morning, so, that’s good news. But we’re still running at five times the normal flow rate.”

The unusually heavy flow rate resulted in high water alerts at 18 lift stations and six confirmed manhole overflows into streets on Sept. 24, the release pointed out. Two manhole overflows occurred on the morning of Sept. 25. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection was notified, the release said.

“Manhole covers are designed to automatically pop off to relieve pressure when the flow rate exceeds capacity,” Tidwell explained in the release.



The playground at Southside Elementary School in Sarasota was mostly underwater on Sept. 24. Photo by Cleve Posey

Once the storm passed, the news release continued, the impacted streets would be sanitized.

Around the county, a number of roads and neighborhoods were dealing with flooding, Spencer Anderson, the county’s Field Services Department director, notified county administrative staff by email.

“Typical issues involve pockets of roadway flooding near intersections with some areas of standing water along entire stretches of road,” Anderson wrote. “The majority of these ... are the result of rain amounts overwhelming adjacent drainage systems. Previous lulls or gaps in rain events have resulted in the quick recovery of most areas. Some areas will have prolonged standing water until adjacent systems drain, which may not occur until longer periods without rain,” he continued.

“There have been several calls from residents/property owners ... with claims of flooded structures (water inside homes/businesses),”

he added. Staff found most of those situations to involve water close to but not within buildings, he pointed out.

However, just after 3 p.m. on Sept. 25, two structures had experienced flooding; one was a garage. Those issues were resolved, he pointed out, “after clearing of trapped debris” from adjacent stormwater systems.


Anderson continued, “The Celery Fields Regional Stormwater Facility (CFRSF) is being operated to retain water, manage downstream levels along Phillippi Creek and levels upstream of the CFRSF. Current levels on Phillippi Creek are 0.5 [feet] lower than the same time yesterday. Levels within [his emphasis] the CFRSF are approximately 2 [feet] higher than the same time yesterday.”

Among the North County areas of flooding were 17th Street westbound across from the 17th Street Park, Goodrich Avenue at Sixth and Eighth streets, Myakka Road, Tuttle Avenue, Verna Road, Siesta Drive and Beach Road on Siesta Key, St. Armands Key, Orange Avenue and McIntosh Road north of Bahia Vista Street.

The affected South County areas included Winchester Road, River Road, Azure Road, Pompano Road, Heron Road, Mangrove Road, Colonia Road, Elm Street, Indiana Avenue/State Road 776, Morningside Drive and surrounding roads, Bayshore Drive and Manasota Key Road.

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County was advising residents and visitors to take precautions against disease-causing organisms that could be in floodwaters:

- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has touched flood waters.
- Wash hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling items that touched flood water or sewage.
- Do not wade through, play in or allow children to play in standing water. If floodwater cannot be avoided, bathe and put on clean clothes as soon as possible.
- Avoid contact between floodwaters and open cuts or sores. If such wounded areas come into contact with floodwaters, wash them thoroughly with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling or drainage, seek a medical provider immediately. Anyone who has not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years should get a tetanus booster.
- If there is a backflow of sewage into the home, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and throw away home goods that cannot be thoroughly cleaned, such as wall coverings, cloth items, rugs and drywall. Clean hard surfaces with soap and water, then disinfect them with a solution of one-quarter cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water.
- Thoroughly disinfect food-contact surfaces (countertops, refrigerators, tables) and areas where small children play.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Air-dry larger items in the sun and spray them with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting. 



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The T. Mabry Carlton Jr. Reserve has more than 80 miles of hiking and biking trails, including the 12-mile Myakka Island Wilderness Trail, which connects the Carlton Reserve with Myakka River State Park. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AGREE TO SET ASIDE A PORTION OF THE VOTER-APPROVED PARKLANDS TAX TO MAKE NEWLY ACQUIRED PROPERTY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Since 1999, Sarasota County has purchased 35,000 acres through the voter-approved Environmentally Sensitive Lands program. It has bought another 144 acres since 2007 through its Neighborhood Parkland Acquisition program.

The purchases are funded through revenue generated by a 0.25 mill ad valorem tax.

Whenever Sarasota County makes these purchases, it usually has to cover separate

expenses for opening the properties to public access. County crews will often have to clear away trash that was dumped on the property, cut through thick vegetation and blaze trails for hikers, birders and horseback riders. “We will put some signage in to let people know where they are and set aside a clear parking area,” Amy Meese, director of natural resources for Sarasota County, told the County Commission this week.

Funding for these “start-up” costs has been pulled from a variety of sources in the past, from surtax dollars to the capital improvement fund.

Two ordinance amendments unanimously approved by the commissioners on Wednesday, Sept. 25, set aside a dedicated portion of the revenue from the 0.25 mill tax — approved by voters in 2005 as part of the land acquisition programs — for the start-up costs. Now the same tax fund that fuels the purchase of the environmentally sensitive and neighborhood parklands will also pay for making these properties accessible to the public.

One concern county staff voiced on Wednesday was that without the ordinance amendments, as the county continued to purchase and set aside more preserved space, the process could lead to a reliance on the surtax and general fund money, Meese said.

“Some of the things that may have been budgeted through surtax can [now] be funded through the program funds,” Meese told *The Sarasota News Leader*.

The first ordinance change sets aside up to 15 percent of the purchase costs for start-up projects when the county buys property through the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP).

The other amendment sets aside up to 25 percent of the acquisition expenses for start-up projects when the county buys park space through the Neighborhood Parklands Program (NPP).



The 129-acre Old Miakka Preserve was purchased in 2006 through the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program. It has a network of trails. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County

OPPOSING VIEWS

Lourdes Ramirez, president of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) objected to the changes, calling for a 10-percent cap on how much of the land fund can be set aside for the start-up costs.

“When voters decided to tax themselves, they didn’t have intentions to buy picnic tables,” Ramirez told the commissioners at Wednesday’s regular meeting. “They wanted to protect parklands, not buy picnic tables.”

Ramirez said she understood the need for “some small” start-up costs, but she did not want to see a large portion of the revenue

“One of the biggest complaints I heard is how [long] it takes us to allow public access to the lands.”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



from the voter-approved tax paying for such things as picnic tables instead of land acquisition. Ramirez added that the 10-percent cap was appropriate.

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta said the ordinance amendments were “not just about picnic tables.”

Multiple projects are necessary, including fire lines, vegetation removal, erection of signage, cleaning up fencing that created boundaries, hauling trash that was dumped on sites, among other work, he pointed out, to enable people to enjoy the lands.

Commissioner Christine Robinson said that when she was campaigning for the County Commission in 2012, she heard from residents who valued the ability to use newly purchased preserves and parklands.

“One of the biggest complaints I heard is how [long] it takes us to allow public access to the lands,” Robinson said. “This is about being responsible. It’s about safety; it’s about cleanup.”


Robinson added that if the county did not provide that access, voters would not approve an ad valorem tax increase and bond issue in the future to keep the lands acquisition program in place.

The current 0.25 mill tax lasts through 2029.

Commissioner Nora Patterson said setting aside a specific funding source for start-up work would ensure the ESLPP and NPP programs remained viable.

“This board had the option during the recession to stop buying parklands. To the county’s credit, that was never discussed,” Patterson pointed out. “We remained completely committed to this program.”

Patterson added that other funding options for start-up expenses could be explored as the economy rebounds.

“I support doing this,” Patterson said of approving the amendments. “I am hoping when the tax base recovers and it is not necessary to use park funds to do this sort of thing, we will do things differently.” 



A butterfly makes a landing at Red Bug Slough. The 72-acre preserve was purchased in 2000 and 2001 through the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program, with funding assistance provided by Florida Communities Trust. It has several miles of hiking trails, a small playground, picnic shelters and a fishing dock. Photo by Roger Drouin

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 a community calendar that highlights the best upcoming events in the area.

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WHOSE SAY-SO?

The County Commission prepares for its regular meeting to begin on Sept. 24. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A COUNTY COMMISSIONER HAS ASKED FOR A LEGAL OPINION ON WHETHER HIS BOARD CAN MOVE THE DATE OF THE NEXT REFERENDUM ON A SPECIAL 1 MILL SCHOOL TAX

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

A Sarasota County commissioner has asked the county attorney to research what authority, if any, the county board has regarding the scheduling of the next Sarasota County School Board referendum on continuing the school system's special 1 mill tax.

On Sept. 24, Commissioner Joe Barbetta said he understood the School Board had set the referendum for March 25, 2014, to coordinate with the next election of commis-

sioners for the Town of Longboat Key. "Do we have any jurisdiction over that?" Barbetta asked County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh.

DeMarsh told Barbetta, "I don't know the extent of the [County Commission's] prerogative." However, DeMarsh said he believed the commission had to vote to approve the March 25 ballot.

On Sept. 25, Scott Ferguson, communications specialist for the school district,

"If we were to lose \$40 million, it's more than what our [reserve] fund balance is. ... We just can't do that."

Caroline Zucker
Member
Sarasota County School Board

told *The Sarasota News Leader* the School Board officially will vote on the March 25 date when it holds its next meeting, on Tuesday, Oct. 1. That session will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the School Board Chambers at The Landings, where the district offices are located.

In confirming DeMarsh's comment to Barbetta, Ferguson pointed to the resolution on the School Board's Oct. 1 agenda. It says, "[P]ursuant to Section 1011.73(2), Florida Statutes, the Board of County Commissioners of Sarasota County is hereby directed to call an election for March 25, 2014, for the qualified electors of the Sarasota County School District to vote on a continuation of the ad valorem millage increase for operating expenses of the School District approved in March 2002,

March 2006, and March 2010 as authorized by Section 1011.71(9), Florida Statutes."

Regarding any other authority the County Commission has relative to the referendum, DeMarsh told Barbetta, "I will begin to research [that]" and provide a report.

DeMarsh told the *News Leader* on Sept. 26 that he is working toward having that report ready when the commission meets on Oct. 8.

Barbetta also said during the Sept. 24 discussion that he believed the March election would cost the taxpayers about \$200,000. Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent told the *News Leader* through a spokeswoman on Sept. 25 that the actual expense would be between \$400,000 and \$425,000.



School Board members discuss budget matters with Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner (far left) and Chief Financial Officer Mitsi Corcoran (next to Weidner) in 2012. File photo

Barbetta continued, “Let’s not kid anybody: The voter turnout is really good in November ... versus March,” especially given that the November 2014 ballot will feature congressional and statewide races — including the election of the governor.

Caroline Zucker, who has served a total of 15 years on the School Board, told the *News Leader* during an interview on Sept. 25 that the district literally could not afford to wait until November 2014 to conduct the referendum. “We cannot wait until [then] because that would mean we would lose a whole year of income from that tax,” she said, adding that the School Board budget, by law, has to be completed in July each year. If the board moved the referendum to November, “That doesn’t leave us any leeway,” she pointed out.

The district received about \$40 million from that tax this year, she noted. “If we were to lose \$40 million,” Zucker said, “it’s more than what our [reserve] fund balance is. ... We just can’t do that.”

Moreover, she added of the referendum, “We’re doing it before the snowbirds leave, to get as many people as possible to vote.”

She pointed out that March 25 is before Easter, which is the latest many seasonal residents stay in Sarasota County each spring.

The School Board originally considered holding the referendum in early March, Zucker said, but the Town of Longboat Key asked the board to move it to the date of the town’s next commissioner elections.



Booker High School, which has been undergoing a rebuild, is known for its visual and performing arts program. Photo by Norman Schimmel

That ballot also will include races for seats on the [Holiday Park and Recreation District Board](#).

THE MILL MONEY

Al Weidner, the deputy chief financial officer for the school district, told the *News Leader* on Sept. 25 that the revenue from the special 1 mill tax is paying for 497 district positions in the current school year.

Zucker pointed out that the first attempt to hold a referendum on the tax failed in 2000. When the School Board tried again in 2002, it was successful. Voters have renewed the tax every four years since then.

According to the Executive Summary provided with the School Board's 2014 fiscal year budget, \$20,571,471 appropriated from the special tax revenue after the first referendum paid the salaries of 235 teachers, 23 teacher aides, nine guidance counselors and nine school secretaries, for a total of 276 positions. It also covered a 3-percent, cost-of-living increase for employees.


Because of decreased educational funding from the Legislature since the 2008-09 school year, the summary continues, referendum dollars are paying for art and music teachers, security aides, guidance counselors and media personnel. For example, in the current school year, \$4,709,706 is covering the salaries of the district's visual and performing arts coordinator, performing arts technicians at Booker and North Port high schools, foreign language teachers for the school system's gifted students, the Young Marines program at Venice Middle School and dance teachers at specific elementary schools.



*School Board member Caroline Zucker.
Contributed photo*

Another \$1,998,846 is being used to enable the district to continue providing assistant principal positions for all its [Title I](#) schools with fewer than 800 students, as well as interns to help with non-Title I schools with fewer than 800 students. Funding for elementary science teachers also comes out of the special tax revenue: \$1,609,517.

Additionally, \$1,533,112 is paying for liaisons or "extra duty day support" provided to schools with significant numbers of students "who do not speak English as their native language," the summary notes.

Again, "due to inadequate state funding," the summary says, \$629,811 is paying for guidance counselors/behavior specialists in the school system. 



WATER WORRIES

Gulf & Bay Club buildings stood out behind the site of the new Siesta Key stormwater project when the area was being cleared in early August. File photo

A COUNTY COMMISSIONER ASKS FOR FREQUENT UPDATES ON THE SIESTA KEY STORMWATER PROJECT AND SAYS SHE HOPES THE COUNTY WILL HELP RESTORE THE BEACH IN FRONT OF ONE CONDOMINIUM COMPLEX TO ITS PRE-PROJECT CONDITION

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Saying the site looks “like a disaster area,” Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson this week asked staff to provide frequent updates to the manager of the [Gulf & Bay Club](#) — as well as the commission itself — on the status of the Beach Road stormwater project on Siesta Key.

Additionally, Patterson said she hoped the county would be able to help with cleanup

of the stained area of beach in front of the complex once the project is completed.

Tom Fastiggi, manager of the 392-condominium unit Gulf & Bay Club — which stands adjacent to the stormwater project work area — appeared before the board during the public comments portion of its Sept. 24 meeting in Sarasota to ask for reassurance

“What Mr. Fastiggi describes is accurate. A lot of area that used to be white beach ... really is Gulf & Bay property..”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



that the county would restore the complex's beach property.

In June, Fastiggi told the board, the contractor "unwittingly pumped water into a swale between our two properties, and it had flooded our beach area."

More than 3 acres of beach that belongs to the Gulf & Bay Club is covered "with a brown mucky substance," Fastiggi pointed out. "With each rain, we get more of it."

Last week, before the heavy downpours began, he continued, the complex's 850-foot wide beach was flooded all the way down to the Jamaica Royale condominiums.

Fastiggi explained that for many years, storm-water flowed along the north side of the Gulf & Bay Club property into a swale that ran across Siesta Public Beach and then into the Gulf of Mexico. Records of that swale's existence go back at least to 1995, he added.

HEALTH RISKS

"What we are most concerned about are the solids, the sediment that's running onto the property and the composition of the solids," Fastiggi told the County Commission.

On Sept. 13, he emailed Patterson the preliminary results "of the most recent water samples



The stained sand in front of the Gulf & Bay Club contrasts with the white public beach area. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

of the surface water flow onto Gulf and Bay property from the Siesta Key Beach [storm-water project] site,” which he had requested on behalf of the complex.

The lab report, which he included in his email, referenced analysis of aqueous fecal samples as indicated below (CFU is the unit of measure for the number of viable bacteria):

Site	Result (CFU/100 milliliters)
Dumpster yard	20
North of F Building	340
Grassy outflow	1,600
Mangroves	590
Outflow from mangroves	2,500

Fastiggi added in that email, “These levels are unacceptable and constitute a danger to the health, welfare and safety of the public. We are therefore requesting that Sarasota County take immediate action to curtail the levels of fecal coliform and water discharge onto Gulf and Bay property.”

Tom Higginbotham, director of environmental health for the Florida Department of Health-Sarasota County, told *The Sarasota News Leader* in an interview on Sept. 25 that the department’s main concern is fecal coliform bacteria counts in recreational waters, including the Gulf of Mexico. Results of the most recent samples, taken Monday, Sept. 23, “are excellent” for all 16 of the county’s beaches, including Siesta Public Beach, where the Gulf & Bay Club is located, he said.



Water stands in the grass in front of the Gulf & Bay Club in mid-September. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County

If the sample results Fastiggi referenced in the email to Patterson were recorded from the Gulf of Mexico or freshwater bodies in the area where people swim or pursue other water activities, Higginbotham pointed out, “They would certainly be of a health concern.”

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection regulation regarding water quality says that, to ensure protection of the public’s health, no samples shall average a figure higher than 200 or exceed 400 in 10 percent of the samples, he continued. The samples also cannot exceed 800 in any single given day.

With stormwater, which is not considered recreational water, he pointed out, “We expect to see high levels of bacteria,” adding that stormwater systems are designed to allow “good” bacteria and the sun’s ultraviolet rays to break down harmful nutrients. That is why the systems have retention ponds, he added, “to let nature take its course.”

As for concerns about people walking through the areas of the Gulf & Bay property where the samples were taken, Higginbotham said his recommendation would be that anyone who has to wade through such standing water — or any area suspected to be unhealthful



Another photo contrasts the stained sand with the white sand on the public beach. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

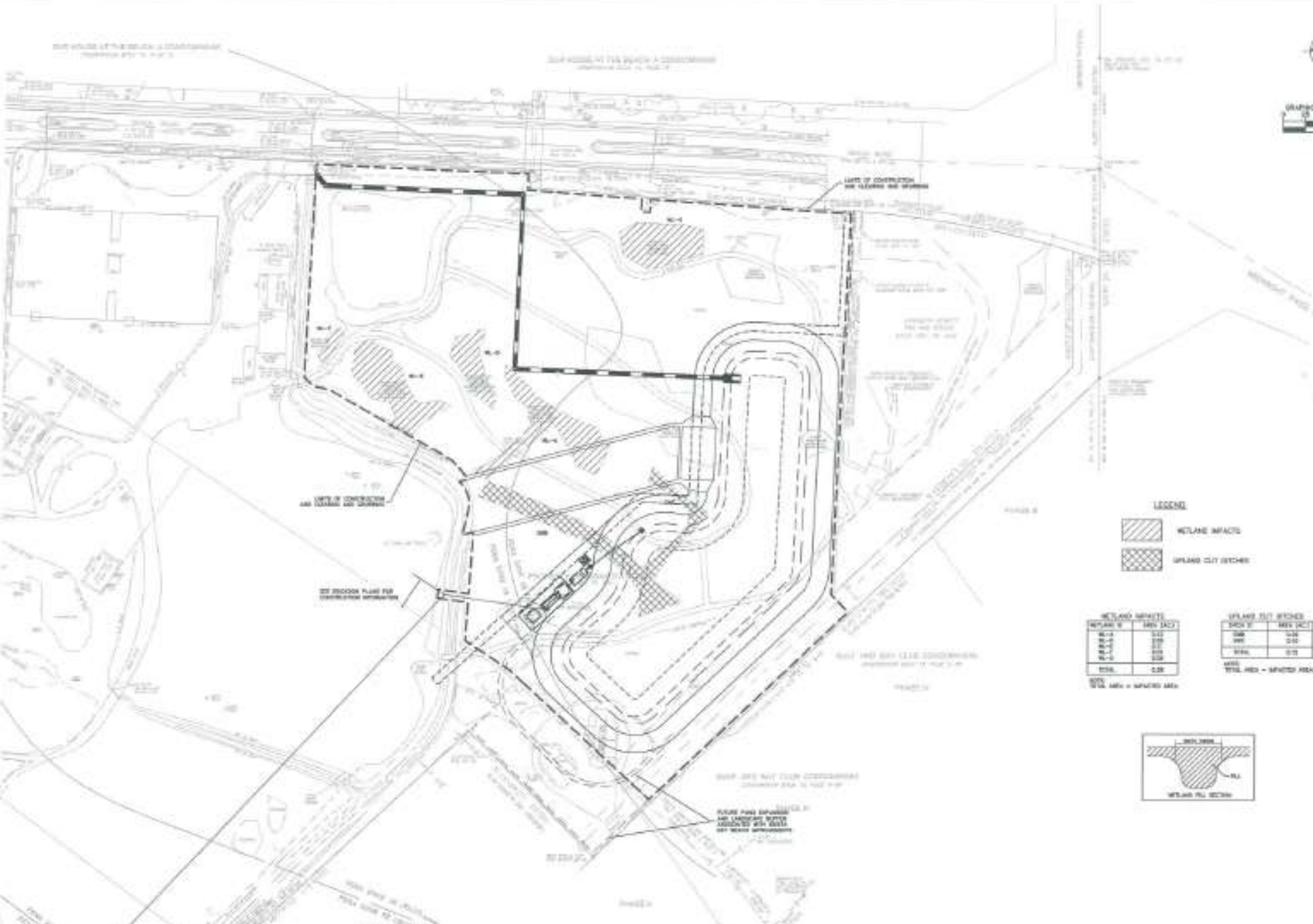
— should wash his feet in the Gulf of Mexico afterward. A person with an open wound on a foot would be advised to avoid such areas and find another route to the gulf, he said.

COUNTY ACTION

Following Fastiggi’s remarks, Patterson told her colleagues that she and county staff members, along with a consultant from Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. — one of the firms that designed the new Beach Road stormwater project — met at the site about a month ago to survey the conditions. “We also walked on the Gulf & Bay property,” she

said. “It was pretty clear that the old pattern of drainage has been disrupted by the work that has been done, and I assume that it will be restored.”

However, the rainfall even prior to this week’s downpours put the project on hold, she pointed out — a fact county Project Manager Alex Boudreau explained to the *News Leader* earlier this month. It is impossible to build the new 1-acre retention pond on the site without pumping water out of the area, Patterson noted, “which is a fairly ludicrous attempt at this point.”



A Kimley-Horn and Associates engineering diagram shows the location of the Siesta stormwater project next to the public beach. Image courtesy Sarasota County

She added that she understood the contractor had left the site for the time being.

“What Mr. Fastiggi describes is accurate,” she said: “A lot of area that used to be white beach ... really is Gulf & Bay property,” although the public can cross the property, according to a state law governing beach access.

“I’ve told [Fastiggi] that I’m sure that the county will help with cleanup efforts” after the project is completed, Patterson continued. In the meantime, she said, she wanted her colleagues’ support to request “fairly frequent reports” to Fastiggi and the commissioners.

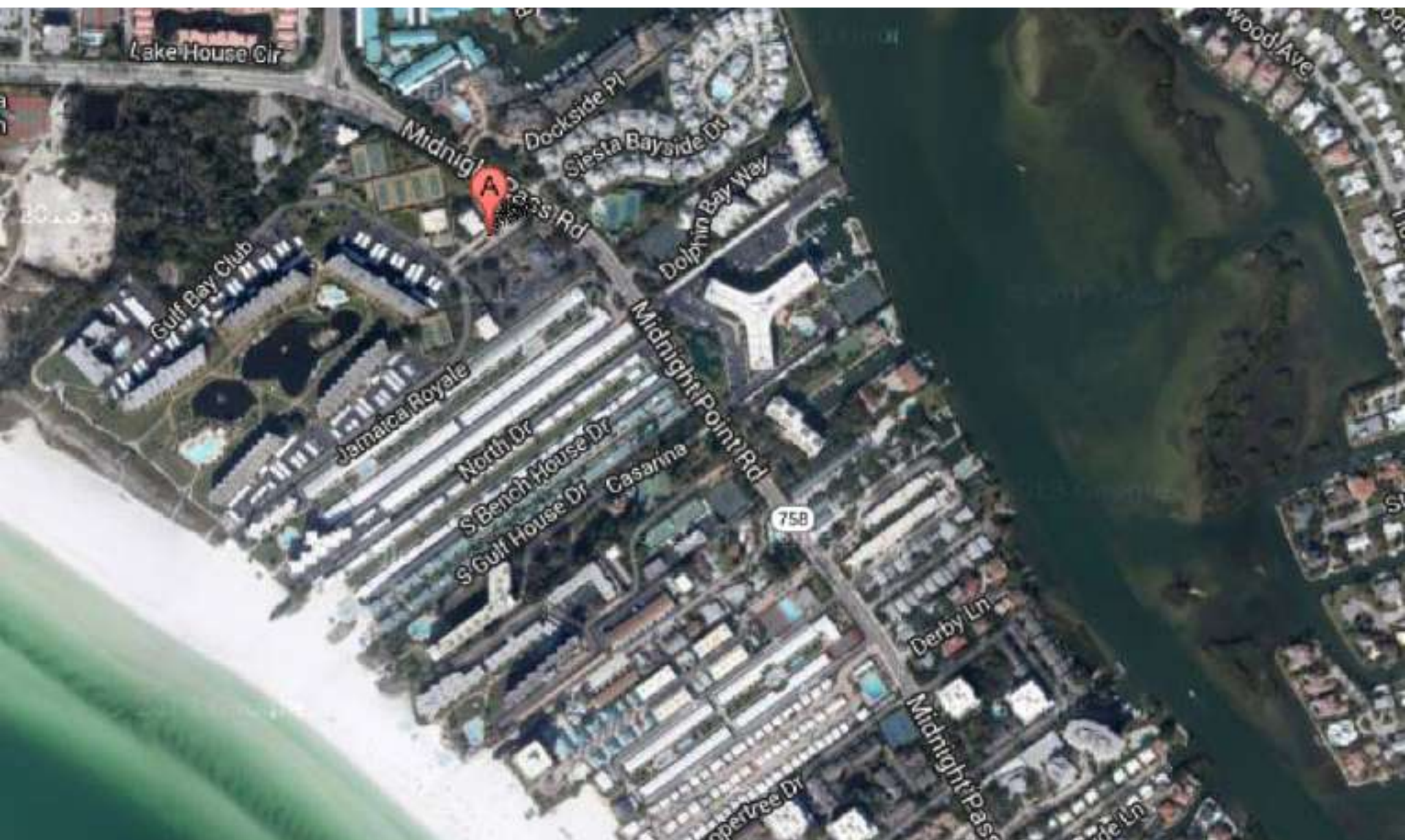
After all, Patterson noted, the Gulf & Bay Club is “probably the largest condo complex on Siesta Key — maybe even the largest in the

county — with a lot of residents, a lot of tourists saying, ‘What’s going on?’”

Patterson also voiced worries about when the stormwater project would be completed. Boudreau told the *News Leader* a couple of weeks ago that the contractor had just notified him the work should be done by Jan. 20, except for the “punch list” of final adjustments, which would be finished in February. The original schedule called for completion in November.

“This may get pushed into season, and I’m hoping we’ll do everything we can to avoid that happening,” Patterson said on Sept. 25. “It would be really nice to get updated on it as quickly as possible.”

None of the other commissioners offered any dissent to her requests. 



A map shows the location of the Gulf & Bay condominium complex on Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps



UNDER FIRE

The Downtown Community Redevelopment Area Extension Committee meets on Sept. 25 to evaluate the pros and cons of another 30 years of tax-increment financing. On an easel against the wall is a map of the two CRAs in Sarasota — one downtown and the other in north Sarasota. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CRITICIZE ACTIONS OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY EXTENSION COMMITTEE

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Many agree a community redevelopment agency (CRA) is a good idea. It allocates city and county property tax revenue into a specific area to fight slum and blight. Downtown Sarasota has enjoyed a CRA for 27 years. Over that time, Sarasota County has diverted nearly \$60 million into downtown initiatives.

Three years from now, the CRA is scheduled to go out of business unless the city and county agree to give it new life. Using conservative figures, if the operation was to continue an-

other 30 years, about \$160 million more in county money would end up downtown.

Earlier this year, a study committee was appointed by the city and county commissioners to evaluate the value and implications of a 30-year extension of the CRA. But questions raised by committee Chairman David Merrill are raising County Commission hackles.

Without straining the metaphor, this has become a David versus Goliath affair, with Go-

“*In my opinion, he either ought to resign as chair or as committee member*”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County



liath being a minimum of three county commissioners. Doubling the irony, one might say, is the fact that Michelangelo's statue of David is the city's logo.

THE SHOW SHOULD GO ON

On Wednesday, Sept. 25, for the second time in two weeks, the committee — officially the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area Extension Study Committee — agreed by consensus that the CRA should be continued. The members have not voted on the question, but their intent is clear.

What troubles the County Commission are Merrill's questions about the impact on the remainder of the county of the downtown

Sarasota wealth transfer. In the past, county commissioners have rebuffed efforts by the City of Venice and the unincorporated area of Nokomis to create their own CRAs.

In a July email to Sarasota Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown and Assistant County Administrator Mark Cunningham, Merrill wrote, "My thoughts include asking mayors or commissioners from the other three cities to come and discuss the topic, especially the southern cities that don't interact with downtown Sarasota on a regular basis. (I like the idea of encouraging them to start their own CRAs so that we don't put them in a position of opposing Sarasota's.)"



Downtown Sarasota has benefited from the infusion of money through the Community Redevelopment Agency. Photo by Norman Schimmel

He continued, “Another agenda discussion would be the financial implications for the city and the county. If the CRA is extended, and the control of the CRA is wrested from the city, you would have a hard time replacing the \$2.6 million that you transfer into the general fund if the agency stopped the transfer. On the other hand, the county has budgeted their \$3.5 million back into their general fund in 2017, so they will have to fill that hole if the CRA is extended with the 1986 tax base intact.”

County Commissioner Christine Robinson fired back the next day. “Your board is getting in front of the county commission on this issue, which should not be happening,” she wrote Merrill. “These discussions have county-wide tax ramification and ramifications for a particular area. While equity is an issue, I am troubled where this conversation is heading as far as recommendations outside of your charge,” she added.

He responded to her four days later: “The logic of having the study committee look at multiple CRAs is simple. If Sarasota’s CRA has had a positive impact, and, if there exists the criticism that it’s inequitable, then one of the solutions to ending the inequity might be to extend the positive benefits of a CRA to other cities. Another way to end the inequity is to eliminate all CRAs, and the study committee should also debate the merits of this approach.”

RANCOR INTENSIFIES

When Robinson brought up the CRA study committee’s activities to the full County Commission, it voted to instruct Chairwoman Carolyn Mason to write Merrill a letter. That Sept. 6 correspondence said, in part: “It has

“To be honest, I am shocked by the attempt of the County Commission to limit the ideas that can be considered in our study.”

David Merrill
Chairman
CRA Extension Study Committee

come to our attention that discussions have been held during your meetings regarding contacting other municipalities to solicit input on the establishment of CRAs. We would like to clarify

that the scope of your committee is to review and explore options for the extension of the City of Sarasota Downtown CRA. Soliciting input regarding establishment of future CRAs is within the purview of the Board of County Commissioners.”

Merrill defended the committee’s inquiries by email: “Since other areas of the county have previously requested CRAs, it would be highly likely that the requests would be repeated if the downtown CRA is extended. Therefore, it would be a glaring omission on the part of the committee to ignore this reality and the possible impact on your budget from requests to establish more CRAs.”

Mason tried to schedule a call with Merrill, but he rebuffed it. “With all due respect, the best way to keep our communication clear so that it can be conveyed to the study committee would be to communicate by either email or writing,” he responded in writing on Sept. 13. “To be honest, I am shocked by the attempt of the county commission to limit the ideas


that can be considered in our study. There currently [exist] in the county's handling of CRAs and redevelopment activities great inconsistencies."

Merrill's refusal to bow to the County Commission's requests boiled over at the County Commission meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 24. At the end of the session during the Commission Reports segment, Robinson said Merrill "is casting an entire cloud on this for me right now."

Commissioner Joe Barbetta piled on. "There's almost a definite intent on [the part of] this chairman, Mr. Merrill, to rouse up animosity between the municipalities and the county. I think he's gone way beyond the scope of his board appointment."

"In my opinion," Barbetta added, "He either ought to resign as chair or as a committee member ... The committee's being totally side-tracked and it's most unfortunate."

Absent so far from the fray is the Sarasota City Commission, which has a heavy stake (\$3 million per year) in the outcome. If not sooner, it will be dragged into the scrum on Oct. 22, when the City and County commissions hold a joint meeting. Both bodies have asked that the CRA issue be put on the agenda.

Sometime between now and 2016, the two commissions will have to come to an agreement on the downtown CRA. Merrill and his committee hope to provide guidance to create a "model CRA" for the commissions to evaluate. His committee is due to deliver a report next January. 



County Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson study budget material during a workshop. File photo



OPENING SOON

City of North Port and county officials hope to announce next week when Warm Mineral Springs will reopen. Image courtesy City of North Port

WITH THE SHORT-TERM OPERATOR'S BACKGROUND CHECKS ALL CLEAR, THE COUNTY AND THE CITY OF NORTH PORT ARE WORKING TO GET WARM MINERAL SPRINGS READY AGAIN FOR VISITORS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Staff members with the City of North Port and Sarasota County had planned to make an announcement this week about the reopening of Warm Mineral Springs. The torrential rains — and the necessity of dealing with repercussions from all that water — have delayed the news until early next week, county spokesman Curt Preisser said in a brief interview with *The Sarasota News Leader* on Sept. 26.

“We’re hoping to have a date for [the reopening] real soon,” North Port Assistant City Manager Danny Schult told the *News Leader* on Sept. 25.

Still, on the positive side, North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis reported on Sept. 20 to his board and the County Commission that the criminal background checks and the requested [Dun & Bradstreet](#) report on the principals of WMS Sarasota Management have cleared the firm to take over the short-term operation of the resort.

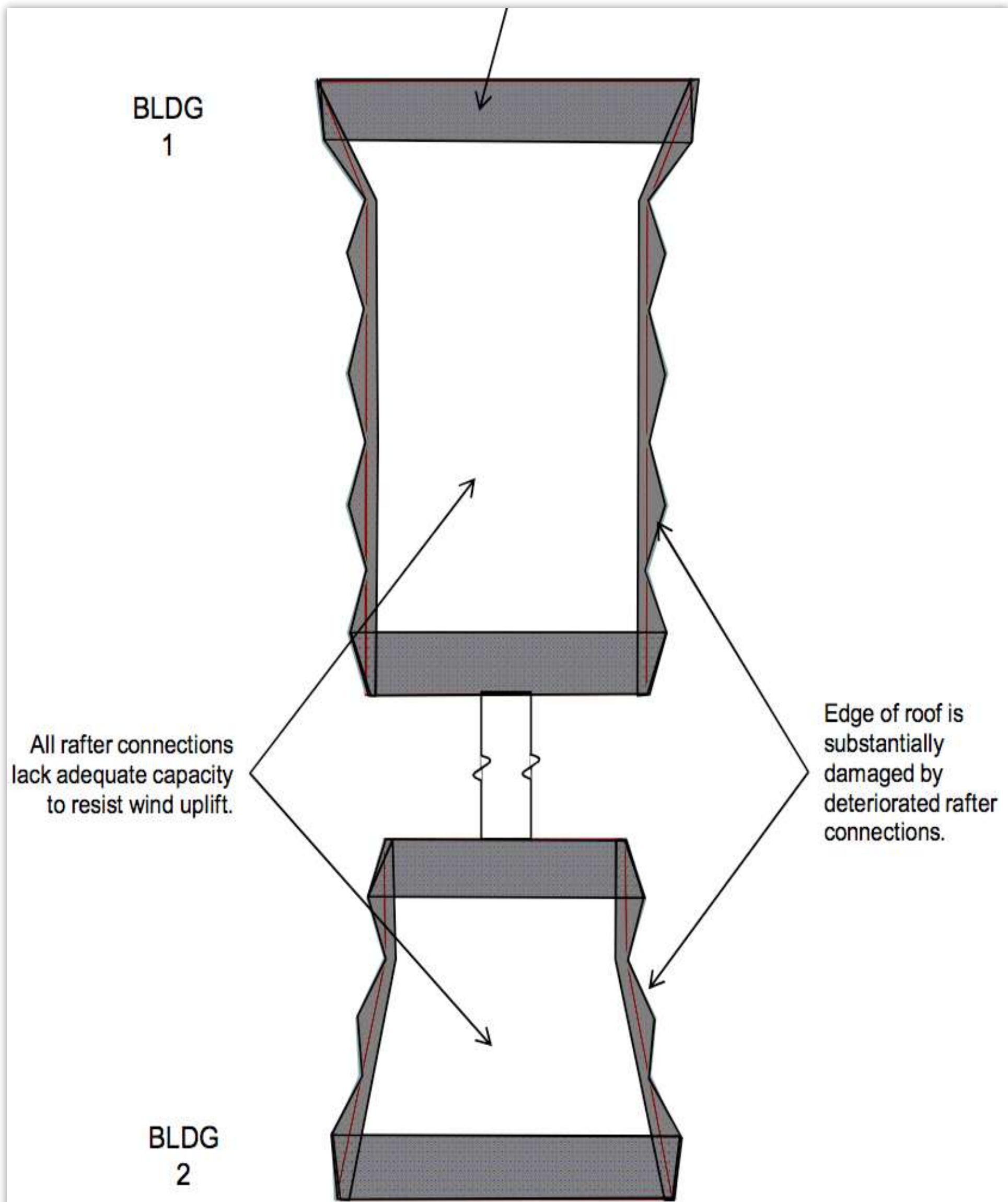
The national criminal background checks on Dr. Grigory Pogrebinsky and Joseph Zaccari “reflected ‘No reportable records found,’” Lewis wrote. “The D&B reports did not reflect any business discrepancies that should raise any concerns,” he added in a memo.

“The reports have been reviewed by me and [County Administrator Randall Reid] and we concur there is no information contained in any of the reports that should prevent the execution of the [management] agreement,” Lewis continued.

The County Commission requested the background checks as a condition of executing the contract with WMS Sarasota Management, the recommended winner of the bid. The county board’s unanimous Sept. 10 vote followed a 3-1 North Port City Commission vote a day earlier that recommended the firm as the short-term



An aerial view shows Buildings 1 and 2 at Warm Mineral Springs. Image courtesy of the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's Office



manager. City Commissioner Cheryl Cook was in the minority on that action.

Because the two local governments own Warm Mineral Springs together, and they approved an interlocal agreement this summer regarding the operation of the resort for up to a year, both boards had to approve the awarding of the bid. The County Commission sought the background checks as a precaution. "It wasn't a reflection of this vendor or a reflection of the other one," Commissioner Christine Robinson said on Sept. 10. "I just was trying to make sure of that extra level of safety."

The other firm that bid on the short-term contract was Cambridgeshire Investment LLC, based in Port Charlotte.

While WMS Sarasota Management operates the resort, city and county officials hope once again to reach an agreement on the long-term future of the popular tourist attraction.

THE FACILITIES

Even before the City and County commissions voted on the conditional award of the short-term management contract, city staff was engaged in efforts to make necessary repairs to the facilities, so the resort would be ready to reopen. It has been closed since June 30, a result of a dispute between the city and county over whether Warm Mineral Springs should be developed or left in its more natural state.

A \$100,000 contingency fund for the repairs was established in the city's 2013 fiscal year budget, Assistant City Manager Schult told



A photo shows a corroded pump casing and piping at Warm Mineral Springs. Photo courtesy City of North Port

TABLE 1 - WARM MINERAL SPRINGS - LIST OF DEFICIENCIES

NOTE: COSTS WHERE SHOWN ARE GROSS APPROXIMATIONS INTENDED TO SHOW THE RELATIVE MAGNITUDE OF THE ISSUE. COSTS MARKED "TBD" ARE TO BE DETERMINED AFTER ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION, PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND/OR CLIENT DIRECTION.

	UNSAFE	REPAIR	RETROFIT	ALTERATION		RECOMMENDATION
				LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	
f. Spray foam insulation is exposed at several locations.						
m) Gutters and downspouts are disconnected, damaged or have inadequate slope at numerous locations.	NO	TBD				R/R gutters and downspouts.
n) Pergola framing	NO	TBD				R/R damaged wood. Clean and paint structural steel. Chip out concrete around column base, weld repair to column/base connection.
a. Wood joist blocking is incomplete at north end.						
b. Steel columns are corroded at the base. One column has lost approximately 25 percent of the section.						
c. Steel beams are corroded.						
d. Wood top plate supporting joists and partial depth blocking is deteriorated.						
e. Wood joists are deteriorated at three locations.						
3.4 Mechanical and Electrical Systems						
a) Many of the plumbing fixtures are dated and worn.	NO		TBD			Owner's choice to retrofit or not.
b) Several plumbing stacks are not functional. They are plugged or crimped above the roof.	TBD	\$ 1,500				Identify active vents. Correct flashing and/or unplug.
c) In the Men's Restroom, the urinal sanitary waste line is not vented.	NO	\$ 500				Add studer vent.
d) In the Dining Area, a floor drain cover is broken.	NO	\$ 50				
e) No ADA fixtures are provided.	NO		TBD	TBD		
f) The A/C evaporator/air handler in the attic of Building 1 is not operable.	NO	\$ 10,000				R/R air handler and evaporator.
g) In the attic of Building 2, the A/C ductwork is separated from the gift shop register.	NO	\$ 150				Reconnect duct to register.
h) In the attic of Building 2, the gas line for the furnace is not properly supported.	YES	\$ 150				Attach to existing framing.
l) The furnace in Building 2 lacks an intake filter for the air handler.	NO	\$ 50				Add filter.
j) Insulation of the building envelop is minimal. The sidewalls (hollow structural tile and glass) have an average R-value of 1.6. The roof has an R-value of approximately 15.	NO				TBD	Coordinate with roof replacement and wall section alterations.
k) Communication wires are routed across the roof and are not properly anchored.	NO		\$ 5,000			Reroute through attic were possible.
l) Exposed electrical raceways are incomplete, junction boxes are open, and cover plates are missing.	YES	\$ 5,000				Correct visible problems.
m) Improvised electrical wiring in the Nail Salon and Meeting/Exercise Room	YES	\$ 500				Remove extension cords.
3.5 Life Safety / Fire Protection						
a) No hydrants are available within a reasonable distance of the buildings. The spring provides a sufficient volume of water but truck access is blocked by site fencing.	NO		TBD			Owner's choice to retrofit or not.
b) The hose distance from the spring to the farthest point on the buildings exceeds 530 feet when fence obstructions are considered.						
c) The spillway flowing from the spring may not have sufficient depth to serve as a water source.						
d) Door thresholds do not meet egress requirements at the Meeting/Exercise Class Room, Men's and Ladies' Restrooms, Dining Area and Gift Shop.	YES	\$ 1,000				R/R threshold at 5 locations.
3.6 Interior Elements						
a) Replacement ceramic floor tile is not properly set in the Skin Care room. Tiles appear to have been thin-set with mortar instead of adhesive.	NO	\$ 1,500				R/R floor tile.
b) Attic space in both buildings is used for storage of materials and trash.	YES	\$ 2,000				Clean attic.
c) The interior partition between the storage areas in Building 2 has a large, rectangular hole.	NO	\$ 1,000				Close opening with wood studs and prefinished wood paneling.
BASE CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTALS	\$	114,400	\$ 491,100	\$ -	\$ 80,000	COSTS MARKED "TBD" ARE TO BE DETERMINED AFTER ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION, PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND/OR CLIENT DIRECTION.
BASE CONSTRUCTION TOTAL			TBD			
CONTRACTOR'S GENERAL CONDITIONS			TBD			
CONTINGENCY (30%)			TBD			
ENGINEERING DESIGN			TBD			
PERMITTING			TBD			
OVERALL PROJECT TOTAL			TBD			

COSTS MARKED "TBD" ARE TO BE DETERMINED AFTER ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATION, PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND/OR CLIENT DIRECTION.

the *News Leader* this week. Although \$40,000 from that fund was allocated for the work, he said he would not have the total of the expenses until after Oct. 1, when he expects all of the bills to have been tallied.

“The city and county are sharing all expenses equally,” he pointed out.

North Port city staff also provided the county a report on an assessment of the facilities, which was prepared by Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc.

A Sept. 5 memo from North Port Neighborhood Development Services Director Scott E. Williams to Schult and North Port City Manager Lewis pointed out that repairs could be made by Oct. 1 to several areas that especially demanded attention.

Williams noted the following:

- Water and sanitary waste systems: While operational, they will be monitored and maintained after the Springs reopens, he wrote.
- Inadequate support of fuel gas piping: North Port Property Maintenance staff will undertake this work.
- Unsafe electrical systems (exposed junction boxes and improvised wiring, among them): All problems have been corrected.
- Three deteriorating interior roof rafters in the women’s locker room: North Port Property Maintenance staff also plans to handle that work.

Once all those repairs were completed, Lewis’ Sept. 5 memo said, a Certificate of Occupancy could be issued.

A Sept. 6 memo from Lewis to the City Commission noted that one repair staff was not pursuing right away was the “septic tank/field issue.” Lewis added, “City staff believes that with proper monitoring the system can continue as it has for the duration [of the short-term operation].”

DETAILS FROM THE INSPECTION

The Kimley-Horn report on the assessment of the Warm Mineral Springs facilities says, “The buildings are generally in poor but serviceable condition. Numerous construction and maintenance deficiencies were observed ... Correcting all [of them] would require substantial improvements that likely would trigger additional upgrades to fully comply with current building codes.”

The report points out that the two main buildings are separated by about 60 feet, but they are joined by a promenade. They have restrooms and lockers for visitors. “Additional facilities include meeting, exercise and spa treatment rooms,” the report says, as well as a gift shop and small dining room.

Water for the buildings comes from two irrigation wells and one domestic water well, the report continues. “Sanitary waste is minimally treated and disposed of on site,” it adds.

Among the deficiencies observed in those systems at the time of the assessment were the following:

- The domestic water system is non-potable.
- “The pump body, discharge piping and suction piping of the well pump west of Building 1 are heavily corroded. Piping is not properly supported ...”


- The sanitary system did not meet current standards for on-site disposal. For example, the drain field was too close to the surface water body.

Regarding life safety/fire protection concerns, the report says neither of the buildings has a fire protection sprinkler system, and no hydrants are available within a reasonable distance. While the spring itself provides a sufficient volume of water, the report notes, "truck access is blocked by site fencing."

Among structural deficiencies, the assessment found the following:

- "Steel building columns are not braced in one or more directions or are marginally braced with glass walls or windows ..."
- Major roof rafters bear weight on the plywood sheathing of the minor roof.

- Roof rafters are not anchored to resist wind uplift.
- "Framing does not provide an adequate diaphragm to laterally brace the walls of the building."
- "Exterior doors are not adequate for hurricane loading."
- "The threshold of the Nail Salon door is not adequate to prevent water intrusion."
- "Roof covering is deteriorated or penetrated at numerous locations and is approaching the end of its useful life."

Kimley-Horn did not provide a total estimate for all the repairs. The report said further investigation was needed, as well as direction from the city and county, before a figure could be generated. 

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AN AIRING OF FRUSTRATIONS

Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance, answers questions during the Sept. 24 County Commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

COUNTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINE ROBINSON RENEWS HER EFFORTS TO HELP SOUTH COUNTY ORGANIZATIONS WIN ARTS AND CULTURAL GRANTS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson failed this week in an effort to require the county's Arts and Cultural Alliance staff to make at least 12 visits a year to South County to assist organizations trying to win some of the arts and cultural grants the county distributes annually.

However, she did gain her fellow commissioners' support on two other votes: increasing funding for one type of arts grant program and direction to administrative staff

that future discussions of the arts and cultural grants, including the Alliance's annual contract, be scheduled as regular agenda items, not as part of a consent agenda.

Only Chairwoman Carolyn Mason joined Robinson in supporting the 12 visits to South County.

“*Frankly, I think this is a sad conversation. I thought the Civil War ended in 1865. ... The process has to be fair.*”

Charles Hines
Vice Chairman
Sarasota County Commission

Vice Chairman Charles Hines and Commissioner Nora Patterson voted with Commissioner Joe Barbetta in approving an amended motion that did include a requirement

— also at Robinson’s request — that the documentation of endeavors to increase South County participation in the grants process be provided to the County Commission and the Tourist Development Council (TDC) at least seven days prior to the TDC meeting when the grants will be considered.

The motion said that failure of the Arts and Cultural Alliance to provide that documentation in a timely fashion “may be cause to delay the decision of the awards ...”

Robinson ultimately joined her colleagues in unanimous support of the new contract with the Alliance.

CONTINUING COMPLAINTS

At the start of the County’s Commission’s regular meeting on Sept. 24 in Sarasota, Robinson pulled the item regarding the Alliance’s FY

2014 contract so she could bring up a number of points.

“I’m still hearing from South County organizations that are struggling and having problems,” Robinson said.

During two County Commission meetings in 2012, prior to the board’s approval of the annual arts grants, she told her colleagues that representatives of South County entities had expressed to her the difficulty of winning any of the grants, saying in some cases they felt they were at a disadvantage in competition with larger, well-established arts and cultural organizations in North County, especially those with staff members who understood the application process far better than they did.

In 2011, Robinson asked Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alli-



Circus Sarasota has been a regular recipient of the county’s arts and cultural grants. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ance, to make a greater effort to meet with South County groups to provide them the assistance they needed. However, she criticized him last year for failing to supply adequate documentation of those subsequent meetings — even after the board delayed a vote on the FY 2013 grants to allow Shirley time to produce it.

Robinson also cast the only “No” vote on the distribution of \$1.3 million in funding last year.

During the discussion this week, she told her colleagues she had heard from people representing two South County organizations “who

“*We need to somehow get away from this discussion of territorialism. We’re all in this as a county. ... I don’t think it’s a quid pro quo [situation].*”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

are extremely upset over this whole process. ... They feel like they can’t come forward because it might jeopardize their opportunity for [even] lesser grants.”

“I’m sad to hear that constituents don’t feel

that they can call us and contact us,” Hines said. “This board is *open*. We answer our phones; we answer our emails.”

While he had heard no complaints this year, Hines continued, he did hear some two years ago from South County groups citing the same concerns Robinson had heard.



The Sarasota Chalk Festival’s early efforts to get county arts funding support led to some changes in the grants process, Commissioner Nora Patterson says. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Patterson said it was unrealistic for the South County entities to have the fears Robinson referenced.

“It’s hard to calm somebody’s fears,” Robinson responded.

“We need to somehow get away from this discussion of territorialism,” Barbetta told his colleagues. “We’re all in this as a county. ... I don’t think it’s a quid pro quo [situation].”

Then Robinson asked Shirley for clarification of some of the documentation he had provided regarding meetings over the past year with South County arts and cultural group representatives, especially a countywide orientation session held at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota.

Shirley characterized the annual celebration of each year’s grants winners, conducted at the Van Wezel, as an opportunity for people representing arts and cultural organizations all over the county to approach him and his staff. “Throughout that evening, we’re talking to everyone there about the availability of these grants,” he pointed out. “It is a way of reaching people.”

Hines concurred with Robinson that it was not appropriate for Shirley to document that Van Wezel gathering as a meeting for South County groups. “Have [a session] in South County,” he told Shirley. “That may be extra work, but it’s a long drive” for South County groups to come to Sarasota.



Banyan Theater, whose 2013 series included Heroes, won a 2014 fiscal year arts grant to support its next summer season. Photo courtesy of Banyan Theater

Robinson then presented the proposed amendment she had prepared for the contract, specifying the 12 South County meetings during the 2014 fiscal year.

“I think it’s verging on micromanaging,” Patterson said.

“I don’t find it unreasonable,” Robinson responded.

“I understand it’s well-intended,” Patterson told her, “but honestly, if we don’t trust these people to appropriately administer these grants, then we ought to find another group to do it.”

“I would agree with that,” Shirley said.

“I don’t want to be micromanaging,” Robinson said. “I tried to be as gentle as possible [last year] to prevent getting to this point. But it hasn’t worked.”

Patterson also pointed out that the arts grants are not designed to make it more convenient for people to stay closer to their homes to attend productions.

“There are people who drive from other counties, not just from South County, to go to a performance at the Van Wezel, which, by the way,” Patterson told Robinson, “is the Van ‘Way-zel,’” correcting Robinson’s earlier pronunciation.

“These organizations aren’t about convenience,” Robinson replied of the South County groups she had referenced. She had verified that, she added. “They are developing programs specifically for tourism.”

When Mason asked Robinson why she had settled on 12 visits, Robinson replied, “Quite



*County Commissioner Christine Robinson.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

frankly, spending one day a month in South County, I think, is not too much to ask for when it serves half of our population.”

Still, Robinson continued, if the majority of the commissioners felt that request was unreasonable, she would abide by their decision.

“I’d be comfortable if you want to demonstrate that these conversations have occurred” between the Alliance staff and South County groups, Patterson said.

After Robinson made her motion to amend the contract with the language calling for 12 South County visits, Hines said, “Frankly, I think this is a sad conversation. I thought the Civil War ended in 1865. ... The process has to be fair.”

He added to Shirley, “For us to tell you you must do this 12 times — well, guess what: You’ll do it 12 times and you won’t do it anymore.”

Hines continued, “If all the money’s going to North County, there’s something wrong.”

In making his amended motion, Barbetta pointed out that while he appreciated Robinson’s efforts to help her South County constituents, “[Shirley is] a professional. I’ve known him for a long time. He hears the message. He’s doing his best.”

Barbetta added that he felt it behooves representatives of the two organizations Robinson referenced to sit down and discuss their views with Shirley.

Robinson reiterated that she had encouraged them to make their concerns public, but they had declined.

“I would definitely love to hear from the organizations that have indicated fear in talking to us,” Shirley said. “There should be no fear, because every grant program we have ... is evaluated by an independent panel. ... I do not participate on those panels. ... Our job is to support the arts in Sarasota County.”

Finally, Barbetta said, “Let’s revisit this at a future date and see how Jim does with it.”

Robinson responded that she could not support Barbetta’s motion. “The process is failing an area of our county right now. It’s not fixed; it’s getting worse.”

SUPPORT ON OTHER POINTS

Robinson did win support from her fellow commissioners on two other, related motions. The first called for increasing the amount of funding for the Arts Opportunity Grants program from \$20,000 to \$50,000. However, the motion calls for the Tourist Development Council to weigh in on that change during its



*Commission Vice Chairman Charles Hines.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*


November meeting, before the issue comes back to the County Commission for final approval.

Those grants provide support for organizations that do not qualify for, or did not receive, one of the regular arts and cultural grants, the [Alliance website](#) says.

“I would hope that we’re not just talking about brand new organizations [applying for these grants],” Patterson said, but also those that feel like they could bring more tourists into the county with the extra funding support.

“Absolutely; absolutely,” Robinson replied.

Patterson noted the only caveat she would add to that would be “if nobody’s worthy, [a grant] doesn’t have to be distributed.”

The entire commission also supported Robinson’s motion to direct staff to make certain that future Arts and Cultural Alliance discussions are not included anymore on the consent agenda. 



\$5,000 MORE

Lourdes Ramirez, president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, addresses the County Commission earlier this year. Photo by Norman Schimmel

FORMER SARASOTA REPUBLICAN CHAIRMAN FINED AGAIN

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

Former Republican Party of Sarasota County head honcho Bob Waechter [has been hit](#) with another fine, this one from the Federal Election Commission (FEC), for his alleged role in a series of fake campaign donations made to 2012 Democratic candidates.

On Sept. 17, the FEC notified the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office that it had reached a \$5,000 settlement with Waechter in the matter, which was referred to the FEC by the Sheriff's Office on behalf of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) President Lourdes Ramirez. Prosecutors here have filed identity theft charges against Waechter, alleging he illegally used Ramirez's name to contribute money to Democratic campaigns. Ramirez, a Republican, is positioning herself

to run for a seat on the Sarasota County Commission next year.

The Sheriff's Office first contacted the FEC last New Year's Eve, writing that Ramirez believed Waechter had made a \$200 contribution to Democrat Keith Fitzgerald, a congressional candidate, in her name "in order to influence the voting public from supporting her in the future." In a Jan. 30 follow-up letter, the Sheriff's Office wrote that detectives had discovered another federal donation, \$250 to President Barack Obama, which had been made at the same IP address and with the same prepaid VISA card as the Fitzgerald donation.


The VISA card was purchased at a Sarasota Sweetbay by someone resembling Waechter,

and the IP address is affiliated with Waechter's company, RWR Installations, according to the Sheriff's Office investigation. The January letter to the FEC notes that the Obama donation was made in the name of "Lourdes Ramierz," pointing out the misspelling.

Waechter attorney Cleta Mitchell — who has represented a number of high-rolling Republican federal officials, including Sens. James Inhofe and Jim DeMint, and the NRA — asked the FEC to drop its investigation in March. She claimed the \$200 Fitzgerald donation was too little "to warrant the use of Commission resources." But the FEC pressed on, transferring the case to its Alternative Dispute Resolution Office in June. Mitchell and Waechter eventually agreed to the settlement process.

The agreement was signed by Mitchell on July 1, but it was not approved by Krista Roche, the assistant director of the FEC's Alternative Dispute Resolution Office, till Sept. 10. The settlement does not touch on the third alleged donation, to Florida House candidate Liz Alpert, since the state has jurisdiction in that case. The Florida Elections Commission hit Waechter with a \$750 fine for the Alpert donation last month; it found "probable cause" of an election law violation.

Waechter has been an influential Republican fundraiser for years. He served as head of the Republican Party of Sarasota County from 2004 to 2006. His criminal trial was originally set to begin in August, then in October, but it has now been pushed back to January 2014.

Since his arrest, Waechter has left posts on the Sarasota County Tourism Development Council, the Sarasota County Board of Zoning Appeals and the Sarasota Manatee Airport Authority. He has told *The Sarasota News Leader* he is not commenting on the issue. 



Robert Waechter. Photo from the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office



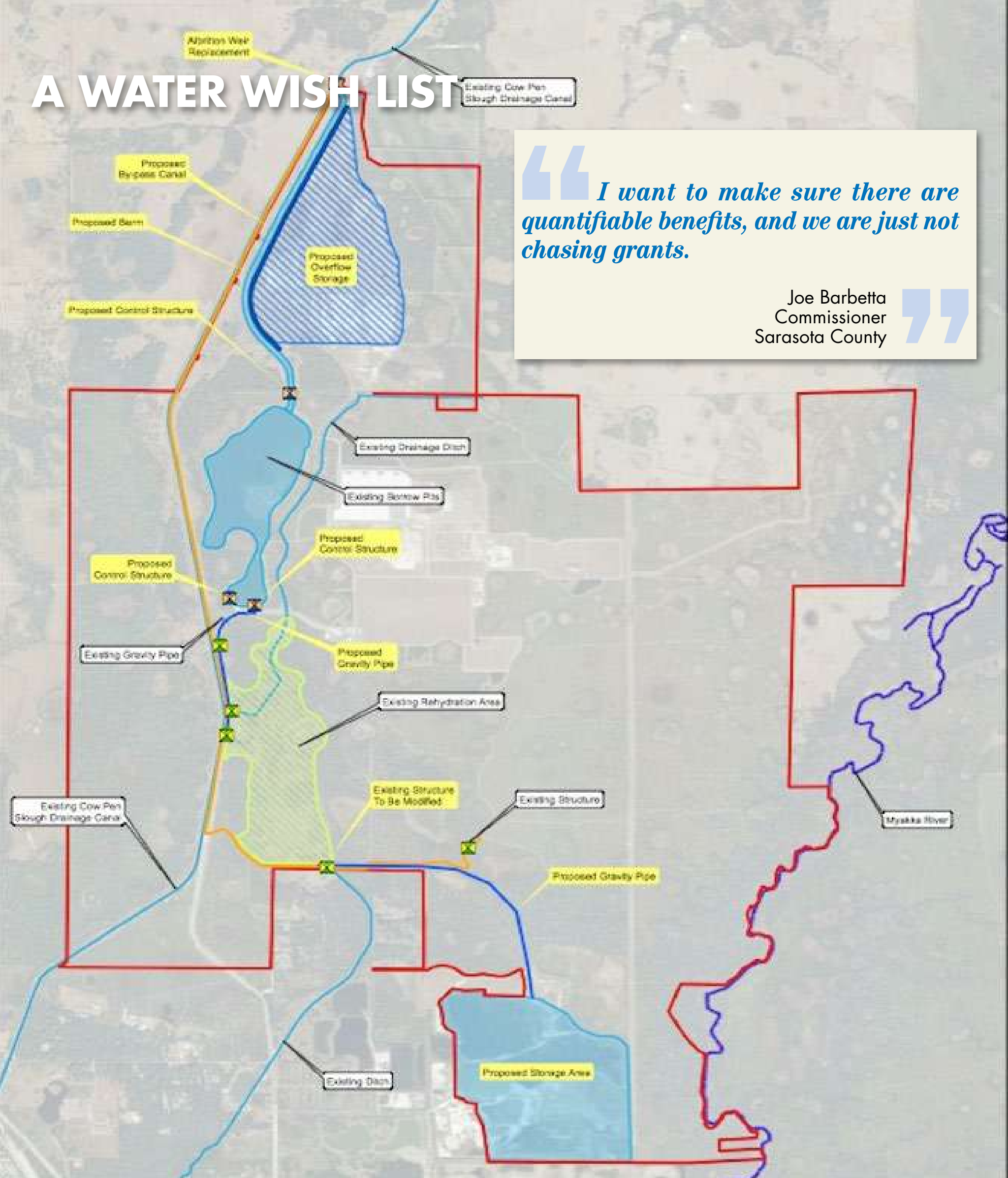
Keith Fitzgerald makes his concession speech after losing a local congressional race last year. Photo by Robert Hackney

A WATER WISH LIST

“ I want to make sure there are quantifiable benefits, and we are just not chasing grants.

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

”



One project will divert excess surface water from Cow Pen Slough to the Dona Bay Surface Water Storage facility. This will reduce pollutants and the amount of freshwater entering Dona Bay. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES A PRIORITY LIST FOR SWFWMD GRANTS THAT COULD FUND PROJECTS TO FILTER NUTRIENTS FROM RAINWATER BEFORE THEY WASH INTO AREA WATERWAYS

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

The wetlands restoration at Sarasota's Celery Fields has resulted in a 53-percent decrease in nitrogen over the past two years, the Sarasota County Commission learned this week.

That is more than 10 times the initial goal of the restoration project's goal of a 5-percent reduction in the presence of a nutrient that can exacerbate the impact of red tide blooms.

"We blew those goals out of the water," said Molly Williams, the county's interim stormwater manager, during the commission's Sept. 24 meeting.

Sarasota County staff hopes to see similar results from a Dona Bay stormwater treatment project.

"We have that opportunity for the same kind of success with Dona Bay," Williams told the county commissioners.

The project will divert rising rainwater from Cow Pen Slough into a 380-acre water storage facility, where the rainwater will be filtered before it is discharged into Dona Bay. This year, the county began the design and permitting process for the multi-phased project, which has an estimated total cost of \$7.25 million.

Two planned, upcoming phases of the project will cost \$3.25 million — with half of the money possibly coming in the form of a Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) grant.



The green area on this map shows the proposed water filtration location in North Water Tower Park, where stormwater will be treated before it is discharged into a canal that empties in Whitaker Bayou. Image courtesy Sarasota County

On Tuesday, Sept. 24, the county commissioners approved a priority list of eight projects to send off to SWFWMD for potential funding. SWFWMD will rank all of the proposed projects across the region, setting aside money for the top ones, Williams told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the vote.

The project wish list included two phases of the Dona Bay stormwater improvements, along with six other projects. (See the list below.)

Altogether, the commissioners are requesting matching funds of \$3.31 million (in fiscal year 2015) for stormwater improvement projects across the county.

Commissioners did offer a few comments Tuesday about the county's share of the expenses.

Commissioner Nora Patterson noted that if the regional stormwater agency approved every project on the priority list, the county would have to come up with the matching \$3.31 million.



Priority Ranking

1. **Dona Bay Conveyance System (N424)**
2. **Dona Bay Surface Water Storage Facility (N484)**
3. **Hudson Bayou In-stream Restoration & Sediment Management***
4. **10th Street Outfall Sediment Management***
5. **North Water Tower Park Stormwater Improvements***
6. **Indian Beach/ Sapphire Shores Beach Bio-Retention***
7. **Stormwater Pond Timing & Volume***
8. **Watershed Model Update (L019)**

A chart shows the priority rankings staff recommended to the County Commission relative to Southwest Florida Water Management District grant applications. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Commissioner Joe Barbetta put it this way: “When we get a grant, we have to spend our money, too. I want to make sure there are quantifiable benefits, and we are just not chasing grants.”

Williams explained how the Dona Bay project would reduce nitrogen runoff into the bay. She also said county staff chose projects that would increase water quality while also decreasing annual maintenance costs, thus lowering the county’s recurring expenses.

THE OTHER PROJECTS

In addition to the two phases of the Dona Bay project, the County Commission approved six others on the priority list:

1. **Hudson Bayou in-stream restoration and sediment management (two phases of a larger project).**

SWFWMD cost: \$300,000.

County cost: \$300,000.

About 830 acres of stormwater drains into wetlands on the Sarasota High School property.

This project would restore habitat there by removing nonnative plants, reshaping the wetlands, filtering stormwater and installing bioswales to filter rainwater that runs off the parking lot before it enters Hudson Bayou. The project would include an educational program with interpretive signage and boardwalk access points. If SWFWMD funding is approved, the project is slated for an October 2014 construction start date.

“There are a lot of moving parts to this one,” Williams said. “It is an interesting project.”

2. **10th Street outfall sediment management.**

SWFWMD cost: \$500,000.

County cost: \$500,000.

The plan is to reduce debris and sediment pouring from the boat basin into Sarasota Bay. Future sediment would be directed into a specific area in the basin so the sediment would be “easier to access and remove” during future maintenance of the basin, Williams noted. The project would include installation of bioswales to filter stormwater.

Williams said county staff plans to work closely with the City of Sarasota, which has received a West Coast Inland Navigation District Grant (WCIND) grant to dredge the basin.

If SWFWMD funding were approved, the county would add a barrier to confine the sediment as well as a kayak launch.

3. **North Water Tower Park stormwater improvement.**

SWFWMD cost: \$500,000.

County cost: \$500,000.

Thirty-eight acres of U.S. 41’s stormwater drainage area drains through the southern portion of North Water Tower Park. But that rainwater is not treated before it empties into Whitaker Bayou.

This project would redirect stormwater through a series of bioswales placed in the park. Then the filtered water would flow into a canal emptying in Whitaker Bayou.

“Four or four and a half acres of bioswales can treat that water,” Williams said.

4. Indian Beach/Sapphire Shores Beach.

SWFWMD cost: \$150,000.

County cost: \$150,000.

The neighborhoods of Indian Beach and Sapphire Shores were developed prior to stormwater regulations. As a result, stormwater there pours directly into the bay — without treatment.

According to plans, this project would route surface rainwater from “approximately 19 acres of commercial/medium density residential contributing area to bioretention areas within the road right-of-way providing much needed stormwater treatment in a priority water body.” The project has an anticipated start date of February 2016, if funding is approved.

5. Stormwater pond timing and volume.

SWFWMD cost: \$40,000.


County cost: \$40,000.

This effort would help county staff understand more about the effects of climate variability and rainfall on nutrients discharged into the watershed.

6. Watershed model update.

SWFWMD cost: \$200,000.

County cost: \$200,000.

This effort entails the expansion of work to better define the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) special flood hazard area; it is a continuation of the district’s FEMA map modernization project for Sarasota County. 



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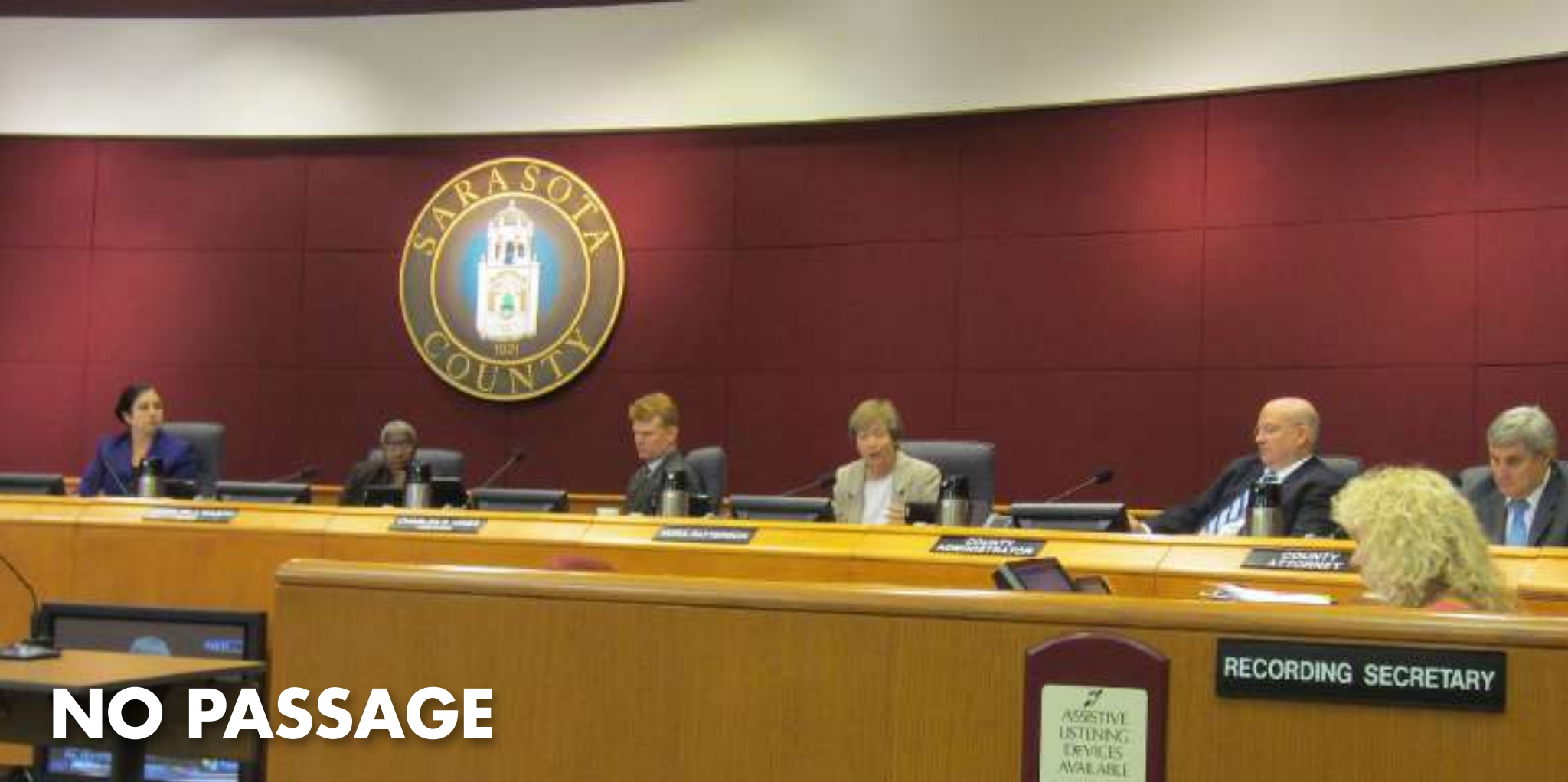
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NO PASSAGE

Discussion about a sidewalk on U.S. 41 spurred some disagreement among members of the County Commission. Photo by Roger Drouin

A SIDEWALK WAIVER REQUEST RELATED TO THE REDEVELOPMENT OF PELICAN PLAZA SPURS DISAGREEMENT ON THE COUNTY COMMISSION

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

On the same day a developer appeared before them to ask for two sidewalk waivers, the Sarasota County commissioners discussed the fact that county residents named sidewalks among their top transportation issues during the 2013 Citizens Survey.

While the commissioners conditionally approved the waivers, their motion directed staff to try to reach an agreement with the firm doing the work — Benderson Development Co. LLC — to give it additional time to build one sidewalk after it completes reconstruction of Pelican

Plaza at the corner of U.S. 41 and Vamo Road.

In June, the commissioners approved a redevelopment plan for the plaza, which sits mostly abandoned. The project, however, has yet to receive final approval.

Todd Mathes, director of development at Benderson, told the commissioners during their Sept. 24 meeting that company representatives felt the waivers were necessary for several reasons.

Along Vamo Road, landscape buffering has been built into the project's south-

“ This is almost like saying there will be a perpetual gap.

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



ern boundary, taking away some of the space necessary for an Americans with Disabilities Act-complaint sidewalk. Benderson has agreed to construct an updated and signalized crosswalk to the southern portion of Vamo Road in lieu of the sidewalk. There is an existing sidewalk on that side of the street.

However, the sidewalk along U.S. 41 has proved more problematic.

A ditch bordering the property makes constructing a sidewalk there difficult, according to Mathes.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has told Benderson representatives they have to put in a sidewalk. But the state agency will not allow the developer to lay a pipe in the ditch so crews can build a sidewalk over the ditch. FDOT says that would

create maintenance issues, Mathes told the commission.

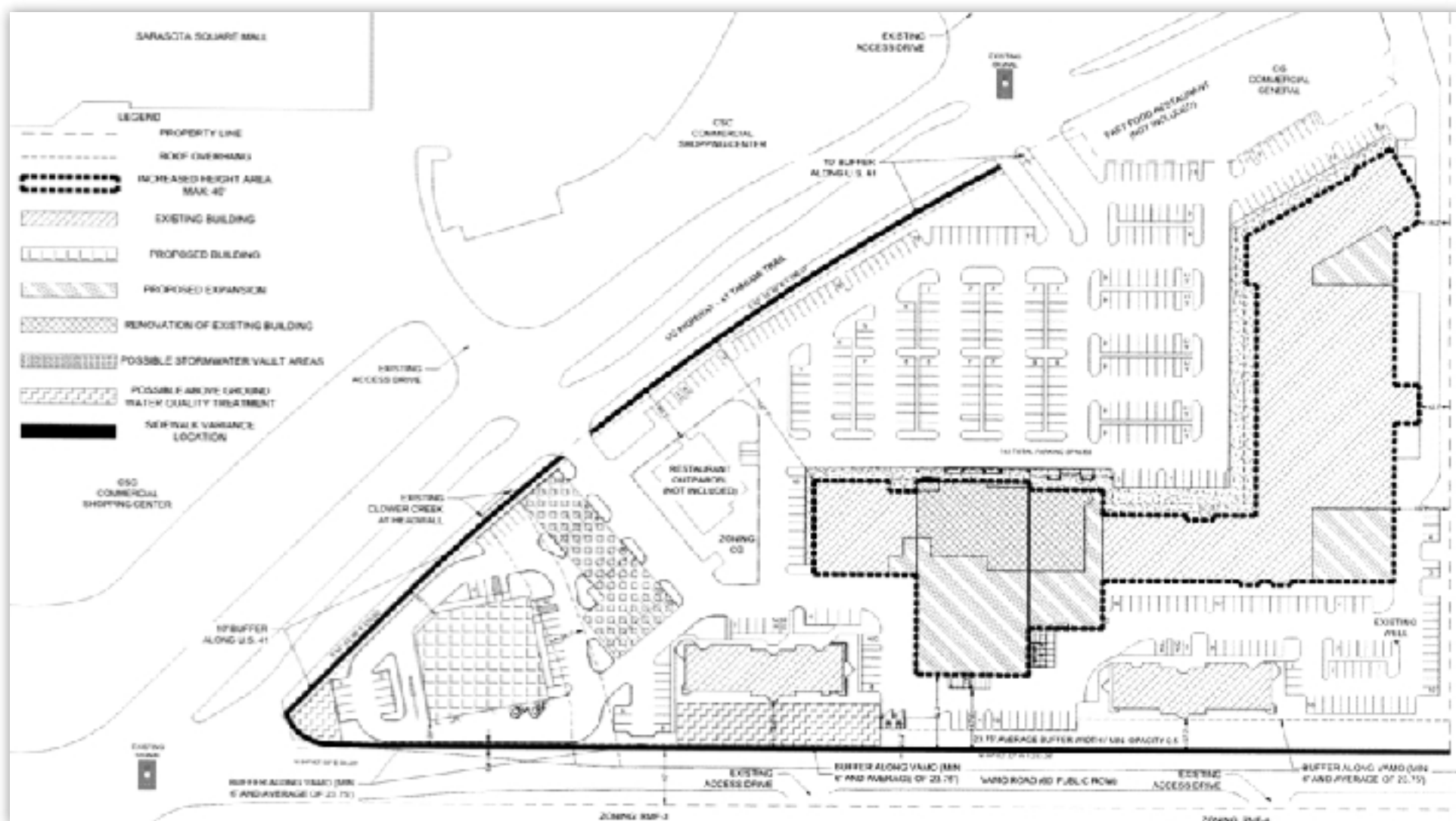
As a result, to make construction of a sidewalk possible along the eastern side of U.S. 41, Benderson would have to donate a sliver of land to FDOT. That would require Benderson to remove 25 parking spaces from the plaza plan, according to a memo from Mathes to the commissioners.

“We don’t have enough physical land,” Mathes told the board. “We are sort of in a tight spot.”

UNSOUND LOGIC

The sidewalk dilemma on U.S. 41 spurred some disagreement on the County Commission.

Mathes explained another concern: A sidewalk along U.S. 41 would direct pedestrians



A representative of Benderson Development Co. LLC appeared before the County Commission this week to seek two sidewalk waivers for its Pelican Plaza project. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

to the intersection of U.S. 41 and Vamo Road — a high-traffic corner that does not have a signalized crosswalk.

“We don’t want to install a sidewalk that [directs] people to an intersection that creates a safety issue,” Mathes said.

In an interview with *The Sarasota News Leader*, Mathes pointed out that Benderson does want to construct a sidewalk so long as the pathway leads to a safe crossing at U.S. 41 and Vamo Road.

Commissioner Nora Patterson told Mathes his reasoning was not sufficient grounds for denying residents a sidewalk in that location.

“By that logic, all sidewalks on [U.S.] 41 are problematic,” Patterson said.

Not every intersection on the highway has a signalized crosswalk, but that has not impeded the construction of sidewalks in the past, she noted. “How would [a sidewalk in front of the plaza] be different than other areas on 41 that are a half mile from a signalized crossing,” Patterson asked.

“This is a tough property to put a sidewalk, and I very much want to see redevelopment of that property. But this is almost like saying there will be a perpetual gap,” Patterson said.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta disagreed, saying the sidewalk would create a “safety issue.”

Barbetta also pointed out that if Benderson were forced to install the U.S. 41 sidewalk on its property, “it could jeopardize the redevelopment because it jeopardizes the parking.”



An aerial view shows the location of Pelican Plaza. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

He called for a motion allowing Benderson to move ahead with the redevelopment minus the sidewalk on U.S. 41. Commissioner Christine Robinson seconded the motion, voicing frustration with the state transportation department.

“I am really, really upset with FDOT,” Robinson said. “If the governor knew FDOT was holding up redevelopment, his head would pop off.”

Robinson added that the state agency was “talking out of both sides of its mouth.”

“If [FDOT] really wanted a sidewalk there, they would be helping and wouldn’t hold up permitting,” Robinson said.

Parking is limited in the plaza that once housed Linens n Things, she added. “I do not believe to redevelop this property they should have to give up parking to build a sidewalk.”

However, in a 3-2 vote, Patterson, along with Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Vice Chairman Charles Hines, shot down Barbetta’s motion.

A POSSIBLE AGREEMENT

That action cleared the way for a motion by Patterson to delay the sidewalk approval until county staff could work out an agreement with Benderson.

That agreement would require the firm to build the sidewalk sometime after the plaza redevelopment has been completed. Benderson would likely be required to obtain a bond and construct both sidewalks within five years.




A photo shows the view of U.S. 41, looking south at Club Drive. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County

Hines said he wanted to see the site redeveloped, and he concurred that a sidewalk was needed. A bond agreement could be one means of allowing the developer to put in the sidewalk within six months or a year after the completion of the plaza upgrades, he pointed out.

The commission would have to vote on the sidewalk agreement and the bond amount.

“An agreement needs to be worked out and brought back to the commission for ratification,” said County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh.

The issue of where to place the sidewalk on the edge of the property along U.S. 41 still remains a challenge. Patterson’s motion called for it to be situated on FDOT right of way. She said she planned to call FDOT District One Secretary Billy Hattaway to talk with him, to determine whether a solution could be worked out. 

TWO MORE YEARS



An aerial map shows the location of Luke Wood Park just outside downtown Sarasota. Image from Google Maps

THE SCHEDULE CALLS FOR NEW LIFT STATION 87 IN SARASOTA TO BE OPERATIONAL BY AUGUST 2015

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

As promised, the City of Sarasota and contractor McKim & Creed held a biweekly meeting on Monday, Sept. 23, to keep each other on the same page regarding the status of Lift Station 87. One important page was the project schedule.

Robert Garland, a vice president with the firm, distributed the timeline during that meeting. It indicates everything will be wrapped up by Halloween 2015. That includes demolition of the “star-crossed” Lift Station 7, where repeated spills demonstrated the need for a new facility.

The new lift station — dubbed Lift Station 87 — is located in Luke Wood Park, where U.S.

41 and U.S. 301 join just south of downtown Sarasota. It is designed to have four pumps buried deep underground to handle the usual flow of more than 2 million gallons of sewage daily.

However, in extreme weather events, such as the substantial rainfall this week, the sanitary system will handle volumes four times the daily load. Garland said one pump alone could not deal with that capacity, so at any one time, two pumps must be operational. “The design intent is, with all four pumps in both wet wells, we can cope with maximum flow.”

He hopes Lift Station 87 is operational by Aug. 20, 2015. However, the schedule says LS 87 will be “commissioned” on Feb. 27, 2015. On the latter date, it still would need to be connected to the piping, including a new 24-inch sanitary sewer line.


The original project ran into difficulties, and the contractor threw up its metaphorical hands and walked away. Lawsuits have ensued. McKim & Creed is now picking up the pieces, confirming prior information and devising a way to move forward.

Early next month, the company will begin test borings to reconfirm earlier findings. The city’s engineers reminded Garland to make sure the public in the area is informed of any traffic delays or street closures.

“There are a lot of utilities out there, so you may need to do some [water] jetting first,” said city Utility Manager Michael Crumpton.

Of special interest is the joint between the footers of the Osprey Avenue bridge over Hudson Bayou.

“They were not sure what was happening under the bridge abutments,” said Garland of the original contractor and crew. He added that there is concern about the boundary between the bridge supports and the lime rock underneath. “We need to confirm the concrete-lime rock interface,” he pointed out.

According to the schedule, construction is expected to begin in late September 2014, starting with the installation of a 36-inch gravity sewer line. After all the work is finished and tested at LS 87, the old and failing LS 7 will be demolished. 



Before



After

Before and after photos provided by the City of Sarasota show no significant effects to Luke Wood Park as a result of the Lift Station 87 work. Image courtesy of the [City of Sarasota](#)

LOTS OF POTENTIAL



The Sarasota County BMX track is located in the 17th Street Park. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE COUNTY'S TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL GIVES ITS 'BLESSING' TO A FUNDING STRATEGY FOR THE PLANNED BMX TRACK IMPROVEMENTS

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

With two other communities working on facilities that could lure some of the same BMX athletes Sarasota County hopes to attract, the county's Tourist Development Council last week unanimously recommended the County Commission use a proposed Tourist Development Tax

(TDT) funding stream to accelerate upgrades of the local BMX track.

The total cost of the improvements is estimated at \$1,744,160, Carolyn Brown, the county's Parks and Recreation Department director, told the TDC members during their Sept. 19 regular

“*We actually think [training] will be a huge economic driver.*”

Nicole Rissler
Director of Sports
Visit Sarasota County



meeting. The county already has spent about \$256,000 on upgrades since 2011, Brown explained. Funds already are available for the work, but another \$986,000 would be needed to complete the project, she added. The total expense of the work has been put at \$1,333,569.50.

If everything stays on the projected schedule, Brown pointed out, the design should be complete this winter, with construction starting in late 2014 and completed in the summer of 2015.

On a motion by TDC member Tony Swain, seconded by Ed Braunlich, the advisory board recommended the County Commission utilize a funding mechanism Commissioner Nora Patterson — who is also the TDC chairwoman — broached on Sept. 6 to her fellow commissioners. About \$800,000 will come from a percentage of TDT funds that will be used in the future to finance [new capital projects and events](#) to increase visitors' overnight stays in the county. The rest will come out of impact

Enjoying the Park



fee money designated for Parks and Recreation expenditures in North County.

PLANS AND POTENTIAL

During her presentation to the TDC, Brown pointed out the BMX track improvements will include the following:

- A steel 8-meter ramp.
- A starting gate system for both the 5-meter and 8-meter ramps.
- Reconfiguring the track.
- Improved electrical service, lighting and drainage.
- Repositioning of existing bleachers and picnic tables.
- Installation of conduit for a future sound system, control boards and timing loops.

A shade canopy might be constructed, Brown said, if sufficient funding is available.

The design work is at the 60-percent mark, she noted.

Parks and Recreation staff is hopeful, Brown said, that the improved track will be able to host a major event in the late fall of 2015.

Brown told the TDC members that county staff had just learned the previous week that the City of Rock Hill, SC, has a BMX track under construction, and talks have begun about building a track in the City of Oldsmar in Pinellas County.

When Patterson asked how close the Oldsmar community is to constructing a track, Nicole Rissler, director of sports for Visit Sarasota County — the tourism office for the county

Future Events Projection/Economic Impact

Sarasota BMX plans to submit bid requests to host the following future events:

Event		Annual Ec. Impact	Athletes	Countries	Spectators
Supercross World Cup (3 Year Bid Proposal)	International	\$1.3M	250	30	3,000
National Supercross	National	\$1.3 - \$2M	1,200 - 1,500	17	2,500
USA Cycling Championships / Elite Race	National	\$.3M	500		500
USA BMX or SSA	State	\$.87 - \$1M	800 - 950		2,500
National Olympic Training/Strider, Scholarship	Varies	TBD	250		1,000
		\$3.77 - \$4.6M	3,000 - 3,450		9,500

Resulting in an additional 13,000 visitors to Sarasota County annually

A chart shows the potential economic impact of future BMX events in the county. Image courtesy Sarasota County

— replied indications are that “Oldsmar is a lot further away from getting this done than we are.”

Sarasota County’s track, located at the 17th Street Park, opened in 1974 and is the oldest continuously used BMX facility in the nation, Brown pointed out. The Southwest District Parents Council — working as Sarasota BMX

— operates and maintains the track through a lease with the county, she added.

With the planned track improvements, the county could expect to realize an annual economic impact of between \$3.77 million and \$4.6 million, according to Brown’s presentation. Events would draw up to 3,450 athletes and about 9,500 spectators each year.

Proposed Ramp Design



A schematic shows the planned new ramp design for the BMX track. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Rissler explained that the only other BMX track in the United States is in [Chula Vista, CA](#), and it is open for training by invitation only. Riders competing for slots on the U.S. teams are the only ones allowed to use that facility, she told the TDC board.

Because Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, will host the 2016 Summer Olympics, and BMX is an Olympic sport, Rissler pointed out, Sarasota would expect to see a lot of athletes coming to the area to train in advance of those games.

“We have a climate similar to Rio,” she added.

“Are we convinced that this [project] is a direct driver for building hotel room-nights” and bringing families into Sarasota County, asked

Braunlich, who is the resort manager at the Hyatt Siesta Key Beach.

Rissler told him Visit Sarasota County staff had “pulled numbers” from convention and visitors bureaus in areas that had hosted national and international BMX events to determine projections for this community.

Moreover, she said, “We’ve been home to the [Strider World Championships](#) for the last couple of years,” and those participants stay on Lido Beach.

Rissler added that the VSC staff purposely left out of the economic development statistics any numbers related to training, because some athletes could end up rooming with oth-

Event Details

- International Supercross Event
 - 250-800 participants from 30 countries
 - 3,000 -5,000 spectators
 - Estimated Direct Economic Impact of \$1.3 – 4 million*
 - *Does not include the marketing and media value associated with the TV broadcast reach of a global audience estimated at \$4.24 million TV viewers
- National Supercross Event
 - 1,200-1,500 participants from 17 countries
 - 2,500 spectators
 - Estimated Direct Economic Impact of \$1.3 – 2 million
- State Championship Event
 - 800-1,000 athletes
 - 2,500 spectators
 - Estimated Direct Economic Impact of \$870,000 – 1 million
- Elite and Olympic Training
 - Annually it is anticipated that this facility will be utilized as an ongoing training facility for national and international riders. This will be especially true in 2015 and 2016 leading into the Rio Olympics. The economic impact of this ‘value-added’ amenity is yet to be determined.

ers who already live in the area. Still, she noted, “We actually think [training] will be a *huge* economic driver.”

TDC member Norman Schimmel said he felt that because the Chula Vista facility is open by invitation only, the potential for revenue from BMX athletes training at the Sarasota track “will be enormous.”

Patterson pointed out, “In all fairness, this is also an asset for the community.”

Rissler told the TDC members that 20 to 25 percent of the local riders who use the track on a regular basis are from South County. “That was really impressive to see [in Sarasota BMX data].”


Patterson added, “I will come back and haunt you guys if this thing ends up closed and *only*

for the most expert of riders,” eliciting chuckles from TDC members.

After asking for a recapitulation of how the funding would be derived from TDT revenue for the project — a process Patterson explained earlier with the help of Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County — Swain made his motion. “I have got confidence in what you do and bring to us,” he told Patterson.

“I vetted it personally with our county attorneys as well,” Patterson responded.

“It’s also interesting that we’re investing in ourselves,” Swain said.

Given the past history of events at the Sarasota track, Brown said, and the inclusion of BMX in the Olympics, “it’s certainly viewed that, in the future, this [sport] will just explode and become more and more popular.” 

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The Sarasota City Commission listens to residents during its final meeting this week on the 2014 fiscal year budget. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY AND COUNTY OF SARASOTA APPROVED THEIR FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGETS THIS WEEK WITH NO CHANGES IN BOARD MEMBERS' EARLIER VOTES

**By Stan Zimmerman
and Rachel Brown Hackney**
Staff Editors

The budget votes did not vary at either the Sarasota City Commission or County Commission dais this week.

On Sept. 24, the City Commission approved its 2014 fiscal year spending plan on a 3-2 vote, with Commissioner Paul Caragiulo and Mayor Shannon Snyder in the minority. They have been voting against the budget since July, when the preliminary millage rate was set.

Despite a 6.8-percent increase in that mill-

age rate, the city still needed to pull \$1.1 million from its reserves to balance the budget. Neither Caragiulo nor Snyder offered any suggestions on where the budget could be cut further or how to reduce the reliance on reserves.

“*What we've realized is we've increased services to the point they cost more than we're taking in.*”

Charles Hines
Vice Chairman
County Commission

They were challenged to speak up by Commissioner Susan Chapman, who asked them what they would pare from the budget to stop the millage in-

crease. Neither apparently had anticipated the question.

Caragiulo said, "There's certainly money that could be saved." Snyder replied, "I don't need to get into that, because that is not what I was prepared for."

The millage increase on a \$200,000 home will cost an additional \$50. The total budget is \$191 million. Property tax revenue accounts for less than half that sum.

THE COUNTY SIDE

During the County Commission's second required public hearing on the budget, held Sept. 23 in Venice, no one came forward to speak.

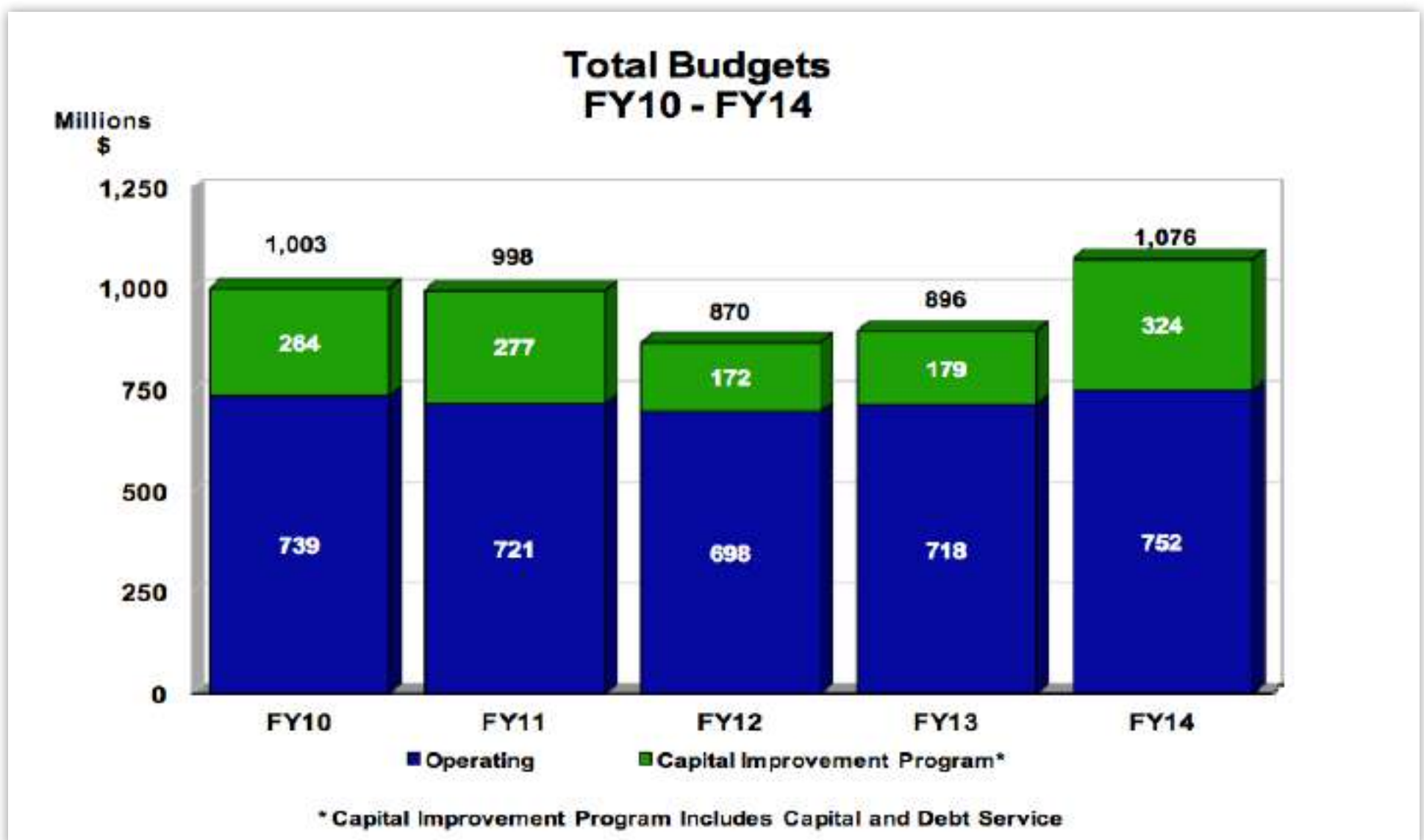
With Commissioner Christine Robinson again in the minority, the board voted 4-1 to approve

its FY 2014 spending plan. She has protested the continued reliance on the county's economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the budget.

The County Commission kept its millage rate at the 2012 level of 3.3912, though that will mean a slight increase in tax bills for some homeowners, as property values went up 4.2 percent across the county this year. The board's resolution regarding the final millage rates also notes the total is a 3.3 percent increase over the rolled-back rate of 3.2828.

The FY 2014 budget is \$1,077,919,038, about 20 percent higher than the 2013 spending plan when it was adopted.

Just before the board vote, Robinson told the audience she wanted to make it clear the com-



A chart compares total county budgets for the fiscal years 2010 through 2014. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

missioners had engaged in “hours and hours and hours of discussion” to reach that point. The board held its first FY 2014 budget workshop in February.


A day later, during the Commission Reports part of the board’s regular meeting in Sarasota, Vice Chairman Charles Hines said, “I really appreciate the debate that occurred and what’s been brought out through those public [budget] meetings and workshops.”

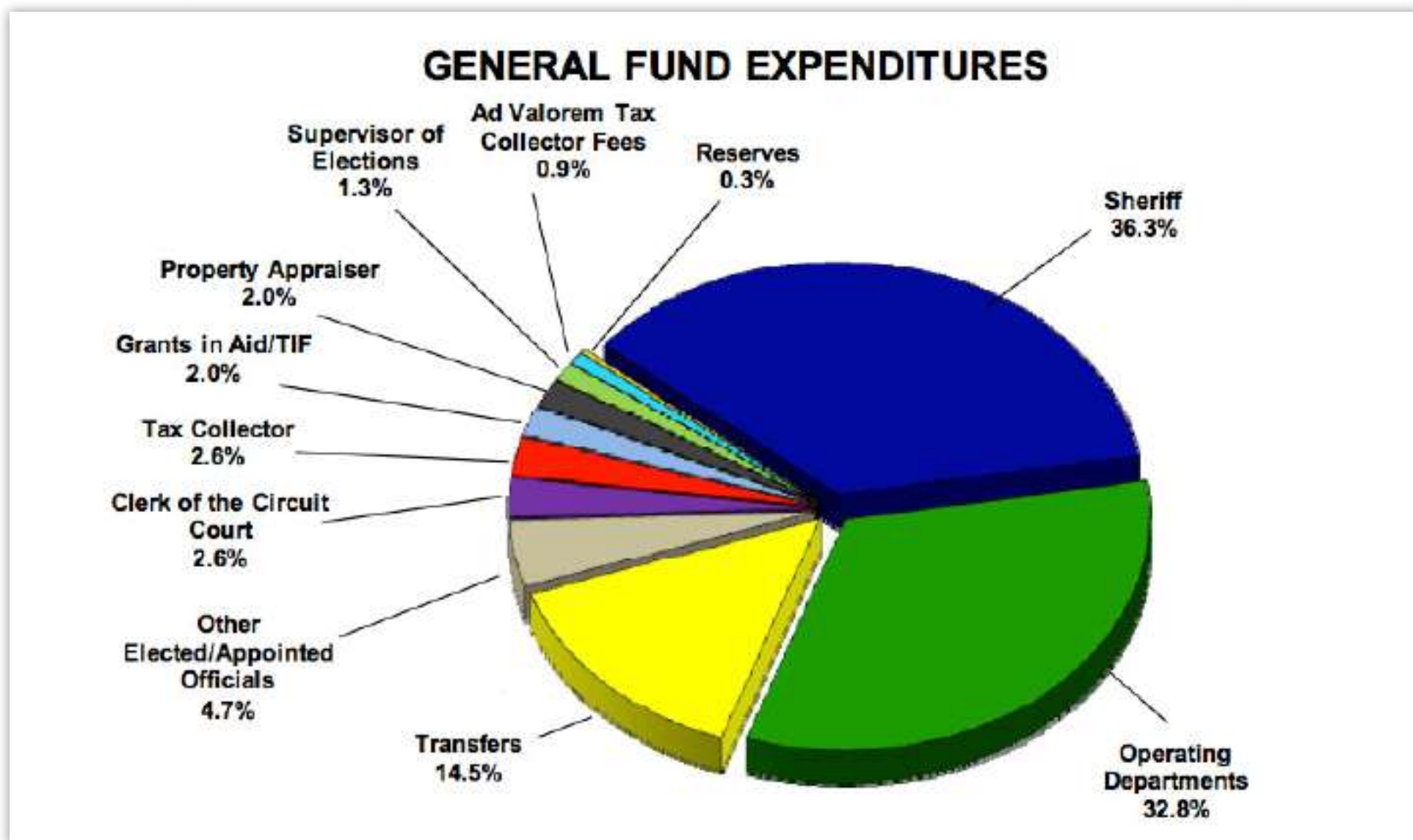
He pointed to “how important it is to look at how we’re spending money and the policies that we set,” and he thanked Robinson for “raising some flags and constantly reminding us we’ve got to really look at this hard.”

Referring to comments in the county’s 2013 Citizens Survey, Hines noted that the majority

of respondents did not want to see their taxes go up. “But what we’ve realized,” Hines said, “is we’ve increased services to the point they cost more than we’re taking in.”

Steve Botelho, the county’s chief financial planning officer, has estimated that \$11 million will have to be used from the economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the FY 2013 budget.

During the board’s last budget workshop, on Sept. 6, Botelho provided a chart showing the worst-case estimate for the amount needed from that reserve fund to balance the FY 2014 budget: \$29,181,951. That figure could be lowered by another increase in property values, reduced expenses and growth in other sources of revenue, he pointed out. 



A pie chart shows general fund expenditures projected for Sarasota County in the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy of Sarasota County



Central-Cocoanut neighborkids leading the first annual celebration of the 1955 Sarasota Beach Caravan in 2010. Contributed photo

NEIGHBORKIDS TO LEAD FOURTH CELEBRATION OF BEACH CARAVAN

On Sept. 28, for the fourth consecutive year, children who live on Central and Cocoanut avenues in Sarasota and their neighbors in the greater Newtown community will celebrate the 1955 Beach Caravan, “a powerful example of the forward-thinking leadership of Newtown neighbors,” a news release says.

All members of the broader Sarasota community are invited to join them on Saturday, Sept. 28, beginning at 3 p.m., the release adds. The “neighborkids” will lead their own caravan, host a beach picnic and share the story of the 1955 Beach Caravan, the release continues. This is “a way of celebrating and honoring

the community’s significant civil rights history and ... a way of inspiring forward-thinking leadership today,” the release adds.

“Over half a century ago, Newtown neighbors made civil rights history when they introduced and championed the idea of fully integrated beaches in Sarasota County and organized weekly car trips to Lido Beach as a way of demonstrating that it was high time for all beaches in Sarasota County to be open to all people,” the release points out. This happened before Rosa Parks’ actions led to the Montgomery, AL, bus boycott, and before many people in the United States had heard of the

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the release continues. "It established the community of Newtown in Sarasota as one of the earliest hot spots of civil rights activism, both in the state of Florida and in the broader region of the American South."

The 2013 Neighborkids caravan will begin at the corner of 20th Street and Central Avenue in Sarasota and travel to Lido Beach at 400 Ben Franklin Drive. Neighborkids will lead,

the release notes; anyone interested in joining the caravan is welcome to follow them. Hotdogs and hamburgers will be served at the beach.

Youngsters need to bring at least one parent or another adult with them, the release adds. "It does not cost money to participate, but plan to bring stories to share about people in Newtown and the broader Sarasota community who are making a difference," the release concludes.

SCHOOL GROUP TO HOLD CAR WASH AS ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVE

McIntosh Middle School students in a group known as United Against Bullying have organized a car wash to raise funds and awareness of the problem of bullying, the Sarasota County School District has announced.

The event will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 28, at the T&T Shell Station, 6001 Palmer Blvd., Sarasota, at the intersection with Packinghouse Road. A donation of \$10 is suggested but not required, a news release says.

United Against Bullying seeks to prevent and intervene in bullying and harassment situations, the release points out. "The McIntosh Parent-Teacher Organization supports the group's efforts," the release says.

"This program educates and teaches students to be leaders against bullying and works with parents on recognizing and talking with their children about the issue," said McIntosh PTO President Ann Weidler in the release.

Funds raised by the car wash will help cover the expenses of providing students with McIntosh United Against Bullying T-shirts

and materials for use during October, which is National Bullying Prevention Month, and throughout the school year, the release continues. The group is planning other activities throughout the year, in classrooms, in the cafeteria and online, the release adds.

"We focus on education regarding the misbehaviors that constitute bullying and how all can deal with them more effectively," said McIntosh Behavior Specialist Rich Clay in the release. "We want to reach students who have bullied others, students who have been bullied and bystanders."

Clay added in the release that research indicates bullying and harassment misbehaviors peak during the middle school years and affect most students one way or another.

"The data shows that these misbehaviors have a negative influence on student attendance and achievement," he noted. "Efforts to build a stronger sense of engagement in school help counter this negative influence."

McIntosh Middle School is located at 701 S. McIntosh Road in Sarasota.

COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR RECEIVES STATE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Barbara Ford-Coates, tax collector for Sarasota County, has earned a special state designation for excellence in financial operations, her office has announced.

“The Legacy Award is one of the highest achievements the Florida Tax Collector’s Association (FTCA) can award a local tax collector,” said FTCA President Diane Nelson of Pinellas County in a news release. “The judging process was arduous ... (Ford-Coates) ... represents the very top echelon of elected officials.”

Last year, Ford-Coates earned the Excellence in Financial Operations Award after demonstrating proficiency in four areas: innovation and

automation; preparation of the annual audit report; customer focus; and budgeting.

“For the 2013 Legacy Award, Ford-Coates demonstrated that the office had further enhanced its financial operations,” the release points out. This year, a five-person panel comprising government financial executives from throughout Florida reviewed the processes as related to those same four areas of competency, the release notes.

“The panelists’ review of her office went far and above reviewing her perfect audit report,” added Nelson in the release. “The review included methods utilized by Honorable Ford-Coates to deliver service to the people she serves and consideration of the technological innovations she has developed and put into place.”

Florida tax collectors gather and distribute more than \$27 billion in local public funds each year, the release continues.



Sarasota County Tax Collector Barbara Ford-Coates is one of only 12 tax collectors in the state to earn a special designation this year for excellence in financial operations. Contributed photo

ANNUAL FALL COLLEGE NIGHT SET FOR OCT. 1 AT ROBARTS ARENA

Local high school students and parents may meet representatives from more than 100 colleges and universities from across the U.S. when Sarasota County Schools hosts the 2013 Fall College Night, the school district has announced.

The event will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 1, at Robarts Sports Arena in Sarasota. Admission is free.

Among the schools scheduled to send representatives are post-secondary institutions in the State University System of Florida as well as public and private colleges and universities from around the nation, a news release notes.

This year, a representative of the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office will be at the event so students and other attendees can register to vote. According to the Supervi-

sor of Elections Office website, SarasotaVotes.com, a person who is otherwise qualified may preregister on or after his or her 16th birthday and may vote in any election on or after his or her 18th birthday.

Robarts Sports Arena is located at 3000 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota. More information about the 2012 Fall College Night is available by visiting www.SarasotaCountySchools.net or calling the Student Services Department of Sarasota County Schools at 927-4036.

Among the universities that will be represented at the event will be the Berklee College of Music, Brown University, The Citadel, Cornell, Dartmouth, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Florida A&M University, Harvard, Indiana University, Johnson and Wales University, Mercer University, Salem College and Smith College.



Harvard University will be among the institutions of higher learning represented at Fall College Night on Oct. 1 in Robarts Arena in Sarasota. Photo via Wikimedia Commons

PHILLIPPI FARMHOUSE MARKET TO REOPEN OCT. 2 FOR FIFTH SEASON

The Phillippi Farmhouse Market, located at 5500 S. Tamiami Trail, will reopen Wednesday, Oct. 2, at 9 a.m. for its fifth season, Sarasota County has announced.

The market is a partnership between Sarasota County Parks and Recreation and Sarasota County Extension, along with Friends of Sarasota County Parks, a news release notes. It is the county's only mid-week farmers market, open Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The market offers local plants and produce, including Department of Agriculture-certified organics.

The market's grand reopening will feature 45 vendors, music by Ted Stevens and his band, raffles, free treats from Sift Bakehouse and

a puppet story time for children at 9:30 a.m., presented by the Waldorf School, the release continues.

"In addition to the talented local artisans selling their unique handicrafts, there will also be specialty vendors," said Priscilla Brown, Parks and Recreation Department specialist, in the release. "Market-goers can enjoy delicious prepared foods picnic-style on site or take [them] home for quick and easy meals," she added.

Additionally, "the Phillippi Estate Park and the Farmhouse Market are dog-friendly for well-behaved canines on leashes," Brown pointed out.



The Phillippi Farmhouse Market offers all sorts of local foods — from fruits and vegetables to honey and sweets. Images courtesy of Sarasota County

The market has free parking and is handicapped-accessible.

“Be sure to stop by the market’s welcome tent for information on what’s happening in the county and community. You can also meet the Extension Master Gardeners, who will be at the tent to answer gardening questions,” said Brown.

Further, at noon in the historic Edson Keith Mansion on the Phillippi Estate Park grounds, the county’s Extension staff will host an hour-long class on various gardening topics.

At 10 a.m. every Wednesday, a free, guided tour of the mansion lasts approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

For more information, call 861-5000 or visit www.farmhousemarket.org.



‘AIR POTATO ROUND-UP’ PLANNED FOR OCT. 19

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) is inviting volunteers to an “Air Potato Round-Up” on Oct. 19 at North Water Tower Park in Sarasota.

Air potato is an invasive vine that covers and shades beneficial native plants, a news release notes. “The vine grows a large tuber that looks like a hanging potato,” the release adds. “There will be a contest with prizes for the smallest, biggest, weirdest-looking and most air potatoes collected!”

The event will begin at 9 a.m. and end at noon. Lunch will be provided for all volunteers after the removal process has been completed, the release continues.

North Water Tower Park is a community facility “with one of the most popular disc golf

courses in this part of Florida,” the release notes. It is located at 4700 Rilma Ave.

This event is suitable for all ages, the release adds.

Participants *must* wear closed-toed shoes — “(old tennis shoes work great)” — and preferably long-sleeved shirts and pants, the release points out. Additionally, SBEP representatives advise volunteers to wear hats, sunscreen, clothes that can get dirty and work gloves. “Also, please bring a reusable water bottle if you have one to reduce our plastic pollution,” the release notes, and carpool to the event if possible.

An RSVP is required: [Click here to register](#).

Anyone with questions may contact info@sarasotabay.org, call 955-8085 or email Karen@aroundbend.com.



COUNTY ELECTIONS OFFICE TO HOST PROJECT INTEGRITY TEAM

On Oct. 8, Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent will host the fourth in a series of roundtable discussions between Florida Secretary of State Ken Detzner and local supervisors of elections to discuss statutory voter list maintenance programs, Dent has announced.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 8, in the 10th floor conference room of the Sarasota County Terrace Building, located at 101 S. Washington Blvd. in downtown Sarasota.

Voter list maintenance programs are conducted by supervisors of elections on a regular basis to protect the integrity of the electoral process by ensuring that voter registration records in the statewide database are accurate and up-to-date, a news release notes.

Members of the public who would like to attend the session are requested to RSVP to 861-8610. Because of limited space, public seating will be on a first-come, first-served basis, the release adds.

REGISTRATION OPEN FOR NEXT TEEN DRIVER CHALLENGE

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is accepting registrations for the next Teen Driver Challenge, a defensive driving and vehicle control program designed for young drivers, the office has announced.

The free program includes classroom instruction and training behind the wheel, a news release notes. "The course is designed to provide teen drivers with the knowledge and understanding of the forces created by an automobile and the effects of the forces on the human body," the release points out.

There are two sessions of the Teen Driver Challenge to choose from: Oct. 25-26 or Nov. 1-2. Classroom instruction will be held both Fridays from 5 to 9 p.m. (at The Landings in October or Laurel Nokomis School in Novem-

ber). Hands-on training will be held both Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the driving range, 6664 W. Price Blvd., North Port (next to North Port High School).

For more information, visit www.SarasotaSheriff.org; under Public Interest, click Youth Programs and then choose Teen Driver Challenge. Registration forms may be downloaded from that part of the website.

A new video explains more about the program and its features; it includes local youth who recently took the Teen Driver Challenge. The video is on the website and the agency's [YouTube channel](#), the release says.

Contact Youth Services at 927-4190 with any additional questions.

MOTORCYCLE ROAD SAFETY AND AWARENESS RIDE PLANNED

The largest Sarasota/Manatee counties motorcycle road safety and awareness ride — and a free concert — will be held on Sunday, Oct. 6, organizers have announced.

The ride will begin at 1 p.m. at Peggy's Corral (4511 U.S. 41, Palmetto) and end at Sharky's on the Pier (1600 Harbor Drive S., Venice).

The event is anticipated to draw more than 500 motorcycles, organizers say in a news re-


lease. Participation is free. The West Coast Chapter of [ABATE of Florida Inc.](#), a not-for-profit organization and the largest motorcycle rights group in the state, has planned the ride. The theme is "Look Twice For Motorcycles," with the goal of reducing accidents, the news release adds.

The event will conclude with a concert at 3 p.m. at Sharky's, featuring One Night Rodeo.

CORRECTIONS

A Sept. 13 article, *A new and ugly trick*, incorrectly reported that foreclosure law expert April Charney is retired. Charney says she is not presently taking individual cases, although she does consulting work with lawyers who do. "I may put out my shingle locally in the future to offer my services directly to individual consumers," she adds.

A Sept. 20 article, *Confidence and contention*, referenced one speaker at the Sept. 18

Coastal Advisory Committee meeting whose name was not given, although the *News Leader* identified her as a consultant with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The *News Leader* was unable to reach Corps officials to verify the spelling of the speaker's name prior to deadline. Her name is Kelly Legault, and she is not a consultant but a senior coastal engineer with the federal agency. 

CRIME BLOTTER



A map shows the location of Foremere Place near Wilkinson and Swift roads in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps



A burglary suspect is shown entering a car on Foremere Place. Contributed photo

PUBLIC'S HELP SOUGHT IN IDENTIFYING SUSPECT

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is asking the public for help in identifying a suspect and vehicle connected to residential burglaries near Swift and Wilkinson roads in Sarasota.

On Sunday, Sept. 22, a teen reported hearing someone knock on the door of his Murdock Avenue home, but he did not answer, a news release says. Moments later, a man broke in through a sliding door but fled when he saw the boy inside. Less than half a mile away on Foremere Place, "the same subject attempted another burglary but was scared off by a neighbor," the release adds.

The accompanying photo shows the suspect getting into a car, which witnesses say was a small white or silver four-door sedan driven by a woman.

Anyone with information about the incidents, the suspects or the vehicle is asked to call Criminal Investigations at 861-4900 or Crime Stoppers at 366-TIPS (8477) or going online at www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com.

"Burglars often knock on doors to determine if someone is home before going to the back of the house to make entry," the news release points out. "If you are not expecting anyone, announce that you are [home] but say you can't come to the door. If they are up to no good your presence will usually cause them to leave," the release adds. If their visit seems suspicious, the release continues, contact the Sheriff's Office non-emergency number, 316-1201, with as much information as possible so law enforcement officers "can try to make contact and find out why [the persons] are in the area."

WOMAN ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH MULTIPLE BURGLARIES

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a woman in connection with multiple residential burglaries "to fuel what she says is an addiction to Roxicodone," the office has announced.

Joan Williams (aka Joan Baker), 29, of 4006 Maverick Ave., Sarasota, was identified by detectives as a possible suspect in a burglary in the Bent Tree area last week because she and her vehicle matched witness descriptions of the suspect, a news release says.

In a Sept. 18 incident, the victim, who lives on Gator Creek Boulevard — located near Bee Ridge Road Extension and State Road 72 — told deputies she was awakened by the sound of glass breaking, so she ran downstairs, the report notes. The victim added that she heard noises coming from the bathroom door in the pool area. When the victim approached that location, she spotted a woman later identified as Williams, the report notes. The victim said the woman had a tool in her hand and was attempting to open the bathroom door, according to the report. The victim added that the suspect was wearing a small brown fanny pack round her waist; she apparently was keeping tools in that. When the woman spotted the victim, the report continues, the woman ran off.

Detectives conducting surveillance on Williams on Monday, Sept. 23, watched her knock on the door of a house on Dryden Road, according to the report. When the resident answered, Williams said she was looking for her lost dog and left. Williams then went to Southwell Way, where deputies and detectives set up a perimeter, the report continues.



Joan Williams/Contributed photo

She was taken into custody when she exited the rear of a home, wearing white gloves and carrying coins, jewelry and cash in a clear baggie, the report says. Williams also had a brown fanny pack around her waist at that time, the report adds.

The victim in that case identified the jewelry in Williams' possession as having been removed from the residence, the report continues. The approximate value of the jewelry was \$20,000, the report notes.

"During questioning, Williams admitted committing burglaries because she is addicted to Roxicodone," the release adds. The investigation is continuing.

Williams is charged with two counts of Burglary of an Occupied Dwelling, three counts of Possession of Burglary Tools and one count of Attempted Burglary.

PROLIFIC OFFENDER ARRESTED FOR DEALING IN STOLEN PROPERTY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a prolific offender for allegedly dealing in stolen property and for fraud after he reportedly sold jewelry stolen in a Venice burglary.

On Sept. 16, someone broke into a home on Cypress Road in Venice and stole several pieces of jewelry, a news release says.

The burglar used a pipe to break a bedroom window and gain entry to the house, according to the report.

During the investigation, detectives learned Allen Edwards, 36, whose last known address was 116 N. Verona St., Nokomis, had pawned 11 pieces of jewelry at three different locations within hours of the burglary and received \$774, the release adds. The next day, Edwards pawned four more items at another pawnshop for \$125, the report says. The victim confirmed that all but one of the jewelry items were hers.

Edwards was charged with four counts of Dealing in Stolen Property and four counts of fraud for giving False Ownership Information to a Pawn Dealer. He is being held on \$60,000



Allen Edwards/Contributed photo

bond for those charges, but no bond for an Escape charge that was added after he tried to run from the South County office as detectives prepared to take him to jail, the news release notes.

Edwards has 15 prior arrests, including five for occupied residential burglaries and several for battery and grand theft, the release points out.

POLICE SEARCHING FOR SUSPECT IN ARMED ROBBERY

The Sarasota Police Department is seeking a male suspect in an armed robbery that occurred about 1 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 25, at the Marriott Residence Inn at 1040 University Parkway, Sarasota, the department has reported.

When officers arrived at the scene, the female clerk told them she was doing her nightly paperwork in the sitting area of the hotel when the suspect walked in and displayed what

appeared to be a semi-automatic handgun, the report says. The suspect then asked the clerk to give him money as he pointed the gun at her.

The clerk refused and as the suspect came closer, she attempted to grab the gun, the report adds. The suspect pulled the gun back and struck the clerk on the left side of her head, resulting in a laceration and making her fall to the ground, the report continues.

She told the officers she feared the suspect would kill her, so she went with him to the front desk. The clerk then unlocked the safe and gave the suspect an undisclosed amount of money, according to the report.

The suspect ordered the clerk to lie facedown on the ground and to stay there, the report says.

The suspect is described as a Hispanic male in his 20s, 5 feet 8 inches tall to 5 feet 10 inches

tall with a slender build. He was wearing a black baseball-type hat with a white letter on it, a gray bandana over his face, a black long-sleeved shirt with possibly a gray design or just a gray undershirt beneath it, black shorts and shoes.

Anyone with information about the suspect is encouraged to call the Sarasota Police Department at 316-1199, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or going online at www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE'S OPERATION MAIN PAIN NETS 61 ARRESTS

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested 61 people "in a lengthy investigation into a widespread prescription fraud ring involving local residents," the office announced on Sept. 19.

In July 2011, a person came into a Sarasota County pharmacy to present a fraudulent Oxycodone prescription from a physician at a Miami pain management clinic, a news release says. When subsequent scripts were presented, they were identified as suspicious and declined, the release points out.

"The suspects regrouped and on July 18, 2011, just days after the new state law went into effect requiring prescriptions be written on counterfeit-proof paper, the group ordered 400 fraudulent prescriptions on counterfeit-proof paper," listing the Miami doctor's name, DEA number and the Sarasota address of 1620 Main St., the release continues. On July 25, 2011, the scripts were delivered to that location, which is a valid address but not the location of a pain management clinic, the release notes.

Investigators with the Pharmaceutical Diversion Unit were able to determine the crime


ring had several recruiters who asked runners to enter the pharmacies multiple times a day with identical prescriptions, for which efforts the runners were paid in cash, the release says. The recruiters chose two primary pharmacies, Olson Liggett Rexall Drug in Sarasota and Barclay Pharmacy in Venice.

"The unexpected arrest of one recruiter caused the ring to disband," the release adds. The fraud script ringleader is Cuban, and the ring primarily involved people of Cuban descent from Sarasota County who were paid for the use of their personal information on the prescriptions, the release points out. "Most defendants knew each other and were recruited by word of mouth, particularly if they were in need of cash," it says.

The investigation eventually revealed that 220 fraudulent prescriptions were written for 19,980 Oxycodone pills, which were diverted from legitimate medical use, as well as for Xanax and ibuprofen, the release adds. The recruiters collected the pills from the runners and turned them over to the ringleader, who lived in Sarasota at the time. "The street value

of this quantity of Oxycodone pills would have been about \$300,000," the release notes.

As of Sept. 19, the ringleader, Pedro Alcantara, 35, was being held in Miami, where he was wanted on unrelated charges, the release says. He is charged with Conspiracy to Traffic in Oxycodone. Another 60 people were arrested over the past several months and as recently as last week in Sarasota and Manatee counties. One woman was tracked to Tampa International Airport, where she tried to board a flight to Cuba, the release adds.

The investigation is ongoing. Additional warrants have been signed, with most suspects facing multiple counts of Obtaining Oxycodone by Fraud and Trafficking charges. 



Pedro Alcantara/Contributed photo



OPERATION MAIN PAIN



A poster shows all the people arrested during Operation Main Pain. Image courtesy of the Sheriff's Office

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OPINION



THREE SARASOTA COMMISSIONERS STAND THEIR GROUND

EDITORIAL

Earlier this year, the Sarasota City Commission heard an appeal of a decision made by the city's Planning Board, which had approved the location of a Walmart Supercenter in the derelict Ringling Shopping Center, an approval granted after the careful analysis and assent of the city's planning staff.

In a 3-2 decision, the City Commission reversed the Planning Board and killed the Walmart project. The commissioners delivered an undeserved rebuke to their planning staff members, who were only following earlier commission urgings to be more "business friendly." Their Planning Board, whose members desire at least a little respect as compensation for their service, was belittled. And the business community got a wake-up call: The City Commission figuratively will stab you in the back.

Yet the encomium that followed the City Commission's reversal of the Walmart approval was so pervasive that one might have thought the Israelites had just been freed from Pharaoh's bondage.

No petitions were started for a recall of commissioners. No Republican stalwarts intoned from on high that the City Commission had committed a heresy of epic proportions. No editorialists droned on about the lack of "consensus."

But that is because it was the City of Sarasota versus Walmart, not the City of Sarasota versus the National Rifle Association.

So, on Sept. 3, the city commissioners had another 3-2 vote. At the behest of Vice Mayor Willie Shaw, they added to their legislative priorities for the coming year a revisiting of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law. Commis-

OPINION

sioners Suzanne Atwell and Susan Chapman voted with Shaw to add the request, while Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo opposed it.

A tsunami of remonstrance washed over the city in the days that followed. Several petition campaigns were begun, either to seek the recall of the three offending commissioners or to urge them to renounce their apostasy.

Republican Party leaders were united in their condemnation of the proposal. And the disdain of the members of the county's legislative delegation upon receiving the city's recommendations left little doubt as to their own dismay at the city's meddling.

As we observed last December following the Sandy Hook massacre of schoolchildren and again in July following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, the National Rifle Association seems to have a stranglehold not only on our Congress and many state legislatures in this country, but also on the collective sanity of the people of our nation. The NRA apparently has tapped into the atavistic zeitgeist of the country, exalting weapons as holy relics. It has made the Second Amendment as sacred as the Ten Commandments or the Apostle's Creed.

Shaw only pointed out what many reasonable people have been saying in Florida: As writ-

ten, the Stand Your Ground law allows entirely too much latitude in the application of deadly force, making a claim of self-defense virtually impossible for prosecutors to disprove.

Only a minor revision, removing immunity if the threatened person became an aggressor, could put the burden back on those threatened individuals to retreat if that was an option. For example, Zimmerman had been ordered by police not to get out of his vehicle or to follow Martin. He ignored them and did so anyway, leading to the fatal confrontation with Martin. Had the law been different in only

one small way, Zimmerman likely would have been convicted of murdering Martin.

What three courageous commissioners for the City of Sarasota have suggested is that the law can be improved to provide more protection for all people, while retaining the spirit of the present statute. And for

that suggestion they have been pilloried in the court of public opinion.

They were not suggesting an outright repeal of the law, although a clerical error at the meeting created that impression. They were not suggesting special requirements for the purchase, ownership or carrying of a firearm. They simply were being good stewards of their city's welfare, seeking to improve a law that, in its current form, could increase street violence rather than diminish it.



Vice Mayor Willie Shaw only pointed out what many reasonable people have been saying in Florida: As written, the Stand Your Ground law allows entirely too much latitude in the application of deadly force, making a claim of self-defense virtually impossible for prosecutors to disprove.




OPINION

Certainly, there was not a consensus on the issue. But if consensus were a prerequisite, we might still be subjects of the British crown, given that a substantial number of Colonists were at the least ambivalent about independence from Great Britain.

Democratic government is not always unanimous. In fact, it seldom is. It is guided by the maxim, "Majority rules; minority rights." Often simple majorities are the deciding factor in the creation of ordinances and laws, and when such a majority takes action to protect

the interests of a minority appalled — and, yes, threatened — by a law as capricious as *Stand Your Ground*, then democracy is glorified.

A majority of the city commissioners requested their legislative delegation consider their concerns about a law that is poorly written and extremely controversial, out of an abundance of concern for the constituents who elected them. They should be praised for their thoughtful leadership, not condemned. And those nattering endlessly about "meddling" or "consensus" should learn from their example. 

THE MODERN PHENOMENON OF 'E-BUDS'



By Harriet Cuthbert
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

No, I am not talking about ear buds, those little white discs people stick in their ears so they can listen to the music on their iPods and try to look cool — though they really look strange to me. (I still prefer to hear music projected to my ears from afar, and nice and loud, too.)

I am actually talking about a phenomenon I am calling "E-Buds," which is the act of emailing a total stranger for varying reasons and having him/her respond in an email to me, which then leads to a follow-up email and establishes a casual informal relationship between us. Ten minutes ago (more or less), all I knew was this person's name and the material in the column he/she wrote that inspired me to want to delve further into that person's

thinking and express my own opinion about it. Ten minutes ago, this person was a total stranger to me, and now we are E-Buds.

I am interested in a variety of subjects, which often leads to my reading about them in various publications. These topics include sports, music, literature and, occasionally, local politics. When the writers list their email addresses, they are basically inviting me to have a chat or a debate or offer a rebuttal. I am no longer amazed or surprised when I get responses from these busy writers, but I am still very flattered that they acknowledge me and actually respond to the subjects I write them about that concern me. And now, I am on a first-name basis with them and we can enjoy casual cyber, totally G-rated relationships.

OPINION

Remember the olden days, when people wrote letters to columnists and addressed their subjects as “Mr.” or “Miss”? That kind of correspondence hardly ever got a response, and we did not really expect one. But nowadays,

emailing and other forms of chatting make it so easy for us to have E-Buds; the sky is the limit.

I wonder what Matt Damon’s email is. ... I just know we could be great E-Buds. 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TERRORISTS DISTORT RELIGION’S TEACHINGS

To the Editor:

Mohammed Ali was asked what he thought about the Boston Marathon bomber sharing his faith. He replied, “What do you think about Hitler sharing your faith?”

Terrorists claim to be of one religion or another while, in fact, distorting their religious teachings.

The best information about Islam can be found at the website of

Interfaithalliance.org/Americanmuslimfaq. It’s one place to learn.

Sitting down with your Muslim neighbor or visiting a mosque would be other examples.

Charity Navigator, which tracks all registered charities, recently recognized Helping Hands for Relief and Development, a Muslim charity, as one of the top charities in the U.S.

Every religion throughout the world has a similar form of the Golden Rule. The Jewish ver-

sion is “that which you would not have done to you, do not do to others.”

I’d like to add one other thought to the Golden Rule — that which you would not have done to your *children*, do not do to other children.

Arlene J. Pearlman
Sarasota

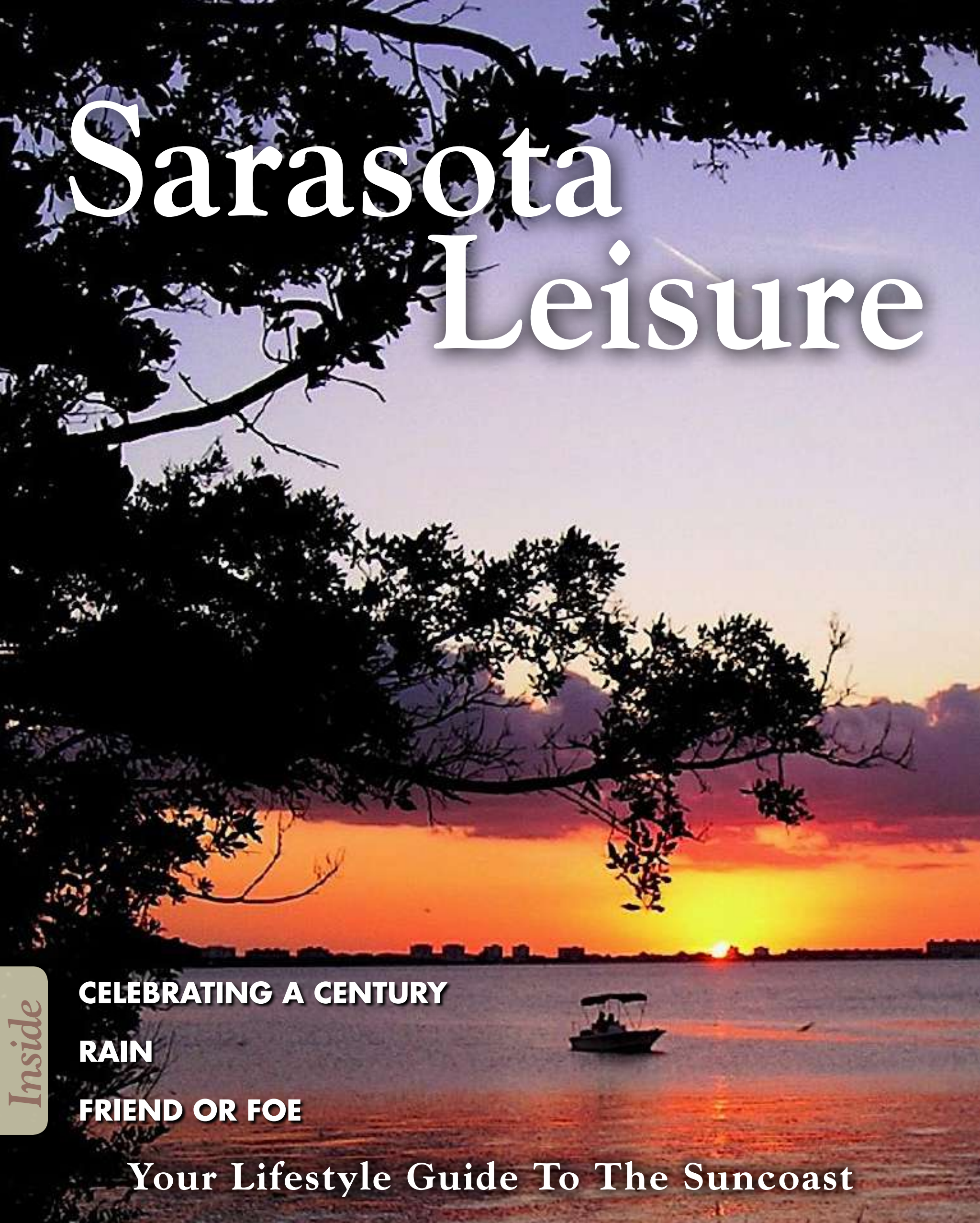
Editor’s note: The writer is the founder of the Women’s Interfaith Network of Sarasota/Bradenton (WIN).



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sarasota News Leader welcomes letters to the editor from its readers. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length, and in-

clude the name, street address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be emailed to Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com, with “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line. Letters actually printed will be selected based on space available, subject matter and other factors. We reserve the right to edit any letters submitted for length, grammar, spelling, etc. All letters submitted become the property of *The Sarasota News Leader*.



Sarasota Leisure

Inside

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RAIN

FRIEND OR FOE

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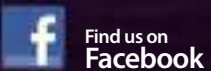


PHOTO BY FRANKATURA





CELEBRATING A CENTURY

Football has always been a part of the Sarasota High School tradition. Here is a scrimmage outside the first high school on Main Street. Photo courtesy of the Sarasota County School Board

SARASOTA HIGH SCHOOL HAS CALLED A NUMBER OF BUILDINGS HOME OVER THE YEARS, BUT THE MIGHTY SAILOR SPIRIT ROARS ON

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sarasota was not yet an official city when Sarasota High School opened on Sept. 15, 1913. “The new building, which has been completed, will open its doors Monday to the 200 and more pupils from primary through the eleventh grades,” reported the weekly *Sarasota Times* in its Sept. 11, 1913, edition.

The brick building that stood downtown is long gone. The classic Sarasota High School building of “Collegiate Gothic” design was built a decade after the original one, when the growth of students totally overwhelmed that first Sarasota High.

In fact, the initial student body was already bigger than the capacity the school was designed to handle. A week after students entered the doors, the newspaper reported an “enrollment of 253 (on) the first day” in a sub-headline.

The newspaper’s enrollment figures are disputed by Karl Grismer in his book *The Story of Sarasota*. “When the new building was opened for classes on Monday, Sept. 15, 1913, more than 350 students were enrolled. To be exact, 200 girls and 153 boys,” Grismer wrote.

“The visitors and children gathered in the auditorium of the school house, and the 300 seats were not near enough to accommodate the audience,” the newspaper article continued. A.B. Edwards told the students, “[T]he building and the grounds were theirs,” and encouraged them to take “personal pride ... in keeping them like they were on the opening day.”

Edwards later that year became Sarasota’s first mayor, after articles of incorporation were received for the municipality. The new school cost \$23,000. The old general-purpose school, built of wood by volunteers in 1904, was moved to another site.

The next year, the board of trustees for the school system decided to make SHS a “real” high school by extending classes through a 12th year, along with implementing an elementary and junior high curriculum. As the number of students grew, the old 1904 building was returned to the site — an early version of a “portable” classroom.

The first graduates in 1917 were four young women. The first prin-

cipal, Professor T.W. Yarbrough, “was very proud of this, his first class to graduate,” said the *Sarasota Times*. At commencement, an issue was raised that would resonate over the coming century.

Referencing comments from Yarbrough, the *Times* article continued, “The school had suffered badly during the term because of the heavy turnover of teachers, due to the fact that they were paid only \$50 and \$55 a month

— and it cost them that much to live. He said salaries would have to be raised if higher educational standards were to be maintained.”

THE POPULATION BOOMS

As Sarasota moved into the Roaring Twenties, it split itself off from Manatee County in 1921. A Sarasota County Commission was appointed to govern, and Yarbrough was picked as supervisor of public instruction.

By 1924, two new schools had been built, Central Elementary and Booker High School. In 1925, Bay Haven and Southside Elementary were erected.



Sarasota’s first high school opened on Sept. 15, 1913, and the *Sarasota Times* was there to cover it. Sarasota was not even an official municipality at that time. Image courtesy of the Sarasota County Schools

A site was selected for a new Sarasota High School, and the county paid \$317,000 for the lot at the height of the first Florida land boom. In his book, Grismer notes the sum was more than the original investment company paid for the entire site of the city in 1885, all 50,000 acres of it.

A building was designed by Tampa architect M. Leo Elliott, who also designed Bay Haven and Southside in the Mediterranean Revival Style. But the high school was to become a shining example of Collegiate Gothic, a very popular school of architecture, with examples on university and high school campuses across the nation.

Athletics have always been a part of Sarasota High's activities, even at the Main Street campus. For the new 1927 building, a football field and track were essential to keep the "Fighting Sailors" competitive.

With two new high schools in the city — Booker to the north and Sarasota High on the South Tamiami trail — an athletic rivalry naturally arose and continues to this day.

SAVE SARASOTA HIGH!

Sarasota's only example of Collegiate Gothic architecture was almost lost to the wrecking ball in the early 2000s. After it had seen nearly three-quarters of a century of hard use, the School Board was ready to tear it down.

While the exterior remained as impressive as ever, the interior was obsolete. Students who grew up with air conditioning could not understand how a school would use window units, or lack A/C entirely.

But the School Board's plans ran afoul of alumni, fans of architecture and a general community attitude that the iconic building should be saved. After a bitter back-and-forth,



Building 4 at Sarasota High School is known internationally as a design created by architect Paul Rudolph. Photo by Norman Schimmel

a group emerged that was willing to accept responsibility for the building. Spearheaded by the Ringling College of Art and Design, it wanted to create the Sarasota Museum of Art.

The venture will be a \$22 million project, with about \$17 million already raised. It will include galleries for 20th century art on the second floor, with the first floor used by Ringling College's Continuing Studies and Special Programs.

While the plan could still fall through if fundraising stalls, backers believe they can be up and running long before the building celebrates its first century.

With student growth continuing to press on the School Board, in the late 1950s it hired architect Paul Rudolph to sketch out preliminary designs for a Sarasota School of Architecture addition to the SHS campus.

His design was — for its time — revolutionary for a school. It incorporated shaded passageways in the open air and natural ventilation before the advent of air conditioning. The building, finished in 1958, is considered a significant link between Rudolph's "Sarasota School" homes and the much larger concrete structures he would later design. Rudolph became the dean of architecture at Yale.



This undated photo of Sarasota High does not show a single air conditioner, and the Tamiami Trail is very much a two-lane street without curbs or sidewalks. Photo courtesy of the Sarasota County School Board

But 50 years later, just like its predecessor, the addition was showing its age. The School Board proposed a reconstruction of Rudolph's Building 4 on campus — along with the tear-down of others — that architecture fans believed would destroy the historic character of the famed architect's structure.

This followed a community "battle royal" that resulted in the demolition of Rudolph's other local school, Riverview High. Supporters were not going to lose both examples. Today work is proceeding, but the iconic exterior and breezeways are expected to remain intact.

Sarasota High, of course, is more than just a progression of buildings old and new. Today more than 2,000 students study, act, compete and play there. The school has produced many outstanding professional athletes in a variety of sports. It has also produced business and civic leaders.

On Friday evenings in the fall, residents of the Alta Vista neighborhood can hear the music of the Mighty Sailor Band and the cheers following every Sailor touchdown.

Here's wishing the Sailors and their teachers an awesome second century. 



This year's SHS cheerleaders led a pep rally on Sept. 20 before the varsity football game that night: (from left) Rachel Mead, Sydney Battie, Ashley Beland and Kaitlyn Needham. Behind them are members of the Mighty Sailors Marching Band. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

RAIN

ALL THE PRECIPITATION THIS SUMMER HAS REPLENISHED THE AQUIFERS AND RESULTED IN VERY HAPPY CREATURES

Story and Photos

By Fran Palmeri

Contributing Writer

It is like the movie, *Groundhog Day*. Each morning we are awakened by the rumble of thunder. The rain comes down in torrents. “Again?” we ask.

All summer, rains have soaked Florida. The National Weather Service reported that in the Tampa area, June, July and August each received 10 inches of rain, which has not hap-

pened since 1957. Off and on, the Manatee and Myakka Rivers have been at flood stage.

Dragonflies turn up everywhere there is water. And it seems there is water everywhere. Plants lap it up. Parks are transformed into sumptuous gardens of wildflowers — golden aster, pale blue mistflower, morning glories — and dozens more. The brilliant red pine lily





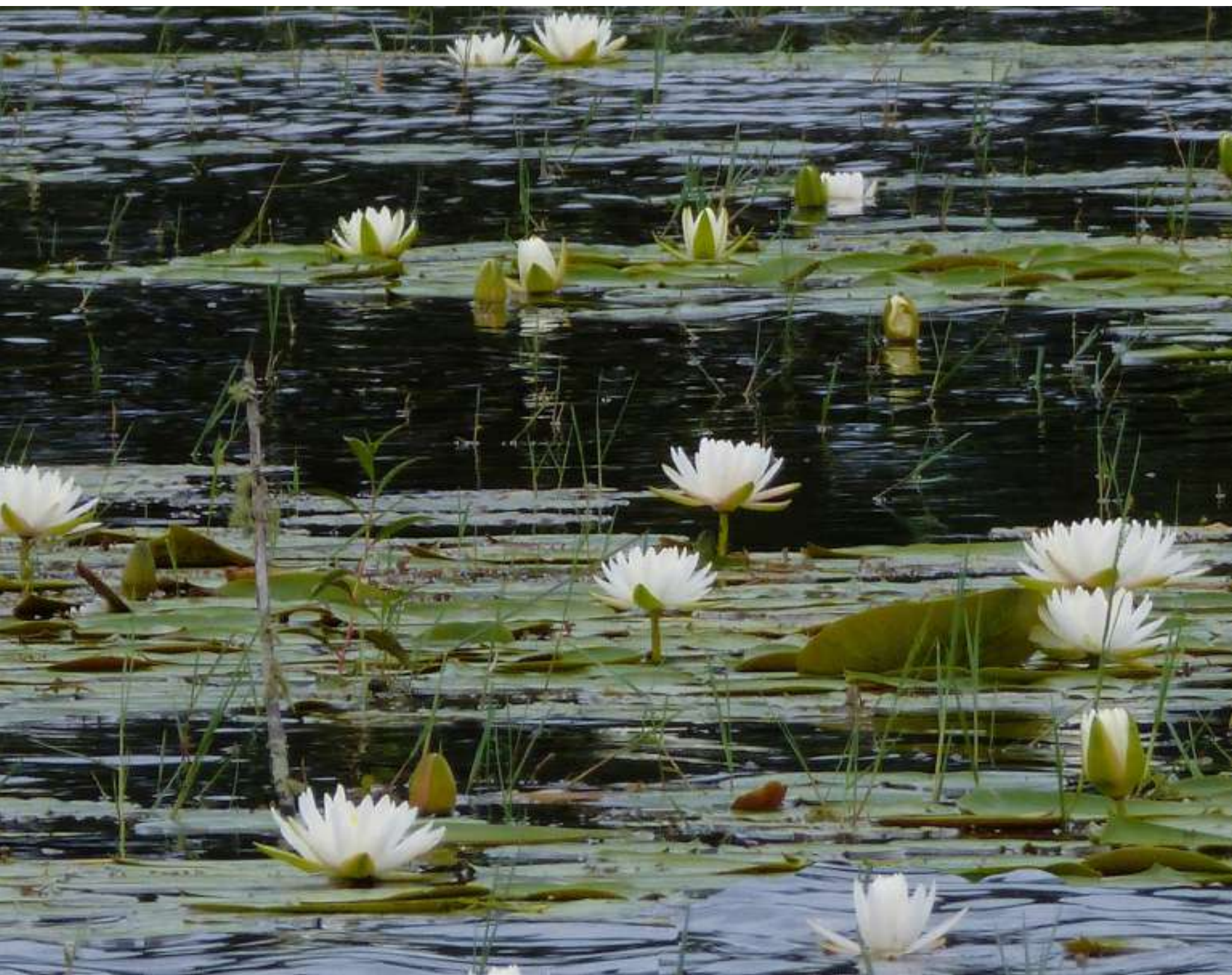
has put in a rare appearance. Sphagnum moss dotted with yellow carnivorous plants covers trails. Spanish needles, a Mecca for butterflies, carpet lawns and roadsides. Ponds and creeks brim over with white water lilies. With the right mixture of heat, humidity and an obliging horse, magical mushrooms pop up.

In flooded pastures, horses and cattle pick their way over sodden ground, seeking bits of dry land.

At home, I am back on waterfront! I drive the main road through Myakka River State Park

and stop on the bridge. Usually, the river is far below me. Today I can almost step into the water. Gone are the alligators that will have to wait for riverbanks to reappear so once again they can play to an adoring crowd on the bridge.


This is the way it is supposed to be. Years ago, summers in Florida were a cycle of precipitation, absorption, evaporation, condensation and more precipitation. Rainwater percolated down into the Floridan aquifer, the huge water-holding limestone reservoir under the peninsula. More than half the state was wetlands.







As people poured into the state, they cleared land for agriculture and residential uses. That activity reduces evaporation rates. Roads and concrete surfaces shunt rainwater directly into bays, the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean. Years of drought and increased demand have reduced water levels in the Floridan aquifer. People are using water faster than it can be replaced, according to the University of South Florida. Fresh water is in short supply.

Soon the rains will end. Rivers will recede. Yards will dry up. No waking up to thunder. No deluges. But for now, when out your window you hear, “Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit!” relish the gifts the season brings! 





FRIEND OR FOE?

Australian pines provide shade at Ken Thompson Park. Photo by Rick Wielgorecki

PEOPLE REMAIN DIVIDED IN THEIR VIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN PINES

By Rick Wielgorecki

Contributing Writer

Avid gardener, Renaissance man and third U.S. president, Thomas Jefferson was known to have suffered all his life from migraine headaches because of a debate that ravaged his consciousness.

One part of him believed it was vital to pursue a life of public service to mankind and his country. The other part argued that it was better for him to live a life close to home and hearth, working on a multitude of projects at his beloved Monticello. He referred to it as an internal struggle between his head and his heart.

When I consider the pros and cons of the Australian pine, I have similarly conflicting thoughts.

On one side, my heart beholds the aesthetic beauty of the tree. Growing to a height of 100 feet or more, it stands out spectacularly in our peninsular environment that has few statuesque trees. When growing near our beaches, it provides welcome shady relief from the unrelenting sun. The *Casuarina* (which includes some 17 species) is not without practical value, either, serving as a soil acidifier when mulched in some of the Pacific islands where it is a native. It also serves as a source of lumber there.

More whimsically, I can remember the feeling of tiptoeing as a barefoot child under Australian pines, vainly attempting to avoid the

prickly cones. I have also enjoyed the sweet sound of the wind blowing through their needles at beach picnics. But my warmest (pun intended) memories of “ironwood” come from recollections of being comforted on a cold winter’s night by the heat of a seasoned Australian pine burning in my living room fireplace.

Then the head intervenes. To the knowledgeable naturalist, “beef wood” — another of the Australian pine’s monikers — is an ecological disaster. It is an invasive, brittle tree subject to damage during storms. Its roots are shallow, and I have seen the trees toppled by beach erosion on the shores of Siesta Key and Cayo Costa. Most damning is that they produce biochemicals that prohibit the growth of all other plant species, both native and exotic, in the same area. When allowed to proliferate, they render their habitat sterile and unable to

support the fauna that are attracted to more giving species.

The planting of *Casuarina* is outlawed in Florida and many other states, though, remarkably, it can still be found for sale on the Internet.

Each person must decide for himself what the fate of the Australian pine should be. While I would never suggest anyone should plant more of them, it seems to me that where they exist now and serve a purpose — such as the spot in the accompanying photo taken at Ken Thompson Park on City Island — perhaps we could just allow them to live out their lives and replace them with native species as they disappear into extinction.

Rick Wielgorecki may be contacted at 362-0600 or wielgo@hotmail.com. 



County commissioners have sought reassurances that mature Australian pines in the picnic area at Siesta Public Beach will not be removed when park improvements get under way. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County



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 community calendar, I always know what the most exciting happenings are each week. Plus, it is simply so beautiful, with photography that takes my breath away.

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

You have a whole week.

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Siesta Seen

GIDGET'S COASTAL PROVISIONS GETS ITS CONSTRUCTION PERMIT; THE COUNTY SEEKS STATE FUNDING FOR MORE FACILITIES AT TURTLE BEACH PARK; THE VILLAGE ASSOCIATION WILL GET AN UPDATE ON THE SIESTA PUBLIC BEACH PROJECT



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor



Architect Mark Smith received the county permit last week for construction to proceed on Gidget's Coastal Provisions, which will occupy the spot where Napoli's served pizza and other Italian entrées for many years.

Workers with [Southern Cross Contracting Inc.](#) of Sarasota and Bradenton were planning to

start work this week, Smith told me on Sept. 23. "They were anxious to get rolling."

Although Smith added that he would like to see the new retail shop open by Thanksgiving, the more realistic expectation would be for the construction to be completed before the end of the year.

Siesta resident Peter van Roekens shot this dusky Siesta beach scene before the 'monsoon season' began this week. Photo courtesy of Peter van Roekens

Siesta Seen

“It will be the first new building in the Village in like forever,” Smith pointed out.

As for plans to put three transient apartments on the upper level: Those will have to be heard before the county Planning Commission and then the County Commission, Smith added, as a special exception must be granted for that work. With the Gidget’s permit in hand, he planned to turn his attention to answering the technical questions county staff has posed regarding the rental units.

Mark Loveridge, project manager in the county’s Planning and Development Services office, said this week that he was not able to give me

a timeline for those discussions. Smith needs to provide more details about the plans first, Loveridge added. Once he has all the requested information, Loveridge continued, he can proceed with scheduling the hearing of the special exception petition at a Planning Commission meeting.

Smith told me he has heard no negative comments about the proposal for the apartments. However, Commissioner Nora Patterson — who lives on the north end of Siesta Key — has fielded some emails in past weeks from a person who is worried about those living quarters.



Pedestrians walk toward Napoli's when it was still open in Siesta Village this spring. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

The writer emailed Patterson on Sept. 19 to say he had learned for a fact that the plans for the former Napoli's site does include the apartments. "The concern is that once this is approved, every building owner in the Village will want approval to put condos or apartments above the retail space they currently have which will dramatically change the cute little fun village that draws so many people to our area," the man wrote.

Patterson forwarded the email to Assistant County Administrator Mark Cunningham, requesting that he verify for her what the zoning code will allow on that site.

Smith told me he has not read that email exchange.

The apartments would be about 500 square feet each, he said, and they could be rented for no longer than 30 days at a time, according to the county code for short-term rentals. The apartments will be like hotel/motel units with kitchenettes, he added.

"I just think it's a neat idea, right in the heart of Siesta Village," to provide transient accommodations, Smith noted. "It's not unprecedented," he added, pointing out that residential units also are above Big Olaf's ice cream shop and Beach Bazaar in the Village.

After all, Smith continued, the idea of living above shops "goes back to the founding of the country."

As for Gidget's — the retail shop with more upscale gifts and clothing than the typical



Workers began pulling down the Napoli's structure on Aug. 6. File photo

Siesta Seen

T-shirt shop: It will have about 1,750 square feet of space in the new building, whose total footprint will be 2,048 square feet, Smith noted. The design includes an elevator as well as storage space on the second floor for the time being. Napoli's footprint, by the way, was 2,050 square feet, he added.

"It'll be a nice little building," Smith said.

One especially interesting aspect of the design for Gidget's is that the retail space will be floodproof, so the structure will not have to be elevated more than 19 feet to meet regulations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "When you're dealing with

retail," Smith told me earlier this year, "you have to keep the shop close to the street."

Gidget's is the project of Siesta residents Brian and Trudy Wigelsworth. Trudy, manager of Blvd. Beachwear on Ocean Boulevard, has more than 20 years of retail experience, Brian told me in August.

SIESTA BEACH PARK UPDATE

Brad Gaubatz, manager of the construction portion of the Siesta Beach Park improvements, and Carolyn Brown, Sarasota County's director of parks and recreation, will provide an update on the \$21.5 million plans



An artist's rendering shows the view of the new east concession area and restrooms at Siesta Public Beach as people head toward those facilities on an elevated walkway. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

and answer questions during the next regular meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA), President Cheryl Gaddie has announced.

The SKVA will meet on Tuesday, Oct. 1, at 8:30 a.m. at the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar, located at 5254 Ocean Blvd.

TURTLE BEACH PARK IMPROVEMENTS

With no comment on Sept. 24, the County Commission unanimously authorized administrative staff to submit a grant application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the installation of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible



SWEET SPARKMAN
ARCHITECTS

Historic Pavilion, West Concession and Public Safety Building



Artist's renderings show the proposed designs of the new Public Safety Building and the historic pavilion and west concession area for Siesta Public Beach. Images courtesy of Sarasota County



County staff hopes to add an extra Turtle Beach playground that would be accessible to children with disabilities. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

playground for children ages 2 to 12 and a gazebo as part of the improvements at Turtle Beach Park.

The item was on the board's Sept. 24 consent agenda.

The grant amount sought is \$111,000, according to a memo Carolyn Brown, director of the Parks and Recreation Department, wrote to the commission.

The application will go to DEP's Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP), the memo notes, which provides funding "to local government entities for acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreation use or to construct recreational trails," the memo adds.

The primary goal of the grant application, the memo notes, "is to provide improved public amenities at Turtle Beach Park." An existing small playground would be replaced with the



Picnic areas and an outdoor shower are located in shady areas of Turtle Beach Park. Photo by Rachel Hackney



A graphic shows current and planned facilities at Turtle Beach Park. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

new equipment paid for through the grant. Additionally, the planned gazebo would “provide shade and opportunities for picnicking, outdoor classrooms, scenic vistas, and small events,” the memo adds.

The grant, if awarded, would bring the total project cost of new amenities to \$148,000.


Regular visitors to Turtle Beach Park know that renovations to the existing community room and restrooms, landscape enhancements and new signage and fencing already have been completed as part of a multi-year project. The next phase will include better sidewalk connectivity throughout the park, an

ADA-compliant dune walkover, picnic shelters and a kayak launch, the memo notes.

WELCOME TO THE VILLAGE

The Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting on Sept. 26 for a new business, **Studio Rubylake**, which is located in the Arches at 5219 Avenida Navarra. Among its neighbors are Used Book Heaven and Bonjour French Café.

Studio Rubylake “has a noncompetitive and peaceful atmosphere focusing on working out for fun relaxation and releasing stress,” its website says.

For more information, call 312-0700 or check out the website. 



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Becky Holahan is Becky — first with Walter, played by Neil Levine, then with Joe, played by Neil Kananofsky. Photo by Renee McVety

BECKY'S NEW CAR TO OPEN VENICE THEATRE 2013-14 SEASON

Venice Theatre will launch its 2013-2014 Main-Stage Season with the comedy *Becky's New Car*, the theatre has announced. The play will open on Tuesday, Oct. 1, and run through Sunday, Oct. 20.

Becky's New Car was written by popular American playwright Steven Dietz, a news release notes. "He introduces audiences to Becky Foster, a woman who is feeling stuck in middle age, middle management and a middling marriage," the release says. "She has no prospects for change on the horizon until an eccentric grief-struck millionaire stumbles into the car dealership where she works. Soon she is facing a fork in the road that could offer her nothing short of a new life."

The release adds, "Audiences will be in for some surprising twists and turns as they cruise with Becky down the road not taken."

Venice Theatre's Executive Artistic Director Murray Chase is directing the show, which stars veteran Venice performer Becky Holah-

an and an ensemble of six other actors. Chase says he chose the play "because of how popular it has become among community theatres and describes its theme as being 'what happens when the good choices we make are put to the test,'" the release points out.

Becky's New Car was originally commissioned by and produced at Seattle's ACT Theater in 2008. *The Seattle Times* called the premiere "a warmly humorous and nimble romantic farce," the release notes.

Performances are Tuesdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets are on sale (\$13 to \$15 for students; \$25 to \$28 for adults) at www.venicestage.com or by contacting the box office at 488-1115. A special early-season rate of \$20 is available (not online) during the first week of the show.

Box office hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday and one hour before all performances. Venice Theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. on the island in Venice.

PERLMAN MUSIC PROGRAM TO PRESENT BEETHOVEN'S STRING QUARTETS

The Perlman Program/Suncoast (PMP/Suncoast) "has added an inspired new concert series to its 2013-2014 line-up celebrating the 10th anniversary of the PMP Sarasota Winter Residency," the program has announced.

As part of PMP/Suncoast's Emerging Artists Performances Series, the acclaimed four-member Ariel Quartet will perform *The Beethoven Cycle: Complete String Quartets* over the course of six concerts in October, February and May, a news release says. The concerts are scheduled for Oct. 2 and 4, Feb. 26 and 27, and May 15 and 16 at Selby Auditorium on the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus, 8350 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. The series kickoff on Oct. 2 includes *Breakfast with Beethoven*, a continental spread at

10 a.m.; a *Musical Conversation with June LeBell* at 10:30 a.m.; and the Ariel Quartet performance at 11 a.m. The remaining concerts will begin at 7 p.m.

LeBell is a well-known classical music lecturer, radio personality and author, the release points out.

The public is invited to celebrate the conclusion of the concert series on May 16 with a *Bravo, Beethoven!* reception with the artists. Tickets are \$100 per subscription or \$20 per concert.

"The Ariel's undertaking of the complete Beethoven string quartets is an epic feat of music-making," says LeBell in the release. "We rarely get to hear all of these phenomenal



The Ariel Quartet will perform all of Beethoven's string quartets this season in Sarasota. Photo courtesy of the Perlman Music Program/Suncoast

pieces played by such an exemplary group in one lifetime, no less one season, and Sarasota is about to have an extraordinary and monumental musical feast.”

The Emerging Artists Performance Series showcases the newest generation of world-class musicians to regional audiences, the release points out. “These gifted Perlman Music Program alumni, now acclaimed musicians, perform concerts three times a year at different venues throughout the Sarasota-Manatee region,” the release notes.

“Characterized by its youth, brilliant playing and soulful interpretations, the Ariel Quartet (Gershon Gerchikov, violin; Alexandra Kazovsky, violin; Jan Grüning, viola; and Amit

Even-Tov, cello) has quickly earned a glowing international reputation,” the release continues. In January 2012, the group was named quartet-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati’s Conservatory of Music, “an astonishing accomplishment for such a young ensemble and a testament to the Ariel’s skill and dedication,” the release adds.

For more information about the Ariel Quartet, visit www.arielquartet.com.

The Beethoven concerts will feature general admission seating. The lobby will open one hour before each event, and the auditorium will open 30 minutes prior to the concert.

For more information, call 350-2338, or visit PMPSuncoast.org.

CURTIS’ WORKS TO MAKE DEBUT AT WOMEN’S RESOURCE CENTER

“The bold, colorful, expressive oils of Sarasota artist Patricia Curtis” will make their debut during a public reception on Thursday, Oct. 3, from 5 to 7 p.m. at The Women’s Resource of Sarasota, 340 S. Tuttle Ave. in Sarasota, the center has announced.

The show, titled, *As I See It: Finding beauty and uniqueness in unexpected places*, extends through Nov. 20. It can be seen most weekdays after 10:30 a.m., a news release notes.

Curtis’ inspirations come from the colors, natural beauty and diversity that surrounded her as a child when she was growing up in Miami, the news release says.

“Patricia seeks to find uniqueness in places others may not want to explore,” the release

continues. “She believes there is beauty in all that surrounds us, even that which we may want to turn away from.”

“Sometimes you just have to look a little harder and reach a little further to see and appreciate that beauty,” she says in the release.

Her palette is one of bold strong colors, and her brush strokes “are aggressive and sensual,” the release adds.

Recent exhibits of Curtis’ work were held at The Billings Gallery in Sarasota, 25 CPW Gallery in New York, Il Chiostro in Sienna, Italy, and various other galleries in Florida.

For more information, call 366-1700.

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The Watcher, oil on canvas, is 24 inches by 36 inches. Contributed photo

SECOND ANNUAL SARASOTA BOOK FAIR PLANNED FOR OCT. 5

Area authors will meet their readers at the second annual Sarasota Book Fair on Oct. 5 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Art Center Sarasota, 707 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.

This literary festival will showcase independent, self-published authors and illustrators of adults' and children's books, a news release says. The fair is being run in collaboration with ABCBooks4Children Inc., a not-for-profit organization with members from Tampa to Fort Myers, the release adds. Readers of all ages are invited to meet local writers, peruse a variety of their books "and listen to inspired readings by the authors themselves," the release continues.

Admission is free.



Nick Manolukas is a Siesta Key author. Contributed photo



Author Robert Krupp will participate in the Sarasota Book Fair on Oct. 5. Contributed photo

According to event coordinator Brenda Spalding in the release, “Sarasota is famed as a visual artists colony. People forget that it’s also been a thriving writers’ colony since the days of John D. MacDonald. We’ve got some great living authors here, and they’re anxious to meet their public.”

She adds that the upcoming book fair will showcase 35 to 50 regionally based authors and illustrators, some of whom are members of the Florida Writers Association, Peace River Writers and the National League of American Pen Women.

“The book fair offers the community the opportunity to meet our area’s wealth of talented self-published authors and illustrators,” says Spalding, adding that the event features literature for all ages.

Attendees may meet Boston-born Elinor Rogison, for example, who has lived in many

parts of the world. Her book, *Chasing Love: A Mother’s Journey*, describes the struggle with her past after her youngest child disappeared in India. Lucy Beebe Tobias, a former journalist whose books include *50 Great Walks in Florida*, highlighting great short walks all over Florida; *Florida Gardens Gone Wild*, “with helpful information about gardening in this sub-tropical paradise”; and *Mary Margaret Manatee*, a picture book about a young manatee that “learns to go with the flow,” also will participate, the release continues.

Yet another author to be featured in the fair is Siesta Key resident and thriller writer Nick Manolukas, whose books are *The Coming of a New Millennium* and *2004: An Olympic Odyssey*.

For more information about the event, call 365-2032 or visit www.artsarasota.org.



Carole Stevens Bibisi is another local writer confirmed for the Sarasota Book Fair. Contributed photo

VENICE THEATRE TO PRESENT *FRANKENSTEIN* BY BO LIST

Venice Theatre will open its 2013-2014 Stage II Series in the Pinkerton Theatre with *Frankenstein*, the theatre has announced.

“This new adaptation will in no way resemble the many comic versions of *Frankenstein* that our pop culture has grown accustomed to,” a news release points out. “Audiences should expect a beautifully written drama closely based on Mary Shelley’s 1818 Gothic/Romantic novel.”

The play will open on Thursday, Oct. 10, and run through Sunday, Oct. 27.

Frankenstein playwright Bo List has written and directed for venues such as the Lexington (KY) Shakespeare Festival, Lexington Summerfest — where *Frankenstein* premiered — and River Valley Rep, a professional summer theater company based at Marist College in New York, the release continues. He will be in Venice the first two nights of the show to lead a talkback after the performances, it adds.

Regarding his adaptation of the novel to the stage, List said in a 2011 interview, “If anything is surprising to the audience, it may be that the Creature speaks. In the book, it is very eloquent — but since the famous Boris Karloff creature does NOT speak (he only grunts and roars, in a fashion oft-imitated on *Saturday Night Live*, etc.) that’s how audiences think of him. More heartbreaking is that the creature is acutely aware of his own deformities and difference and can articulate his loneliness.”

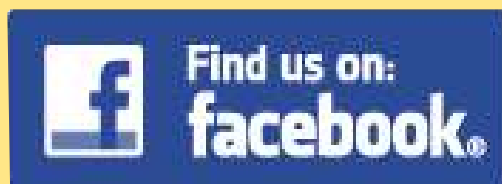
After being produced for Lexington Summerfest, *Frankenstein* went on to enjoy success in Chicago where it was recommended by *Centerstage*, *ChicagoCritic* and *Chicago Stage Standard*, the release notes.

Venice Theatre has chosen Kelly Wynn Woodland to direct *Frankenstein*. Her recent direction of *A Behanding in Spokane* in Venice Theatre’s Stage II Series earned the show a 2013 Handy Award for best community theater play. “Boding well for the quality of her upcoming production, she has cast three of the four actors from *A Behanding in Spokane* in *Frankenstein*: Jeremy Guerrero as Victor Frankenstein, Steve O’Dea as the Creature and Alison Prouty as Elizabeth,” the release adds.

Because of the depiction of graphic violence, *Frankenstein* is not recommended for children and pre-teens, the release points out.

Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. on Sundays. Tickets are \$25 to \$28 for adults and \$10 to \$15 for students. They are on sale at the theatre’s box office, online at www.venicestage.com or by phone at 488-1115.

Box office hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday and one hour before all performances. Venice Theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. on the island in Venice.



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Jeremy Guerrero as Victor Frankenstein shadowed by Steve O'Dea as the Creature. Photo by Renee McVety

ASOLO REP TO PRESENT TWO PERFORMANCES OF *ROMEO & JULIET*

The *New Stages* tour of a Florida State University/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training production of *Romeo & Juliet* will present two public performances with post-performance discussions on Thursday, Oct. 3, the Asolo Repertory Theatre has announced.

“The world-premiere of this 45-minute adaptation will be performed by two different casts of FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training third-year students,” a news release notes. A special cocktail reception will be held at 7 p.m. between the productions; it is included in the ticket price.

The first performance will begin at 6 p.m., “featuring Team Montague,” the release notes.

The second performance will be at 8:30 p.m., featuring Team Capulet, the release adds.

The director is Dmitry Troyanovsky, who co-adapted the play with Lauryn Sasso, Asolo Rep’s literary manager and dramaturge, the release points out.

Tickets are \$25 per performance; they may be purchased by phone at 351-8000 or at the Asolo Repertory Theatre box office, located at 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, on the grounds of the Ringling Museum of Art.

The performances will be in the Cook Theatre.



An 18th century illustration shows the Montagues and Capulets quarreling in Act 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*. Image from Sir John Gilbert via Wikimedia Commons

FST ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WOMAN'S EXCHANGE

Florida Studio Theatre (FST) has announced a fundraising collaboration with The Woman's Exchange Inc. of Sarasota.

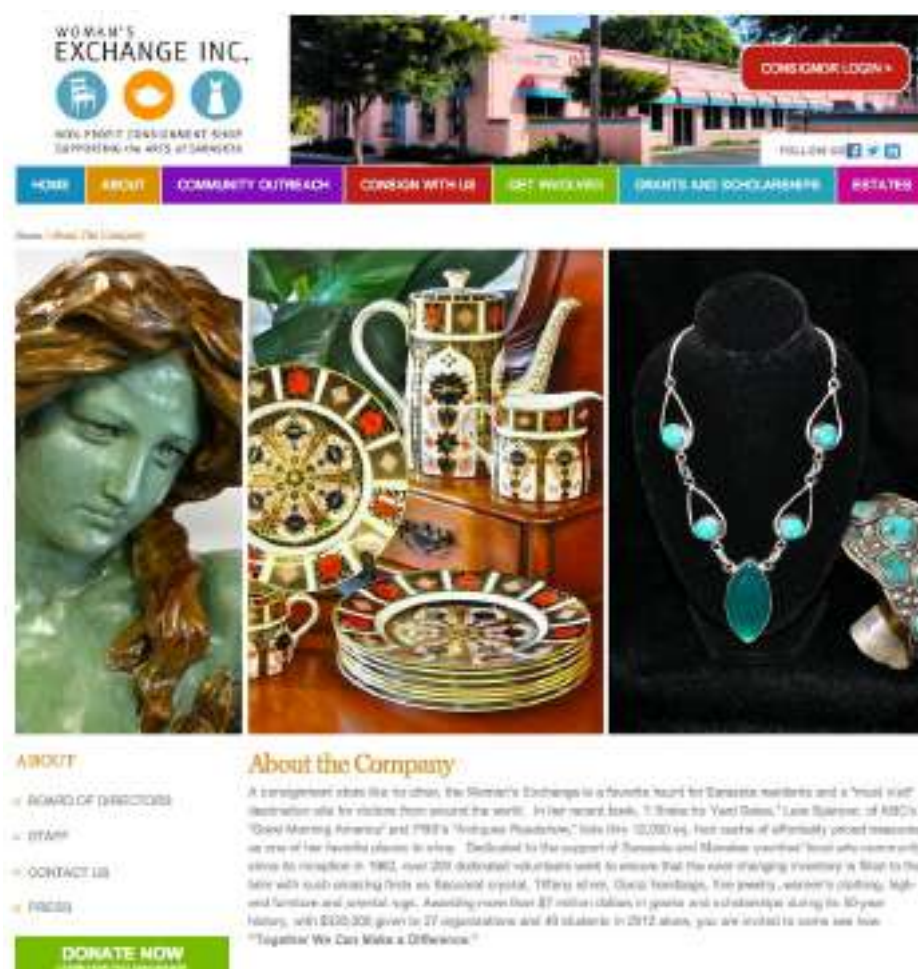
FST will take donations from members of the community, consign them through The Woman's Exchange and receive a percentage of revenue from the sale, a news release says.

FST will be collecting donations Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Items may be brought to the box office reception desk at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota or prearranged for pickup by contacting jrekkas@floridastudiotheatre.org. For a list of items that can be donated, visit <http://sarasotawex.com/faq>.

In the news release, Florida Studio Theatre Artistic Director Richard Hopkins says of the partnership, "I am delighted that we are deepening our relationship with The Woman's Exchange Inc. They have been staunch supporters of Florida Studio Theatre (and many other Sarasota arts organizations) for nearly four decades. Along with their support of our intern program, cabaret theatre and Mainstage, they have ... provided arts scholarships for needy children to attend our theatre education programs for many years."

He added in the release, "This year we are happy to deepen that partnership by serving as a satellite location for property drop-offs. And remember, the used goods you donate today will be sold to support FST and all the Sarasota arts tomorrow."

Karen Koblenz, CEO of The Woman's Exchange, noted in the release, "In an effort to make theatre accessible and affordable for all, The Woman's Exchange Inc. is thrilled to partner with Florida Studio Theatre in a



The Woman's Exchange is located at 539 S. Orange Ave. in downtown Sarasota. Image courtesy of The Woman's Exchange

collaborative effort to turn your gently used household, clothing and furniture items into a cash donation. Dedicated to the arts of Sarasota and Manatee counties for more than 50 years, The Woman's Exchange Inc. is proud to be a season sponsor of the Florida Studio Theatre. This new program is just one more opportunity to bring the joy of live theatre to so many. "

Items accepted for consignment include clothing, linens, lamps, chandeliers, electrical appliances, furniture and other large pieces, the release continues. Some items require a preapproval process, the release points out. For a full list of preapproved items, visit www.sarasotawex.com.

The Woman's Exchange is a nonprofit corporation that operates as a self-sustaining, debt-free consignment store. 

Ana Pankey watches as her daughter, Valeria, holds the family dog to receive the blessing from the Rev. Fredrick Robinson, rector of the Church of the Redeemer, during the parish's Blessing of the Animals event in 2012. Contributed photo

ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS TO BE HELD AT REDEEMER

The Church of the Redeemer, located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, will hold its annual Blessing of the Animals event on Sunday, Sept. 29, at 4 p.m.

The event will be conducted on the Palm Avenue Terrace. All members of the community are warmly invited to bring dogs, turtles, cats, birds, fish or any other pet — as long as each pet is safely leashed or caged, a news release says.

Redeemer holds this public event each year in recognition of St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order and patron saint of animals, the release notes.

On the Feast Day of St. Francis, which is Friday, Oct. 4, Redeemer will also offer readings for St. Francis during its 10 a.m. morning Mass.

For more information, contact the parish office at 955-4263, or visit www.redeemersarasota.org.

MOTE-ISRAEL COOPERATIVE PROGRAM TO BE TOPIC OF TALK

On Saturday, Oct. 5, during the 10:30 a.m. Shabbat service, the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism will welcome Dr. Michael P. Crosby, president and CEO of Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, as a guest speaker on the topic, *Mote-Israel Cooperative Marine Research Program*, the Congregation has announced.

In May, Crosby was appointed to his new position at Mote Marine, a news release notes. Prior to that, he was Mote's senior vice president for research. Additionally, he has served as executive director of the National Science Board and as senior advisor for international science policy in the Under Secretary's Office of International Affairs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). At NOAA, he also was national research coordinator for ocean and coastal resource management and chief scientist for sanctuaries and reserves, the release points out.

Crosby has held numerous faculty positions as well. He is adjunct professor of marine science at the University of Hawaii-Hilo.

Additionally, Crosby has led major national and international, multi-discipline, multi-year research projects, among them the U.S.-Israeli-Jordanian joint initiative titled, *The Red Sea Marine Peace Park Cooperative Research Monitoring and Management Program*; and the Hawaii State EPSCoR project, *Pacific High Island Evolutionary Biogeography: Impacts of Invasive Species, Anthropogenic Activity and Climate Change on Hawaiian Focal Species*, the release adds.

He serves as a reviewer and panelist for numerous scientific journals, and has published



Michael Crosby enjoys a visit to Kiryat Yam, Israel. Contributed photo

more than 50 articles in the *Journal of Shellfish Research*, *Diseases of Aquatic Organisms*, *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, *Natural Areas Journal* and others. He also has edited several books and manuals dealing with marine protected areas and coral reefs, the release notes.

The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism meets at Unity, located at 3023 Proctor Road, Sarasota. The Oct. 5 program is free for CHJ members; a \$5 suggested donation is requested from non-members.

For more information, call 929-7771 or visit www.chj-sarasota.org.



WIN TO HOLD ITS ANNUAL MEETING ON SEPT. 28

The Women's Interfaith Network of Sarasota/Bradenton (WIN) will hold its annual meeting at 10:15 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 28, at the North Sarasota Library, 2801 Newtown Blvd., Sarasota. Guests are welcome to come and learn more about the organization. Those planning to attend are asked to bring a children's book or DVD, which WIN will donate to the Sarasota YMCA Youth Shelter. Annual dues of \$10 will be collected. Photo by Norman Schimmel

HIGH HOLY DAY FOOD DRIVE BENEFITS ALL FAITHS FOOD BANK

Temple Emanu-El once again observed Yom Kippur — the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, marked by prayer and fasting — with a food drive to benefit All Faiths Food Bank, the Temple has announced.

After services for Rosh Hashanah — the Jewish new year — on Sept. 4 and 5, members of Temple Emanu-El's Social Action Committee distributed 600 paper bags, asking worshippers to fill them with nonperishable food and return them on Yom Kippur, Sept. 13 and 14, a news release says. Although the response to the annual High Holy Day food drive has always been strong, program chairwoman Helene Rosenberg commented that this year's results exceeded her expectations, the release adds.

"I worried that because Rosh Hashanah was so early this year ... people wouldn't be ready to give, but everyone was very cooperative,"

Rosenberg said in the release. "I ordered seven [empty] bins [from All Faiths Food Bank] this year ± one more than last year — in the hopes of filling them, and again, they were so full that cans were on the floor.

"Next year," she added, "we'll order eight bins."

The final tally for the drive was 3,673 pounds of collected food and \$2,315 in financial donations for All Faiths Food Bank, which corresponds to 6,605 meals for the hungry of Sarasota and DeSoto counties, the news release points out.

Rosenberg thanked members of Temple Emanu-El's Social Action Committee and Brotherhood, as well as students of the preschool and Religious School and Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman for their support of the food drive.

For more information, please call 371-2788. 



Temple Emanu-El High Holy Day food drive chairwoman Helene Rosenberg (center) and Temple Emanu-El Religious School students Sarah Mankowitz and Alena Barwick display some of the collected food. Contributed photo



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

27
SEPTEMBER

We've Got You Covered: A Toga Party!

(a Halloween Bash pre-party)

Sept. 27, 8 to 10 p.m., Mr. Beery's in Gulf Gate, 2645 Mall Drive. Admission: Free (\$1 of every Magic Hat beer sold goes to Planned Parenthood). Information: [Toga Party Event page](#).

27+
SEPTEMBER

Dabbert Gallery presents *Summer Showcase*

Through Sept. 30, 76 S. Palm Ave. Admission: free. Information: 955-1315 or [DabbertGallery.com](#).

27+
SEPTEMBER

Allyn Gallup Gallery presents *Some Wonderful Abstractions*

Through Oct. 5, 1288 N. Palm Ave. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or [AllynGallup.com](#).

28
SEPTEMBER

WSLR presents *Proyecto Son* in concert

Sept. 28, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance/\$12 at the door. Information: 894-6469 or [WSLR.org](#).

03
OCTOBER

Halloween Bash Pre-Party: Second Annual Safe Sex Kiki

Oct. 3, 8:30 to 11 p.m., Darwin's on 4th, 1525 Fourth St., Sarasota. Admission: Free. Information at [Safe Sex Kiki page](#).

04
OCTOBER

Jazz Club of Sarasota presents *Jazz at Two*, featuring Betty Comora's Happy Jazz Band

Oct. 4, 2 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 3975 Fruitville Road, Sarasota. Tickets: \$7 (\$12 for non-members). Information: 366-1552 or [JazzClubSarasota.org](#).

05
OCTOBER

Second Annual Sarasota Book Fair

Oct. 5, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Art Center Sarasota, 707 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 365-2032 or [ArtSarasota.org](#).

WATERFRONT DINING

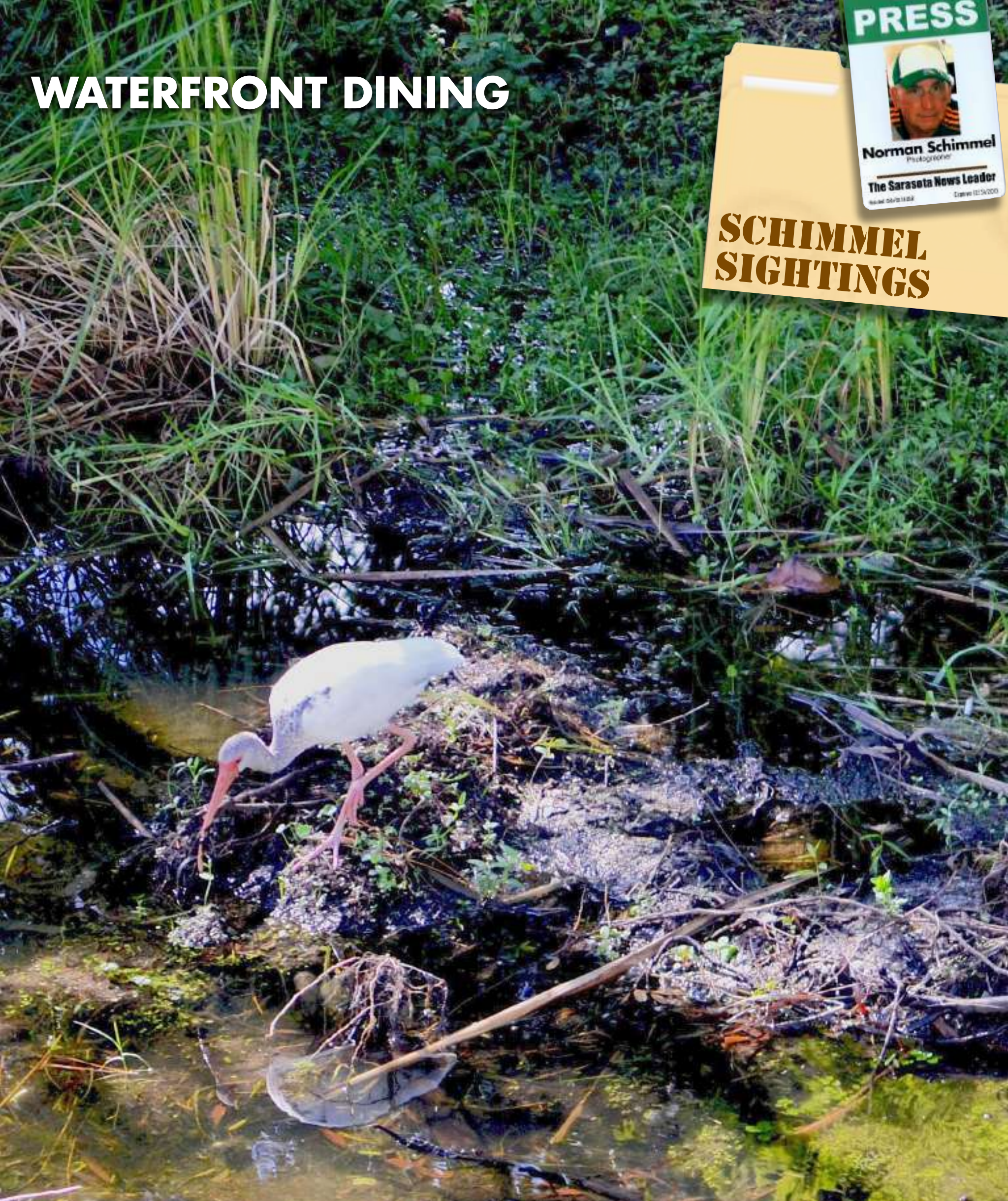
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Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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Issue 04/2018/04 Expires 10/15/2020

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



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