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# News Leader



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*Inside*

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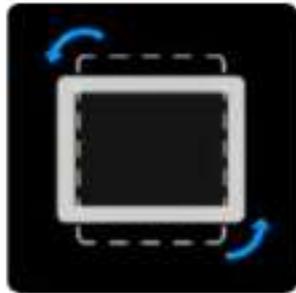
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# A.K.A. HELP

# SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

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# Welcome

Once upon a time, it seemed the weeks were not as busy for us when the County Commission was not in session. That board might not have met this week — except informally for the Siesta Public Beach Park improvements groundbreaking on Wednesday — but this week has been incredibly busy.

And, yes, the City Commission and the Downtown Improvement District did have regular meetings on Tuesday, I should point out.

As one of my regular correspondents reminded me, it is that time of year, after all.

From talk of fracking in the Florida House to talk of the business plan for operating Benderson Park events, from a wonderful interview County Editor Roger Drouin conducted with Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer to the proposal for a new Sarasota County Technical Institute in North Port, our staff once again has found diverse topics to tackle.

And Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel was *everywhere* over the past week — from the kickoff of the Sarasota Keys program downtown to the recognition of aerialist Nik Wallenda as a Circus Celebrity to the Ringling Bridge Run to that Siesta groundbreaking. I do not think he had time to sleep!

On the *Sarasota Leisure* side, our offerings include Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker's preview of World Peace Day, and contributor Barbara Dondero's foray into the world of a stage production manager at Florida Studio Theatre.

Additionally, City Editor Stan Zimmerman, Roger and I all have stories to carry over to the next issue or two for lack of time to pursue them.

And, yes, the County Commission meets again next week.

*Rachel Brown Hackney*  
Editor and Publisher





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Front cover: *Tickling the Ivories* - Norman Schimmel  
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## FRACKING FRONTIER?

An organization on Facebook opposes fracking in Florida. Image from [www.facebook.com/FLNoFrack](http://www.facebook.com/FLNoFrack)

# FLORIDA NATURAL GAS RUSH LOOKING MORE PLAUSIBLE, WITH POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR SARASOTA COUNTY

By Roger Drouin  
County Editor

The once seemingly far-fetched possibility of fracked wells and impoundment ponds in Florida could soon be a reality.

A state House panel last week OK'd two bills that would require the reporting of chemicals used in fracking. In a partisan 8-4 vote, the two measures cleared the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee — which has a Republican majority — as state legislators grapple with

the potential of the Sunshine State becoming the “Fracking Frontier.”

Even more telling, one industry lobbyist says some research has shown that fracking — officially called hydraulic fracturing — could force up oil and gas that is trapped thousands of feet below the surface in Florida’s compressed limestone formations.

“The camel’s nose is in the tent. We know there is interest.”

Mary Jean Yon  
Legislative Director  
Audubon Florida

“Where hydraulic fracturing has been most successful has been in shale-type structures,”

said David Mica, executive director of the Florida Petroleum Association. “It is now thought that it can work in other formations.”

Those formations, Mica explained to *The Sarasota News Leader*, include Florida

limestone 10,000 feet — or deeper — below the surface.

Hydraulic fracturing injects a cocktail of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure to blast open rock below ground to release



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trapped oil and gas. The controversial process uses large amounts of water and produces flowback that contains some of the chemicals employed in the action.

“The camel’s nose is in the tent,” said Mary Jean Yon, legislative director at Audubon Florida, which has started a petition drive opposed to hydraulic fracturing in Florida. “We know there is an interest.”

Proponents such as Mica say fracking would help provide energy in a state that gets about 60 percent of its electricity from natural gas. They also point to historic conventional oil and gas drilling in the state, along with improvements in pipe casing and other technology used in hydraulic fracturing.

Critics such as Yon, however, warn the process could harm groundwater supplies and



*A fracking operation is under way in Warren Center, PA. Image from Ostoff Law via Wikimedia Commons*

suck millions of gallons of water from the aquifer.

When it comes to fracking in Florida, the industry's attention appears to be focused on two parts of the state. The first is the “[Sunniland Trend](#)” in Southwest Florida, mostly in Lee, Collier and Hendry counties. That trend is 150 miles long and 20 miles wide, stretching from Fort Myers to Miami. The second area is northwest Florida. But that does not mean the gas and oil companies are not looking in other regions.

“A lot of the activity has to remain confidential because the stakes are so high,” Mica said of the race to bring hydraulic fracturing to new places. “Public attention is on those two areas in southwest Florida and northwest Florida.”

Also unknown is whether it will be economically feasible to frack in Florida, where the geology is so different from natural gas-rich areas such as the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia.

Media reports as early as October 2012 in the *Fort Myers News Press* detailed some initial interest of at least two companies in regard to the deep unexplored regions of the Sunniland Trend.

## ‘A DELICATE BALANCE’

Even fracking to the south in Lee, Collier and Hendry counties could have implications in Sarasota, said Jon Thaxton, former county commissioner and current director of community investment at the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. Thaxton has concerns. One of those regards the potential stresses on the aquifer, rivers and lakes — as well as the potential for contamination in a state where



*Ray Rodrigues, R-Estero, speaks on the Florida House floor. Photo courtesy [myfloridahouse.gov](http://myfloridahouse.gov)*

“a delicate balance” keeps water clean and viable as a source of drinking water.

Yon, the legislative director at Audubon Florida, says water used in the fracking process in Lee or Collier counties could have a big impact on the water supply — even in Sarasota County.

“One of the first and foremost concerns would be the amount of water used to carry out this process,” Yon noted. “If there are counties nearby where fracking is happening, there should be some concern [in Sarasota County]. There are no county lines on the Peace River or the aquifer.”

Sarasota County draws its drinking water from several sources, including wells throughout the county, as well as the Manatee River and the Peace River/Manasota Regional Water

Supply Authority, which uses the Peace River as its source.

Thaxton said he is not “completely negative” on hydraulic fracturing as an industry. Coal is considered a dirtier fuel. But there has been enough recent negative news in fracking-intense states such as Pennsylvania that the idea of fracking anywhere close to Sarasota County raises the issue of real threats — from damage to economic engines such as tourism to possible water contamination.

“Environmental standards should be maintained,” Thaxton pointed out.

## **DISCLOSURE OR DISGUISE?**

Audubon Florida, along with environmentalists, contends the proposed two Florida House bills (HB 71 and HB 157) do not do a good job of establishing environmental standards and holding oil and gas companies accountable if they frack in Florida. Critics argue the measures appear to offer disclosure but that they actually provide the oil and gas companies cover to start the process in Florida.

The first bill, HB 71, would require companies to inform the state Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) of the chemicals they would use in the process and for the state agency to forward that information to a national registry called [FracFocus.org](http://FracFocus.org). The second bill, HB 157, would allow DEP to determine if an exemption from public disclosure should be given to any chemical that a company argues needs to be shielded as a “trade secret.” Both bills are sponsored by Ray Rodrigues, R-Estero.

There are two problems with the bills, Yon said.

First, “There is no mention of the concentration of these chemicals,” Yon said. Audubon Florida also “has a level of discomfort” with the use of [FracFocus.org](http://FracFocus.org), which was created through industry funding.

The major red flag for Yon is the “trade secrets” provision that would provide a path for the industry to try to disguise the use of certain chemicals or compounds that could be toxic individually or in combination with other substances.

“House Bill 157 says the industry can leave anything out by claiming trade secrets,” Yon pointed out. “That’s a huge issue.”

Mica told the *News Leader* that fracking proponents might be willing to strike a deal to add some language to HB 71 to ease concerns about concentrations. “I think that is a responsible thing, to disclose the amount of the chemicals,” he said. “We’re going to work with them on that.”

In addition to opposition from environmental groups such as Audubon Florida, some grassroots concerns have percolated. In 2012, Floridians Against Fracking started a Facebook page. As of Wednesday evening, Jan. 22, the group had 325 likes.

As of press time, Jan. 23, FDEP’s Mining and Minerals Regulation division had not responded to a request for information on whether there are active fracking permits or applications for permits. 

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## FINALLY BACK IN THE BLACK?

*Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner discusses the projected 2014-15 school district budget.  
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

### **WHILE IT IS TOO EARLY TO CALL THE PROJECTION A CERTAINTY, THE SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS MAY NOT HAVE TO DRAW ON RESERVES TO BALANCE ITS 2014-15 BUDGET**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Although the Governor's Office has not released its 2015 fiscal year budget yet, and legislative funding remains an unknown, the Sarasota County School Board budget for 2014-15 could be the first one balanced without reserve funds since 2007-08, the school district's deputy chief financial officer told the board during its Jan. 21 workshop.

"This appears to be having a budget surplus," board member Frank Kovach said of the projection

provided to the board, "and I haven't seen that in so long. It was just really hard to believe ..."

However, he conceded, things could come up to reverse that.

Weidner, the deputy CFO, told the other board

members Kovach called him on Jan. 17 to say Weidner must have made a big mistake, based on the material Weidner had sent the board for the

**“ The one big unknown is what the governor and the Legislature will do. ”**

Al Weidner  
Deputy Chief Financial Officer  
Sarasota County Schools



workshop. Finally, Weidner said, he realized Kovach was joking.

“After all these years,” board member Shirley Brown replied with a chuckle, “you’ve finally, finally listened to what Mr. Kovach requested and balanced our budget.”

For years, Kovach has argued that the district needed to stop dipping into its reserve fund to keep its budget in the black.

“The one big unknown is what the governor and the Legislature will do,” Weidner pointed out. The Governor’s Office typically has released its budget by this time of year, he

noted, indicating the plan could be out at any time.

If the Legislature designates new school funding for certain functions — as it did with teacher salary increases in the current fiscal year — the Sarasota district budget “would change ... completely,” Weidner said.

Given the financial hardships many Florida school districts are facing, he continued, he hoped that would not be the case. “School districts *need* to not have additional funding earmarked for specific purposes,” he told the board members.



*School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin makes a point during the Jan. 21 workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



*School Board member Frank Kovach listens to a presentation on Jan. 21. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

Many other districts have “very low reserves,” Chairwoman Jane Goodwin agreed, and a number are struggling.

According to the projections Weidner presented to the board on Jan. 22, the total estimated revenue for the 2014-15 fiscal year is \$393,972,940. The estimated appropriations are \$393,019,966. Adding in the estimated revenue left unspent in the current fiscal year, the district would have a surplus of \$47,961,180 on June 30, 2015.

The total of the district’s reserve fund is projected to be \$37,717,131 as of June 30, 2015, or 9.6 percent of the budget.

Mitsi Corcoran, the district’s chief financial officer, pointed out to *The Sarasota News Leader* last year that School Board policy 7.101 provides for a minimum unassigned fund balance of 7.5 percent. That is more fiscally conservative than the state required minimum of 3 percent, as set out in Florida Statute 1011.051. The statutes also provide that if a school district’s reserve falls to 2 percent or below, that district is considered to be in a state of financial emergency, she added.

Board member Carol Todd said on Wednesday, “Every year ... we have a higher percent in our reserve than we had anticipated. We do very well.”

Goodwin credited Superintendent Lori White and the staff.

Todd concurred, noting that when White has to recommend cuts, the board members “have heated discussions sometimes,” but “our staff [members] know how to save. They know how to squeeze these dollars, and I think we need to compliment everyone in this district.”

White thanked Goodwin and Todd for their remarks. “There are so many ways our staff makes sacrifices, trying to prioritize what the greatest needs are.” White added, “What we would all love to see go away are those tremendous budget cuts at the end of the year,” which have been necessitated by funding shortfalls.

During his presentation, Weidner noted the following assumptions in his preparation of the projected budget:

- A 5 percent increase in property valuations in Sarasota County. However, Weidner added, “I’m really anticipating a little bit more than that.” Values went up 4.22 percent for the current fiscal year.
- Expected renewal of the district’s special 1 mill tax. The referendum will be held for the fourth time on March 25. The tax would bring in about \$42 million, district leaders have said.
- An enrollment decrease of 80 students, which would mean the loss of three teachers.
- Continuation of the hiring freeze that has been in effect since the recession necessitated that action about six years ago.
- A 10-percent increase in district healthcare costs, effective Jan. 1, 2015.
- A 4-percent rise in the expense for other employee benefits, effective Jan. 1, 2015.
- A 5-percent uptick in fuel and energy costs.

Weidner noted that this is his 32nd year of working on district budgets. 

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## CALM AND COMPOSED

*Tom Harmer poses with the county seal in the lobby outside his and the county commissioners' offices. Photo by Roger Drouin*

### **AS A FIREFIGHTER, TOM HARMER LEARNED TO BE COMFORTABLE IN UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS, AND TO STAY CALM**

**By Roger Drouin**

*County Editor*

Before 8 a.m., Tom Harmer checks his schedule as soon as he walks into his office at the Sarasota County Administration Building in downtown Sarasota.

On the left, is his “To Do” list. There are more than a half dozen A’s scribbled beside it. “Those are my priorities,” Harmer says.

On the right is a detailed schedule indicating another busy day. When he gets a chance, Harmer fills in

some notes about the day — what went well; what he might have to address the following day.

It is a system the former fire chief and Titusville city manager has used for a long time, and over the past three months, it has helped keep him organized as Sarasota County’s interim county administrator, a post that oversees more than 2,000 employees and more than 20 departments.

**“Never, ever during my 13 years with the Chamber, has a county administrator ever attended a North Port Chamber meeting. We were very honored.”**

Fred Tower  
Chairman  
Government Relations Committee  
North Port Chamber of Commerce



Harmer's schedule has been full as he handles double duty, balancing some of his former responsibilities as deputy administrator while overseeing the county's day-to-day operations and communications with commissioners.

Working with his administrative staff, he adopted the motto "Full Steam Ahead" in October.

"When I was asked to serve as interim administrator, one of the things that was important to me and the board was trying to make the transition as smooth as possible," Harmer said during an interview with *The Sarasota News Leader* in his office Wednesday morning, Jan. 22.

In October, the commissioners voted 4-1 to fire then-Administrator Randall Reid without cause. They unanimously replaced him with Harmer, who was hired by Reid in July 2012 to fill the post of deputy county administrator.

During the Tuesday, Jan. 28, County Commission meeting, the board members will review Harmer's job performance so far. That discussion will likely include discussion about whether to extend his tenure as interim administrator or whether to remove "interim" from his title.

## 'WHEN THE TONE GOES OFF'

Harmer has 26 years of experience in local government, including almost eight years as city manager of Titusville, where he also was executive director of the Community Development Agency. Additionally, he has served as fire chief and emergency manager in Titusville. Prior to that, Harmer was deputy fire chief in Tallahassee and a firefighter/

## GET TO KNOW TOM HARMER

**Hometown:** Philadelphia; he moved to Florida at the age of 12.

**Hobbies:** Biking and kayaking (he just purchased a kayak).

**Family:** wife Dee Dee; two sons, 26 and 33, who live in Orlando.

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EMT for three years in Davie, according to his resume.

"I like to work; always have liked to work," Harmer said. "I guess because I have always liked the jobs I've had and the challenge of trying to make a difference."

During his time as a firefighter, Harmer — also a former interrogator for the U.S. Marine Corps — learned to be comfortable in a vast array of situations.

"As a firefighter, you never know what to expect when the [alarm] tone goes off," Harmer pointed out. "It can be as simple as a snake in the fireplace to a building fully engulfed, with someone trapped inside."

He also learned how to maintain his composure. "You can't be the one that gets so excited you don't know what to do," Harmer said. "You learn to have that calm presence."



*Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer offers remarks during the Jan. 22 groundbreaking for the Siesta Public Beach Park improvements. (See the related story in this issue.) Photo by Norman Schimmel*

In some ways, it was his firefighting experience that prepared him for high-pressure, high-scrutiny roles in governmental management.

“There is always someone who has to see the county administrator,” Harmer noted, “and you have to make time.”

Teamwork is key, in both firefighting and government operations. “You can’t just go out there and do it yourself,” Harmer said.

“There are over 2,000 of us if something is an important county project,” Harmer added. “We have to think of ourselves as an entire team.”

Harmer hopes to strike a chord of collaboration outside county government headquarters as he seeks to address unresolved issues

ranging from a recommended homeless shelter in Sarasota to a dispute between city and county commissioners over the former Police Department site on Ringling Boulevard.

“The key is that somehow this stays a collaborative effort,” he said of consultant Robert Marbut’s recommendation for a homeless shelter in Sarasota. “There will be some public debate on where the shelter should go and who pays for what, but it has to be a collaborative effort.”

The topic is slated for discussion during an April 1 joint session of the City and County commissions.

In addition to meeting with his staffers, working with the county commissioners and addressing issues, Harmer has been trying to



*Tom Harmer (left) listens as Ed Gable, the county’s facilities services director, addresses the County Commission during an October 2013 workshop. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

get out more in the community than he did as a deputy administrator.

That effort has not gone unnoticed.

In a Jan. 14 email to County Commissioner Christine Robinson, Fred Tower, chairman of the North Port Chamber of Commerce Government Relations Committee, praised Harmer.

“The North Port Chamber had a Business After Hours honoring a North Port business,” a function held every month, Tower wrote. “Your interim county administrator showed up and [was introduced] and he spoke for a few minutes and introduced himself. His wife also accompanied him.

Never, ever during my 13 years with the chamber has a county administrator ever attended a North Port Chamber meeting. We were very honored,” Tower added. “You have a winner.”

## THE BUDGET CHALLENGE

Much of Harmer’s schedule during the coming months will be focused on the Fiscal Year 2015 budget. This year the County Commission will hold earlier workshops than it has in previous years to address its new spending plan.

Harmer will also receive budget proposals sooner from the department heads, allowing him and the finance staff to go through the material and put together a “County Administrator’s Budget” to present to the county commissioners.

“We’ll be scrutinizing department budgets,” Harmer said.

During the process — as long as he sits in the chief administrator’s chair — Harmer and staff members will be working to come up with a plan to mitigate a projected 2016 general fund deficit, and that includes trying to trim expenses. 



*Tom Harmer joins the commissioners at the dais during one of his first board meetings as interim administrator. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



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# ROWING FORWARD

*Rowers compete in a race during the USRowing Masters National Championships at Benderson Park in August 2013. File photo*

## LONG-TERM ROWING PARK BUSINESS PLAN UNVEILED AT TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**  
*Associate Editor*

Pressed hard last month by the Sarasota County Commission to deliver a detailed business plan for the rowing facility at Nathan Benderson Park, the head of the nonprofit created to manage the venue unveiled some of those numbers this week, offering an optimistic look at the park's long-term finances.

Doing the unveiling was Paul Blacketter, executive director for planning with Benderson

Development and the president of Suncoast Aquatics Nature Center Associates (SANCA), the nonprofit charged with raising money for and overseeing the park. He addressed the Tourist Development Council Wednesday

evening, Jan. 22, specifically to garner feedback before presenting the Suncoast Aquatics plan to the County Commission next week. Chaired by County Commissioner Nora Patterson, the Tourist Development

“Public-private partnerships can be very dicey. There's a perception that there's no scrutiny put to them, that they're a form of welfare.”

Paul Caragiulo  
Commissioner  
City of Sarasota  
And Tourist Development Council Member



Council is made up of representatives from the county's cities — e.g., Venice Vice Mayor Bob Daniels, North Port Commissioner Cheryl Cook and City of Sarasota Commissioner Paul Caragiulo — and the private sector — e.g., *Sarasota News Leader* Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel.

Blackketter discussed all the research that had gone into the business plan, which included trips to almost every major rowing center in the country, and then dove into the numbers. Suncoast Aquatics is projecting that 25

total events will take place at the rowing center this year, a number the group thinks will grow to 81 by 2020, with projected growth in each of the types of events as well. Seventeen training teams have already booked the park for 2014; Blackketter's presentation indicated that number could swell to 52 by the end of the decade.

Each so-dubbed "large" event would generate upwards of \$15,000 in profit over the next couple of years, Blackketter explained. But revenue from so-called "special" events, such



*Benderson Park will be hosting a number of major events leading up to the World Rowing Championships in 2017. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*(From left) Paul Blacketter, County Commissioner Joe Barbetta and Benderson Development CEO Randy Benderson gather during a regatta at Benderson Park in February 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

as the 2017 World Rowing Championships, is difficult to estimate. The events are “so big” that outcomes are tough to gauge at this point, Blackketter said. “They bring in television. They bring in world athletes.”

One key to success Blackketter laid out was the need for Suncoast Aquatics to grow events. How can the organization nurture a medium-sized competition to help it become larger as the years go on? Blackketter said the group was dedicated to working with organizers to grow their programs from year to year.

Then talk turned to money. Blackketter was adamant that Suncoast Aquatics would not be coming back to Sarasota County — which has already chipped in \$19.5 million for park improvements — for additional funds. “We will not be asking for capital from Sarasota County,” he said, telling the Council he is “very confident” that Suncoast Aquatics can raise the rest of the money needed to get the park up and running.

How much are we talking? \$22 million. Blackketter said Randy Benderson, president of the company that bears his family’s name, would personally chair the foundation charged with rounding up all that dough. Blackketter said he has spoken with several fundraisers to ask them if the \$22 million goal is doable, and they’ve assured him it is. “If there’s any project out there today, this is certainly one you can raise the money for,” Blackketter said he has heard.

Caragiulo complimented Blackketter on the amount of detail in the business plan, but said the group needed to develop a simpler message for the public. “Public-private

partnerships can be very dicey,” Caragiulo pointed out. “There’s a perception that there’s no scrutiny put to them, that they’re a form of welfare.”

“Where’s our talking points?” he asked.

Blackketter referred the Council to one particular slide in his presentation, the one that showed an \$8.5 million economic impact this year leaping up to a \$56.1 million impact in 2020.

One major concern discussed during Blackketter’s meeting with the County Commission in December was the state’s insistence that the county repay half of the state’s \$10 million investment in the rowing park if the facility fails to generate \$25 million in sales taxes by the end of 2018. But Blackketter said Wednesday that debate may be moot. He has spoken to Enterprise Florida, the public-private entity that oversees economic development projects for the state, and asked its staff to gut the so-called “clawback” provision in its deal with Sarasota County. He expects to have amendments to that contract within a few weeks, he said.

Patterson called the Council a “tough crowd”; Blackketter will face another tough crowd Tuesday, Jan. 28, when he delivers the Suncoast Aquatics plan to the County Commission. In December, the board asked critical questions about why the business plan had been delayed for so long. “We’ve had the business plan discussion for a long time,” Blackketter acknowledged Wednesday. With such a significant investment of taxpayer dollars on the line, don’t expect that discussion to end soon. 

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# AN SCTI FOR NORTH PORT

*The main Sarasota County Technical Institute campus is located at the intersection of Proctor and Beneva roads in Sarasota. Image courtesy School Board*

## **A SITE SELECTION PROCESS PROBABLY WILL BE CONCLUDED THIS SUMMER FOR A COMBINED TECHNICAL INSTITUTE AND NEW COUNTY LIBRARY IN NORTH PORT, WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS WORKING ON WAYS TO PAY FOR CONSTRUCTION**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Staff members of the Sarasota County Schools, the City of North Port and Sarasota County are working on a project that would combine a new Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) and a second public library in North Port, the school district's director of long-range planning told local government officials from all over the county during the Convocation of Governments on Jan. 17 at the SCTI main campus in Sarasota.

Although Ken Marsh said no funds are available for construction,

the district has carry-over school impact fee revenue that can be used for site acquisition. The tentative timeline calls for the purchase to take place by the summer, he added.

"I believe we will have a site soon," Todd Bowden, the district's executive director of career, technical and adult education, told the School Board members during their Jan. 21 workshop in Sarasota.

Schools Superintendent Lori White added during that workshop that staff is exploring revenue streams to

**“ I think we all understand we're in a very fragile recovery, and I think part of that recovery is what we're talking about today.**

James Blucher  
Mayor  
City of North Port



pay for the facilities. During the Convocation of Governments last week, North Port Mayor James Blucher pointed out that city commissioners and staff already have talked with state Sen. Nancy Detert of Venice to seek her help in securing funding from the Legislature to help with the project.

“What I heard loud and clear [on Jan. 17] was ‘Sooner rather than later’” for the proposal to become a reality, Bowden told the School Board this week.

## THE BACKGROUND

Marsh explained to the local government leaders on Jan. 17 that White directed him and his staff about a year ago to start looking at potential sites for a new SCTI in North Port. The City of North Port’s Economic Development

Strategic Plan for 2013-2018 points out one of that community’s weaknesses is lack of a vocational or technical school, he added, “which really helped motivate us to proceed.”

Regarding the library: Marsh noted that in 2006, he and Sarabeth Kalajian, the county’s director of libraries and historical resources, “were working on the very real possibility” of putting a second county library within the district’s [Woodland Middle School](#). However, because of the recession, Marsh said, “That didn’t happen, unfortunately.”

Then, last spring, he continued, Kalajian phoned him to ask whether the district had any new plans for a school in North Port, so he told her about the SCTI proposal. “Light bulbs went off all over the place,” Marsh



*(From left) North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis, North Port Mayor James Blucher and School Board member Caroline Zucker listen to a presentation during the Jan. 17 Convocation of Governments. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

added. “We have been working on this ever since.”

A search committee started out with 34 sites, Marsh continued. Once the determination was made to include a new public library as part of the project, “a number of those sites were excluded because they were really too close to the existing North Port Library.”

All of the remaining locations, he noted, are in what is called the “Toledo Blade corridor” between Interstate 75 and Price Boulevard.

Only a handful of locations remains under investigation, Marsh pointed out, adding that

he also is working with John Herrli, the county’s land acquisition manager.

## **THE NEED FOR A NORTH PORT SCTI**

Bowden explained to the local government leaders that more than 200 North Port High School students spend three hours a day at the SCTI main campus, located at the intersection of Beneva and Proctor roads in Sarasota, to take career and technical education classes. Their commute is 45 minutes each way, he pointed out. Not only would a North Port campus serve them better, he said, but it also would be able to offer a range of

# Potential Career Development Opportunities in North Port

- Automotive Service Technology
- Business Technology
- Construction Technology
- Cosmetology
- Culinary Art
- Dental Assisting
- EMS (EMT and Paramedic)
- Manufacturing
- Nursing (CNA and LPN)

courses — from those in adult basic education to those that would enable students to pursue careers in such fields as automotive service technology, business technology, cosmetology, culinary arts, manufacturing and nursing.

During the Jan. 22 School Board meeting, Bowden pointed to those courses as “certain programs [that] belong at every technical center.”

“It really [would be] a scaled-down version of our main campus,” he added of the North Port SCTI.

Further, as a branch of the primary SCTI, he noted, it would be immediately accredited, and it would be able to offer financial aid.

## THE LIBRARY VISION

During her remarks at the convocation, Kalajian, the county libraries director, talked of her vision for the new North Port library. She likened the potential to what she saw in a recent visit to the [Seminole Community Library](#) at St. Petersburg College. That facility, she said, “[has] drawn award-winning attention for its innovative merging of high-end technology access to digital information and traditional library collections and resources.”

As for the existing North Port Library, she added, “We’re at capacity or near capacity ...”

## THE FINANCIAL ASPECTS

School Board member Shirley Brown explained to her fellow local government

# ILA – School Site Analysis

## Issues to “*consider*” --

1. Logical focal point for community
2. Opportunities for shared-use and co-location of community facilities
3. Elementary and middle schools proximate to urban residential neighborhoods

*A chart lists some of the site considerations for the location of a new Sarasota County Technical Institute in combination with a second Sarasota County library in North Port. Image courtesy School Board*

leaders on Jan. 17 that the district's construction plans have been limited over the past five years, since the Legislature cut the allowable property tax for capital funds from 2.0 mills to 1.5 mills. One mill brings in about \$40 million, she added. Seeking help from the county's legislative delegation to allow the district to go back to the 2-mill level "may be one of our major priorities" during the 2014 legislative session, she pointed out.

Then North Port Mayor Blucher announced that North Port leaders already had been working with Detert. The City Commission would like to see the combined SCTI/library completed as soon as possible.

"I think this is an exciting opportunity for all of us," County Commissioner Carolyn Mason

said. "[The project] should be done, and I think it can be done. It's going to behoove all of us to continue to work together to have these conversations to make it happen."

"I know it can be done, especially with all the people sitting in this room," School Board member Caroline Zucker added.

**“ I think it's the most exciting thing that we could possibly do in the school district.**

Jane Goodwin  
Chairwoman  
Sarasota County School Board

"This could be a game-changer for North Port and for Sarasota County," County Commissioner Christine Robinson said. "What role [is the county] going to play in this?" she asked.

Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer replied that over the next couple of months, the County Commission would be crafting its next five-year capital budget priorities list, so the library funding could be part of that discussion.



(From left) Sarasota Vice Mayor Willie Shaw, North Port City Commissioner Linda Yates, Vice Mayor Emilio Carlesimo of Venice, Longboat Town Manager Dave Bullock and Mayor Jim Brown of Longboat Key listen to the discussion during the Convocation of Governments. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Moreover, Harmer said, the county's governmental relations staff would work closely with the School Board and North Port city leaders regarding the effort to obtain legislative support.

"Realistically, we do have to examine the funding closely," County Commissioner Nora Patterson pointed out. "This may be a project you can't break ground on as soon as you acquire the property."

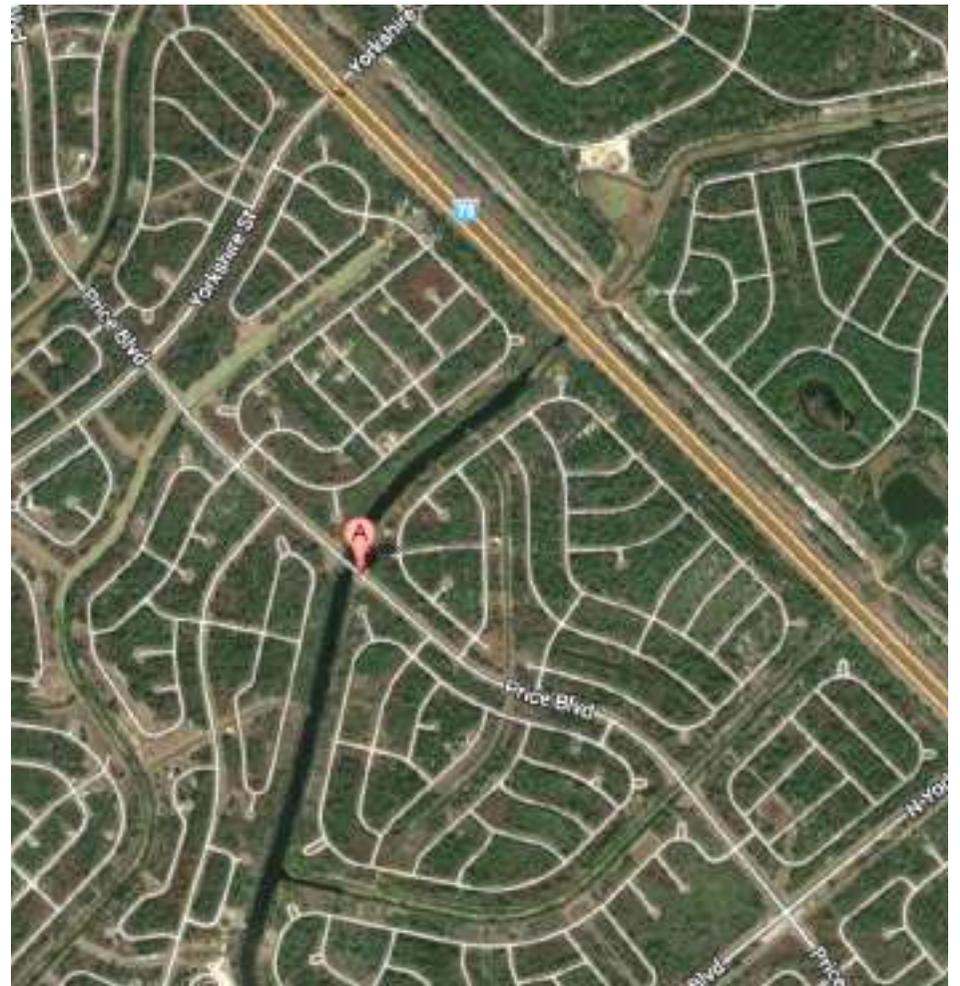
Patterson also noted that the expense of operating the new library would be another factor for County Commission consideration. She estimated that cost at \$1 million per year.

While Blucher said he appreciated Patterson's fiscal caution, "I think we all understand we're in a very fragile recovery, and I think part of that recovery is what we're talking about today."

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta urged Marsh to have the site selection committee take a close look at property owned by the City of North Port and the county, to determine whether one of those parcels would be acceptable. "That would obviously save some money and expedite the process if we looked at our own land first."

Marsh replied that North Port property had been reviewed, with one possible location found, but he would work with Herrli, the county's land acquisition manager, to take a closer look at county sites.

When Blucher asked if the district had devised a construction estimate, Marsh told him it did not have a figure "at this point." Staff is "very close, I think, to getting to what that total would be ..." Marsh added that tentative plan calls for the SCTI to be built in phases.



*A map shows part of the area between Price Boulevard and Interstate 75 in North Port. Image from Google Maps*

"It would not be a turn-key project," Bowden noted.

## **OTHER WORDS OF SUPPORT**

Mayor Jim Brown of Longboat Key, Vice Mayor Emilio Carlesimo of Venice, Vice Mayor Willie Shaw of Sarasota and Sarasota City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell all voiced support for a North Port SCTI with a new library. "I don't see how you can't do this," Brown pointed out.

North Port, he added, "[is] where the people are going to come from that are going to fill the jobs in this county."

"I am fully committed to this project," School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin said. "I think it's the most exciting thing that we could possibly do in the school district." 



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# ANOTHER \$7.5 MILLION

*Construction material cluttered Luke Wood Park near downtown Sarasota in late 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## THE CITY COMMISSION GETS A BRIEFING ON FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND COST ESTIMATES TO MAKE LIFT STATION 87 A REALITY AT LAST

By Stan Zimmerman  
*City Editor*

The conclusion of a review of the work done to date on the City of Sarasota's Lift Station 87 in Luke Wood Park shows another \$7.5 million will be needed to complete the project — if all goes well. So far it has not.

After beginning the original estimated \$12.4 million project, the previous engineering team members walked off the site in failure. And it was a good thing they did, for they were on the verge of drilling into

the northern support slab of the Osprey Avenue bridge over Hudson Bayou.

The Sarasota City Commission took the latest news calmly on Tuesday, Jan. 21, while receiving a briefing by city utility officials and the project manager of an engineering company hired to find out what went wrong.

“ I just want [the lift station] finished in my lifetime.

Susan Chapman  
Commissioner  
City of Sarasota



“We're very lucky we didn't have a catastrophe with our utility department,” said Mayor Shannon Snyder. “This is bad

no matter how you cut it. The fact that we found out before we had a bigger tragedy, I thank you for that.”

Much of that original project can be rescued, said Robert Garland, the project manager for McKim & Creed, the consulting engineering firm hired to figure out what went wrong and pick up the pieces. “We have a complete picture of the underground situation,” he said. “The lift station itself is about 85 to 90 percent complete, but we have identified about 200 issues to be addressed in the Phase 2 design.”

Garland hopes the commission will allow his firm to start that Phase 2 work, including designing a new system of pipes and pumps to carry about one-third of the city’s sewage. “We hope to have this built by the final quarter

of 2015,” he added. “We are committed to that schedule.”

Most of Garland’s news was revealed piecemeal in a series of public meetings conducted as a joint effort last year of his team and senior city utility staffers. A public meeting last month at the Waldemere Fire Station in Sarasota was a direct public outreach initiative. But the dollar figures Tuesday were new.

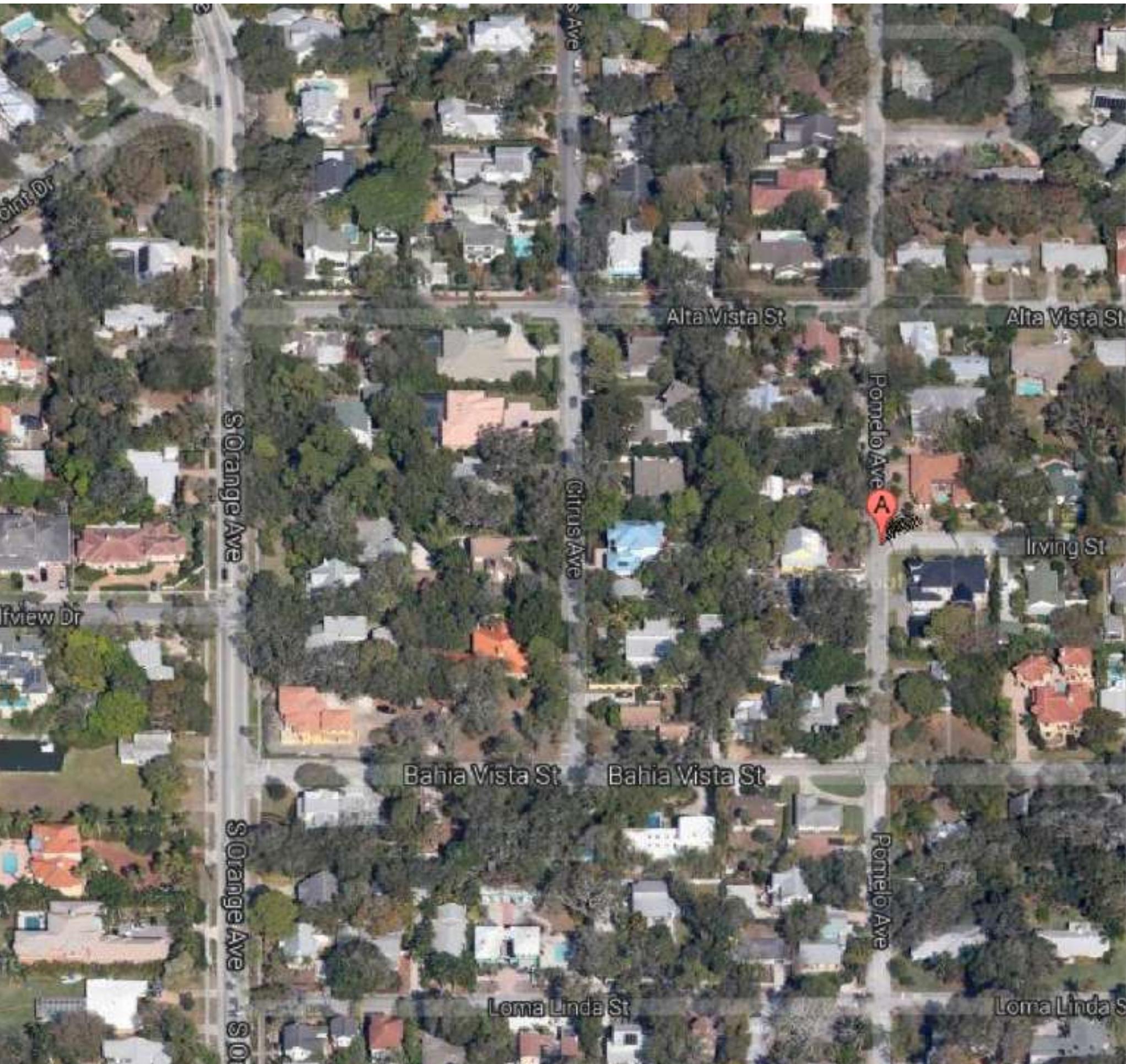
One major and costly change is the need to run pipe deeper under Hudson Bayou. Garland says it must be at least eight feet further below ground than called for in the original plan. That means the pumping station on the north side of the bayou needs to be lower, too.



*In October 2013, the construction site was mostly vacant as a team from a new engineering firm took an intensive look at the Lift Station 87 project. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Snyder asked how the latter could be done. “We can lower the current floor [which is now about 25 feet below the surface], or build something contiguous [using some of the same walls], or go adjacent and put in a new one,” said Garland.

That question will not have a final answer until McKim & Creed is authorized to begin the design phase. The company, in a small way, is already in Phase 2, which will require environmental permitting. Because of the usual delay in getting permits from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the



*A map shows the location of Pomelo Avenue and Alta Vista Street in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps*

company is already filling out the required paperwork.

Garland opened his remarks to the commission by “offering thanks to the residents for their patience.” There will be a need for more residential patience, as some streets will be torn up to install new water, sewer, storm-water and reclaimed water lines. Citizens on Pomelo Avenue and Alta Vista Street will receive access to reclaimed water, if they want to pay a connection charge. The non-potable water is often used for irrigation at a fraction of the cost of drinkable water.

All streets damaged during the work will be completely resurfaced.

## COUNTING THE DOLLARS

The original Lift Station 87 contract was for \$12.4 million. Of that, about \$10 million has been spent, leaving \$2.4 million in the budget. However, the work to complete the project is estimated to run roughly \$9 million, meaning the city will need to find an additional \$7.5 million.

If McKim & Creed gets the green light for Phase Two, the company will be able to provide more refined cost estimates. Garland said he expects the cost to lower the lift station

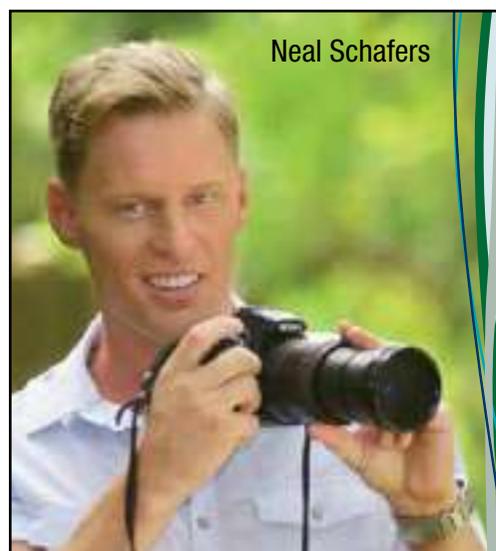
could run between \$400,000 and \$500,000. “And for safety and maintenance, we’ll need a change order with the contractor,” he added. City Utility Director Mitt Tidwell said, “I anticipate that will be about \$1 million.”

The \$9 million already spent includes \$1.1 million for McKim & Creed’s Phase 1 work, as well as \$790,000 to mothball the already-installed pumps and other heavy equipment.

Tidwell noted, “We’re estimating, without the design [work] or negotiations with the contractor, another \$9 million, raising the total price to \$21 million.”

Westra Construction was the contractor for the project, and it is asking for \$2 million for breach of contract with the city, which halted the original work when the former engineering and design firm, AECOM, walked off the job. “These would be damages to recover from AECOM,” said Deputy City Attorney Mike Connolly. The city sued AECOM after it stopped work. So far, the city has spent more than \$400,000 in legal expenses in the case.

The City Commission accepted the legal news with resignation. Said Commissioner Susan Chapman, “I just want [the lift station] finished in my lifetime.” 



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# TAP WATER AND SOFTWARE

*City residents who do not have backflow preventers will be required to get — and pay for — them.  
Image from photobucket*

## **THE CITY COMMISSION LEARNS THAT ABOUT 3,200 CITY UTILITY CUSTOMERS WILL HAVE TO PAY \$350 FOR A BACKFLOW PREVENTER, AND IT APPROVES NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT COMPUTER EQUIPMENT**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

If you have a pool or well, a unanimous decision by the City Commission on Jan. 21 is going to cost you \$350. That is the expense of a backflow preventer, which stops contamination of the city's drinking-water system.

The city was planning to give the U-shaped plumbing away for free to residential water customers, and it had \$1.2 million of the devices ready. But the threat of a class-action lawsuit

from a major owner of apartment buildings in town — Harvey Vengroff — prompted the city to abandon “free” and substitute “pay” so all customers are treated equally under the law.

“ *It was at the height of the recession, and there was [City] Commission resistance to forcing people to pay \$350.* ”

Sarah Warren  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Sarasota



The backflow preventers are necessary for homes with irrigation, wells and pools, along with those that use reclaimed water for irrigation. Utilities Director Mitt Tidwell said the city has 19,000

customer connections. About 2,600 already have the devices (for which they paid), while 3,200 other customers need the equipment. The remainder have no requirement for it.

For those who do, the cost will be about \$350. Some customers will simply write a check for that amount, but others can pay under an installment plan. Tidwell estimates the latter would require the addition of about \$10 per month to those homeowners' water bills; the expense would be paid off in three years.

The Utilities Department proposed free preventers so the devices could be installed quickly. "And it was at the height of the recession, and there was [City] Commission resistance to forcing people to pay \$350," Assistant City Attorney Sarah Warren recalled.

Tidwell pointed out, "We have a cross-connection control ordinance, but we've been a little slow in implementation."

That is no longer the case. There are a couple of wrinkles to iron out — interest on the three-year "loan" under the installment plan, perhaps? — but if you need a backflow preventer, be prepared for a visit from someone in your city Utilities Department.

## **POLICE COMPUTER UPGRADE**

It has been a year coming, but the city commissioners this week green-lighted a robust upgrade to the Police Department's computing power. The New World Systems Corp. will receive \$850,000 for the software transaction.

Mayor Shannon Snyder put a stick in the proverbial procurement wheel in late October,



*New Police Department software will make it easy to keep track of officers' locations. File photo*

because New World Systems was being sued by Collier County for \$1.7 million for “non-compliance.” City of Sarasota Procurement Manager Mary Tucker investigated the suit and reported that Collier County had settled the case after mediation.

The problem, she said, is New World offers an off-the-shelf product, while Collier wanted a custom installation. “New World has been in business 32 years,” she said. “And this is their only lawsuit.”

Capt. Corinne Stannish, head of administration for the Police Department, explained the software will allow staff to know the status of officer and auto assignments, and it will use the Global Positioning System to post vehicle locations, either on a map or on a satellite photo. When asked about a specific individual, the new system will “give alerts, pictures, prior activity and past calls,” she said.

Snyder asked in October whether a regional solution would be possible with a single software package. Sarasota Police Department Information Technology Chief Adam Richter said on Tuesday, “There’s no perfect solution for data sharing with local agencies.” But he added that state software — Cop-Link — “is a giant system in our state, and all of our officers have a log-in.”

“[The New World package would be] the core software for our department,” added Richter.



*Mayor Shannon Snyder listens to comments during a City Commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

The Orlando Police Department has used the company’s software for 25 years, Stannish said.

The money to buy the software package will not come from the city’s general fund. Instead, it will come from the proceeds of the \$25 million bond issue approved by voters to build and equip the new Police Department on Adams Lane, overlooking Payne Park. The purchase was approved by a 4-1 vote, with Snyder in the minority. **SNL**

## QUICK TIP



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# WHO PAYS FOR THIS CLEANING?

*Downtown Improvement District board members say outdoor dining is one primary reason city sidewalks stay dirty. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS LOOK TO THE CITY FOR HELP IN REMOVING GRIME – AND CHEWING GUM – FROM THE SIDEWALKS**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

In its “salad days,” the Sarasota Downtown Improvement District board members considered sidewalk cleaning an important task, but peripheral to their major mission — downtown beautification. Now that a beautification has been completed, the DID is so short of money that sidewalk scrubbing is almost out of financial reach.

During the group’s Jan. 21 meeting, members looked for ways to soften the cost. First up was a representative of the Downtown

Merchants Association (DMA). Ron Champion, who is that group’s “chairman of clean sidewalks,” said, “We’d like to partner with the DID to clean our sidewalks to a higher level.”

The problem is grease, grit and gum, in that order. Champion’s plan is for the DID to front as much as \$25,000 for the DMA to buy a sidewalk cleaning machine. The merchants association would take it from there, hiring a part-time retiree to

“*We’d like to partner with the DID to clean our sidewalks to a higher level.*”

Ron Champion  
Member  
Downtown Merchants Association



operate the equipment. “We can run a scrubbing machine; cover the cost of water and detergent,” noted Campion. “Your part would be to fund the machine.’

However, the machine would not remove chewing gum. That requires a different machine, which costs \$4,000. “Is this worth pursuing?” asked Campion.

Sidewalk cleaning was put forward as a high-priority task when promoters sought the approval of downtown property owners to create the district and tax themselves 2 mills annually to fund it. “It’s the first thing we’re supposed to be doing,” said the DID’s newest board member, Ron Soto.

“Our sidewalks are a disgrace,” said DID board member Eileen Hampshire. “I’m supporting

of anything to make the sidewalks clean.” She regularly spruces up the sidewalk in front of her business on Palm Avenue. “I think the merchants can organize and pay for it,” she added.

Board member Dr. Mark Kauffman suggested another solution. “Maybe the city could offer something. The primary reason for dirty sidewalks is the restaurants. Either they wash every two weeks, or pay the city to do it. This is labor-intensive,” he said.

The city has tried on two previous occasions to solicit a sidewalk-cleaning company, but in both cases, the responses were not deemed sufficient. Now a third Request for Proposals is to be released at the end of the month. Michael del Rossi with the city’s Public Works Department said, “Twice before, it didn’t work



*Main Street underwent a beautification project last year at Downtown Improvement District expense. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

out. Now we're going for a three-year contract, including removing the gum. We would do [the work] twice a year. The city would fund that."

DID Chairman Ernie Ritz suggested restaurants pay more for sidewalk cafe permits to cover the expense. "Something in the range of \$500 or \$1,000 per year," said Kauffman. "Only for restaurants with outdoor dining."

Kauffman added that the DID might be willing to put some money towards "supplemental cleaning," but he noted, "I think there is a limit to how much the downtown merchants can contribute."

Hampshire added another funding source to the mix, suggesting the old "business tax" be

tapped. "The inventory tax on retail establishments may be a source," she said.

While the difference between "clean" and "dirty" concrete is simply shades of grey, the chewing gum residue is immediately apparent. Therefore, maybe the city should tax chewing gum retailers, but that idea was not raised.

## DENSITY ALERT

In other business this week, Karin Murphy with the city's Urban Design Studio gave a short briefing to the DID. She said her team is looking at measures to provide incentives for downtown redevelopment. One might be new building code language concerning first-floor measurements. "It could remove the penalty for higher ceilings," added Murphy.



*The Urban Design Studio operates under City of Sarasota aegis in the Federal Building on Orange Avenue in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Another incentive would be higher densities — more dwelling units per acre. She noted a triple-density plan is moving forward in the Rosemary District across Fruitville Road from downtown. She also suggested the possibility of transferring development rights to increase downtown density.

Some historic buildings in downtowns are destroyed simply because of the underlying density of the zoning. A two-story historic hardware store, for example, could be torn down to build a 10-story condominium. The Historic Preservation Board recently cleared the way for such action on Second Street, allowing demolition of a two-story apartment building on the historic register to facilitate construction of a 10-story hotel.

A transfer of development rights (TDR) would allow the owner of the hypothetical historic hardware store to sell the excess units allowed on the property to facilitate a development with extra density elsewhere in a defined area. TDRs create a “market” for density that can be bought, sold, bartered or swapped among buyers and sellers.

The county is starting to use TDRs, allowing density transfers from agricultural land



*Dr. Mark Kauffman is a DID board member.  
Photo courtesy City of Sarasota*

(making it no longer developable) to “urban villages” east of Interstate 75.

The TDR and other ideas from the studio will get a public airing on Wednesday, Jan. 29, at 5:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Selby Public Library at Five Points. 

## Someone you know needs Planned Parenthood

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





## MAKING IT HAPPEN

*Todd Bowden of the Sarasota County Schools talks about workforce development during the Convocation of Governments on Jan. 21. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

### **SIXTEEN STUDENTS IN SARASOTA COUNTY ARE ON THE PATH TO GRADUATE WITH PRECISION MACHINING SKILLS THAT COULD EARN THEM ANNUAL PAY UP TO \$90,000 IN A FEW YEARS**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

Almost 17 months after the Sarasota County Commission and the Sarasota County School Board agreed to collaborate on a new workforce initiative in response to a survey of area manufacturers, 16 students are learning precision machining skills in a program launched late last summer at Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI), local government officials from all over the county learned Jan. 17 during the annual Convocation of Governments at SCTI.

Mireya Eavey, executive director of [CareerEdge Funders Collaborative](#), and Todd Bowden, executive director of career, technical and adult education in the Sarasota County Schools, provided an overview of the program during the session, which was

“*They’re going to be making \$80,000, \$90,000 per year.*”

Mireya Eavey  
Executive Director  
CareerEdge Funders Collaborative

hosted by the School Board and attended by mayors and city council members and commissioners, along with the county commissioners.

After six or seven years, Eavey said of precision machinists, “They’re going to be making \$80,000, \$90,000 per year.”

When Mayor Jim Brown of Longboat Key asked the cost of the program, Bowden replied that it is less than \$4,000.

“I can tell you today we are receiving calls about when that [first] class is graduating,”

Bowden told the group. Additionally, the new precision machining lab “has turned out to be quite popular on a statewide basis,” he added. SCTI has hosted representatives of half a dozen other technical institutes, most of whom asked how the school was able to get the program up and running in such a short time frame, Bowden pointed out.



*North Port City Commissioner Rhonda DiFranco (foreground, seated) prepares for the start of the Convocation of Governments as Schools Superintendent Lori White (left rear) speaks with Longboat Town Commissioner David Brenner and Mireya Eavey (standing to the right of DiFranco) talks with Todd Bowden. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

His answer, Bowden explained, is that with this model, “Employers take the lead and a variety of organizations line up behind them to make things happen.”

County commissioners also took the opportunity to note that the current vice chairwoman of their board — Christine Robinson — called for timelines to be set to ensure community leaders took action in response to the 2012 manufacturers’ survey.

During an Aug. 29, 2012, joint meeting of the School Board and the County Commission, Stephanie Kempton, a professional researcher with her own firm, Kempton Research and Planning, presented findings from the survey of manufacturers in Sarasota and Manatee

counties. Among the results, Kempton said, was a response from 100 people indicating that 41 percent of the jobs that had gone unfilled for three or more months were classified as “skilled production” — positions for production machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors and technicians.

Moreover, a pool of 105 responses indicated that 75 percent of the companies surveyed had between one and 10 positions open.

Fifty-six of 103 respondents said they needed to hire skilled production workers, “which is a huge percentage,” Kempton pointed out.

Eavey commissioned the survey on behalf of CareerEdge after discussions with Bowden,



*Students participate in training in the precision machinists program at SCTI. Image courtesy School Board*

she explained to the board. He had told her he needed data about what careers were available and what employee skills manufacturers were seeking before addressing any changes in the SCTI curriculum.

In November 2012, Bowden announced that the school district was working on the new precision manufacturing program. That came as a result of the work of a committee organized to address the survey results. The County Commission provided \$330,000 to buy the necessary equipment, Eavey noted on Jan. 17.

Bowden added that the first class will graduate on June 26; its members were seated on Sept. 3. While SCTI originally planned to start the program in August 2013, he said, "It was the hiring of the instructor that I thought would be the lynchpin for success of this program."

That person proved to be Edward Doherty, a machinist, Bowden continued. "He was born to be a machinist. He loves what he does ... He absolutely has a passion for manufacturing."

Doherty joined the SCTI faculty on Aug. 26. To make sure the class can graduate in late June, Bowden pointed out, the students will work through spring break and on some Saturdays.

As part of the course, Bowden noted, the students will spend two weeks — one each — at two different machine shops on a full-time basis. It is not enough for them to just visit a manufacturing facility, he added, or to spend a day at such a place.

The approach SCTI settled on, he explained, is a result of the effort to make sure the students



*Ed Doherty is the precision machining program instructor at SCTI. Image courtesy School Board*

can find work after graduation. "We expect job offers to flow better" after manufacturers see the students at work with regular employees over each of those weeks, he said.

Still, if every student cannot find a job, Bowden told the local government leaders he plans to call people at area firms to remind them of the commitment they made to the program.

## **THE ROAD AHEAD**

Recruiting the first class — which began with 18 people — was not difficult, Bowden pointed out. However, recruiting the second, third and fourth classes may be more challenging.

Already, he said, efforts are under way to market the program to high school seniors and to recent high school graduates.

“We are developing an outreach video for the students, so they can get excited about high-technology manufacturing,” Eavey pointed out.

One other factor that could help with demand for such classes at SCTI, Bowden explained, would be the ability to change the name of the school from “institute” to “college.” An initiative already is under way in the Florida House of Representatives to make that possible, he noted.

“Students continually talk, ‘College, college, college,’” he told the School Board during its Jan. 21 workshop, and “Everybody wants their baby to go to college ...”

By next year, Bowden said during the convocation, he hopes SCTI and the 48 other institutions similar to it in Florida will be known as technical colleges.

The next precision machining class will get under way on Aug. 18 at SCTI, Bowden said, with 18 students expected in that group and a second class of six in an evening program. Those in the latter group will need one-and-a-half years to graduate, he added.

“At that point, we’ll have some staggered graduations,” he said. The program’s commitment calls for 100 new machinists to be available in the community in five years, he explained.

Further, while school district leaders made a promise to manufacturers to undertake the precision machining program first, Bowden

said if it proves as successful as the survey indicated it would be, school leaders will consider starting a welding program. “We’re preparing to engage the community again and say, ‘If you will lead, we’re prepared to follow.’ It has got to be led by the employers.”

CareerEdge is getting ready to organize the members of the committee that worked on the precision machining program so they can determine whether demand is sufficient for welding classes, he said.

Research has shown that a common skills set can be applied in 80 percent of the manufacturing jobs available, Bowden also noted. The other 20 percent is too specialized, he said, to make it economically feasible to create specific programs to answer those needs.

## **KUDOS OFFERED**

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta praised the work of Bowden and Eavey. “I think you’re on track to make [the program] super successful.”

Barbetta also extended “special thanks” to County Commissioner Robinson “for keeping this one on the front burner and pushing it forward.”

He thanked the School Board, too, for its commitment.

Robinson was among the numerous local government officials who took advantage of an opportunity before the convocation began to tour the precision machining facilities. She was very pleased with what she saw, she told *The Sarasota News Leader*. 



## BEACH BLANKETS, ANYONE???

*With sand stockpiled in the background for use in the construction, the dignitaries and the audience gather for the event to begin. All photos by Norman Schimmel*

### **COUNTY LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF SIESTA KEY ORGANIZATIONS MARK THE FORMAL BEGINNING OF REFURBISHMENTS TO SIESTA PUBLIC BEACH**

#### *Staff Reports*

Sarasota County Commission Chairman Charles Hines emailed Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer on Monday, writing, “Weather permitting — I think it would be fun for those Commissioners who are attending the Siesta Key ground break to wear Florida style outfits rather than the standard business attire. Any thoughts?”

Harmer’s response: “I like the idea. Let me know and the staff I am sure will be happy to participate.”

Unfortunately, the temperature at Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport just before the 11 a.m. ceremony began was 54 degrees, with the wind blowing out of the north at

12 mph. As *Sarasota News Leader* Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel, who was at the beach, put it, “It is freezing!”

Most of the attendees may have been attired more appropriately for New York City in the winter than a tropical Florida beach visit, but the event nonetheless was festive.

The \$21.5 million project will put a fresh face on facilities that county officials say are long overdue for upgrades.

Among the facets of the effort will be restoration of the historic pavilion and the creation of a 15-foot-wide esplanade along the entire length of the beach park, to provide a safer means for people to get from one end to the

other without having to deal with traffic in the parking lots.

In remarks the previous day at a meeting of the Siesta Key Condominium Council, Commissioner Nora Patterson — who lives on Siesta — said of the project, “We’re really doing it up big.”

She explained that the work will be done in phases, “because we can’t shut down major portions of the parking [areas]” all at one time.

While she added that she felt the overall expense of the project was too high, Patterson noted the improvements will add about 16 percent more parking spaces to the facility. Still, she told the audience of about 50 people, “It’s pretty packed now, so I can’t say more people will enjoy it.”

Nonetheless, when the project is completed, she said she believes the result “will be gorgeous.” 



*Chairman Charles Hines remarks on the importance of the occasion.*



*A windblown Carolyn Brown, director of the Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department, offers remarks on the project.*



*A sculpture by Siesta Key master sand sculptor Brian Wigelsworth stood as the centerpiece for the event.*



*A close-up of Brian Wigelsworth's sand sculpture shows how it pays homage to the improvement plans.*



*Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, offers her thoughts.*



*The Sarasota County commissioners are bundled up in the brisk wind before the start of the event: (front row, from left) Nora Patterson, Charles Hines, Carolyn Mason, Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson.*



*The chairs are all set up, awaiting the attendees in the playground area on the eastern side of the beach park.*



*Let the breaking of ground begin!*



*Siesta Key Association President Catherine Luckner takes a turn at the podium.*



*Homeless people gather on Central Avenue in Sarasota in early 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **ANNUAL HOMELESS CENSUS TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN COUNTIES**

The Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness, working in tandem with its partners and volunteers, will be conducting the Annual Homeless Census on the night of Monday, Jan. 27, the nonprofit organization has announced.

Known as a “Point-in-Time” count, this national survey focuses on who is homeless during a single night in January, and “it captures substantially more demographic information” than the survey done in the fall for homelessness consultant Dr. Robert Marbut, who was hired by the City and County of Sarasota, a news release points out.

“The results of this survey are critical to targeted planning to meet the needs of families and individuals experiencing homelessness,” the release explains. “This required survey qualifies the region for nearly \$800,000 in

federal funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.”

The programs benefiting in this current funding cycle are Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice’s Our Mother’s House and Casa San Jose programs, the Salvation Army of Sarasota’s F.A.I.T.H. program, [Harvest Tabernacle](#) and [Renaissance Manor/CASL](#), the release notes. “In addition, smaller federal grants support planning and the continued improvement of the data and case management software that providers need to coordinate services,” the release says.

Volunteers are still needed to assist both during and after the count, the release continues. Anyone interested in volunteering in Sarasota County may contact the Volunteer Community Connections office at [connectingvolunteers.org](http://connectingvolunteers.org) or by calling 953-5965.

## CONTROL GROWTH NOW TO HONOR RANDALL REID AS CITIZEN OF YEAR

Local civic organization Control Growth Now (CGN) will honor former Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid as its Citizen of the Year at the group's 25th Anniversary Annual Meeting and Luncheon, it has announced.

The event will be held on Saturday, March 15, beginning at 11:30 a.m. at Marina Jack's upstairs meeting room overlooking Sarasota Bay, a news release notes.

Control Growth Now is honoring Randall Reid, says the group's president, attorney Dan Lobeck, "because he put ethics and sensible planning first in his service to all of the people of Sarasota County," the release continues.

Among CGN's other speakers will be County Commission candidate Lourdes Ramirez.

Registration for the luncheon is \$20, with a choice of pan seared grouper, chicken caprese or vegetarian plate. The meal will include rice, a vegetable, dessert and choice of tea or coffee.

25 YEARS

For a Better Sarasota County

Reserve Your Place TODAY

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

Attend the 25th Anniversary Control Growth Now Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Saturday **March 15** 11:30 am at Marina Jack's

Honoring as **Citizen of the Year**  
Former Sarasota County Administrator  
**Randall Reid**

★ Please Complete and Return the Attached Registration ★

The event is open to the public. Guests may register by calling Lobeck at 364-8777 or 955-5622.

## FIRST STEP TO HONOR KNIGHT AT ANNUAL CARING HEARTS LUNCHEON

First Step of Sarasota Inc., a nonprofit substance abuse treatment agency, will honor Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight at the 11th Annual Caring Hearts Luncheon, scheduled for Feb. 19 at Michael's On East in Sarasota, the organization has announced.

"Each year, First Step presents the Caring Heart of the Year award to an individual who has made a positive impact in the community, with a focus on those whose efforts have improved the lives of women and children" or those who have dedicated themselves to raising awareness or providing treatment for

substance abuse or mental health disorders, a news release explains.

Since he was first elected in 2008, "Knight has worked diligently to increase awareness of the dangers of prescription drug abuse," the release adds. He implemented a Pharmaceutical Diversion Investigative Unit and permanent drop boxes for the safe disposal of unused medications, for example, the release says. Recently, Knight brought the state's [Safe Sleep Campaign](#) to Sarasota County, the release points out. "The Sheriff's Office is working with child safety advocates

to educate mothers about safe sleeping environments and will provide them with brand new portable cribs,” it adds.

The Caring Hearts Luncheon benefits First Step’s Mothers and Infants program and is “a celebration of the healthy, drug-free babies born each year thanks to the efforts of [that] program,” the release explains. “In this specialized program, pregnant women receive both group and individual counseling for their substance abuse disorders, along with parenting, nutrition and life skills classes,” the release says. “The residential program is proud to have celebrated the births of 322 healthy, drug-free babies,” it notes.

For more information about the 11th Annual Caring Hearts Luncheon, visit [www.fsos.org](http://www.fsos.org) or call Kelly French at 552-2065.



*Sheriff Tom Knight/Contributed photo*

## **GOODWILL MANASOTA LAUNCHING GOOD READERS PROGRAM**

Goodwill Manasota launched its Good Readers program on Jan. 23 at Alta Vista Elementary School in Sarasota, “to engage students and help develop and foster a love of reading,” the organization notes in a news release.

At Alta Vista, 94 percent of students are living in households below the poverty line, a news release points out. Goodwill representatives presented each student with complimentary books at the end of the session.

“Strong literacy skills are closely linked to the probability of having a good job, decent earnings and access to training opportunities,” said Bob Rosinsky, president and CEO of Goodwill Manasota, in the release. “It is the greatest weapon in the ongoing struggle between success and failure — between economic vitality and prosperity,” he adds in the release.

“Research has shown that reading is the single most important activity for literacy development and is critically linked to children’s later success,” the release explains. “Unfortunately, poverty and illiteracy are closely connected and parents raising children in poverty are less likely to buy or have access to books and more likely to have limited literacy skills themselves. The goal of the Good Readers program is to provide additional support and assistance,” the release adds.

“Education has always been a focus for us,” said Rosinsky in the release. “This time we are reaching out to educationally at-risk students, to provide help to those who need it most.”

Anyone who would like to participate in the Good Readers program may contact Goodwill Manasota at 355-2721, Ext. 114, or email Rick Hughes at [Rick.Hughes@gimi.org](mailto:Rick.Hughes@gimi.org).

## BOBBY JONES GOLF CLUB SEEKS COMMENTS FOR STRATEGIC PLAN

The City of Sarasota's Bobby Jones Golf Club has scheduled a public meeting to discuss the development of the *Bobby Jones Golf Club Strategic Plan*, the city has announced.

The session is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 28, at 6 p.m. at the Bobby Jones Clubhouse Restaurant, located at 1000 Circus Blvd. in Sarasota.

"We're seeking input from our residents, golfers, business owners and visitors to establish a new strategic plan," said Susan Martin, club manager, in a news release. "This plan will be the blueprint for the future of the golf club, and we welcome all comments from our citizens," she adds in the release.

## PHASE 2 OF THE CITY'S DOWNTOWN MOORING FIELD COMPLETED

The City of Sarasota has announced the completion of Phase 2 of the Sarasota Bay Mooring Field, which includes an additional 35 moorings, bringing the total to 70.

Each mooring anchor is storm-rated and designed for vessels up to 100 feet in length, a news release says. In conjunction with the mooring field, a new "Slow Speed — Minimum Wake" zone has been installed and delineated with post-mounted signs, the release adds.

Late this year, Phase 3 will get under way with the placement of the final 39 additional

moorings, which will bring the total to 109, the release points out.

The mooring field is managed by Sarasota Moorings LLC, located at Marina Jack and accessible from Big Pass, New Pass and the Intracoastal Waterway, the release notes. "The use of the mooring field provides guests with a host of great amenities," including two dinghy dock locations, shower and laundry access, pump-out services and "a full-time friendly staff," it adds. Rental information, including rates, may be found at [www.marinajacks.com/marina/sarasota-bay-mooring-field.html](http://www.marinajacks.com/marina/sarasota-bay-mooring-field.html).



Boats rest at their moorings on the Sarasota bayfront. Photo by Norman Schimmel

## PRESIDENT OF BOSTON FEDERAL RESERVE TO SPEAK AT NEW COLLEGE

Eric Rosengren, president and chief executive officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, will discuss the nation's economic outlook as part of the New Topics New College lecture series, the college has announced.

Rosengren's presentation will be at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 6, in the Mildred Sainer Pavilion at New College, a news release says.

"Rosengren has written extensively on macroeconomics, international banking, bank supervision and risk management," including articles in leading economics and finance

journals, the release notes. "Much of his recent research has focused on how problems in the financial sector impact the real economy," the release adds.

Sainer Pavilion is on New College's Caples Campus, directly south of The Ringling museum complex, at 5313 Bay Shore Road. Admission will be \$20 for the public; it will be free to New College students, faculty and staff.

The public may reserve seats online at [donate.ncf.edu/events](https://donate.ncf.edu/events) or by calling 487-4888.



*New College of Florida is located just north of Sarasota on U.S. 41. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## HISTORIC SPANISH POINT INVITING COUPLES TO 'DO IT AGAIN'

Married couples will have the opportunity to say, "Be my forever valentine," in a special way at Historic Spanish Point on Friday, Feb. 14, the site has announced.

The museum is offering — *Let's Do it Again ... at Mary's Chapel* — "a day of memorable wedding vow renewal ceremonies planned for Valentine's Day in a historic setting," a news release says.

Couples will participate in a 30-minute ceremony conducted by a wedding officiant in

Mary's Chapel on the museum grounds, the release adds. Each couple will receive a photo keepsake of the event, a certificate of vow renewal and champagne and chocolates at the Pergola. Each couple may bring four guests, the release notes.

The cost is \$199 per couple. Reservations are limited and required.

For more information or to reserve a spot, call Gilly Francis at 468-0611.



*The Pergola is one of Historic Spanish Point's landmarks. Image courtesy Historic Spanish Point*

## SARASOTA COUNTY LIBRARIES TO OFFER FREE PUBLIC WEBINARS

The Sarasota County Library System will be continuing its free webinar offerings throughout the year, with a focus on topics such as technology, self-empowerment, parenting, personal finance and entrepreneurship, the county has announced. These webinars will be presented once live, and they then will be archived and viewable for one year from any computer, a news release notes.

Sarasota County library card holders can access and register for webinars online at the libraries' web page at [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net). Classes may be taken from any Mac or PC at home, in an office or at a patron computer in a library, the release explains. "No additional software or components are needed, except for headphones at the library," it adds.

The first classes offered are designed to assist tech-savvy individuals or those wanting to be more tech-savvy:

- Jan. 29 at 3 p.m.: *Best Apps for Your Tablet* will explain "how to best use the growing mobile application marketplace," and it

will share ideas and suggestions on some of the best applications for e-readers, "productivity, homework and learning, children and fun," the release notes.

- Feb. 26 at 3 p.m.: *Social Media Basics* will give participants a look at how to connect, share, learn and explore the world through the social media programs Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

Among the upcoming webinars will be *Creating Effective Websites* on March 12, *Keeping Your Family Safe Online* on Sept. 10, and *Getting the Most Out of the Internet in 2014 and Beyond!* on Sept. 24.

Library patrons are encouraged to register and attend the live sessions, or utilize the archived sessions during the year, the release continues. For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000.



Selby Public Library is in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

## CITY COMMISSION SCHEDULES UPGRADES TO ITS CHAMBERS

The City of Sarasota has scheduled much-needed upgrades for the City Commission Chambers beginning Feb. 24, the city has announced.

The upgrades will require approximately two weeks to complete, a news release says. During that period, the Sarasota City Commission will be hosted by the Sarasota Board of County Commissioners for the March 3 regular Sarasota City Commission meeting in the County Commission Chambers on the first floor of the Sarasota County Administration Building. That facility is located at 1660 Ringling Blvd. in downtown Sarasota.

Meeting locations for city advisory boards will be determined and noticed in advance, the release adds.

“The audio-visual equipment upgrades are necessary to replace outdated and failing

technology” so the City of Sarasota can continue to broadcast live City Commission and advisory board meetings “without the service interruptions currently experienced on a routine basis,” the release notes. The upgrades are part of the city’s “continuing effort to assure the public of transparency and openness” in city government, the release continues.

Meeting locations for the City Commission and advisory boards will be announced on the meeting notices regularly sent out in advance of those sessions, the release says. Anyone who has not already done so may sign up for City of Sarasota eSubscriptions by visiting [www.sarasotagov.com](http://www.sarasotagov.com). In the lower left corner under “News and Events,” select “eSubscriptions,” and then select the meetings for which you would like to receive notices, the release points out. 



*The March 3 City Commission meeting will be held in the County Commission Chambers in the Administration Building on Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota. File photo*



*Shelley Bezanson is shown with her dog after she adopted it from the Humane Society of Sarasota County. Photo courtesy Sheriff's Office*

## **OSPREY WOMAN CHARGED WITH KILLING HER DOG**

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a 28-year-old woman "for killing her dog in a cruel and painful manner because she didn't want anyone else to have it," the Sheriff's Office has reported.

The Animal Services division was contacted by the Venice Police Department in November after receiving a report that Shelley Bezanson, 28, of 42 W. Oak Street, Unit F3, Osprey, had killed her seven-year-old dog, Diamond, and planned to bury it at a home on Base Avenue, a news release says. The investigation revealed that Bezanson had tried to convince her veterinarian to euthanize Diamond, but the request was refused "because the animal was not sick and there was no ethical or justifiable reason to do so," the release adds.

"The vet's staff had encouraged Bezanson to return Diamond to the Sarasota Humane Society," it continues, "but she refused and chose to kill the dog herself."

"A necropsy confirmed Diamond was strangled and suffered a prolonged, painful and cruel death," the release adds.

Bezanson was taken into custody Friday, Jan. 17, and charged with Cruelty to Animals: Resulting in Cruel Death. She is being held on a \$25,000 bond.



*Shelley Bezanson/Contributed photo*

## BRADENTON MAN CHARGED WITH POSSESSION OF CRACK COCAINE

Charles Williams, 41, of Bradenton, has been charged with felony possession of crack cocaine after he told officers, "I don't smoke cigarettes, I smoke weed," the Sarasota Police Department reported on Jan. 23.

Officers were on patrol in the area of Whitaker Park (1401 N. Tamiami Trail) in Sarasota when they observed several people sitting at a table on the north end of the park, a news release says. As they approached the people, the officers "noticed Williams turn around on the bench where he was sitting and drop a cigarette box to the ground," the release adds. Officers told Williams he dropped his cigarettes, the release continues, prompting his response about smoking "weed."

After officers picked up the cigarette box and opened it, the release says, they found it contained a small blue plastic bag containing



*Charles Williams/Contributed photo*

what they suspected was four pieces of crack cocaine, the release adds. They then conducted a field test on the suspected cocaine, which had a positive result.

Williams was placed under arrest for Possession of Crack Cocaine and taken to the Sarasota County Jail, the release says. 

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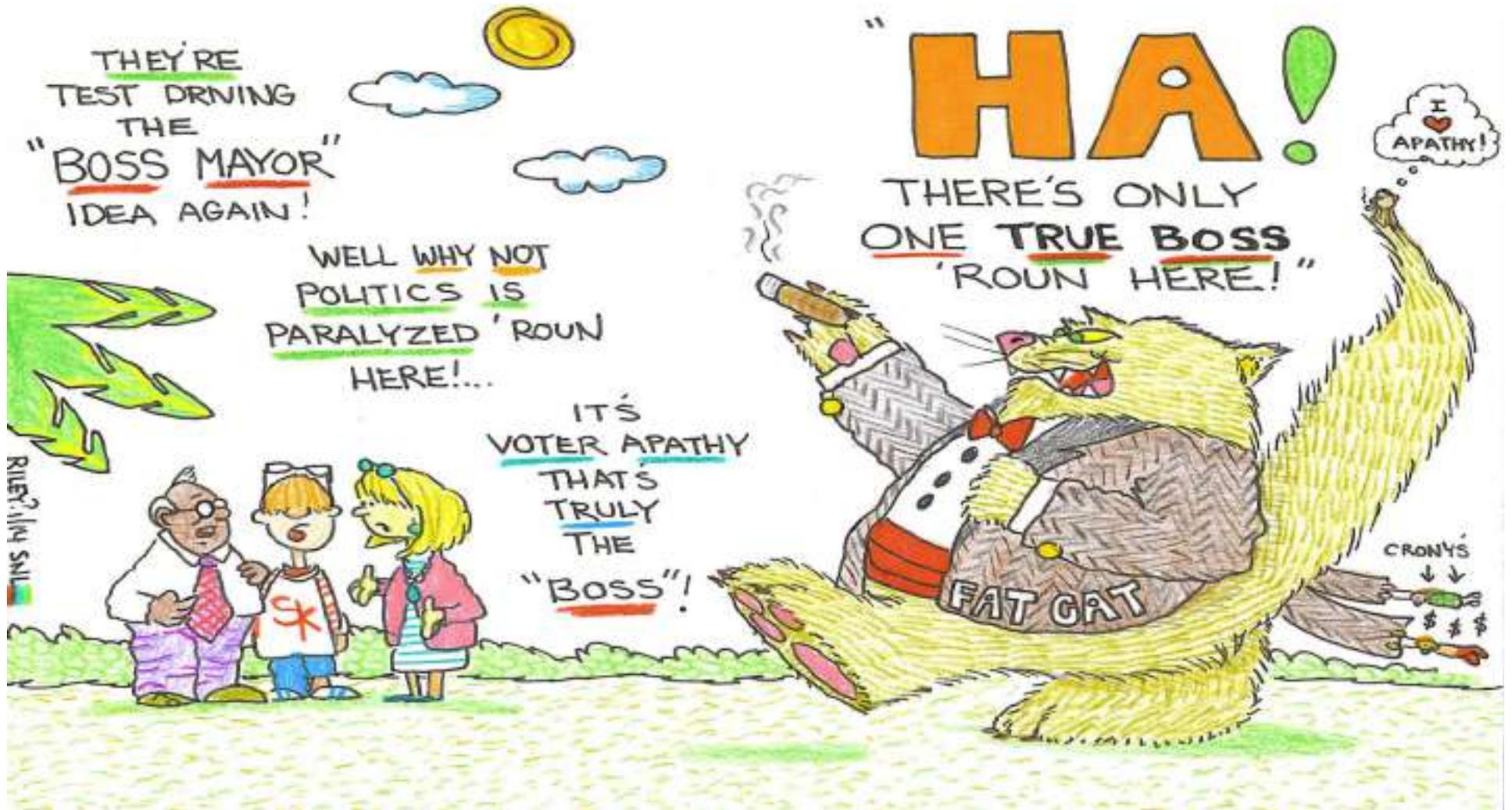
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# OPINION



## CITY OF SARASOTA NEEDS ALL CITIZENS ACTIVELY INVOLVED

### EDITORIAL

An old joke has a newspaper reporter approaching a voter, asking him, “How do you respond to the assertion that most voters are ignorant and apathetic?”

The voter replies, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!”

As news has spread that yet another attempt is being made to alter the City of Sarasota’s government, this time with a from-scratch replacement of the existing city charter, one has to wonder if it is not more prudent to look at the root causes of the city’s issues. And the primary focus should be on a disconnected and uncaring citizenry.

Despite the hope we expressed here a year ago that more qualified citizens would step forward and offer themselves as candidates for the City Commission, only the six candidates already announced actually filed. And while all of the candidates were serious in their desire to win election, not all were serious choices for the voters.

That was reflected, sadly, in the first round of balloting on March 12, when barely 17 percent of registered voters straggled to the polls. The runoff election, which decided the two new commissioners from among the three finalists, was not much better: Not even one-in-five voters bothered to cast a ballot.

# OPINION

Many pundits over the years have offered many theories as to why the voters of the city appear so disinterested in their government. Certainly, the combined factors of ignorance and apathy have their roles.

Despite numerous public appearances by candidates throughout the campaign period, only a handful of people ever showed up for the events. And, likely, many in attendance were the same who went to other events. The larger majority of the city's voters were not reached, either because those persons were not aware of opportunities to meet their candidates, or because they simply did not care about the process.

Now a new collective — or old collective, if one looks at the principals involved in this latest effort — is attempting yet again to have the City of Sarasota establish a “strong mayor” — one elected directly by the voters, with executive authority to run the city, assisted by a hired deputy mayor, which would correspond to our current city manager. Rather than the entire City Commission — which would now be called the City Council — setting policy and giving orders to the city manager, only the mayor would be giving direction to the deputy mayor.

And while the mayor would not have a vote during City Council meetings, he or she would be able to veto actions of the council, subject to an override by at least four of the five council members.

Some critics of this new proposal have pointed out that the latest effort has been conducted in the shadows, with an entirely new city charter

*Some critics of this new proposal have pointed out that the latest effort has been conducted in the shadows, with an entirely new city charter drafted without any public participation ... not even by the city's Charter Review Board.*

ter drafted without any public participation ... not even by the city's Charter Review Board. These critics believe that the proponents, having failed in the past to convince city voters to endorse a strong mayor, are

attempting to offer an entirely new charter they hope will be more attractive to voters. Certainly, it will be more confusing.

There have been three attempts in recent years to establish a strong mayor in Sarasota, and every effort has been soundly defeated by voters, by an average two-to-one margin. Is it assumed by the proponents of this new city charter that those rebukes were because the issue was establishing a strong mayor only, and not putting forth a wholesale revamping of the city charter (which also would establish a strong mayor)?

Nonetheless, the group proposing the new charter has put forth one idea worthy of

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# OPINION

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consideration: moving municipal elections to November, when voter turnout tends to be higher. It would be higher still if the elections for municipal officials were held in even years, when county officials are selected.

Consider the general election of 2012, which also had a presidential contest on the ballot. A number of charter amendments for the City of Sarasota were on the ballot and more than 55 percent of city voters turned out to cast ballots on those proposals, defeating the vast majority. But the fact remains that more than three times as many city voters cast ballots for or against those charter amendments in November than cast ballots for the election of two new city commissioners the following March. Therefore, holding city elections in even years in November should have the effect of dramatically increasing voter participation.

Of course, that change will not address the eye-rolling and yawning by city voters as the usual cadre of hacks and rejects file to run, yet again, for a plum seat on the City Commission. It still is necessary for seriously qualified and civic-minded citizens to step forward and offer themselves for election to the City Commission.

We believe the traditional election in March even further suppresses voter turnout. The sad effect of this is that a handful of city voters make the biennial Hobson's Choice for the latest additions to the City Commission, and that dysfunctional body then continues

to struggle with the major issues confronting the city. It becomes, to use a popular computer-programming acronym, "GIGO" — "garbage in, garbage out."

But a wholesale rewriting of the city charter is not needed. Moreover, advocates have not proven that a conversion of the city's governing model to one with a strong mayor is necessary, as indicated by voters' abject rejection of such a proposal the last three times it was attempted.

Moving city elections to November, especially if they are held in even years, just might increase voter participation enough that better-qualified candidates would want to run, and citizens might be more open to serious discussions of amending the city charter.

However, this current dark-of-night approach is wrong, and a disservice to the city — even a city populated by apparently disinterested citizens.

Work to amend the charter to move the city elections to November. Then see how that impacts voter participation.

If it has little or no effect — credible candidates for the City Commission are still in short supply, and voters cannot be bothered to show up on Election Day — then the larger question, which has been broached by some, but mostly ignored, will return to the fore: Does the City of Sarasota even need to exist? 

# OPINION



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **SARASOTA COUNTY HAS ITS OWN VERSION OF ECONOMICS 101**

To the Editor:

Economists, in determining when a recession has truly ended, often look at leading and lagging indicators.

A leading indicator might be a decrease in inventory — the thinking being that if inventory is low, new orders will follow, which would lead to an increase in jobs. A lagging indicator might be a decrease in the level of unemployment, showing that more jobs have already been created. Pumping money into the economy to get the country out of a recession after it is already out of a recession would simply fuel inflation.

In Sarasota, we have a different set of indicators. A leading one is the number of building lots that developers have bought, with projects about to be started. This publication has had many articles about such situations in the past few months. A lagging indicator is the fact that those same developers are asking the city and county to give them variances and to reduce impact fees so they can make additional profits. However, they would not be buying building lots or starting projects if they were not going to make money in the first place.

It seems that the city and county commissioners who give unwarranted variances and cut impact fees when they do not need to do so are pandering to their campaign contributors, lining their own pockets — if their “day jobs” are related to an increase in building activity — or simply reacting to gut feelings rather than a rational analysis of economic factors.

Case in point: On Jan. 14, the County Commission kept the road impact fees at the 2011 levels (when fees were slashed 50 percent to get us out of a recession) and on Feb. 12, it will institute a procedure whereby builders can claim they are still being unfairly treated (having to pay their fair share of required changes to roads necessitated by the construction of new homes).

Inflation might be defined as a faster than normal (or required) increase in the cost of goods — or, in Sarasota, as an unwarranted increase in the amount of existing property for which taxpayers will be assessed relative to the costs of new infrastructure.

*Rodger Skidmore  
Siesta Key*

**Press Releases & News Tips**

**News@SarasotaNewsLeader.com**

# OPINION

## NEWS LEADER BIASED IN COVERAGE OF LIDO PROJECT

To the Editor:

I am disappointed by *The Sarasota News Leader's* one-sided news coverage of the proposal for Lido beach Renourishment Project. I read only of the opposition from Siesta Key (expected, as Sarasota citizens have a long record of objecting to any planned change).

Anyone who has lived on Lido Key for over a decade, as I have, has seen the south point of the key and the shoals to its south expand

greatly as sand from Lido is moved south by natural wave action.

That is, as the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has said, Lido is hoping to get some of its own sand back. I am not going to be dogmatic, but I would hope the *News Leader* would provide more balanced coverage rather than appearing to support the "Great Sand Grab."

David Moore  
Lido Key

## WRITER DISAGREES WITH CHARACTERIZATION OF REPUBLICANS

To the Editor:

I read each issue with considerable interest and find your news articles to be interesting and informative. However, I usually disagree with your opinion pieces.

At issue last week was your characterization of the Republican Party as composed of "moneyed bigwigs" who comprise a "demented" "lunatic fringe" that is "dominated by its right wing." Actually, the Republican Party in Sarasota is dominated by its *left* wing.

Think of it. The "moneyed bigwigs" are constantly seeking various handouts, "favors," tax expenditures in their favor and "subsidies,"

— millions of dollars at a crack. That is not right; it is left!

A single mom welfare cheat costs the taxpayers a few thousand dollars a year. A land developer who may claim to "need help" — even though no one believes that — and seeks favorable treatment by his bought-and-paid-for commissioners gets away with other people's money in the millions! Who, after all, is the real "welfare cheat"?

Welfare for the rich is still welfare! Welfare is left, not right.

Pete Theisen  
Sarasota



### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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

# Sarasota Leisure



**PEACE CORPS  
SHOW WITHIN A SHOW  
FLYING FEET**

**Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast**

*Inside*



## PEACE CORPS

*Jacci Tutt (left) and Arlene Pearlman participate in a Women's Interfaith Network Seder. Photo courtesy [womensinterfaithnetwork.org](http://womensinterfaithnetwork.org)*

### **WORLD PEACE DAY TACKLES OCCUPY WALL STREET, HONORS LOCALS FOR 'RELIGIOUS COURAGE'**

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**  
*Associate Editor*

“I need to find people who aren't like me,” says Arlene Pearlman. “People like me are very nice, but they're the same.”

Six years ago, that simple urge led Pearlman to found the Women's Interfaith Network. But what began as a small group of friends from different backgrounds has grown exponentially, into a community with 124 women from a variety of religions. There are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Bahá'ís — even a Wiccan. The Network offers monthly events that cover faith issues from across the spectrum, and it

organizes a book group, but Pearlman says among its most important cornerstones are the regular conversations called Common Tables. The events bring together six to eight women for lunch; participants are encouraged to talk about the afterlife, their childhoods, their religious traditions and holidays — whatever.

Pearlman notes that the lunches remind attendees that a handful of principles cuts across all belief systems. “We all want our kids to be safe,” she says. “We all want wars to stop.”

That message will resound at this Saturday's World Peace Day, where Pearlman and Jacci Tutt, one of the Network's founding members and a founding board member of Sarasota United for Responsibility, will be presented with the Center for Religious Tolerance's Elisabeth Schilder Award for Courage in Religious Tolerance.

Pearlman adds that she was "tickled" when she found out about the recognition. Tutt says she was "shocked" to be given an award named for a German schoolteacher who challenged Hitler's racial policies after Kristallnacht. For Tutt, the idea of uniting female voices is particularly urgent. "We found that the women were the ones we could rely on for peace-making," she says, "because you guys seem to be messing everything up."

According to Pearlman, men are welcome at the Network's public events, and they frequently ask to join the organization, but Pearlman instead pushes them to form their own group. Keeping the organization centered around women's connectedness is vital, she says. "Nobody's vying to be the alpha dog, which happens with men. It's a level playing field. We want to be friends. We don't want to be adversaries. We don't want to be in competition."

But, "it would be cool to see men doing it," she adds. "Then we could have a prom."

Tutt sees a big difference in how open to diversity Sarasota residents have become. She moved here 20 years ago. Even local plays and shows have become more diverse, she says, but challenges remain. Racially, "the diversity is there," she points out, but we aren't tapping into it the way we need to.



*Arlene Pearlman will be honored on Jan. 25. Photo by Barney Sack, courtesy Arlene Pearlman*

The Schilder Award is only part of World Peace Day, organized by the South West Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice. Activists Zoltán Glück and Manissa McCleave Maharawal will deliver a keynote speech on the future of Occupy Wall Street, which has engineered a series of interesting and provocative programs since the movement was kicked out of Zuccotti Park in late 2011. One example: Occupy Sandy, a do-it-yourself emergency response movement that formed to help those affected by Hurricane Sandy in the fall of 2012. Another: Rolling Jubilee, a program that buys up American debt for pennies on the dollar and then abolishes it. Having raised \$680,000, Jubilee has already eliminated \$14.7 million in debt.

There will also be a panel discussion, moderated by WMNF's Rob Lorei and made up of

homeless advocate Vallerie Guillory; Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, one of first ordained Catholic women priests in the U.S.; and Judge Charles Williams, who is involved in a project that brings female Middle Eastern students to New College.

The discussion, as you can probably guess, will be all over the map. But, as Tutt says,

we're all more alike than not. That goes for the issues we care about, too. "What is it that we're fighting and arguing about?" Tutt asks.

*World Peace Day runs 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25. It will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota.* 



*Occupy Wall Street activists gather in New York City's Zuccotti Park in September 2011. Photo by David Shankbone via Wikimedia Commons*

# SHOW WITHIN A SHOW



*Kelli Karen, production stage manager at Florida Studio Theatre, tells her lighting director, 'House lights to half!' The show is about to begin. Photo by Fran Palmeri*

## THE STAGE MANAGER IS THE UNSEEN FORCE IN MAKING SURE THEATER PRODUCTIONS RUN AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE

By Barbara Dondero  
*Contributing Writer*

*The theatre, strictly speaking, is not a business at all — but a collection of individualized chaos that operates best when it is allowed to flower in its proper medley of disorder, derangement, irregularity and confusion.*

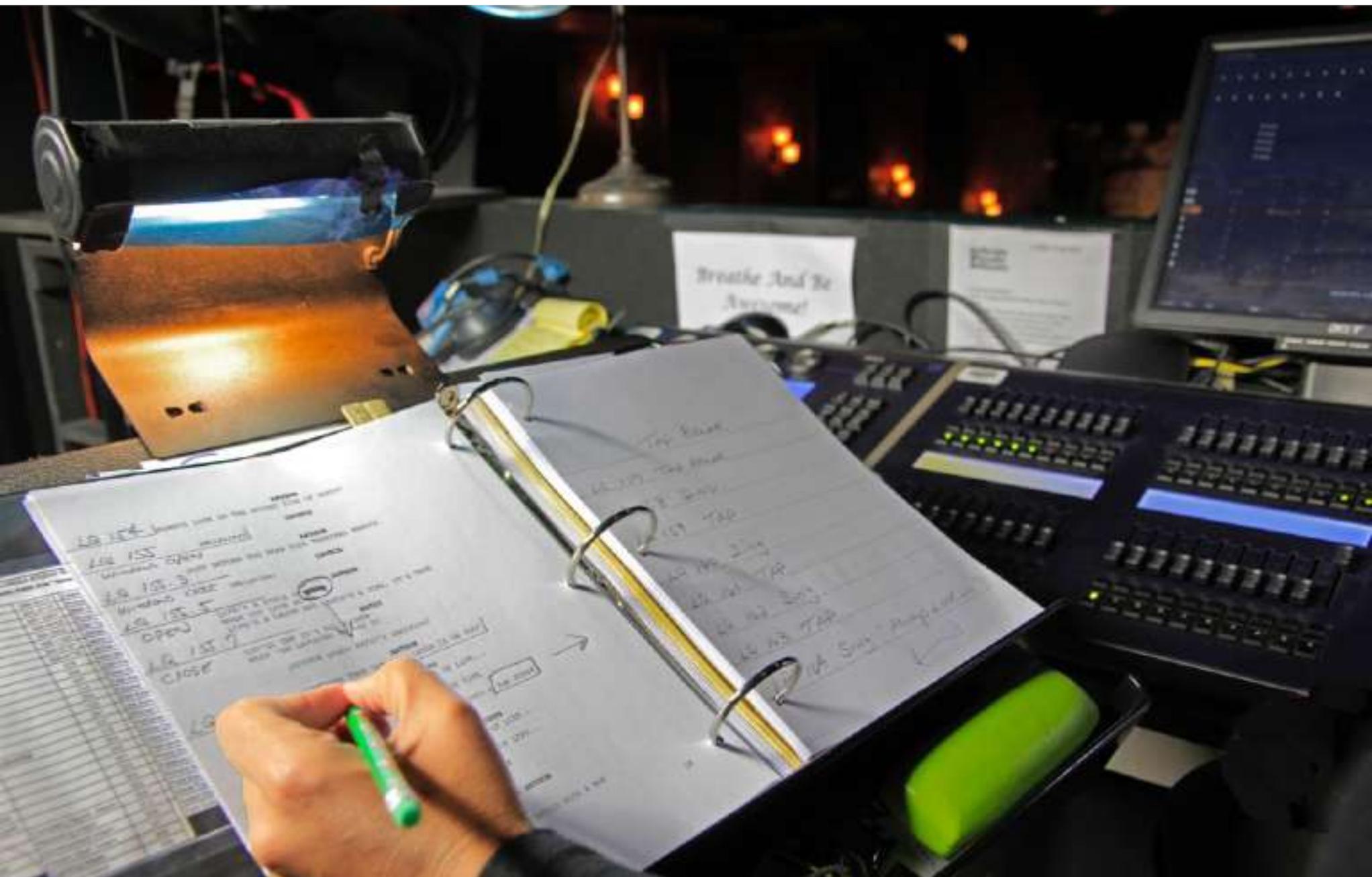
Moss Hart  
*Act One*

What is the difference among an air traffic controller, an emergency room nurse and a stage manager? Nothing!

Thirty-five minutes before show time, the stage manager checks the sign-in sheet backstage, hoping that all actors and crew are on board. Then she visits dressing rooms to announce, “Half-hour, please! Half-hour!”

The actors, according to theatre etiquette, respond, “Half-hour! Thank you!”

That is when scrambling becomes a fine art. *Where’s the sword for the Act One fight scene? Why is the paint on the dance floor still wet?* These emergencies dealt with, it is time to



*Kelli Karen works from her 'prompt book.' Photo by Fran Palmeri*



*Patrick Noonan and Priscilla Fernandez star as Arthur and Guinevere in Monty Python's Spamalot at Florida Studio Theatre. Contributed photo by Maria Lyle*

notify everyone that the audience is being seated: "Ladies and gentlemen, the house is open! Fifteen minutes please."

All respond, except for one person frantically searching for the property mistress. Would she retrieve the shoes he left in the front row of the orchestra, please?

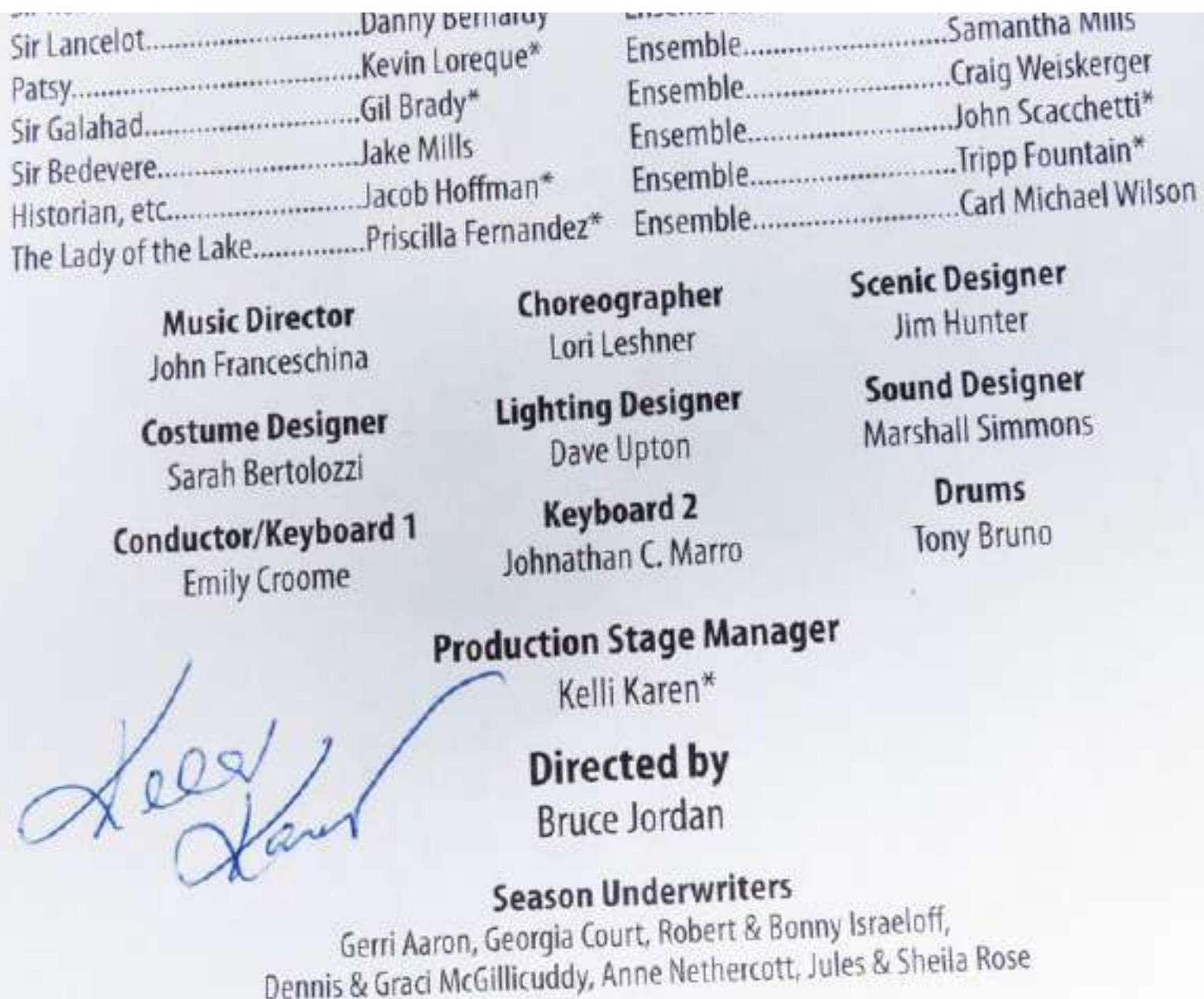
Then it is time for the final call, "Places please!"

The stage manager takes her position, adjusts her headset and takes a deep breath. She has memorized every word and notation for action in the show. Traditionally on opening night, the director leaves town. It is all up to her now.

She begins to "call" the show. "House lights to half," she tells the lighting director, who is awaiting cues in the control booth.

When I worked as a stage manager for the Hampton Theatre Company on Long Island, I was told by a friend, "The director proposes. The stage manager disposes." I thought it would be fun to ask Kelli Karen, production stage manager for Florida Studio Theatre in Sarasota, what she thought of that advice. I was lucky to catch her during "tech week" (also known as "hell week") just before *Monty Python's Spamalot* opened this season.

"Yes," she agreed, "except that I would say the director, the artistic director, the music director and the production manager propose, and the stage manager disposes."



Why not look for the name of the stage manager in your theatre program and ask for an autograph! Photo by Fran Palmeri

## CALLING CUES

She calls each cue in three parts: first, a “warning”; soon after, a “standby”; then, seconds later, at the exact moment of execution, “Go.”

“*Spamalot* has only a few hundred cues,” Karen said, “but *Thirty Nine Steps* had a four-person cast playing 150 characters.” She shuddered. “Imagine calling over 2,000 cues! It’s like a show within a show.”

## THE BOOK

Most shows run smoothly because Karen has her prompt book — affectionately called the “Bible,” which she never lets out of her sight. As she holds up her pencil, I notice the worn-down eraser. “This is all I ever need,” she says. “Next to each line of the script, I write all sound and lighting cues, plus stage directions — whether an actor speaks his line from upstage, downstage or center stage as deemed by the director.”

## CALAMITIES

“What could possibly go wrong during a production?” I asked. “Last night,” she replied, “a power surge in Act Two blew a fuse. After notifying Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, I stopped the show.”

Then looking as if she were having a bad dream, Karen remembered a fuse blowing just minutes before the finale of *Shotgun*. Thinking the show was over, the audience members began applauding. She cued the actors to continue reciting their lines. “Seven seconds later — a *lifetime* — the lights came back on,” she explained.

The audience members, realizing what had happened, applauded madly for the actors who had carried on during the blackout.

## THE ‘COOL AUNT’

Of all the roles required of a stage manager, what are you best at, I asked.

“Caring for individuals,” she answered. “Handling all types of personalities. I’m responsible for 16 people in this cast, three in the orchestra and three in the control booth, plus others backstage — 27 people in all — for whom I play favorite aunt, nurse and techie.”

She explained that from the outset of her three-week rehearsal period, she tries to set a humorous tone. “If someone forgets to sign in,” she said, “I ask, ‘Is Warren’s understudy here?’ He quickly obliges. In reality, there is no understudy for Warren.” She smiled. “The actors tell me, ‘You’re like the cool aunt we want to hang out with.’”

The “cool aunt” gets to go on vacation for eight weeks at the end of the season. Last year, after visiting her family in New Jersey, Karen went on a medical mission in Swaziland, in South Africa, with representatives of [Hearts Afire](#). She counted out meds, helped with classes on AIDS and read to children while they waited to see a doctor.

“Did you resist the impulse to stage-manage on vacation?” I asked. “Yes!” she admitted.

Just before curtain time, Kelli says a silent prayer for each actor’s success and tells all the cast members, “Breathe and be awesome!”

Silently, I wished the same for her as she went backstage once again to perform her magical show-within-a-show.

*Spamalot* closes on Saturday, Jan. 25. Then Kelli Karen will begin rehearsals for *FST’s Daddy Long Legs*, which opens on Feb. 5. For more information, visit [FloridaStudioTheatre.org](#). 

# PLAY ME A TUNE



*A group of pianists 'jams' in Five Points Park to mark the opening evening of Street Keys. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **SARASOTA KEYS DRAWS A CROWD WITH ITS LAUNCH DOWNTOWN, AND INTEREST CONTINUES TO BUILD**

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**

*Editor*

The temperature may have been brisk, but Jim Shirley, executive director of the [Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County](#), was delighted with the crowd that gathered for the kickoff of the Alliance's Sarasota Keys program, held in downtown Sarasota on the evening of Friday, Jan. 17.

"We did have a great turnout," Shirley told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Jan. 22. "If the music is hot enough, you don't worry about the weather."

As a jam session began in Five Points Park, Shirley said, he watched more and more people walk up, intrigued by the music and

wanting to find out what was happening. That was exactly what he was hoping for, he added.

Among the musicians participating in that concert were Rich Ridenour, Lee Dougherty Ross and Jesse Martins, according to the [Sarasota Keys Facebook page](#).

With the approval of the City Commission, the Alliance has placed six spinet pianos along the sidewalks of Main Street, Pineapple Avenue and Palm Avenue for daytime use. The pianos "are open for the public to play, explore, learn, practice and most importantly, enjoy," an Alliance news release says.



*Jim Shirley, executive director of the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County, welcomes people to the Jan. 17 launch of Street Keys in Five Points Park as City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell listens. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

The city commissioners split 3-2 on a Dec. 2 vote to allow the six-month pilot program. Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioners Suzanne Atwell and Paul Caragiulo were in the majority. Atwell told a reporter during the Jan. 17 Convocation of Governments at Sarasota County Technical Institute that she was excited about the project getting under way, adding with a laugh that she was brushing up on *Chopsticks*.

Local businesses and individuals “chipped in to sponsor and host the pianos,” the Alliance

release points out. Six Sarasota artists were selected, with the help of curator Tim Jaeger, to craft the pianos “into works of public art,” the release adds.

The artists were Jack Dowd, Richard Capes, Gale Fulton-Ross, Steven Strenk, Cassia Kite and Lori Loveberry George. Kite and Jaeger partnered on one of the pianos.

His observations from walking along Main Street this week, Shirley told the *News Leader*, indicate a warm public response. Some



*Gale Fulton-Ross was among the participating visual artists chosen for the project. The theme for her piano is Secret Life of a Circle. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*Sarabeth Kalajian, director of libraries for Sarasota County, City Manager Tom Barwin and City Commissioner Susan Chapman also were among the crowd. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*County Commissioner Joe Barbetta and his wife, Mary, (left), join County Commissioner Carolyn Mason for the event. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

people seeing the pianos for the first time are uncertain about why the musical instruments are out in the open, he noted, but people are taking advantage of this new opportunity.

“I saw a 3-year-old doing some playing the other day,” Shirley said. “That’s what we want.”

While it remains unknown whether the City Commission will extend Sarasota Keys

beyond this trial basis, Shirley added, “I’m just happy we’re able to do it.”

The pianos are located at the Sarasota Opera House on Pineapple Avenue, across from Five Points Park; Louies Modern and the DiFilippo Kent Gallery on Palm Avenue; and Mattison’s City Grille, Main Street Traders and the Bohemian Bliss Boutique along Main Street. 



*The playing of the piano in front of Louies Modern restaurant on Palm Avenue drew an audience later in the evening. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

# A BIG HONOR



*Circus Celebrity 2014*



*Nik Wallenda receives applause as he steps to the podium. Pedro Reis (right, just behind Wallenda) and his wife, Dolly — co-founders of The Circus Arts Conservatory — spoke of Wallenda's accomplishments prior to Wallenda's introduction. All photos by Norman Schimmel*

## **INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN AERIALIST NIK WALLEDA BECOMES THE YOUNGEST PERSON TO BE NAMED A CIRCUS CELEBRITY**

### *Staff Reports*

Almost exactly a week shy of his 35th birthday — Jan. 24 — Nik Wallenda had only to walk across a stage to accept congratulations for his latest feat — becoming the youngest person ever to be named a Circus Celebrity in Sarasota.

During a Jan. 18 ceremony at The Ringling, Wallenda joined The Rudy Rudynoff Family and Felix Adler in receiving that honor for 2014. The annual recognition goes to outstanding representatives of the circus world.

During back-to-back summers, Wallenda won international acclaim for his crossings of Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. The 2014 Circus Celebrity program notes, “From his childhood, Nik dreamed of walking the wire in places no one had walked before. On June 15, 2012, he realized a part of this dream, walking 1,800 feet across the widest part of Horseshoe Falls.”

That event, the program points out, was the focal point of ABC TV's highest rated

non-sports program in 10 years, seen by an estimated 13.3 million people.

Then on June 23, 2013, the program continues, “Nik thrilled the world again as he walked 1,400 feet across a section of the Grand Canyon.” At a height of 1,500 feet, the walk “was the highest of [his] career ....” Viewership for the Discovery Channel, which carried that feat, was 23 million just in the United States.

The Sarasota native has been performing for a number of years with Circus Sarasota, part of the newly organized Circus Arts Conservatory. The co-founders of Circus Sarasota and the Conservatory, Dolly and Pedro Reis, introduced Wallenda during the Circus Celebrity program. 



*Attendees enjoy the reception at The Ringling.*



*Nik Wallenda and his wife, Erendira, accept congratulations at the reception.*



# FLYING FEET

## THE ANNUAL RINGLING BRIDGE RUN DRAWS ITS USUAL PLETHORA OF COMPETITORS BUT, THIS TIME, ON A CHILLY MORNING

*Staff Reports*

More than 2,000 people participated in the Wilde Automotive Ringling Bridge Run on Saturday, Jan. 18, which featured a 4-mile run across the Sarasota landmark for which it is named.

A 1-mile Fun Run also drew participants.

The top overall time for the event was 21:21:60, achieved by Blake Riley, 16, a member of the Riverview High School cross country team.

*With a police escort, runners prepare for their ascent of the Ringling Bridge in the early morning. All photos by Norman Schimmel*



The top woman finisher was Kaitlin Koplín, 29, with a time of 23:51:87.

According to the race results [website](#), 1,887 completed the longer run. The event started at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, north of the bridge on U.S. 41.

The competition is a fundraiser for the Sarasota YMCA's family programs.

Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel was on the bridge and on Gulfstream Avenue to capture faces in the crowd. 



*The moon hangs amid the palms as dawn begins to give the runners more light.*

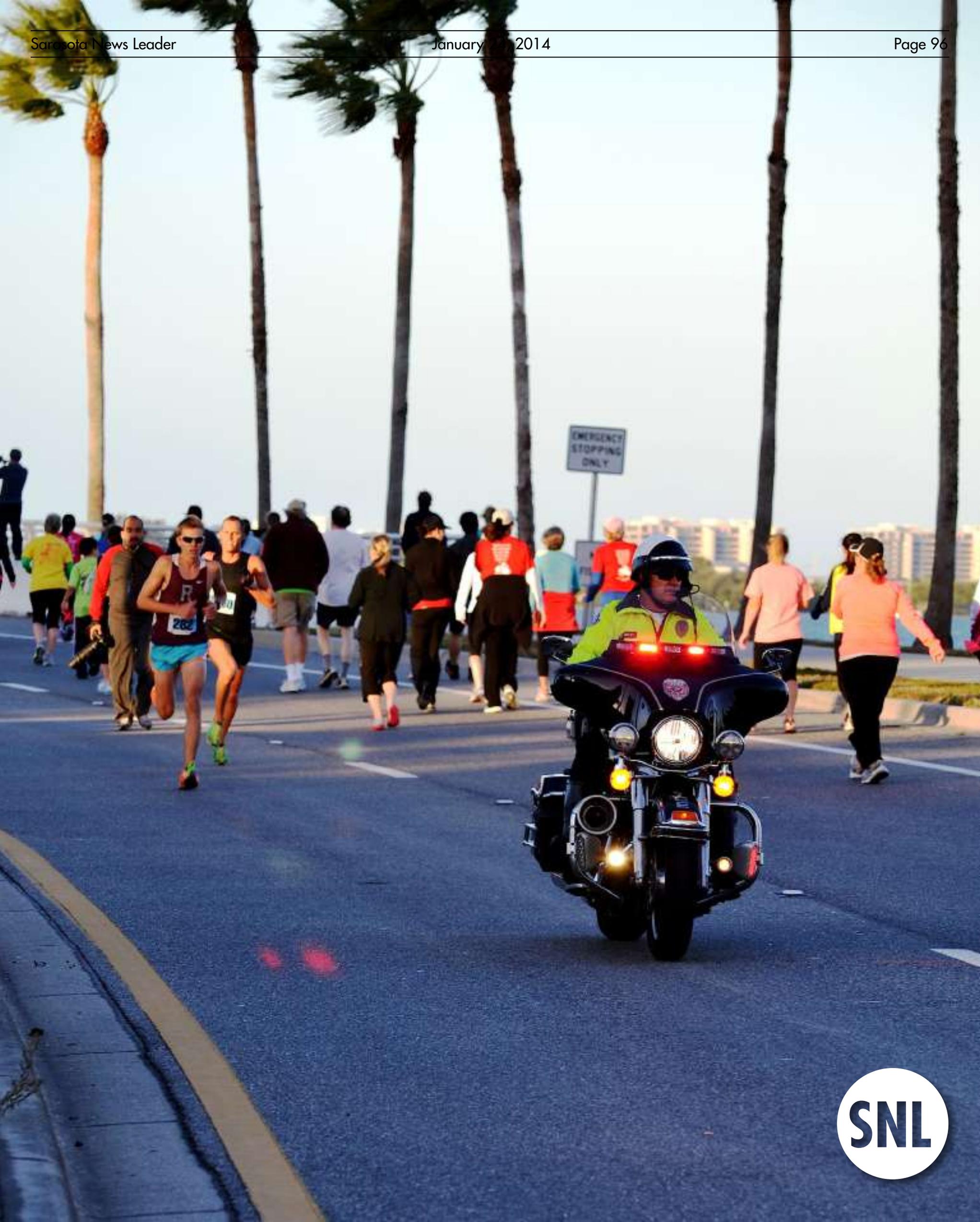


*A sign directs participants to the Fun Run part of the course.*



*Kathy Pletzke, the IT director for the Town of Longboat Key, puts her running skills to the test.*







# *Siesta Seen*

## **COMMISSIONER PATTERSON TALKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR A COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT PEER REVIEW OF THE LIDO RENOURISHMENT PROJECT – AND WHO IS VYING TO WIN HER SEAT – IN AN ADDRESS TO THE CONDO COUNCIL; NEW CROSSING LIGHTS FINALLY ARE UP AT BEACH ROAD INTERSECTIONS**



**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

In a Jan. 21 address to about 45 members of the Siesta Key Condominium Council, County Commissioner Nora Patterson said the proposed Lido Key Renourishment Project is “not a done deal.”

Her hope, she added, is that a peer review will be undertaken of the modeling and reports expected from the U.S. Army Corps

of Engineers late this winter regarding the proposed construction of three groins on south Lido Key and dredging of the shoal in Big Sarasota Pass. She added her preference is for “a triple check on those groins.”

Depending on the results of such a review, she told the audience, “We’ll either feel better about [the project]; we’ll take the groins out



*New lights have gone up on the Beach Road intersections near Siesta Public Beach, replacing the lights that flashed constantly. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

and let the rest of the project go; or we'll have it just done to us."

Patterson continued, "Write letters; email concerns. I hate to say we are politicians ... but we are politicians." While the County Commission does represent Siesta Key, she pointed out, it also represents all the other residents of the county, including those in the city of Sarasota and those on Lido Key. "So we've got a very difficult decision to make. Your participation would be a good thing in my mind."

Patterson explained that some of the condominium complexes on Lido were built "way

too close to the water" and that erosion over the years has threatened them. As for the plan to renourish Lido Beach, she said, "I'm all for it."

Earlier, Patterson told the audience she wanted "to hear from somebody other than the Army Corps" about the validity of the federal agency's contention that the project will not have a negative impact on Siesta Key. "I personally would like a peer review by some people who don't have their wallets in this game ..."

Moreover, Patterson continued, "I really don't like the idea of groins on Lido Key." She



*Commissioner Nora Patterson presents a first-place Christmas Lighting Contest award to Eric Shroack of Peppertree Bay. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

pointed out that the county's comprehensive plan prohibits hardened structures such as groins.

Patterson explained that sand builds up on the north side of a groin, "and on the south side ... you tend to lose sand." Additionally, because many people enjoy walking on the southern portion of Lido Beach, she pointed out, she is concerned the groins will not remain covered, as Corps representatives have insisted, and that the structures will impede public enjoyment of the beach.

Because one of those proposed groins appears to be on county property, Patterson

noted, "The county may have some say" about whether the \$22 million, 50-year project can proceed. The Corps has yet to apply for the necessary permits from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, according to information provided to *The Sarasota News Leader* last week.

In 1994, when Big Pass was eyed for dredging, she added, a Save Our Sand Committee of the Siesta Key Association was organized to oppose the plan. At that time, she said, the City of Venice wanted to mine the Big Pass shoal for a large renourishment project, while the City of Sarasota wanted to use some of the sand for a smaller effort on Lido. However,



*Commissioner Nora Patterson congratulates Veronica Bajtale of Beachaven for its first-place honors. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

after protests mounted, the municipalities backed away from the proposal, she noted.

The Save Our Sand group even petitioned the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to prevent Venice from getting the permit it needed for the dredging. That document said the petitioners “have accumulated evidence from eminent coastal engineering experts disputing [the City of Venice’s] assertions that the activities authorized by the Permit will not adversely affect publicly and privately owned portions of Siesta Key.”

She continued, “It’s been sort of a simmering conflict ever since, because the shoal has become *enormous*.”

With the natural flow of sand from north to south on the west coast of Florida, she explained, sand that has been added to the beaches on Lido and Longboat keys in past renourishments “comes down to the shoal just off Siesta Key.”

Patterson said people are welcome to address the commission about this topic — and any



Commissioner Nora Patterson presents one of the first-place plaques to Doug Oberlee of Sandpiper Beach Club. Photo by Rachel Hackney

# Siesta Seen

matter — during the public comments segments at the opening of each morning and afternoon session of a regular meeting. “Say what you think.”

When Siesta Key Association Vice President Michael Shay asked whether the County Commission would hold a public hearing on the matter, Patterson said, “A public hearing would be fine.”

## A NEW CHAMPION FOR THE KEY

During her remarks, Patterson also told the audience several people have asked her, “Who’s going to be the champion of Siesta Key?” when she steps down from the County Commission in November. (Term limits prevent her from running again, though she said she had no plans to file for re-election before a Florida Supreme Court decision made it impossible.)



*Commissioner Nora Patterson congratulates Roger Deary of The Anchorage for its third-place honors.  
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# *Siesta Seen*

Patterson pointed out that all the commissioners are elected at-large and that while she has advocated for Siesta Key, she also has fought for constituents in other parts of the county.

“Two good people” have filed for her seat, she continued. One, Al Maio, is an accountant

with Kimley Horn and Associates Inc., a design consulting firm, she said, “and he’s a good guy.”

The other candidate is Lourdes Ramirez, Patterson noted. She asked Ramirez, who was present, to stand.



*Commissioner Nora Patterson presents a third-place ribbon to William Slovik of Harbour Towne.  
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# Siesta Seen

“Lourdes is also a friend of mine,” Patterson continued. “I’ve known her for years. She’s got a good brain, and she lives on Siesta Key.”

Patterson added, “I’m going to leave you with that note.”

## THE ROUNDABOUT

Concern apparently is spreading on Siesta Key about the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) proposal for a roundabout at the intersection of Beach Road and

Midnight Pass Road, just south of St. Boniface Episcopal Church.

On Wednesday afternoon — the day after the Condo Council meeting — Patterson emailed Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr.: “I am getting a lot of negative feedback from Siesta Key residents on the ‘pedestrian improvement’ on the [[Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization](#)] work plan that turns out to be a roundabout. I think this needs to be aired to the public at a meeting run by FDOT that can show how this will



*Commissioner Nora Patterson chats with Richard Jones of Whispering Sands as she gives him the complex's ribbon for third place in its category. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

# *Siesta Seen*

work — even do one of those demos with a bird's eye view of a similar roundabout. This situation is fairly unique to the roundabout discussions as the [Siesta] roads are just 2 lane but the traffic is sometimes very heavy. [Residents of a] nearby condominium project of some size [fear] that they will never be able to even get out of their driveways in season. Others think the level of traffic on the circle will be so heavy that it will cause more backup than a traffic light.”

Patterson added that she planned to raise the topic during one of the County Commission's regular meetings next week. In the meantime she suggested Harriott let FDOT representatives “know there is concern. A response on their part to hold a couple of meetings as they did for the pedestrian walkways [on Midnight Pass Road] would be great, where people actually got to vote in a straw poll.”

In the latter note, Patterson was referring to the new Midnight Pass crosswalks constructed in late 2012 between Beach Road and Stickney Point Road. FDOT held a public hearing about residents' safety concerns along that stretch of road and then surveyed condominium residents before planning the project.

## **SPEAKING OF CROSSINGS ...**

On Jan. 20, Tony Romanus, president and technology chairman of the Siesta Isles Association, sent Commissioner Patterson an email saying, “On behalf of the Siesta Isles Association Board of Directors and the

residents of our community I wanted to thank you for your support of the upgraded crosswalk warning signal at the intersection of Beach Road and Beach Way Drive.”

He added, “This crosswalk is the primary path for our neighborhood of 298 homes to get across Beach Road to Siesta Beach. As you have heard, the previous signal was ineffective. My experience more often than not was that drivers did not slow down at all for people trying to cross. I'm optimistic that this new warning system will improve the safety at this crosswalk. My observation is that the upgraded units installed by FDOT on Midnight Pass Road work very well.”

Finally, he wrote, “We are also appreciative of the support provided by the Siesta Key Association, especially Peter Van Roekens.”

During the Feb. 5, 2013, Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) meeting, van Roekens — secretary of the Siesta Key Association (SKA) and a Terrace East condominium complex representative at the SKVA meetings — raised the matter about those constantly flashing lights at the Beach Road crosswalks near Siesta Public Beach. Just as he pursued a county response to the need for better illumination of crosswalks in Siesta Village, he went on a mission, so to speak, to address this second safety issue.

Discussions about those Beach Road lights continued at the February 2013 SKA meeting, and Patterson brought the matter to the attention of her fellow commissioners and county staff.

# Siesta Seen

The new signs — with “wig-wag” lights like those at the six new Midnight Pass crosswalks FDOT installed in 2012 — went up on Jan. 17.

Van Roekens extended his thanks for the completion of the project in an email to Lisa L. Cece, business professional and special district coordinator in the county’s Transportation and Real Estate Department. Cece has assumed responsibilities previously handled by Ryan Montague in the county’s Traffic/Mobility Office.

Montague left county employment last fall, having taken a job with the Florida Press Association.

## CHRISTMAS LIGHTING CONTEST HONOREES

The Condo Council agenda on Tuesday also featured the presentation of the annual awards to the winners of the 2013 Christmas Lighting Contest.

Condo Council Secretary Helen Clifford told the audience members the key had “a great Christmas season. This was probably the most beautiful place in Sarasota, and along Midnight Pass was just breathtaking.”

The winners, as previously reported in this column, follow:

### 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
- 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

## CLARIFICATION

My eagle-eyed former editor at the *Pelican Press*, Anne Johnson, gently pointed out to me last week that I mentioned Point of Rocks in conjunction with parking for visitors to Beach Access 1 on North Shell Road, but Point of Rocks is quite a bit south of that beach access. I checked with county spokesman Curt Preisser this week to find out for sure whether Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. meant to write “Roberts Point Road” instead of “Point of Rocks” in the memo I quoted. Preisser was unable to get an answer for me by deadline, but he said he felt pretty sure my assumption was correct. 



# Kin Killin' Kin

Art as an agent for change

**A&E BRIEFS**

**JANUARY 28 - FEBRUARY 23, 2014**

*Kin Killin' Kin will be on display at the North Sarasota Library Jan. 28 through Feb. 23. Contributed image*

## YOUTH VIOLENCE TO BE FOCUS OF NORTH SARASOTA LIBRARY EXHIBIT

*Kin Killin' Kin*, a series created by Ohio artist James Pate, will be featured at the North Sarasota Library from Jan. 28 through Feb. 23, the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County has announced.

Pate's work "addresses one of the most critical social ills of our time — youth violence," a flyer points out. His "powerful images are a visual call to action to find solutions and discuss positive alternatives toward negative behavior," it adds.

The series of images reflects Pate's "deep love for the African American community and great concern for the epidemic of youth violence plaguing it," the flyer continues.

"If I can save one young brother, these 10 years of creating this series will not have been in vain," Pate says in the flyer.

Pate is considered to be one of the most important African American artists in the United States, the flyer points out. He is known

for his self-described "Techno-Cubism" style. In an article on the website [Neighborhood Scribe](#), La Risa Lynch writes that Pate uses "stark charcoal drawings" in a "storyboard format."

An article by Deborah Bayliss on [The Chicago Citizen](#) website says Pate "hopes that troubled youth, young adults, drug traffickers and gang members who feel hopeless will see the provocative images such as *Turn of Endearment*, a brightly colored oil painting that depicts a young man gradually turning away from a life of crime, and will be inspired to do the same thing."

Bayliss wrote about *Kin Killin' Kin* when it was on exhibit last fall at the DuSable Museum of African History in Chicago.

The North Sarasota Library is located at 2801 Newtown Blvd. in Sarasota. For more information, visit the Arts and Cultural Alliance [website](#).

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## RICH TRADITION OF ANCIENT ART TO BE SHOWCASED AT SELBY GARDENS

Sumi-e, an Asian art form that is nearly 2,000 years old, will be the focus of an exhibition and sale in the historic Selby House at Selby Gardens beginning Jan. 29, The Gardens has announced.

"Closely related to the ancient art of Chinese calligraphy, the brush strokes used to create Sumi-e paintings are based on the strokes used to produce the beautiful characters of Chinese writing," a news release says. "The exhibition will include work representing a variety of Oriental Brush Painting 'schools,'"

the release continues, as the artists have developed their talents by studying Chinese, Japanese, Korean and contemporary styles.

The exhibit will be produced by the Sarasota Chapter of the Sumi-e Society of America, "which serves as a cultural bridge between Eastern and Western art and also seeks to foster and encourage the study and the appreciation of Oriental Brush Painting," the release explains.

For more information about the exhibit, visit the Selby Gardens [website](#).



*Tulips by Keiko Romerstein. Contributed image*

## EVENING OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM ANNOUNCES ITS 2014 TOP 25

Twenty-two students from seven Sarasota County high schools captured top honors before a standing-room-only crowd Wednesday night, Jan. 15, the Education Foundation of Sarasota County has announced.

The Foundation is marking the 19th year of its annual Juried Art Show competition.

Ashlee Baker, a senior at Sarasota High, won Best of Show for her sculpture, *Dark Rain*. Six other Best of School winners were Azul Diaz, Pine View; Yuwen Liu, Venice High; Sabino Lops, Riverview High; Rachel Ross, Booker High; Alina Timshina, North Port High; and Ginger Whitely, Suncoast Polytechnical High.

Three students placed two pieces in the Top 25: North Port's Hayley Denham and Olga Gasanova; and Sarasota High's Yalicia Miller, a news release says.

Susan Scott and Cheryl Gordon, the Education Foundation's executive director and board chairman, respectively, welcomed the audience of more than 200 to the reception, the release adds. Steve Cantees, executive director of Sarasota County High Schools, congratulated the participants and thanked their art teachers for dedicating many extra hours to help students with their submissions.

Ringling College's admissions director, James Dean, presented the Heart of Art Awards



*Winners of the Evening of Excellence student awards, with the event co-chairs, are (front row, from left) Rachel Ross, Alina Timshina, Azul Diaz, Sabino Lops, Clarissa Choi, Paige Miller, Brittany Probus, Courtney Kern, Ashlee Baker; (middle row, from left) Kris Numbers, Olga Gasanova, Wade Turner, Jayda Blake, Christina Gunter, Ginger Whitely, Hayley Denham; (back row, from left) Yalicia Miller, André Johnson, Co-Chairwoman Alix Morin, Susan Scott (executive director of the Education Foundation), Co-Chairman Taylor Collins, Devin Brown and Yuwen Liu. Winning students not pictured are Trequan Moreland and Allison Jones. Contributed photo*

— including free supplies and tuition for summer art classes — “to eight promising young artists selected by their high school art teachers,” the release notes.

Taylor T. Collins and Alix Morin, the 2014 Evening of Excellence co-chairs, then announced the winning students. A panel of five arts professionals used a blind-scoring process to select the Top 25 works out of 347 entries submitted by students from every Sarasota County public high school, the release explains. The panel of judges comprised artist and New College instructor Jean Blackburn; artist and interior designer Katie Cassidy; James Dean and Dr. Christopher Wilson from Ringling College of Art and Design; and April Irwin, digital design teacher at Sarasota County Technical Institute.

All entries were on view Jan. 11-14 in a free public exhibition at Ringling College of Art

and Design, the scene of the announcements. During the four days of the art show, visitors were invited to vote for their favorite work to win the Marie B. Ritter People’s Choice Award, the release continues. Sarasota High’s Brittany Probus received the most votes and the \$250 prize for her electronic media piece titled *Transient*, the release adds.

The student artists are donating all 25 of their winning pieces — paintings, photographs, mixed media, sculpture and more — to the Education Foundation. Both the students and their art will be photographed by Gene Pollux of Pollux Photography and Digital Imaging. Then each piece will be professionally framed by local galleries, which will be donating materials and services, the release notes.

Finally, the students will be honored at the Evening of Excellence gala dinner and



*Sarasota High senior Ashlee Baker with her Best of Show piece, a sculpture titled Dark Rain. Contributed photo*



*Venice High senior Yuwen Liu with her Best of School mixed media piece, Who am I? Contributed photo*

auction on the last Friday in February, when they will see their work auctioned off to the highest bidder. Last year's event grossed more than \$229,000, including a live auction total of \$28,650, the release says. Through the work of the Education Foundation, the proceeds benefit the 41,200 students enrolled in Sarasota County's public schools, the release points out.

The 22 students will receive cash awards from \$500 to \$2,000 as well as other gifts "and recognition for their talent and generosity," the release says. "More than \$35,000 in prizes, scholarships and art department grants will be presented during this year's Evening of Excellence activities," it notes.

"Since 1996, Evening of Excellence has grown to become both the premier arts competition for area high school students and a fixture on the social calendar," the release continues. This year's theme is *An Evening in Paris*, "taking inspiration from the student whose award-winning work from last year's event was adapted for the gala invitation," the release points out.

Sponsorships are available starting at \$1,000, the release adds. Individual tickets are \$200, with \$250 the fee for patrons. This year's dinner and auction will be held on Friday, Feb. 28. Guests may arrive for the cocktail hour at 6 p.m. at Michael's On East, when they can meet the students and view the artwork before bidding. To request an invitation, call the Education Foundation at 927-0965 or visit [www.EdFoundation.net](http://www.EdFoundation.net).



*Suncoast Polytech junior Ginger Whitely with her Best of School drawing, Jay-Walking. Contributed photo*



*Booker High junior Rachel Ross with her Best of School sculpture, The Driving Range. Contributed photo*

## **OTHER DESERT CITIES PLAYING AT ASOLO REP THROUGH FEB. 27**

*Other Desert Cities* by Jon Robin Baitz — a “scathingly funny play” by the creator of TV’s *Brothers & Sisters* — has opened at the Asolo Repertory Theatre and will continue through Feb. 27, a theatre news release says.

Directed by Greg Leaming, the story “brings dysfunctional family drama to new heights,” the release points out. “Promising young novelist Brooke Wyeth is home in Palm Springs for the holidays with a copy of her latest manuscript — one she’s *not* showing her parents. Her brother is a reality TV show producer, her father a former movie actor turned politician,” and her mother is a 1960s-era comedy writer turned socialite, the release continues. “But now long-buried secrets threaten to put this picture-perfect family back in the tabloids.

Hold onto your seats — things are about to get bumpy,” it adds.

The Asolo Rep cautions that the play contains mature language.

“Funny, fierce and immensely entertaining,” the *New York Times* calls the production. The *Wall Street Journal* adds that it “packs a roundhouse punch.”

Tickets start at \$21. To purchase them, call 351-8000, go to [www.asolorep.org](http://www.asolorep.org) or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre box office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts.



*Carolyn Michel, Laren Klein and Benjamin Williamson star in Other Desert Cities at the Asolo Repertory Theatre. Contributed photo by Gary Sweetman.*

## HIGH SCHOOL JAZZ FESTIVAL RETURNS ON JAN. 24 AT RIVERVIEW HIGH

The Jazz Club of Sarasota has announced the fifth annual High School Jazz Festival will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 24, at Riverview High School, located at 1 Ram Way in Sarasota. Admission is free to this non-competitive event, which will showcase the talents of musicians from Booker High School, Manatee High, Riverview High, Sarasota High and Southeast High, a news release notes. For information, call 366-1552.

“If you’re wondering about the future of jazz, the answer is right here at this festival — the only one of its kind on Florida’s west coast,” says festival coordinator and Jazz Club of Sarasota board member Gordon Garrett in

the release. “Every year audiences are amazed at the talent and high level of musical ability demonstrated by these young jazz performers. They are indeed the future of jazz — the ones who will keep the flame burning.”

This year the festival moves to Riverview High School under the guidance of the school’s associate music director and Jazz Club board member, Norm Vagn, the release continues. The lead musician mentor for the event is George McClain, leader of the Sarasota Jazz Project big band and another Jazz Club of Sarasota board member, the release adds. “McClain will be onstage to offer real time insight and advice to the young musicians,



*The Manatee High School Jazz Ensemble performs in concert. Contributed photo*

many of whom receive Jazz Club of Sarasota scholarships to continue their studies in jazz while in college,” the release points out.

“Sponsoring events like this is a big part of the Jazz Club of Sarasota’s mission,” says Garrett in the release. “It’s a perfect fit with our scholarship program, which has presented thousands of dollars of scholarships to local young musicians over the past 16 years.”

McClain agrees. “It is a real privilege to work with these outstanding young artists,” he adds in the release. “This festival is a great way to support them and the future of jazz. I encourage anyone who loves jazz to come see them perform.”

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



*High school students will entertain audience members during a Jan. 24 jazz festival at Riverview High School in Sarasota. Contributed photo*

## **FST IMPROV IS BACK FOR ANOTHER SEASON IN SARASOTA**

FST Improv returns for another season beginning Friday, Jan. 24, and continuing through April, with performances each week Thursday through Sunday, Florida Studio Theatre has announced.

“Three hilarious shows will be performed in the brand new Bowne’s Lab,” a news release says. Tickets range from \$12 to \$15. Subscriptions are available to see all three shows for as little as \$21, the release adds. Tickets may be purchased from the FST box office at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in Sarasota, by calling 366-9000 or by going online at [www.FloridaStudioTheatre.org](http://www.FloridaStudioTheatre.org).

Managing Director and FST Improv MC Rebecca Hopkins talks in the release of the excitement of FST Improv’s “edgy,

steampunk-inspired new home”: “It’s January 2014. It’s the start of not only a new year, but of a new theatre at FST — Bowne’s Lab. It is a time of possibilities, resolutions and promises. To celebrate our fancy new space, we are expanding our schedule to offer three shows that will make the world a less depressing place.”

The first of these shows is *Out of Bounds*, the all-star FST Improv comedy game show. Since 2001, the release continues, FST Improv comedy troupe members “have played together in the all-improv game show explosion of madness.” This is a fast-paced, no-holds-barred show “featuring five virtuoso improv comedians for a night of games, scenes and skillful storytelling. There are no rules and no

boundaries — just spectacular comedy and incredible improvisation.”

The second show, *52 Card Pickup*, takes 52 suggestions for one play, the release explains. “The audience will take control,” it notes, “deciding what crazy characters, unexpected locations and incredible hurdles the actors will portray — just by filling out the cards on each table before the show begins. Will it be delightfully frenzied or mysterious and satirically sinister?”

Rounding out the series will be *TEXT M for Murder*. “FST cordially invites audiences to

witness a completely improvised murder!” the release says. “Audiences do, of course, have the honor of choosing the murder weapon and the scene of the crime. They call the shots as the clueless detectives meet and question eccentric suspects, reveal secrets and uncover deadly motives,” the release continues. Each week will feature a new, completely improvised murder.

Back for another season are cast members Hopkins, Christine Alexander, Tim Beasley, Catey Brannan, Chris Friday, Patrick A. Jackson, Darryl Knapp, Angel Parker, Jim Prosser and Steve Turrisi.



An FST Improv group performs in May 2013. Contributed photo

## MERLE HAGGARD BRINGING HIS 'HONKY TONK GROOVE' TO TOWN

“Having won just about every music award imaginable,” country music legend Merle Haggard will be appearing at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota on Jan. 29, the venue has announced.

“With his unique ability to lyrically connect his listeners with emotions and circumstances that could either be all too familiar or entirely foreign,” Haggard bridges a gap with which many songwriters struggle their entire careers, a news release says. Johnny Cash once introduced Haggard by saying “Here’s a man who writes about his own life and has had a life to write about,” the release adds.

Haggard “became a strong symbol of working class America” with songs such as

*Working Man Blues* and *Hungry Eyes*, the release notes. “One of the beautiful aspects of Haggard’s approach to music is that he always [has been] true to going his own way and making his own sound,” it says. Even when recording tributes to the musicians who influenced him — such as Jimmie Rodgers, Lefty Frizzell and Bob Willis — Haggard always incorporated elements of jazz, rock, blues and folk into his compositions “while maintaining reverence for traditional country style,” the release continues.

Tickets are priced from \$52.62 to \$63.32. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit [www.VanWezel.org](http://www.VanWezel.org).



*Merle Haggard performs during a 2013 concert. Photo by Jeremy Luke Roberts via Flickr and Wikimedia Commons*

## CAPITOL STEPS BRINGING ITS COMICAL ACT BACK TO VENICE

Venice Theatre will present one of its most popular national acts on Sunday, Jan. 26, and Monday, Jan. 27.

The Capitol Steps will bring its up-to-the-minute political humor to the Venice stage at 8 p.m. on Sunday and 3 and 8 p.m. on Monday. Tickets are \$47, the theatre has announced.

“Notorious for poking fun at Democrats and Republicans alike,” the Capitol Steps has been around since 1981, a news release points out. It has been featured on NBC, CBS, ABC and PBS, and it can be heard four times a year on National Public Radio stations nationwide

during their *Politics Takes a Holiday* radio specials, the release adds.

The “Steps” have been described by *The Wall Street Journal* as, “a favorite on the Washington social circuit. Their political satire brings chuckles ... rave reviews ... guffaws ... and bipartisan grins all around. Their satire hits the mark.”

“The Capitol Steps are what Washington would be like if everyone were funnier and could sing,” says humorist P.J. O’Rourke in the release.



*The Capitol Steps will return to Venice Theatre this weekend. Contributed photo*

Now in the height of its concert and special events season, Venice Theatre presents shows most Sunday nights, Monday afternoons and Monday evenings, the release continues. Coming in February are The Sounds of Harry James and the Andrews Sisters for one performance on Feb. 3 at 8 p.m.; Tony and Emmy Award winner Ben Vereen on Feb. 7 and 8; and folksters The Kingston Trio on Feb. 23 and 24.

In March, the theatre will welcome, for the first time, celebrity impersonator Rich Little; he will appear on March 2 and 3. The Frankie Valli tribute act *Let's Hang On* will take the stage on March 9 and 10; and *Rave On* (a

tribute to Buddy Holly) is scheduled on March 16 and 17.

The concert and special events series will conclude in April with *Monday, Monday* (a tribute to The Mamas and the Papas) on April 6 and 7, and *The Baby Boomer Comedy Show* on April 13 and 14.

Tickets for all Venice Theatre shows through June are available at the box office at 488-1115 or online at [www.venicestage.com](http://www.venicestage.com). Venice Theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. on the island in Venice. Box office hours are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and one hour before show time.

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## SARASOTA POET ORGERA TO READ FROM HER NEWEST COLLECTION

Bookstore1Sarasota will present a program with poet Alexis Orgera of Sarasota at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 30, the downtown Sarasota shop has announced.

Orgera will read and sign her newest collection, *Dust Jacket*, which won the Coconut Books' Braddock Prize, a news release says. She is also the author of the poetry collection *How Like Foreign Objects*. Her poems, essays and reviews can be found in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Forklift Ohio*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *H\_ngm\_n*, *HTMLGiant*, *The Journal*, *jubilat*, *Memorious*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Rumpus*, *Sixth Finch* and *storySouth*, among others, the release notes.

She lives in Sarasota, where she has taught writing at New College and Ringling College of Art and Design.



Alexis Orgera/Contributed photo

Bookstore1Sarasota is located at 1359 Main St. For more information on this and other events at the shop, visit [www.bookstore1sarasota.com](http://www.bookstore1sarasota.com) or call 365-7900.

## **THE PRIMA DONNETTES AND THURGOOD EXTENDED AT FST**

As a result of popular demand, Florida Studio Theatre has extended the runs of *The Prima Donnettes*, developed by Richard Hopkins and Jim Prosser with special assistance by Rebecca Hopkins; and *Thurgood*, by George Stevens Jr., the theatre has announced.

*The Prima Donnettes*, which opened on Oct. 25 in the John C. Court Cabaret, has been extended for a 17th week, the release points out, “shattering all previous Cabaret show records.” In the release, returning company member and *Prima Donnette* Jannie Jones describes her experience: “I love doing this show with my sweet and talented cast. What

I love even more are the smiles, cheers and participation of our audiences as they travel down memory lane. It’s simply a joy!”

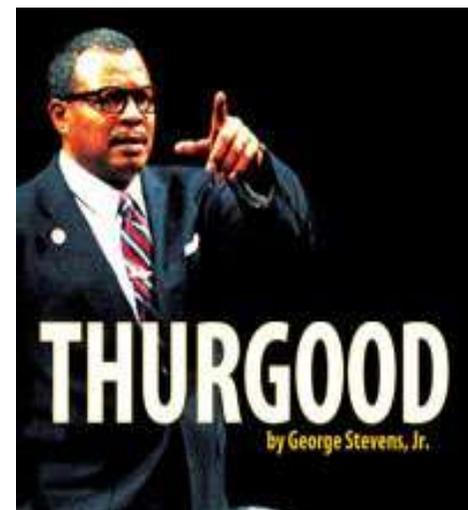
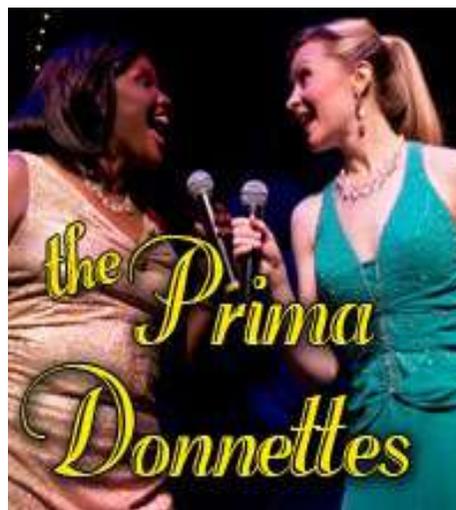
*Thurgood* has been extended for a 13th week. Cast as American hero Thurgood Marshall, Montae Russell is most recognized for his role as Dwight Zadro on the series *ER*, the release notes. Russell portrayed Thurgood Marshall at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre last summer “and is a seasoned performer on Broadway and around the country,” the release adds.

*Thurgood* will run through March 8, while *The Prima Donnettes* has been extended through Feb. 14.



*The Prima Donnettes* — (from left) Jannie Jones, Susan Haefner, Erin McGrath and Liz Power — will be performing at Florida Studio Theatre through Feb. 14. Photo by Maria Lyle.

Subscriptions for all three FST Cabaret shows may be purchased for as little as \$35, a news release points out, while tickets for all four Mainstage shows may be purchased for as little as \$45 online at [FloridaStudioTheatre.org](http://FloridaStudioTheatre.org), by phone at 366-9000 or by visiting the box office at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota. Single tickets for *The Prima Donnettes* cost from \$18 to \$36; for *Thurgood*, from \$36 to \$39.



## A GIFT FROM THE HEART



Artist John-Norman Tuck of Sarasota recently presented two large-scale paintings to the [Manatee Players](#) in Bradenton. Well known as a hairstylist at Green Ginger Hair Design on St. Armands Circle as well as an artist, Tuck says he is a tremendous fan of the musical theater. The subject matter of his paintings ranges from famous personalities to landscapes to pets to flora. He also has donated paintings to [Plymouth Harbor](#) and the [Sarasota Bay Club](#). For more information about his artistry, visit [john-normantuck.com](http://john-normantuck.com).

## ASSOCIATION TO PRESENT THE EAST COAST CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The Sarasota Concert Association (SCA) will continue its 2014 season with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO) on Wednesday, Feb. 5, at 8 p.m., part of its *Great Performers Series*.

The concert will be at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, located at 777 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, an SCA news release says. Individual tickets are \$40, \$50, \$60 and \$70. Tickets and information are available by calling 955-0040 or visiting [www.scasarasota.org](http://www.scasarasota.org).

The East Coast Chamber Orchestra, a conductor-less string orchestra often known as ECCO, is composed of “some of the classical music scene’s most vibrant, gifted and busy young string players, including soloists,

chamber musicians and members of major American orchestras,” the release points out. “As ECCO, the group convenes for select periods each year to explore and perform different musical works and to indulge in the joy and camaraderie of classical music-making,” the release adds.

“ECCO was formed in 2001 when a group of young musicians, mostly colleagues and friends who had first crossed paths at leading conservatories and music festivals across the country, envisioned the creation of a democratically run, self-conducted chamber orchestra that would thrive on the delights, growth and conviviality that can be part of classical music-making,” the release continues. The group made its New York City debut



*The East Coast Chamber Orchestra will perform at the Van Wezel on Feb. 5. Photo courtesy of the orchestra*

in 2004, and it embarked on its first U.S. tour in 2006. “Fourteen years later, ECCO’s interpretations of new and old works, coupled with passionate and joyous playing,” continue to earn its members critical acclaim and an enthusiastic following at concerts and festivals worldwide, the release adds.

ECCO’s Sarasota concert will take listeners on a musical voyage through time, beginning with Mozart’s *Divertimento in B Flat Major, K. 137* and then leaping into the 21st century with David Ludwig’s *Virtuosity: Five Micro-Concertos for String Orchestra*, which was commissioned for the orchestra in

2013 by the Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival, the release notes. The program also will include Eric Satie’s *Gymnopédies No. 1*, Judd Greenstein’s 2006 composition *Four on the Floor*, *Tristis est Anima Mea* by Italian Renaissance composer Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa and Ravel’s *String Quartet in F Major*.

The *Great Performers Series* season will continue on Feb. 19 with the historic St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Russia’s oldest symphony orchestra. The Sarasota performance will be conducted by Nikolai Alexeev, and it will feature pianist Denis Kozhukhin, the release says. 

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart.” — *Helen Keller*

## QUICK TIP



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*Temple Sinai is located off Proctor Road in Sarasota. File photo*

## **MIDDLE EAST SCHOLAR TO BE GUEST OF TEMPLE SINAI JAN. 24-25**

*Israel, the U.S. and the 'Muddle East': Hope without Delusion* will be the theme for a weekend event at Temple Sinai Jan. 24 and 25, the Temple has announced.

Professor Mark Rosenblum, director of the Jewish Studies Program and Center for Jewish Studies at Queens College, will be the guest, a news release says. "He is an award-winning historian who is an expert on the region and has often appeared on television as a skilled analyst," the release points out. He has met with the past six U.S. presidents to discuss the issue of American policy and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the release adds.

"Most recently, he was awarded a prestigious [Clinton Global Initiative](#) grant for a public

education project about coexistence," the release says.

Rosenblum will speak during the 6 p.m. Friday Shabbat service. Guests are invited to arrive at 5:15 p.m. for the welcome reception.

He will continue his remarks during the 10 a.m. Saturday Shabbat service, the release notes.

"These services are free and everyone is welcome," the release points out. "It will be an enlightening experience as Rosenblum recently returned from the region and has a fresh take on the subject," the release adds.

For more information, email [TS.SIR2014@gmail.com](mailto:TS.SIR2014@gmail.com), or visit [templesinai-sarasota.org](http://templesinai-sarasota.org) for a complete list of topics and titles.

## WESTAR RELIGIOUS LITERACY SEMINAR SET FOR FEBRUARY

The 19th Annual Westar Religious Literacy Seminar in Sarasota will be held Feb. 7-8 at the Unitarian Universalist Church on Fruitville Road in Sarasota with the theme *Does God Have a Future? Why It Matters Now*.

The church, which has a welcoming congregation, is located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota, a news release says.

“The early church relied on Plato, not Jesus, to talk about God,” a news release points out. “How did this come about? Religious studies scholars Joe Bessler and David Galston will explain [the answer] and show how later generations came to challenge the classical model of God,” the release continues. “Participants will learn about new language for God, assess recent attempts to accuse or defend God” and attempt to answer the pressing question, “Does God have a future?” the release adds.

[Joseph A. Bessler](#) is the Robert Travis Peake associate professor of theology at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, OK, where he also serves as associate dean, the release notes. He is the author of *A Scandalous*

*Jesus: How Three Historic Quests Changed Theology for the Better* (2013).

[David Galston](#) is a university chaplain and adjunct professor of philosophy at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, and academic adviser to the [SnowStar Institute](#) in Canada, the release explains. He is the author of *Embracing the Human Jesus: A Wisdom Path for Contemporary Christianity* (2012).

The organizer of the seminar is [Westar Institute](#). The program will be sponsored by the Advocates for Religious Literacy at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota in cooperation with Advocates for Religious Literacy in Florida.

The fee for all events is \$60 if paid by Jan. 24, the release notes. After that date, the cost will be \$75.

Single session fees are \$20 for the Friday lecture; \$20 for the Saturday morning workshop; and \$30 for the Saturday afternoon workshop.

For more information, call David Ryan at 365-4027 or email [d2mryan@verizon.net](mailto:d2mryan@verizon.net).

## TEMPLE EMANU-EL TO HOST SHABBAT DINNER ON JAN. 31

Temple Emanu-El, located at 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, invites members of the community to a Shabbat dinner on Friday, Jan. 31, at 6 p.m., with Shabbat services following at 7:30 p.m.

This festive meal will welcome Temple members and community guests “for delicious food in a warm and friendly atmosphere,”

a news release says. Chicken and vegetarian options will be offered, along with side dishes, salad and dessert. The cost is \$18 per adult and \$8 per child ages 6 to 12; children ages 5 and under will be admitted free.

Reservations are required by Jan. 27. For more information or to make a reservation, call Ethel Gross at 388-7899.

## PUBLIC INVITED TO DADDY-DAUGHTER DANCE AT TEMPLE EMANU-EL

Little girls and their fathers, grandpas or special friends are warmly invited to the Daddy-Daughter Dance on Sunday, Feb. 9, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Temple Emanu-El, located at 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, the Temple has announced.

“Back by popular demand, Temple Emanu-El’s third biannual Daddy-Daughter Dance will feature a disco ball, music and dancing; a nail salon and makeup station; finger sandwiches, chicken fingers, macaroni and cheese, fruit, crudités, tea, root beer floats and a gallery of homemade desserts; father-daughter games and crafts; professional father-daughter

portraits; and a raffle for prizes, including a father-daughter dinner at Michael’s on East and Vera Bradley gear,” a news release says. Every girl will receive raffle tickets and a long-stemmed rose.

Admission to the Daddy Daughter Dance is \$18 with paid reservations received by Feb. 3, or \$30 at the door, the release notes. Payment may be mailed to Temple Emanu-El, Attention: Daddy-Daughter Dance, 151 McIntosh Road, Sarasota, Florida 34232; please note the daughter’s age on the reservation.

For more information, call 356-3006.



*Alexandra and Madison Witherspoon wore matching dresses at Temple Emanu-El’s most recent Daddy-Daughter Dance. Contributed photo*



*Marc Rosenthal and daughter Tayla enjoyed the festivities at the most recent Daddy-Daughter Dance at Temple Emanu-El. Contributed photo*



*Temple Emanu-El Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman escorted his daughter, Eden, to the Daddy-Daughter Dance. Contributed photo*



# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**24+**  
JANUARY

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

Through Jan. 25; times vary; Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$18 to 49. Information: 366-9000 or [FloridaStudioTheatre.org](http://FloridaStudioTheatre.org).

**24+**  
JANUARY

**Dabbert Gallery presents *10th Anniversary Exhibition***

Through Feb. 1; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or [DabbertGallery.com](http://DabbertGallery.com).

**24+**  
JANUARY

**Allyn Gallup presents *Nature and Irony***

Through Feb. 1; times vary; Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art Gallery, 1288 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or [AllynGallup.com](http://AllynGallup.com).

**24+**  
JANUARY

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

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

**26**  
JANUARY

**ASCS presents *The Dave Bennett Quartet***

Jan. 26, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m., Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center, 709 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$40-45. Information: 306-1202 or [ArtistSeriesConcerts.org](http://ArtistSeriesConcerts.org).

**31**  
JANUARY

**Jazz Club of Sarasota presents vocalist *Kit Moran***

Jan. 31, 2 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 3975 Fruitville Road, Sarasota. Admission: \$7 for members/\$12 for non-members. Information: 366-1552 or [JazzClubSarasota.org](http://JazzClubSarasota.org).

**18**  
FEBRUARY

**FSU/Asolo Conservatory presents *How I Learned To Drive***

Feb. 18 through Mar. 9; times vary; Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$27 to 29. Information: 351-8000 or [AsoloRep.org](http://AsoloRep.org).

**YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST**

**PRESS**



**Norman Schimmel**  
Photographer

**The Sarasota News Leader**

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## **SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS**

**'HMMM ... PERHAPS SWIMMING IN  
THAT CESSPOOL WAS A BAD IDEA.'**



*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.*