

**THE SARASOTA**

Vol. 2, No. 15 — December 27, 2013

# News Leader

*The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida*

**PUSHING BACK THE DELIVERY DATE**

**DUE PROCESS DENIED**

**UPGRADING A POPULAR PLACE**

*Inside*

**Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.**

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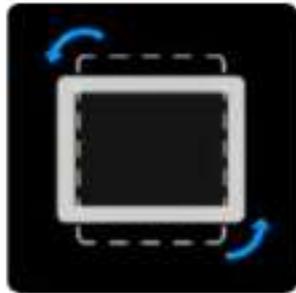
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# A.K.A. HELP

# SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

*The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida*

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# *Welcome*

I think it is safe to say most of us on staff figured this would be an issue pretty much devoid of news, preparing it, as we were, on an earlier holiday deadline. That is all the more reason I am pleased to point out we do indeed have some interesting news this week.

First, a couple of developments have occurred relative to the Lido Beach Renourishment Project, one involving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and one involving the only branded hotel that serves Siesta Key.

Then Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker learned about an 88-year-old Sarasota resident who is challenging a guardianship ruling designating her as incapacitated. The fact that she is a Holocaust survivor makes this all the more heart-tugging.

County Editor Roger Drouin went out late last week with the president and conservation chairman of Sarasota Audubon to learn the latest not only about the many species of birds that visit the Celery Fields but also about the nature center the Audubon chapter has planned.

And, not to be outdone, City Editor Stan Zimmerman offers an analysis as only he can about the work of the committee charged with recommending whether the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency should be extended past 2016. Stan also put in quite a bit of time on stories about a vast array of “lighter” city happenings to cap off the year.

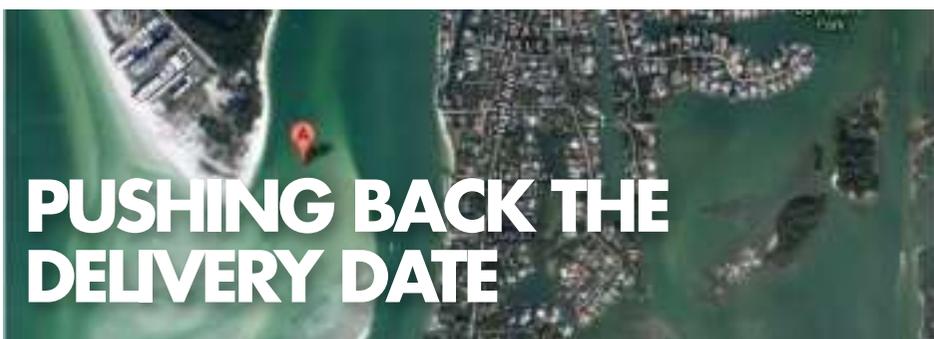
And as we close out 2013, we want to wish all of you the very best for 2014.

See you next year!

*Rachel Brown Hackney*

Editor and Publisher





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Sarasota Leisure: *Framing Fronds* - Norman Schimmel



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# PUSHING BACK THE DELIVERY DATE

Helmsley Sandcastle  
South Lido County Park



“*I would like there to be a peer review that’s completely independent, done by people that have no dog in this [hunt]... especially someone who doesn’t do dredging and beach renourishment for a living.*”

Nora Patterson  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County



# THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS NOW SAYS ITS ANALYSIS OF THE LIDO RENOURISHMENT PROJECT WILL NEED AN EXTRA MONTH TO COMPLETE, RESULTING IN A DELAYED COUNTY COMMISSION DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

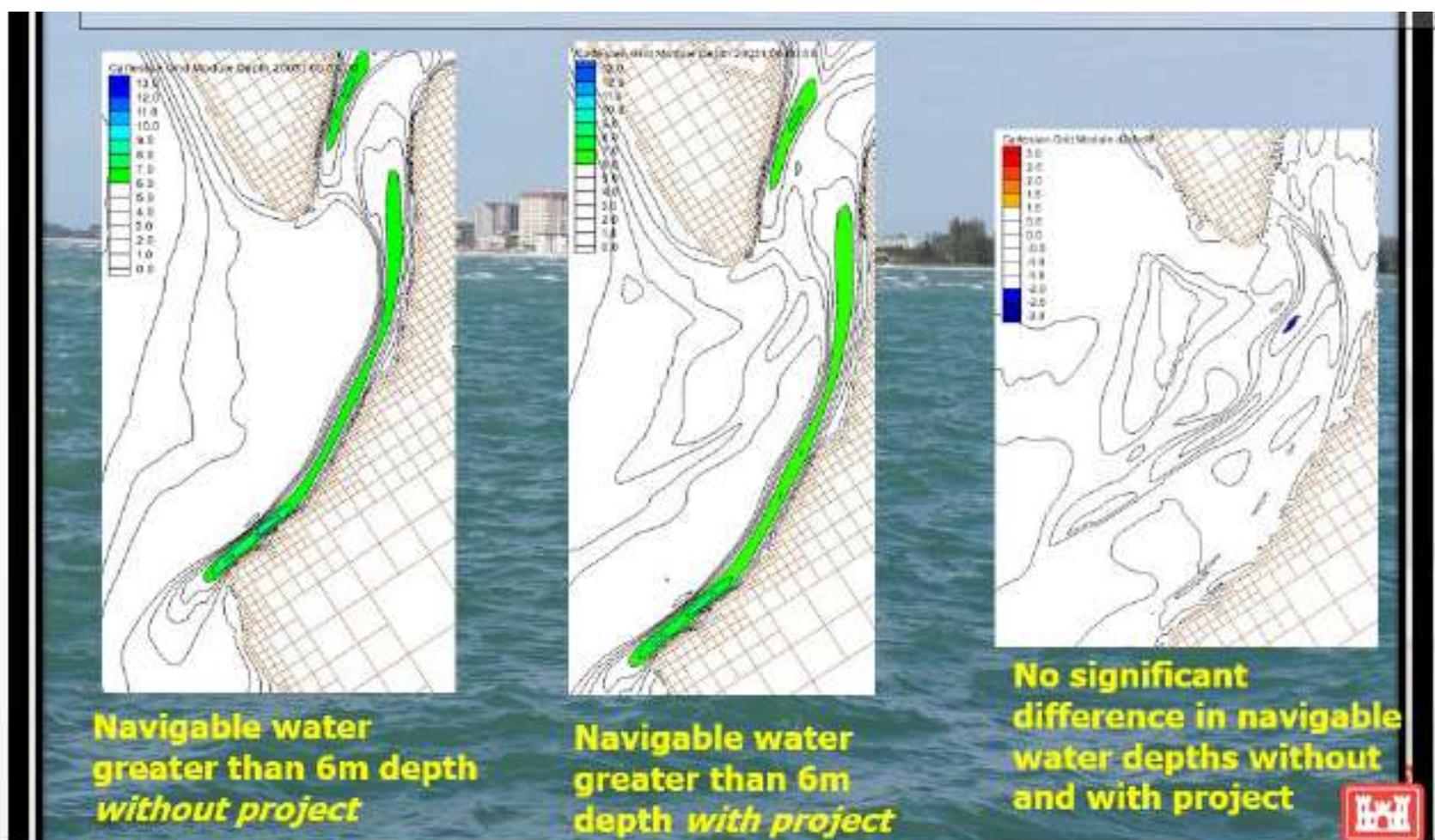
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has pushed back the timeline for delivery of its comprehensive analysis of the Lido Beach Renourishment Project — including potential impacts related to the dredging of Big Pass, Sarasota City and County staff learned last week.

While the project manager, Milan A. Mora, told attendees of the Dec. 5 Siesta Key Association (SKA) meeting that the plan was expected to

be finished in late January or early February, City Engineer Alexandria DavisShaw told *The Sarasota News Leader* that Army Corps representatives notified her on Dec. 17 that it would be late February or early March when everything was ready for release.

DavisShaw has promised the documents all will be available to the public.

As a result of the Corps announcement, county staff has postponed the date of a



1. graph shows without project
2. graph shows with project
3. A Comparison plot incorporating the difference between with and without project

*The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expects no significant change in the navigable depths of Big Pass if the channel is dredged. Members of the area's Boaters' Coalition say depths shown in the above graphics are incorrect, which bodes poorly for the completed analysis. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*

County Commission discussion of the project from Jan. 28 to March 18.

In the meanwhile, the *News Leader* has learned that the owners of the Best Western Plus Siesta Key hotel have decided to retain a Tampa attorney to advise them on how they should respond as project details continue to unfold.

“Nobody’s suing anybody,” Maria Bankemper, general manager and co-owner of the hotel emphasized to the *News Leader* on Dec. 20. The Best Western is the only branded hotel in the vicinity of Siesta Key, Bankemper pointed out, “and it’s our livelihood here.” That was

why her family wanted solid advice going forward, she said.

“Where [hiring the attorney is] going to take us at this point, I don’t know.”

## THE CORPS’ DELAY

Asked about the reason for the delay in the Army Corps timeline, DavisShaw told the *News Leader* that project team members probably want to check with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to make sure they have everything its staff will want to review, as DEP considers whether to grant the necessary state permit for the renourishment.



*It is not uncommon to see a flock of sea birds gathered in a group on the broad expanse of Siesta Public Beach. File photo*

In an interview with the *News Leader*, Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, said, “I don’t know that DEP is going to voice an opinion before they have all [of the Army Corps] documents” when told about DavisShaw’s speculation.

Additionally, DavisShaw noted that the primary Army Corps engineer working on the modeling for the study was involved in a serious accident and was out of work for a while.

Even before DavisShaw learned about the latest delay, Amy Meese, director of the county’s Natural Resources Department, had proposed to Assistant County Administrator Lee Ann Lowery that the County Commission push back its discussion of the Lido project until Feb. 19. That suggestion came from Commissioner Christine Robinson, who attended the SKA presentation. Meese wrote to Lowery, “Commissioner Robinson, [county



**LIDO KEY GROIN FIELD WITH ECL**

*A graphic shows the Erosion Control Line in red and the proposed locations for three groins on southern Lido Key. The southernmost groin appears to be on Sarasota County property. The area on the Gulf of Mexico side of the line is owned by the state. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

Coastal Resources Manager] Laird [Wreford] and I spoke briefly at the end of the [SKA] meeting and all discussed that bringing the Board item forward on 1/28/14, as tentatively scheduled, would be absent the findings of the [Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)] report and the Commission would have incomplete information as a result. As such, we are requesting to postpone the [discussion until after] the ACOE report is issued and staff has the ability to incorporate its findings into the discussion.”

Robinson was the board member who first proposed a County Commission discussion of the project, after all the commissioners learned that one of the groins the Army Corps proposes for construction on south Lido Key

would be on county land. Patterson quickly concurred, and the idea won unanimous approval.

“I’m glad to see the Corps taking a step back, as everyone should,” Robinson said in a telephone interview on Dec. 20 when asked about the delay.

## **FACETS OF THE ANALYSIS**

Wreford, the county’s coastal resources manager, told the *News Leader* last week that the delay was not surprising. “This is a very, very important project.”

Estimated at a maximum cost of \$22.7 million, the initial renourishment would add 1.1 million cubic yards of sand to Lido Beach,



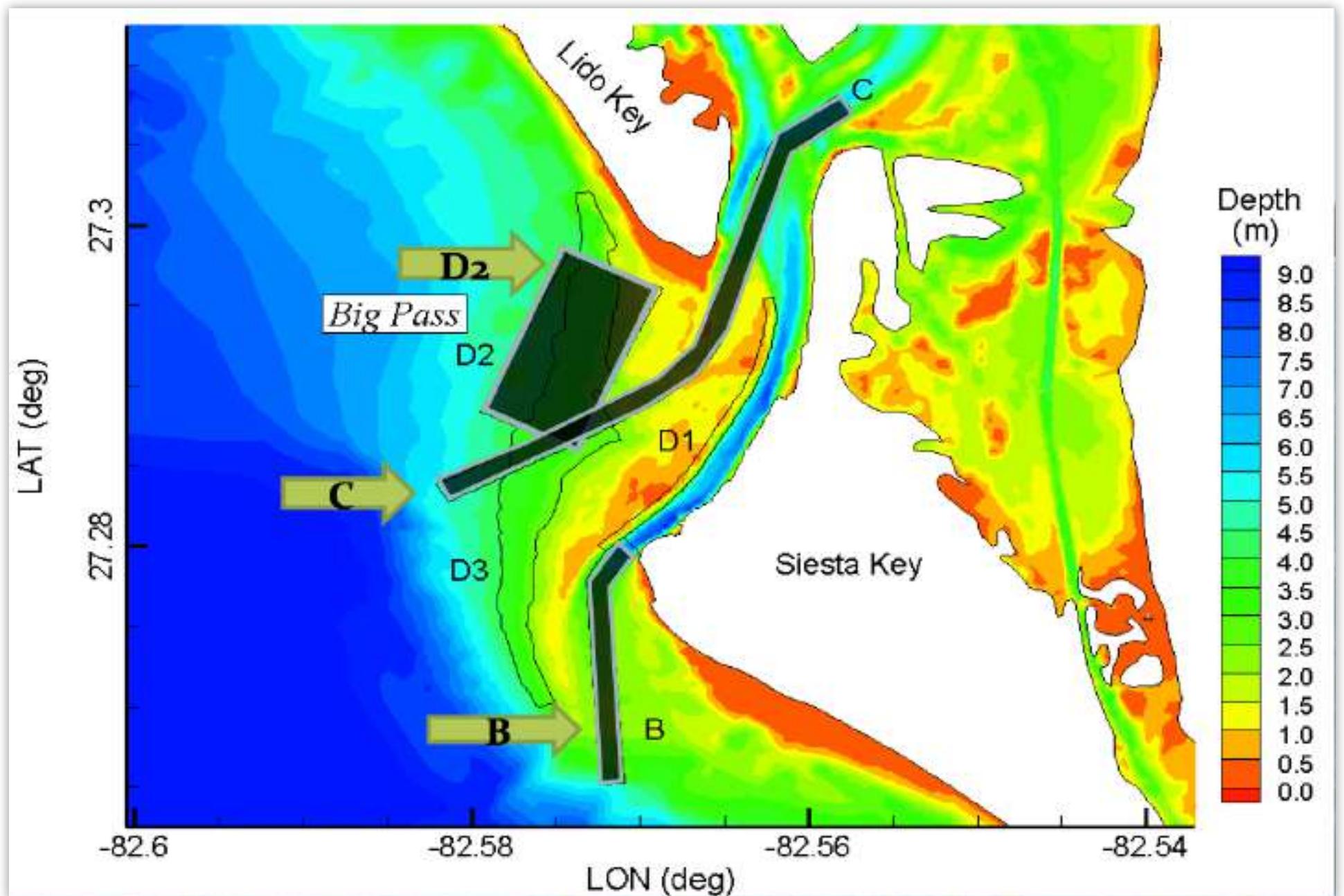
*This photo shows one stretch of Lido Key plagued by frequent erosion. The building’s pool deck is exposed to the water. Image courtesy of the City of Sarasota*

which the state has classified as a “critically eroded” beach. The three groins would be built on the southern end of the island to help retain much of that sand, although renourishments would be needed every five years over the 50-year-life of the project, Army Corps project engineers have explained.

During the Dec. 5 SKA meeting, Mora — the principal Corps spokesman on the team — told the audience of about 100 people that insufficient sand exists in reasonable proximity to Lido Key to make the project possible. Therefore, the focus has been on dredging the ebb shoal of Big Pass, which separates Lido and Siesta keys. Big Pass never has been dredged, though it was considered the prime



*Milan A. Mora, an engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is based in Jacksonville. File photo*



*A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers graphic shows the primary borrow areas for sand to renourish Lido Beach. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*

source for 2.1 million cubic yards of sand to renourish Venice beaches in the early 1990s.

In response to that proposal, a 1994 scientific study was undertaken by D.G. Aubrey and Robert Dolan, who noted, “Siesta Key’s stability and low erosion rates are linked, both directly and indirectly, to the Big Sarasota Pass ebb shoal’s capacity to shelter the key from high wave and storm forces, as well as to the sand transport that occurs in conjunction with the shoal, the pass, and the key. If [proposed] dredging ... by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is carried out, this will modify the wave and storm protection and alter the sediment supply to the onshore beaches.”

At the time, Aubrey was president of his own consulting firm and a senior scientist at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Dolan was a professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia.

Wreford explained to the *News Leader* on Dec. 19 that the breadth of the Army Corps work for the current project analysis includes scientific investigation of the potential impacts on navigation in Big Pass and on the Siesta shoreline, especially the island’s beaches.

In 2011, Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman of Florida International University — known internationally as “Dr. Beach” — named Siesta Public Beach the No. 1 beach in the United States.

The Army Corps also is analyzing potential impacts to Lido, including [Ted Sperling Park](#), which the county owns on the southern end of that island. The park is located at 2201 Ben Franklin Drive.

### SARASOTA COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX

#### COLLECTIONS BY LOCATION

\*Collections through 10/31/2013

	CONSOLIDATED	LONGBOAT KEY	NORTH PORT	SARASOTA	SARASOTA COUNTY	SIESTA KEY	VENICE	TOTAL
October 2012	17,826.07	77,191.25	3,012.57	268,937.71	110,128.79	184,398.49	43,845.74	704,938.62
November 2012	16,439.46	90,295.49	2,602.41	301,590.91	118,710.98	198,158.78	38,891.99	766,490.00
December 2012	40,229.88	125,766.71	4,973.23	326,809.47	170,027.49	281,525.33	60,597.16	1,009,929.27
January 2013	119,172.83	161,722.75	7,100.79	379,705.24	312,940.02	450,710.16	199,188.33	1,830,540.12
February 2013	73,004.95	204,379.75	6,889.39	501,263.01	333,370.45	699,747.28	136,063.30	1,964,718.13
March 2013	62,249.28	314,181.84	15,397.02	709,512.73	488,623.02	946,820.67	173,228.17	2,710,012.71
April 2013	31,092.69	159,859.22	4,851.91	431,676.03	213,783.62	393,256.83	64,682.44	1,299,201.74
May 2013	18,641.49	119,388.46	4,059.56	339,701.82	159,096.04	303,317.05	40,216.36	984,418.78
June 2013	24,290.25	122,247.52	3,997.49	330,160.79	178,833.25	462,867.90	41,910.72	1,164,307.92
July 2013	23,546.71	132,516.75	2,809.12	374,559.90	163,135.10	457,800.80	45,613.55	1,199,781.73
August 2013	18,359.75	84,977.57	2,704.91	315,500.71	130,660.83	249,014.73	33,689.46	834,907.96
September 2013	11,666.13	56,315.04	2,240.04	224,493.36	108,037.86	142,234.58	24,082.71	569,069.72
Grand Totals	456,319.47	1,648,839.35	60,638.44	4,503,911.68	2,487,345.43	4,769,652.40	901,609.93	14,828,316.70
Percentage of Total (%)	3.08%	11.12%	0.41%	30.37%	16.77%	32.17%	6.08%	100.00%

Note: All figures are subject to change following audit and enforcement actions.

Sarasota County Tax Collector  
Barbara Ford-Coates

*Siesta Key took in more Tourist Development Tax revenue for the county in the 2013 fiscal year than any other location. Image courtesy Sarasota County Tax Collector’s Office*

The county's position at this point, Wreford added, is "We're simply open and reserving judgment" until staff and the County Commission can review the Corps' findings. "Once we have some of that final information, we'll have a better idea of what questions to ask."

## ANALYZING THE ANALYSIS

"Personally, I want all the information we can get on this, so better to have [the Corps] analysis/report and then we have something we can get peer-reviewed," Patterson told the *News Leader*.

She added, "I would like there to be a peer review that's completely independent, done by people that have no dog in this [hunt] ... especially someone who doesn't do dredging and beach renourishment for a living."

Siesta residents and the Boaters' Coalition in Sarasota County also have asked for a peer review of the Corps' work on the Lido project. Mora and other Corps representatives have maintained their initial analysis has indicated the project would have minimal impacts on Siesta. Patterson told the *News Leader*, "Other than somebody's opinion, I'd like to know what that's based on."

“They need to go find sand someplace else.”

Maria Bankemper  
Co-Owner and General Manager  
Best Western Plus Siesta Key



*Maria Bankemper is co-owner of the Best Western Plus Siesta Key hotel. File photo*

Patterson herself has described in public meetings how sand naturally drifts from north to south on the west coast of Florida, and Siesta residents have remarked over the past couple of years, especially, about how sand has accreted on the public beach.

Mora told the SKA audience that dredging the ebb shoal of Big Pass would be returning sand to Lido that came from Lido.

Patterson is concerned about the groins, too, she said, noting they would likely be exposed on Lido beach between the five-year renourishments Mora has outlined. Mora has maintained in presentations that sufficient sand will be placed on Lido Beach in the initial renourishment to keep the structures covered.

Nonetheless, Patterson pointed out, she is a city resident who served on the City Commission before she was elected to the first of her four terms on the county board. “Lido is one of the assets that Sarasota County has,” she stressed, and not just in economic terms. “I don’t take this lightly at all. We’ve got all kinds of important assets to protect here.”

Although the economic factors are just part of the focus, a study undertaken for Visit Sarasota County — the county’s tourism agency — shows visitors to Lido Key account for about \$155 million every year in the county’s economy.

Back at the Best Western Plus Siesta Key, Bankemper points to the financial impact tourism on Siesta has on the county.

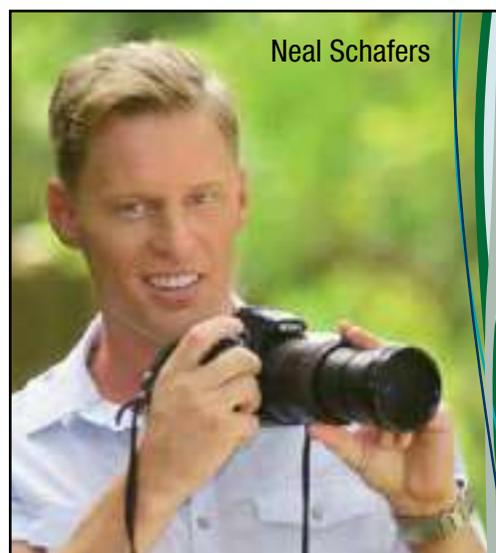
The final 2013 fiscal year report on Tourist Development Tax revenue collections for Sarasota County showed Siesta Key came out on top for the multiple locations tracked, accounting for 32.17 percent of the total: \$4,769,652.40, as of Oct. 31. The city of Sarasota — in which Lido Key is located — was in second place, with 30.37 percent, or \$4,503,911.68.

Referring to the proposal in the 1990s to dredge Big Pass, Bankemper said, “I think it’s outrageous that we are now sitting here 15 years later with the same idea. [Siesta] obviously [is] a jewel for this county.” The public beach, she pointed out, with its 99.9-percent quartz sand, is unlike most beaches anywhere else.

“I don’t think anyone argues the fact that Lido needs renourishment,” she stressed. However, “Big Pass is the way it is because of Mother Nature, and it hasn’t been touched.” Its sand very well could have originated in a lot of other places, including Lido, she said. Nonetheless, the Army Corps cannot guarantee Big Pass will be the same if it is dredged, she pointed out.

She takes comfort in the fact that Patterson has called for a completely independent peer review of the Army Corps analysis. “We have time to be able to make sure that this, hopefully, is vetted correctly.”

The real solution to Siesta’s concerns, Bankemper added, seems to lie in an undertaking the Army Corps project team members have discounted: “They need to go find sand someplace else.” 



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## DUE PROCESS DENIED

*Marie Winkelman in her home. Photo courtesy of Beverly Newman*

### **SARASOTA HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR FIGHTS INCAPACITY RULING**

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**

*Associate Editor*

Sarasota resident and 88-year-old Holocaust survivor Marie Winkelman is challenging a guardianship ruling designating her as incapacitated, a ruling one activist working hard to publicize the case calls all too common.

According to an interview she gave in her Bird Key home in 1987, Winkelman was born in Włocławek, a town in northern Poland, to what she called a “well-off” if “not rich” family. She grew up in an era of vicious

anti-Semitism, escaped the Warsaw ghetto and lost her entire family in the Holocaust. At 19, at the end of World War II, she was utterly alone, with “no family, not one person,” she told her interviewer.

“*There’s a rush to judgment against elders.*”

Beverly Newman  
Director  
Al Katz Center for Holocaust Survivors &  
Jewish Learning

The conversation was recorded as part of an effort by the Sarasota-Manatee chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women to document local Holocaust experiences. Winkelman later expanded on

her recollection in a memoir, *Keeping a Promise: To Tell My Story of Survival in Warsaw During World War II*, which she self-published.

Beverly Newman, the director of the Al Katz Center for Holocaust Survivors & Jewish Learning, calls Winkelman “brilliant,” one of the most “vivacious” elders she’s met — which, for Newman, makes a court ruling judging Winkelman incapacitated all the more “distressing.”

In July, Robert Szychowski, who is married to a daughter of Winkelman’s second husband, asked a Sarasota court to appoint what is known as an Emergency Temporary

Guardian to Winkelman. Guardians are generally appointed to handle another person’s personal, financial, health or property matters, if that person becomes unable to do so. In one court filing, Newman charged that Szychowski did so only to become “the sole Trustee of her multi-million dollar Trust.” (Szychowski did not respond to a *Sarasota News Leader* voicemail.)

In December, the court held a final incapacity hearing, appointing a guardian and effectively closing the case. “In 30 minutes, Marie went from someone who was capacitated to someone who had many of her rights taken away,” says Newman, who was alerted to the case in August by a friend of Winkelman.



*Winkelman shows a visitor some of her paintings. Photo courtesy of Beverly Newman*

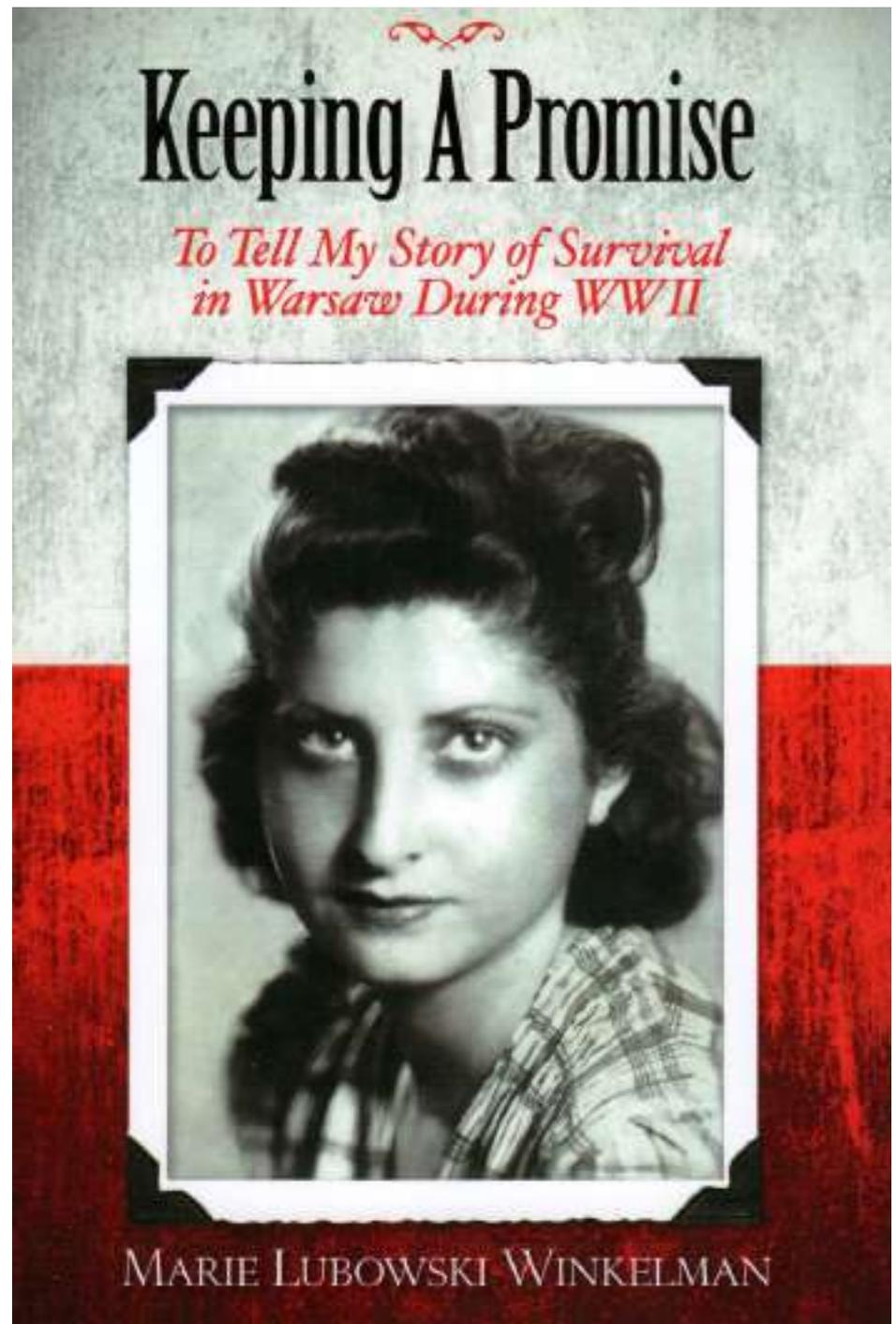
But despite the December ruling, the fight didn't end there. According to documents filed afterward, Winkelman never saw the mediated settlement the attorneys had reached, nor was she notified in advance of the hearing at which that settlement was approved.

“Marie Winkelman has never testified under oath; presented evidence; called witnesses; or been given an option by her attorney to have the hearing open or closed,” wrote attorney Audrey Bear, appointed to represent Winkelman after the case was originally decided. “Her attorney chose to close hearings, did not present numerous witnesses whom Ms. Winkelman wanted to testify on her behalf, and never presented any evidence to the court of her capacity.”

Bear's filing argued that Winkelman had been denied due process, and it asked the court to vacate its December incapacity ruling. The case has since been reopened.

Bear also challenged the validity of an examination of Winkelman performed by a “Dr. Rivera,” who arrived at Winkelman's home unannounced and never stated the purpose for his visit. “Since Rivera's report was made without consent,” it should be “stricken from the record,” Bear argued, calling for a new round of evaluations. (Bear did not respond to a *Sarasota News Leader* message.)

Newman says one particularly galling document stands out. Barry Spivey, a lawyer with Spivey & Fallon P.A., wrote to the judge in the case, Deno Economou, asking him to deny Winkelman a copy of the audio transcript of a November hearing, which she had requested.



*The cover of Winkelman's memoir, Keeping a Promise: To Tell My Story of Survival in Warsaw During World War II. Photo courtesy of Beverly Newman*

“This is a very slippery slope,” says Newman, “when we can take away a person's civil rights without due process.”

Newman calls Winkelman's case “monumental,” but it's also not entirely atypical. The Al Katz Center — named for Newman's father, who was placed into a guardianship against Newman's will — is monitoring a handful of cases at any given time. “There's a rush to judgment against elders.” 

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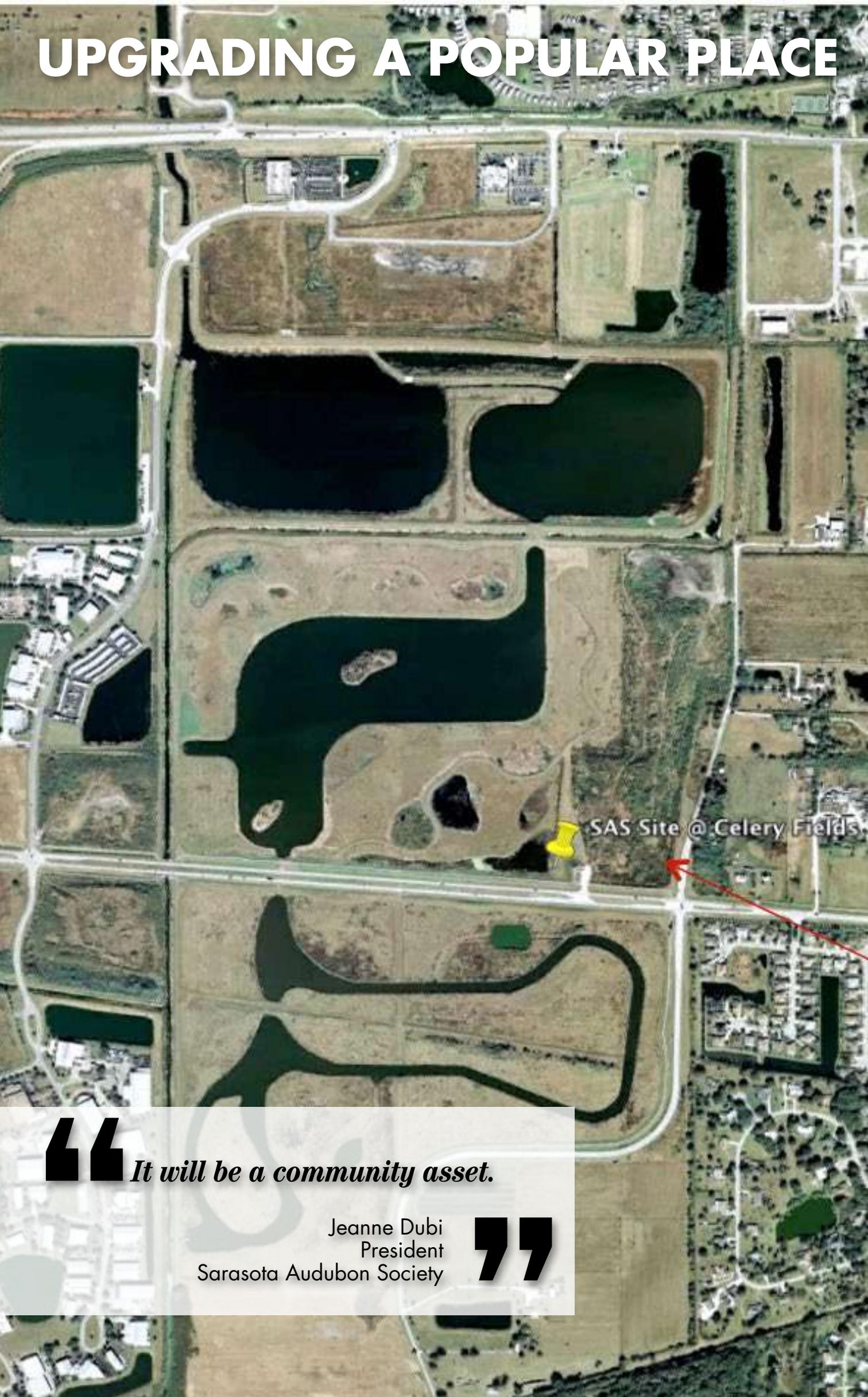
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# UPGRADING A POPULAR PLACE



“ *It will be a community asset.* ”

Jeanne Dubi  
President  
Sarasota Audubon Society

**Nature  
Center  
Site**

*The Celery Fields preserve sets aside 440 acres of wetlands and natural habitat for passive recreation. Construction of a Nature Center is slated to begin in June 2014. Image courtesy Sarasota Audubon*

## THE CELERY FIELDS MAY BE FOR THE BIRDS, BUT PUBLIC RESTROOMS AND A NATURE CENTER WILL IMPROVE THE PRESERVE FOR RESIDENTS AND TOURISTS

By Roger Drouin  
*County Editor*

A loggerhead shrike perched momentarily in a small oak tree at the Celery Fields, not far from where Wade Matthews, conservation chairman of the Sarasota Audubon Society, stood.

“It’s a songbird but has a hooked beak like a hawk, but not as long,” noted Matthews.

The shrike — which preys on vertebrates, mostly dragonflies — is a year-round resident

of the Celery Fields. It is just one of the 217 species of breeding and migratory birds that have been spotted at the 440-acre preserve. In Florida, there are about 500 recorded bird species.

The only other preserve in Sarasota County that has close to that number of avian species is the much larger Myakka River State Park, said Sarasota Audubon President Jeanne Dubi.



*From dry to wet: This July 1930 photo was taken where the Celery Fields Regional Stormwater Facility stands now. Image courtesy Sarasota County*

The Celery Fields, which was historically agricultural land until Sarasota County purchased it in 1995, is getting two new additions that will improve it for residents and tourists alike.

In the first project, the county is constructing permanent restrooms and parking spaces. That work began Nov. 13, with completion estimated for spring 2014.

Adjacent to the restrooms and parking area, the Sarasota Audubon chapter will be building a \$1 million nature center. The society will operate the facility and fund its upkeep through donations. The group will lease the land from the county for \$10 per year. So far, Sarasota Audubon has raised 70 percent of the total needed to build the center.

Construction is slated to start in June 2014 and take six to eight months, Dubi said. Nature center visitors will use the public restrooms in the county structure.

### **'AN EXCITING PROJECT'**

The center has been designed to house educational sessions and receptions. When it is not in use for those programs, it will feature exhibits such as a history of the Celery Fields — named after one of the primary crops grown on the land when it was farmed.

Outside, the education and visitor center will feature a patio and a native-plant garden designed by students in an environmental science class taught by Ringling College Professor Tim Rumage.



*Sandhill cranes stroll through the water. Photo by Roger Drouin*



*The Sarasota Audubon Society has collected 70 percent of the funds needed to build the Nature Center. Wade Matthews (right) is the conservation chairman for the local Audubon, while Jeanne Dubi is the president. Photo by Roger Drouin*



*A great blue heron wades in the area of the preserve the county restored to wetlands in 2011 during a \$15 million project. Photo by Roger Drouin*

“It’s really an exciting project,” Dubi noted of the center. “It will be a community asset.”

Solar panels will power the facility, and an 8-foot overhang will help keep the building cooler on hot days.

Dubi said volunteers will be on hand at the center daily to direct tourists to hotels or tell them about other eco-tourism activities in the county, such as kayaking.

“Birdwatching and wildlife viewing is a big source of tourism dollars in Sarasota County,” Matthews pointed out.

Birdwatching generates millions in annual economic impact for Sarasota County, according to the Audubon chapter. The nature center is expected to bolster those local eco-tourism initiatives.



*A palm warbler perches on one of the palms county staff recently planted on the northern half of the Celery Fields preserve. Photo by Roger Drouin*



*Wade Matthews, conservation chairman of the Sarasota Audubon Society, shows the boundary of the Nature Center to be constructed at the Celery Fields. Photo by Roger Drouin*

Birdwatching and other eco-tourism activities are popular throughout the state, attracting flocks of visitors — just as some migratory birds themselves come south. Tourists in pursuit of such recreation in Sarasota County spent more dollars than visiting golfers did last year, Dubi said, referencing a local tourism report.

Once the local Audubon chapter's endowment grows, Dubi hopes to hire an executive director to run the nature center. The organization is still accepting donations that will go toward the entire project: [www.sarasota-audubon.org](http://www.sarasota-audubon.org).

The center will not be just for tourists; it will be a facility for local residents and an integral part of the Audubon chapter's Celery Fields Explorer program, which brought more than 1,100 Sarasota students to the Celery Fields last year. The program is funded jointly by Sarasota Audubon and the Gulfcoast Community Foundation.

## BUFFER PLANS

Along with planning for the center, Audubon leadership has been involved in preliminary discussions between Sarasota County and Benderson Development Co., which proposes to build an industrial project on 42 county-owned acres one mile north of the nature facility.

According to Wade, the goal is for Sarasota Audubon to help ensure the 200,000-square-foot development dovetails as well as possible with the preserve space to its south.

At a special meeting on Nov. 26, the county commissioners directed Benderson to include specifications for lighting and a buffer that would be appropriate in consideration of the nearby environmental area.



*One of two boardwalks at the Celery Fields, this structure offers visitors vistas of the marsh. Photo by Roger Drouin*

Wade would have preferred a natural history museum on the county-owned land, but he said it is encouraging that the local Audubon group was asked to participate in the planning phase of the development. One of the possible discussion items in that process is the potential implementation of a linear trail between Benderson's industrial/business complex and the Celery Fields.

Once the Benderson project has been completed, along with other developments such as the Fruitville Initiative (see the related story in this issue), the Celery Fields will become even more of a gem in a growing industrial and commercial part of the county, Dubi pointed out.

The county in October took some other steps to enhance the preserve. It hired a contractor to plant pine trees and native shrubs on the Celery Fields hill — the landmark visible to Fruitville Road motorists. Already, palm warblers are making the habitat their home. 



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## CONTINUING TO LEAD THE WAY

*The full moon shines down on The Beach Club and The Lobster Pot in Siesta Village on Dec. 18. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

### **TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX REVENUE IS HIGHER AGAIN FOR THE FIRST MONTH OF THE NEW FISCAL YEAR, AND BUSINESS OWNERS PROJECT A STRONG SEASON AHEAD**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

In the six years since Libby's Café + Bar opened in Southside Village, business has continued to build, says Joe Seidensticker, chief operating officer and general manager.

Given the number of other restaurants that have opened and become well established in that same period, he adds, one big key to Libby's success has to be tourism.

Acting on the basis of that continued growth, the Seidensticker family members and their partners opened not only another restaurant but also a banquet/meeting

facility in April in the ground level of the Palm Avenue parking garage. "It looks like it's going to shape up to be a really good season," Seidensticker says of the new restaurant, Louies Modern.

At Libby's he notes, numbers have been "really strong" this fall, a trend the Seidenstickers have marked since summer.

**“ I think it'll be a very strong season for Sarasota. ”**

Joe Seidensticker  
Chief Operating Officer & General Manager  
Libby's and Louies Modern

Over on Siesta Key, businessman Chris Brown points out, "The season seems to be getting longer."

Brown adds, "We had a terrific August and

actually a pretty darn good September. [The season is] really stretching out.”

Events such as the Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition in November have drawn more and more visitors to the area during what traditionally was a slower part of year, he points out. “It’s benefiting a lot of people.”

Although the percentages of growth vary among his Siesta Village properties — The Hub Baja Grill, The Cottage and The Beach Club — Brown says he has seen steady increases with each. “The weather has been very, very helpful,” he adds with a chuckle, referring to balmy temperatures in Sarasota compared to frigid conditions in many other sections of the country.

Restaurateurs are not the only ones noticing growth. Sheila Lewis, co-owner of Siesta Sports Rentals on south Siesta Key, says that while the company’s numbers right now are about the same as they were during the same

period of 2012, rentals for the holidays “are looking stronger. ... People are obviously unhappy with the cold weather and they are on their way down.”

Additionally, she points out, having checked last week with representatives of a number of condominium complexes on the island, she learned the key should be quite busy with tourists over Christmas and New Year’s.

Early signs are that season itself will be very busy, too, she notes. One person emailed her on Dec. 19 to reserve a scooter car for three weeks in April.

At the Best Western Plus Siesta Key, General Manager and Co-Owner Maria Bankemper tells The Sarasota News Leader she thought the hotel’s superior numbers in 2013 could not be matched, but “I’m elated that we are pacing much better than in previous years” for the first quarter of 2014, in terms of reservations.

She also has heard from rental properties on Siesta that bookings are looking good.



*Libby's Café + Bar in Southside Village has continued to see steady growth. Contributed photo*

Having Easter in April instead of March — as it was this year, she points out — “[is] going to give us a much longer season.”

She is just keeping her fingers crossed, she adds, that a cold snap will not hit, as it did in the early part of this year, and make some of those tourists change their minds about heading to Florida.

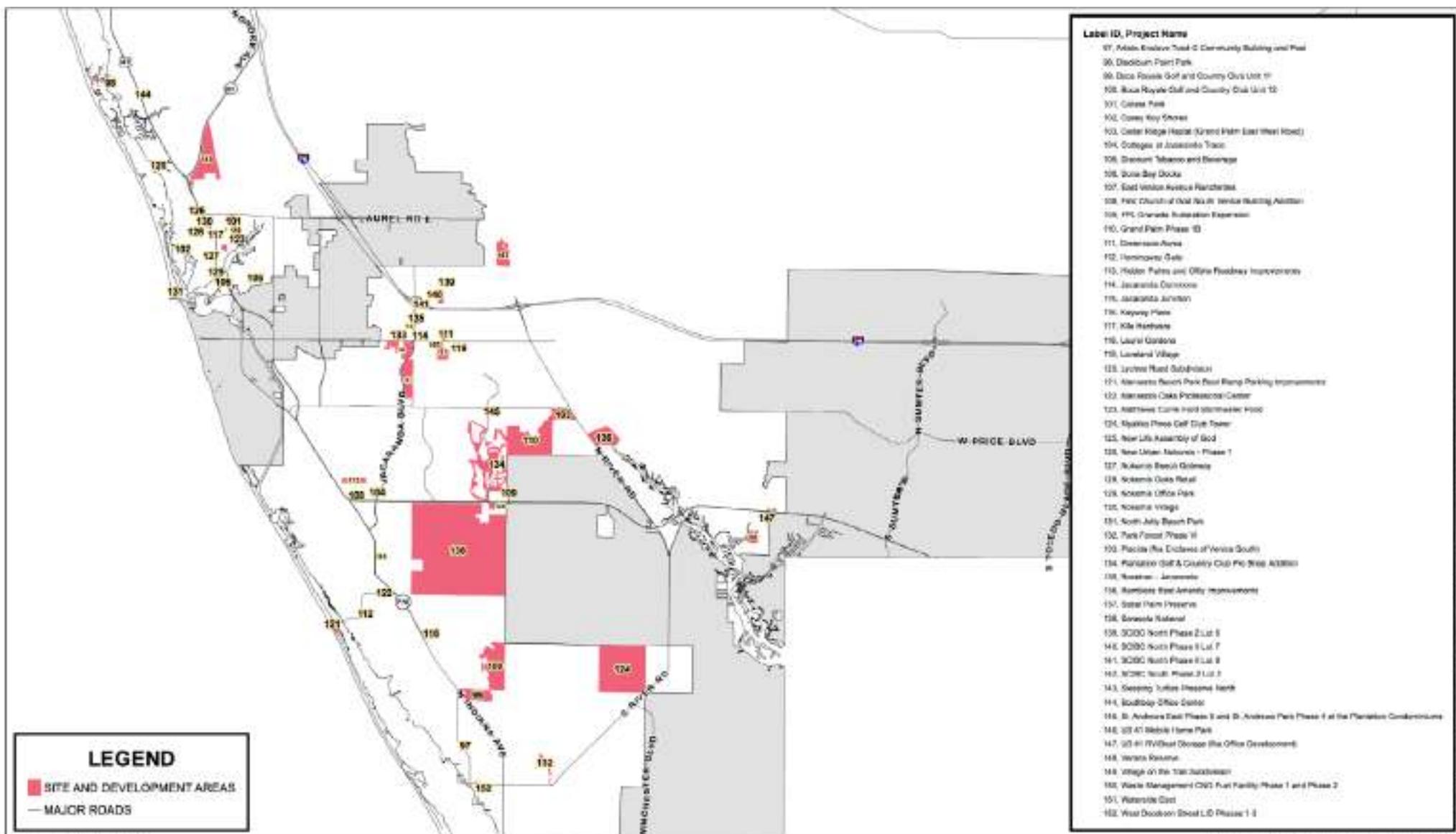
“I think it’ll be a very strong season for Sarasota,” Seidensticker says.

The comments voiced by Seidensticker, Brown, Lewis and Bankemper are supported by the first report on Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. According to the numbers released by the Sarasota County Tax Collector’s Office, the county brought in \$45,029.27 more in

TDT revenue during October this year than in October 2012. (Those are the latest figures available.) And, as Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, has pointed out, the 2013 fiscal year was a record-breaker in TDT revenue collections.

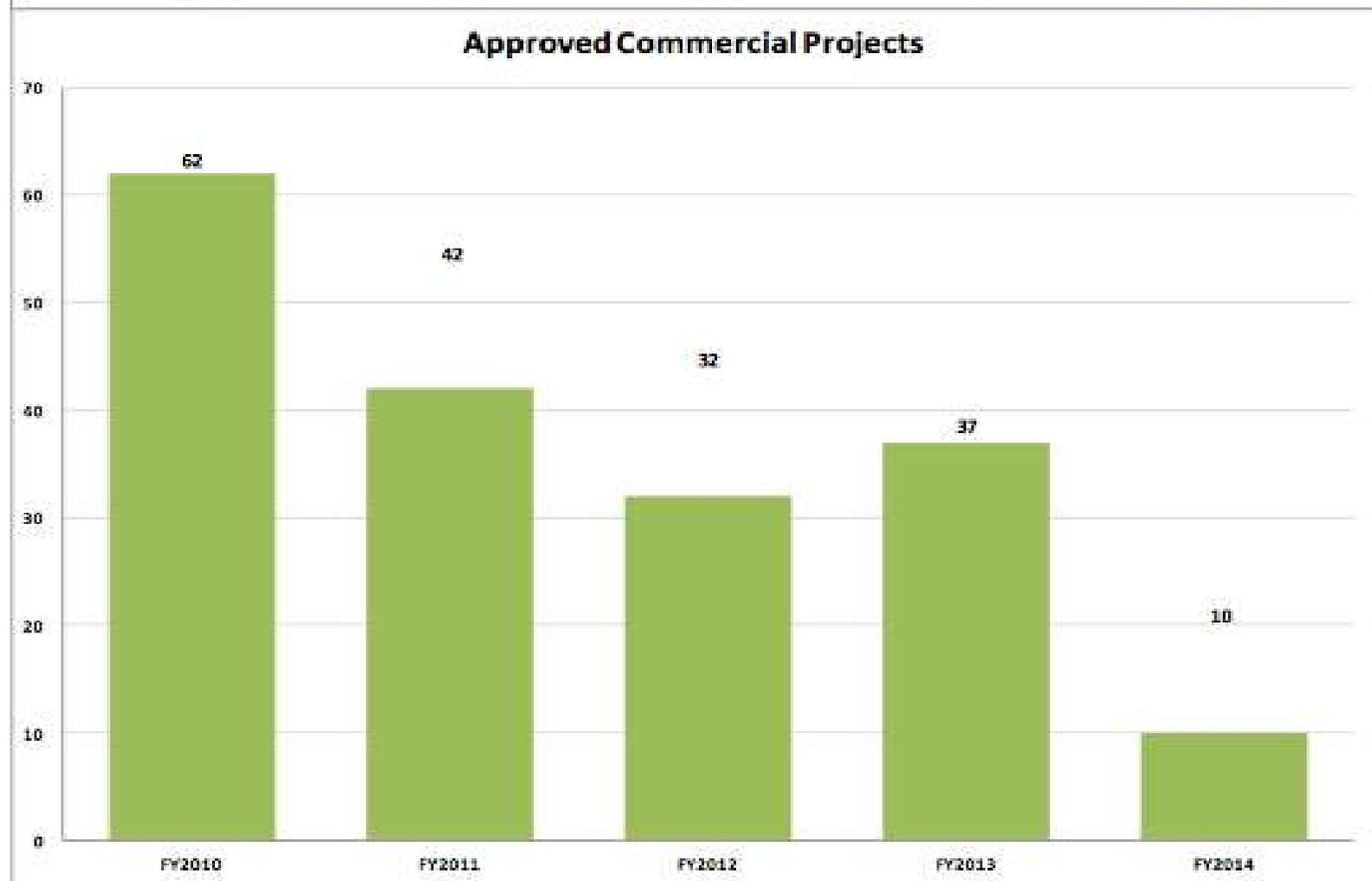
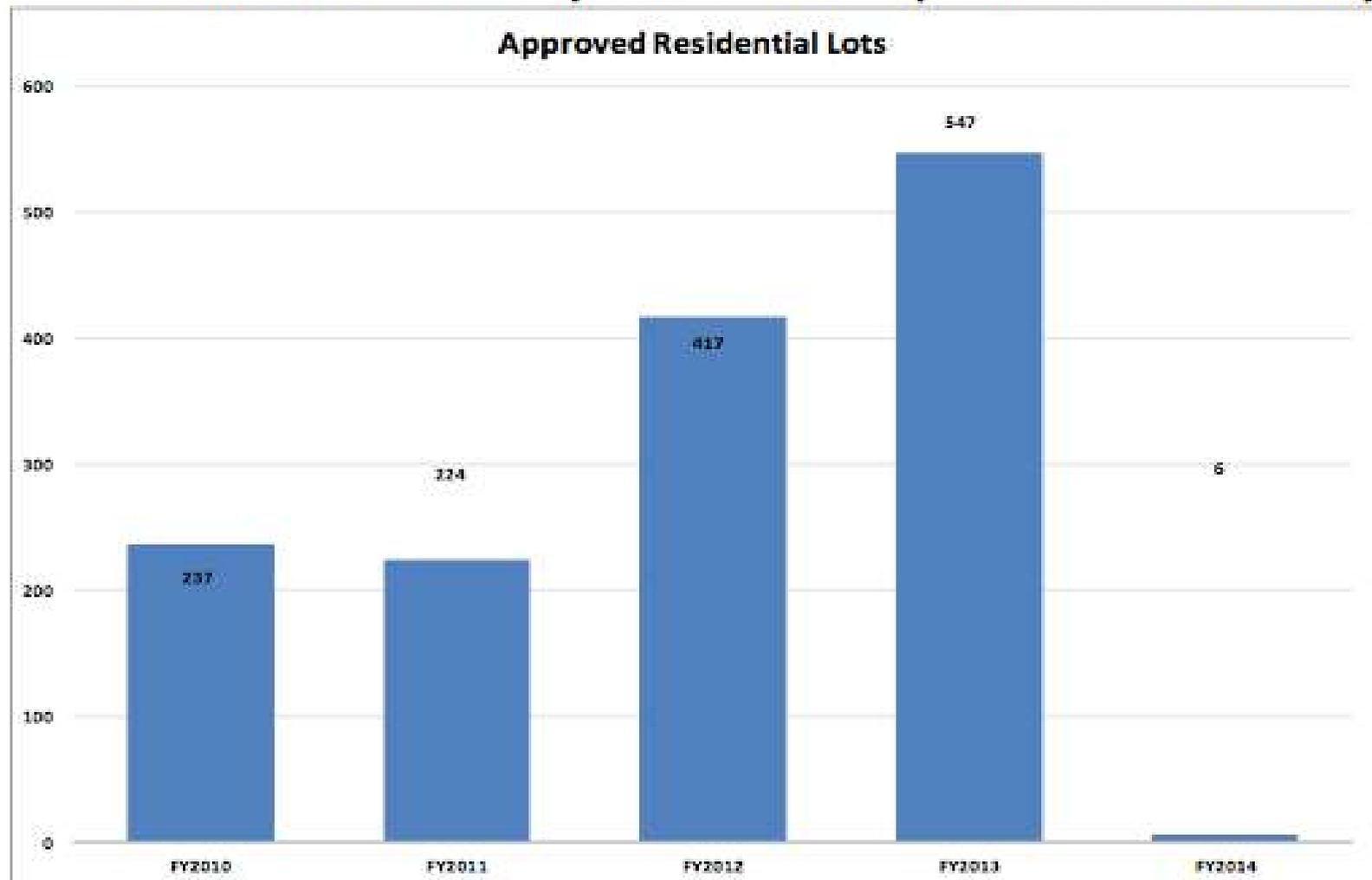
During a presentation prepared last month for the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council (TDC), Haley and her staff provided several statistics to show how tourism continues to boom in the county. Among them were the following:

- The total number of visitors rose to 929,000 for the 2013 fiscal year, up 5.7 percent over 2012.
- The total for European tourists in FY 2013 was 103,000, up 10 percent over the FY 2012 mark.



A county map shows all the active site and development projects in South County as of this month. Image courtesy Sarasota County

### PDS Charts – Land Development Services (November 2013 Data)



*Graphs released by the Sarasota County Planning and Development Services Department compare the numbers of permits issued for residential and commercial projects from the 2010 fiscal year through November of this year. Image courtesy Sarasota County*

- Visitor spending was also up 10 percent year-over-year, at \$757 million.
- Sports tourism had an economic impact of \$71 million in FY 2013, compared to \$43 million the previous year.
- Room nights generated by sports tourism reached the 67,000 mark, up from 52,000 in FY 2012.

## MORE POSITIVE NEWS

Adding further emphasis to the impact of tourism, the latest figures from Sarasota County's Office of Financial Management (OFM) show gross hotel and motel sales for October 2013 were up 20.1 percent over the number for October 2012, at about \$17,510,000.

Yet, tourism is not the only bright spot on the county economic front. The OFM report shows the number of permit applications for

single-family homes was up 29.2 percent in November compared to the same month in 2012. Moreover, the value of construction was 15.4 percent higher — at approximately \$10,664,000.

The gross retail sales figure for October 2013 was up 4.6 percent over that of October 2012, for a total of about \$978,930,000.

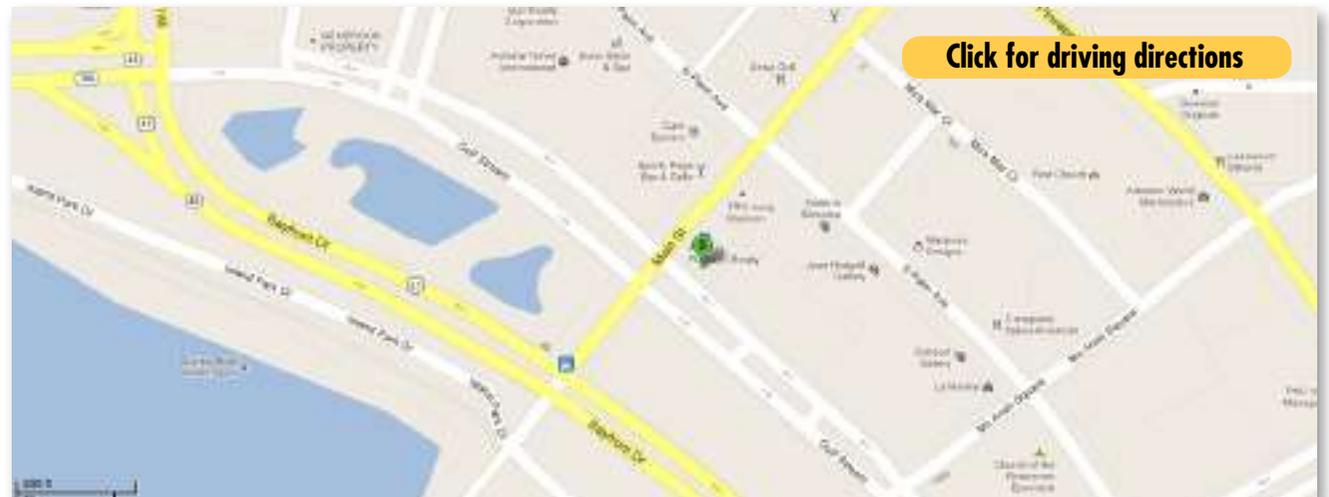
Data from the Sarasota Association of Realtors showed the average days a property stayed on the market in October 2013 was lower year-over-year: 90 compared to 105, though the number of house and condominium sales was down 8.4 percent in October compared to the same month in 2012: 760 units this October versus 830 in October 2012.

Back on the positive side: The median price was 13.7 percent higher — at \$178,187 — in October this year compared to October 2012. 

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## CAN THEY SELL THE PLAN?

*With no 'blight' or 'slums' visible in downtown Sarasota — even from a rooftop — the City and County commissions will have to decide whether to extend the life of the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **ANALYSIS: DOWN TO THE WIRE, THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS WORKING ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DOWNTOWN SARASOTA COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY PROVE LESS THAN AMBITIOUS**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

It has been a bumpy ride for the “airplane” called the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency Extension Study Committee. In the cargo compartment is a delicate half-billion-dollar package of tightly interconnected public policies.

As the plane makes the final approach to its destinations — the Sarasota City and County Commission daises — there has been a mutiny by the crew and nobody wants to do any more work.

When the pilot — Committee Chairman Andy Dorr — asked for volunteers to draft the final report, not a single member stepped forward to help finish the task. Instead, Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown rushed to the controls to keep the ship on the glide path.

“*I don't think the ordinance [establishing the committee] called for a written report.*”

Chris Gallagher  
Member  
Downtown Sarasota  
CRA Extension Study Committee

It is absolutely crucial to the city's future that the payload gets delivered and accepted by the two elected bodies. The failure of the committee members to show any willingness to complete their

mission bodes poorly for the final outcome of their flight.

## THE STAKES

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is a financial investment scheme. It moves property tax revenue produced by a defined area out of city and county coffers into the CRA's account. In 1986, the City and County commissions agreed to freeze their property tax revenue level in a specific section of downtown Sarasota. For 30 years, the revenue that came in above the 1986 base level accrued to the Downtown Sarasota CRA to fight "slum and blight" in that same section of the city.

The deal expires in 2016. Earlier this year the City and County commissions appointed

a 10-person committee — the Downtown Sarasota CRA Extension Study Committee — to come back in January with recommendations on whether the CRA should be extended and, if so, how it should operate in the future.

When the *ad hoc* committee "opened up" the CRA for examination, a few worms crawled out. Instead of using CRA money for projects to fight "slum and blight," the city was using an ever-increasing fraction of the revenue to augment city finances, paying police salaries, for example. The use of CRA funds for operations instead of investment rankled several committee members.

After a couple of months of meetings, then-Chairman David Merrill was asked to resign by one county commissioner because



*Pineapple Avenue businesses are included within the Downtown Community Redevelopment Agency boundaries. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Merrill was working to develop a “model CRA ordinance” that could be used in other places in the county. County Commissioner Joe Barbetta suggested Merrill resign, and no other commissioner rose to Merrill’s defense because the county does not want any more diversion of its property taxes into CRAs.

Merrill was replaced by Andy Dorr, and the entire committee acted chastened, tamping down its vision for the CRA’s future. Over subsequent months, the members agreed to recommend extending the CRA for another 30 years, with continued use of 1986 as the “base year.” One member calculated that since 1986, the CRA has raised nearly \$100 million. And in the next 30 years, it would bring in more than \$500 million.

Sweeping all other factors aside, that is what is at stake — an estimated \$528 million. That is the “cargo” for our figurative airplane. When the city and county commissioners eventually meet to consider writing another 30-year agreement, that will be the center of attention.

## THE FINAL DETAILS

Other details were decided at the committee’s Dec. 10 meeting, including a recommendation stripping the City Commission’s sole and absolute authority to govern how the CRA money is spent. Instead, the committee decided to establish a new governing structure with two city commissioners, two county commissioners and three city citizens selected by the City Commission.



*Andy Dorr is the extension committee chairman. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

It then tossed a sop to the County Commission, agreeing to give the county an undetermined percentage of the CRA funding, a “skim” on the \$500 million.

And it kicked two decisions down the road. Should the CRA’s defined area be expanded, perhaps to the North Tamiami Trail? Establish another committee to consider that, said the current committee. And what are the “allowable uses” of CRA money? That decision was deferred to the new CRA governing board, assuming the CRA is extended.

On Dec. 18, the committee met to clear up odds and ends, focusing on new rules and recommendations that came up during the months of discussion. But first it had to wait for enough members to show up to create a quorum. This was not an auspicious start to the session.

Most of the “new rules and recommendations” were “kicked” as well. Should the new CRA have its own lawyer? Let its governing board decide. Should there be a new strategic action plan, or should the current one be updated? The decision was deferred. Should the CRA hire its own staff? Again, deferred. Its own management? Again, deferred.

Should the final report of the committee recommend one or two really big projects to pursue (for example, a downtown cultural district)? By a 7-0 vote, the answer was “No.”

Should the new CRA governing board have an advisory board to help it? Right now there are two advisory boards — one for the Downtown CRA and one for the city’s Newtown CRA. Unanimously, the *ad hoc* committee members said, “Yes.”



*Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown has been the city liaison to the committee considering the extension of the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Should the two CRA master plans — Downtown and Newtown — be merged? That decision was deferred because legal issues are involved.

## THE FINAL REPORT

When it came time to consider crafting a final report, the *ad hoc* committee was uncharacteristically silent. Member Chris Gallagher recalled setting out a framework for one; he read from his notes of the Nov. 12 meeting.

“There were six chapters. The first was a background on CRAs in general and ours and the impacts of our CRA,” he said. “Then what we’ve done in our research and meetings. No. 3 is the ‘decision tree,’ with its pros and cons identified. Four, the results of the decision tree and our recommendations. Five, what

are the big opportunities in front of us. And six, specific recommendations for the ultimate city-county agreement.”

“I think the next report could be a PowerPoint slide show,” said member Michael Beaumier.

“I don’t think the ordinance [establishing the committee] called for a written report,” noted Gallagher.

“No, just a final report,” said Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown.

“So at the next meeting, you present it,” replied Gallagher.

After ruining any Christmas holiday Brown might have anticipated, the committee members agreed to meet again on Jan. 14 and 29, and then they adjourned. 

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# GREEN-LIGHTING GIDGET'S RENTERS

“Quite honestly, we have a lot of tourists, outside visitors, that come and enjoy themselves on Siesta Key, so I think it's going to be quite popular, to be right there where the action is, right between the Siesta Key Oyster Bar and the Daiquiri Deck.

Mark Smith  
Architect  
Siesta Key



## WITH A PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL, IT WILL BE UP TO THE COUNTY COMMISSION TO DECIDE ON THREE NEW TRANSIENT UNITS IN SIESTA VILLAGE

By Rachel Brown Hackney

*Editor*

With two members voicing their commendation of the project, the Sarasota County Planning Commission on Dec. 19 voted unanimously to recommend that the County Commission approve a special exception for the creation of three transient units above Gidget's Coastal Provisions, a retail shop under construction in Siesta Village.

The issue tentatively is scheduled to come before the County Commission on Jan. 28, Mark Loveridge, a project manager in the county's Planning and Development Services

Department, told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Dec. 23.

Mark Smith of Smith Architects on Siesta Key — the architect for the project — explained to the Planning Commission that the new shop, which will feature the [Margaritaville Apparel](#) line, and the rooms for rent represent a less intense use of the property than a restaurant or bar. The site, 5242 Ocean Blvd., previously was occupied by Napoli's Restaurant.

"Looks like a great place," said Planning Commission member Michael A. Moran after



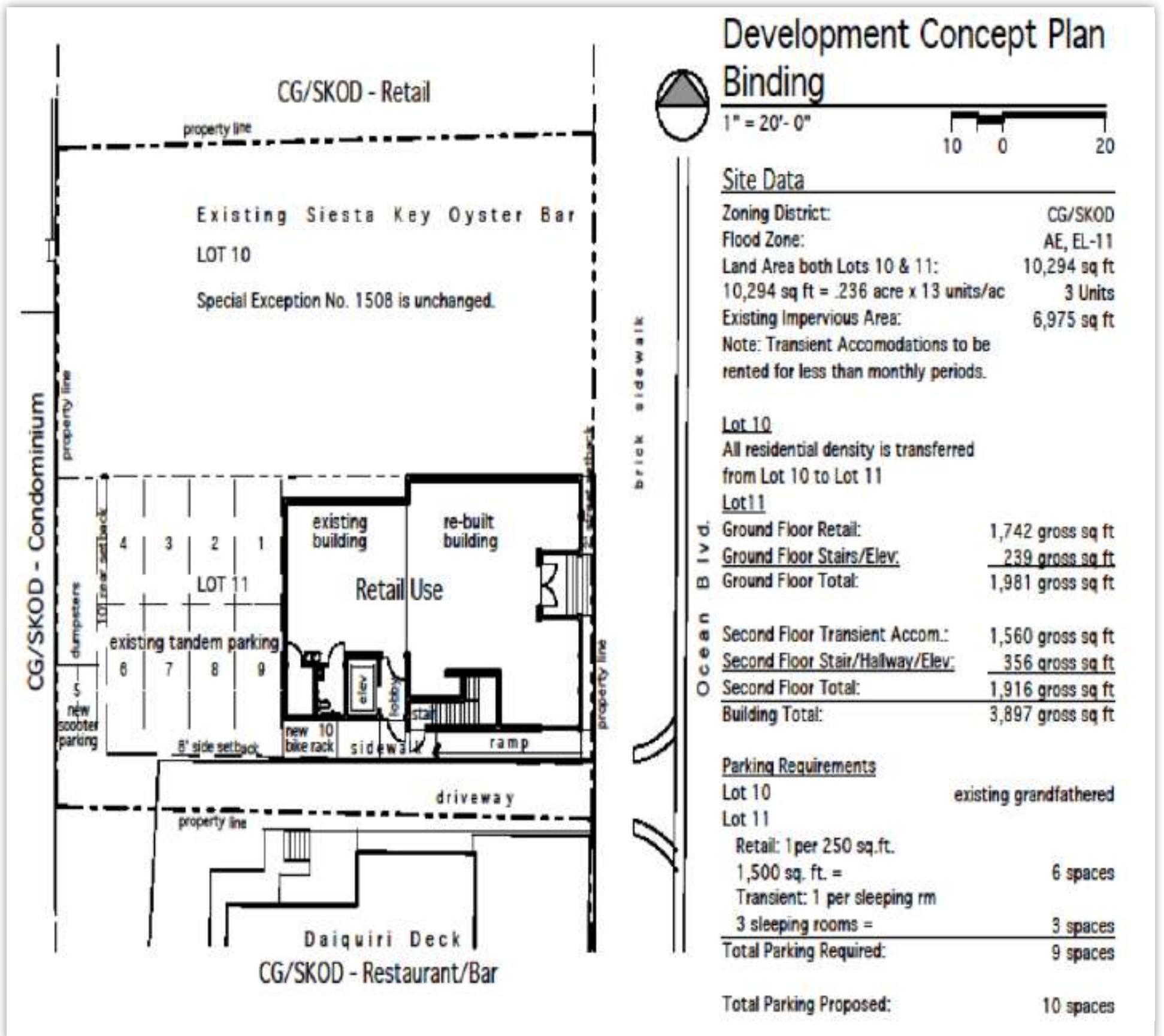
*On Oct. 1, three original walls from Napoli's Restaurant were visible on the site where Gidget's Coastal Provisions will stand. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

making the motion to recommend approval of the request.

“I, too, think it’s going to be an improvement to Siesta Key,” added Vice Chairman Robert Morris after seconding the motion. “I grew up on Siesta Key. It’s a lot different than it was when I was a kid, that’s for sure,” he pointed out. “Some ways good; some ways not so good.”

During his presentation to the board, Smith explained that Jay Lancer and Jim Syrett, owners of the parcels that include the Siesta Key Oyster Bar on the north and the Daiquiri Deck to the south, “felt it would be better for the Village if we had retail space where [Napoli’s stood].”

However, Smith pointed out, Syrett and Lancer needed the income from lease of the



A site plan shows details about the design of Gidget’s Coastal Provisions. Image courtesy Sarasota County

shop and the transient units to make the project worthwhile. Otherwise, he said, they “will put a restaurant back in ...”

According to his understanding of the county zoning rules governing Siesta Village parking, Smith noted, Syprett and Lancer would have a year from the time Napoli’s closed — which was in July — to open another restaurant in that space and still be able to utilize the parking plan Napoli’s had. After that 12-month period ends, he continued, the Siesta Key Overlay District (SKOD) zoning regulations would make it necessary for a restaurant on the site to have 23 spaces. Napoli’s had eight.

“An existing restaurant that has grandfathered parking is like gold” in Siesta Village, Smith told the commissioners.

To comply with the SKOD stipulation regarding parking accommodations for new retail

space, Smith said, nine spaces are necessary. By adding a bike rack and scooter parking to the site plan, he noted, 10 spaces have been created.

With county Project Manager Loveridge having pointed out that the Siesta Key Oyster Bar is on the northern half of the parcel where Gidget’s is being constructed, Commissioner Jack Bispham asked Smith, “Why would anybody want to sleep next to a noisy place?”

With a laugh, Smith replied, “The clientele would know what they’re getting into, for lack of a better term.” Smith continued, “Quite honestly, we have a lot of tourists, outside visitors, that come and enjoy themselves on Siesta Key, so I think it’s going to be quite popular, to be right there where the action is, right between the Siesta Key Oyster Bar and the Daiquiri Deck. Gilligan’s [Island Bar and Grill] is right across the street.”



*An aerial view shows the parcel with Gidget's and Siesta Key Oyster Bar (outlined in yellow) in Siesta Village. Image courtesy Sarasota County*

The Beach Club and The Hub Baja Grill also are in close proximity to the site, he noted.

Moreover, a person staying in one of the transient apartments would have “no fear of drunk driving,” Smith pointed out.

Additionally, the new building “will help block the noise going south to the Terrace East condominium, which will help,” Smith said. “Also, what better way to control noise than for the landlord to have tenants above them that could complain about noise.”

If more of the Village restaurants had upper-level rental units, he noted, “There’d be some self-policing going on.”

## DESIGN FEATURES

In response to a question from Commissioner Terry Richardson, Smith said a person could

stay up to 30 days in one of the units, according to county zoning regulations.

Smith also explained that a commercial elevator and a staircase would provide access to the upper level for tenants, with keyed access. Each of the three units would have exterior doors opening onto a hallway, he added.

Because of the tenants’ desire to get the retail shop under way as soon as possible, Smith continued, he sought county approval for that construction, with the stipulation that the second floor would be designated for storage at the outset. “It’s not like we started the building and said, ‘Oops, we needed to get a special exception for the transient accommodations,’” he told the Planning Commission.

Brian and Trudy Wigelsworth will operate Gidget’s. Wigelsworth, a master sand sculptor



*Napoli's Restaurant specialized in pizza and Italian dishes. File photo*

who founded the Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition, told *The Sarasota News Leader* in July that Trudy has more than 20 years of retail experience, most recently as manager of Blvd. Beachwear in Siesta Village. They expect Gidget's to be open by mid-January, Wigelsworth said in November.

If the special exception request ultimately is turned down, Smith pointed out, the second floor could continue to be used for storage.

Smith further explained that he designed the building to be compliant with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood control regulations through flood-proof construction, so the first floor did not have to be elevated about 7 feet. The foundation has a 32-inch concrete slab, and flood panels have been installed at a height of 1 foot above

base flood elevation for all the ground floor windows and doors. The combination of that slab and the flood panels should enable the ground floor to resist the hydrostatic pressure of a storm event, he pointed out. "It's really neat technology," Smith added.

He incorporated those design features, he noted, because people need to be able to look into shops from the sidewalk level. An elevated entry "kills retail," he said. "[Shoppers] just won't come see you."

The total area of the parcel with the Siesta Key Oyster Bar and Gidget's — plus parking spaces in the rear of Gidget's — is 10,294 square feet, according to the special exception application. The ground floor of Gidget's will comprise 1,742 square feet, with 1,560 square feet on the upper floor. 

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# G.WIZ, WHAT A LOSS



*G.WIZ remains closed on the bayfront. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **THE BUILDING OF THE FUTURE IS A THING OF THE PAST — UNLESS THE CITY CAN FIND ANOTHER LESSEE**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

Use your imagination. What if the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall really is an alien spaceship? And what if one day earlier this year, it beamed an abduction ray into its nearby neighbor — the Gulfcoast Wonder and Imagination Zone (also known by its acronym, G.WIZ) — and kidnapped all the people inside.

The thought could cross your mind, because when G.WIZ abandoned the city-owned building, they simply got up and left. Very little went with them. Now the building — once a Mecca for school field trips and doting grandparents — sits silent. After 22 years, G.WIZ is no more.

The City of Sarasota's purchasing department has been putting together an "Invitation to Negotiate" with another tenant. It almost certainly will be some kind of cultural amenity. The city's plans allow for a contemporary art museum, a modern art museum, expansion of the nearby Art Center Sarasota or the county's history center, or a maritime museum, film center or maritime education or cultural institution on the site.

"There is a lot of interest," said Purchasing Department Director Mary Tucker. "But there is a lot of work to be done."

Tucker is musing on an in-place auction to empty the building. A number of displays are still there, demonstrating Newton's laws of motion, the metamorphosis of butterflies, the way sound travels and the elements of space travel, for example.

The structure was designed and built as the county's central public library; it opened in 1976. It was never a big public hit, with its angular architecture and a central staircase only an LSD addict could love. And the roof was a perpetual source of leaks. The library eventually moved to downtown Sarasota.

In 1991, the building — all 33,444 square feet of it — was leased to G.WIZ. The facility was a huge step up for the organization, which had used leased space in a low-end mall near the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport.



*Names of donors to the museum are engraved on bricks along the walkway. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*A playground and picnic area remain on the grounds. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

The board fashioned the new museum after San Francisco's "Exploratorium" — a recognized center of excellence for science museums.

The building is expensive to operate, with an average electric bill of \$4,500 per month. Tucker estimates it needs a minimum of \$150,000 in repairs. But for a qualifying organization, the rent is hard to beat. GWIZ paid \$1 per year. 



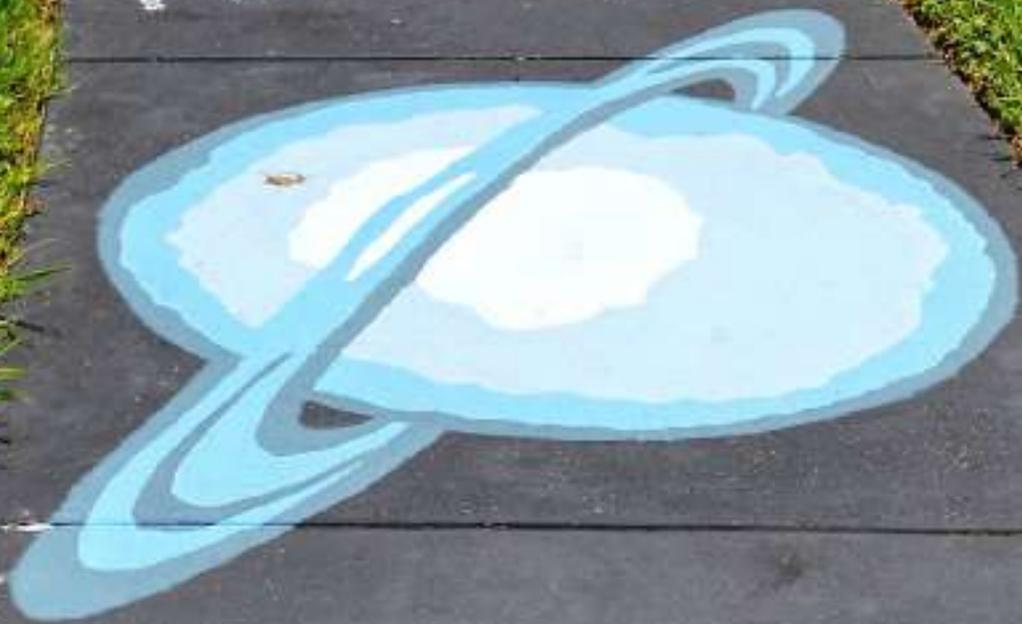
*The G.WIZ Science Walk offered visitors a creative way to learn. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*The museum was notable not just for its exhibits but also for its colorful façade. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Volunteer vests still await the return of volunteers. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*



• takes 30 Earth years to travel around the sun

• distance from the Sun: 800,000,000 miles (1.3 billion km)

• Temperature at top of clouds: -217°F (-139°C)

• Has an atmosphere consisting of hydrogen, helium, and methane

• One day = 10 Earth hours, 14 Earth minutes

The Science Walk featured facts about Saturn. Photo by Norman Schimmel



*Many exhibits remain, waiting to teach science. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*



*The newer Fab Lab stands ready for use again. Only the 3-D printer is missing. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*



*A robot bids visitors 'Goodbye.' Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## THINKING OF MABLE

*Lions, contributed to the original project by John Ringling, stand guard along the path to the fountain.  
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **A FOUNTAIN FLOWS ANEW IN REMEMBRANCE OF A LEADING LADY OF THE CITY**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

There is a traffic light on U.S. 41 where the Tamiami Trail turns west and U.S. 301 splits off to go north. Some night you may be first in line, stopped at that light. Something new is there if you look beyond the pavement and into the park. It is a fountain dancing in colored lights, brought back to life after half a century of lying buried and almost forgotten.

Its lights subtly change color from dusk until dawn, playfully illuminating this kinetic remembrance of one of the women who helped put Sarasota on the path to beauty.

Mable Ringling came to the city in 1909 when it was not much more than a pioneer village. As the wife of circus tycoon John, she could have remained aloof from the dusty doings of what must have seemed to her a remote

outpost of civilization. But over the next two decades, she chose to expend her time and energy making her winter home a place of beauty for all to enjoy.

In 1925, the village was granted a municipal charter by the Florida Legislature and became a city. In 1926, a causeway was opened to Lido Key, but later in the year, the bloom fell from the Florida rose. Mable died in 1929, having seen the community rise from a fishing village to a true city. And she could recognize her handiwork in many spots.

In 1936, with the city in the grip of the Great Depression, the Sarasota Federation of Garden Circles voted to build a memorial to Mable — a fountain in Luke Wood Park near what is now downtown Sarasota. The Rotary



*The purple coloring contrasts with the park's green grounds. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Club, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts all wanted to be involved, for Mable had played a role in their beginnings as well.

The fountain with statuary in the center was crafted and dedicated in one of the most visible parts of town, the intersection of two major traffic arteries.

But sometime after World War II, the fountain fell into ruin. “The city punched holes in the bottom and filled it with soil, “ said Dorothea Calvert with the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation. “The city didn’t want to maintain it.”

The remembrance fountain was itself forgotten until 2010. A committee was formed to investigate bringing “Mable’s fountain” back to life, and in April of this year, construction began. The project was done without a dime of city money. An endowment was even created to pay for maintenance of the facility in



*A light system shines different colors on the fountain. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*The foundation of the fountain has been refurbished as well. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

the future so the indignities of the past would not be repeated.

The rehabilitation was as much a community collaboration as the original construction. The Selby Foundation provided some funding, along with 85 other donors and a grant from the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County. Sarasota Military Academy students and their families, among others, provided volunteer labor. Fifteen local contractors ensured the reconstruction was professional and met all city codes.

The St. Armands Merchants Association volunteered the use of a statue found behind a St. Armands Circle parking lot for duplication by Florida State University students. It is now the centerpiece of the fountain.

Pieces of the original construction were discovered during excavation. The perimeter

ring of “Myakka bog iron rock” was saved and redeployed. John Ringling himself had provided two statuary lions for the original project. They were found at J.D. Hamel Park in Sarasota and returned to their original site.

Work will continue to beautify the fountain dedicated to the woman who beautified the city. Park benches and more lights are part of the plan.

In a quiet ceremony on Sunday, Jan. 12, the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation will formally rededicate the fountain to Mable Ringling’s memory. “She was integral to the establishment of green space in this city,” said Calvert.

So the next time you are stopped at the U.S. 41/U.S. 301 light at night, enjoy the show — or drop by anytime, and say a nice word in memory of a beautiful lady. 

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## QUICK TIP



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# A NEW BOAT



*The Sarasota Police Department's old Donzi patrol boat will get a lot less use now that the new Yellowfin 34 is on the water. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

# THE SARASOTA POLICE DEPARTMENT GETS A YELLOWFIN FOR ITS MARINE PATROL

By Stan Zimmerman

*City Editor*

If one of the happiest days in a boater's life is when he gets a new boat, Bruce King is a happy police officer. He has taken delivery of a new 34-foot Yellowfin for the Sarasota Police Department.

The boat is fully offshore-capable, and it carries 453 gallons of fuel. King says he does not normally run with full tanks because the heavier the boat, the higher the fuel consumption.

With less than 100 hours on the twin 300-horsepower Mercury outboards, he is still determining the gallons-per-hour usage.

The city's new marine patrol boat carries not only a first aid kit but also a heart defibrillator and oxygen.

The vessel and trailer were purchased with a \$174,000 grant from the **West Coast Inland Navigation District** (WCIND). Grants from the organization also cover the operational expenses of the police patrol and the city's SCUBA-equipped dive team. The WCIND gets its funding from property taxes.

Yellowfin Yachts, a local manufacturer whose home office is on 58th Avenue in Bradenton, produces center-cockpit fishing boats. The



*Officer Bruce King cruises at speed in the new patrol boat. It made its official debut at the Christmas Boat Parade. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

company's president is a former offshore powerboat racer.

The craft's bow incorporates a turndown design to keep splashes out of the vessel when it is running at speed.

Company literature indicates King's new boat should hit 56 mph flat-out. At 45 mph, it is supposed to be burning 28 gallons of fuel per hour.

The new Yellowfin replaces a Donzi the department previously used. It remains in service for the time being as a backup boat.

King took reporters and photographers for a "check ride" earlier this month. The department's volunteer marine patrol made it possible for the media to get photos of the new Yellowfin under way. 



*From the captain's seat, everything is brand-spanking-new. At the bow are the volunteers for the city's marine patrol. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

# THE NEWS LEADER OFFERS A PHOTO ALBUM OF THE SIGHTS OF THE SEASON

## Staff Reports

From parades down Main Streets to parades “down the Bay,” from neighborhood lanes to commercial shopping districts, decorations have glowed this holiday season.

Sarasota News Leader staff members put together one last look at the results of many imaginations at work. After all, the landscape will dim after New Year’s Day’s hours tick away. **SNL**

## HOLIDAY LUSTER

*Santa Claus appears ready to try a different mode of transportation this year. Photo by Norman Schimmel*





*Marie Selby Gardens is blossoming with Lights in Bloom for the holidays. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*The traditional Lighting of the Fleet at the Sarasota Yacht Club brings out the competitive bents of boaters. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*This vessel was among many 'all dressed up' for the Sarasota Boat Parade on Dec. 14. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Following the Sarasota Boat Parade, all sorts of boats shine from the docks at Marina Jack. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Brightly adorned palm trees line the shopping center streets off University Parkway. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*The house near the intersection of Higel Avenue and Ocean Boulevard on Siesta Key once again is aglow for the season. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*A Sarasota Yacht Club member offered Hanukkah greetings. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Professional ice skaters bring humor and glamor to Ice on the Diamond at Ed Smith Stadium on Dec. 20. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Ice on the Diamond dancers delight the Ed Smith Stadium audience in Sarasota on Dec. 20. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*A big beautiful package awaited shoppers off University Parkway. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Rowers are a fitting motif for décor off University Parkway near Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Davidson Plaza in the heart of Siesta Village gleams a week before Christmas. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# NEWS BRIEFS



*Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino helps girls pick out Barbie dolls. Contributed photo*

## **HONOR THE BADGE HELPS MORE THAN 80 KIDS SHOP FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

The Second Annual Honor the Badge event on Dec. 14 saw more than 40 members of the Sarasota Police Department join representatives of the Sarasota Housing Authority and Target to help about 80 children shop for the holidays, the department announced.

The event was made possible through donations totaling nearly \$10,000 from the Sarasota Police Department, local businesses, religious organizations and individuals, a news release points out. Nearly \$2,600 came from members of the Sarasota Police Department, the release adds.

The event was held at the north Sarasota Target, located at 5350 Fruitville Road in Sarasota. It kicked off at 6 a.m., when buses filled with youngsters and their loved ones arrived. Police officers “were cheering and

clapping to welcome the children and their families to their early morning shopping spree,” the release notes.

The Sarasota Housing Authority’s Honor the Badge shopping event is an initiative designed to help build trust and respect between law enforcement officials and children of families living in Sarasota Housing Authority communities, the release explains. “Our goal is to help underprivileged children from our community come together with local law enforcement in an inclusive, non-threatening environment that will encourage open and honest communication with law enforcement officers, to remove any fear the youths may have when interacting with officers,” said Capt. Lucius Bonner of the Bureau of Professional Standards in the Police Department in the release.



*A child grins with his new bike, thanks to the Sarasota Police Department. Contributed photo*



*An officer helps youngsters with their shopping cart. Contributed photo*

## SARASOTA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS RECEIVE A AND B GRADES

All Sarasota County public high schools received A or B grades for the 2012-13 school year, the district has reported.

The information was released Dec. 18 by the Florida Department of Education. Grades for elementary and middle schools were released in July; Sarasota County continues to be graded an A district overall, a news release notes.

Pine View School, Suncoast Polytechnical High School and Sarasota Military Academy — a public charter school — received A grades. All other district high schools received B grades, the release notes.

According to the state's high school graduation formula, high schools that would otherwise earn an A must also meet a requirement to improve the annual graduation rate of at-risk students, the release says. "This requirement affected the majority of Sarasota County high schools that earned a B for 2012-13."

"We are pleased that all our high schools are A or B schools," said Superintendent Lori White in the release, "but there is certainly room for improvement. We will redouble our efforts to monitor every student's pathway to graduation and help those who struggle academically to reach their full potential."

Fifty percent of a school's grade is based on 2013 state assessment scores, including the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and 50 percent is based on the school's graduation rate, the number of students taking advanced-placement courses, the number of students who pass advanced-placement examinations and indicators of student readiness for college, the release points out.

Oak Park School, a district facility for students with severe or multiple exceptionalities from the elementary grade level through high school, was not graded, the release notes. Most students at Oak Park School do not participate in the FCAT, but instead take the Florida Alternate Assessment, the release adds.

School Grade	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
District	A	A	A
Booker High School	B	B	B
North Port High School	B	A	B
Pine View School	A	A	A
Riverview High School	B	A	B
Sarasota High School	B	A	B
Sarasota Military Academy	B	A	A
Suncoast Polytechnical High	A	A	A
Venice High School	B	B	B

## ULTIMATE FRISBEE MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIPS TO BE HELD IN SARASOTA

Sarasota County has been selected by USA Ultimate, the national governing body for the sport of Ultimate in the United States, to be the site of the 2014 Masters Championships, scheduled July 18-20, the organization has announced.

“USA Ultimate has had a long-standing relationship with Sarasota with their Club Championships being here for 13 years,” said Nicole Rissler, director of Sports for the Sarasota County Sports Commission, a division of Visit Sarasota County, in a news release.

“Combining the non-stop movement and athletic endurance of soccer with the aerial passing skills of football, a game of Ultimate is played by two teams with a flying disc or Frisbee™ on a field with end zones, similar to football,” according to the USA Ultimate [website](#). “The object of the game is to score

by catching a pass in the opponent’s end zone. A player must stop running while in possession of the disc, but may pivot and pass to any of the other receivers on the field.”

Hosted by the county Sports Commission, the event will take place on the grounds of the Sarasota Polo Club. Sixteen teams in each of the men’s masters, women’s masters and grand-master divisions will compete for national titles in 2014, the release points out.

“We are honored to host the 2014 USA Ultimate Masters Championships here in Sarasota,” said Tournament Director Tim Naylor in the release. “We welcome the returning players from years past as well as those making their first trip. With our world-renowned fields and beautiful white sand beaches, we plan on making this tournament an adventure the whole family can enjoy.”

For more information, visit [usultimate.org](http://usultimate.org).

## WINNERS OF FIFTH ANNUAL GINGERBREAD FESTIVAL ANNOUNCED

Community Youth Development has announced the winners of the Fifth Annual Gingerbread Festival, which was held Dec. 13-15, at Westfield Sarasota Square Mall.

The event featured 180 houses submitted by classrooms, after-school programs and adult groups throughout Sarasota County.

The winners follow:

### Elementary

- First place: Mrs. Aultman’s Ashton Astros.
- Second place: Team Schwaed from Fruitville Elementary School.

- Third place: Mini Chef’s Café from Girls Inc.

### Middle School

- First place: Robert and Joan Lee Boys & Girls Club — Club Venice
- Second place: Girl Scout Troop 121.
- Third place: Island Village Gardening Club.

### High School

- First place: Venice High School Sophomore Class.
- Second place: Pine View Art 3 — Team Amsterdam.

- Third place: Booker High School Advanced Placement Literature Class.

### Adult Division

- First place: Art Center Sarasota.
- Second place: Pastries by Design.
- Third place: Sarasota Manatee Dance Alliance.

Community Youth Development (CYD) empowers youth as leaders in service to their community, a news release points out. Youth in grades 6 to 12 participate in a variety of social and personal skill development programs. In 2013, CYD served 2,192 youth throughout Sarasota County. Community Youth Development is funded in part by Sarasota County, the release adds.



*Club Venice took first place in the Middle School division. Contributed photo*



*Mrs. Aultman's Ashton Astros entry took first place in the Elementary division of the Fifth Annual Gingerbread Festival. Contributed photo*



*The Sarasota Manatee Dance Alliance won third place in the Adult division. Contributed photo*



*Sarasota Police Department representatives join staff and students at Booker Middle School for the annual Holiday Stocking Program. Contributed photo*

## **POLICE DEPARTMENT TEAMS UP WITH BOOKER MIDDLE FOR PROGRAM**

On Dec. 20, Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino and officers from the Sarasota Police Department teamed up with the staff at Booker Middle School for their annual Holiday Stocking Program.

Officers went with school employees from classroom to classroom, handing

out holiday stockings to students, a news release says.

The Police Department has offered a special thanks to Church of the Palms on Bee Ridge Road, First Presbyterian Church on Oak Street, Siesta Key Chapel on Gleason Avenue and All Faiths Food Bank for donating the candy for the stockings, the release adds.

## **DEPUTY CHRIS INDICO WINS 2012 CASE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Sheriff Tom Knight has announced that the National Police Canine Association (NPCA) has given Deputy Chris Indico the 2012 Case of the Year Award.

Indico and K9 Zuul responded to the area of Laurel Road and Interstate 75 on Nov. 6, 2012, in pursuit of five armed suspects who robbed Mayor's Jewelry Store in Westfield Southgate Mall in Sarasota, a news release explains.

They tracked and arrested two of the five suspects who were apprehended near a pond at the PGT Industries facility, the release adds.

Indico has been with the Sheriff's Office since 2004. K9 Zuul retired this summer after more than six years of service with more than 100 apprehensions "and is now enjoying his well-earned life of relaxation," the release says.



*Deputy Chris Indico and Zuul proudly display their award. Contributed photo*

## PINE VIEW JUNIOR NAMED 2014 SUNSHINE STATE SCHOLAR

Nicholas Pelisek, a junior at Pine View School in Osprey, has been selected to represent the Sarasota County School District as the 2014 Sunshine State Scholar during a statewide celebration Feb. 13-14 at the Orlando Hilton, the district has announced.

If Nicholas is unable to attend, the alternate student is Jacob Hurwitz, a junior at Riverview High School, a news release notes.

Each school district throughout Florida selects and names its top 11th-grade scholar, a student “who demonstrated tremendous academic ability and expressed a desire to attend a Florida university,” the release adds. The Sunshine State Scholars program recognizes students’ achievements in STEM

courses (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), a weighted grade point average of 3.9 or higher and a minimum of 25 hours of approved community service, the release adds.

The focus of the Sunshine State Scholars program is to retain intellectual talent in Florida. All of the scholars, along with their parents and one teacher per student who has served as a significant influence, will travel to Orlando for the two-day program, the release says.

As one facet of the program, representatives of Florida’s colleges and universities are scheduled to talk with the students about career and postsecondary opportunities available to them in the state, the release says.

## ORANGE COUNTY CHOPPERS FOUNDER COMING TO THUNDER BY THE BAY

World-renowned custom motorcycle builder Paul Teutul Sr., owner and founder of Orange County Choppers, will be among the attendees of the 16th Annual Thunder By The Bay Motorcycle Festival, the Suncoast Charities for Children — which organizes the event — has announced.

Teutul will join an honor escort leading the Legacy of Valor Ride to Sarasota National Cemetery on Sunday, Jan. 12, a news release notes. Registration will open at 8 a.m. that day at O’Leary’s Tiki Bar in Bayfront Park off U.S. 41 in downtown Sarasota. The first bike will head out at 9 a.m., the release adds.

Teutul will also sign autographs at the Orange County Chopper display that will be located on lower Main Street in Sarasota Jan. 11-12, the release points out. The festival will open on Jan. 9.

Festival details may be found at [thunderbythebay.org](http://thunderbythebay.org). 



*Thunder by the Bay brings thousands to Sarasota in January each year as a fundraiser for Suncoast Charities for Children. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

# Sarasota Leisure

**HANGING UP THE VEST**

**'SOME ENCHANTED EVENING'**

**SIESTA SEEN**

*Inside*

**Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast**



## HANGING UP THE VEST

*Barbara Stallings accepts a plaque from Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino on Nov. 14. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

### **A CROSSING GUARD LOOKS BACK AT 41 YEARS ON THE CORNER**

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**

*Associate Editor*

It was a friend who first suggested Barbara Stallings become a crossing guard in 1972. “Why not?” Stallings remembers thinking. “It’ll give me a few pennies in my pocket.” Pennies, almost literally. When Stallings started, the weekly pay for a crossing guard was \$30 to \$35. “That was pretty slim,” says Stallings — now 78, with a thick bush of curly white hair on her head. She chuckles.

But if Stallings started working as a crossing guard to earn some extra change, she stuck around for 41 years, longer than any other crossing guard in the whole state, for a much stronger reason: the kids. “They just tell you everything,” says Stallings. “They talk to you more than they talk to their own

parents. You’re just there, and they just spill everything. They’re fresh and honest and nice — most of them.”



Stallings and her husband, LP, moved to Sarasota in 1957. LP’s parents already lived here, and he had visited the city in the summers to help his uncle build homes, so they knew the area well. Sarasota was “a lot less crowded” in those days, Stallings remembers. Fruitville was a two-lane road.

Fewer cars on the road meant becoming a crossing guard was a less dangerous proposition than it is today, but Stallings points out that the work when she started was grueling.

Twice a day, in sweltering heat, pounding rain or streaking lightning storms, crossing guards were responsible for setting up and taking down heavy metal signs that were sunk into tires filled with concrete. While crossing guards today can choose either morning or afternoon shifts, back then they were required to work both the a.m. and p.m., a schedule that drastically interferes with your day.

Stallings started at Alta Vista Elementary, but she spent only a short time there before moving to Tuttle Elementary, where she manned the Fruitville and Tuttle corner for “a long, long time.” She then spent 16 years at Southside Elementary before retiring at the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

There wasn’t much training when Stallings began her tenure. Nowadays, crossing guards

must take anti-harassment classes and even pass randomly assigned drug tests. A couple of years ago, after well over three decades on the job, Stallings had to pee in a cup to prove she was clean, twice in the same month.

Although Stallings faced few real crises on the job, that doesn’t mean her tenure was uneventful. A mother once passed out while crossing the street; she once had to report missing streetlights; a gas leak once forced her to come in to help evacuate a school; passengers in a passing car once spit on her. And then there’s the more routine drama of kid life: falling down while crossing the street, being left at school by their parents, getting lost.

Seeing the same kids day in, day out throughout the school year allowed Stallings to get to

[Click to watch the video](#)



*The Sarasota Police Department recorded Stallings’ retirement ceremony. Video courtesy of the department*

know them, and their parents. She frequently runs into former students who have moved on. They recognize her, but they're not always sure from where right away. They don't recognize her without the vest and the rest of the crossing guard getup.

Amazingly, Stallings says, dire warnings to the contrary, young kids haven't really changed over the decades. Elementary students are still "true and honest," she says — years away from the painful drama of junior high and the know-it-all attitudes of high-schoolers.

Not every crossing guard lasts as long as Stallings. Some are on the job just a couple of days. "One man relieved himself behind his car," Stallings laughs. "You have people that just do crazy things." But many others have been on the corner for 15 to 20 years, still

nowhere near Stallings' record, which she thinks might be the longest tenure not just in Florida, but in the U.S. "I don't think that's ever been checked," she adds.

Most days, Stallings loved the work, so why'd she hang up the uniform? "I'm 78, almost 79: Does that tell you something?" she replies. Not that the job was wearing her out. "I just felt like I should retire," she says. "I should have some time that I can do things, time to be home."

On Nov. 14, when the Sarasota Police Department, which oversees the crossing guard program, held a retirement ceremony honoring Stallings, Police Chief Bernadette DiPino called Stallings "part of our family" while thanking her. Former Chief Mikel Holloway also praised her during the event,



*Former Police Chief Mikel Holloway joins in the retirement festivities for Barbara Stallings. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

and Gov. Rick Scott sent her a letter. Stallings wished “safe crossings” to all her fellow crossing guards.

Nicki Whitehead, the Police Department’s crossing guard coordinator, became good friends with Stallings over the years, and even traveled with her to Alaska to visit one of Stallings’ daughters. Whitehead went by the nickname “Kodiak” during the trip; Stallings was “Polar Bear.”

Since retiring, Stallings has traveled to Colorado, and she spends her time antiquing — “junking,” as she calls it. Almost every horizontal surface in her home holds some type of small figurine, and a glass case just to the

left of her front door is stocked with small Oriental sculptures and knick-knacks. She picks up items at estate sales and browses *Gump’s* catalogue for treasures.

Does she suggest becoming a crossing guard to others? “I’d recommend it for the right person,” she says. “You’d have to like kids, you’d have to have a lot of free time that you could waste, and you’d just need something to do. I wouldn’t recommend it for a lifetime thing, let me tell you.”

The pay may have gone up some since the days of \$30 weeks, but it’s still nothing glamorous. “You’d starve.” 



*The intersection of South Osprey Avenue and Webber Street was Barbara Stallings’ last posting as a crossing guard for Southside Elementary School. Photo by Norman Schimmel. Inset courtesy Google Maps.*



## 'SOME ENCHANTED EVENING'

*All photos by Peter van Roekens*

### **SELBY GARDENS WELCOMES YOU TO STROLL THROUGH LIGHTS IN BLOOM**

#### *Staff Reports*

Area residents know one of the most memorable outings of the holiday season is a stroll through Lights in Bloom at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

Bob McComb, who created this enchanted Sarasota kingdom, returned in 2010 to add his special magical touches to the displays. The new Ann Goldstein Children's Rainforest Garden is also decked out with holiday lights for the first time.

Along with the lights and "forest creatures" welcoming guests, activities for youngsters, such as creating crafts, are available in the Kids' Corner.

The last nights to see the show this year will be Dec. 27-30. The Gardens is open from 6 to 9 p.m. On Dec. 27, 28 and 29, the Tommy Rox Band will be performing on the grounds, adding to the festivities. On Dec. 30, The Missing Links will entertain the guests.

The Gardens is located at 811 S. Palm Ave. in Sarasota. For more information, visit the website.

*Contributor Peter van Roekens graciously shared with The Sarasota News Leader some scenes from his visit to Lights in Bloom.* 









# *Siesta Seen*

## THE CONDO COUNCIL ANNOUNCES ITS CHRISTMAS LIGHTING CONTEST WINNERS FOR 2013; AND THE SIESTA RESORTS TEMPORARY INJUNCTION HEARING IS CANCELLED



By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

*With apologies to Clement C. Moore*

*Twas the week before Christmas,  
and all through the trolley,*

*The eggnog was flowing, making each  
of us jolly.*

*With Helen perched at the front to  
guide Driver Geoff,*

*Out of Davidson Plaza we headed,  
turning first to the left.*

*From Whispering Sands down to  
Terraces East we did cruises,*

*With bright lights and dazzles drawing  
our "Ahs" and our "Ohs."*

*Down Beach Road we rolled, mulling  
"Uniqueness" and "Wow factor,"*

*As we gazed at the condos, chatting  
amid lots of laughter.*

*Gulf & Bay Club, Harbour  
Townes and Peppertrees -*

*Exactly how many hues of lights did we  
see?*

*There's the pig at Beachaven,  
perched on the sign*

*And the Siesta Dunes fantasyland  
really does shine.*

*Helen was right, we can't help but  
agree:*

*The displays are superior; it's easy  
to see.*

*The condo complexes "stepped up their  
games."*

*Now a new round of winners will enjoy  
their fames.*

# Siesta Seen

On the night of Dec. 18, a group of us invited by the Siesta Key Condominium Council had the pleasure of touring condo complexes from the north end of the island to its southern reaches to judge the entries in the 2013 Christmas Lighting Contest. The number of participants this year represented an increase of four over the 2012 list.

With Daiquiri Deck co-owner Russell Matthes having made the [Siesta Trolley](#) available once again (as he generously has in the past), we gathered at Davidson Plaza and then set out to see the sights. Helen Clifford, Diane Erne and Al Holpp represented the Condo Council — with Helen serving as the tour guide for

trolley driver Geoff van Deusen. Erne had new forms for us to use this year, asking us to consider four factors in ranking each entry from 1 to 10 (10 being the best). Those factors were “Uniqueness” (design and colors); “Seasonal” (tells the Christmas story); “Colorful” (illumination and displays); and the “Wow Factor” (breath-taking).

The judging panel consisted of County Commissioner Nora Patterson; Mark Smith, past chairman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce and past president of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA); Matthes, also a past SKVA president; Alana Tomasso, the chamber’s chairwoman-elect, who is



*Peppertree Bay wowed the judges this year, taking first place in the category for the largest condominium complexes. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# ***Siesta Seen***

with Cunningham Property Management; Keith Martin (who accompanied Tomasso); Harriet Sokmensuer, community editor of the *Sarasota Observer*; and yours truly.

SKVA President Cheryl Matthes climbed aboard before we headed out to give us holiday hugs. She asked Tomasso and Martin to stand in for her, as she was unable to go with us that night.

On Dec. 20, members of the Condo Council board gathered to tally the results of our deliberations. Peppertree — which won rave reviews as we surveyed it — took top honors this year in the category of condominium complexes with 101 or more units, leaving

Siesta Dunes in second place after it wore that crown for 2011 and 2012.

The following is the complete list:

## **Category 1 (101 or more units)**

- First place: Peppertree Bay
- Second place: Siesta Dunes
- Third place: Whispering Sands
- Honorable Mention: Excelsior

## **Category 2 (51 to 100 units)**

- First place: Beachaven
- Second Place: Crescent Arms



*Peppertree Bay shines brightly for its guests and passersby. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*Beachaven took top honors in Category 2. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

- Third place: The Anchorage
- Honorable Mention: Tortuga
- **Category 3 (50 or fewer units)**
- First place: Sandpiper Beach Club
- Second place: Siesta Sands
- Third place: Harbour Towne
- Honorable Mention: Terrace East



With the proclamation of winners, Erne sent the following note:

“We had a record number of entries this year matched by a record number of quality displays. Every condo that entered contributed to the overall holiday ambiance on Siesta Key. We appreciate all the time and effort put forth by all our member condominiums. You made 2013 a memorable event for all the viewers from near and far.”

The awards will be presented at the Condo Council’s annual Membership Meeting, set for 3:30 p.m. on Jan. 21 at Siesta Key Chapel, located at 4615 Gleason Ave., north of Siesta Village.



*The Sandpiper Beach Club earned extra credit for its cross and Christmas tree, easily visible from afar. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*What judge could resist Beachhaven's pink pig? Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*(Front row, from left) Rachel Hackney, Nora Patterson, Harriet Sokmensuer, Alana Tomasso, Keith Martin, Diane Erne; (back row, from left) Mark Smith, Russell Matthes, Geoff van Deusen, Al Holpp and Helen Clifford gather after the trolley ride. Contributed photo*



*Siesta Dunes, winner of the 2011 and 2012 contests, came in second this year in Category 1. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*Siesta Sands won second place in Category 3. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*Crescent Arms took second-place honors in Category 2. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*A Christmas tree adorns the tower at Horizons West. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# *Siesta Seen*

## THE SABAL DRIVE HOUSE

Although I was unable to learn any details, I did find out through a search of court records that David Pearce, assistant Sarasota County attorney, cancelled a temporary injunction hearing that was set for Dec. 18 regarding illegal construction at 6537 Sabal Drive.

Regular readers know that the owners of that house, Siesta Resorts LLC, violated both the county building code and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain regulations in creating a lot of extra bedrooms on the ground floor.



*The eye-catching entryway of the Sandpiper Beach Club helped it earn top honors in Category 3. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

The house was rented regularly through a website called [Vacation Rentals By Owner](#). It was still listed on the site even after a renter notified county staff in November 2012 that she feared it violated Fire Department codes. County Code Enforcement staff members, who investigated it along with a Fire Department representative, called it a “firetrap.”

Pearce had expected the hearing to be cancelled, as it appeared in early December the parties comprising Siesta Resorts were working to obtain the last bit of paperwork they needed to show they had brought the property back into compliance with both the county and FEMA rules.

I hope to learn more after the first of the year about the resolution of the liens Siesta Resorts owed as a result of Special Magistrate action at the behest of the county Code Enforcement staff.

## AGAIN???

I expect a number of motorists were surprised to see the north Siesta drawbridge stuck open for more than an hour on Dec. 19. After all, the bridge went through a major rehab in the summer of 2012.

At 10:41 a.m. on Dec. 19, the Sarasota Police Department alerted the news media that the

bridge was “stuck in the open position ... causing major traffic delays.”

At 11:41 a.m., the following notice came from the Police Department: “The North Bridge malfunction on Siesta Drive has been resolved and the bridge is reopened. However, there is still heavy traffic in the area.”

Although I tried twice to contact Florida Department of Transportation public relations staff to find out exactly what caused the problem, I heard no response.

## STORMWATER PROJECT UPDATE

The last update I had on the Siesta stormwater project adjacent to the public beach — with its misnomer of Beach Road Drainage Project (it will do little to alleviate flooding on Beach Road) — came on Dec. 18. At that point, the one-acre retention pond was 30-percent complete.

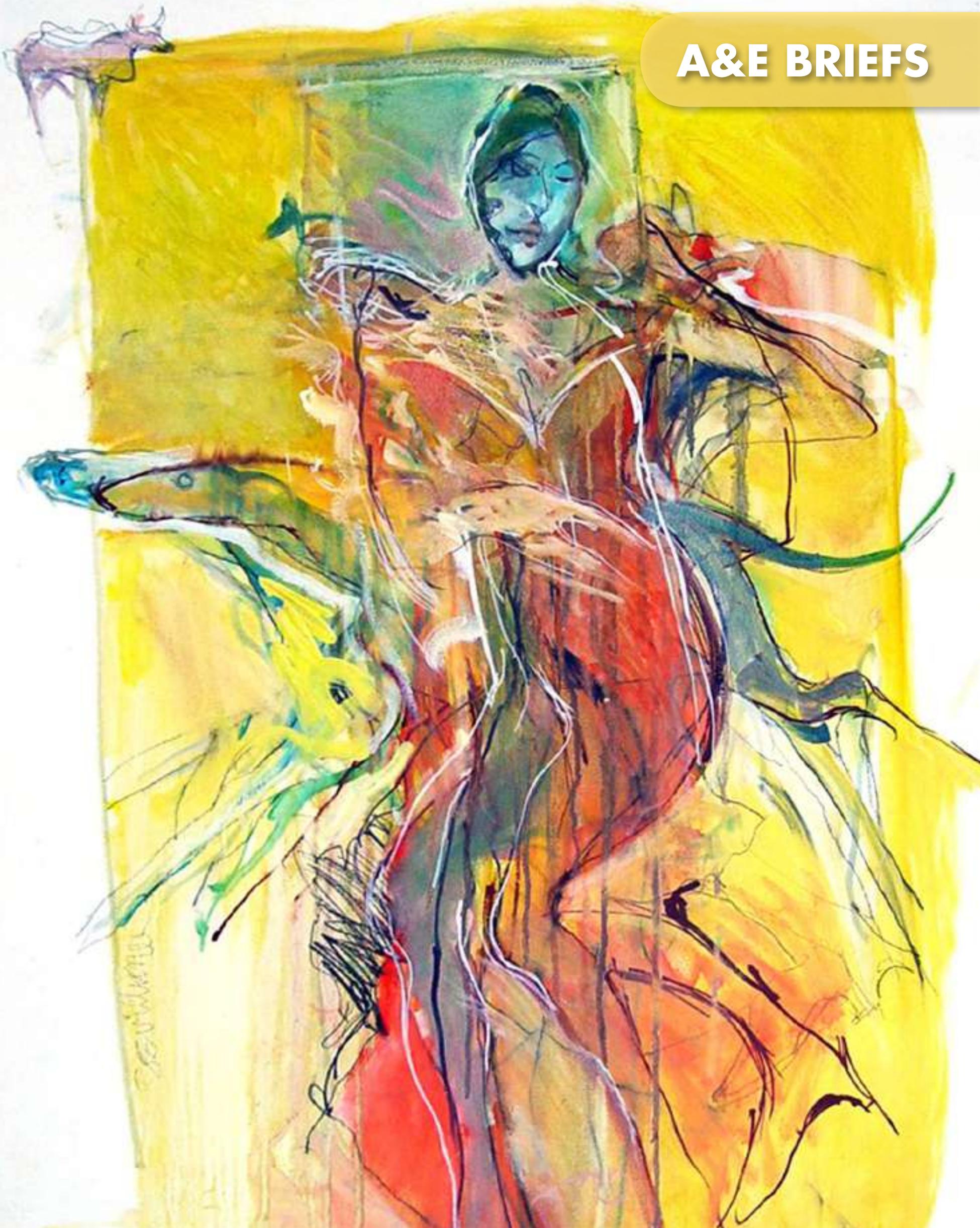
The report from Isaac Brownman, director of capital projects in the county’s Public Works Department, added, “Work in the next 2 weeks is expected to consist of the excavation and removal of buried debris (concrete, pavement and tree limbs) from the site, clearing work, continued pond excavation and continued installation of a 60-inch pipeline.

The drier weather obviously has benefitted the contractor. 



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*Sevilliana, reflecting a dance that originates from Seville, Spain, is by Craig Rubadoux. Contributed photo*

## DABBERT GALLERY TO MARK 10TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

Dabbert Gallery, located at 76 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, will present its 10th Anniversary Exhibition from Jan. 3 through Feb. 1, the gallery has announced.

Owners David and Patricia Dabbert invite the public to join them in an opening reception from 6 to 9 p.m. on Jan. 3. Most of their Florida-based artists will be present for the event, a news release says.

“We proudly present the artwork of 25 outstanding artists who have shared our vision,” the release adds.

“With genuine appreciation and a deep respect for the extraordinary talents and artistic passion of these artists, we have been truly inspired throughout our 10-year partnership,” the release says.

For more information, call 955-1315 or visit [www.dabbertgallery.com](http://www.dabbertgallery.com).



*Patricia and David Dabbert/Contributed photo*



*Moon Glow by Barbara Krupp. Contributed photo*

## WESTCOAST BLACK THEATRE TROUPE TO OPEN *THE WHIPPING MAN*

*The Whipping Man*, one of the most produced plays in regional theaters during the past two years, will open as Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe's (WBTT) second 2013-14 production, the theatre has announced.

It will run from Friday, Jan. 3, through Sunday, Feb. 2.

Set in Richmond, VA, at the end of the Civil War, the play is about a Jewish confederate soldier who returns home on the first day of Passover to find his house destroyed, a news release explains.

Howard J. Millman, former Asolo Repertory Theatre producing artistic director and WBTT board member, will direct this as his first play for the Troupe, the release notes. Performances will be Tuesdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Two Saturday matinees have been scheduled as well — for Jan. 25 and Feb. 1. Tickets, priced at \$29.50, may be purchased online at [www.wbttstrq.org](http://www.wbttstrq.org) or by calling the box office at 366-1505.

*"The Whipping Man* concerns the sudden return home of a confederate captain who has



*The Whipping Man* cast features Taurean Blacque, Drew Foster and Robert Douglas. Contributed photo by Don Daly Photo

a severely wounded leg,” explains Millman in the release. “It is April 12, 1865. The house is wrecked and looted; everyone is gone, except for two former slaves. It is Passover. The captain is Jewish and his two former slaves are also Jewish. Passover represents the freeing of the Jews from slavery, and this time signifies the freeing of the slaves in this Jewish household. In its own way, the play represents the journey all Americans went through as the United States moved into a new era. Everyone in the play has secrets and as they unfold, truth is revealed.”

The ensemble cast includes three male actors, all from outside the Sarasota area, the release notes. Most recognizable is Taurean Blacque, who played Det. Neal Washington on *Hill Street Blues*, a role that earned him an Emmy nomination. “In addition to his 30 TV credits, Blacque has been recognized for his work on

stages from coast to coast,” the release points out. The cast also features Drew Foster, a Sarasota native who began his career as a child actor on the Asolo Rep stage. “After graduating from the Booker VPA program, Foster went on to study at Julliard and has been working on stages around the country every since,” the release adds.

The third actor is Robert Douglas, who comes to WBTT from Gary, IN. “Douglas is also an experienced actor very much in demand at regional theaters,” the release notes.

“We are expecting this to be one of WBTT’s best works of the season,” says WBTT Founding Artistic Director Nate Jacobs in the release.

For more information on WBTT, visit the website at [www.wbtttroupe.org](http://www.wbtttroupe.org), follow the Troupe on Facebook or call 366-1505.

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## **DICK REYNOLDS QUARTET TO OPEN JANUARY JAZZ AT TWO SHOW**

The Jazz Club of Sarasota’s *Jazz at Two* 2014 concert series will welcome the new year with the Dick Reynolds Quartet (Jan. 3); Eddie Tobin (Jan. 17); the Jerry Eckert Trio (Jan. 24); and vocalist Kitt Moran (Jan. 31), the club has announced.

Founded in 2001, the *Jazz at Two* series showcases the region’s top jazz performers from 2 to 4 p.m. on Fridays at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota, a news release explains. Tickets are \$7 for Jazz Club members and \$12 for non-members. A portion of ticket sales is directed to the Jazz Club’s scholarship program. For more information, call 366-1552.

The Dick Reynolds Quartet, on Jan. 3, will feature Reynolds on piano, Johnny Moore on drums, David Pruyn on trumpet and vocals and Dave Trefethen on bass. Reynolds was a house pianist at Chicago’s renowned Mr. Kelley’s nightclub and has performed with such notables as Mel Tormé, Carmen McRae and Sara Vaughn, the release adds. Reynolds also had his own commercial studio in Chicago, where he wrote, filmed and recorded commercials for such industry giants as United Airlines and McDonalds. The quartet’s program will include popular jazz standards as well as favorites from the “Great American Songbook,” the release notes.

“A perennial favorite amongst area jazz enthusiasts,” pianist and vocalist Eddie Tobin, who

will perform on Jan. 10, “is known for his versatility on the piano and a resonant singing voice that has been likened to that of a male Diana Krall,” the release points out. Tobin lived in Nashville for 15 years, playing with the Forester Sisters and Brenda Lee and opening for Kenny Rogers, the release adds. He spent seven years as pianist, conductor and music director for Engelbert Humperdinck.

The Jerry Eckert Trio, on Jan. 24, will feature Eckert on piano, Dave Hubbell on bass and Rich MacDonald on drums. “Eckert grew up playing the piano, and while jazz is undoubtedly his first love, his playing is also infused with a pleasing trace of the classical music that Eckert favored early on in his musical career,” the release says. Eckert has served as music director for such notables as John Davidson, Kate Starr, Donald O’Connor, Frank Gorshin and Bobby Vinton, the release points out.

The January *Jazz at Two* series will close on Jan. 31 “with the sultry sounds of vocalist Kitt Moran,” who will be performing with her husband, Mike, on the piano and Dominic Mancini on bass, the release notes. “Moran’s captivating stage presence and powerful musical abilities have made her a favorite of New York jazz critics,” the release says. She and her husband are regulars on the New York City jazz club circuit, performing at such venues as Michael’s Pub, the Village Vanguard, The Blue Note and Shanghai Jazz. Moran has opened for Jay Leno, Rodney Dangerfield and Jackie, the release adds.

For more information about the Jazz Club of Sarasota, call 366-1552 or visit [www.jazzclubsarasota.com](http://www.jazzclubsarasota.com).



*Kitt and Mike Moran/Contributed photo*



*Jerry Eckert/Contributed photo*



*Eddie Tobin/Contributed photo*

## UNITARIAN CHURCH GALLERY TO FEATURE WORKS OF DOROTHY OKRAY

*Every Day the World Is New*, an exhibit featuring paintings by Dorothy Okray, will open on Jan. 5 and continue through Jan. 29 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota Lexow Wing Gallery, located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota, the church has announced.

A reception for the artist will be held on Sunday, Jan. 5, from noon to 1 p.m.

Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and Sundays after services. Admission is free.

Okray is a former design executive as well as a retired United Methodist minister, a news release notes. "Those diverse careers inform her thought-provoking paintings," the release adds. Okray says in the release, "Every

morning, the trees grow a little. Grass grows a little. Every morning the world is new and will never be exactly the same again. You see new things, think new thoughts, and feel new feelings ... every day. You wake up every day a little bit different. And that is what makes painting the most exciting art form ... trying to capture the sensation, that fresh moment which exists only for the briefest instance in time."

The work includes award winners in pastels, oils and acrylics, the release points out. "I am constantly amazed by the comments of viewers who claim a spiritual element can be seen in my work," says Okray in the release. "Whatever one finds ... I love painting them. I never thought I would find the success I have



*Ocean by Dorothy Okray. Contributed image*

experienced. In fact, painting has become my third career.”

Okray is represented by the Artists’ Guild of Anna Maria Island Gallery. She has shown in numerous venues around the country, the release adds.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota (UUCS) and its members have a rich history

of support and involvement in the arts, the release explains. The south wing of the complex — the Lexow Wing — was designed as a gallery to help fulfill the mission of the UUCS Arts Council, providing for artistic expression and appreciation. Learn more about the church and its varied programs at [www.uusarasota.org](http://www.uusarasota.org).



*Time to Head South by Dorothy Okray. Contributed image*

## ART CENTER SARASOTA TO STAGE *THE COCKTAIL HOUR*

Art Center Sarasota will present a staged reading of *The Cocktail Hour*, a comedy of manners by A.R. Gurney, on Jan. 5 at 4 p.m., the gallery has announced.

Art Center Sarasota is located at 707 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. The event is free, but donations will be accepted. For more information, call 365-2032 or visit [www.artsarasota.org](http://www.artsarasota.org).

Winner of the Lucille Lortel Award as Best Off-Broadway Play, *The Cocktail Hour* “blends mordant humor with moments of affecting poignancy,” a news release says. Directed by Cinda Goeken, this production will star Tim Minar as Bradley and Emilie Robinson as his wife, Ann. They discover, over cocktails, that their son (Paul Hutchison) “has written a new play exposing the family foibles and secrets. Adding to the hilarity is Laura Smith as Nina, the sister, who is upset that her role in the play is so small. As the martinis flow, so do the revelations and recriminations, both funny and poignant, in this heartfelt comedy about the ties that bind,” the release continues.



*Tim Minar, Laura Smith, and Emilie Robinson will star in Theater of the Mind's staged reading of A.R. Gurney's play, The Cocktail Hour. Contributed photo*

Theater of the Mind, established in 2010 by Emilie Robinson and Janet Davies, presents play readings and staged performances at Art Center Sarasota. All proceeds benefit the gallery.

The season continues with *Walter Cronkite Is Dead* (Feb. 9, 4 p.m.); *A Voice of My Own* (March 2, 4 p.m.); and *Coming to Life* (March 23, 4 p.m.).

## VENICE THEATRE'S STAGE II TO PRESENT *SUPERIOR DONUTS*

Venice Theatre's first production of 2014 will be Tracy Letts' Chicago-based comedy *Superior Donuts*, the theatre has announced.

The play will open Thursday, Jan. 9, in the Pinkerton Theatre and run through Sunday, Jan. 26. Performances will be at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays. Tickets are \$25 to \$28 for adults and \$10 to \$15 for students. They are

on sale at the theatre's box office, online at [www.venicestage.com](http://www.venicestage.com) or by calling 488-1115.

*Superior Donuts* introduces audiences to a cast of neighborhood characters headed up by Arthur Przybyszewski, a news release says. “Arthur is the proprietor of Superior Donuts, a decrepit shop located in the heart of Chicago's equally decrepit Uptown neighborhood. His new employee, Franco Wicks, is an idealistic self-starter who wants to shake

things up a bit with healthier menu items and poetry nights,” the release continues. “Franco’s youthful exuberance reflects the neighborhood itself, which is experiencing a slow but sure gentrification. Arthur is taken aback by his new hire’s enthusiasm. His own energy is long gone, left in the ’60s where he was dodging the draft, getting arrested at the ’68 Chicago riots and collecting the concert T-shirts he wears to this day.” The release points out, “Throughout this character-driven piece Arthur and Franco learn from each other, deal with some difficult life situations and experience the redemptive power of friendship.”

It adds, “Anyone should be able to appreciate the play Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* compared to ‘Norman Lear’s groundbreaking shows of the 1970s, which mixed smart jokes and social commentary in satisfying proportions,’ but Chicagoans will find specific treasures.” They will enjoy an

authentic depiction of their city with references to Bridgeport, Riverview and Jefferson Park, as well as a realistic portrait of the diverse Uptown neighborhood, which becomes a character in its own right, the release points out.

As a resident member of Chicago’s acclaimed Steppenwolf Theatre (where *Donuts* debuted before moving to Broadway), Tracy Letts is well equipped to write about the Second City, the release notes. He is best known for his Pulitzer-winning play, *August: Osage County*.

“Director Kelly Wynn Woodland brings the intimate cast of eight characters to life,” the release adds. “Her recent direction of *A Behanding in Spokane* in Venice Theatre’s Stage II earned the show a 2013 Handy Award for best community theater play.”

Venice Theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. in Venice. Box office hours are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and one hour before all performances.



(From left) Lynne Buhle plays Lady, a regular customer at Superior Donuts. Arthur, the owner of the shop, is played by Jerry Zezas. Brandon Butler is Franco, a young employee with lofty aspirations and some debts to settle. Contributed photo by Renee McVety

## **NATURE AND IRONY TO OPEN JAN. 3 AT ALLYN GALLUP GALLERY**

Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art gallery will present *Nature and Irony* Jan. 3 through Feb. 1, featuring works by Leslie Neumann, Nancee Clark and Katherine Wobie, the gallery has announced.

A reception with the artists will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. on Jan. 3, with an “artists’ talk” at 7 p.m.

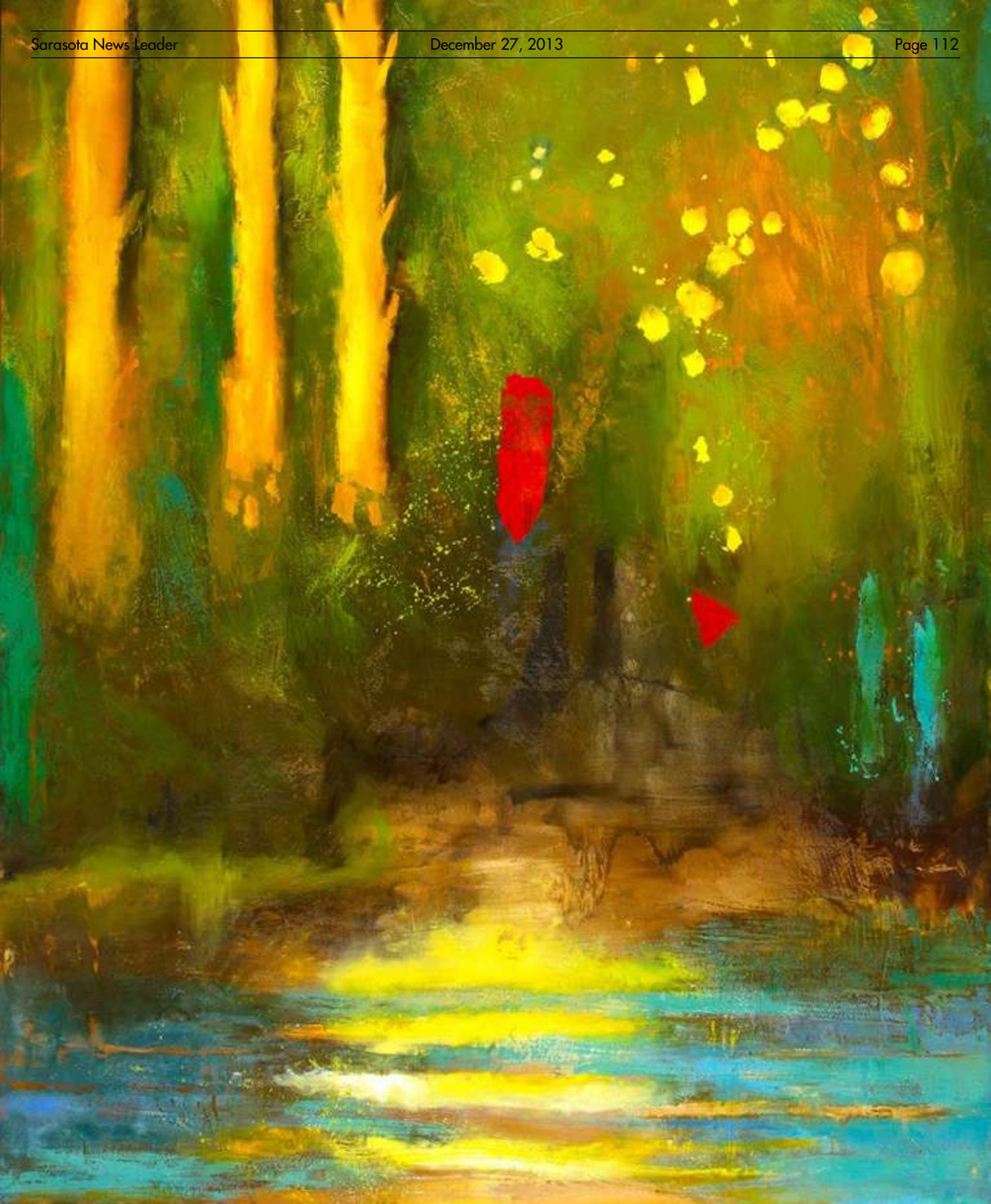
“This dynamic exhibition is the brainchild of Leslie Neumann, a prolific artist who makes

her home in the tidewater region of Aripeka,” a news release points out. “Inspired by nature and the contradictory human responses it evokes, Neumann realized this was a constant theme in her work and the work of her friends and colleagues at the University of Florida.”

“Nancee, Katherine and I all employ the physical world as our subject matter,” Neumann says in the release. “The beauty we see could be a wetlands marsh, sunlight on water, a human being, a monkey, a chicken or a stream



*Woodstork* by Nancee Clark. Contributed photo



*Beauty Deep Within by Leslie Neumann. Contributed photo*

of motes moving in the wind. We marvel at the grandeur of it all, at the same time recognizing how tiny our species is in comparison. Our hierarchical human systems stand side-by-side with nature. Sometimes we live in harmony, sometimes not. The irony is, we can ignore nature, but we're really a part of it. The title *Nature and Irony* takes its inspiration from that inconvenient truth."

"Neumann is known for constructing radiant, meditative landscapes of oil and encaustic that invite the viewer to melt into them," the release adds. Lara Bradburn of *The Tampa Tribune* described Neumann's work as, "both

passionate and soothing, powerful and disarming, apocalyptic and transcendent, and predictable with an element of surprise. It's a dichotomy of sensations from an artist intent on peering into nature's soul."

"Neumann's reverence for the Florida landscape began to flower after she moved to the small fishing village of Aripeka in 1991, after a decade in New York City," the release notes. "Her passion for the land extends beyond painting. She and other environmentalists have helped to preserve more than 14,000 acres of pristine coastal lands."



*Adrift* by Kathie Wobie. Contributed photo

The works of Gainesville artist Kathleen Wobie focus on two concurrent realities: the age of information overload and the resiliency and renewal of natural systems, the release points out. “My latest series of paintings expresses the feelings I have about the daily overload of information in our minds and the transformations we’re inflicting on the environment,” says Wobie in the release. “She expresses the surfeit of fragmentary data with an overlay of imagery — an onslaught of marks, which she transforms into suggestions of organic shapes,” the release adds. Wobie is a founding member of the Melrose Bay Art Gallery, a signature member of Plein Air Florida, and a 10-year invitational painter at Epcot. She is represented by several galleries in north Florida, the release continues.

The work of Nancee Clark, a two-time recipient of the State of Florida Visual Artist

Fellowship, rounds out the show. “Her narrative paintings glow with active brushwork and layers of color achieving density and richness,” the release adds. “Clark populates her ambiguous spaces with human and animal figures, surrounded by props — a table, trapeze, cups and other detritus.”

“I create my own strange space in my work,” says Clark in the release. “It’s a space of irony, where what’s expected is not what actually occurs. In this world, the observed and the observer occupy the same space.”

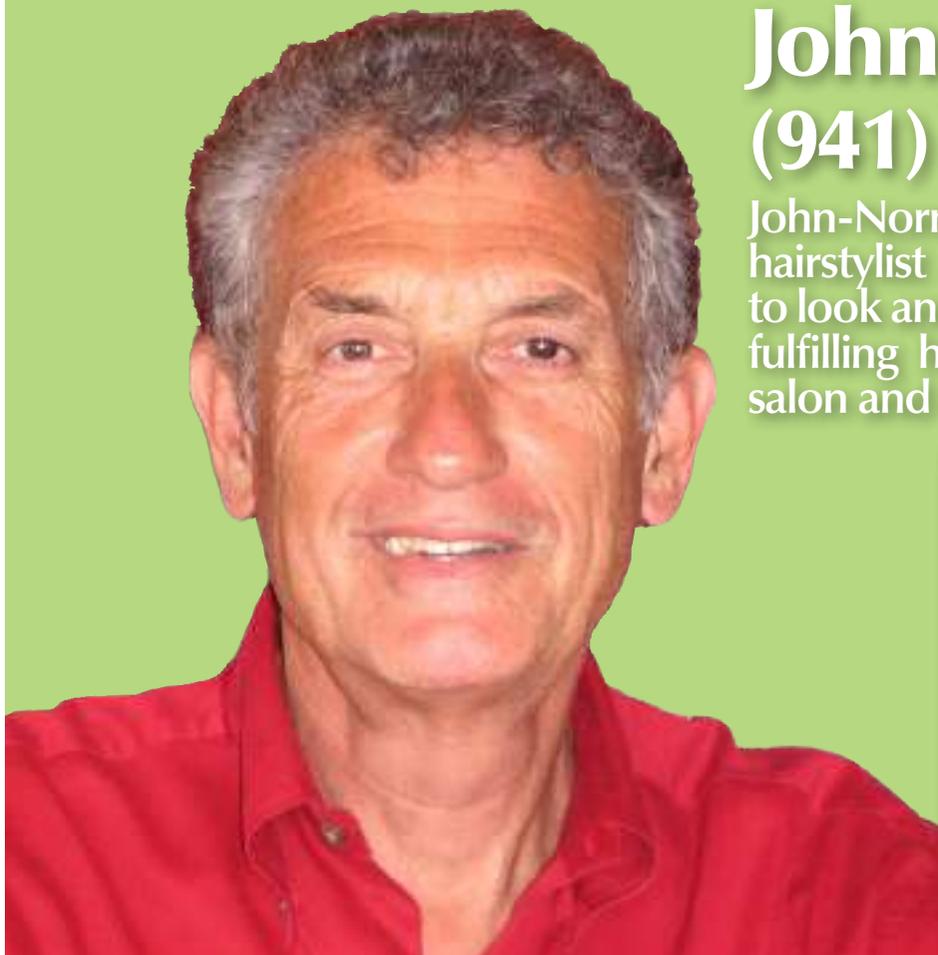
Clark is on the faculty at Ringling College of Art and Design.

For more information about this exhibit, call 366-2454 or visit [www.allyngallup.com](http://www.allyngallup.com). The gallery is at 1288 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

## SARASOTA'S HAIR COLOR SPECIALIST

### John-Norman Tuck (941) 928-1203

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Located Upstairs In the Green Ginger Salon

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**27+**  
DECEMBER

**Selby Gardens presents *Lights in Bloom***

Dec. 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](http://Selby.org).

**27+**  
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](http://AllynGallup.com).

**27+**  
DECEMBER

**Dabbert Gallery presents *Sculpture: Metal, Marble & More***

Through Dec. 30; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or [DabbertGallery.com](http://DabbertGallery.com).

**27+**  
DECEMBER

**FST presents *Monty Python's Spamalot***

Through Jan. 19; times vary; Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$18 to 49. Information: 366-9000 or [FloridaStudioTheatre.org](http://FloridaStudioTheatre.org).

**28**  
DECEMBER

**WSLR presents *Grandpa's Cough Medicine in concert***

Dec. 28, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$8 in advance; \$10 at door. Information: 894-6469 or [WSLR.org](http://WSLR.org).

**02+**  
JANUARY

**Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents *The Whipping Man***

Jan. 2 to Feb. 2; times vary; 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or [wbttsrq.org](http://wbttsrq.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](http://SCASarasota.org).

**YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST**

# A SALUTE TO THE HOLIDAY SEASON

PRESS



Norman Schimmel  
Photographer

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## SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



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