

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 12 — December 6, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



A ROSEMARY SPRING

AT WITS END

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Inside

Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.

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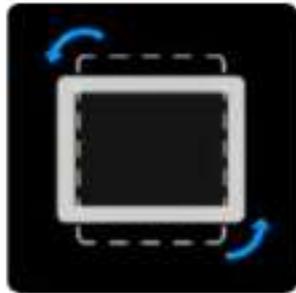
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A.K.A. HELP

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The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

With the holiday season well under way, we have more features to offer in this issue — from the lovely article by Fran Palmeri (with co-authorship by Laurel Schiller) I mentioned last week to photo essays covering the Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless to Siesta Key's annual Light Up the Village festivities to Selby Gardens' Bromeliad Tree ceremony.

Dare you think the news was light, fear not. City Editor Stan Zimmerman must have cloned himself this week. He was all over the place. Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker put at the top of our story list Stan's article about a proposal to revitalize the Rosemary District — another coup in coverage for Stan.

Not to be outdone, Cooper must have been the only reporter in town to attend the Dec. 4 meeting of the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness, and he heard some new points regarding consultant Robert Marbut's recommendations. On the same topic, County Editor Roger Drouin talked to city and county leaders to learn the latest in the steps for implementation of Marbut's proposal.

And then there is Bob's Boathouse: I spent not a little time delving into the controversy surrounding that South Tamiami Trail business and its live entertainment.

Siesta Key has plenty going on, too. Village Association members were practically giddy this week thanks to putting behind them the very successful Light Up the Village event and the Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition.

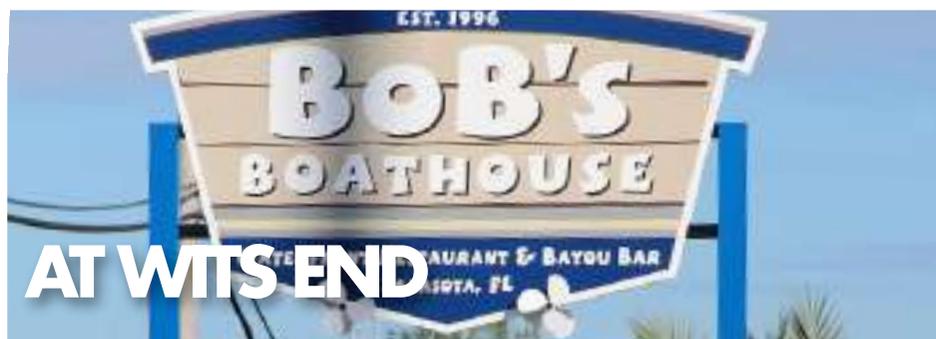
Our issues understandably may be heavier on features over the next couple of weeks, but we will continue to do our best to ferret out the news you need to know.

Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor and Publisher





A ROSEMARY SPRING



AT WITS END

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FOR THE BIRDS



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SARASOTA LEISURE

FOR THE BIRDS

Save Our Seabirds will host a family event designed to make the holidays extra special for the area's feathered natives and 'guests' — *Laurel Schiller and Fran Palmeri*

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Barbara Lee

A Second Chance on My Smile.



**Awarded 20 Gold Medals
for Smile Makeovers by
the Florida Academy of
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A smile is the first thing I notice about someone. However, that was the part of me I wanted to hide from everyone, including myself. In 2007, my family dentist of 30 years told me he could help. He then crowned all of my teeth. They looked better, but they immediately started to crack, one by one. He kept promising me he could correct them by re-making them. He was frustrated, but I was devastated. I then realized that I never received a stable, comfortable position to chew. My bite was totally off.

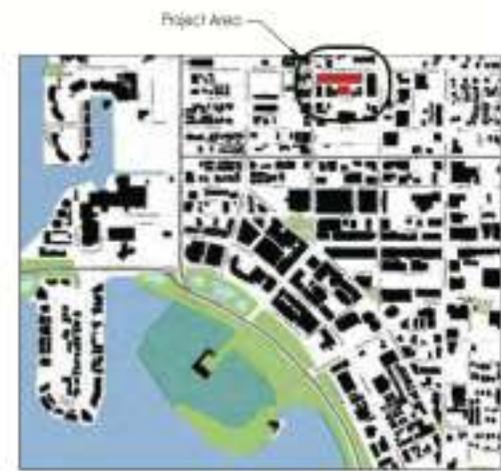
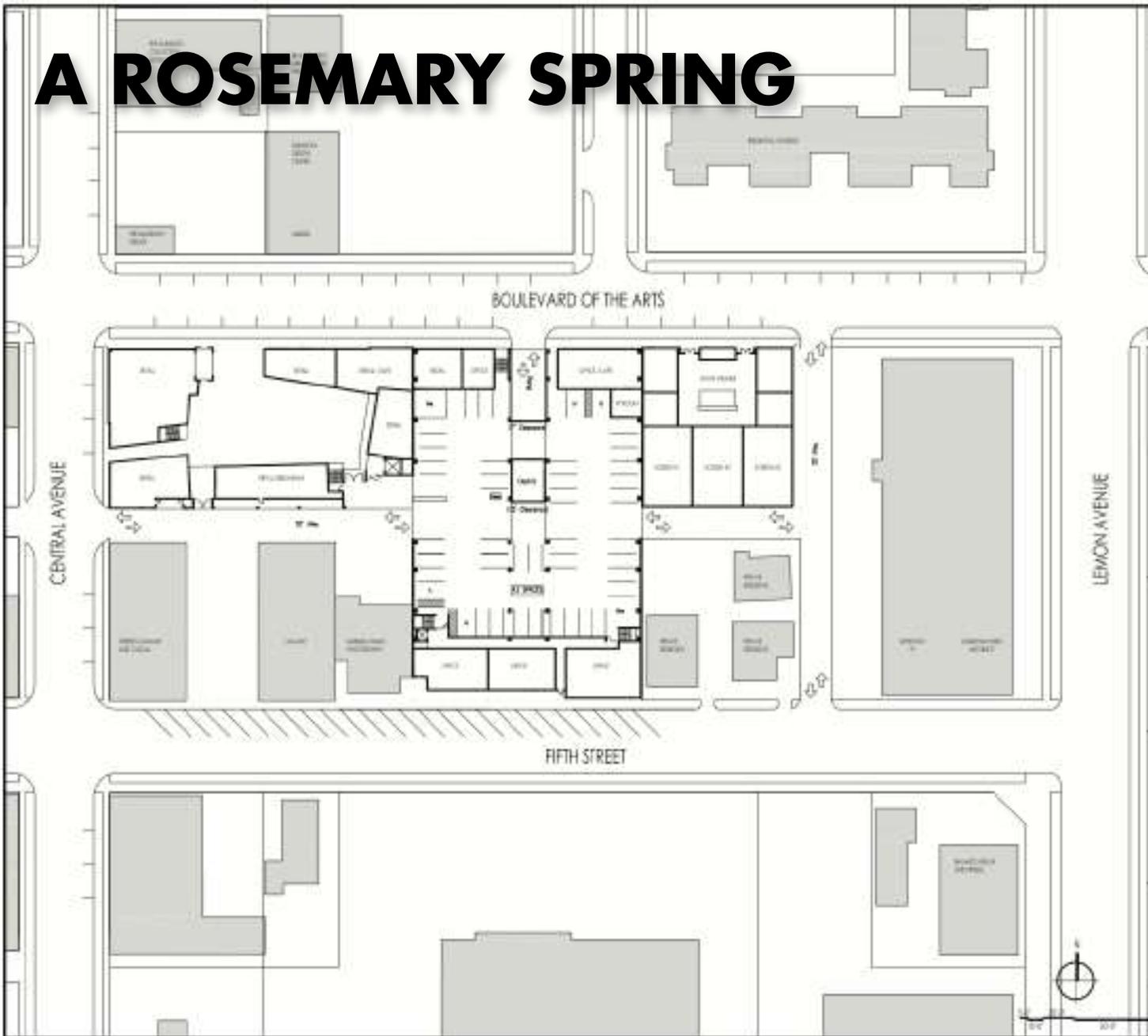
After four consultations with different dentists and lots of research, I chose Dr. Christine Koval for her warmth, reassurance, confidence, and experience in correcting bites and making teeth beautiful! Dr. Koval's team is very caring and professional, and her skill level is second to none. I am so incredibly pleased, not only with my beautiful smile but also with my comfortable and natural bite.

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A ROSEMARY SPRING



ROSEMARY SQUARE
TYPICAL LOWER LEVEL
CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The Rosemary Square proposal includes a conceptual plan for lower level development. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

THE CITY OF SARASOTA HAS RECEIVED A PROPOSAL TO TURN THE OLD COMMUNITY GARDEN ON THE BOULEVARD OF THE ARTS INTO A PUBLIC PLAZA SURROUNDED BY MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

While downtown Sarasota has basked in a golden shower of tax dollars for beautification, infrastructure, public-private partnerships, promotion and enhanced police presence, the Rosemary District — a stone's throw to the north — has struggled on its own. And it shows.

But change is in the air. A proposal to turn the old community garden on the Boulevard of the Arts (aka Sixth Street) into a public plaza surrounded by mixed-use development is under evaluation by city staff. It will be under

a go/no-go decision on Dec. 17. The project is called Rosemary Square.

City staff is also working on a different developer's proposal to double or even triple the allowable residential density in the Rosemary District. The details of that specific development — even its location — has not been revealed, but the intention is to provide small rental units for the downtown workforce.

Development consultant Joel Freedman tells *The Sarasota News Leader* the rental

PRELIMINARY ROSEMARY SQUARE PROFORMA

Preliminary Rosemary Square Proforma	Preliminary Budget
10.10.13	
Project Costs	
Land Purchase - City Parcel	\$100.00
Land Purchase - Central and Blvd of the Arts	\$500,000.00
Building Construction - hard cost minus sitework	\$9,554,691.00
Parking Costs - hard cost incl sitework	\$3,403,405.00
Site Improvements	\$295,751.00
Off-Site Improvements	\$785,932.00
TI for Retail space	\$1,360,000.00
FPL relocation	\$100,000.00
Developer Overhead and Profit	\$806,260.00
Contingency	\$2,000,000.00
Marketing/Commissions	\$100,000.00
Design/Consulting Fees	\$893,861.00
	\$19,800,000.00
Total Project Costs	
Project Funding	
Equity	\$3,960,000.00
Debt Financing	\$15,840,000.00
Total Project Funding	\$19,800,000.00
Project Benefits	
Jobs - Construction	100
Jobs - Retail office	170
Jobs - Theater	20
Wages	\$5,250,000.00
Movie ticket sales	\$1,310,000
Concessions	\$546,000.00
Building Permit Fees	\$172,000.00
Public Art Fee	\$67,000.00
Impact Fees	\$431,000.00
Property Tax per year	\$335,000.00
Sales Tax Construction materials	\$567,000.00
Taxable revenue from surrounding business	\$15,000,000.00
Sales Tax revenue from retails sales	\$1,050,000.00
Value of Long-Term Cash Flow Sales/Lease	
Other Impact on Economy/Tourism/Downtown Vicinity (please specify)	
Total Project Benefits	\$24,728,000.00

buildings will be three or four stories in height, not Stalinesque high-rises.

ANYBODY WANT TO NEGOTIATE?

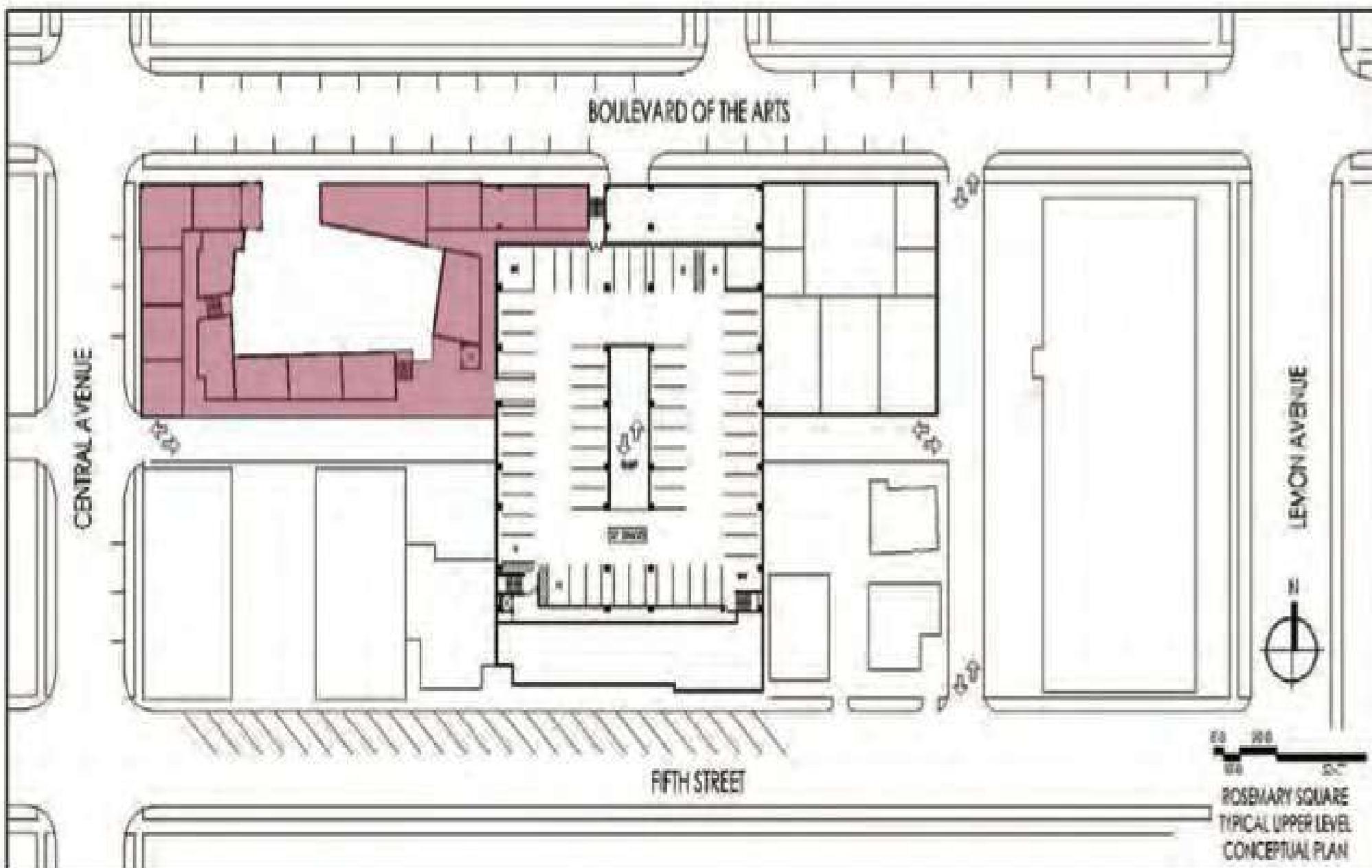
Almost exactly one year ago, the city held a community discussion about the future of the Rosemary District, located north of downtown and Fruitville Road (aka Third Street). At issue was the fate of about 1 acre of city-owned land in two parcels between Fifth and Sixth streets.

One property previously was a community garden, but then it was fenced off and allowed to go fallow. The other was a small surface parking lot.

At the Dec. 10, 2012, meeting, one stakeholder said, “The Rosemary District is almost like a blank palette. A lot of good things are happening there. It seems to me to offer the opportunity to be a bit more edgy than downtown or Towles Court.”

Another stakeholder voiced a question several others repeated. “What does the district want to be? Right now, it’s half blight.”

Several months later the city released an ITN — an Invitation to Negotiate — for the property’s future. The deadline for responses was mid-October, and only one proposal was received.



A drawing shows how residential apartments would be incorporated into the plan. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

ROSEMARY SQUARE

The ITN response was spearheaded by two local professionals. Dr. Mark Kauffman and architect Jonathan Parks propose to enlarge the 1.1-acre parcel by adding one-third of an acre at the corner of Coconut Avenue and Sixth Street. Kauffman and Parks' team have an option on the so-called Parker property at the corner, which may account for their being the only response to the ITN.

Their submission to the city says, "The Rosemary Square proposal, with the Parker property, will have a far greater economic impact in the Rosemary District than could be achieved with the City property alone. As the principals of Rosemary Square control the Parker property, no other proposal could offer the same economic impact."

The project is pure infill. Based on current Downtown Edge zoning, the 1.58-acre parcel will accommodate 40 residential units. It will include 34,000 square feet of office, retail and "arts space," and a 7,000-square-foot "urban town square creating a lively outdoor focal point for use by residents, cafes, business and the public." A second phase will add space for a "boutique cinema" or a live theater company, as well as a parking structure.

If Rosemary Square LLC's proposal is accepted, it will become the starting point for negotiations with the city

THRASHING THROUGH THE TERMS

"Failure of the Rosemary District to attract investment and redevelopment at a significant scale is due partly to economic factors, but more significantly to the perception that the Rosemary District is not a safe place for

investment," says the developer's response to the ITN.

Kauffman and company are willing to take the risk, but they are asking the city to come to the table ready to work out the details. For example, the ITN calls for development of 40 public parking spaces. At \$30,000 per space, that is \$1.2 million the company needs to put up for a public amenity. In return, the group would like to pick up the 1.1 acres of city property for a flat \$100.

While city water, sewer and stormwater facilities are available, they will need to be upgraded "to accommodate the new Rosemary Square development and future redevelopment of the block and surrounding properties," the proposal also says.

In return, Kauffman and his partners will pay \$500,000 to bring the Parker property into the plan, \$400,000 in impact fees, \$175,000 in building permit fees and \$100,000 to move overhead power lines underground.

Construction of the buildings and parking will cost an estimated \$14 million, with other "soft" expenses for design, marketing, commissions and legal and other charges expected to exceed \$1 million. The "total cost of development" is estimated at \$19.8 million. Construction could begin in January 2016.

The ITN response indicates the development would generate \$335,000 in annual property taxes and more than \$1 million in sales tax. The retail and office spaces would create 170 jobs.

The city's property is now zoned "G" for government, and Kauffman's firm wants the city to bear the cost of rezoning it to Downtown

Edge. Lastly, the company wants the city to improve the sidewalks around the property.

If the selection committee gives the green light to the proposal, the city would then begin negotiations to reach a deal. Meanwhile, the proposal to create a higher-density overlay district could be done by summer. That might allow Rosemary Square to ask for higher density as well.

One source close to the negotiations said the final deal might give Kauffman and his partners the ability to bump up density. But the source indicated the proposal now on the table is already structured to ensure profitability, so the increased density is not required to achieve financial feasibility.

The Kauffman team is a who's who of local development. Dr. Mark Kauffman has been involved in developing P.F. Chang's near

downtown, the Roy's/Fleming's restaurant building at the corner of U.S. 41 and Siesta Drive, the Hollywood 20 theaters, Links Plaza and Park (where Eat Here is located on Main Street) and the Florida Cancer Center, among others.

Architect Jonathan Parks has worked on the Palm Avenue Parking Garage, the Sarasota School of Arts and Sciences, the Palm Avenue hotel project (Floridays) and downtown's Ivory Lounge.

Other team members are Mindy Kauffman as leasing agent and property manager; Michael Beaumier as construction manager; and Brenda Patten as legal advisor. Patten has served as counsel for development of the Ritz-Carlton, Pineapple Square, the downtown Whole Foods grocery and the headquarters of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. 



The Rosemary Square proposal includes a concept drawing for retail space. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

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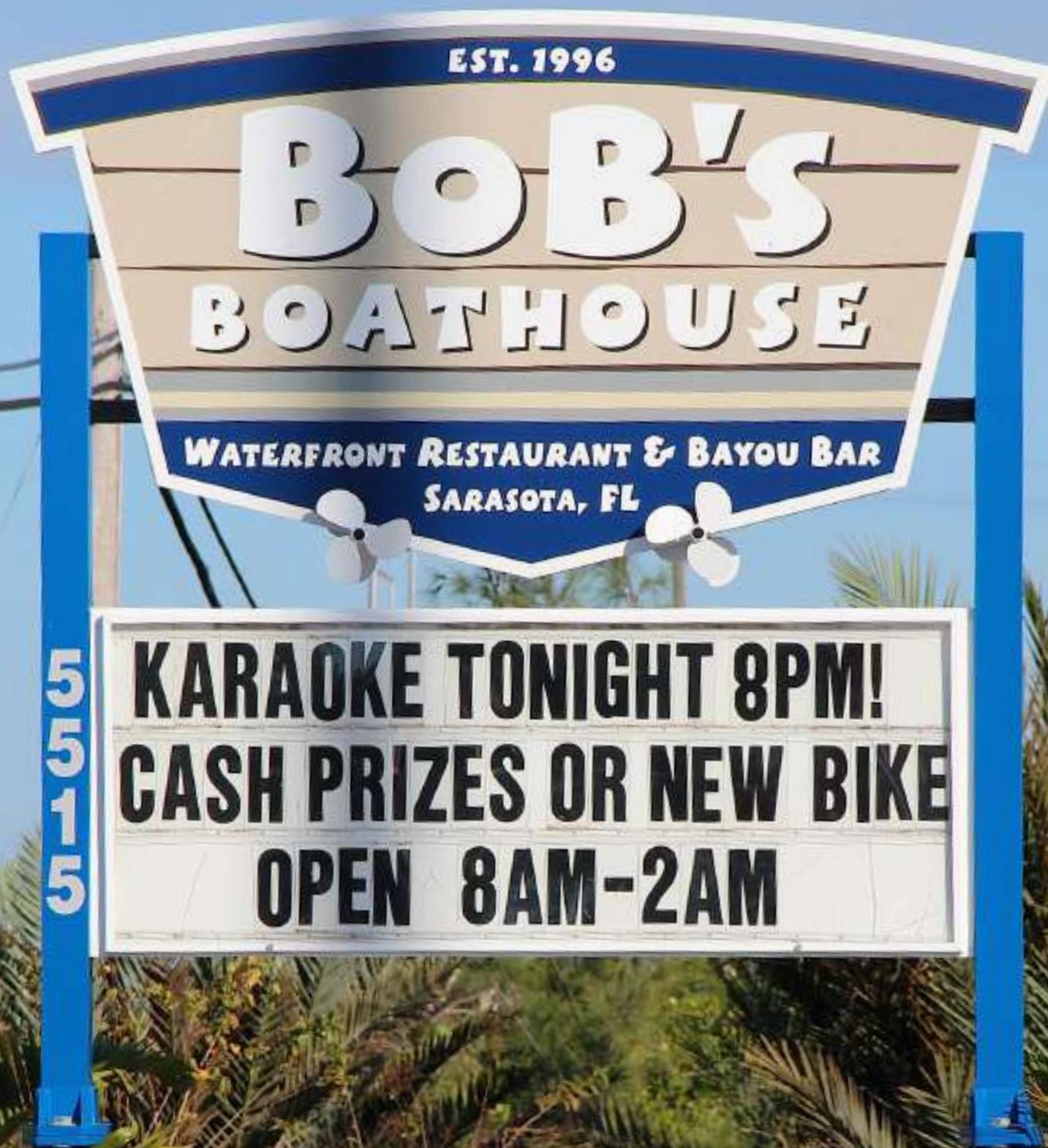
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AT WITS END



“*I can now understand how a prisoner of war can be broken down so quickly with noise, lack of sleep and stress.*

I am at my [wits] end crying at the drop of a hat.

Michelle Lee
Montclair Drive Resident
And Neighbor of Bob's Boathouse



NEIGHBORS OF BOB'S BOATHOUSE CONTINUE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT NOISE AS SARASOTA COUNTY STAFF AND THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE WORK ON REMEDIES

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

At 12:50 a.m. on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 28, Michelle Lee, who lives near Bob's Boathouse on South Tamiami Trail, emailed Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta to describe an ordeal that threatened her enjoyment of the holiday.

"The blasts of music that travel across the water whenever anyone goes outside to the deck [keep] me on edge until I just cannot take it any more. So I get up, take a sleeping pill, and start working on doing what I can about this nightmare. My neighbor said it is [not] a nightmare because you wake up from those. We never get away from the cacophony of noises that bombard us all day and night long. My stress level is through the roof, I am

exhausted, my back is in knots and I am so tired of taking over-the-counter sleeping pills. This is just not right!!!"

She was writing about Bob's Boathouse, which opened on Nov. 3 at 5515 S. Tamiami Trail, right across Phillippi Creek from her home.

Eight days earlier, the County Commission unanimously voted to ask Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer to work with staff and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office — "with a sense of urgency," as Commissioner Christine Robinson put it — to come up with a plan of action to address the multitude of complaints from neighbors of the restaurant and bar.



The South Trail Church of Christ is visible from the back deck of Bob's Boathouse. Photo by Rachel Hackney

In his Nov. 27 response to the board, Harmer wrote that the following actions would be taken to ensure Bob's Boathouse was in compliance with the county's noise ordinance and zoning code:

- Code Enforcement will conduct random evening and weekend inspections for sound, light and zoning violations. Notices of violations and citations will be issued when applicable.
- Code Enforcement will keep a log to track its inspection activity.
- Zoning Administration staff will assist Code Enforcement officers with interpreting the code.
- All violations will be processed through a Special Magistrate and Circuit Court, when applicable.

- The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has been contacted, and Lt. Kevin Mcelyea has confirmed deputies will respond to any complaints phoned in to that office.
- The Sheriff's Office will provide its tracking reports to the Code Enforcement Office.
- On Dec. 10, sound level meter training is scheduled with Quest Technologies for both Sheriff's Office personnel and Code Enforcement staff to facilitate accurate decibel level measurements with noise meters.

Yet, as a result of the most recent complaints to commissioners, the issue will be back on the board's agenda next week at Barbetta's request. In a Dec. 3 email to Tom Polk, the county's director of Planning and



The front door of Bob's Boathouse is through part of a boat. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Development Services Department, Barbetta requested that Polk or another staff member “provide us a detailed report” about the efforts to deal with those ongoing complaints.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

On the [website](#) for Bob’s Boathouse, the “About Us” story says the establishment originally opened on Stickney Point Road, near Siesta Key, in 1997. It is named for the father of owner Tom LeFevre.

After several years, the story continues, Tom LeFevre “dumped all his hard earned living and borrowed above his means to build condos on the old Bob’s Boathouse site. Unfortunately, the market began to crumble and he lost everything!”

Recently, the website adds, “with a few old boats, a few old friends, a worn out workshop and a dream, [LeFevre] went to beg & borrow to reopen Bob’s boathouse and ‘go back to what he knows best!’”

The Florida Secretary of State website says papers for the corporation papers were reactivated on July 12, 2012, with Richard Walkowiak of Fort Myers listed as the manager.

According to the Bob’s Boathouse [website](#), it had 4,362 Facebook friends as of midday on Dec. 4. It is open from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The December calendar has a variety of entertainment listings — from “KARAOKE” to “LATIN Tiki Night” to “LIVE music.”

But a perusal of County Commission email since late October shows a number of the neighbors of Bob’s Boathouse feel the furthest thing from affection for it.

Jim McWhorter, vice president of the River Forest Civic Association, was among the first to contact commissioners. In his Oct. 30 email, he wrote, “The main concern has been [the restaurant’s] outdoor music and potential for high decibel noise levels infringing upon our



Houses on Montclair Drive are just across Phillippi Creek from the restaurant. Photo by Rachel Hackney



“Anybody who reads English and sees the words ‘completely enclosed building’ doesn’t expect the completely enclosed building to have open windows and open doors.”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



The sidewalk takes a sharp turn as a pedestrian heads toward the Bob’s Boathouse sign on South Tamiami Trail. Photo by Rachel Hackney

previously serene environment in the area of Phillippi Creek just east of the Trail when we are trying to sleep.”

McWhorter also referenced the complaints Bob’s Boathouse generated when it was located on Little Sarasota Bay, off Stickney Point Road. It was the regular focal point of frustrations aired at Siesta Key Association meetings, he pointed out.

Commissioner Nora Patterson brought up all the recent email complaints during the board’s Nov. 20 regular meeting in Sarasota.

The list of problems cited, she pointed out, “[is] really pretty extensive and expresses just a lack of general consideration for the neighbors. That’s big.”

For one thing, she continued, she believed the county zoning code forbids commercial establishments from shining lights on residential areas. Second, the ordinance does not allow outdoor food and drink service after a certain time, she said. Third, after 10 p.m., she recalled, the ordinance says live entertainment may be offered, but only in a completely enclosed building. While doors and windows obviously are regular features in structures, Patterson pointed out, “Anybody who reads English and sees the words ‘completely enclosed building’ doesn’t expect the completely enclosed building to have open windows and open doors.”

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh reviewed the ordinance and concurred: “One must close the windows at 10 p.m.”

Patterson said she understood the design of Bob’s Boathouse incorporates numerous openings facing an outdoor dining area,

and microphones for performers are being pointed to patrons at those tables.

Regarding the county code, she continued, “I really do expect [staff] to interpret this in a fashion that makes common sense, and if we do that, then I think the neighborhood would be much better protected. ... In my mind, this particular operator ... needs to be made to follow the codes very strictly.”

Barbetta pointed out the restaurant is closer to the adjacent South Trail Church of Christ than the distance the county code allows for an establishment with a liquor license. He had visited the site, he told his colleagues. Although the sidewalk for Bob’s is more than 873 feet from the church, he said, “It’s ludicrous the way that sidewalk goes. ... The driveway’s right in the center of the property,” but the sidewalk meanders to maintain the mandatory distance for Bob’s Boathouse to comply with the code.

If the sidewalk followed the driveway, Barbetta continued, it would be only about 500 feet from the church at its greatest distance from the church property line.

“I don’t think it follows the spirit of the ordinance,” Barbetta said.

Because the property where Bob’s is located was zoned for that type of business, the matter never came before the County Commission for approval, Barbetta pointed out. The location of the church should have prevented Bob’s Boathouse from obtaining a liquor license, he added, but “staff says otherwise.”

When Patterson asked for her colleagues’ support on action “to bring this down to a level of enforcement,” Commissioner Robinson asked

whether Patterson was seeking an authorization of overtime work for Code Enforcement staff.

“If it’s necessary,” Patterson replied. “This is a crisis for these people.”

“I agree,” Robinson told her.

“I’m asking for a common-sense approach to what the ordinance says and enforcement of the ordinances,” Patterson said.

That was when Robinson made the motion to have Harmer develop a plan of action as soon as possible.

STAFF RESPONSE

Before the commissioners voted on that motion, Vice Chairman Charles Hines asked for more information from staff.

Polk, the director of the Planning and Development Services Department, told the board staff was monitoring the situation at Bob’s.

“We’re asking for an elevated level” of attention to the situation, Robinson said.

As of that date, Polk pointed out, Bob’s had not been cited for music louder than allowed under the county’s Air and Sound Pollution ordinance. However, the restaurant was cited on Nov. 17 for providing food service outside after 10 p.m., he said.

When Patterson asked how many sound measurements had been taken, Polk responded, “Five.”

“It’s been going on for a while,” Patterson told him, “and it isn’t happening all the time.” Based on what residents had written, she

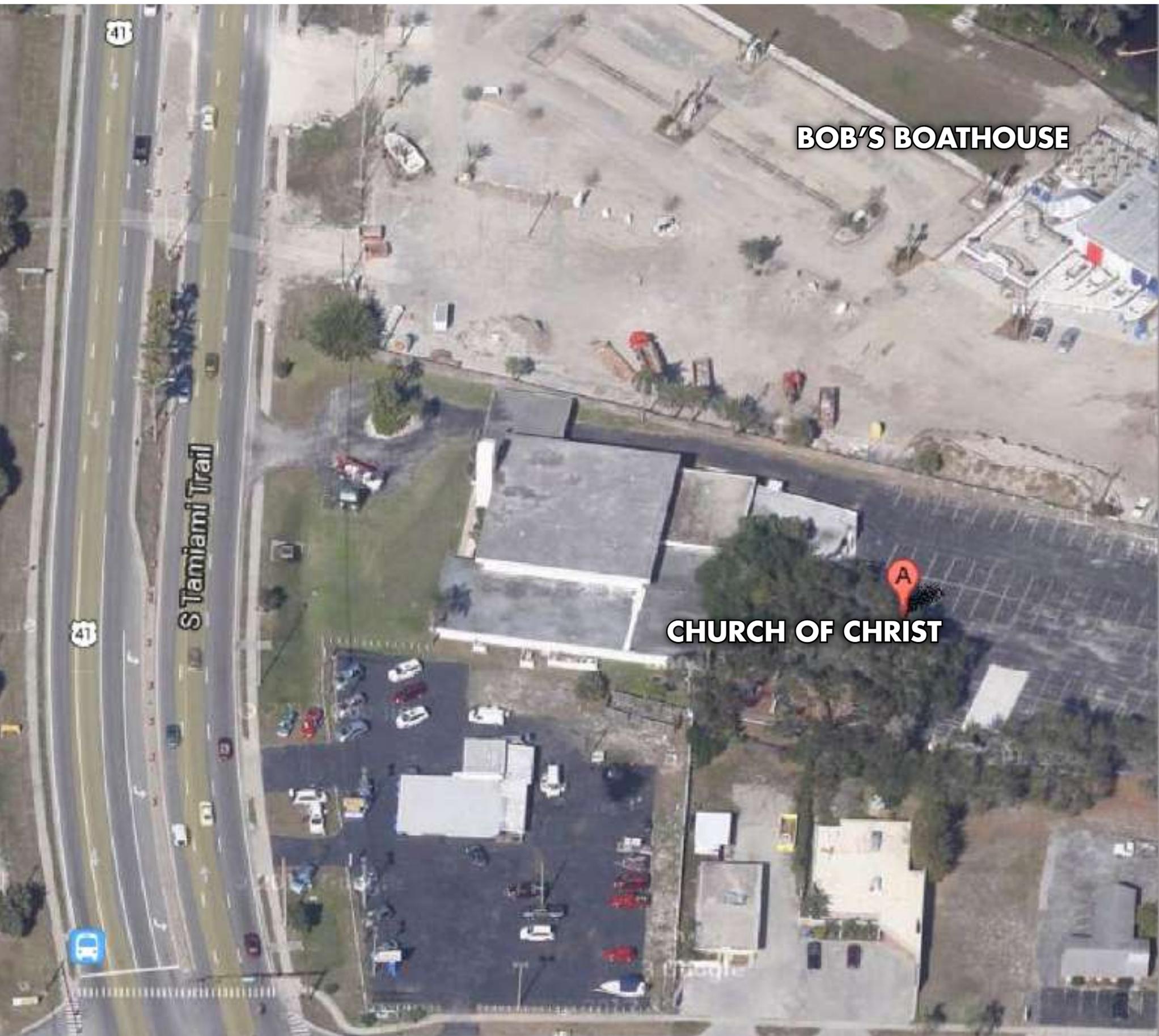


The sidewalk can be seen (left) parallel to a portion of the driveway to the front of the building. Photo by Rachel Hackney

continued, the sound goes down when Code Enforcement staff shows up to monitor it, and then the noise level increases again after staff leaves.

In response to another question from Patterson, Assistant Zoning Administrator Donna Thompson explained that the

ordinance does require sound levels to be lower after 10 p.m. unless a business has a special exception. Bob's does not. She also concurred with Patterson's earlier point. "[The noise level] appears to exceed [the limit] after [Code Enforcement officers have] taken the readings and left the scene."



An aerial image shows the proximity of Bob's Boathouse (upper right) to the South Trail Church of Christ. Image from Google Maps

In his Nov. 27 memo to the County Commission, Harmer wrote that Code Enforcement staff met with four of the managers from Bob's Boathouse on Nov. 4 "to inspect the acoustical arrangements and to explain the sound control ordinance requirements. The inspection found the musical speakers were placed randomly and suggestions were made as to how to place the speakers so the sound would be less intrusive to neighbors."

Additionally, Harmer wrote, Code Enforcement staff received permission from several residents along Montclair Drive to access their properties for sound measurements. Readings taken on Saturday, Nov. 23, between 9 p.m. and midnight and on Sunday, Nov. 24, between 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. found the restaurant in compliance on every occasion. However, a lighting inspection from a Montclair Drive address did result in a violation, Harmer noted.

UPDATES FROM STAFF

In a Dec. 3 email exchange with Barbetta, Polk explained that the restaurant is operating under a temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO). "An additional 30-day extension of the TCO was issued on November 27," he added. As part of that extension, he continued, the county's deputy building official "outlined outstanding items that needed completion prior to a final completion issuance. These items included payment of building fees (including road impact fees), site and development certification ... shoreline plantings noted in [other staff] emails, water meter and capacity fees, and several building permits. As part of this letter, the County notes the TCO is predicated on the expectation of the remaining outstanding issues being completed by December 30, 2013."

In a separate Dec. 3 email, Amy Meese, director of the county's Natural Resources Department, explained, "A watercourse buffer exists on site and must be planted and managed. ... [P]lantings in this area may provide some benefit relative to mitigating noise over time as the plants mature."

Barbetta responded to Polk, "I'm still trying to figure out how they were allowed to proceed with the initial opening without all the building fees, impact fees, certifications, shoreline plantings and various other fees and permits being taken care of first, prior to any TCO, since these aren't minor items ... This is very confusing."

Commissioner Robinson used almost the exact same words when *The Sarasota News Leader* contacted her on Dec. 4 about the ongoing issues. "I'm really confused," she said of the situation, declining to elaborate until the board hears the update next week.

The *News Leader* was unable to obtain a comment from any representative of Bob's Boathouse.

In the meantime, Michelle Lee emailed Barbetta in a separate note, "We have a box fan on loud, our sliding glass doors are closed, even though we would prefer to have them open this time of year, and yet we still can hear the bass constantly with an occasional blast."

She added, "I can now understand how a prisoner of war can be broken down so quickly with noise, lack of sleep and stress.

I am at my [wits] end crying at the drop of a hat." 

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Who We Are

The Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness was formed by community leaders from Sarasota and Manatee Counties in 2005, with the ambitious vision of ending homelessness in the region. The Partnership is funded by local governments, the State of Florida, Department of Children and Families, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as private donations.

The Suncoast Partnership supports a two-county Continuum of Care, which convenes service providers, community leaders, law enforcement, government and homeless individuals for the purpose of collaborating and coordinating services for the homeless. Together, the members determine the unmet needs for this population and partner to identify solutions. By advocating for homeless and near-homeless individuals and families, and improving their circumstances, we believe that we help provide a better quality of life for the community as a whole.



The Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness was created in 2005. Image from suncoastpartnership.org

SUPPORT, AND QUESTIONS, FOR THE MARBUT PLAN AMONG HOMELESS ADVOCATES

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

Homelessness has been a source of vexation, angst and controversy for Sarasota leaders and agencies for decades, but with the city and county's decision this year to hire Robert Marbut, there's unprecedented momentum behind actually tackling the problem. Harvest House Executive Director Erin Minor has heard one particular joke on multiple occasions: "It's sexy now to be involved in helping the homeless."

“ I think it was a very, very wise decision from our city and our county and our community foundations to bring Dr. Marbut to town, because it really motivated all the social agencies to unify.

Erin Minor
Executive Director
Harvest House

The Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness, a two-county consortium of social service agencies that formed in 2005, met Wednesday in part to discuss and debate the specifics of Marbut's recommendations, unveiled with much pomp to the public before Thanksgiving. While Marbut's work specifically focuses on the homeless problem in Sarasota County, it has big implications for Manatee. Executive Director

Leslie Loveless pointed that out to the 22 nonprofit and government reps who attended Wednesday's meeting, many of them from organizations based in Manatee.

While Sarasota County and its municipalities have agreed to synchronize new ordinances to ensure continuity across city lines, Manatee County has so far agreed to no such thing. Which means that even if Sarasota approves some of Marbut's recommendations, such as a ban on public feeding programs, the homeless may just migrate to Manatee, or they may in fact be drawn to Sarasota because of its new emergency and transitional housing.

The counties need "parallel ordinances," Loveless suggested, arguing that government needs to "think regionally" about the issue.

Minor tells *The Sarasota News Leader* that her agency, established first as a men's drug and alcohol rehab facility in 1992, sees homeless individuals from all over the region, from Tampa to Fort Myers. "It's so important for us to have a bi-county agreement with some of these ordinances," she says. To have the homeless migrate back and forth between Sarasota and Manatee will only complicate the problem. Sarasota won't succeed if Manatee doesn't come on board, Minor adds.

Reaction to Marbut's recommendations was largely positive among Partnership members, but concern over the fine print did bubble up. Public feeding programs, for example, don't just support the homeless, one agency rep pointed out. Participants are often the working poor or needy seniors. How can churches



Homeless people gather outside Selby Library in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

continue to serve the poor without enabling homelessness?

Other questions about the report show how many details still need to be worked out. Would the emergency intake portal for families with children include families led by same-sex couples? What about minors with children: Will they be considered minors or parents? And what should the intake portal and emergency housing facilities look like? Partnership members want to make sure they're designed in a non-"institutional" style.

The Partnership only made it through the first four of Marbut's 12 recommendations before the meeting had to be wrapped up due to time constraints, but the group expressed unanimous support for the sections it did address.

Harvest House is moving ahead with its role in Marbut's report, Minor tells the *News Leader*.

The organization has a contract on the property near Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Tuttle Avenue that it hopes will become the new North County intake portal. While there are "many variables in play," she says that if things go as planned, the portal should be open by May. At first, that site would focus primarily on providing emergency shelter for the homeless, before moving them to transitional housing for up to a year and then, ideally, into permanent housing.

The joke about helping the homeless being "sexy" may be just that, a joke, but there is a sense of urgency to solving the homelessness problem that didn't exist before. Minor says: "I think it was a very, very wise decision from our city and our county and our community foundations to bring Dr. Marbut to town, because it really motivated all the social agencies to unify." 

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A REPRIEVE



The City Commission this week continued to debate 'Lady Justice' in terms of a Sunshine lawsuit. Photo from Wikimedia Commons

THE CITY COMMISSION REVERSES COURSE AND VOTES TO PAY COMMISSIONER SUSAN CHAPMAN'S LEGAL FEES FOR ANOTHER 90 DAYS

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

In a dramatic turnaround, the Sarasota City Commission on Dec. 2 agreed to extend the time it will pay for the defense of one of its members in a suit charging she violated the state's open meetings law.

City Attorney Bob Fournier opened the discussion by changing the recommendation he previously made to the board. He had offered the commission three options: pay all of the legal fees for Commissioner Susan Chapman, pay

installments or wait and see. The law requires full payment from the city if Chapman succeeds in her defense. The commissioners during that meeting voted to pay her legal bills for two weeks, ending Dec. 2.

On Monday, Fournier endorsed one of his options. "My recommendation: Authorize the full payment of Commissioner Chapman's attorney's fees, win or lose. If you have some discomfort, make it six-month or quarterly payments."

“If the city will not back up its commissioner, will it back up advisory panel members?”

Eileen Normile
Member
Independent Police Advisory Panel



Commissioners Chapman and Suzanne Atwell met on Oct. 10 with downtown merchants to hear complaints about homelessness and vagrancy. On Oct. 18, Citizens for Sunshine, represented by Sarasota lawyer Andrea Mogensen, filed suit against the city and the two commissioners individually.

The city and Atwell quickly reached a settlement in the case, but Chapman says she did not violate the law and instead has filed a counterclaim against Citizens for Sunshine. According to public statements, the city and Atwell settled to prevent the city from paying legal fees to Mogensen (if she wins) and Fournier (regardless of the outcome).

Because Chapman has a financial stake in the outcome of the fee-payment discussions, she

has been barred under state law from voting on any of the related motions.

ONE FOR ALL ...

Fournier offered three reasons for his firmer recommendation. "It isn't about the four of you thinking about the strength of her case or her reason to proceed. It should be up to the individual being sued," he said. "It should be a matter of individual conscience."

"The second reason: There are reasons that this needs to be adjudicated," added Fournier. "Maybe it's time for the court to weigh in on some of these issues. Is there a Sunshine law violation if two commissioners meet but don't say anything?"



Four speakers came Monday to support payment of Chapman's legal fees, making the total 17 in two weeks. Among them were Eileen Normile (far left) and Jude Levy (second from right). Photo by Stan Zimmerman

“And third, there is an overall benefit to the city. If each of you feel you didn’t violate the Sunshine law, wouldn’t you like a defense?” he asked. “It calls for some display of unity on your part.”

Four more members of the public spoke Monday in favor of the commission’s supporting Chapman. Two weeks earlier, 13 people spoke in her behalf. So far, no member of the public has advocated cutting Chapman loose.

Jude Levy, a Laurel Park resident, told the commissioners Monday, “I hope you all stand up and push back on this. This is not what the Sunshine law is about.”

Eileen Normile is an attorney serving on the city’s Independent Police Advisory Panel. “I’m reevaluating my position on the advisory panel or any advisory panel. If the city will not back up its commissioner, will it back up advisory panel members?” she asked. “You need to stick together on this. You need to

think big, and long-term ... if you want to take advantage of all the talent in this city.”

... AND ALL FOR ONE

“We should go forward with full payment in the litigation of Ms. Chapman’s case,” said Vice Mayor Willie Shaw. Two weeks earlier, he cast the sole vote supporting the full payment of Chapman’s fees.

“All the way to the [Florida] Supreme Court?” Commissioner Paul Caragiulo responded.

Shaw then moved to pay for Chapman’s legal costs through the Circuit Court stage, but he received no second, so his motion died.

“What would you suggest? What are you looking for?” asked Shaw. “I feel really, really saddened that we would allow ourselves to be humiliated and intimidated.”

Mayor Shannon Snyder then passed the gavel and moved the commission “pay all her legal



(From left) Vice Mayor Willie Shaw, Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioner Susan Chapman participate in an earlier City Commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

bills through the end of the week.” That also found no second. “We need more conversation here,” said Snyder, reclaiming the gavel.

“Perhaps it would be inconsistent for me to approve this,” offered Atwell. “I made a decision to settle the lawsuit and I’m pleased with my decision. This is not about me. I did not base my decision on emotion, anger or gossip. I decided not to have all of you take on the courage of my convictions.”

Atwell’s settlement does not admit she violated the law. In a press release, she stated, “I am firmly convinced that I did not violate the Sunshine Law”

“This is bigger than us. This is bigger than the moment,” said Shaw. “Not everybody has the

luxury of having the financial stability that you may have had. Not everybody seeking a commission seat will have your resources. If I were on the street, I’d say you were punking out.”

“I think the law is ridiculous. I’ve said it a thousand times,” added Caragiulo. “The question going forward is, what is our responsibility?”

Fournier then reminded the commissioners, “You need three affirmative votes to pass anything. After today, there is no authorization to continue payment.”

Caragiulo then moved to “extend payment of fees for the next 90 days.” Shaw seconded it, and the motion passed 3-1, with Snyder in the minority. He then adjourned the meeting. 



City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo made the motion that finally passed regarding Commissioner Susan Chapman’s legal fees. Photo by Norman Schimmel



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NEXT STEPS

An aerial view shows the property at 1330 N. Osprey Ave. Image from Google Maps

CITY AND COUNTY STAFF HOPE TO HAVE AN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS BACK IN ABOUT TWO MONTHS ON THE THREE SITES SHORT-LISTED FOR A PERMANENT HOMELESS SHELTER

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Of consultant Robert Marbut's 12 strategic recommendations for addressing homelessness in Sarasota County, No. 4 on the list will likely prove the most challenging and the most controversial.

City and county staffers and elected officials are already taking the next step in regard to No. 4 — an

environmental study of the three short-listed sites for a permanent homeless shelter in Sarasota.

“*Nothing needs to happen until we have the environmental analysis back. Then it will get narrowed down further. Then we need to talk about funding.*”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

The report will look into issues such as possible contamination and specific areas on each site that are buildable or not buildable. Once it is complete, county staffers will be able

to put together cost projections for a shelter at each location, Wayne Applebee, Sarasota County's director of homeless services, told *The Sarasota News Leader* this week.

Applebee has been tasked with implementing Marbut's recommendations.

"I would hope within one to two months we would have [the environmental studies] wrapped up," Applebee said.

After a site is chosen, the city and county leaders will hold public meetings to begin vetting plans with the county's residents, Applebee added.

All three of the sites would trigger some form of rezoning or lengthy permitting process under the city's development codes, Applebee pointed out.

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo expects that the path to building a facility will not be an easy one, but he believes the project can be accomplished if the city and county commissioners work together. Caragiulo has proposed setting up a series of meetings between the two boards.

"I see what we're wandering at, if you will, as a collaborative utopia, and I think we should take it for a spin and see what we can get — and not lock ourselves in a closet and get our tattoos and be partisan," Caragiulo said during Monday's City Commission meeting.

In a series of votes on Nov. 25, the County and City commissions not only approved Marbut's 12 strategic action recommendations, but they also agreed to the following: to extend Marbut's contract to keep him working as a



Homeless people were camping regularly on Florida Avenue in Sarasota until the police cleared the area in the spring. Photo by Norman Schimmel

consultant; to begin drafting a uniform code of ordinances covering crimes such as pan-handling and camping on private property; and to move ahead with due diligence on the short list of three possible sites for a permanent shelter — a list narrowed down from Marbut's top four locations.

THE NEXT POLICY STEPS

A "Phase One" environmental assessment on each of those three sites will provide the boards clearer direction for their next step.

The three locations are 1330 N. Osprey Ave. (a city-owned parcel) together with the adjacent 1530 N. Osprey Ave. property; 1121 Lewis Ave.; and 1800 East Ave. The first two are in the city, while the third is located partially in the city.

County Commissioner Nora Patterson said she does not favor one site over the other at this point.

Although 1330 N. Osprey Ave. was Marbut's top choice, the other two are viable locations, Patterson noted.

"Nothing needs to happen until we have the environmental analysis back. Then it will get narrowed down further," Patterson told *The Sarasota News Leader*. "Then we need to talk about funding."

Sarasota Mayor Shannon Snyder agreed. "We have to get the environmental [studies] done before we can even rank the three."

Not everyone will support the concept of a homeless shelter. "Some are afraid it will be a magnet," Patterson said. But a shelter would



Wayne Applebee speaks to the City and County commissions on Nov. 25. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Homelessness consultant Robert Marbut makes his presentation to the City and County commissions on Nov. 25. Photo by Norman Schimmel

be a significant improvement over the current situation, she added.

“The [homeless] people are there. They are on the street,” Patterson continued. “They are better off the street than on the street, from every perspective, including the perspective of downtown businesses.”

When it comes to funding a shelter, a strategy will be necessary, Applebee said. “We will be looking at all sources, governmental, grants, private.”

One new potential source of assistance could be a proposed state revenue stream championed by Florida Rep. Kathleen M. Peters and state Sen. Jack Latvala, both of Pinellas County — the county with one of the country’s largest homeless populations.

“County staff are monitoring that closely,” Applebee said about the state proposal. “We believe homelessness will be a big priority at the Legislature.”

AN UNKNOWN AT OSPREY AVENUE

In his report, Marbut wrote of the property at 1330 N. Osprey Ave., “This is an ideal location,” because it has existing buffers and space for additional buffering. The site could also be the least expensive land option.

But a big question lies under the surface.

A memo from City Manager Tom Barwin urging caution about an underground storage well on the property had some backers of shelter plans questioning whether Barwin supported the idea of a facility in the city limits.

The mayor said changes made after Barwin issued his original memo about the water-treatment storage well put emphasis on an issue that initially did not seem worrisome. Snyder added that he considered those changes in the memo evidence that the city manager was pushing against the idea of a shelter at 1330 N. Osprey Ave.



(From left) County Commissioner Nora Patterson, City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell, County Commissioner Christine Robinson, City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo and City Manager Tom Barwin participate in a joint meeting of their boards in October. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“Eight hours earlier, it was ‘no operational problem.’ Then it became an issue that might endanger the city’s water supply. They are playing games down there [at City Hall],” Snyder told the *News Leader*.

During Monday’s City Commission meeting, Barwin addressed concerns that the city administration is “not totally on board” with Marbut’s suggestion for a shelter anywhere in the city.

“I want to put that to rest right now and state clearly that we are prepared to enthusiastically implement whatever decisions this commission has made or will make,” Barwin told the city commissioners. “We will work in whatever capacity we can to make this work. It is a really tough challenge but an important one that we see through to fruition and success.”

The wrangling over the North Osprey site will likely subside as the Phase One environmental analysis clears up the question of whether the storage well would be an impediment.

“That will give a clear understanding, from an expert’s position, to tell us how we can

or cannot manage that issue,” Applebee said. “We need to get that resolved, find out how much of a hurdle that is — if it is one at all.”

In an interview with the *News Leader* Dec. 4, Barwin said it is clear that both commissions have given staff the direction to move forward with a shelter in the city.

Barwin praised Applebee, who previously led the search for a new jail site when the county was considering such a facility. He said Applebee is a good choice to lead this process and that the city will work closely with him.

If the North Osprey site remains on the table as a possibility after the environmental study is completed, the next question will be whether the city will make the site available for a shelter.

“Would they donate the site, maybe in lieu of contributing to building [the shelter]? If not, how much would they like for it?” Patterson asked. “But I don’t think we should just focus on that site.” 

“Your present circumstances don’t determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.” — *Nido Qubein*

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ATWELL PROVES KEY TO ACTION

“*Having some fun downtown is not a bad thing.*”

Shannon Snyder
Mayor
City of Sarasota

Regarding a Proposal for Pianos At Downtown Locations

The City Commission voted against a request by the Gator Club for an ordinance change so it could serve drinks to patrons seated outside. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY COMMISSION SPLITS ON SIX VOTES, RANGING FROM FUNDING FOR A POSITION TO ASSIST WITH HOMELESSNESS ISSUES TO PROVIDING PIANOS FOR PEOPLE TO PLAY AT A FEW OUTDOOR SITES DOWNTOWN

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Monday, Dec. 2, ended the Sarasota City Commission's calendar year of regularly scheduled sessions. While it displayed the board's unanimity on some small issues, six of the 11 policy votes were narrow victories. In every case, Commissioner Suzanne Atwell was on the winning side, often with the swing vote.

The commission has settled into a 3-2 rhythm, with Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo pitted against Vice Mayor Willie Shaw and Commissioner

Susan Chapman. Increasingly, it is Atwell deciding the city's policy and future course.

RARE UNANIMITY

On three issues, the board was unanimous. A proposal from the Downtown Improvement District to allow bars to have café tables on the sidewalk failed to get a single vote. The idea was floated by the Gator Club as a test case, but it did not fly. Therefore, city policy will continue to allow only establishments serving food to sell alcohol to patrons seated on the sidewalk.

Another plea from businesses fell on more fertile ground. St. Armands merchants want to put the brakes on more events in the park at the center of the traffic circle during tourist season. They simply asked that a prior policy be revived, and the commissioners agreed unanimously.

The plight of the St. Armands Business Improvement District's Sunshine Law woes also solicited five affirmative votes. Angry and worried the city's advisory boards were too cavalier in using personal email accounts to conduct city business, the commissioners ordered staff to telephone each member of the city's myriad advisory boards this week to warn him or her of the perils of flouting the state's public records laws. "We're going to have to put an end to these committee

meetings until we get these boards retrained," said Snyder.

The final item of unanimity was simply a consensus — not a vote — to allow the petitioner in a Hampton Roads rezoning initiative to proceed as he desired. This long-dragging issue concerns an obscure change to the property's designation from residential to commercial on the future land use map. The parcel lies along the north Tamiami Trail; the change has raised a huge brouhaha with the Tahiti Park Neighborhood Association.

City Attorney Bob Fournier reported that he made an offer to buy the property for the city to short-circuit the controversy, but the owner declined it. Fournier then said the process — now in the rebuttal phase — would start afresh.



The City Commission has put the brakes on events in the circle at St. Armands during season. Photo by Norman Schimmel

COMMON ACRIMONY

Eight other issues ended with split votes Monday, and Atwell on the winning side each time.

The Independent Police Advisory Panel came before the commission in the afternoon session to ask for an expansion of its duties under the enabling ordinance. Panel Chairman Elmer Berkel recommended a rewrite to allow the board to make recommendations to the chief of police and city manager in addition to the City Commission. “We may have actually violated the ordinance or stepped over it already,” said Berkel.

Commissioner Caragiulo replied, “If you have faith in your police administration, if the chief is doing [her] job, I don’t think we need this

kind of panel.” Snyder agreed, saying, “I won’t support this motion, either.” But they were in the minority when the vote was taken to rewrite the ordinance to expand the police panel’s powers of recommendation.

The next contentious issue was spending \$30,000 to help fund “an administrative support position for the director of homeless services.” At a joint City-County commission meeting last month, Shaw asked for time to get public testimony before any significant decisions were made on a plan to address homelessness and vagrancy produced by consultant Robert Marbut.

“The wheels on this bus are starting to move very fast,” said Shaw on Monday. “Will citizens have anything to say?”



Commissioners Susan Chapman (left) and Suzanne Atwell prepare for a City Commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Chapman asked, “Are other cities being asked to pay for this position?”

The answer, said Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown, is “No.”

Shaw moved to withhold the money until the City Commission or staff can have further discussions with county representatives. Chapman seconded the motion and added, “I would like to see some discussion with other municipalities about sharing the burden of staffing.” The motion failed 2-3, with Atwell voting against it. She then moved to approve

the \$30,000 funding, and that passed 3-2, with Shaw and Chapman in the minority.

Shaw and Chapman were in the minority again on a lighter note, when they were outvoted on a downtown piano issue. During the “sidewalk tables for bars” discussion, City Engineer Alexandra Davis Shaw asked if the commission would object to putting several pianos downtown. Anybody could sit down and play, or try to play. “Having some fun downtown is not a bad thing,” said Snyder. “Let’s give it a year.”



The Francis, which provides banquet and meeting space, is adjacent to Louies Modern restaurant in the Palm Avenue garage. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Caragiulo and Atwell went along with Snyder, and the downtown piano playoff was approved 3-2.

A proposal to allow a table or two in front of Parker Books for people to play chess or conduct book signings was also approved 4-1, with Shaw in the minority, and a plan to charge for parking in the Palm Avenue garage starting next month was shelved by a 4-1 vote, with Chapman in the minority. Parking will remain free until the end of the tourist season at the request of the owners of Louies Modern and The Francis, which will be marking their first season on the ground floor of the garage.

Another split vote was recorded when staff suggested a consistent method for grant applications. In the past, the process has been willy-nilly and often a last-minute dash for cash by nonprofits. Planner Cliff Smith suggested the applicants instead make their

requests during the budget planning for each fiscal year. "They'd have to be prepared and come early, as much as a year in advance," said Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown.

Snyder was against any grants program. "It took almost five years to wean everybody off this grant money," he said. "If we do it, the budget process will get a lot more complicated."

Chapman moved to approve Smith's suggestion with an additional requirement that each applicant provide the city an audit of the organization if it was seeking money for an event it held the previous year. Her motion passed 3-2, with Snyder and Shaw in the minority.

The final issue of the evening concerned payment for Chapman's legal defense against a lawsuit filed by Citizens for Sunshine. That tale is told elsewhere in this issue. For the purposes of this story, that vote was not unanimous, either. 

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NEW CONDOS BEYOND THE BRIDGE

Runners participating in the Fourth Annual Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving Day pass the site of the Gulfstream Sarasota at U.S. 41 and Gulfstream Avenue. Photo by Norman Schimmel

WHILE THE CITY'S DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS LOTS OF QUESTIONS ABOUT A PROPOSED LIDO COMPLEX, THE GULFSTREAM SARASOTA SEES SMOOTHER SAILING

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Plans for an 18-unit condominium structure on the southern end of Lido Key offered an example on Dec. 4 of why the city's Development Review Committee (DRC) was established. The owner, the architect and their legal representative appeared before the group to respond to questions and comments.

The DRC is composed of representatives from every city department, as well as the county Fire Department, that has a say in development. The required number of trees in the landscaping plan, sewer capacity, building regulations, fire suppression requirements and a host of other rules are addressed at one meeting instead of a developer traipsing from office to office.



At the far end of the table, the development team for the Sarasota Gulfstream fields questions from building, planning, engineering and safety officials on the other three sides. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Mark Sultana is designing the condo complex, which is planned for three levels over parking at 129 Taft Drive. The site is just north of the popular “mangrove tunnels” on the southeast coast of Lido Key.

His plan took hits on a variety of aspects. Why were four stairwells needed to access the roof? Landscape plans showed the use of public right of way and used too many non-native plants. “You’ll need a right-of-way agreement for landscaping outside of public property,” said City Engineer Alexandria DavisShaw. “That’s county parkland.”

Sultana held his own. When asked why the plans did not show the percentage of impervious surface, he quietly showed city staffers where the information was on the plans. But the hits kept coming.

“There are some concerns about bedroom door access to the stairwell,” said Senior Planner Courtney Mendez, who chairs the DRC. “You can’t have an access as a fire escape if it goes through a sleeping room, which can be locked.”

Larry Murphy with the city Building Department said automatic fire suppression sprinklers are required in the building, as is a “Class One” standpipe in all the stairwells. He did toss out a bone by reminding the developer that a building was demolished on the site some time ago, and the developer could use it to claim some credits on impact fees.

Attorney Brenda Patten said that in fairness to her group, the development team had just received the staff’s comments the day before,

so some of the questions and issues had not yet been addressed.

GULFSTREAM FLOWS ALONG

The DRC then faced a much larger proposal at a signature Sarasota crossroad. Plans call for an 18-story tower at the northwest corner of the Tamiami Trail and the John Ringling Causeway. It would hold 250 hotel rooms and 144 residential condominiums.

The proposal — called the Sarasota Gulfstream — has been before the DRC before; it was back Wednesday so the developer could clear up any lingering details before moving ahead to seek permits.

Bruce Franklin, a development consultant for the project, asked what credits the team would receive on impact fees for the Holiday Inn that previously stood at the intersection. “We can give you room-for-room credit if the building was still standing 10 years ago,” replied Murphy.

Franklin then asked about credits for the Denny’s restaurant that used to be adjacent to the Holiday Inn on the 2.9-acre site. “For the Denny’s, I’ll have to research it,” said Murphy. City Planner David Smith reminded everyone the Denny’s was eventually closed and the structure became a sales office for the condominium project originally planned for the location.

DRC Chairwoman Mendez closed the agenda item saying, “It looks like we are in pretty good shape and should be able to get a sign off on these plans.” 

*City advisory board members will get more 'marching orders' about how to conduct public business.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS 'GO TO THE WOODSHED' OVER THE SUNSHINE LAWS AND A PAYNE PARK MASTER PLANNING WORKSHOP IS SCHEDULED

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Members of the city's multitude of advisory boards received telephone calls this week from city staffers reminding them in the strongest terms to use their city email accounts for city work, and not to discuss any city business in communications on their personal computers.

At the advisory boards' next meetings, the members will be confronted by a representative of the City Auditor and Clerk's Office and her director of information technology, bearing handouts with new email addresses and passwords, as well as the log-in for a new two-minute tutorial on public email

and the Florida public records laws plus a sternly worded document they all must sign to acknowledge understanding of advisory board members' responsibilities.

The info blitz is a result of a City Commission demand for immediate action during the Monday, Dec. 2, meeting, when one of the boards was found to have been using private email accounts. A public records request led to private computer files being scrutinized by a "forensic" professional to extract — if possible — the public records. This is the second time this year for such an incident. Both errant advisory boards are responsible for spending tax dollars.

Most advisory boards meet to discuss issues and make recommendations for action to the City Commission. Even the influential Planning Board can only offer guidance, and it has no access to public money.

But two special taxing districts — the Downtown Improvement District (DID) and the St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID) — levy a property tax and spend the resulting revenue. And it was first DID members and then BID members who admitted to using private email accounts for public business.

Each time the district board members were asked for public records, it ended up costing the city money for legal attention to the issue as well as defense against a lawsuit. Historically, the city has defended members of its advisory boards from allegations of violating the state's Open Meetings and Public Records statutes that collectively are known as the Government in the Sunshine law.

ON A HAPPIER NOTE ...

City residents are being invited to offer their thoughts on the Payne Park Master Plan.

A community workshop will be held on Monday, Dec. 9, at 6 p.m. at the Payne Park Auditorium, located at 2100 E. Laurel St., to discuss the plan and existing facilities.

Since the Master Plan was adopted 10 years ago, the amenities and usage at the park have changed. "Payne Park now is a signature urban greenspace" and recreational area, a city news release says. Before moving forward with any possible modifications to the park or its facilities, city staff wants to hear from the public.

Possible topics for focus at the meeting are the tennis courts, parking, the auditorium and new features — along with funding for them. 



City staff is seeking public comments on the Payne Park Master Plan. Photo by Norman Schimmel

LOOKING AFTER LOST MONEY



The penny-tax oversight committee holds its annual meeting. Among the attendees are Deputy Finance Director Kelly Strickland (lower left) and Jose Garnham (under the city logo). Photo by Stan Zimmerman

DURING ITS ANNUAL MEETING, THE CITY'S CITIZEN TAX OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE GETS AN UPDATE ON THE SHUFFLING OF REVENUE FOR PROJECTS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

In 1998, the citizens of the City and County of Sarasota agreed to levy an extra one-cent sales tax to raise money for infrastructure. In the subsequent years, the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) has brought in millions for city and county projects.

To ensure the City Commission properly manages the city's LOST income, the original ordinance set up a Citizen Tax Oversight Committee. That board meets once a year; this year that session was held on

Wednesday afternoon, Dec. 4. The 10-member committee almost did not manage a quorum; it had to wait until a fifth person showed up to begin the meeting. Eventually, a sixth member straggled into the City Commission Chambers.

Deputy City Finance Director Kelly Strickland led the members through changes to the spending plan adopted in September, prior to the approval of the current fiscal year's budget. The changes originated during an

“ *Our function is not to evaluate the merit of the changes.* ”

Robert Casella
Chairman
Citizen Tax Oversight Committee
City of Sarasota

April City Commission workshop, when the commissioners examined alterations to the city's capital improvement plan.

While this sounds academic, in reality, it involves the shuffling of large sums, essentially moving money from one proposal to fund others. For example, there is a total of \$28.5 million set aside over 15 years for "street reconstruction" in the third iteration of the LOST money program. In the previous fiscal year, the annual allotment for that purpose was \$1.5 million.

But the September resolution raided more than \$1 million from the account. The City Commission redistributed \$180,000 for "boardwalk improvements" at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall; \$300,000 for "bayshore protection;" \$125,000 for "O'Leary's [Tiki Bar and Grill] shoreline protection;" \$150,000 for "soil and erosion" behind the Van Wezel; \$125,000 for the "Whitaker Gateway Park Seawall"; and \$180,000 for "decks behind [the] Van Wezel." In other words, more than \$1 million was shifted from "road reconstruction" last year to seawalls, shoreline protection and Van Wezel improvements.

When voters approved the extension of the LOST levy, they also approved a laundry list of projects (including the \$28.5 million for street reconstruction). But city commissioners, with a public hearing and passage of a resolution, were able to divert the money to other uses.

The "oversight committee" believes, however, that its job is ensure that proper notice was given, a public hearing was held and a City Commission resolution was passed. How the money got re-jiggered is not its business.



The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall will benefit this fiscal year from local option sales tax funds. Photo by Norman Schimmel

"Our function is not to evaluate the merit of the changes," said committee Chairman Robert Casella.

Committee member Jose Garnham asked, "During the process of the year, did the [City] Commission add new projects?"

Strickland said, "They did. They also deleted projects and moved money."

"Can the nature of the project change?" asked Garnham.

"Sometimes there are completely new projects," replied Strickland. "This year, street reconstruction had a big pot of money. They divided that out into specific projects. There are projects that are new, so they will take it from one that's not as much of a priority."

“All these projects were voted on by the voters [in referendum],” noted Garnham. “Does the City Commission have the ability to add projects? Can they diminish some and add new ones that were not in the referendum?”

“The commission has the ability to do that, but it requires a public hearing,” said Strickland.

The LOST funds are audited annually, and no discrepancies have been reported.

In the immediate past, the commission’s rationale for moving money was easy to understand. The planned-for level of funds simply was not there. In the mid-decade bust, people spent less and LOST revenues tumbled. In the 2006-07 fiscal year, LOST revenue was \$7.3 million. That was the year citizens re-upped the tax for 15 more years.

The following year, the LOST revenue dropped to \$6.4 million, and the year after that, to \$5.2 million.

Today the LOST levy from the 1-cent hike in the sales tax is producing about \$5.6 million, so the fund has stabilized, but it is still bringing in sums well below boom-time levels. With stable income, though, it is no longer necessary to slash spending.

Instead, this year the City Commission juggled the money in April and moved more than \$1 million from streets to shorelines. It then held a public hearing in September, and by December the Citizens Oversight Tax Committee was powerless to complain.

The committee will meet again next December. 



Shoreline stabilization at O'Leary's Tiki Bar and Grill also will benefit from changes in plans for LOST revenue. File photo



FOCUS ON ROAD FLOODING

A Sarasota County employee took this shot of flooding in the vicinity of Myakka Drive and Playmore Drive in Venice when Tropical Storm Debby was offshore in June 2012. Image from Sarasota County

SARASOTA COUNTY STAFF PLANS FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON HOW BEST TO WARN MOTORISTS ABOUT ROADS WHERE WATER TENDS TO STAND IN STORM EVENTS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In response to a request from the County Commission this fall, staff is continuing to work on how best to handle alerts to drivers on roads that tend to flood more frequently.

“Stormwater staff is scheduled to meet with the Transportation Operations staff to determine the proper application of [flooded road warning] signs,” says a Nov. 18 memo to the County Commission.

“While signage for areas that historically become dangerous

during heavy/prolonged rains alert drivers to the possible hazard, the signage could raise concerns from the neighborhood regarding the perceived impact on property values” adds the memo from David A. Cash, interim director of the Public Utilities Department, and Molly Williams, interim manager of the department’s Stormwater Office.

“Prior to placement of the signage, an effort should be made to engage the residents to address their concerns.”

David A. Cash
and Molly Williams
Sarasota County Public Utilities

“Prior to placement of the signage, an effort should be made to engage the residents to address their concerns,” it notes.

Commissioner Nora Patterson brought up the topic of flooded roads during the board's regular meeting on Oct. 8, referencing a letter the commissioners had received from tourists whose car was damaged as they navigated Siesta Key's Beach Road during the September week that saw significant rainfall countywide.

Patterson asked then County Administrator Randall Reid to talk with staff about whether it would be practical to keep signs handy to deploy on roads that typically flood "in extreme weather conditions."

Commissioner Christine Robinson told Patterson she saw motorists stranded in cars in Englewood during that same September

period, while Vice Chairman Charles Hines pointed to problems in downtown Sarasota with street flooding. Therefore, Robinson suggested staff assess the situation countywide.

Reid mentioned the possible development of a "Top 10" list of roads that flood often, along with some type of plan for keeping signs close by for deployment as needed to warn motorists.

"I don't know that anybody really wants permanent signs," Patterson told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Dec. 3 in response to the memo from Cash and Williams.

"I understand where they're coming from," Robinson said in an interview with the *News*



Beach Road is prone to flood during heavy rain events, especially near the entrance and exits for Siesta Public Beach. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

Leader on Dec. 4, referring to the concerns about potential impact on property values.

What Patterson was more interested in, she told the *News Leader*, was signage that could be put up easily if staff became aware of a situation in which a road might be blocked for several hours. Certain county employees already keep an eye on such developments, she added.

The Nov. 18 memo explains, “During storm events, the maintenance crews are organized based on priorities as reported and staff that normally works on [preventive] maintenance (pipe repairs and canal maintenance) is deployed to address immediate concerns including roadway flooding and blockages that are creating a high water hazard. In addition, heavy equipment is on call and the vacuum trucks are deployed, one in North County and one in South County, to assist the crews, as necessary with debris removal.”

Given the fact that Sarasota County is a coastal community that sees a lot of water on roads from time to time — including tide-related rises that subside naturally — insufficient staff is available to “put a warning sign up” on every road with standing water, Patterson pointed out.

“If staff can respond sufficiently to warn people off [in the more critical situations], that will be great,” she added.

The memo from Cash and Williams also points out that 53 known problem areas “are investigated and cleared prior to a storm event. During an event, Staff is actively evaluating



W8-18



W8-19

The federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices includes two types of signs designed to warn motorists about flooded roads. Image from the Federal Highway Administration

these areas and [placing] road ... signage as required ...”

The memo adds that the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices includes a section titled *Weather Condition Signs*, which provides guidance for the placement of two specific types of signs. One says, “ROAD MAY FLOOD,” while the other serves as a depth gauge to show how high the water is on a road. The manual notes, “If used, the Depth Gauge sign shall be in addition to the ROAD MAY FLOOD sign and shall indicate the depth of water at the deepest point on the roadway.”

Robinson said she would wait to see what other suggestions staff may provide after continued review of the matter.

“That’s a good thing,” Patterson noted of the continued staff work on the issue. 



SKOD REVISION PROCEEDING

(From left) James Ritter of Siesta Key Outfitters, Maria Bankemper of the Best Western Plus Gateway Siesta Key, Lori Ann Steiner of Foxy Lady, Mark Toomey of Robin Hood Rentals, Martha Smith of Le Grand Bisou and Dave Ochsendorf of Siesta Key Sports and Physical Therapy participate in the Siesta Key Village Association meeting on Dec. 3. Photo by Rachel Hackney

A COMMITTEE COMPRISING SIESTA KEY BUSINESS OWNERS IS ABOUT A WEEK AWAY FROM COMPLETING A NEW PROPOSAL REGARDING OUTDOOR MERCHANDISE DISPLAYS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In about a week, a committee working on a proposed zoning change to allow for limited outdoor merchandise displays on Siesta Key should have its draft ready for review, a spokesman for the group told the approximately 20 people attending the Dec. 3 Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) meeting.

Mark Toomey, owner of [Robin Hood Rentals](#), said he and

the other committee members would like to make a presentation to representatives from the SKVA, the Siesta Key Association (SKA) and the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce once the draft has been completed.

“You just need to come up with what you’re going to propose, and [county staff will] do the ‘legalese.’”

Cheryl Gaddie
President
Siesta Key Village Association

It would take about 20 to 30 minutes, he added. Furthermore, Toomey said, the group has been working on two different proposals — one for businesses like his,

which rent equipment such as bicycles and [Segways](#), for example; the other would cover retail companies.

Several businesses on the south end of the island have been involved in the process along with those in Siesta Village, he noted.

In May during a meeting organized by the SKVA, Sarasota County staff explained provisions of the Siesta Key Overlay District (SKOD), the zoning ordinance that governs all of Siesta Key. In the following weeks, several business owners protested that Code Enforcement staff had warned them they no longer could display merchandise outside their shops because the SKOD did not allow that.

As a result of the crackdown, Martha Smith told SKVA members in June that she saw sales at her shop, [Le Grand Bisou Caribbean Boutique](#), drop from \$1,600 a day to \$195 a day in one week.

James Ritter, owner of [Siesta Key Outfitters](#), added that his sales fell 90 percent the day after a Code Enforcement officer told him he no longer could display items outside his front door to attract shoppers.

The SKVA hosted another meeting on the SKOD on Nov. 12, SKVA President Cheryl Gaddie pointed out during the regular session on Dec. 3. About 30 people were present, she said. "It was really a good forum."



Le Grand Bisou had no outdoor displays after Code Enforcement staff warned business owners in late spring that such activity was not allowed by the Siesta Key zoning code. File photo

- b) Additional signage, beyond those normally permitted in compliance with the special district sign regulations, shall not be provided as a result of the of the outdoor display area.
- c) Outdoor display shall only include incidental outdoor display items, consisting of a small sample of merchandise, placed outdoors adjacent to the responsible business, which represent or compliment the goods and services sold or provided by the responsible business. Vendors operating independently from the indoor business shall not be permitted.
- d) Display merchandise shall, at all times, be maintained in a safe, sound, and visually attractive condition. The business owner shall be responsible for continuously supervising the safe, sound, and visually attractive condition as well as the appropriate placement of the display items.
- e) Display items shall not obstruct any entries, exits, permitted signs, mailboxes, utilities, public seating, public safety measures, or interfere with ADA compliance.
- f) Display items shall not be located in or obstruct any required setback, parking space, vehicular use area, fire lane, landscape buffer, ADA accessibility route, or public right-of-way.
- g) Outdoor display is specifically prohibited in connection with any outdoor sale unless specifically allowed for through the issuance of a temporary use permit.
- h) County staff shall have the authority to request that item(s) be removed from outdoor display areas if it is felt that the item(s) constitute a potentially hazardous distraction to vehicular or pedestrian traffic; constitute a potential health or safety hazard; are not appropriately maintained or located; are excessive in size or quantity; or compromise the public peace, morals or welfare. If County staff requests that item(s) be removed, the business owner shall cause the item(s) to be removed immediately.

Toomey told SKVA members this week that the draft changes to the SKOD would not be “too far away from what Kevin [Cooper] proposed initially.”

During June, Cooper, then executive director of the Siesta Chamber, completed a proposed revision of the outdoor display section of the SKOD after researching practices in other Florida resort communities. However, Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on the island, has told SKA members and *The Sarasota News Leader* that she felt Cooper’s draft was too lenient.

That proposal restricted the outdoor display area to 6 feet “above finished grade unless a greater height is permitted through the special exception process.” Further, the display area would be “located only adjacent to and/

or against a single building wall, or storefront, of the responsible business,” and it could not extend further than 6 feet from that wall or storefront except by virtue of the special exception process.

No tents or canopies would be allowed over the display area.

Referring to Cooper’s proposal, Toomey told SKVA members on Dec. 3, “It’s very detailed, like maybe a lawyer wrote that.” Therefore, he was hoping someone would be willing to volunteer to work with the committee members to craft the final document so it included more specificity.

Gaddie responded that county staff will put such finishing touches on the document “once you have a proposal that seems feasible.”



Mannequins stood outside Le Grand Bisou in early October after Code Enforcement staff members were advised by the county zoning office not to enforce the outdoor display ban until island organizations had worked through a proposal to change the zoning code. File photo

Past SKVA President Russell Matthes confirmed that.

“You just need to come up with what you’re going to propose, and they’ll do the ‘legalese,’” Gaddie added.

After a version has won agreement from the SKVA, the SKA and the Siesta Chamber, she said, it will have to win County Commission approval before becoming part of the SKOD.

As soon as the draft is ready, Gaddie asked that Toomey send it to her; Maria Bankemper, chairwoman of the Siesta Chamber; and Catherine Luckner, president of the SKA. “We can look at it before we meet ...”

Once they have the document, Matthes pointed out, all three organization leaders could provide their board members with copies to review before the committee makes its presentation. Gaddie, Bankemper and Luckner also could suggest changes in advance, he added.

Toomey said he hoped the committee could schedule appearances before the boards over the next couple of months.

SKA Secretary Peter van Roekens also suggested the committee members show the draft to county Code Enforcement staff, to be sure the changes can be enforced.

When Toomey asked whether Code Enforcement Officer John Lally, who works on Siesta Key, would be the appropriate person to contact, van Roekens replied, “I think so.”

“He will be a good resource for you,” Gaddie agreed, adding that Lally should be able to advise the committee of any needed changes from an enforcement standpoint.

Gaddie further pointed out that Patterson had indicated to SKVA and Chamber representatives that if changes were made to the SKOD to allow for some types of outdoor displays, Patterson felt the modifications would never be revised again.

However, Matthes responded, “Never say, ‘Never.’”

Still, Gaddie told Toomey and the other committee members, “Just keep that in mind. [The county commissioners are] going to be looking at that [aspect] very closely.”

When SKVA Treasurer Roz Hyman asked for clarification about the plan to present two proposals, representing the different types of businesses, Toomey told her the committee members feel there is “a wide gap” between retail and rental companies.

“I think they’ve got to be combined,” Hyman replied of the proposals. Otherwise, she said, more problems might ensue.

“They could be the same proposal,” but in two parts, Toomey told her.

Gaddie also recommended the committee members photograph examples of the types of displays the draft will include as appropriate. Visuals are important in conveying ideas, she pointed out. 

The Sarasota News Leader
No-Nonsense Reporting



St. Nicholas waves to the crowd during the 2012 Downtown Sarasota Holiday Parade. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ROAD CLOSURES ANNOUNCED FOR SARASOTA HOLIDAY PARADE

The Downtown Sarasota Holiday Parade will be held on Saturday, Dec. 7, beginning at 7 p.m. at Main Street and U.S. 301, the Sarasota Police Department has announced.

The parade will end at J.D. Hamel Park, which is located at Main Street and Gulfstream Avenue.

Several vehicle tow-away zones and street closures will be in effect for the following times to make the parade possible, the department says in a news release:

- Noon: Main Street closed from U.S. 301 to School Avenue.
- 5 p.m.: Main Street closed from U.S. 301 to U.S. 41.
- 5 p.m.: Gulfstream Avenue closed from U.S. 41 to Church of the Redeemer (222 S. Palm Ave.).

- 5 p.m.: U.S. 301 closed between Fruitville Road and Ringling Boulevard.
- 6:30 p.m.: Hollywood 20 parking garage will close; Main Street will be completely shut down.
- 7 p.m.: Parade begins.

Each road will reopen once the last unit of the parade has covered a two-block distance from each point of closure, the release notes.

Towing will begin at 5:30 p.m. Vehicles not removed by the posted time will be towed at the owners' expense, the release points out. For information on towed vehicles, contact Upman's Towing at 365-7084.



A map shows the streets that will be closed Saturday in preparation for the Downtown Sarasota Holiday Parade. Image courtesy Sarasota Police Department



Circus Sarasota and Sailor Circus performers team up to delight the crowd in the 2012 Holiday Parade. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ORIOLES TO HOST TOYS FOR TOTS BASEBALL TOURNAMENT

With the holiday season under way, the Baltimore Orioles will host a youth baseball tournament and help a worthy cause this Saturday, Dec. 7, the team has announced.

The Orioles are inviting Sarasota area residents to bring new unwrapped toys for donation to the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots program to the Buck O'Neil Baseball Complex in Twin Lakes Park between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Then everyone is welcome to stay to watch games during the Suncoast Travel Ball's Toys for Tots Baseball Tournament, a news release notes.

Donated toys will be distributed to economically disadvantaged children in the Sarasota area, the release adds.

"The Orioles are proud to support Toys for Tots, a program that recognizes and celebrates the value of play in every child's development," says David Rovine, vice president for the Orioles-Sarasota, in the release.

The tournament will bring in more than 85 youth baseball teams for games at various locations in Sarasota County on Dec. 7 and 8, the release continues. "Teams in the

tournament will also donate toys to the collection," it points out.

By the end of 2013, the Buck O'Neil and Ed Smith Stadium complexes will have hosted 14 baseball tournaments and welcomed more than 25,000 players, families and spectators to various youth baseball practices, games, tournaments and clinics, the release adds. The Buck O'Neil Baseball Complex at Twin Lakes Park is located at 6700 Clark Road in Sarasota. Toys will be collected at the North entrance to the complex, directly behind the Buck O'Neil administrative building. For additional information about Toys for Tots in Sarasota, call 925-4014.



▶ Make a Monetary Donation

[DONATE ONLINE USING A CREDIT CARD >](#)

▶ Request a Toy for Your Child

▶ Host a Local Toys for Tots Event or Find a Local Toy Drop Location



SAFE SLEEP CAMPAIGN TO HELP NEW PARENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is teaming up with the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) to promote Safe Sleep, a campaign to educate new parents about proper sleeping environments for their newborns and to ask the public to support the initiative by donating brand new portable cribs for parents who cannot afford them.

So far this year, DCF has investigated nearly 150 infant deaths in Florida attributed to unsafe sleeping environments, including two in Sarasota County, a Sheriff's Office news release says. Although many parents want to use soft bedding, fluffy pillows and plush stuffed animals, these elements can prove dangerous to babies who are not old enough to move their heads to ensure clear airways, the release points out. "The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies sleep

alone, on their backs and in a crib or bassinet that is clear of everything else," the release notes.

In addition to promoting a safe sleeping environment and distributing materials countywide in both English and Spanish, the campaign is encouraging the public to donate pack 'n' plays or bassinets as well as new portable cribs. Drop-off points are the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office's Sarasota (2071 Ringling Blvd.) and Venice (4531 State Road 776) locations.

The Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County, the Florida Department of Health and the Child Protection Center are also partnering on this long-term effort.

A public service announcement and an educational video may be found on the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/user/SarasotaSheriff.



(From left): Department of Children and Families Regional Managing Director Mike Carroll, Healthy Start Executive Director Jennifer Highland and Sheriff Tom Knight gather to launch the Safe Sleep campaign. Contributed photo

OAK PARK TEACHER WINS STATEWIDE RECOGNITION

An Oak Park School teacher who works with high school and adult students with special needs has been named the Florida Council for Exceptional Children Teacher of the Year, the Sarasota County School District has announced.

Helen Pastore received the recognition at this year's state conference, held Oct. 17-19 in St. Petersburg. She will represent Florida and compete for the national Teacher of the Year title at the CEC Convention and Expo scheduled for April 8-11, 2015, in San Diego, a news release notes.

Many of Pastore's students have autism; her goal is to "bring the world" to them, she says.

She was the founder of the We-Work Lab, a campus-based work program for students to

learn work skills. Her class members also decorate bags for a local yarn shop, and they are learning to create other products with the help of a recently donated loom, the release continues.

Additionally, Pastore has led the Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops at Oak Park, which are the only two special needs Scout troops in the state of Florida.

"Helen has always readily welcomed new challenges and is one busy lady," said Elizabeth Lewis, a fellow Oak Park teacher who serves as president of the Sunset Chapter of CEC (Sarasota, Manatee and DeSoto counties), in the release. "She is Oak Park's professional development coordinator and treasurer of our local CEC chapter. She also was our chapter's 2012-13 Teacher of the Year."



Helen Pastore (center) has been named the Florida Council for Exceptional Children Teacher of the Year. With her (front row, from left) are students Jesus Rodriguez, Derek Patton, Anushri Prakash and Kenia Sawyers-Montiell; along with (back row, from left) classroom staff Karen Sherrard, Pastore, Charles Hill and Darlene Jones. Contributed photo



Helen Pastore displays her plaque. Contributed photo

SISTER CITIES GROUP TO REDEDICATE COMMEMORATIVE ARTWORK

The Sister Cities Association of Sarasota will rededicate an art piece given to Sarasotans years ago to commemorate the arrival of Scots as the area's very first settlers, the City of Sarasota has announced.

The ceremony will be held on Friday, Dec. 6, at 2 p.m. at the northwest corner of Main Street and Gulf Stream Avenue in downtown Sarasota, a news release says.

The piece, known as the Corinthian Column, was given to Sarasotans from the City of Glasgow, Scotland, in 1985 to celebrate the centennial of 65 Scots arriving in Sarasota, the release points out. Although privately owned for years, the piece has been on public display at Five Points adjacent to a commercial building. Recently, the Corinthian Column was donated to the City of Sarasota and the decision was made to relocate it to Main Street and Gulf Stream Avenue, the release adds.

“Back in 1885, the area we now know as Main and Gulf Stream would have been the original landing site of the Scots,” said Dr. Cliff Smith, the city's senior planner, in the release. “That would have been the water's edge. So, from an historical perspective, it makes sense to relocate the piece there.”

The Corinthian Column is next to a Sarasota County historical marker that recognizes the “Landing of the Scots.”

The rededication ceremony will include bagpipes, a welcome from Mayor Shannon Snyder, comments from City Manager Tom Barwin and an historic overview of the strong



The Sister Cities Association of Sarasota will rededicate artwork commemorating the arrival of the city's first settlers. Photo courtesy City of Sarasota

Sarasota-Scotland connection, presented by city staff and members of the Sister Cities Association, the release points out.

Dunfermline, Scotland, is one of Sarasota's Sister Cities. The others are Hamilton, Ontario, Canada; Merida (Yucatan), Mexico; Perpignan, France; Siming (Xiamen), China; Tel Mond, Israel; Treviso Province, Italy; and Vladimir, Russia.

For more information on Sister Cities, visit www.SarasotaSisterCities.org.



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CIRCUS CIRCUS! TO BE THEME OF NEXT CONVERSATION AT THE CROCKER

Deborah Walk, Tibbals Curator of the Circus Museum and Curator of Historical Resources at the Ringling Museum, will take to the stage at the Crocker Memorial Church on Tuesday, Dec. 10, for a conversation with three famous circus performers who will share insider stories about life under the big top, the Historical Society of Sarasota County (HSOSC) has announced.

Joining Walk will be Jackie LeClaire, Karen Bell and Mary Jane Miller “for an evening of thrills, chills and circus recollections that will leave you breathless,” a news release says.

The Crocker Memorial Church is located at 1260 12th St. (Pioneer Park) in Sarasota. HSOSC members will be admitted free; guests are asked to pay \$10.

Conversations at The Crocker is an annual series of interactive programs focusing on various aspects of Sarasota’s past.



Deborah Walk/Contributed photo

In 1942, Mary Jane Miller’s friends coaxed her to answer an ad in the *Herald-Tribune* that announced Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus was looking for girls for the season, the release says. “Against her mother’s wishes, Mary Jane went to the Winter Quarters and tried out. Tuffy Genders, aerial director of the show, was reluctant to audition her because of her young age and lack of experience. But he asked Mary Jane to climb a flexible metal ladder 40 feet high. He watched her quickly scramble to the top, hang on by one hand and wave to him. She was hired, went on the road and the rest is history.” Miller spent 13 seasons with Ringling and appeared in the 1952 Cecil B. DeMille movie *The Greatest Show On Earth*.

LeClaire “has delighted and amazed audiences for almost seven decades,” the release continues. His first salaried position was as a clown in partnership with his father on tour

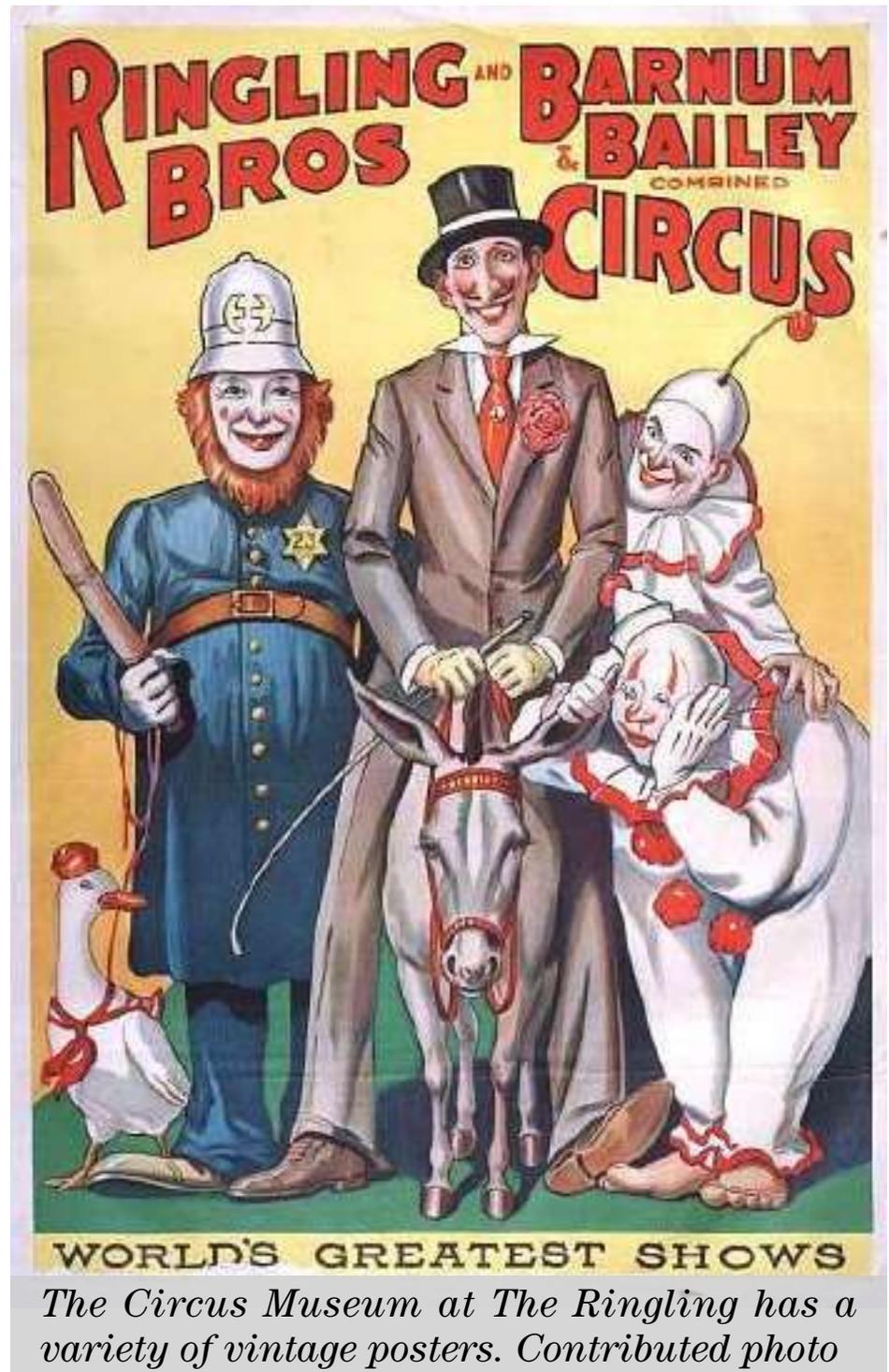


Karen Bell/Contributed photo

with the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus. At 18, he became an aerialist before returning to clowning. He kept up his trapeze skills, though, “and was a double for Cornel Wilde in *The Greatest Show on Earth*,” the release notes. In 1966, he was inducted into the International Clown Hall of fame, and in 2002 he was inducted into the Circus Ring of Fame on St. Armands Circle, the release adds.

Bell has been performing around the world as a clown for 28 years, beginning with an eight-year tour with Ringling Bros. Circus, the release says. She is a well-respected performer and was a “producing” clown for Ringling, having created material for herself and other clowns in the show, the release points out. “Karen has been a featured lecturer at the World Clown Annual Conference twice,” the only female clown to do so, it adds.

For more information about *Circus, Circus!* at Conversations at The Crocker, call Linda Garcia, HSOSC site manager, at 364-9076 or visit www.hsosc.com.



CITY MANAGER SCHEDULES OFF-SITE OFFICE HOURS

To help facilitate community outreach and input, City Manager Tom Barwin this week held his first in a series of *Meet with the City Manager* office hours in north Sarasota.

The office hours were scheduled at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex in Newtown.

“It’s good to meet with members of the community outside of City Hall,” said Barwin in a news release. “I like to find out what’s on people’s minds and listen to their ideas. This is an



opportunity to meet with residents and other stakeholders in a different location — one that's perhaps more relaxed and convenient for them.”

Future meeting locations in north Sarasota will alternate between Taylor Complex and the Newtown Redevelopment Office, located

at 1782 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way, the release notes.

[Click here to see a calendar of Meet with the City Manager dates/times.](#)

While appointments are not necessary, specific times may be reserved by contacting Darlene Mayes at 365-2200, Ext. 4216.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE PRESENTS DONATION TO ALL FAITHS FOOD BANK

Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight presented a check for \$5,000 to All Faiths Food Bank on Nov. 26, the Sheriff's Office has announced.

The funds came from seized or recovered cash that went unclaimed and, per state statute, can be distributed to a qualifying charity, a news release points out.

“All Faiths Food Bank continually demonstrates its commitment to this community,” said Knight in the release, “and it is gratifying to be able to help our neighbors in a small but meaningful way.”

To learn more, visit www.allfaithsfoodbank.org.



Sheriff Tom Knight presents a check to All Faiths Food Bank Executive Director Sandra Frank. Contributed photo

VENICE HIGH STUDENTS DONATE THANKSGIVING MEALS

Students in several classrooms at Venice High School participated in a fundraiser called See the Change, held Nov. 11-15, that raised \$1,237 to buy Thanksgiving meals at Publix for local families in need, the Sarasota County School District has announced.

During the fundraiser, buckets to collect coins from students were placed in 25 classrooms, a news release says. The project was planned by the peer-counseling group Wolfe Peers Assisting and Counseling, also known as Wolfe PAC. The classroom that collected the most change won a breakfast party, the release adds.

The Wolfe PAC, advised by School Counselor and Senior Activities Advisor Nicole Wolfe, was formed in 2008 with a grant from New College of Florida and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. Ten students in grades 10-12 participate in the program, the release notes.

Wolfe PAC activities include mediating peer conflicts, working with middle school students on their transition to high school, mentoring Venice High freshmen and assisting and counseling special education students.

Venice High School is located at 1 Indian Ave. in Venice.



Members of the Venice High School Wolfe PAC count coins for the group's See the Change project: (from left) Tausif Khan, grade 12; Teri DeNiro, grade 11; Veronica Phifer, grade 10; and Lexie Flerlage, grade 12. Contributed photo

FURST ELECTED PROPERTY APPRAISERS' ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

The Florida Association of Property Appraisers has elected Bill Furst, Sarasota County's property appraiser, as its president, the organization has announced.

Furst will serve as president for fiscal year 2013-14, a news release says. The Florida Association of Property Appraisers (FAPA) is a statewide professional organization composed of locally elected, constitutionally authorized property appraisers.

"Part of FAPA's mission is to play a role in shaping property tax policy to benefit taxpayer constituents throughout Florida," the release adds. "FAPA is extremely involved in the legislative process," annually providing legislators administrative insight regarding property tax policy, the release continues.

"The other part of FAPA's mission is to promote fair and equitable assessments of property, within and between Florida counties; this is accomplished through educational meetings



Bill Furst/Contributed photo

to address recent changes in legislation and to inform members about processes utilized by other counties," the release notes.

Furst has served in various leadership positions within the organization, including legislative chairman, the release says.

CONA TO HOLD A HOLIDAY PARTY ON DEC. 9

On Monday, Dec. 9, the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) will hold a holiday party at 7 p.m. at the Sarasota Garden Club, located on Boulevard of the Arts near the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Members and the public are welcome, the organization says in a news release. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to President Lourdes Ramirez at conasarasota@hotmail.com.

The Sarasota News Leader
No-Nonsense Reporting

VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY WINS GOLD ADRIAN AWARD

Visit Sarasota County (VSC) has been named a recipient of a Gold Adrian Award for its “Amish Las Vegas” feature on the *Today Show’s* website, reaching a potential audience of more than 8 million viewers, the county tourism office has announced.

The Adrian Awards are presented by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMIAI), a news release explains. “The awards honor the best in travel marketing and public relations as determined by a panel of judges from the travel sales and marketing industry,” the release adds. The awards will be presented on Feb. 24 at a gala in New York City.

“We are honored to be recognized with this award,” said Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, in the release. “The Amish community is a special part of Sarasota. We are fortunate to have been able to work with

individuals in that community to gain positive national exposure of their culture and what they have to offer visitors coming to Sarasota County.”

With the objective of differentiating Sarasota County from other Florida beach destinations, VSC, with the assistance of MMGY Global — its public relations firm on retainer — sought to highlight one of the “most unique aspects that visitors can experience,” the release adds: the county’s Amish community. “Amish home-style cooking and baking, woodworking and quilt making were highlighted, as well as a gentleman who created a solar-powered Amish buggy as a substitute for the horse and buggies used in colder climates,” the release continues. The piece, titled *Amish Las Vegas*, showcased how visitors can enjoy the Amish community, and it shared the story of how “Amish snowbirds” go on vacation, the release notes.

The screenshot shows the Visit Sarasota County website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for "Visitors", "Weddings", "Meetings/Travel Professionals", "Sports Commission", and "Press". The "SARASOTA" logo is prominently displayed with the tagline "FLORIDA'S GULF COAST". A weather widget shows "72° Fair" and "more weather" with a search bar and a "GO" button. Below this are menu items: "Beaches", "Areas", "Events", "Lodging", "Dining", "Things to do", "Shopping", "Travel & Planning", and "Other Interests". A booking section includes a "Book Now" button, arrival and departure date pickers (set to Jan-04-14 and Jan-09-14), an "Adults" dropdown (set to 2), and a "Search availability" button. The bottom portion of the screenshot features a video player with a smiling child and the text: "Everyone wins on a Sarasota vacation. Choose the vacation destination your whole family will love. Choose Florida's Gulf Coast. Plan a family vacation to Sarasota."

SARASOTA-BRADENTON TO HOST THE MODERN PENTATHLON

On Dec. 3, USA Pentathlon announced that the international governing body for the Olympic sport of Modern Pentathlon, the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne (UIPM), has selected the Sarasota-Bradenton community as the host of four major pentathlon events.

The events include three World Cup competitions — the Finals in 2014 and 2016 and the first-round competition in 2015, a news release says. In 2016, Sarasota-Bradenton will also host the United States Pentathlon Olympic Team trials.

“The pentathlon world is delighted to be coming to Sarasota-Bradenton and looks forward to bringing the global pentathlon family to the United States,” UIPM President Klaus Schormann said in announcing the selection.

“For the first time in over 40 years, the international championship for one of the oldest and grandest Olympic sports will return to the United States,” USA Pentathlon Executive Director Rob Stull added in the news release. “Sarasota-Bradenton’s cohesive vision and exceptional presentation secured World Cup events in each of the next three years, an amazing feat and a significant opportunity for



Show jumping is one facet of the Modern Pentathlon. Photo by Jon Kassel via Wikimedia Commons

the growth of pentathlon in the United States and throughout North America,” he pointed out in the release.

UIPM chose Sarasota-Bradenton over an “elite group of cities” that bid to host championship pentathlon events, the release notes. Among them were Cairo; Frankfurt, Germany; Acapulco; Rome; Budapest; Minsk, Belarus; Buenos Aires; and Cheng Du, China.

The 2014 World Cup Final will showcase the top 36 male and 36 female pentathletes from around the world, the release continues.

According to the USA Pentathlon organization, the Modern Pentathlon was designed by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic movement. It combines five sports: equestrian show jumping, fencing, swimming, running and pistol shooting. This

selection of disciplines was based upon the legendary tasks of a 19th century military courier, “which could involve virtually anything necessary to deliver a message successfully, such as procuring the first available horse and jumping over an array of obstacles; defending from enemy attacks with a pistol and sword; swimming across intervening bodies of water; and running on foot,” the release points out.

Olympic pentathletes ride an unfamiliar horse (drawn by lot) over a jumper course, fence other participating athletes with an épée, swim freestyle for 200 meters and shoot a laser pistol while running a half-mile course (4 meters by 800 meters).

Gen. George Patton was the first American Olympic competitor in this event, the release adds. He participated in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. 

The Church of the Redeemer

222 S. Palm Ave., in downtown Sarasota

Warmly Invites the Community to Join in

The Celebration of the Birth of Christ

Christmas Eve

Family Mass - 4 pm

Music & Carols begin at 3:30 pm

Choral Mass (with incense) - 6:30 pm

Brass Quartet, Organ & Carols begin at 6 pm

Midnight Mass (with incense) - 10:30 pm

Brass Quartet, Organ & Carols begin at 9:30 pm

Christmas Day

Holy Communion at 7:30 am

Choral Mass at 10 am

Mass in Spanish at 1 pm

Complimentary parking for Christmas Eve available at BMO Harris Bank
Parking Garage, McAnsh Square Christmas Eve beginning at 3 p.m.

Child Care Available During 4pm Family Mass.
www.redeemersarasota.org / call 941.955.4263





Red ribbon magnets will be on DUI Unit vehicles to remind motorists to designate a sober driver.

TIE ONE ON FOR SAFETY CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCED BY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight and members of his DUI Unit joined Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) on Dec. 3 to promote the *Tie One On for Safety* campaign.

“Because the time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day includes some of the most dangerous days of the year on our nation’s roadways, deputies placed red ribbon magnets on DUI Unit vehicles to remind motorists to include a non-drinking designated driver when celebrating this holiday season,” a news release points out. “The red ribbons also reinforce the ongoing commitment to stop impaired drivers and keep all motorists safe in Sarasota County,” the release adds.

“I appreciate Sheriff Knight and the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office partnering with MADD to kick off our *Tie One On for Safety* red ribbon campaign,” said Monica Johnson of MADD in the release. “The holiday season

should be a time of celebration, so by planning ahead to include a designated driver, we can ensure we all get home safe.”

As part of its ongoing partnership with MADD and support through a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office conducts monthly saturation patrols to remove dangerous, uninsured or impaired drivers from the roads, the release points out.

In November, deputies conducted seven saturation patrols resulting in 21 DUI arrests and 219 traffic citations for other offenses. “It is important to note that these numbers are for the saturation patrols only and do not include DUI arrests made during the month outside of these specific initiatives,” the release says.

This month, saturation patrols will be conducted Dec. 7, 14, 21, 28 and 31, the release adds.

TWO MEN ARRESTED FOR STEALING ATM CUSTOMER'S WALLET

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested two men for allegedly stealing a woman's wallet after she withdrew money from a Sarasota ATM over the weekend, the office has announced.

The victim was using the automatic teller outside the Publix at 4840 S. Tamiami Trail around 1 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 29, when a man grabbed her wallet and ran, a news release says. A witness reported seeing two suspects run across U.S. 41 toward Outer Drive. Deputies viewed video of the incident and recognized one of the suspects as Paul Casteel, who lives at 2020 Outer Drive, the release adds.

"Deputies interviewed Casteel and he admitted to being with the man who actually took the wallet, but gave detectives an incorrect name for the suspect," the release says. He was arrested Saturday on a charge of Principal to Strong Arm Robbery.

On Dec. 4, detectives received a tip naming Scott Buchanan as the second suspect. "He

was located and confessed to detectives that he was sorry but needed money for drugs," the release continues. Buchanan, who has a long criminal history, the release notes, was charged with Robbery by Sudden Snatching.

The Sheriff's Office offers the following ATM safety tips:

- Use ATM machines in a busy area and try to avoid using them at night.
- Pay attention to your surroundings before, during and after your transaction.
- If you see anyone suspicious standing around the machine, leave the area and find another ATM.
- When your transaction is finished, take your card and receipt and avoid counting or displaying your cash.
- Consider asking for cash back when making other purchases, such as buying groceries, when you are safe indoors instead of using an outside ATM.



Scott Buchanan/Contributed photo



Paul Casteel/Contributed photo

VENICE WOMAN CHARGED WITH TWO COUNTS OF CHILD NEGLECT

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a Venice woman on two counts of Child Neglect "after deputies discovered toddlers living in horrific conditions," the office has announced.

Deputies went to 9055 S. Tamiami Trail on the night of Dec. 3 to look for a wanted sex offender and were told by 22-year-old Donnalee Ballard that the suspect lived with her, would be home soon and they could wait inside, a news release says. Once in the home, deputies saw 1- and 2-year-old children

walking barefoot on floors covered in garbage, blood and rotting food; dirty diapers smashed into the carpet; and beer cans and drug paraphernalia scattered around, the release adds.

The report says deputies found the kitchen sink overflowing with dirty dishes and rotten food. The refrigerator contained some food (pizza, soda and milk), the report continues, but "the food smelled as if it was spoiled."

"Ballard also admitted being addicted to drugs and shooting up that day while the children were in the next room," the release says.



The kitchen floor of a Venice woman's home was strewn with food, syrup, a pizza box and plastic bags, deputies reported. Contributed photo

According to the report, deputies also found needle caps on the floor of the living room, within easy grasp of the children.

Deputies requested Sarasota County EMS to respond to evaluate the children, and one of the toddlers had a high fever, the release continues. Ballard said the child had a fever the day before, and she admitted she did not have medication and did not seek medical treatment, the release points out.

The Florida Department of Children and Families took custody of the children and Ballard was arrested, the release says. She is being held without bond.

The wanted sex offender, James Denegall, was also arrested for violating probation. 



Donnalee Ballard/Contributed photo



Furniture in a Venice woman's home was soiled with old food and garbage, a deputy reported. Contributed photo

AT PLANNED PARENTHOOD, CARE IS MUCH MORE THAN THE SERVICES WE PROVIDE; IT'S THE WAY WE APPROACH OUR WORLD.

WE CARE.

DEEPLY. WITH RESPECT. WITHOUT JUDGMENT.

WE ARE UNWAVERING IN OUR BELIEF THAT ALL PEOPLE DESERVE HIGH QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE.

WE ARE TIRELESS IN OUR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION SO PEOPLE CAN MAKE THEIR OWN HEALTH DECISIONS. WE PROUDLY FIGHT FOR WOMEN TO BE ABLE TO GET THE REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES THEY NEED. WE DO ALL OF THIS BECAUSE

WE CARE PASSIONATELY ABOUT HELPING WOMEN, MEN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE

LEAD HEALTHY LIVES.

NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE. NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE. WE WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO GET THEM THE CARE THEY NEED. BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRULY CARED FOR, THEY WILL MAKE THEIR LIVES, THEIR FAMILIES – AND EVEN THE WORLD – BETTER AND HEALTHIER.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD. CARE. NO MATTER WHAT.



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OPINION



THE CANCEROUS DECLINE OF SIESTA KEY PUBLIC BEACH

EDITORIAL

It has been almost exactly a year since a decision by the 12th Judicial Circuit Court, in a completely unrelated case, ended Sarasota County's ability to ban smoking on its beaches.

That smoke-free environment, in addition to being a delight for those who enjoy breathing, kept the pristine white sands ... well, pristine.

And the absence of butts littering the beach was a key consideration of the famous Dr. Beach — also known as Florida International University's Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman — in granting Siesta Key Public Beach his coveted "No. 1 Beach in America" ranking.

Legislators tried to restore the rights of local governments to regulate smoking on public

lands in the last legislative session. However, House leaders objected to the bills as "government overreach" and the bills went nowhere.

Now it has been reported that the sponsors of those bills have capitulated in that fight, planning to introduce bills in the next session that only allow for the banning of smoking on playgrounds on public property.

It is a bitter defeat for common sense and the rights of all to breathe unpolluted air. But, short of putting a swing set behind every life-guard tower and renaming all of the beaches "children's playgrounds," there is something the county can do to protect our beaches: Bust some butts.

We were appalled during a recent excursion to Siesta Beach to discover just how many

OPINION

cigarette butts now litter the sands. One would be excused from thinking, at least momentarily, that one was on the Jersey Shore (or on any beach between Coney Island and Ocean City).

However, the problem with butts is not just that they are unsightly litter. They are tiny containers brimful of toxic sludge. As the smokers putrefy their lungs, many of the most harmful chemicals added by tobacco companies to ramp up the addictive quality of the products is stored in the filters, which then are casually tossed by crass addicts onto the sand.

These butts then can be picked up by beach wildlife — and even small children — and eaten, with devastating results.

Collectively, the toxicity of those butts can alter the ecology of the beach, wiping out the flora and fauna that sustain it.

Even worse, the county cannot simply rake the beach to collect these discarded butts, because that would disturb wildlife that lives in the top layer of sand. The butts must be picked up one at a time to minimize the impact of their collection on the environment.

So Sarasota County should move to stop this ecological disaster-in-the-making by enacting harsh penalties for disposing of cigarette

butts on the beaches — not as litter, but as the inappropriate disposal of hazardous waste.

Think that is “government overreach?” Pick up a few butts on the beach and send them to an independent test lab for analysis. Most people would be shocked to learn just what harmful agents lurk in those innocuous cellulose tubes.

The problem with cigarette butts is not just that they are unsightly litter. They are tiny containers brimful of toxic sludge.

Years ago, North Carolina instituted a program to cut down on roadway litter in general and cigarette butts in particular (because they also

have the nasty habit of starting destructive wildfires) by initiating the “Swat-A-Litterbug” campaign.

The state set up a special website through which anyone observing another person throwing a cigarette butt from a vehicle could make an online report, citing the location, date, time and vehicle license number.

The state then sent a letter to the owner of that vehicle pointing out that someone occupying it at the stated date, time and location threw out litter. The state warned that, had a law enforcement officer observed the act, the offender would have been cited and subjected to a fine of up to \$1,000.

If the same vehicle got tagged in several reports for incidents of tossing butts, the vehicle was identified to law enforcement

OPINION

agencies as owned by a chronic litterer in need of monitoring.

Obviously, people on public beaches do not wear license plates on their bodies, so other beachgoers could not identify anyone they see throwing butts onto the beach. However, the county could achieve the same result as North Carolina by creating a special page on the county website, called “Butt Busters.”

Anyone observing another throwing butts on the beach could take a cellphone photo, then upload that photo to the Butt Buster “Wall of Shame.” Those visiting the website could see these reprehensible, inconsiderate beachgoers who think the public beach is their personal landfill.

As in North Carolina, someone getting his or her photo posted numerous times could be identified using facial recognition software (yes — *quelle surprise* — law enforcement has this capability) and then monitored more closely by deputies patrolling the beaches.

The fine for the inappropriate disposal of toxic waste on our beaches? Try \$50 per butt. Even better, if the aggregate fine for

an observed offense reaches \$500, or if the offender is issued more than two citations on the same day, the deputy would have to arrest the scofflaw and haul him or her to jail.

Those arrested and convicted for being egregious offenders would serve their sentences picking up butts on the beach by hand, so as to minimize disturbance of the sand. Their service to pay their debt to society would be to ameliorate the awful consequences of their foul addiction.

Think that is “government overreach?” Think that will hurt tourism (certain to be an objection voiced by some county commissioners)?

In fact, keeping cigarette butts off our beaches will have the opposite effect — it will encourage the throngs drawn to the natural beauty of our unique beaches to visit more often.

The county may no longer have the right to ban smoking on the beach. But it does have the power to avoid the most significant impact of allowing that smoking — the proliferation of filthy, cancer-causing butts that litter the sand. Only our tourism economy hangs in the balance. 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sarasota News Leader welcomes letters to the editor from its readers. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length, and include the name, street address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be emailed to

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

Sarasota Leisure

**FOR THE BIRDS
FOR A VERY WORTHY CAUSE
LIGHTING UP THE FACES**

Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast

Inside

FOR THE BIRDS



SAVE OUR SEABIRDS WILL HOST A FAMILY EVENT DESIGNED TO MAKE THE HOLIDAYS EXTRA SPECIAL FOR THE AREA'S FEATHERED NATIVES AND 'GUESTS'

By Fran Palmeri and Laurel Schiller

Contributing Writers

Want to prepare a feast for our feathered friends?

You and your family are invited to City Island's Save Our Seabirds Wild Bird Learning Center on Dec. 14 from 10 a.m. to noon or Dec. 15 from 2 to 4 p.m. You can decorate a small red cedar tree with edibles that birds relish (popcorn, tangerines, cranberries, peanuts). The

event is free with admission: \$6 for adults and \$4 for children.

You can take your tree home and plant it in your yard or donate it to Save Our Seabirds, and volunteers will plant and take care of it.

Save Our Seabirds is located at 1708 Ken Thompson Parkway in Sarasota.



Putting on a party for the birds is a great way to introduce children to birding, “tree hugging” and nature. It is an opportunity for them to learn that holidays are not just about what Santa will bring them — but what they can do for their fellow creatures. Besides, kids love hanging edibles on the branches and smearing pinecones with peanut butter and rolling them in birdseed.

If you cannot make the event, you can have your own holiday party at home. You will find red cedars at local native plant nurseries: Florida Native Plants Nursery, 730 Myakka Road, Sarasota (322-1915); or Sweetbay

Nursery, 10824 Erie Road, Parrish (776-0501). Edibles can be purchased at any grocery store. You will need “hangers” such as those used to hang balls on a Christmas tree, and cotton puffballs, which birds will use to line their nests.

Red cedars are fast-growing evergreens that are very adaptive. They can be planted anywhere — even in poor soil. They do well in wet to dry spots and sunny to shady places. Water a newly planted tree well: Water it every day for two weeks; then, every other day for two weeks; and, finally, every third day for two weeks.







Watch your tree grow! Just give it enough room! You will create a little habitat. Every yard counts. Parks and open spaces are valuable natural areas. With so much being cleared for development, natural places are at a premium.

Your tree can be a residence for the locals — cardinals, mockingbirds, catbirds and blue jays — that are with us all year, and it can provide five-star accommodations for migratory birds seeking shelter against rain and cold when they move through our area in spring and fall.

We often have a cold snap in this area just around the holidays, so this a perfect time to provide a “roof and complimentary breakfast” for the birds.

We are grateful for the generous grant from our local chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, as well as for the Florida Native Plants Nursery volunteers who will host the SOS Holiday Party for the Birds. Call SOS at 388-3010 to make a reservation, or visit the site on [Facebook](#) for more information. 





FOR A VERY WORTHY CAUSE

(From left) City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo, County Commissioner Joe Barbetta and Public Defender Larry Eger are the clowns Zop, Zap and Zip. All photos by Norman Schimmel

THE SARASOTA MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION FEEDS A RECORD CROWD DURING ITS ANNUAL THANKSGIVING LUNCHEON

Staff Reports

Close to 500 people showed up for the 13th annual free Thanksgiving Luncheon hosted by the Sarasota Ministerial Association on Nov. 27, Chaplain Tom Pfaff told *The Sarasota News Leader* this week.

“I have never seen so many,” he added. “This was just overwhelming. ... It was just really hard to feed so many people in need.”

Last year, he pointed out, about 370 homeless people were served.

As a result of the larger than expected number of participants, Pfaff said, no food was

left for about 100 volunteers who assisted with the program.

On the positive side, however, Pfaff noted the event raised \$2,400 from community members to enable The Salvation Army to serve its Thanksgiving Day meal. That was the second-highest amount ever brought in during the event, he pointed out.

Along with the luncheon, the program included a play titled, *Thanksgiving at the Circus*, which featured a number of community leaders. “All those who participated were very excited,” Pfaff said.



Pedro Reis, co-founder of The Circus Arts Conservatory, has the stage all to himself.



Pedro Reis gets a pie in the face from Zop the Clown (Paul Caragiulo).



Clown Zop (Paul Caragiulo) admires his 'work.'

The performers were Public Defender Larry Eger, County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason, County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo, Sarasota County School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin, School Board member Caroline Zucker, Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce CEO Steve Queior, NAACP Sarasota chapter President Trevor Harvey, Circus Arts Conservatory co-founder Pedro Reis, Sarasota County Fire Chief Mike Tobias, Downtown Sarasota Association member John Harshman, Downtown Improvement District Chairman Ernie Ritz, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe CEO Christine Jennings and past Sarasota Mayor Lou Ann Palmer.

The Westcoast School Chorus provided music for the event. Members of the senior class at Cardinal Mooney High School were the “runners,” assisting with serving the meal, Pfaff noted.

Members of the Church of the Redeemer’s Men’s Ministry worked in the kitchen as usual, Pfaff continued, “and they are just champions at that.”

About 50 organizations collaborate to make the program possible, he said.

Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel was present to record the event.



The performers line up after the finale.



Members of the Westcoast School Chorus present music amid the comedy.



More homeless people than ever before showed up for the free Thanksgiving dinner.



St. Martha's Catholic Church hall is brimming with homeless people and volunteers.



Christine Jennings (left), CEO of the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, and Carolyn Mason, chairwoman of the County Commission, play their parts.



Christine Jennings takes a turn on stage with Fire Chief Mike Tobias.



LIGHTING UP THE FACES

A Taste of Germany presents a Toy Shop float, appropriately enough. All photos contributed by Peter van Roekens

SIESTA VILLAGE'S KICKOFF OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON BRINGS BUSTLE TO OCEAN BOULEVARD

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Siesta Key Village Association President Cheryl Gaddie had warm words of praise this week for the volunteers and business owners who pulled off a very successful Light Up the Village on Saturday, Nov. 30.

“It was really great [with] probably one of the biggest crowds we ever had,” Gaddie said during the organization’s regular meeting on Dec. 3 at the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar. “Everything went off really, really well.”

Roz Hyman of Siesta Center — the SKVA treasurer and a longtime volunteer with the Village’s holiday season kickoff — also took the opportunity to express appreciation

to Sarasota County Sheriff’s Deputy Chris McGregor for his and his fellow officers’ help.

“No matter how hard we try to be organized, we’re not, and it still goes off,” Hyman added of the event, drawing laughter.

Additionally, Gaddie thanked the business owners for keeping later hours that evening. “It makes the Village very festive,” she pointed out.

The biggest kudos went to Beach Bazaar. “It would not happen if it were not for you guys,” Gaddie told Steve Hoffman, the shop’s manager. Though he was not there for the Dec. 3 meeting, Beach Bazaar General Manager Wendall Jacobson received accolades as well.

SKVA Vice President Kay Kouvatsos pointed out that Beach Bazaar provides gift bags for the children who wait eagerly in line to tell Santa Claus their wish lists. The business also creates a float for the parade and manages the children's games in Siesta Center.

Hyman said the games brought in about \$300 to help cover expenses, while sponsors gave the SKVA \$1,800 to put on the event.

In an email to SKVA members that he shared with *The Sarasota News Leader*, Siesta Key Association Secretary Peter van Roekens wrote, "It was a great parade and the crowds were enormous – I believe even more than previous years. It was just plain fun!"

Van Roekens generously provided the *News Leader* his photo record of the activities Saturday night. 



Two youngsters make it clear they are fans of reindeer.



Children of all ages await the start of the parade.



One family secured a curbside seat before dusk.



Sarasota County Fire Engine 13, based on Siesta, heads down Ocean Boulevard.



A toddler takes it all in.



Representatives of Massage Experience wave to the crowd.



Children and adults line up at Siesta Center for a chat with Santa Claus.



Beach Bazaar's float is merry and bright.



What is a parade without a pony?



Sun Ride Pedicab owner Glen Cappetta gets a lift in one of his cabs.



The Red Tiger Martial Arts group members offer lots of smiles.



The Grinch grins from his parade perch.



The most important person in any holiday parade is the Jolly Old Elf himself.



Siesta Key Oyster Bar ladies have a nice perch, too.



Even the dog has appropriate headgear as the Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate group marches in the parade.



The smile on the child's face says it all.



MAGIC IN THE AIR

The Booker High Chamber Choir performs with the bright Bromeliad Tree as its backdrop. All photos by Robert Hackney

SELBY GARDENS ADDS ITS GLOW TO THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Staff Reports

Guests gathered near Selby Gardens' signature Bromeliad Tree for its lighting on the evening of Dec. 3, kicking off the season for holiday celebrations in the Gardens.

More than 20 feet high, the tree is composed of hundreds of colorful bromeliads; the Gardens debuts a new display each year. The Bromeliad Tree first appeared in 1997 and has been a holiday favorite of Selby Gardens visitors for 15 years, according to a news release.

The bromeliads are available for sale to the public after the holidays.

Among other seasonal festivities at the Gardens is the popular Lights in Bloom, which "transforms the Gardens into a family-friendly tropical wonderland with brilliant holiday-themed light displays," the release notes. For the first time, it will include the new Ann Goldstein Children's Rainforest Garden.

Lights in Bloom will welcome the public Dec. 20-23 and Dec. 26-30 from 6 to 9 p.m., featuring live entertainment, activities for children, holiday treats and a visit from Santa and his elves. 



Selby Gardens board Chairwoman Cathy Layton makes a few remarks during the event.

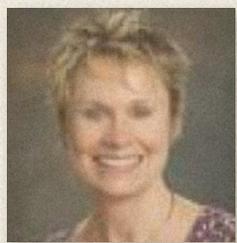


Guests enjoyed the festive occasion.



Siesta Seen

THE CRYSTAL CLASSIC ENDED UP WITH GOOD ATTENDANCE IN SPITE OF THE WEATHER; THE SABAL DRIVE HOUSE IS ALMOST FULLY IN COMPLIANCE WITH CODE AGAIN; AND VOLUNTEERS COLLECTED A RECORD AMOUNT OF TRASH IN THEIR LATEST ADOPT-A-ROAD ENDEAVOR



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In spite of gloomy skies on the opening day and rain the second morning of the Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition in mid-November, attendance was down only about 5 percent over the 2012 total, Maria Bankemper, chairwoman of the event, told me this week.

Visitor numbers were good enough on the last two days of the Crystal Classic to make up for fewer admissions the first couple of days, she pointed out on Dec. 3.

Bankemper was present at the Siesta Key Village Association meeting that morning, wearing all three of her proverbial hats at once. She is also chairwoman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce and general manager of the Best Western Plus Gateway Siesta Key.

Cheryl Gaddie, the SKVA president, told the approximately 20 people present for the meeting, “I think [the event] went off extremely well ...”

Some traffic issues did arise at Siesta Public Beach, Bankemper and Mark Smith, chairman of the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp., explained. Still, Bankemper said, “The utilization of Riverview [High School for parking] was much better than the utilization of Phillippi [Estate Park].”

This was the first year the Crystal Classic organizers used the high school as the “park-and-ride” facility for visitors wishing to take a bus to the beach on the weekend days of the event. The park, located on South Tamiami Trail, had served that purpose in previous years.

Smith told Deputy Chris McGregor of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office that he felt the deputy stationed at Riverview to assist with traffic there was unnecessary.

“We’re working for you” in that type of situation, McGregor told Smith. Deputies look for guidance about what they should be doing, he added.



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A master sand sculptor works on his entry in the 2013 Crystal Classic under cloudy skies on the opening day. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Siesta Seen

“We actually didn’t need him there at all,” Smith replied. However, more help would have been preferable at the beach, Smith noted. “[T]he buses had a great deal of difficulty getting into the parking lot [at Siesta Public Beach].”

The biggest problem was the number of beachgoers loading and unloading passengers in the area closest to the beach, Smith said. If deputies had patrolled that section of the parking lot, he continued, “That would have helped tremendously.”

“Definitely easier said than done,” McGregor responded of keeping that lane open. In his many years of beach duty, he explained, traffic management has been one of the biggest headaches.

No matter how often deputies advise drivers to make their drop-offs as quickly as possible and move on, McGregor pointed out, when one driver heads away, “there’s four more to take [his] place. ... With the new beach lot, we tried to get a drop-off lane-type thing put in.”

“Didn’t the county nix that?” SKVA Vice President Kay Kouvatsos asked.

“Yes,” McGregor told her.

After the meeting, I contacted Carolyn Brown, the county’s director of Parks and Recreation, to ask her about that. Brown responded in an email, “[T]he final park design (for the future) includes a drop-off area.”

Kouvatsos, McGregor and Brown were referring to Sarasota County plans to implement



Without a dedicated area for drivers to drop off passengers, Sarasota County deputies say it can be difficult to keep traffic moving smoothly through the Siesta Public Beach parking lot. File photo

Siesta Seen

\$21.5 million in improvements at the beach park. That project is just getting under way, according to county staff memos.

County staff was supposed to have blocked off some of the beach parking lot to make room for the Crystal Classic buses to pick up and offload passengers, Bankemper said. “Somehow, it didn’t happen,” though such a plan worked “quite well” during the three previous Crystal Classics, she noted. By the time organizers realized the space had not been dedicated to the buses, she added, it was too late to remedy the situation. “If you don’t do it by 7 o’clock in the morning,” she pointed out, “you can’t do it.”

Carolyn Brown provided me with the following comment in her email regarding that part of the discussion:

“I was informed that two parking spaces were blocked off [for] buses to nose in and drop off [people] in the lot during the Crystal Classic. Signage and barricades were put up at 6 a.m. Saturday morning. The area was not as large as previous years but it worked for traffic flow.”

McGregor added some general thoughts in his remarks at the SKVA meeting. “I don’t think we can do a whole lot with that parking lot. You’re trying to put a lot of vehicles into only so many spaces. ... I don’t know if we can improve on it” other than keeping the drivers moving.



Kay Kouvatsos, vice president of the Siesta Key Village Association (left) takes notes as President Cheryl Gaddie listens to a discussion in August. File photo

Siesta Seen

ALMOST THERE

The illegal structures built into the [6537 Sabal Drive](#) house on south Siesta Key to enable it to hold up to 40 people — as advertised on a website rental site — have been removed, I learned this week.

John Lally, the primary Code Enforcement officer on Siesta Key, told me on Dec. 3 that he had signed off on his inspection of the house. The first level was gutted to bring it back into compliance with the county's zoning code. All the plumbing, electrical work and air conditioning equipment had been removed, he said. As a result, he sent a certificate of compliance

to the Sarasota County Clerk of Court to stop the fines a special magistrate levied on the owners last spring because of their refusal to tear out the non-conforming additions to the house.

All that remains to be done on the Code Enforcement end, Lally continued, is for the owners to have a new elevation certificate completed to show the property complies with Federal Emergency Management Agency floodplain regulations.

County Code Enforcement Officer Martin Duran is working on that part of the process, Lally noted. "Basically, it's just one more piece of paperwork."



On Dec. 3, one last bit of paperwork remained for the tourist rental house at 6537 Sabal Drive to be considered in full compliance with federal and county codes. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

A source in the Sarasota County Attorney's Office told me a hearing is still set on Dec. 18 for the county to seek a temporary injunction to compel Siesta Resorts LLC — the trust that owns the house — to deal with the non-compliance issues. However, if the elevation certificate is provided to the county prior to that date, the source said, the hearing will be cancelled.

THE BEST EVER

Although Siesta Key Association Vice President — and Keep Sarasota County Beautiful Volunteer of the Year — Michael Shay was unable to attend the SKVA meeting, he sent in a report about the Adopt-a-Road turnout on Nov. 23.

It was “the best ever,” SKVA President Gaddie reported on his behalf. Twenty-four volunteers



Just before Thanksgiving, Isaac Brownman, the county's director of capital projects, reported to the County Commission that construction of the new 1-acre stormwater pond next to Siesta Public Beach was continuing without any problems. 'We are encouraged that due to the dewatering/pumping efforts combined with the lesser amounts of rainfall, the contractor has been able to make good progress on the excavation work,' he wrote on Nov. 27. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

showed up that morning, and they filled 32 bags of garbage, which Mark Smith collected for appropriate disposal, Gaddie added.

Village Café, as usual, hosted the group for a free breakfast.

Gaddie also said Shay's county honor, bestowed last month, was "well deserved."

Shay organizes members of the SKA and SKVA for the quarterly cleanups on the north end of the island.

'GREAT' TURNOUT

During the SKVA meeting, Deputy McGregor also reported that the Turkey Trot Pub

Crawl, held in the Village the night before Thanksgiving, resulted in only five physical arrests and about 18 "Notices to Appear" before a judicial officer because of open container violations, mostly.

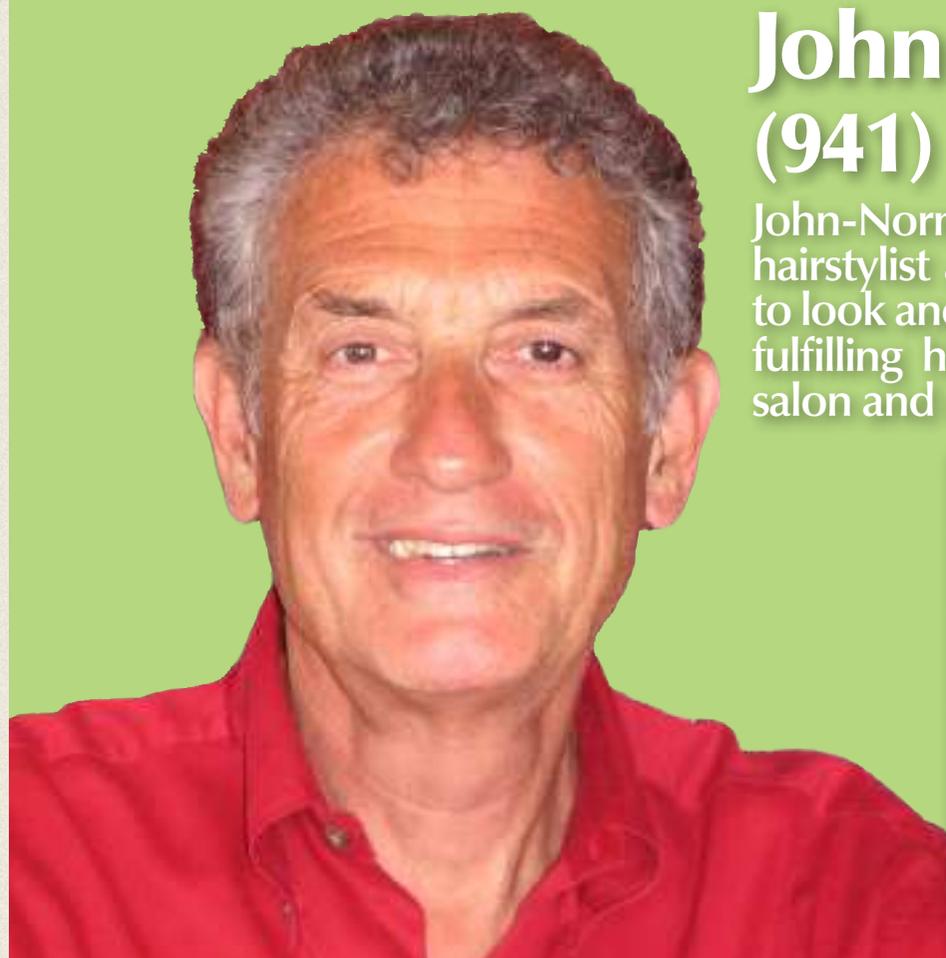
"Our saving grace was that it was so cold," which kept people from mingling outside, he pointed out. When they left the bars, they generally just left the Village, McGregor said.

He initially characterized the turnout as "good," but after some abrupt coughs — which he noted with a chuckle — he changed that to "great," eliciting some laughter among SKVA members. 

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Boogie Woogie by Candace Knapp is made of Chinaberry wood and Avonite. Contributed photo

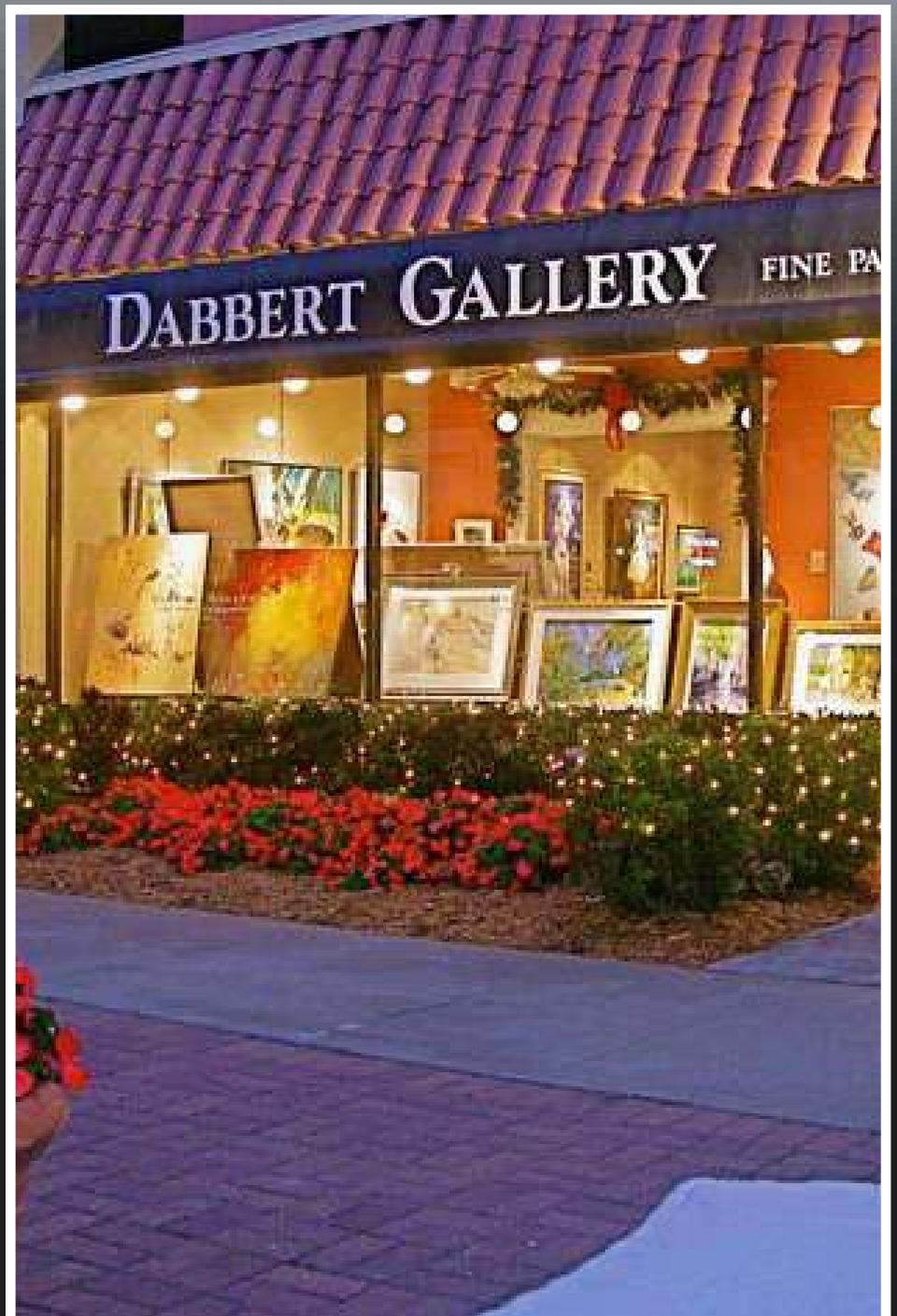
WORKS IN BRONZE, MARBLE AND WOOD TO BE SHOWCASED

Dabbert Gallery will present *Sculpture, Metal, Marble & More* Dec. 6-30, the gallery has announced.

An opening reception will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 6, at the gallery, located at 76 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

The show will feature works by Gert Olsen, Candace Knapp & Thyra Davidson-Wexler.

For more information, call 955-1315 or visit www.dabbertgallery.com.



GALLUP GALLERY PRESENTS WORKS BY POINDEXTER AND COE

Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art gallery is presenting *Above the Planet Through A Microscope*, featuring paintings and works on paper by Carla Poindexter, and *Lossless: Paintings by Dolores Coe*, both through Dec. 28. A reception with the artists will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 13.

“Carla constructs a fascinating world of characters and signs interacting in vast fields of micro and macro space that are both private and collective,” says Allyn Gallup, director of the gallery, in a news release. “She has a lifelong interest in the relationship between science and the humanities and engages us in a profound exploration of how space and form parallel human thought and emotion.”

The show includes eight large-scale acrylic paintings on canvas and 12 smaller, hand-colored copperplate monoprints. According to Poindexter, “these paintings reflect her explorations of contemporary physics from a visually metaphorical point of view, reflecting current conversations involving chaos theory and quantum mechanics,” the release adds. “I’m consumed by how we continuously endeavor to understand and respond to science and poetry, language and movement, time and space, and all manner of enigmatic human causes and effects,” says Poindexter.

She adds that the 12 interconnected hand-colored monoprints were influenced by the Japanese proverb, “When good luck comes to the door, it is often accompanied by devils.”

Dolores Coe is a painter, digital media artist and former Ringling College professor who maintains a home and studio on the Little Manatee River south of Tampa, the release continues. “Her intrigue with the mind’s power to distill experience into stories is a constant undercurrent in her imagery. And



The Juggle by Dolores Coe. Contributed photo

if Coe’s paintings were a movie, they’d be a road picture,” the release notes. “She entices the viewer into a journey through fantastical landscapes, crowded with fragments of iconic, American roadside imagery.”

So why is the exhibit titled *Lossless*?

“‘Lossless’ is actually a tech term,” Coe explains in the release. “It refers to a type of data compression in which the original data can be perfectly reconstructed.”

But in regard to her art, the term has a double meaning, the release adds. “I see painting as a form of data compression; I recombine the fragmented images of memory and fantasy in imaginary landscapes to convey a sense of inner and outer experience,” Coe says in the release. “Growing up in Florida, I was constantly steeped in an awareness of migration and change, what remains and what had been erased.”

The gallery is located at 1288 N. Palm Ave. in Sarasota. For more information, visit www.allyngallup.com.

SARASOTA POPS ORCHESTRA PARTNERS WITH CHOIR FOR CONCERT

Sixty professional and amateur musicians of the Sarasota Pops Orchestra, led by conductor Robyn L. Bell, will be joined by Melodie Dickerson and 65 voices of The State College of Florida Concert Choir for a holiday performance on Sunday, Dec. 8, at the Riverview Performing Arts Center, located at Riverview High School on 1 Ram Way, the Sarasota Pops has announced.

The performance will begin at 3 p.m. and conclude at 4:45 p.m. It will feature *The Musicological Journey Through the Twelve Days of Christmas* in 12 short movements, a news release says.

“The hall will swell with the sounds of this challenging and fun piece as each of the 12 days is introduced in a different style, beginning with

Gregorian chants and skipping through music history to Vivaldi, Wagner, Strauss and others, culminating with John Philip Sousa,” explains conductor Bell in the release.

The concert will include *Three Dances* from *The Nutcracker*, *First Noel*, *Light the Legend* by Michael Isaacson and the first movement from Mozart’s *Jupiter Symphony*.

The Sarasota Pops is a creative community orchestra comprising career musicians as well as non-professionals ranging in age from 12 to 92 “with a mission to enhance the knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of music,” the release notes.

Tickets are available at www.sarasotapops.org or at the box office for \$20 and \$25.



The 12 Days Of Christmas

December 8

Riverview PAC 3:00 p.m.

Featuring:

SCF STATE COLLEGE OF FLORIDA
CONCERT CHOIR

SARASOTA
POPS

JAZZ AT FIRST CHURCH TO FEATURE JAZZ TRIO ON DEC. 8

The upcoming Jazz at First Church program will feature the Jazz Trio, with Johnny Moore on drums, Dominic Mancini on bass and Tommy Goodman on piano, the church has announced.

The performances will be on Dec. 8. Moore, Mancini and Goodman will join special guest Jim Wellen on saxophone, a news release says.

As in the past, two identical concerts are planned: from 4 to 5 p.m. and 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. The First United Methodist Church is located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

A freewill offering will be taken. For more information, call the church office at 955-0935.



The First United Methodist Church in downtown Sarasota will host its next jazz program on Dec. 8. Photo by Norman Schimmel

BOOKSTORE1SARASOTA TO HOST POETRY LOCAL MIC AND HALL

Bookstore1Sarasota will host its Poetry Local Mic program on Sunday, Dec. 8, at 2 p.m., the shop has announced.

“Join local poets Dominic Martia and Pat Owen for a delightful afternoon of reading and discussion,” a news release says.

Then on Wednesday, Dec. 11, at 6 p.m., the store will welcome James W. Hall, whom *The New York Times* calls the “master of suspense.”

Hall will comment on and sign his newest novel, *Going Dark*, the release adds.

His latest thriller deals with Earth Liberation Front, known as ELF, a loosely knit organization comprising environmental activists

scattered around the country. “These extremists take a ‘by any means necessary’ approach to defending the planet,” the release adds. In the past decade, “ELF has been responsible for close to a hundred million dollars in damage mainly through arson,” the release continues. The FBI ranks it, along with other eco-radicals, as the No. 1 homegrown terrorist threat.

To pre-order a copy of the book, call 365-7900. Purchase of the book at Bookstore1Sarasota is required for signing, the release notes.

The store is located at 1359 Main St. in downtown Sarasota. More event information is available at www.bookstore1sarasota.com or 365-7900.



James W. Hall will talk about his new book and sign copies of it at Bookstore1Sarasota on Dec. 11. Photo by Maggie Evans Silverstein, courtesy of Random House

FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE TO PRESENT REGIONAL PREMIERE OF *THURGOOD*

Florida Studio Theatre will present the regional premiere of *Thurgood*, by George Stevens Jr., in FST's Keating Theatre on Friday, Dec. 13, the theatre has announced.

"*Thurgood* is a powerful play based on the life of [U.S. Supreme Court] Justice Thurgood Marshall," a news release explains. "From a childhood in the back alleys of Baltimore to the Supreme Court of the United States, Justice Marshall overcame many adversities,"

the release points out. "A journey of epic proportions, *Thurgood* is an eye-opening, moving, humorous and an uplifting portrait of a true American hero."

Single tickets range from \$18 to 32.

Performances will continue through Feb. 22.

FST is located at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota. For more information, visit www.floridastudiotheatre.org.



Florida Studio Theatre's Keating Theatre seats 173. Photo courtesy Florida Studio Theatre

ASOLO REP TO HOST A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT

The Asolo Repertory Theatre is inviting the public to attend “an intimate cabaret evening that will explore the intersection of racial identity and American music,” the theatre has announced.

Beginning with *Show Boat*, traveling through the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz and Motown eras and continuing through contemporary pop music and modern musical theatre productions such as *Hairspray* and *Memphis*, “this insightful event will illuminate how African-American musical traditions originally came to prominence on stage and in popular culture” and how they have sparked “a flame that has burned ever since,” a news release says.

On Dec. 15 at 7 p.m., a cabaret will feature “passionate performances by *Show Boat*

artists sharing the unique sounds, history and converging influences that make our music,” the release continues.

Updated casting information will be posted on Asolo Rep’s website, www.asolorep.org. The performance will take the place of the *Carefully Taught Cabaret* originally scheduled for Nov. 24, the release adds.

The production will be in Asolo Rep’s Cook Theatre, located at 555 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.

Tickets for *A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight* are \$18 and are available at Asolo Repertory Theatre’s box office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Tickets are also available by calling the box office at 351-8000 or by visiting www.asolorep.org. 



The Asolo Repertory Theatre is located in The Ringling complex on North Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. Photo by Ebyabe via Wikimedia Commons



Rabbi Geoff Huntting and his wife, Sue, will mark Geoff's 20 years of service to Temple Sinai in a Shabbat on Dec. 6. Contributed photo

SHABBAT TO HONOR RABBI GEOFFREY HUNTTING

On Friday, Dec. 6, Temple Sinai will celebrate Rabbi Geoff Huntting's 20 years of dedication to the congregation and the community at large, the Temple has announced.

"The inspiring musical *Rhythm and Jews Shabbat Service*," featuring The Bruno Trio, is scheduled for 6 p.m., a news release says. It will be preceded by a welcome reception at 5:15 p.m. Members of the Youth Group will be participating in the service, the release adds.

Huntting received a Bachelor of Arts in liberal arts from Johns Hopkins University, the release continues. After serving in Vietnam, he moved to California, where he received a

Juris Doctor degree from Loyola Law School. He was ordained by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in June 1991, after five years of study in Jerusalem, Los Angeles and Cincinnati, the release adds.

Huntting; his wife, Sue; and their two children came to Sarasota in late 1993, when he accepted the position at Temple Sinai. Huntting has been involved with the American Jewish Committee and [J Street](#) and is on the advisory board of ALSO, the release adds.

"Rabbi Huntting is known for his innovative and creative nature; whether it is in conceiving a program to keep teenagers involved with

the Temple or in writing religious services to be more meaningful to the congregants,” the release notes.

“Temple Sinai always had its own unique and open culture from the beginning,” Huntting says in the release. “[The members] were willing to experiment with liturgy and programming, an attitude that continues to this day. This, more than anything else, has made Temple Sinai a success.”

Sue Huntting, a nationally respected Jewish educator, has made her mark over the years at Temple Sinai as well, the release points out. She has worked in the field for more than 25 years and holds a Master of Arts in both Jewish education and Jewish communal service from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, which also awarded her an honorary doctorate in 2005 for her professional accomplishments.

Sue was instrumental in planning and launching The Gan at Temple Sinai, Early Childhood Center, in 2006, the release continues. It is now accredited by the National Accreditation Commission of the Association of Early Learning Leaders and is “filled with enthusiastic students” from 18 months of age to pre-kindergarten level, the release notes.

In June 2008, Sue Huntting became the Religious School director; she “utilizes cutting-edge learning concepts and innovative teaching methods that engage the students and their families,” the release adds.

Both Rabbi Geoff and Sue Huntting “have taught extensively in our Sarasota community, most notably through the Melton Adult Mini-School of the Jewish Federation,” the release points out. “Temple Sinai and Sarasota are fortunate to have spiritual leaders of this caliber to inspire and nurture them.”

REDEEMER TO REPRISE POPULAR *MESSIAH SING-ALONG*

The entire community is invited to join the Church of the Redeemer on Sunday, Dec. 15, at 7:30 p.m., in its annual tradition of the *Messiah Sing-Along* — “a joyous singing of George Frideric Handel’s Christmas *Messiah*, one of the best-known, most-beloved and most frequently performed choral works in Western music,” the church has announced.

The performance is dedicated to the memory of Redeemer’s longtime composer in residence, Dr. Daniel T. Moe, a news release says.

This festive family-friendly event features members of the choirs of Redeemer singing along with the congregation, accompanied by a chamber orchestra under the direction of conductor Todd Craven and Redeemer’s assistant organist, Daniel Cartlidge, the release continues.

Each year, Redeemer’s *Messiah Sing-Along* sells out; advance ticket purchase is highly recommended, the release points out. Ticket donations are \$10. They may be made in advance online at redeemersarasota.org, by calling the parish office at 955-4263 or by visiting the church during regular business hours. Subject to availability, tickets will also be sold at the door on the day of the event. Complimentary parking will be available at the BMO Harris Bank parking garage on McAnsh Square between 6 and 10 p.m., the release says

The Church of the Redeemer is a traditional Episcopal parish located in the heart of downtown Sarasota at 222 S. Palm Ave.



The Church of the Redeemer will host its annual holiday Messiah Sing-Along on Dec. 15. Advance ticket purchase is recommended. Contributed photo

REDEEMER ORGAN SERIES TO PROVIDES HOLIDAY SEASON RESPITE

The Church of the Redeemer will offer a mid-day Advent organ recital on Wednesday, Dec. 11, with guest organist Neil Page, the director of music at Siesta Key's St. Boniface Episcopal Church, the church has announced.

Held each Wednesday throughout the season of Advent, the 30-minute recitals are free. They begin at 12:10 p.m. and end promptly at 12:40 p.m., a news release says. Guest organists and musicians perform on Redeemer's

“massive 50-stop Nichols & Simpson pipe organ, providing a brief but welcome week-day respite during the hectic holiday season,” the release adds.

All in the community are invited. The church is located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

For more information, visit redeemersarasota.org or call 955-4263.



Neil Page is the director of music at St. Boniface Episcopal Church. Contributed photo

TEMPLE EMANU-EL FAMILIES CELEBRATE AT HANUKKAH HAPPENING

More than 200 members and guests celebrated the Festival of Lights at Temple Emanu-El's annual *Hanukkah Happening* on Nov. 30, the Temple has announced.

Sponsored by Temple Emanu-El Religious School, the *Hanukkah Happening* featured a traditional Hanukkah dinner of homemade brisket with all the trimmings. The Temple's Brotherhood cooked latkes — potato pancakes fried in oil — that are eaten during the holiday, and religious school families also prepared side dishes and desserts, a news release says.

Other highlights of *Hanukkah Happening* included a display of menorahs created by religious school students, an appearance by Hanukkah hero Judah Maccabee, Hanukkah crafts and games of dreidel and a silent

auction. Proceeds benefitted the scholarship and educational programs of Temple Emanu-El Religious School.

The *Hanukkah Happening* was followed by the synagogue's annual Hanukkah service, which included the kindling of a 170-year-old silver menorah that was crafted in Poland and that somehow escaped destruction during the Holocaust. The menorah was discovered 10 years ago in a Temple Emanu-El storage closet; despite extensive research, the means by which it made its way to Sarasota remain unknown.

The *Hanukkah Happening* was chaired by Cindy Gilburne.

For more information about holiday programs at Temple Emanu-El, call 371-2788.



Temple Emanu-El Director of Education Sabrina Silverberg congratulates Lily Schlosberg, Kira Herman, Aiden Pearson, Luca Schlosberg, Garet Pearson, Katerina Herman and Elena Herman on their homemade menorahs at the Hanukkah Happening. Contributed photo



Temple Emanu-El confirmation student Tyler Yackel, dressed as Hanukkah hero Judah Maccabee, greeted Evan Rubin at the Hanukkah Happening. Contributed photo



Sarah Smith and son Ezra enjoyed the craft table at Temple Emanu-El's Hanukkah Happening. Contributed photo

SIERRA CLUB LEADER TO PRESENT PROGRAM ON *HELL AND HIGH WATER*

Joel D. Fedder, a member of the National Summit Council of the Sierra Club, will present a program titled *Hell and High Water — You and Your Grandchildren*, at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 7, at the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, the CHJ has announced.

The program will focus on “What does this tipping point in our climate change mean for us and the generations to come?” a news release says.

With his wife, Ellen, Fedder established the Fedder Environmental Law Fund at

the University of Maryland Law School, the release notes. This fund recently sponsored the International Environmental Law Professors conference, which was attended by more than 200 people from 30 countries.

CHJ meets at Unity, located at 3023 Proctor Road in Sarasota.

For more information visit CHJ-Sarasota.org or call 929-7771.

The suggested donation for non-CHJ members attending the Dec. 7 program is \$5

ANNUAL COMMUNITY CAROL SING PLANNED AT FIRST CHURCH

On Sunday, Dec. 15, at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary, the First United Methodist Church in Sarasota will host its annual Christmas Concert and Community Carol Sing.

“Music, dance and drama have made this Christmas Concert a hit” for more than 20 years, a news release says. “First Church Singers performing sublime holiday music

will be accompanied by brass quintet, organ and harp.”

All members of the community are invited to join in singing beloved carols.

The church is located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota. Parking will be available in the Zenith garage.

Contact the church office (955-0935) for additional information. 

The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be. — *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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06
DECEMBER

WSLR presents Buddy Mondlock in concert

Dec. 6, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at door. Information: 894-6469 or WSLR.org.

10
DECEMBER

Sarasota Singles Society Christmas Party

Dec. 10, 5:30 p.m., Sarasota Yacht Club, 1100 John Ringling Blvd., Sarasota. (Note: prepayment required by Dec. 6.) Admission: \$80 for members/\$100 for others. Information: 504-4064 or SarasotaSinglesSociety.com.

06+
DECEMBER

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents Purlie

Through Dec. 15; times vary; 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$28.50. Information: 366-1505 or wbttsrq.org.

06+
DECEMBER

Above the planet through a microscope, works by Carla Poindexter

Through Dec. 28; times vary; Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art Gallery, 1288 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or AllynGallup.com.

06+
DECEMBER

FST presents Monty Python's Spamalot

Through Jan. 5; times vary; Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$18 to 49. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

06+
DECEMBER

Dabbert Gallery presents Sculpture: Metal, Marble & More

Dec. 6-30; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

07+
DECEMBER

Fuzión Dance Artists presents Voices of Fuzión: Mélange

Dec. 7 & 8; times vary; Jane B. Cook Theater, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$28 (\$10 for students). Information: 359-0099 or FuzionDance.org.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

07+
DECEMBER

Artist Series Concerts presents *Colored Lights* with KT Sullivan and Jon Weber

Dec. 7 & 8; times vary; Historic Asolo Theater, 5401 Bay Shore Road, Sarasota. Tickets: \$25 to 45. Information: 306-1202 or ArtistSeriesConcerts.org.

08
DECEMBER

Sarasota Pops Orchestra Holiday Concert

Dec. 8, 3 p.m., Riverview Performing Arts Center, 1 Ram Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$20 to 25, available at SarasotaPops.org.

08
DECEMBER

First United Methodist Church presents *Jazz At First Church*

Dec. 8, 4 and 5:30 p.m., 104 S. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. Admission: donation. Information: 955-0935 or FirstSRQ.org.

09
DECEMBER

Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations Holiday Party

Dec. 9, 7 p.m., Sarasota Garden Club, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota. Members of the public welcome. RSVP to CONASarasota@hotmail.com.

11
DECEMBER

Sarasota Concert Association presents Bill Schustik

Dec. 11, noon, Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center, 709 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 351-7467 or SCASarasota.org.

20+
DECEMBER

Selby Gardens presents *Lights in Bloom*

Dec. 20-23 and 27-30, 6 to 9 p.m., 900 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Admission: \$14 for members/\$17 for others. Information: 366-5731 or Selby.org.

06
JANUARY

Sarasota Concert Association presents Mark-André Hamelin

Jan. 6, 8 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$40 to 70. Information: 351-7467 or SCASarasota.org.

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

THE BLUE MAN GROUP'S FISHING BOAT

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.