

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 24 — February 28, 2014

News Leader



'AN OLD SORE'

ROLLING FORWARD

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A.K.A. HELP

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Welcome

Some weeks, it seems, we find ourselves writing many variations on old themes. The goal is to keep readers keenly interested in those topics up-to-date on what has transpired, of course.

At the same time, we strive to find different subjects to put in the spotlight, to satisfy those of you who could not care less about any of those long-running sagas.

This week's issue captures that mix. County Editor Roger Drouin and I spent a considerable amount of time with "old friends," while Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker and City Editor Stan Zimmerman explored fresher themes.

One of my longstanding pet peeves has been the propensity of publications to fail to keep up with a story. I would prefer too much coverage, frankly, to a lack of resolution. And I feel strongly that our readers who are concerned about the revision of the 2050 Plan or whether Warm Mineral Springs ever will reopen, for just two examples, appreciate the effort we put into reporting on those issues.

Among the fresh takes this week, Cooper has written about the first debate of County Commission candidates, and Stan has examined a new crosswalk project in downtown Sarasota.

On the much lighter side: Fran Palmeri has given all of us a splendid gift in the form of new nature photos and lovely prose, and Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel apparently put a lot of mileage on his car last weekend to capture for you many of the delights of season.

Frankly, I believe you will find a lot to enjoy this week — the old and the new.

Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor and Publisher





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Front cover: *Credit: Here's the pitch* - Norman Schimmel
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*Although parking remains free at all the county beaches, some residents say tourists should pay a fee.
File photo*

A MAJORITY OF CURRENT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WOULD CONSIDER CHARGING VISITORS, BUT NOT RESIDENTS, TO PARK AT THE BEACHES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

When discussion of the Siesta Public Beach Park improvements was under way at the Feb. 6 Siesta Key Association (SKA) meeting, one person took the opportunity to raise a matter she called “an old sore”: paying for parking.

The woman asked County Commissioner Nora Patterson — a member of the audience — why the county continues to let everyone park for free at the beach. Patterson replied, “I’m not the proper spokesman. I was on the other side of this issue.”

As she has pointed out in the past, Patterson was part of a 3-2 board majority in 2008 that did approve fees for parking at county beaches. Subsequently, Shannon Staub, then chairwoman of the board, changed her mind about the plan, and the commission scrapped the idea.

Although the current board has “a little bit different makeup” than it did in 2008, Patterson told SKA members, she doubted a revival of the proposal would win approval. “You

“ *I think we could be creative.*

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission



need to talk to somebody else, other than me,” she added at the SKA meeting.

Patterson and Commissioner Joe Barbetta are the only current board members who were on the commission in 2008. They served with Commissioners Jon Thaxton and Paul H. Mercier as well as Staub.

To find out whether Patterson’s supposition at the SKA meeting was correct, *The Sarasota News Leader* conducted brief interviews last week of the current board members. It appears there is wiggle room for a renewed effort, but only to charge visitors. Chairman Charles Hines and Commissioner Carolyn Mason said they would be willing to discuss the matter.

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson remains dead set against the idea. Like parks and

libraries, Robinson said, “[Beaches] need to be accessible to families.”

Robinson told the *News Leader*, she was treasurer of the MOMS Club of Venice in 2008. The members were ready to turn the County Commission Chambers into a “daycare center” with mothers and children, she joked, to protest if the County Commission continued its move toward beach parking.

Barbetta at first told the *News Leader* “No comment” when asked about his view. Then he said he does not feel county taxpayers should have to pony up money to use their own beaches. He added that the only way he would support a paid parking plan would be if county residents were issued stickers making it clear they could park for free.



The Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office prepares a ‘spring break plan’ every year to handle the anticipated crowds at the beaches, especially on Siesta. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE HISTORY

On May 14, 2008, the County Commission heard a presentation from Community Services Department staff regarding authorization to advertise a Request for Proposals (RFP) “to implement a proposed Beach Paid Parking Pilot Program at the Caspersen, Manasota, and Blind Pass Beaches,” the official minutes say.

Afterward, Commissioner Mercier moved to authorize the advertisement, but he stipulated the pilot program would include Blind Pass, Nokomis and North Jetty beaches as well as the Caspersen, Manasota and Blind Pass beaches. Patterson seconded that motion. With Staub’s support, it passed 3-2. Commissioner Thaxton joined Barbetta in the minority.



Shannon Staub stepped down from the County Commission in 2010. Contributed photo



Siesta Public Beach is busier year-round than it was in years past, residents say. File photo

Then Patterson moved to amend the motion to include all the county beaches in the RFP. Mercier seconded it, and it, too, passed 3-2, with Staub again in the majority.

Finally — with the same three commissioners in support — the board approved a resolution to implement the Beach Paid Parking Pilot Program, including the establishment of a policy and fee schedule. It called for parking fees for all vehicles without an annual permit to be \$2 per hour — or fraction of one hour — with a \$10 maximum per day.

A Sarasota County resident would pay \$30 for an annual permit for the first vehicle registered at a single-family residence or condominium or apartment unit; the cost would be \$10 for each additional vehicle permit for the same single-family household.

Non-residents of the county would pay \$75 per vehicle for an annual permit.

The pilot program was to go into effect in February 2009.

The county expected to raise about \$4 million from the fees, according to staff reports. The firm hired to handle the parking would receive 35 percent of the proceeds, and the county would use the rest of the revenue to pay for beach maintenance, operations, cleanup and other related costs.

As reporter Stan Zimmerman wrote in the *Pelican Press*, the County Commission was scheduled to start its budget deliberations the following month, and it was facing a \$38 million shortfall.

Less than two weeks later, on May 27, 2008, during the Commission Reports part of the



Commissioner Nora Patterson has been an advocate of paid parking at county beaches. Photo by Norman Schimmel

meeting, Patterson made a motion to direct “the County Administrator to withdraw the authorization for the [RFP] relative to the Beach Paid Parking Pilot Program,” according to the minutes. Thaxton seconded the motion, which carried by a 5-0 vote.

As Zimmerman wrote in his subsequent *Pelican Press* article, the commissioners had received more than 100 emails protesting the paid parking plan.

During that May 27, 2008 meeting, Patterson told her colleagues, “I saw this morning that Commissioner Staub ... has sent out one email, and I assume more will follow, telling people that she no longer supports paying for beach parking. I think if that is the case, we shouldn’t burden people with having to do an RFP when there are already three votes not to do it.”

Patterson added, “Frankly, I guess I would rather have had ... a board discussion than read it in an email.” She then told Staub, “But I appreciate your copying us on your email. And I have to say that I was feeling a little bombarded by emails that were very negative on this as well ...”

Patterson pointed out that she had explained to people who had talked with or emailed her that “we would see at budget time just how far behind the eight ball that we are” in terms of funding to pay for parks maintenance and other ongoing county expenses.

Nonetheless, she said, “No matter how far behind we are on the eight ball, I think we should instruct [County Administrator Jim] Ley to have staff withdraw the RFP.”

“Somebody has to maintain the beaches,” Mercier pointed out. The county also needed to continue to employ lifeguards and to provide parking at beach accesses that had no spaces.

He added, “There are other opportunities for funding to make up for these maintenance and management needs. We’re just going to have to find ’em.”

BACK TO THE FUTURE

On Feb. 19, Commission Chairman Hines pointed out to the *News Leader* that he recently had visited the beach in Clearwater, where paying to park is a fact of life. He and his family looked at that as “no big deal,” he added, as it is not unreasonable to ask tourists to help cover the cost of beach maintenance.

Considering the situation locally, he pointed to the example of the parking meter saga

in downtown Sarasota a couple of years ago: The City Commission chose to remove the devices after a multitude of complaints from residents.


“We never really heard our community advocate” paid parking at the beach, he said. If the County Commission were to pursue such a plan, he added, full-time residents could be made exempt from paying. “I think we could be creative.”

Commissioner Mason told the *News Leader* that when she first came on the county board in 2008, “My answer would have been ‘No’” if she had been asked if she would support requiring people to pay to park at the beaches.

However, given the never-ebbing demand for beach lot spaces, she continued, “I would consider it. ... I think we have to look at everything. I may not support it in the end.”

Still, she added, “I think [considering it] would be the important thing to do.”

While the 2008 County Commission was looking at a \$38 million shortfall in revenue at the outset of FY 2009 budget discussions, the current board is looking at a hole of about \$28 million for FY 2015. As it has over the past several years, it anticipates using Economic Uncertainty, or “rainy day,” funds to balance that budget.

However, figures presented during the board’s first workshop on the FY 2015 spending plan — held Feb. 21 — showed the county’s FY 2016 budget could have a \$18,936,003 gap to fill — and no more rainy day funds will be left to help out. (See the related FY 2015 budget story in this issue.) 

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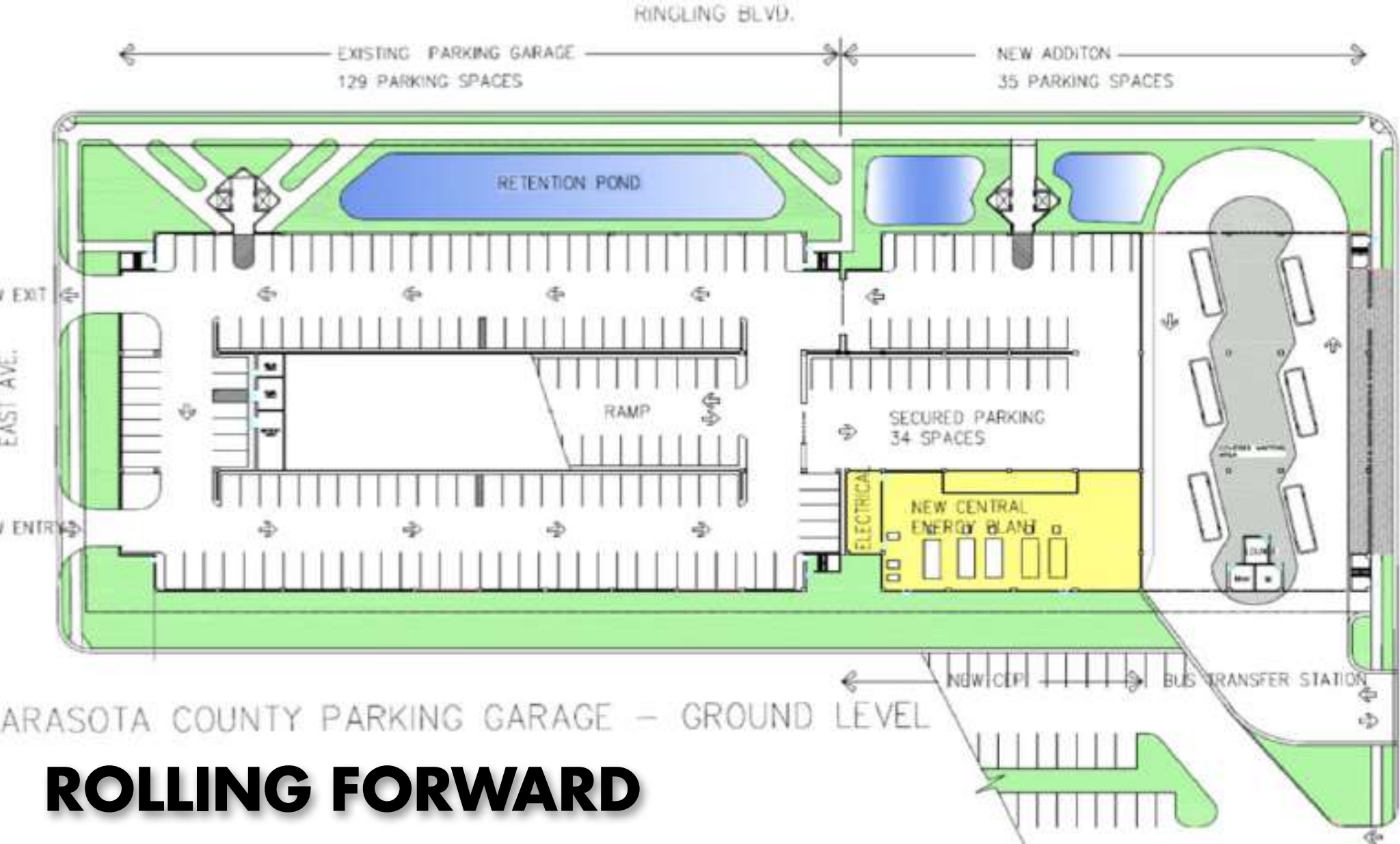
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ROLLING FORWARD

An illustration shows how a new county bus transfer station could be constructed on Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE COUNTY COMMISSION MOVES AHEAD WITH FURTHER STUDY OF PRIVATIZING ITS BUS SERVICE AND DISCUSSES THE CONCEPT OF MOVING THE DOWNTOWN TRANSFER STATION

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

The Sarasota County commissioners on Friday, Feb. 21, decided to roll ahead with further study of two proposed Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) changes. If enacted, the initiatives would mean a big move for the bus transit station in downtown Sarasota and a new way of operating the bus system throughout the county.

The commission first tackled the related questions of whether to privatize Sarasota County's transit system and consolidate it with Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT).

“A joint meeting would have been a good way for us as policymakers to understand what positions we are both in.”

Christine Robinson
Vice Chairwoman
Sarasota County Commission

They then discussed the possibility of moving the bus transfer station from Lemon Avenue at First Street to property across from the Health Department near the

intersection of Ringling Boulevard and School Avenue in Sarasota.

REJUVENATED PLANS

Under one privatization proposal, a contractor would operate both MCAT and SCAT, while the two counties would retain ownership and ultimate oversight of the agencies.

County resident William Baez told the commissioners he was opposed to privatization. But if Sarasota County were to pursue a contract-operator concept, Baez suggested letting Manatee County accelerate with that idea first, to see how privatization works for its system.

“I do not agree with doing this, but if we are thinking of doing it, please watch and see what Manatee County does before we jump in with both feet,” Baez said.

The county commissioners agreed to move ahead with studying the concepts of privatization and consolidation, voting to ask county staff come back with cost estimates for an independent study.

Last fall, plans to collaborate with MCAT on the proposals hit a snag when the Manatee County commissioners canceled an Oct. 15, 2013 joint meeting, citing insufficient time to go over the most recent information available to them.



If the county bus transfer station were moved in downtown Sarasota, routes would have to be reconfigured, bus department staff has pointed out. File photo

“I have to voice some disappointment,” Sarasota County board Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson said Friday. “We had a meeting scheduled. They canceled the meeting ... We asked them to continue to meet. And now we are in a position where we had made a decision to make a joint effort, and we can’t even talk to them about it at a joint meeting because they canceled it. A joint meeting would have been a good way for us as policy-makers to understand what positions we are both in.”

Robinson added, “I’m not understanding who is driving the ship on this one right now.”

Actually, it is a bus, Commissioner Joe Barbetta joked.

The Manatee County board has expressed a desire for hiring a single contractor to run the two separate agencies. It does not want to merge the systems because that would entail trying to keep straight who owns which buses and how to maintain federal funding assistance.

“They want to proceed with privatizing theirs, and we can come with them if we want to,” Chairman Charles Hines summed it up.

Under that plan, SCAT could lease its buses to a contractor for \$1 a day in exchange for having the firm operate the vehicles.

Commissioners wanted to find out if that plan would reduce costs.



An aerial view shows the proposed location of the new county bus transfer station near the county Health Department. Image courtesy Sarasota County

There is fiscal incentive for studying the privatization option. At \$21 million a year, SCAT's budget is the second largest in the county's general fund, behind that of the Sheriff's Office. (See the related County Commission budget story in this issue.)

"I want to explore this," Barbetta said.

One of the guiding factors in reaching consensus would be determining how much money could be saved, added County Commissioner Nora Patterson. "That's part of the decision ... What are we going to get for the bucks?"

The discussions have always focused on two separate agencies, Barbetta noted.

"We are talking about a public-private partnership to operate two systems and therefore have economy of scale and more efficient

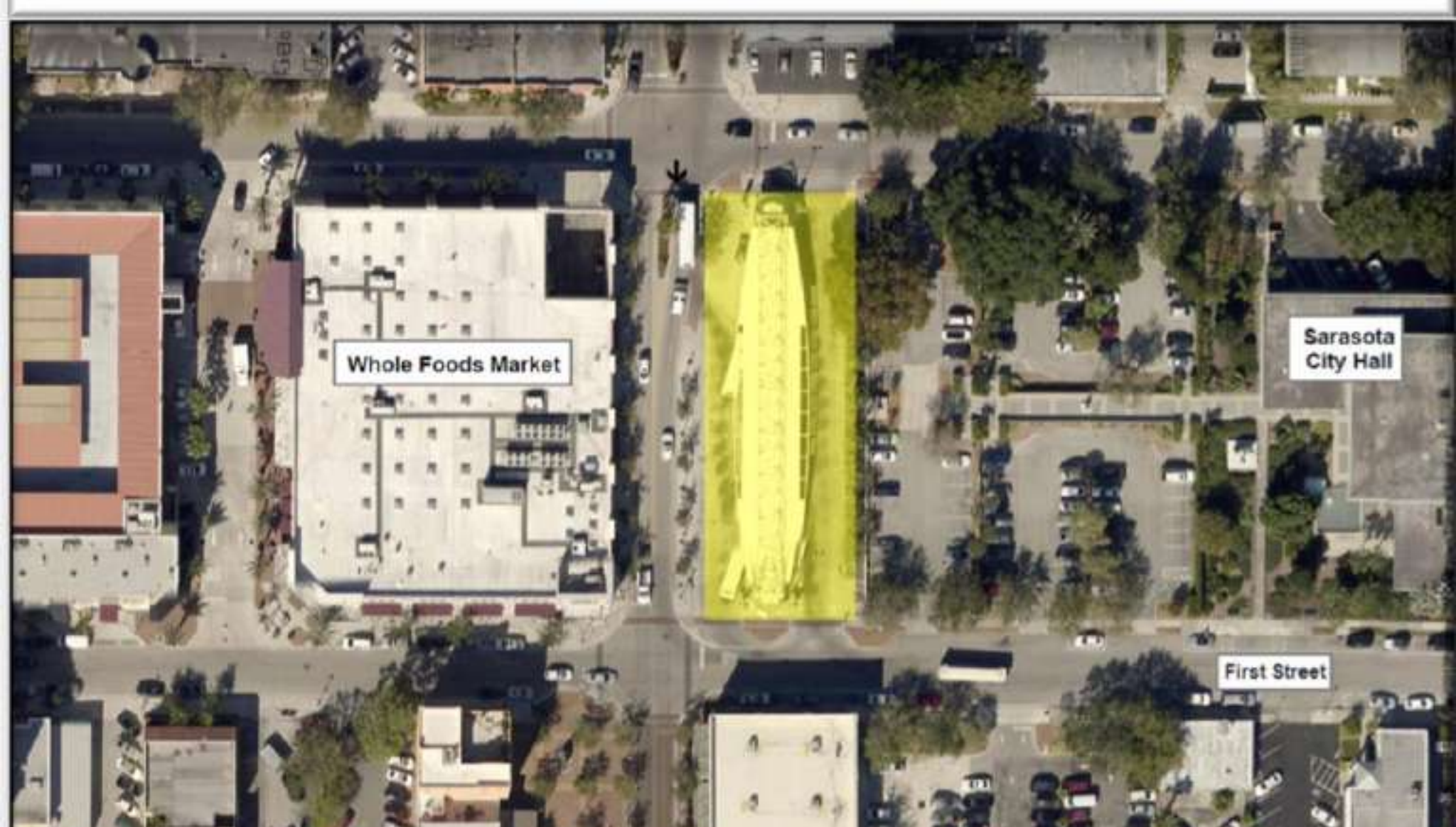
operation," Barbetta said. "It does work around the country. I think that is why we are exploring it, because we are continuing to pump a lot of money into SCAT."

Barbetta suggested seeking a consultant with a proven track record of establishing public-private bus systems.

Patterson questioned whether privatization would be "a slam dunk for me."

One option is to just let Manatee County try it and see how that works, as resident Baez suggested during public comments at the Feb. 21 meeting.

If the county moves ahead with privatization, but retains ownership of SCAT and leases the buses to the operator, a way out theoretically exists if the plan fails to proceed as the board would like.



An aerial view shows the proximity of the current downtown bus transfer station to Whole Foods and City Hall. Image courtesy Sarasota County

“If we decide it isn’t working, we don’t have to go out and buy all new equipment and start from scratch,” Patterson pointed out.

“There are pros and cons to every system,” Glama Carter, the SCAT director, told the board, referring to options for determining how many aspects of the transit system would be operated by a contractor.

RELOCATION CONSIDERED

In a unanimous vote Friday, the commissioners also decided to take a closer look at moving the downtown transfer station,

located at Lemon Avenue and First Street. Staff will work on a plan showing how buses would maneuver in a new site across from the Health Department and how much it would cost to reorganize the routes to accommodate the change of place.

Some downtown advocates say the station is not the best use of the prime property across from the Whole Foods market and City Hall. Space is also limited at that station; the facility cannot accommodate the county’s longer Express buses. “It does work, but it is a very tight site,” Carter told the commissioners.



A person sleeps at the county’s downtown Sarasota bus transfer station. The propensity of homeless people to gather at the station is another reason city residents and business people would like to see the facility relocated. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Additionally, the majority of SCAT riders end up at the downtown station. "Seventy percent of all trips go [there]," Carter said. "That is a high percentage."

The total cost to build the station on Lemon Avenue was \$3.17 million, including the \$490,000 expense to purchase the land from the city.

If the county builds a similar facility further east, near the Health Department, it will not likely have to repay the \$2.83 million Florida Department of Transportation grant that was awarded for construction of the Lemon Avenue station, SCAT staff says.

Barbetta and proponents of the facility relocation have pointed out that revenue from the sale of the Downtown Core-zoned property on Lemon Avenue could be used to partially fund a new station. He advocated hiring a consultant to examine the possibilities.

"If we are thinking about moving [the station], we need to bring in a professional to look at this," Barbetta said.

Commissioner Carolyn Mason told her colleagues she has concerns about pedestrian safety if the station is relocated to the site

on Ringling Boulevard and School Avenue. "People cross mid-block to the Health Department. It is very dangerous," Mason said. "With a transfer station there, there will be more people."

County Administrator Tom Harmer noted that the City of Sarasota has been working on a crosswalk project that will be constructed soon in that area. (See the related story in this issue.)

Another expense would involve the need to replace the parking area the county would lose if a station were built on Ringling Boulevard.

Patterson said if the station were relocated, she would like to see a plan showing how it could be constructed of sufficient size to handle the county's bus traffic for years to come. She also asked for renderings showing how many bays could fit on the new site.

Further, Patterson sought cost estimates for the reorganized bus routes that would be necessitated by the station move.

In its unanimous vote, the board directed staff to find the answers to Patterson's questions and report back. 



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Republican Sarasota County Commission candidate Alan Maio speaks to the Village Walk Republican Club Wednesday night. Photo by Cooper Levey-Baker

CAMPAIGN SEASON ARRIVES FOR FOUR REPUBLICAN SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION CANDIDATES

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

And they're off. Kind of.

After months of fundraising, strategizing and positioning, the contest to join the Sarasota County Commission finally hit the public Wednesday, Feb. 26. And while the turnout at the Village Walk Republican Club meeting was modest, the event offered important clues about how the candidates hope to present themselves to the voting public.

The field is all-Republican so far, with two candidates in each district. City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo and past City Commission candidate Pete Theisen are running to replace outgoing County Commissioner Joe

Barbetta, while Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations President Lourdes Ramirez is squaring off against Kimley-Horn and Associates executive Alan Maio to take the seat of retiring Commissioner Nora Patterson.

The club asked the candidates to introduce themselves and to address three major issues: the possibility of widening Honore Avenue between Clark and Bee Ridge roads, the future of Warm Mineral Springs and turnover in the county administrator's seat.

Maio spoke first, describing his development background and family life and largely

defending the status quo. He praised the board for not having raised taxes in the past 12 years and said the budget was in good shape overall. As for the administrator position, Maio said the county was “spoiled” by Jim Ley, who spent 14 years in that post before being forced to resign in 2011 amid a cloud of scandal over staff’s handling of county contracts.

A vocal supporter of ousted Administrator Randy Reid, Ramirez praised current Administrator Tom Harmer, who replaced Reid after he was fired last fall. She said that while Harmer has not yet reached out to community groups as he needs to, she is confident he will.

Ramirez also directly addressed her experience as the victim in former Republican Party of Sarasota County chairman Bob

Waechter’s scheme to impersonate her and donate to Democratic candidates such as Keith Fitzgerald, who was running for the U.S. House. Why was she targeted by the local Republican “machine”? “They knew they couldn’t convince me to be like a bobblehead,” Ramirez said. Her campaign play is simple. She’s a “fiscal conservative” who likes to “think outside the box” and believes in transparency. “I am the voice of the people,” she told the audience.

Caragiulo presented himself as a problem-solver, someone interested in looking at the big picture rather than getting lost in policy minutiae. When club member Helen Wolff asked the candidates for their thoughts on the county’s decision to rewrite portions of its Sarasota 2050 land-use plan, Caragiulo



Lourdes Ramirez addresses the Village Walk Republican Club audience. Photo by Cooper Levey-Baker

said the county needed to determine its larger goal before moving forward. “The best plans are the ones that can bear alteration,” he said.

Maio also supports revising 2050, accusing current critics of being the same people who originally fought 2050 when it was created a decade ago. Citing developer Pat Neal’s experience designing *Grand Palm*, the first 2050 project to actually get off the ground, Maio said the plan’s regulations, intended to encourage the construction of walkable mixed-use communities, are much too onerous.

Wolff told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the debate she felt Ramirez best laid out her position on 2050. Ramirez has repeatedly criticized the county for overhauling the plan, arguing the process is being driven by a handful of well-connected developers. According

to Wolff, people need to get more involved in what’s happening with 2050. “Sarasota is growing,” she said, “and I think we should get engaged.”

But are people paying attention? Only 20 or so club members turned out for the forum. During his introductory remarks, organization President Roy Wells said President Obama’s 2012 reelection seems to have dampened enthusiasm for this cycle. “It’s difficult to get people involved,” Wells said. “They worked hard the last election and just can’t get going on this one.”

“I thought they did well,” club member William Morrow told the *News Leader*. He hasn’t made up his mind on whom he’ll support, but he appreciated the humor Theisen brought to the affair. Theisen, who ran




Paul Caragiulo makes a point in his remarks during the Village Walk Republican Club debate on Feb. 26. Photo by Cooper Levey-Baker

three unsuccessful campaigns for the City Commission before throwing himself into the county race, showed up 45 minutes late because he accidentally started a fire in his kitchen. He praised the Village Walk club for the quality “nibbles” it offered at its meeting.

Village Walk residents Jack and Judy Paschall told the *News Leader* they need to read up more on the issues discussed by the candidates before knowing whom they’ll support. Jack said the jargon used — 2050, ITNs, etc. — can be tough to penetrate. “What it does is make you want to go out on your own and research it,” he added.

With 24-hour cable news and the proliferation of political news sites and blogs and social media sharing, it sometimes seems easier to keep up with the White House or

what’s happening with, say, discrimination in Arizona, than to know what’s happening in the commission chambers down the street. That’s a problem all four candidates are facing as they vie to join the county board. The Village Walk event kicks off a series of upcoming candidate forums, with a Tiger Bay debate scheduled for May, so they’ll have their opportunities soon. Can anyone break through?

Another key question: Will the race remain all-Republican? If so, that means that under Florida’s limited open primary rules, all Sarasota County residents — regardless of party affiliation — will be eligible to vote this August. Will a Democrat run? Will someone file as an Independent simply to block out non-Republicans? Burning questions as campaign season kicks into high gear. 



County Commissioners Joe Barbetta (left) and Nora Patterson (right) will be stepping down in the fall, thanks to term limits. Photo by Norman Schimmel

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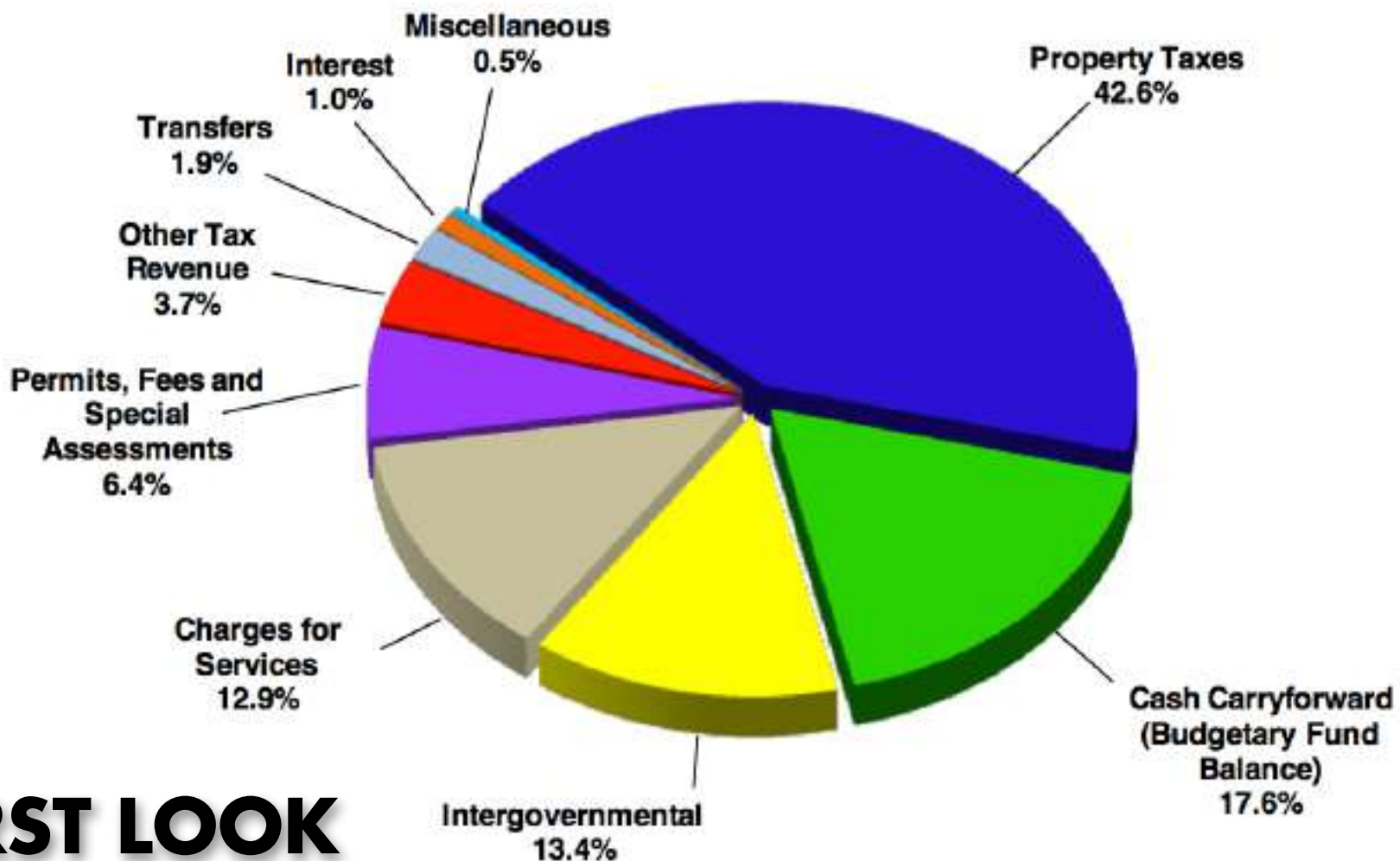
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PERONI



General Fund Revenues

FY14 Adopted Budget (\$260,786,324)



FIRST LOOK

A pie chart shows the sources of Sarasota County revenue for the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County

IN STEP ONE OF THE LATEST BUDGET PROCESS, THE COUNTY COMMISSION LOOKS AT THE 2015 FISCAL YEAR PLAN AND PREPARES FOR THE CHALLENGE OF A PROJECTED 2016 DEFICIT

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

During their first budget workshop of the year, the Sarasota County commissioners heard some final numbers related to their 2013 spending plan and reviewed a timeline for crafting the 2015 fiscal year document.

The Feb. 21 workshop was Step One in an atypically early start on the next budget and the not-so-distant challenge of addressing an \$18.9 million general fund shortfall projected for Fiscal Year 2016.

In addition to scheduling an earlier beginning for the workshops this year, Tom Harmer, who was named county administrator last month, has instituted a new review plan for departmental budgets, which will get under way later.

For Chairman Charles Hines, one top goal will be keeping a close eye on the projected 2016 deficit and budgeting accordingly.

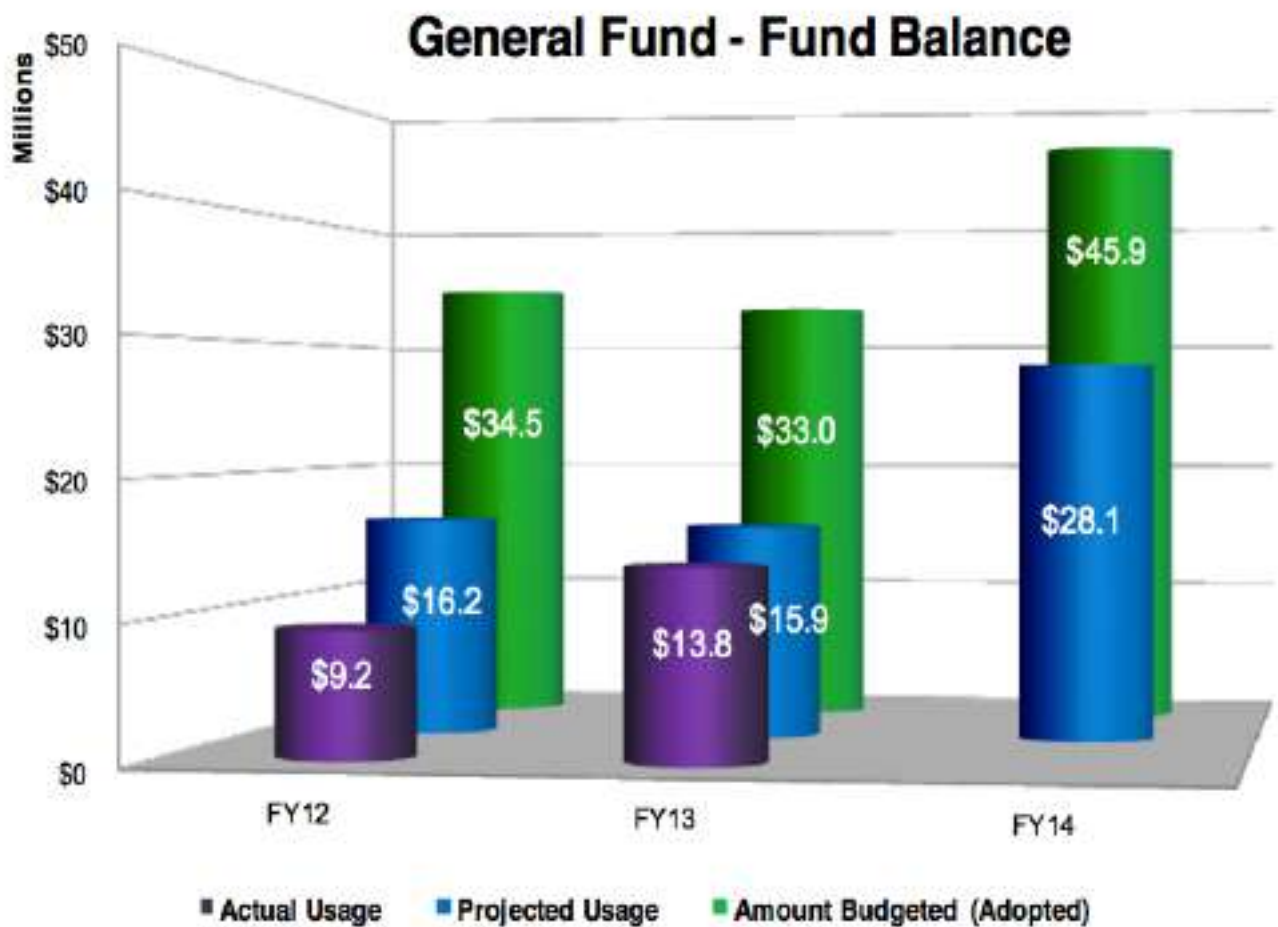
“When we approved our budget [for FY 2013], we felt we were fine for this year and potentially for next year,” Hines said. “This goes with what Commissioner [Christine] Robinson has been saying in the past. For us to spend into reserves beyond what is a safe and reasonable point really isn’t fiscal sustainability. And we all know that ... That is why we are doing these additional budget reviews.”

“For us to spend into reserves beyond what is a safe and reasonable point really isn’t fiscal sustainability. And we all know that.”

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission



Fund Balance – Budget vs. Actual



Projected Usage based on historical average of 3% over-collection of revenues and 6% under-spending of expenditures

Beginning FY14 Fund Balance of \$41.4M (75 Day Contingency / Emergency) and \$20.9M (38 Days for Budget Stabilization). Does not include the \$8M+ (15 Days) which the Board set aside or any amount budgeted to balance the FY14 Adopted Budget.

He added, “So, everyone knows what is coming and where and what we can do over these next two years to avoid when those reserves run out, avoid raising taxes.”

Hines also noted several measures under consideration in the Florida Legislature that could decrease the county’s revenue by \$800,000 to \$1 million — if the changes are approved. Those initiatives could result in lower state sales tax revenue and medical examiner fee income for counties.

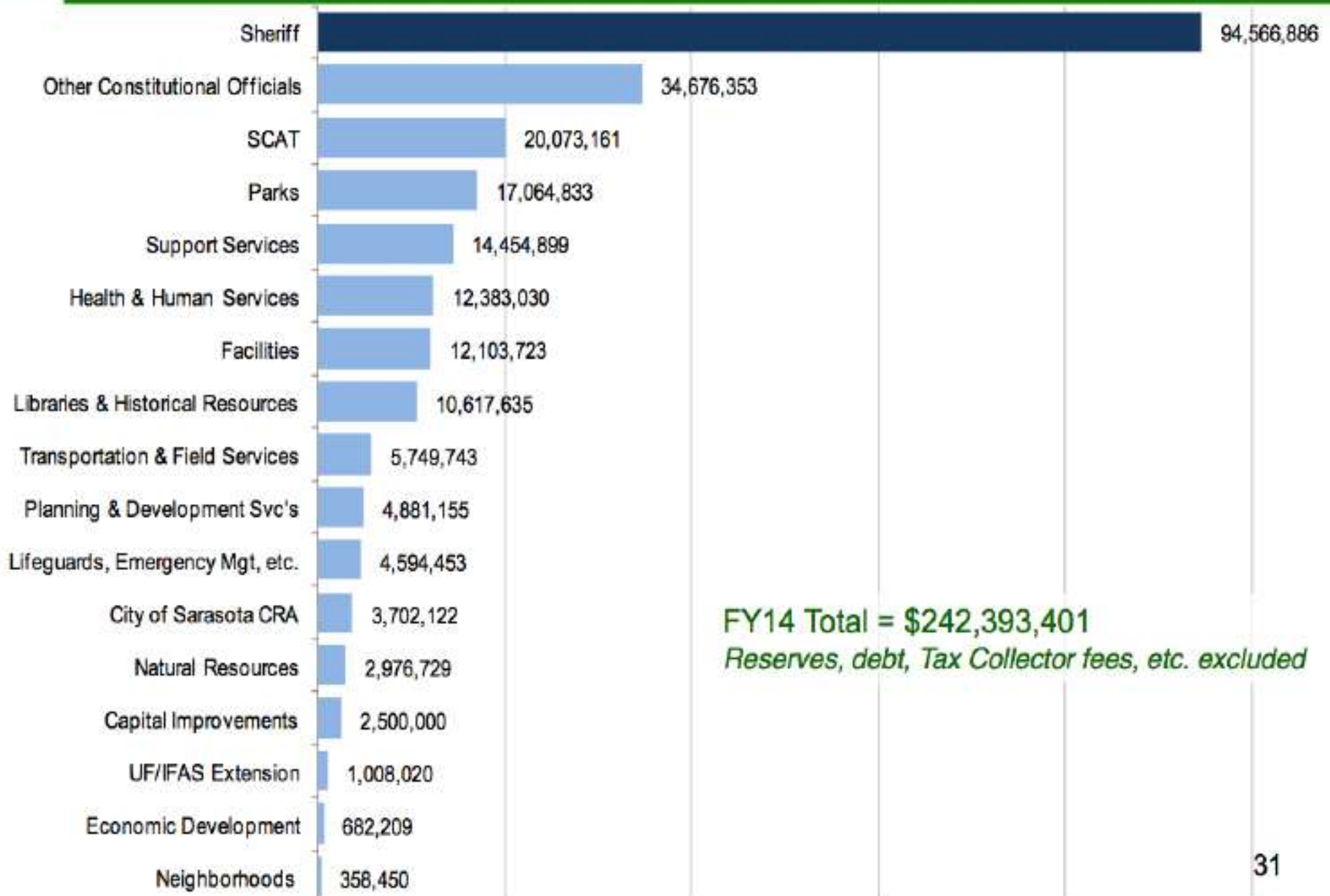
GENERAL FUND BALANCE

During last year’s workshops, when the commissioners discussed whether, and by how much, to dip into the county’s “economic uncertainty fund” to balance the budget, the topic proved to be one of their most heated.

During a September 2013 workshop, Robinson, who has become the board’s chief fiscal watchdog, said, “We can’t erase the fact that we’re spending more than our growth



General Fund Budget



A chart shows how general fund revenue was allocated for the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County

rate ... What we're not doing is holding the rate on what we're consuming and spending."

The commission ended up allocating \$46 million in general fund reserves to plug a revenue gap for the 2014 fiscal year. That amount was larger than it had been in previous years, and the decision left a slightly less robust reserve for an emergency or for budget stabilization in future years.

In 2013, the commission budgeted \$33 million from its general fund reserve to fill a gap, and in the 2012 fiscal year, the amount budgeted was \$34.5 million.

Each year, the actual amount of reserves used was less than the estimate, thanks to an overall increase in revenue collected

plus under-spending. For instance, in 2013, although the commission set aside \$33 million of general fund reserves for the budget deficit, only \$13.8 million was needed.

On Feb. 21, both Robinson and Commissioner Nora Patterson asked for a breakdown showing how much of the general fund reserve was used to pay for operating costs going back to 2006.

THE NUMBER TO WATCH

\$18.9 million: That is projected deficit in the FY 2016 general fund. And it is the number to watch during the upcoming budget workshops.

That figure results from "current conservative estimates," said Steven Botelho, acting



Commissioner Joe Barbetta originally proposed that about \$8 million generated by a change in the county's reserve policy be used for improvements to the BMX track. However, other funds were found for that project. Photo by Norman Schimmel

assistant county administrator. Botelho has been the county's chief financial management officer.

Conceptual strategies are in the works for mitigating the shortfall. "It's out there; we are watching it," he said of the number. "But we have plans and will aggressively be discussing options to lower that amount."

The projected deficit can change thanks to a number of variables, ranging from a rise in fuel costs to the potential extension of the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). It would increase, for example, if the City and County commissions approve the CRA extension for another period following the agency's scheduled termination in 2016.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta noted, however, that higher property tax values than anticipated would lower the deficit.

"This will change," Botelho said of the shortfall.

"We are going to monitor it," Harmer added. "We will continue to update the board on that."

NEW PRIORITIES — AND COSTS

The effort to rein in the budget will have to be balanced with some new spending priorities.

On Friday, commissioners said they want to put the focus on new sports tourism projects, such as more rowing facilities at [Blackburn Point Park](#), in anticipation of the 2017 World Rowing Championships planned for Nathan Benderson Park.



Steve Botelho, the county's chief financial management officer and acting assistant county administrator, listens to discussion during a 2013 budget workshop. File photo

Local rowing teams use Blackburn Point Park in Osprey for regular training.

Efforts to address homelessness in the county — including a proposal to construct a shelter in Sarasota — could be another expense for the FY 2015 budget that cannot be projected accurately at this time. The Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office would operate the shelter.

Harmer cautioned the commissioners that funding for any services or projects associated with handling community homelessness will likely come from the general fund.

“If the sheriff comes in and says he need funds for the homeless shelter, for instance, we may have to look at [cutting] other [county] services,” Harmer pointed out.



Probable Cost Analysis – Mid Rise

Mid-Rise Configuration

Hardened Facility (200mph)

Sheriff Admin	
120,000 sf @ \$250/sf	\$30,000,000
Forensics/Medical Examiner	
30,000 sf @ \$250/sf	\$7,500,000
Combined Training Center	
30,000 sf @ \$250/sf	\$7,500,000
Structured Parking	
560 spaces @ \$10,000	<u>\$5,600,000</u>
Facility Cost	\$50,600,000
Site Development, FFE, & Technology Systems	\$8,500,000
Soft Costs & Contingency	<u>\$12,200,000</u>
Probable Project Cost	\$71,300,000

A chart shows projected expenses for a new four-story complex for the Sheriff’s Office and a new two-story structure for the Sarasota County Medical Examiner and the Sheriff’s Office Forensics Division on property adjacent to the Emergency Operations Center being built on Cattlemen Road. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The shelter and related efforts have moved to the top of the county's priority list. "We would like to secure the partnership funding and the sites required to move forward our homeless initiative," said Charles Henry, director of Sarasota County Health and Human Services, during an update to the commissioners last Friday.

Other upcoming county expenses will be associated with infrastructure, including bridge maintenance and road resurfacing. Commissioners have already drawn attention this year to those needs, some of which were not attended to during the recession. During the Feb. 21 workshop, Robinson asked when the infrastructure budget discussion would be held. Capital projects, including road resurfacing and bridges, will be the focus of a March workshop, Harmer responded.

A new \$71 million Sheriff's Office campus would be another big expense not currently budgeted. The Cattlemen Road project, which the board has been discussing in depth since last year, is expected to become a lively topic as the commissioners explore funding options. Sheriff Tom Knight has pointed out to the board that his facilities are spread out in more than 20 different buildings, that they are vulnerable to natural disasters and that the agency is operating in about half the space needed for a sheriff's department of the size and caliber of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office.

"If we were to approve it and say start working on it now, we would be digging a real hole for the commission," Patterson said Friday of the Cattlemen Road complex. "I don't see a revenue stream for it, unless people want to approve a bond."

"It is not funded now and it is not [a listed capital works] project," said Ed Gable, director of the county's Facilities Services Office.

A POSSIBLE STATE HIT

Regarding another point of concern, state legislators and Gov. Rick Scott have been considering tax and fee cuts in an effort they have touted as a means to draw more companies to Florida. Some of those legislative measures could impact local governments, including Sarasota County. Changes involving a communication services tax could decrease county revenue by \$166,000 to \$400,000, while a bill that would do away with a medical examiner tax on cremation services could cost the county \$228,000.

For another example, Florida Senate Bill 176 could reduce the amount of state tax revenue the county receives by \$400,000. It would lower the tax levied on rental or license fees charged for the use of commercial property. Robinson noted that Sen. Dorothy L. Hukill of Port Orange is working on a revenue neutral version of the bill, so it would have zero impact on counties.

"That bill will continue to move through the process," said Rob Lewis, head of government relations for Sarasota County.

DEPARTMENTS IN THE BLACK

At the other end of the budget spectrum, there is a surplus in some department budgets, including those of Information Technology (IT), Fleet Services, Building and Zoning.

The IT department has \$9 million in unallocated reserve funds, while Fleet Services

has \$16.7 million, according to the county's annual fiscal report.

"There are some opportunities to shift some funds around," Botelho pointed out.

Some of the surplus dollars will be rebated to other departments that were charged for IT services, Harmer said. Additionally, "We have started some rate reviews" to determine whether departments are charging too much, Harmer told the commissioners.

Robinson said, "It's safe to say we know we have some excess funds in some of these accounts that aren't reserve funds, that aren't dedicated as economic uncertainty funds, that are excess funds, period. That is correct?"

Harmer said that she was right.

"Do we know how much we are looking at?" Robinson asked.

Harmer replied that department chiefs have to review their balances and figure out what they need for upcoming budget years before he can provide an estimate.

"There are significant dollars there," Harmer said.

"Our general fund picture will improve," Robinson added. "That is an important message to put out there. The numbers we have today will improve."

Barbetta emphasized his belief that some of those unspent department dollars should be put back into the general fund.

"We have some reserves we probably shouldn't have ... Our fees may be too high, or we should make sure we use [the money],"

he added. "When there are excesses, I want to make sure we refund it to the public or invest in assets for the public."

"We have all these reserves on one hand; yet, the article [about the budget workshop] in the paper is going to say, 'County borrowing against its reserves,'" Barbetta pointed out.

In addition to the department funds, the County Commission last year set aside a fund of about \$8 million for economic development. That money resulted from a reduction in the county's operating reserve policy. Instead of keeping enough money on hand for 90 days of county operations in an emergency, the board approved a 75-day reserve, albeit on a split vote. Some of the \$8 million could be utilized to cover the projected deficit, commissioners subsequently have said.

ACTING ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Harmer named Botelho acting assistant county administrator last week, announcing the promotion at Friday's meeting.

The commissioners congratulated Botelho on his new title.

"Steve continues to be a strong asset to the Leadership Team and has a great understanding of the internal operations of the County," Harmer wrote in his announcement to county staff on Feb. 21. (See the *News Briefs* in this issue.) "He has also worked hard to develop a positive work environment in his Department," Harmer added.

Botelho will still be involved in the financial management of the county. 



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YET ANOTHER DELAY



“ *The report is still under Corps peer review*

Susan J. Jackson
Public Information Officer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

”

THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS HAS PUSHED BACK UNTIL LATE APRIL THE RELEASE OF ITS MODELS AND REPORTS ON THE PROPOSED DREDGING OF BIG PASS

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

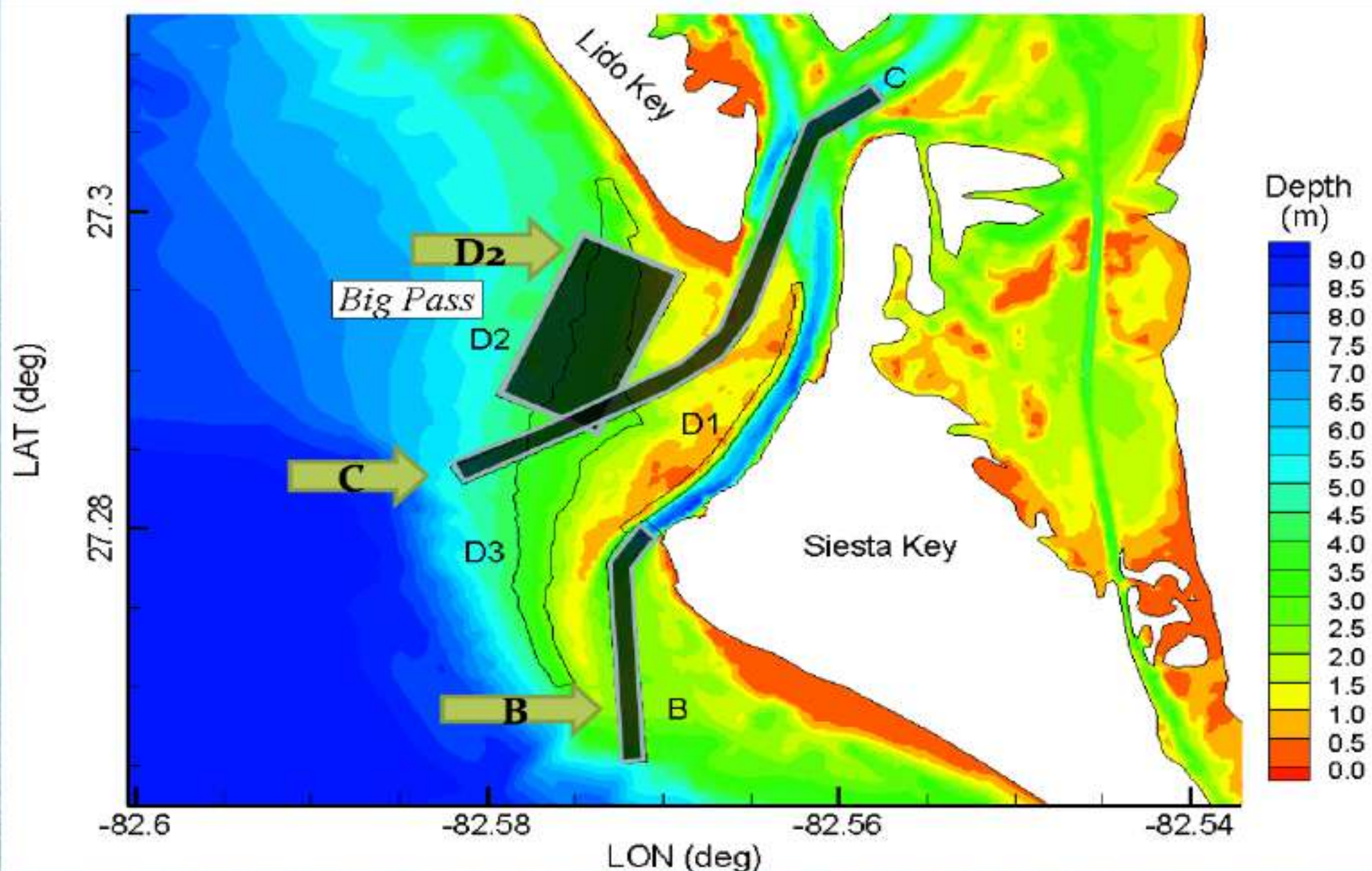
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers once again has delayed the release of the models and reports related to its proposed dredging of Big Sarasota Pass for the Lido Beach Renourishment Project, *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned.

The latest schedule calls for the material to be available for public review by the end of April, Susan J. Jackson, a public information

officer for the Corps in its Jacksonville office, told the *News Leader* on Feb. 26.

Jackson was responding to a *News Leader* query about whether the material would be available by the end of this week, as she had told this reporter in January.

In her Feb. 26 email, Jackson wrote, "The report is still under Corps peer review."



A graphic shows the areas where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has proposed dredging in Big Pass. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

On Jan. 27, Jackson explained to the *News Leader* that subject matter experts in other Corps districts were reviewing the modeling and reports.

Given that timeline, Sarasota County staff had pushed back a County Commission discussion of the project from Jan. 28 to March 18. More recent county communications with the Corps led county Coastal Resources Manager Laird Wreford to expect the release of the reports and models by early March, county spokesman Curt Preisser told the *News Leader* this week. As a result, staff tentatively moved the board discussion again, this time to the afternoon of April 23, Preisser and Leigh Sprimont, County Commission services manager, said this week.

With the latest news that the material would not be expected before late April, Preisser said on Feb. 26 that staff will keep the April

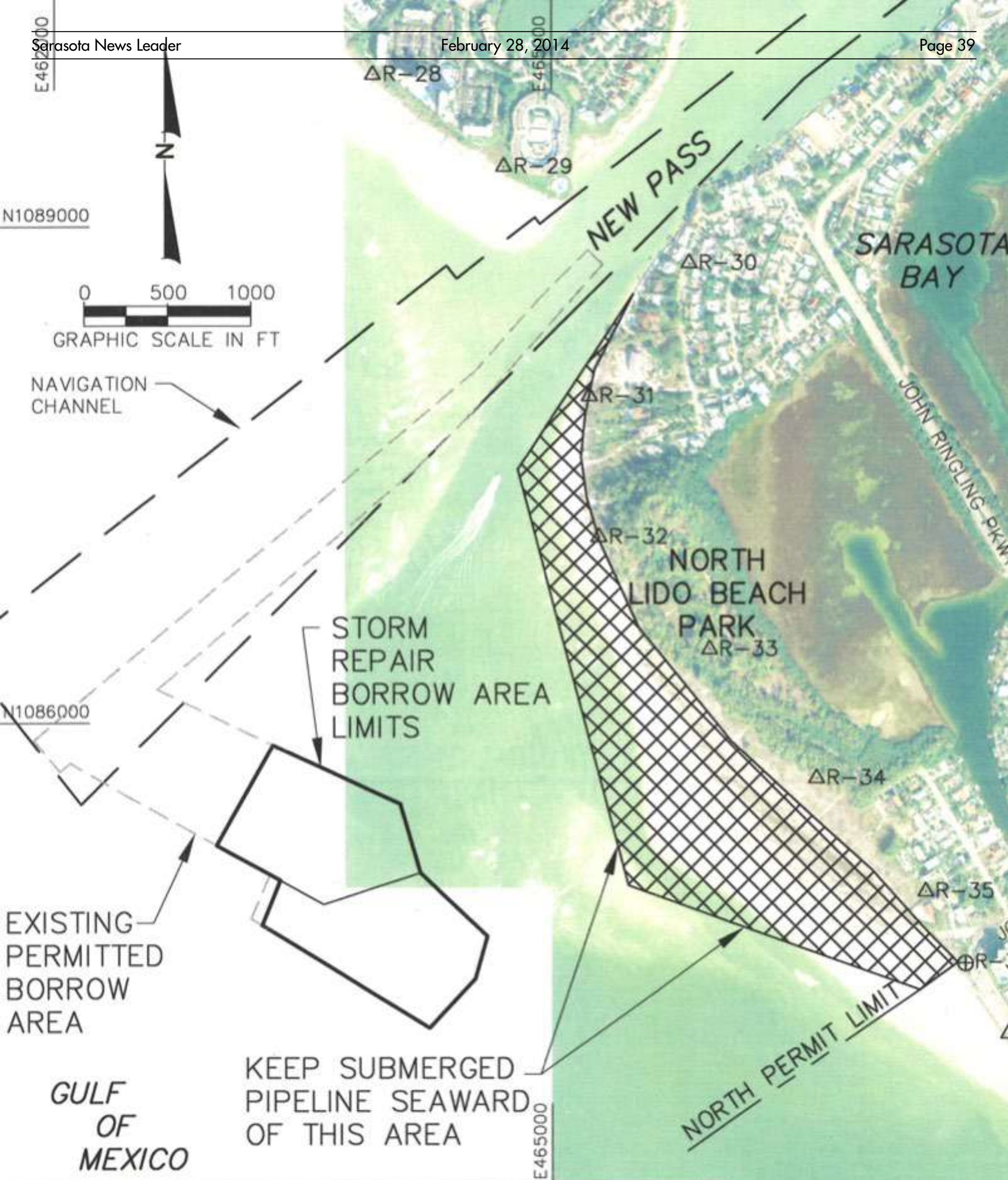
23 date. County Administrator Tom Harmer or the commission could ask for the agenda item to be rescheduled once more, he added, but it is possible the commission will want to go ahead and have some sort of discussion in April.

The timing of the release of the materials for public review has been a proverbial moving target. On Sept. 18, 2013, the Corps' project manager, Milan A. Mora, told members of the Sarasota County Coastal Advisory Committee that he hoped to start the renourishment permitting process with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection by early November 2013.

During a presentation to the Siesta Key Association on Dec. 5, 2013, Mora said he expected the modeling and reports to be ready for release in late January or early February. Then on Dec. 17, the Corps notified City of



(From left) City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo, City Manager Tom Barwin, then-County Administrator Randall Reid and City Engineer Alex DavisShaw listen to comments by Laird Wreford, the county's coastal resources manager, during the Oct. 22, 2013 joint meeting of the City and County commissions. Photo by Norman Schimmel



A graphic shows the borrow areas and the section of Lido Beach to be renourished under a project designed in response to damage created by Tropical Storm Debby in June 2012. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

Sarasota Engineer Alexandria DavisShaw that the materials would not be ready until late February or early March.

The plan originally called for up to 1.2 million cubic yards of sand to be removed from Big Pass for the first renourishment of a 1.6-mile stretch of Lido Beach — from just north of John Ringling Boulevard to Lido Key Park. Subsequent renourishments would be undertaken every five years over the 50-year life of the project, Mora has explained, with each of those projects utilizing about 615,000 cubic yards of sand. New Pass and Big Pass would be dredged alternately for the sand, Mora has said.

However, in January, Wreford, the county's coastal resources manager, told the *News Leader* that building opposition to the proposed dredging of Big Pass had led the Corps staff to rethink the first renourishment, with a portion of the sand to come from New Pass.

Big Pass never has been dredged, and Siesta residents have voiced alarm over the potential that such action could damage the island's beaches as well as the channel in the pass.

DavisShaw told the *News Leader* on Feb. 25 that Mora had informed her of "a few steps yet to be accomplished" before the reports and models would be ready, including the completion of the internal review by Corps staff.

THE FIFTH GROUP IN OPPOSITION

In the meantime, the Siesta Key Condominium Council has joined the Siesta Key Association, the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, the Siesta Key Village Association and the Bay Island-Siesta Association in announcing its opposition to any dredging of Big Pass and the shoal in the pass.

In a Feb. 10 letter sent to each of the county commissioners, the council's board of directors wrote that it had held a vote on Feb. 4 on the issue. The board approved the following resolution:

"Whereas Big Pass has never been dredged and the shoal provides both protection and natural re-nourishment of Siesta beaches, the Siesta Key Condominium Council Board, on behalf of the 81 members and 7000 Siesta Key property owners and based on documentation currently available, states its grave concerns and opposition to any form of dredging in Big Pass channel and shoal."


SOME GOOD NEWS FOR LIDO

At least DavisShaw, the city engineer, received some good news this week about a separate initiative to repair storm damage on Lido Beach. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) finally signed off on funding to help the city add 120,000 cubic yards of sand to the area of the beach most critically eroded by Tropical Storm Debby in 2012.

The primary location is in the vicinity of the Lido Pool, she added, which is located at 400 Benjamin Franklin Drive.

The total amount of the FEMA grant, DavisShaw told the *News Leader*, is \$1,971,811.67, covering 75 percent of the expense. The city and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will split the remaining 25 percent of the cost, with the city paying approximately \$300,000.

The sand for that project will come from a shoal just south of New Pass, DavisShaw said. The work will not begin until after turtle nesting season ends in late fall, she pointed out.

The city has submitted permit modifications to DEP for that undertaking, DavisShaw noted. 



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AWAITING A COURT DATE

Many areas of the Phillippi Creek bank adjacent to Bob's Boathouse appeared bare on Feb. 22. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE ATTORNEY FOR BOB'S BOATHOUSE SAYS THE ESTABLISHMENT IS MAKING PROGRESS ON A COUNTY LIST OF ITEMS THAT MUST BE COMPLETED IF THE RESTAURANT IS TO STAY OPEN

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The next step in the Bob's Boathouse saga will be an appearance before a Special Magistrate as the 5515 S. Tamiami Trail establishment fights to remain open, *The Sarasota News Leader* learned this week.

James Aker, the attorney for Bob's Boathouse, told the *News Leader* on Feb. 25 that he was awaiting a date for that appearance so he can argue Bob's Boathouse has accomplished more on a county "punch list" of items than county staff has asserted.

At the same time, the county has filed an amended motion asking the 12th Judicial Circuit Court to dismiss an amended lawsuit Aker filed against the county on Jan. 31 on behalf of Bob's Boathouse.

Asked during a telephone interview how things stood on Feb. 25, Aker told the *News Leader*, "We believe that they stand a lot better than what that Affidavit of Violation states."

Aker was referring to action the county took on Feb. 21.

“ We believe that [things] stand a lot better than what that Affidavit of Violation states. ”

James Aker
Attorney
For Bob's Boathouse

**Bob's Boathouse Certificate of Occupancy Punch List
as of February 21, 2014**

Public Utility Department:

1. Fence needs to be installed at the Lift station.
2. Crushed concrete to be installed with weed barrier in lift station area.
3. Abandon the existing water service on back side of lift station.
4. Record drawing mylars and disk with AutoCAD files are required.

Natural Resources:

1. Install all watercourse buffer plantings consistent with the approved watercourse buffer planting plan dated August 10, 2010.
2. Complete the removal of all nuisance and invasive vegetation on the property.

Land Development:

The following is our list of deficiencies required to be completed for the subject site in order to receive final certification. Items 1 – 5 and 7 are required to be completed prior to the Engineer of Record, Cavoli Engineering, and certification. The Final Land Development Inspection will be completed per the as-builts that are submitted.

1. All storm pipes must be flushed clean from sediment.
2. The fence around the storm basin must be replaced per code.
3. The storm basin must be certified by a structural engineer for integrity.
4. The storm basin must be cleaned of all organic debris as well as any other debris.
5. Landscape must be checked for compliance with the permitted plans and certified complete by a registered Landscape Architect.
6. The roof drains that are directed to the storm drain basin appear to be temporary and need to be made permanent.

Zoning Administration:

1. Lighting Plan – Submit a photometric lighting plan to the Zoning Administrator for review and approval. Currently, Code Enforcement staff has been monitoring the lighting on site and is currently in compliance.

Assistant County Administrator Mark Cunningham notified the County Commission in a Feb. 24 email that the county had filed an Affidavit of Violation against Bob's Boathouse for operating without a Certificate of Occupancy (CO).

Cunningham reminded the board that on Jan. 31, the county denied Bob's Boathouse's request to extend its Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO). Instead, the county issued a Notice of Violation and informed the owners of Bob's Boathouse that they had 20 days to come into compliance by addressing the 19 outstanding items that were identified on the punch list. Unless that work was completed

by Feb. 20, Cunningham pointed out in a Jan. 30 email, the county would issue the Affidavit of Violation and take the business to court.

Cunningham continued in his Feb. 24 email, "[T]he County inspected the premises on 2/21/14 and determined that only 3 of the 19 items were addressed." Subsequently, he wrote, the county issued the Affidavit of Violation.

Aker told the *News Leader* that the engineer of record for Bob's Boathouse filed a response with the county on Feb. 24, pointing out that two more items on the punch list had been completed, "and the county apparently — I don't know why, yet — disagrees."



Bob's Boathouse stands on the site of a former car dealership on South Tamiami Trail. File photo

As of Feb. 21, the punch list items remaining to be completed included the following, county staff has reported:

- Installation of watercourse buffer plantings consistent with the plan county staff approved on Aug. 10, 2010.
- The completion of the removal of all nuisance and invasive vegetation on the property.
- Replacement of the fence around the storm basin.
- Certification of the storm basin by a structural engineer who has checked its integrity.
- Submission of a photometric lighting plan to county Zoning Administrator Brad Bailey for his review and approval.

According to the Notice of Violation filed by the county on Jan. 31, the Code Enforcement Special Magistrate can impose a penalty up to \$250 per day for any existing violation. Penalties of up to \$500 per day can be imposed for each repeat violation.

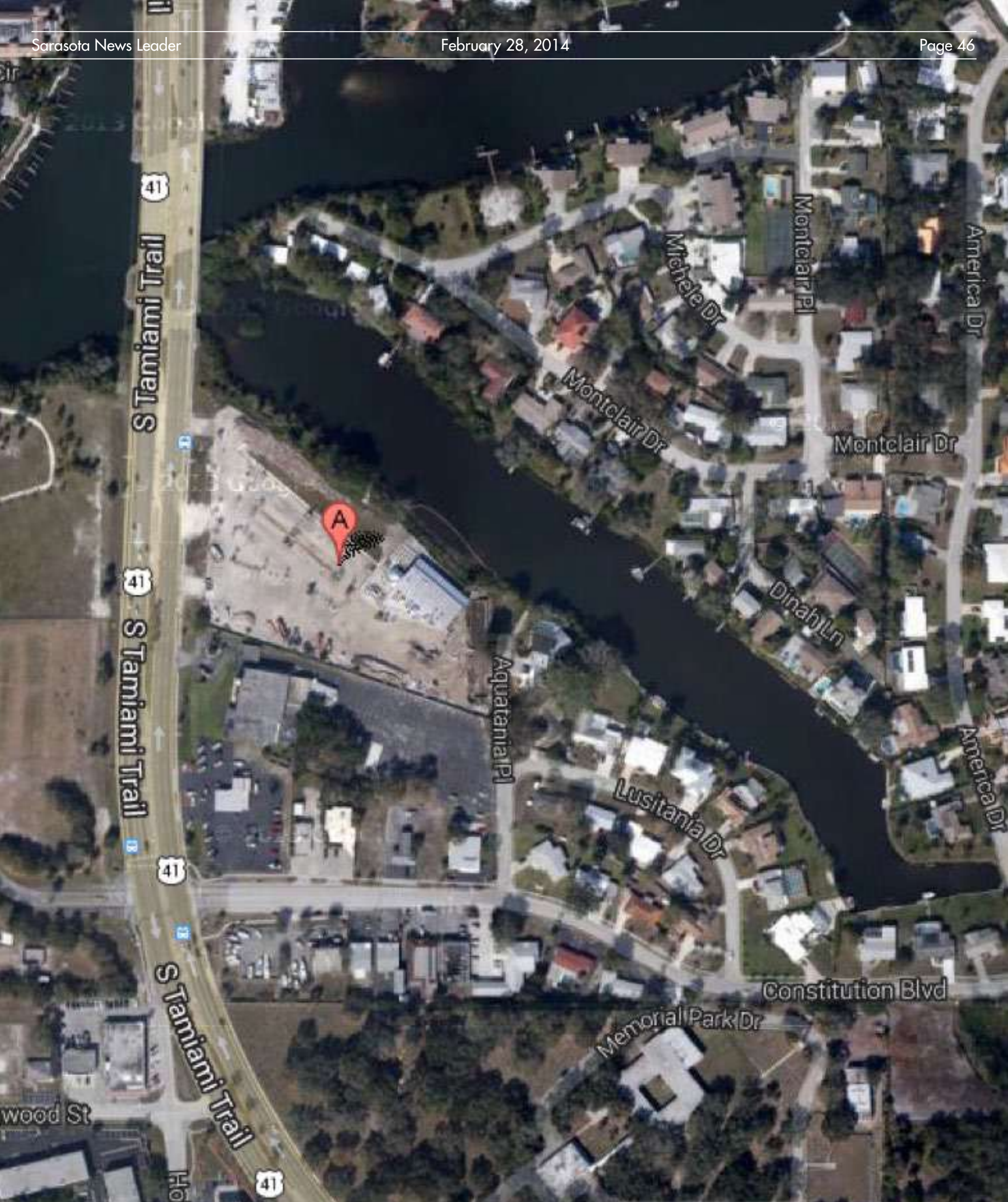
THE NEW COUNTY MOTION

In the county's Feb. 24 motion to dismiss the [amended lawsuit](#) Aker filed on Jan. 31, Assistant County Attorney David Pearce argues that because of the recent events in the case, the 12th Judicial Circuit Court now lacks jurisdiction over the dispute.

After pointing out that the Notice of Violation and the Affidavit of Violation had been issued, the motion says, "Bob's Boathouse has two available remedies through the administrative



Houses on Montclair Drive sit across Phillippi Creek from Bob's Boathouse. Photo by Norman Schimmel



An aerial view shows the site of Bob's Boathouse (marked with the flag) in proximity to surrounding homes. Image from Google Maps

provisions of the County Code”: challenging the county Building Official’s decision to issue the Notice of Violation and challenging “the alleged violation of the [county code] at an evidentiary hearing conducted by the Code Enforcement Special Magistrate.”

The motion also notes that the amended lawsuit filed by Bob’s Boathouse “alleges a ‘breach’ of the terms of a [TCO]. There is no recognized cause of action in Florida law associated with this discretionary decision by a Building Official.”

It continues that while a building official can issue a TCO “before the completion of the entire work covered by the permit, provided that such portion or portions [of a structure] shall be occupied safely,” the building official also can set a period of time during which the TCO is valid.

The motion further says that the Bob’s Boathouse amended motion alleged a breach of contract by the county, referencing a telephone conversation with a county employee on Oct. 23, 2013. That employee — Tony Gipe, operations manager for Sarasota County Utilities — told representatives of the restaurant that \$77,063.44 in water and sewer capacity fees they owed did not have to be paid before the CO was issued, the Bob’s Boathouse amended motion noted. Gipe confirmed the conversation in an email, it added.

However, the county’s motion points out that Gipe’s telephone conversation and email “cannot formulate a contract.” Even if they did, the motion says, “[S]uch a contract would be illegal because the Code of Ordinances requires

payment of capacity fees prior to receipt of water and wastewater service.”

Tom Polk, director of the county’s Planning and Development Services Office, explained to the County Commission on Dec. 10 that Bob’s Boathouse never should have been allowed to open without the payment of the capacity fees. Confusion resulting from several different entities filing Bob’s Boathouse paperwork with the Building Department led to an employee issuing the first TCO without being aware the fees were outstanding, Polk indicated.

The Best Restaurant on 41 LLC and Skipper Bobs LLC are named as the plaintiffs in the legal matter. Both the Notice of Violation and Affidavit of Violation also list Restaurant on 41 LLC, with Richard Walkowiak as the registered agent.

The Bob’s Boathouse property is owned by Royal Oldsmobile — GMC Trucks Co., for whom the registered agent is Cross Street Corp. Services on Orange Avenue in Sarasota.

The first permit application for work on the business was filed with Sarasota County on April 27, 2010. The applicant was listed as Restaurant on 41 LLC, with Anthony Ferlito of Roseville as the agent.

According to Sarasota County Property Assessor records, the total land area for the Bob’s Boathouse site is 171,529 square feet. In 2013, the assessed value of the property and the 1970 structure on it was \$1,911,250.

[Judge Kimberly Bonner](#) was assigned the case in the 12th Judicial Circuit. 

AN AMBITIOUS SCHEDULE



Swimmers enjoyed the swimming area at Warm Mineral Springs before it closed at the end of June 2013. Image courtesy Sarasota County

A REQUEST FOR LONG-TERM PROPOSALS FOR WARM MINERAL SPRINGS PROBABLY WILL NOT BE ADVERTISED BEFORE APRIL, THOUGH THE RESORT COULD REOPEN JUST FOR SWIMMING THAT SAME MONTH

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Just three days before bids were due for the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs, one Sarasota County commissioner expressed serious doubts about whether that board and the North Port City Commission would be able to award a long-term management contract for the resort by the deadline the county set in December.

Assistant County Administrator Lee Ann Lowery told the County Commission at the end of its Feb. 21 budget workshop that county and North Port city staff working

together on a revised Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) for the long-term contract planned to have it ready to advertise in April.

In a Dec. 10 vote, the County Commission set Aug. 31 as the ending date for a short-term operation of the swimming area at Warm

Mineral Springs. At that time, North Port Mayor James Blucher was optimistic it would take only a couple more weeks before the long-term solicitation package was ready to be released.

“We’re at the end of February and we’re just talking about getting a solicitation together?”

Christine Robinson
Vice Chairwoman
County Commission





The bid package for the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs included this map of the area that will be open. Image courtesy City of North Port

However, on Feb. 21, Lowery explained that county staff had been reviewing the latest version of the ITN North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis originally drafted in the summer of 2012 — after the County Commission and the North Port Commission agreed unanimously to pursue proposals for development of the 81-acre resort they own together.

“We are providing our comments on it and we will send it back to the North Port staff,” Lowery said of the proposed ITN.

North Port also is asking the county to lead the solicitation process once the ITN has been completed and approved by the two commissions, she added.

“I don’t see why there’d be a lot of changes in it,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta replied, referring to the 2012 document.

“We’re just updating it, I think, based on a little bit more knowledge we have of the site and the possibilities,” Lowery told him. “We’re supposed to get it to [North Port staff members] by the first of next week, and then they will take it to their commission.”

In a follow-up email to County Administrator Tom Harmer on Feb. 25, Carolyn Brown, director of the county’s Parks and Recreation Department, wrote, “The City of North Port was provided the previous ITN as the draft working document for us to start the



A class participated in water exercises at Warm Mineral Springs prior to its closing last year. Photo courtesy City of North Port

RFB NO. 2014-19**WARM MINERAL SPRINGS SITE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT****BID OPENING: 2/24/13 @ 3:00PM AT CITY HALL, ROOM 244****COMPANY NAME (S)****Warm Springs Attractions**

Robert Zabler (Sole Proprietor)
20101 Peachland Blvd., Suite 203
Port Charlotte, Florida 33954
941.457.0240
Roz123@ymail.com

New Vision Energy Solutions Consulting Group, LLC

Wilber Jerome (CEO & Founder)
6280 Keating Avenue
North Port, Florida 34291
941.564.5208
nvesconsulting@gmail.com

Bioluminescence Institute, Inc.

William Delp
1100 Barnett Drive, #19
Lakeworth, Florida 33461
561.586.1486
561.588.0608 fax
bill@dnax.com

Springs Management Services, LLC.

Eric Kotte
8425 Chesebro Ave.
North Port, Florida 34287
(941)483.6265
Eric.kotte@yahoo.com

National and State Park Concessions, Inc.

Jack E. Bobo, President or Clay W. Taylor, CFO
16450 SE Federal Hwy,
Hobe Sound, FL 33455
561.373.0727
561.743.4268 fax
jbobo@nspconcessions.com

conversation about elements of the next solicitation. County staff met internally and we are continuing to discuss the necessary elements. We welcome North Port's comments and suggestions on the changes to the ITN. We plan to send out an updated version in the next few days."

After Lowery made her initial comments during the Feb. 21 meeting, Commissioner Carolyn Mason, looking at Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson, said to Robinson, "You've got heartburn."

"I do have heartburn," Robinson responded. "I've got timing heartburn right now, because I don't understand why this discussion is happening right now at the end of February." She reminded staff about the December action of the two boards, when they concurred on the short-term operation ending Aug. 31.

Robinson, who represents South County interests on the County Commission, has taken the lead on Warm Mineral Springs matters for her board.

"We're at the end of February and we're just talking about getting a solicitation together?" Robinson asked Lowery. "Then it has to go before both boards ... and we haven't even gotten to the advertisement of this ..."

She also pointed out, "Past history means we'll probably have to advertise it for longer than what's average, and we'll probably have to market that advertisement a little bit."

Robinson voiced worries in December that, given the negative publicity surrounding months of deadlock between the North Port and County commissions over the future of the resort, it might be more difficult to find



County Commissioner Christine Robinson has questioned whether a long-term management deal can be concluded by Sept. 1. File photo

firms interested in submitting long-term proposals for the property.

In response to another question from Robinson, Lowery said she believed the timeline called for the North Port Commission to vote March 24 on the ITN solicitation package.

The North Port Commission has only one regular meeting scheduled in March, according to the city's calendar, and that is on March 24. The County Commission is scheduled to meet on March 25.

Lowery added that city and county staff members had worked out a schedule that would make it possible to award the long-term bid in time for a firm to take over in September, as the County Commission stipulated in December.

“We recognize it’s very ambitious,” Lowery added, “but it’s our goal to complete it on time.”

Giving the North Port Commission just one meeting during which to approve the ITN language, Robinson said, “is ambitious.”

Carolyn Brown, the county’s director of parks and recreation, concurred then with Lowery. “[The schedule] was tight.”

In response to a question from Robinson, Brown clarified that the ITN would go first to the North Port board for approval and then to the County Commission for a vote.

When Robinson asked how long the ITN would be advertised, Brown replied, “We talked about 60 days.”

In staff discussions with County Administrator Tom Harmer, Lowery added, the consensus was to “provide ample time for proposers to put together something. If you make the timeline too short, you discourage, sometimes, proposers.”

Robinson also noted that the County Commission might want to hear presentations from some of the firms offering proposals.

“You’re going to have a different [County] Commission by the time this is resolved,” Commissioner Nora Patterson quipped.

Patterson and Barbetta both will be stepping down from the board in the fall as a result of term limits.

Robinson then asked Harmer to take “a close, close look” at the timeline for the ITN, adding, “I’m really, really concerned.”

The County Commission might need to call a special meeting, she pointed out, to make certain the timeline could be achieved. The board is scheduled to take a summer break after its July 9 meeting, not convening again until Aug. 20.

Patterson said if a special meeting becomes necessary, it should be called.

“We’re not going to make this deadline unless we call special meetings,” Robinson continued, referring to the city and the county. “There’s no margin for error in that [schedule] whatsoever.”

“I agree,” Harmer responded. “There’s no margin for error.”

Harmer also reinforced Lowery’s comment that the 60-day advertisement period for the ITN “is probably a minimum ... to get really responsive bids.”

In the meantime, Robinson asked that he check with the North Port administration to ascertain whether the North Port City Commission would be willing to schedule special meetings as well, if those are necessary.

On Feb. 25, Harmer notified the board by email that North Port Manager Lewis had advised him that the City Commission “is willing to consider scheduling a special meeting and ... that the City will make the final determination on date after the draft solicitation documents are finalized.”

On Feb. 25, Parks and Recreation Director Brown provided the following draft timeline to Harmer and the County Commission:

- Feb. 24 to March 7: Staff and legal review of ITN; finalization of solicitation document.
- March 17: North Port Commission special meeting to consider approval of the solicitation document.
- March 24: Sarasota County special meeting to consider waiver of the procurement code and approval of the solicitation document.
- April 1: Post/advertise solicitation for 60 days (includes target marketing/advertisements).
- June 2: Bid closing.
- June 9: City Commission review/selection — regular meeting.
- June 10: County Commission review/selection — regular meeting.
- June 11 to June 22: Negotiate contract terms and draft agreement.
- June 23: Final contract approval by the North Port Commission at a regular meeting.
- July 8: Final contract approval by the County Commission at a regular meeting.
- July 8 to Aug. 31: Vendor begins preparations, including hiring and training of employees.
- Sept. 1 to Sept. 14: Transition from the short-term operation to long-term management.
- Sept. 15: Reopening of Warm Mineral Springs.

THE SHORT-TERM BIDS

During the Feb. 21 discussion, County Commissioner Patterson asked whether any bids had come in for the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs.

Harmer responded that the bids were to be opened on Feb. 24.

According to an email North Port Manager Lewis sent to his board and county staff just before 4:30 p.m. on Feb. 24, five bids were received. "Purchasing staff will be reviewing [them] accordingly," he added.

The five firms that responded are as follows:

- Warm Springs Attractions; Robert Zabler, sole proprietor; Port Charlotte.
- New Vision Energy Solutions Consulting Group LLC; Wilber Jerome, CEO and founder; North Port.
- Bioluminescence Institute Inc.; William Delp; Lake Worth.
- Springs Management Services LLC; Eric Kotte; North Port.
- National and State Park Concessions Inc.; Jack E. Bobo, president; Clay W. Taylor, chief financial officer; Hobe Sound.

The bids were opened at 3 p.m. on Feb. 24, according to Lewis' email. Of the five, the one submitted by Warm Springs Attractions was the only bid to come in before Feb. 24; it was turned in to the city on Feb. 21, the bid receipt sheet shows.

Assistant City Manager Daniel Schult told *The Sarasota News Leader* on Feb. 25 that if the city's Purchasing Department makes a recommendation on awarding the contract to one of the firms, the City Commission would make a decision on the matter during its March 24 regular meeting.

The key issue, Schult pointed out, is determining whether any of the bids meet the criteria to be considered qualified. "Our Purchasing Department is going through that process right now," he added.

OPERATION STIPULATIONS

The short-term solicitation package called for the firm awarded the bid to open the Springs within 21 days from the date the contract is executed. The operator is to open the resort to swimming and bathing with lifeguard services; provide janitorial services, including those for the restroom/locker room areas and ticket booth; and provide security for the premises.

The package further notes, "The Premises is provided in an AS-IS, WHERE-IS, HOW-IS condition, without warranty or representation, subject to any and all conditions that a competent examination of the Premises would disclose."


Entry fees are to be set at \$20 for a visitor 18 and older and \$15 for an adult Sarasota County resident; for students ages 6 to 17: \$15

for a visitor or \$11.25 for a county resident; and for children ages 5 and under: \$10 for a visitor and \$7.50 for a county resident.

Nonconsecutive 10-day passes will be \$170 for adult visitors and \$112.50 for adult residents.

For a monthly pass, the fee would be \$200 for an adult visitor and \$150 for an adult resident.

The package also says, "Unless otherwise directed by Owners, no ten day passes shall be sold after August 22, 2014 and no monthly passes shall be sold after July 31, 2014."

Further, the Springs must be operated "at a minimum" of seven days a week, eight hours a day, "unless otherwise determined by the Owners," although severe weather and health-related or structural hazards could dictate closures, the package notes. 

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DEAL ALMOST SEALED



County lifeguards are members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. File photo

AFTER TWO-PLUS YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS, TEAMSTERS APPROVE CONTRACT WITH SARASOTA COUNTY

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

One of the county's union contracts may soon be ratified, but another round of negotiations could be right around the corner.

After more than two years of negotiations, the members of Local 173 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters voted two weeks ago to accept a collective bargaining agreement offered by the Sarasota County Commission at a public hearing last month. The union represents around 400 county employees — parks workers, truck technicians, lifeguards and

more — whose wages have been frozen since October 2009.

The employees have been working without an agreement since September 2011. Their average hourly wage is \$17, and, according to Elliot Zahalsky, a lawyer representing the Teamsters, the workers have lost 16.9 percent of their buying power since their last raise.

The union had asked the county for a \$1,500 lump sum payment, plus 3 percent wage increases for fiscal years 2013 and

“ We felt we didn’t make any progress till the board actually dealt with us in person. ”

Mike McElmury
Representative
Teamsters International

2014, but then-Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer rejected that request last fall. In January, the commission offered a halfway counter-offer: a \$1,000 lump sum plus a 3 percent raise for fiscal year 2014.

That offer was good enough for the union, which OK'd the deal with a vote held Feb. 13. The Board of County Commissioners should vote next Wednesday, March 5, to officially ratify the deal.

But that doesn't mean any long-term issues have been settled. The current three-year contract, since it was to begin in 2011, is already set to expire this October. According to Teamsters International Representative Mike McElmury, that means the union will be back at the negotiating table with the county come April.

McElmury calls the situation "ridiculous." After more than 30 bargaining sessions, the

union was forced to request the impasse hearing that led to the public meeting last month. "We negotiated with the city and in seven sessions of bargaining we came to an agreement with them," McElmury says.

The county's Employee & Labor Relations Department declined to comment on the contract since the board still needs to ratify the agreement. McElmury, for one, hopes the recent steps toward consensus could make the next go-round easier.

"We're pushing very hard to get the high-dollar attorney they hired out of Jacksonville out of the picture," McElmury says, referring to John Dickinson, a partner at Constangy, Brooks & Smith. "We felt we didn't make any progress till the board actually dealt with us in person. If they keep him, I see more problems taking place." 

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The City Commission on March 3 will discuss a potential revival of plans to create a Cultural Park to the east of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE MARCH 3 CITY COMMISSION AGENDA HAS A RANGE OF TOPICS, AND NOT A LITTLE CONTROVERSY

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Old sores — one of them very old — will be revisited Monday, March 3, during the next regular meeting of the Sarasota City Commission. Those wishing to feel the pain in person should go to the County Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard for the afternoon and evening sessions. The meeting has been moved so new television equipment can be installed at City Hall. (See the related story in this issue.)

As always, the controversial issues are last on the agenda, including a discussion about continued payment of Commissioner Susan Chapman's legal fees as she fights a Sunshine lawsuit. And next-to-last is a discussion Vice

Mayor Willie Shaw has requested for months: taking public input about putting a new homeless shelter in his district.

FIRST, THE MONEY

The most important financial document of the year is on the consent agenda for early approval. If no commissioner or member of the public wants to talk about it, the annual report for last fiscal year will pass unremarked — all 220 pages of it.

Inside it are intimate details of how the city spends every penny of its income. While this may be a document only an accountant could love, filled with endless columns of dollars

and decimals, it represents the reallocation of millions of dollars for common and sometimes even uncommon purposes. With it, you hold a city in your hand, figuratively speaking.

Anybody who can balance a checkbook can understand an annual report. But the agenda item right after it is the auditor's report of the accounting for the money in Fiscal Year 2013. Luckily, this year's audit found no issues of complaint, and it passed the outside inspection.

These documents are required by state law, and they represent enormous labor. But the third financial report on the agenda fits neither of those descriptions. For the first time, the city staff has prepared what it calls a "Popular Annual Financial Report." Instead of 220 pages in black-and-white, it is

nine pages in color. A critic might call it "City Budgets for Dummies." But it is an effort to make the city's multi-million-dollar spending understandable to the people who pay for it.

You can save a tree and find it on the web at http://sarasota.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=7&event_id=950&meta_id=384854

Or you can pick up a copy at City Hall.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Just as the snowy plovers return in the spring to frolic on Siesta sands, so do the hopes of public-private partnerships for the city's biggest piece of undeveloped bayfront land. It is the acreage between the old G.WIZ science museum and the 10th Street boat ramp. Right



The 2007 Cultural Park Concept Plan includes a photo of models showing how the developed area near the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall could look. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

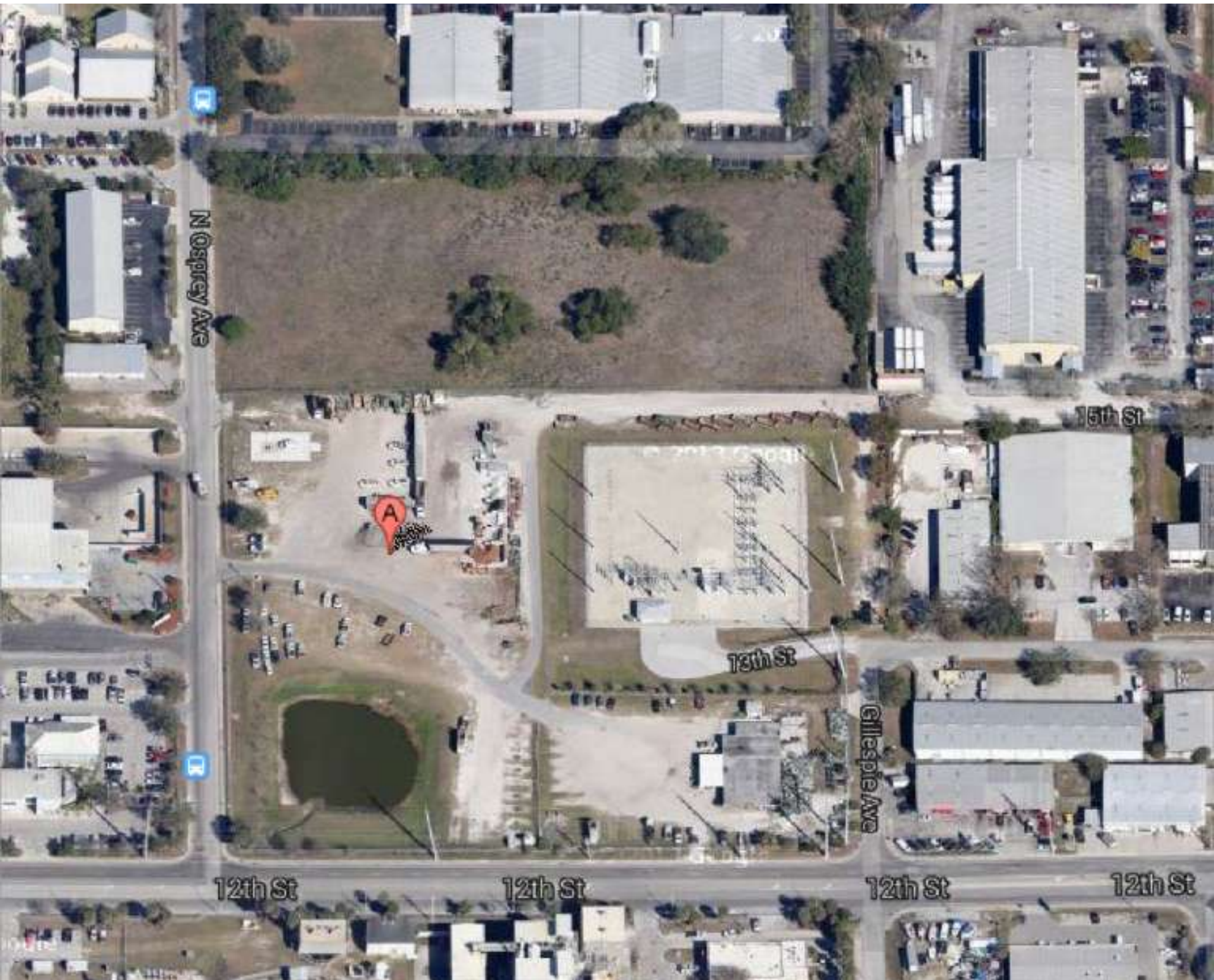


A graphic from the 2007 Cultural Park Concept Plan shows how new buildings could be arranged in proximity to the Van Wezel. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

now it is mostly surface parking for the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. Any developer will tell you that is hardly the highest and best use of the site.

As the real estate market was peaking in 2007, the city adopted a master proposal for the area and called it the “Cultural Park Concept Plan.” The document’s approval did not come with a unanimous decision; it passed with a 3-2 vote. And in nine months, it was dead.

The idea was grandiose. It featured an 1,800-space parking garage, more than four times the size of the one proposed for State Street. Nonprofit organizations were encouraged to think about massive fundraising campaigns to construct new buildings, perhaps as much as 430,000 square feet for the arts. More than \$30 million was proposed for public improvements and another \$28 million for the public side of public-private partnerships.



The city-owned property at 1330 N. Osprey Ave. remains one of two preferred locations for a homeless shelter in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps

Like the plovers, the concept has come back. It is on the Monday agenda. Bets are being placed all over town on who is thinking big, and who is not. It was a contentious issue almost a decade ago, and it probably still is.

SHELTER SHOWDOWN

The city has embarked on a cooperative venture with the county to tackle vagrancy and homelessness by creating a multi-purpose shelter. This is a shaky partnership with a bare majority of city commissioners aboard. So it is fitting that the first public airing of the shelter partnership will come with the City Commission sitting in the County Commission's chambers. It is the next-to-last item on the evening agenda.

For months, Vice Mayor Shaw has asked his colleagues to take community input on the concept of a shelter in north Sarasota. Almost a month ago, a small delegation, including Sarasota Police Lt. Kevin Stiff, toured

similar shelters in other cities. Shaw also is asking Stiff to report his findings from the cross-country trip.

Two weeks ago, both the City and County commissions approved the extension of a contract for Texas-based consultant Robert Marbut, along with funding to provide an in-depth environmental assessment of two possible shelter sites. One site is city-owned on North Osprey Avenue. The other, at 1800 N. East Ave., is zoned "Industrial Heavy," and it would need to be purchased and rezoned.

The city is locked in a 3-2 voting pattern on homelessness issues, with Shaw and Commissioner Susan Chapman — arguably the two most liberal members of the City Commission — opposing the current shelter paradigm at every turn. Consultant Marbut and the county commissioners are promising more information about the plan — including operational costs — in the spring.



Commissioner Susan Chapman (left) is still fighting a Sunshine lawsuit while Commissioner Suzanne Atwell settled last year with the plaintiffs. Photo by Norman Schimmel


HANGING SEPARATELY

The final item of the evening evokes the old Benjamin Franklin quip: "We must hang together, gentlemen ... else, we shall most assuredly hang separately." Franklin's gang hung together; Sarasota's gang is split.

The issue is payment of legal fees to defend Chapman against a lawsuit filed by Citizens for Sunshine. Originally, the suit included the city and Commissioner Suzanne Atwell. They settled out of court, but Chapman maintains she did nothing wrong. Further, she maintains the plaintiff is trying to expand radically, by judicial means, the scope of Florida's Public Meetings Law by banning two or more voting members of the same board from attending the same meeting with constituents.

Last December, the City Commission voted 3-2 (with Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo in the minority) to pay Chapman's fees for three months. The period expires March 3, the day of the next regularly scheduled board meeting.

Chapman's legal pleadings warn that if the plaintiffs can bully the commission into settling cases to avoid legal fees, no city advisory board member is safe from legal blackmail.

Citizens for Sunshine has filed a number of Sunshine suits in the past year, either winning them or getting the city to settle out of court. In response, the city conducted an educational blitzkrieg among advisory board members and commissioners. 

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WILL PEOPLE USE IT?

The Health Department entrance has no handicapped ramp, and people jaywalk with canes and crutches and baby strollers to get to it. Note the missing grass at the curb, worn away by jaywalkers. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

A NEW CROSSWALK IN THE WORKS ON SCHOOL AVENUE HAS BEEN DESIGNED FOR HEALTH DEPARTMENT CLIENTS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Nothing is more unhealthful than getting run over by an automobile. Yet, it is a safe guess to say at least 100 people per day take that risk by jaywalking across School Avenue to get to the Health Department in downtown Sarasota.

While there is a traffic light 100 feet away at Ringling Boulevard with a “push-to-cross” button, most patrons avoid it and almost literally jump into traffic.

There is a parking lot adjacent to the building, but several of the spaces house Health Department vehicles, including a reserved spot for the department director. Often, a handicapped person or disabled veteran who might wish to park in the Health Department’s lot must instead park across the street in the county lot or even further away in the Payne

Park lot. In either case, the next step is jaywalking across School Avenue.

So the County Health Department is asking that a crosswalk be installed, and plans are under way to do that. The first steps became visible this week, with orange flags and spray paint on the sidewalks to help engineers and workers understand the geometry involved. Two workers shared their plans, showing the design for the crosswalk directly across from the department’s side door. The front door on Ringling Boulevard is seldom used.

While the work will be on a city street, the city engineer said, “It’s a county project.”

The cost is estimated to be \$100,000, and work is scheduled for this summer, according to county spokesman Curt Preisser. Plans call for flashing lights on the roadway initiated by



A man with a cane jaywalks only a few feet from the authorized crosswalk location. Photo by Stan Zimmerman




Call it a driver's worst nightmare: a woman dressed all in black on a cloudy, rainy day in the middle of a busy street. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

a push-to-cross button, he added, similar to those at the new crosswalks on Siesta Key's Midnight Pass Road or on Osprey Avenue at Morton's Gourmet Market. Once in the crosswalk, pedestrians have the right of way under Florida law.

However, the plans in the hands of the workers show no flashing lights, just a small pedestrian island/"traffic splitter" in the middle of School Avenue with zebra striping on the street. Location of the new crosswalk is a challenge because the outlet to two large parking facilities — one at Payne Park; the other, at the county multi-level garage — is on the west side of School Avenue. Plans call for the crosswalk to be sited immediately adjacent to the traffic entrance to the county parking lot and garage. And the workers said they expect to start the job any day now.

The worker's plans do not show any fencing on the east side of School Avenue, so Health Department visitors could ignore the new and old crosswalks and continue to jaywalk across the street. Meanwhile, it appears the parking lot at the Health Department will continue to house vehicles for department employees.

The crosswalk will compound an already nightmarish mix, especially in the morning and evening, as county employees fill or empty the lot, neighbors on the south side of the city leave or return home, and Health Department visitors and employees fill the new crosswalk. Southbound traffic on School Avenue will be especially hard hit.

Did I mention there are two bus stops located in the exact same area? Or that the County Commission is thinking of moving the downtown bus transfer station to that vicinity, too? 

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A CHANGE OF VENUE



Behind the wall at the back of the city commissioners is 'TV Central.' This shot was taken a few days before technicians arrived to take out the old and install the new. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

THE CITY COMMISSION WILL MEET IN THE COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS NEXT WEEK WHILE AN AUDIO-VISUAL UPGRADE IS UNDER WAY AT CITY HALL

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

For some viewers in Sarasota, it is their favorite television program — “Monday Night Live” from City Hall: the Sarasota City Commission. But for the March 3 meeting, the commission will be taking its show on the road, three blocks away, to the set of another local favorite, the Sarasota County Commission.

The City Commission is not looking for better ratings. But it might get them in the future, because when the board returns to City Hall

for its March 17 meeting, the show will be performed on all new high-definition, state-of-the-art digital equipment. The city is spending about \$200,000 to replace equipment so old that some parts are not available anymore.

Like all things electronic, the new equipment is better-faster-cheaper-smaller and more energy-efficient. It includes the entire video “pipeline” from cameras to signal processing, from the “switcher” to the final output on fiber optic cable.

Alas, viewers will not notice any difference, because even though the cable company will receive a high-definition video signal from City Hall, it will rebroadcast the feed in the same old low-def resolution. Since nobody makes “lo-def” gear anymore, any upgrade was bound to put the city on a high-definition path.

A Tampa company called Encore Broadcast Solutions is providing the hardware, handling the installation and conducting the training at City Hall after submitting the winning bid.

The firm expects the work to take about two weeks, with completion in time for an official debut during the March 17 meeting. The money comes from the City Auditor and Clerk’s Office budget.

Any of the old gear that is salvageable will be transferred to the city’s other broadcasting facility in the City Hall Annex, where about half the first floor was converted a year ago into a meeting room capable of live and recorded broadcasting.




It is like Christmas in February for the ‘tech-heads’ down at City Hall. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Among the flourishes in the “hi-def” kit will be new microphones with a much better pickup range. Note to commissioners: Those private “asides” may now be clear as a bell to your viewers. Nine of the new microphones will be on the commissioners’ side of the dais, and four more will be used by staff and the public during testimony and public comment.

While there are still a few wrinkles to iron out, the Auditor and Clerk’s Office staff hopes the new gear will allow commissioner votes to be shown on-screen. There are times now when it is almost impossible to sort out how commissioners are voting. By law, they are not allowed to abstain unless they have a

financial interest in the outcome of a particular vote.

For now, the dais is piled high with cardboard boxes and reels of wire. Mounds of old cables are in the walkways. When all this is over, the only beneficiaries of the new high-tech equipment will be the people watching the meeting the old-fashioned way, from a seat in the audience. The images on the monitors in the chambers will be the only public ones to show the new, razor-sharp imagery.

Maybe someday the cable company will upgrade, too. 



Piles of antiquated analog gear are heaped on tables, ready for some high-tech recycling. This stuff does not go to the landfill. Photo by Stan Zimmerman



A POSITIVE SPIN

Sarasota's chapter of Organizing for Action took its pro-Obama message to the streets Wednesday afternoon, Feb. 26. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

GROUP PROMOTES THE PRESIDENT'S PLATFORM

By Stan Zimmerman


City Editor

Organizing for Action certainly lived up to its name Wednesday afternoon, Feb. 26. It pulled together a handful of people to stage a protest outside the old Federal Building at Orange Avenue and Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota.

Except it was not a protest. "We're here to help pass [President Barak] Obama's platform," said organizer Malorie Sneed.

The group is one of about 200 across the county that coalesced out of the 2012 presidential campaign.

"The 2013 State of the Union Address is our platform," she added. "Climate change, gun violence, women's issues, education, jobs, housing."

For about an hour, as people began to leave downtown in the late afternoon, they were greeted by hand-lettered signs urging progressive thinking. In today's often hateful political climate, it was good to see activism with a smile. 

Upgrades of the audio-visual equipment in the City Commission Chambers are under way. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MARCH 3 CITY COMMISSION MEETING TO BE AT DIFFERENT SITE

Work began this week on “some much-needed upgrades to the audio-visual equipment in the City Commission Chambers,” the city has announced.

It will take about two weeks to complete the project, a news release says. As a result, the March 3 City Commission meeting will be held in the Sarasota County Commission Chambers, located on the first floor of the County Administration Center at 1660 Ringling Blvd. in downtown Sarasota, the release points out.

“The audio-visual equipment upgrades are necessary to replace outdated and failing technology” so the city can continue to broadcast live meetings without the types of service interruptions that have become

commonplace, the release explains. “The broadcasts of city meetings on television and the Internet are a valuable service to our citizens, residents and visitors,” said City Auditor and Clerk Pamela Nadalini in the release. “Many people are unable to visit City Hall in person, and this service allows them to stay engaged with their local government.”

Meeting locations for the City Commission and its advisory boards will be announced on the notices sent out in advance of those sessions, the release notes. Those who have not signed up for City of Sarasota eSubscriptions may visit the website at sarasotagov.com and then, in the lower left corner under “News and Events,” select eSubscriptions and the meetings for which they would like to receive notices.

BEACH UNIVERSITY EXPLORES UNIQUE LOCAL COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

The Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department, in conjunction with the Siesta Key Beach Ambassadors, next month will offer a four-week series of free educational seminars about county beaches and habitats, the county has announced.

The March sessions will be held at Siesta Public Beach on Siesta Key, a news release notes.

Among the presenters will be state and local park naturalists and wildlife educators. Each talk will last approximately 45 minutes, with additional time for questions. Class sessions

will be held each Wednesday in March at 9:30 a.m. at the main pavilion at Siesta Public Beach, the release says.

The topics will be *Shorebird Nesting and Environmental Protection*, *Mote Marine Research and Sea Turtles*, *How Everyday Activities Affect Water Quality* and *Sarasota County Parks Capital Projects Update*.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 and ask about Beach University.



Sarasota County Project Manager Curtis Smith (standing, center) talks about the planned improvements at Siesta Public Beach. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

MARCH 8 EXPO TO FEATURE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES TO AID HEARING

The third annual Hearing Tech Expo has commitments from 45 exhibitors who will be representing many state-of-the-art technologies and support systems that can help a person restore lost hearing, organizers say.

The free event will take place on Saturday, March 8, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Manatee Technical Institute (MTI), located at 6305 State Road 70 in Bradenton, just 1 mile west of Interstate 75 and exit 217B, a news release says.

“Fourteen leading experts will provide seminars to round out the most comprehensive educational experience for those with hearing loss in Florida,” the release adds. The recently opened Manatee Technical Institute’s Cantrell Hall “is a cutting-edge facility dedicated to developing new practitioners in numerous technological fields,” the release adds.

Among the exhibitors will be the three leading cochlear implant manufacturers, the top two assistive listening device suppliers and the three leading phone providers, the release notes. The latter also provide many free captioned and amplified phones for Florida residents with hearing loss, it says. Additionally, the Regal Entertainment Group and Sony “will team up to offer live demonstrations of the Sony Captioned Glasses,” which are providing captions on virtually all movies shown at Regal’s more than 6,000 theatres, including Sarasota’s Hollywood 20 and Bradenton’s Oakmont 8, the release points out.



Assistive listening devices are provided at many locations, including cinemas, in Sarasota and Manatee counties. Image provided by the State of Rhode Island via Wikimedia Commons

Free hearing and health screenings will be provided as well, the release says.

Among the seminars, *10 Easy Ways to Improve Your Hearing* “will teach how to take advantage of all the new technologies” at more than 100 theaters, movie houses, houses of worship and community centers in the Sarasota and Manatee counties, “which have made the area the most ‘hearing-friendly’ in the country,” the release adds.

The Hearing Tech Expo is sponsored by the Hearing Loss Association of America-Sarasota Chapter.

For the seminar schedule, visit <http://hlas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/Expo/Expo-2014-Seminars.pdf>.

For more information, contact expo@hlas.org or 706-4312.



SQUADRON OFFERING BOAT SAFETY COURSE IN MARCH

The Sarasota Power & Sail Squadron will offer a four-night Florida-approved Boat Safety Course next month, it has announced.

The course will be held Monday and Wednesday evenings, March 3, 5, 10 and 12, from 7 to 9 p.m., a news release says.

Anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1988 must take a boat safety course to operate a vessel

with 10 or more horsepower, the release points out.

The course includes optional on-the-water training, the release says. Classes will be held at the Squadron building, located at 2814 Hyde Park St. in Sarasota.

Call 927-5879 for information & reservations, or visit sarasota-boating.org.



Power vessels are docked next to sailboats at Marina Jack. Photo by Norman Schimmel

HOUSING NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY TO BE FOCUS OF PROGRAM

On Tuesday, March 11, in Selby Auditorium at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee (USFSM), the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and experts in homebuilding and home healthcare; architects; designers; and representatives of state and local governmental agencies; faith-based and civic organizations and care providers from across Florida's aging network will convene for *Preparing Environments that Meet the Needs of Elders*, a free public program, the college has announced.

The auditorium is located at 8350 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.

According to the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Florida ranks first in the nation in the percentage of elderly residents, a news release says. About 4.7 million of its residents are 60 and older, about one-quarter of the state's population. With life expectancy expected to rise to 90 by 2030, the number of

people 65 and older will double in the next 30 years on a national level, the release adds.

"How can communities make it possible for elders to safely and independently live in their own homes as they age and have access to the services, programs and support they need?" the release asks. That will be the focus of the March 11 program.

Registration will begin at 7:45 a.m., and the day's presentations and panel discussions will end at 3:15 p.m. Attendance and parking are complimentary. Registration and lunch purchase may be made online at communitiesforalifetime.org/regis_rhf_031114.html.

USFSM professor Kathy Black will address *What Do We Know about Aging in Place in Our Community?*, the release notes. Other discussions and work groups will focus on issues such as "universal design," or building and retrofitting homes in ways that are suitable, affordable and effective for aging in place, the release continues.

VOTERS REMINDED ABOUT ABSENTEE BALLOT TRACKING SYSTEM

Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent is reminding voters who request absentee ballots for the March 25 elections that they may track their ballots online from the time they request the ballots until the voted ballots have safely reached her office.

The online tracking system also allows voters to check registration status, party affiliation and local polling place information and to request an absentee ballot, a news release points out. Voters may go to the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) website at SarasotaVotes.com and select the "Vote by Mail" icon at

the top of the home page. Then they should choose "Track your Absentee Ballot" from the menu and enter the requested information to track absentee ballots and access other information, the release notes.

The elections scheduled for March 25 are the Special County School District Election, Holiday Park Park & Recreation District Election, Town of Longboat Key General Election and City of Venice Referendum.

Requests from voters for absentee ballots for the March 25 elections, to be mailed to the voters, must be received by the Supervisor of

Elections (SOE) Office no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 19, the release points out.

Dent cautions absentee voters that, for a ballot to be counted, the voter certificate on the return envelope must be signed by the voter and the voted ballot must be received in the her office no later than 7 p.m. on election day. Marked absentee ballots may *not* be turned in at a polling place on election day, the release adds.

Effective Jan. 1, a voter who forgets to sign the voter certificate on the return envelope will have until 5 p.m. the day before the election to cure the missing signature

by completing an absentee ballot affidavit and providing an ID to the Supervisor of Elections Office, the release adds. A copy of the affidavit and instructions are available on the SOE website.

Dent also reminds voters whose signatures may have changed since they last voted that signature updates must be made on a Florida Voter Registration Application and presented to the Supervisor of elections Office prior to the start of the absentee ballot canvass, which will be at noon on Thursday, March 20.

Voters may contact the SOE office at 861-8600 for assistance or for more information.



Voting By Mail Is Quick And Easy!

ABSENTEE

Election Supervisor:

This is my formal request for an absentee ballot. I am **listed on your rolls at the address on the reverse side** to the address as listed.

☐ Instead, send my ballot to the following address:

BIRTH DATE (mo/day/yr)

Must be signed as registered

Reverse side is complete

REQUEST YOUR BALLOT TODAY

Voters may use online software to track absentee ballots for the March 25 election, the Supervisor of Elections Office says. File photo

FLORIDA MARITIME HISTORY COURSE OFFERED BY ZIMMERMAN

Fans of The Sarasota News Leader's city editor can hear his lectures on Florida's maritime history starting March 10 at the University of South Florida's Sarasota-Manatee campus.

The course will be offered by the Lifelong Learning Academy for a fee; it will be taught by Stan Zimmerman, a news release says.

The instruction is provided on Monday mornings for eight weeks. The course will begin with an examination of the archeological record of the indigenous Floridians, trying to determine if they could have voyaged beyond the peninsula. Subsequent classes will examine the repeated (and failed) attempts at colonization by the Spanish before a foothold was established in 1565 in St. Augustine.

How did the Seminoles sustain their three wars against the U.S. government? What was the impact of the blockade imposed by the Union Navy on Confederate Florida? What role did the state play in the capture of America's first colonies, the paradigm leading to today's global hegemony? Was World War II really decided by naval action in Florida's tropical waters? And what was it like to be at Ground Zero in the world's closest (and, so far, only) brush with thermonuclear war?

These are some of the questions Zimmerman will address as he covers the relationship of humanity, a sandy peninsula and the warm seas surrounding it over the centuries.

For more information, the academy's telephone number is 359-4296, and the website is LLA-SM.org.



Florida as it appeared to the Spanish explorers in 1562, three years before the founding of St. Augustine. Image courtesy U.S. Library of Congress

PARENTS INVITED TO COMMENT ON SCHOOL DISTRICT OPERATIONS


Each year the Sarasota County School District conducts a survey of students, parents and staff to gather information about how schools and district workplaces are meeting their needs and expectations in such areas as communications, curriculum, management, safety, academics, facilities maintenance and parent involvement, the district has announced.

Information received from parents and guardians through the Climate Survey “is particularly helpful in measuring customer satisfaction with school services and in identifying areas that could be improved,” a news release points out.

Staff and students generally take the survey at their worksites or schools. Most parents and guardians take it at home, the release adds. District parents and guardians were sent a telephone message via the district’s automated calling system on Feb. 23 inviting them to respond to the survey, the release continues.

The survey also will be posted on the Sarasota County School District website, www.SarasotaCountySchools.net through March 7. Respondents may take the survey by clicking on the “Parent Climate Survey” button on the left side of the home page. It has been translated into the five languages other than English that are most often spoken in students’ homes, the release notes: Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Haitian Creole.

“District administrators strongly encourage all families with children in the district to take the survey,” the release says. Parents who do not have Internet access may take the survey at any Sarasota County school or any



The Sarasota County Schools’ Climate Survey is available on the district website. Image from the website.

Sarasota County library, the release points out. “Parents who cannot exercise either of those options may call the district office to have a copy of the survey mailed to them,” the release adds.

“It is important for the district to hear from as many families as possible for the results of the survey to be helpful in guiding decisions,” the release says. “Responses are confidential. The district will use summary information from the survey to identify successes or problems, but it does not identify individual respondents,” the release continues.

More information about the Parent Climate Survey is available on the Parents page of the district website under the Frequently Asked Questions link. Parents or guardians who would like more information or who have questions about the survey can call the district Communications Department at 927-4009.

EMERGING LEADERS SOUGHT FOR GULF COAST LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Gulf Coast Community Foundation is accepting applications for its 2014 Gulf Coast Leadership Institute, the foundation has announced.

“The 10-week leadership-training program is designed to identify, develop and connect a diverse group of aspiring and experienced leaders throughout the region,” a news release explains. The application to be considered for this year’s class is [available online](#) at [GulfCoastCF.org](#). The deadline to submit a completed application is 4 p.m. on Friday, March 14, the release adds.

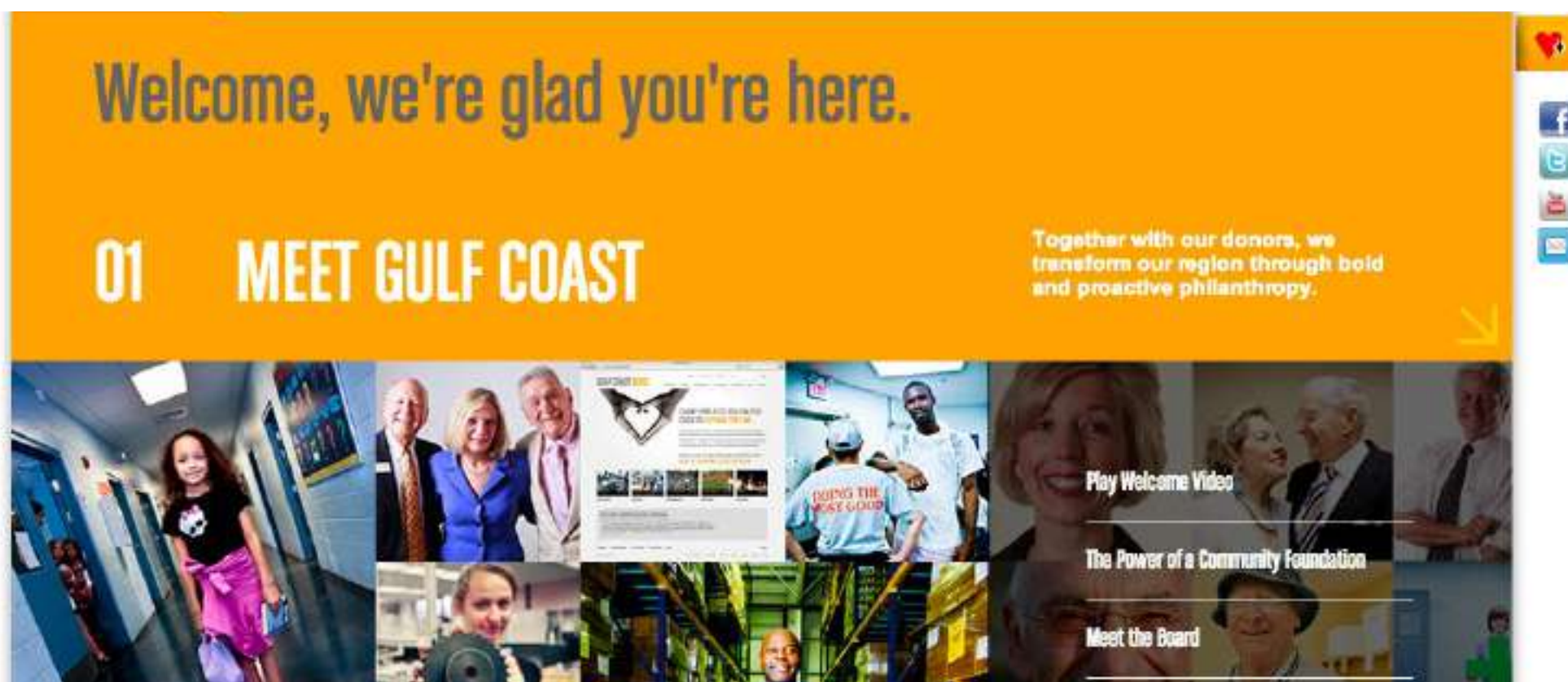
Gulf Coast Community Foundation will select up to 25 participants for the program, which includes seven training sessions from April through mid-June, the release notes. The training will be led by faculty of the nationally recognized J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia, the release says. Gulf Coast has also partnered with the Leadership Development Institute of

Eckerd College in St. Petersburg to add a new component on creative problem solving for this year’s schedule, the release adds.

Gulf Coast provides all training and resources to participants at no cost “in exchange for their commitment to use their new skills to benefit the community,” the release points out.

“Class members will be selected to represent the diversity of the region’s public, private and independent sectors, the release continues. Selection criteria include leadership potential and participation in community and professional organizations. Professionals and community volunteers of all ages are encouraged to apply, the release notes.

This year marks the seventh class of Gulf Coast Leadership Institute, which was preceded by two classes of the foundation’s North Port Leadership Institute, the release adds. In all, more than 200 community members have participated in this leadership training offered by Gulf Coast.



The Gulf Coast Community Foundation is seeking applicants for its Leadership Institute. Image from [gulfcoastcf.org](#)

BOTELHO NAMED ACTING ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Steven Botelho, Sarasota County's chief financial management officer, was appointed acting assistant county administrator by Sarasota County Administrator Thomas A. Harmer, effective Monday, Feb. 24.

Harmer announced the appointment during a county budget workshop held at the Administration Center in Sarasota on Friday, Feb. 21.

"Steve continues to be a strong asset to the leadership team and has a great understanding of the internal operations of the county," Harmer said. "He has also worked hard to develop a positive work environment in his department."

Botelho will continue to serve as Sarasota County's chief financial management officer, a position he has held since 2012, overseeing the Office of Financial Management, its staff and the county's budget process and planning, a news release notes. In his new role, he will also oversee the county's information technology and human resources services.

"I am excited to work with Steve as part of the executive team," said Harmer.

Botelho joined Sarasota County Government in 2005 as a financial analyst and later became the budget director, the release says.

Under Botelho's management, Sarasota County has continued to be recognized with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, most recently in 2013. The award is the highest professional recognition in governmental budgeting and is presented by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the release continues.



Steven Botelho/Contributed photo

Botelho, a 1999 graduate of the University of South Florida, began his financial career as an advisor with the global financial services firm Morgan Stanley. During his tenure with the firm, he earned various financial accreditations and licenses, the release says.

He then assisted Arthur Anderson LLP, a national accounting services and tax consulting company, as a tax software developer. There he helped develop tax software that is still in use, the release notes.

Botelho and his wife, a Sarasota County native, have two daughters.

SALVATION ARMY INSTALLS NEW ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

During the Jan. 22 Salvation Army Advisory Board meeting in Sarasota, Dr. Richard Rehmyer officially took the gavel as chairman for a two-year term, the Salvation Army has announced.

Executive Committee members Neil Scott and Dale Woodling also have new positions, a news release says. Scott was installed as vice chairman; Woodling, as secretary. Further,

new Executive Committee member Paul Sutton was named treasurer, the release adds.

In addition, four new Advisory Board members were approved for three-year terms. They are Dr. Bill Brian, Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino, Sarasota Police Col. Stephen Moyer and Michelle Burke-Phillips, the release notes.

COUNTY CLEANUP PROGRAM RECEIVES NATIONAL HONORS

Keep Sarasota County Beautiful (KSCB) received the Keep America Beautiful President's Circle Award during Keep America Beautiful's 2014 national conference, held recently in Charlotte, NC, the county has announced.

"The President's Circle Award recognizes exemplary performance made by certified affiliates of the national nonprofit in building and sustaining vibrant communities," a news release explains.

"Winning our 10th consecutive Presidents Circle Award is a testament to the thousands of volunteers who take great pride in their neighborhoods, parks and other areas," said Wendi Crisp, manager of KSCB, in the release. "This award is about the dedication and community spirit of the residents, businesses and nonprofit organizations that remain committed to a mission of giving back."

In qualifying for a President's Circle Award, KSCB has met Keep America Beautiful's standards of merit by conducting an annual Community Appearance Index, calculating the affiliate's cost/benefit ratio and administering activities in the areas of litter prevention, recycling and waste reduction,

and beautification and community greening, the release notes.

"One of Keep America Beautiful's most effective tools is the work of our grassroots network of affiliate organizations, which has an impact on millions of Americans each year," said Keep America Beautiful President and CEO Jennifer Jehn in the release.

The Keep America Beautiful (KAB) Community Appearance Index-Litter Index is a tool used by KAB affiliates to visually assess the overall appearance of communities through indicators such as litter, illegal signs, graffiti, abandoned/junk vehicles and outside storage, the release explains. Teams of community, business and government representatives conduct the visual analyses, using a scoring system ranging from 1 to 4, with "1" meaning "no litter" and "4" denoting "extremely littered," the release adds. Each year, affiliates grade their communities during drive-by examinations of the same areas at the same time of the year. "This provides an indication of the success of each community's anti-littering education and other anti-littering programs," the release says.

For more information, visit kab.org.



Volunteers clean a Sarasota County beach during a program sponsored by Keep Sarasota County Beautiful. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

SARASOTA COUNTY RELEASES ITS 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

Sarasota County has announced the release of its 2013 Annual Report, which provides a comprehensive summary of the county's activities and accomplishments last year.

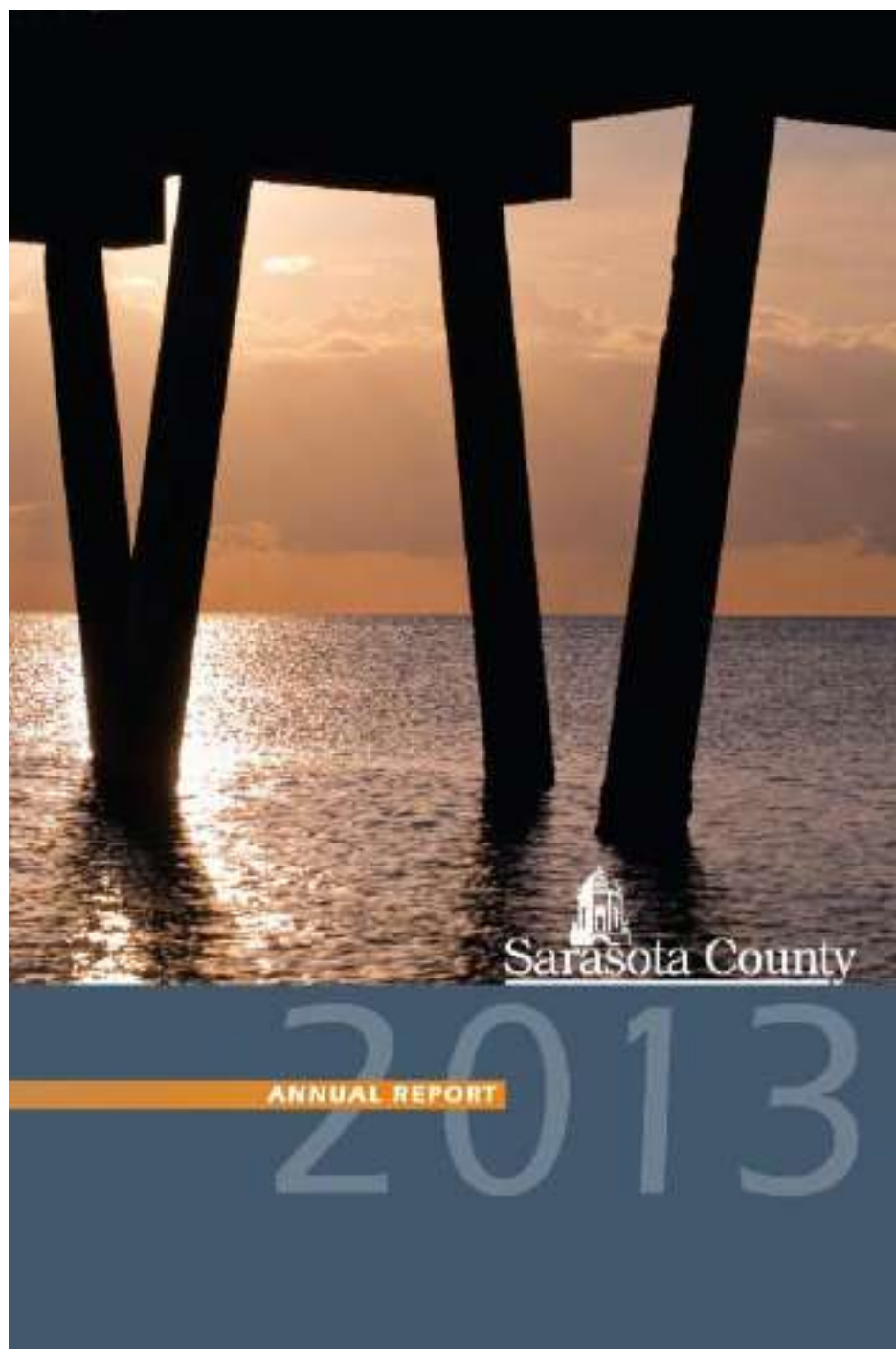
The document may be viewed online at the county's website, scgov.net.


"This report documents the county's dedication to service and accountability during 2013 and demonstrates the value that citizens are receiving for their taxpayer dollars," said Thomas A. Harmer, Sarasota County administrator, in a news release.

In 2013, the county focused most of its goals and activities in six key areas, added Harmer in the release: community preservation and enhancement; growth planning; mobility; water and environmental resources; economic development; and health, safety and welfare.

"The report is organized into categories highlighting those goals along with an in-depth look at the county's leadership and accountability efforts," the release notes.

Printed copies of the annual report are available at county offices and county libraries.



For more information about the report or the programs, services, activities and departments it highlights, call the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 or visit scgov.net. 

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CRIME BLOTTER



CHEETAH LOUNGE

The Cheetah Lounge is located at 3939 N. Washington Blvd. in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps. (Inset) Brad T. Stanford/Contributed photo

BRADENTON MAN ARRESTED FOR MANSLAUGHTER AT THE CHEETAH

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a Bradenton man on a charge of Homicide-Negligent Manslaughter Other Than by Motor Vehicle in connection with the death of a man just after midnight on Feb. 23 at the [Cheetah Lounge](#) in Sarasota, the office has reported.

The victim's death was reported following a physical altercation at the lounge, located at 3939 N. Washington Blvd. in Sarasota, a news release says. When deputies arrived at the scene, the victim was not breathing, a news release says. Deputies performed CPR until an EMS unit arrived on the scene, the release

adds. Shortly thereafter, the victim was pronounced dead.

Brad T. Stanford, 32, of 5914 28th Ave., Bradenton, is being held without bond in the Sarasota County Jail, the release notes. His arrest card says Stanford was employed by the Cheetah as a security guard. His arraignment has been set for March 21, according to information from the Sarasota County Jail.

Anyone with information about the incident is encouraged to call the Criminal Investigations Section at 861-4900, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477), or going online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.

FORMER VENICE CONTRACTOR CHARGED WITH GRAND THEFT

Former Venice contractor Terrence Ream has been arrested following separate investigations by the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and Venice Police Department, the Sheriff's Office announced on Feb. 27.

Ream, 43, of 12081 Granite Woods Loop and owner of Terry Ream Construction on Progress Circle, is accused of taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from nearly a dozen customers and never completing the contracted work, a news release says.

In the three cases investigated by the Sheriff's Office, he allegedly took more than \$285,000 from homeowners between May and October 2013, the release adds. In the eight Venice Police Department cases, he reportedly took more than \$400,000 from customers, the release notes.

Ream recently filed for bankruptcy and relinquished his contractor's license to the State of Florida, it says.

In all, Ream is charged with three counts of Grand Theft, two counts of Misappropriation



Terrance Ream/Contributed photo

of Construction Funds, four counts of Larceny and two counts of Grand Larceny. He is being held in the Sarasota County Jail on \$325,000 bond.

Anyone who contracted Terry Ream Construction and paid for work that has not been completed can call Criminal Investigations at 861-4900 and ask for Det. Colonna, the release notes.


SUSPECT SOUGHT IN MOLESTATION REPORTED ON FEB. 20

The Sarasota Sheriff's Office has been investigating a lewd and lascivious molestation of a 14-year-old that allegedly occurred in the area of the Lockwood Meadows subdivision, the office announced on Feb. 21.

The crime was reported about 10:50 p.m. on Feb. 20 near the intersection of Lockwood Meadows Boulevard and Lockwood Meadows Street, a news release says.

"The incident involved inappropriate contact" by an Hispanic male reported to be 35

years old with a height of 5 feet 4 inches and weighing about 180 pounds, according to the release. The suspect has brown hair and was last seen wearing a tight white sleeveless shirt and black gym shorts, the release adds.

Anyone with information about the suspect is encouraged to call the Criminal Investigations Section at 861-4900, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or go online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com. 

OPINION



VOTE 'YES' ON SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS' 1-MILL REFERENDUM

EDITORIAL

On Tuesday, March 25, Sarasota County voters will go to the polls to consider renewing a special 1-mill property tax that goes entirely for operating expenses of the Sarasota County Schools.

This levy was first approved by voters in 2002, with 62 percent of those casting ballots supporting the special tax. By law, the voters must renew it every four years, and they have overwhelmingly done so. In 2010, the 1-mill tax was supported by two out of every three people who went to the polls.

By statute, Florida counties are strictly controlled in how much they can assess taxpayers for school expenses. In addition, a significant portion of each county's tax revenue

for schools is turned over to the state, which redistributes those funds based on a statewide equity formula. As a result, wealthier counties such as Sarasota send more tax revenue to Tallahassee than they receive in return.

Fortunately, the state has made it possible for counties to assess additional amounts for local capital improvements and operating expenses. While the Sarasota County Schools utilizes these additional levies, the county still has fallen short of the funding level our schools need. Hence, the additional 1-mill tax.

In the 12 years that revenue from the 1-mill tax has been available for our schools, excellent progress has been made in our district's rankings in the state. For example, the county most recently ranked sixth statewide in FCAT

OPINION

scores. Reading and math scores were as much as 14 points higher than the state average, while writing scores ranked third in the state, according to the latest figures.

Sarasota County Schools is rated an “A” district, based on almost all schools scoring “A” or “B” in student achievement.

The special 1-mill tax offers the school district the ability to expand opportunities for students, preparing them for a complex job market and world. Through the retention of arts and music teachers, expanding technologically advanced classrooms, offering more science education in elementary schools, improving campus security, and providing more guidance counselors and assistant principals, the special tax has had a dramatic and positive impact on student success.

It is important to note that the question put to voters will refer to a tax increase. However, there is no additional tax. This is simply a question of renewing the tax increase that was first approved by voters in 2002 and renewed in 2006 and 2010.

Consider, too, the effects of the housing market crash and the Great Recession on the funds generated by the 1-mill tax. Before assessed property values declined sharply as a result of the crisis in the housing market, the 1-mill levy was producing as much as \$60 million a year. However, with property

valuations declining by a net of more than 25 percent over the past few years, funds available from the tax have likewise declined. That is why the roughly \$45 million expected from the continuation of the special 1-mill tax is so important to the continued success of our schools.

At the turn of the 20th century, the sum total of human knowledge had taken about 150 years to double. By the end of World War II, it had doubled in only 25 years. Today, human knowledge doubles every year.

The amount of information a student must absorb to compete effectively in today’s world is exponentially greater than what his parents

and grandparents had to face. The challenge is monumental for our schools to stay abreast of that expansion of knowledge and properly prepare students.

The 1-mill tax may generate only about one-twelfth of the operating funds available to the school district, but the money is critical when it comes to fulfilling the mission of our schools to enable our children to compete in our 21st century world.

The Sarasota County Schools has done an admirable job of meeting that challenge, with transparency and accountability. Sarasota County voters should give the district the resources it needs to continue that excellent record.

We urge you to vote “Yes” in the special referendum on March 25. 

The special 1-mill tax offers the school district the ability to expand opportunities for students, preparing them for a complex job market and world.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

READER OFFERS SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL TAX REFERENDUM

To the Editor:

I am a retired businessman from Boston. I paid high taxes up there to ensure my kids had a quality education. Since moving to Sarasota County, I have seen my property taxes are quite a bit lower than up north, but I've been asked several times to increase those taxes to pay for a better education in Sarasota County than the state funds allow.

The school district's referendum is around the corner and I am being asked once again to renew it. Even though I have no children or grandchildren in the local schools, I gladly **support the referendum** for several reasons (the writer's emphasis). First of all, I want to ensure that the paramedic, law enforcement officer and nurse who are there to help me if I need them, and the electrician, plumber and

accountant I use have had more than a basic education the state provides. I want them to be good thinkers and problem solvers — my life, my home, my finances may depend upon it.

Second, when I sell my home, I want the property values to increase, not decrease because the community didn't support better schools.

Third, the children in school today are our future leaders and I want to ensure they know how to be good stewards of our finances and the environment so my descendants enjoy this country for years to come.

I often wonder: "How can someone look at the youth of today and deny their chance for success that excellent schools provide?"

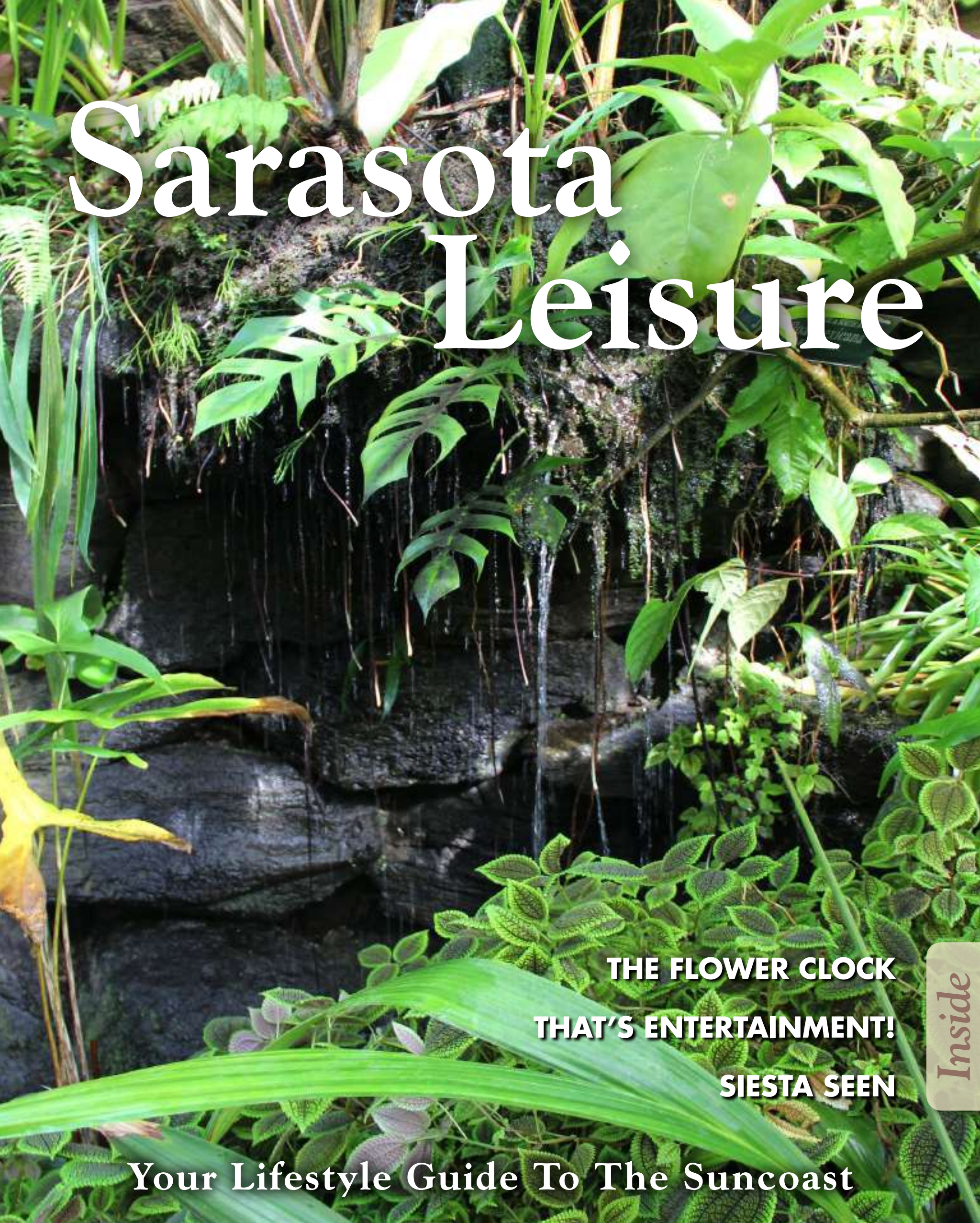
*Richard Diutsh
Longboat Key*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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



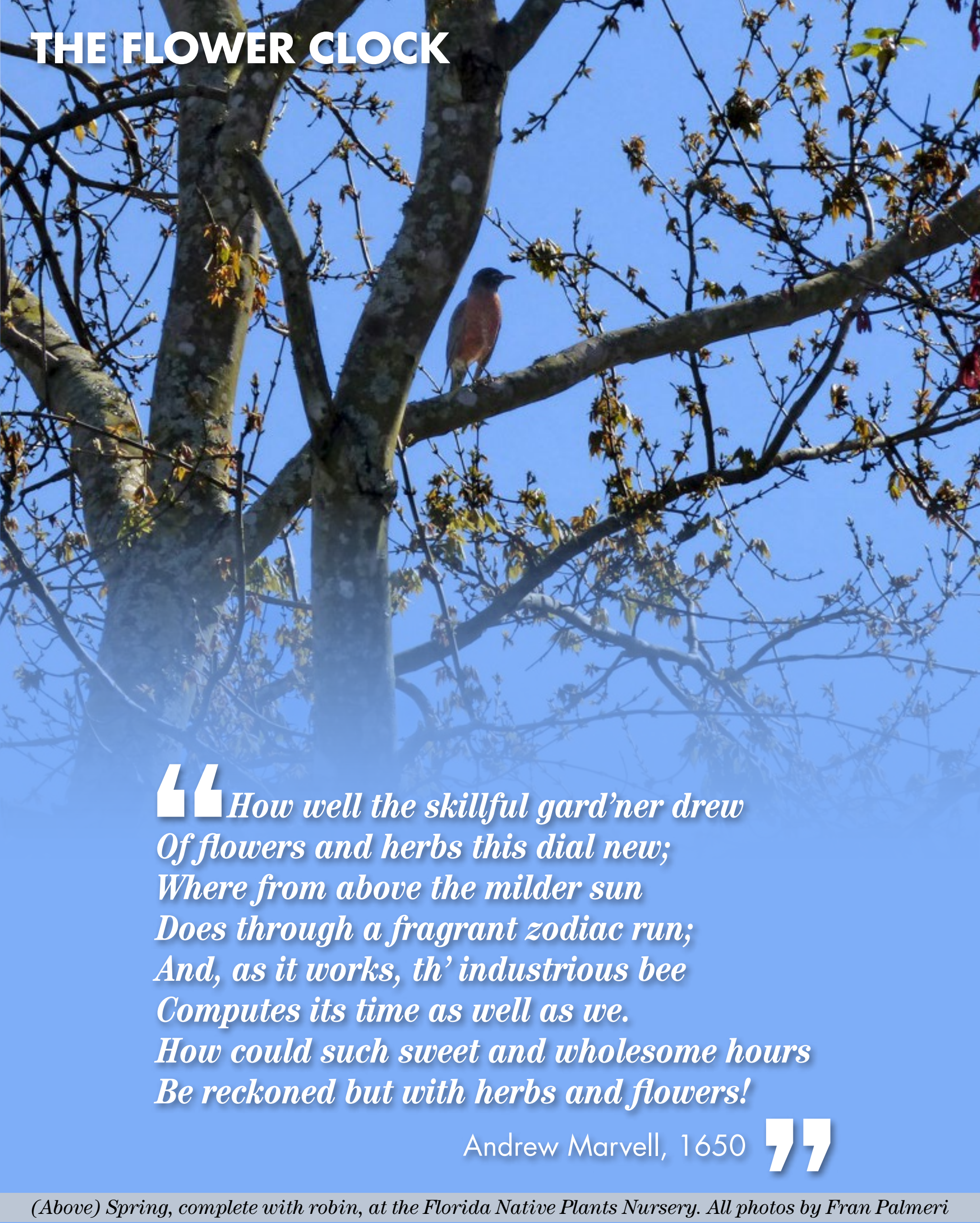
Sarasota Leisure

**THE FLOWER CLOCK
THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!
SIESTA SEEN**

Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast

Inside

THE FLOWER CLOCK



“How well the skillful gard’ner drew
Of flowers and herbs this dial new;
Where from above the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And, as it works, th’ industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers!

Andrew Marvell, 1650

”

(Above) Spring, complete with robin, at the Florida Native Plants Nursery. All photos by Fran Palmeri

BLOOMS IN FLORIDA KNOW NO BOUNDARY OF TIME

Story and Photos

By Fran Palmeri

Contributing Writer

The flower clock is ticking away. On the calendar, we are not even on the right page and yet, in Florida, spring is going full tilt. Violets carpet damp areas. Yellow jessamine clammers over trees and shrubs. Pennyroyal crops up alongside trails. In recently burned areas — and many Florida habitats are fire-dependent — pawpaw puts forth creamy white blooms.

Perhaps inspired by Andrew Marvell's poem, in 1751, Carolus Linnaeus, the taxonomist, described a flower clock, which would mark the passing of time over a 24-hour period. Noting bloom times in his garden, he included morning glories, thistle, dandelion, day lilies,

marigolds and other flowers suitable for Sweden's temperate climate.


Centuries later, Linnaeus' idea is being put into practice. In 2009, the Missouri Botanical Garden celebrated its 150th anniversary by installing a flower clock. Edinburgh, Geneva and, in the U.S., Modesto, CA, Niagara Falls and the Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando all have flower clocks, most of them seasonal.

In 1959, Jean Francaix composed *L'Horloge de Flore* for oboe and orchestra. WSMR played it one day, which is how I learned about the clocks.



Tori Moore at the T. Mabry Carlton Reserve in Venice, on an outing with the Florida Native Plant Society.



Florida's flower clock never runs down. There is no time of year when nothing is in bloom. Spring can arrive before autumn bows out. At the Fakahatchee Strand near Naples, red maples, irrepressible in their rush to be first, key out in early December. Now with the sun rising higher in the sky, there is no holding back, no matter what the calendar says. 



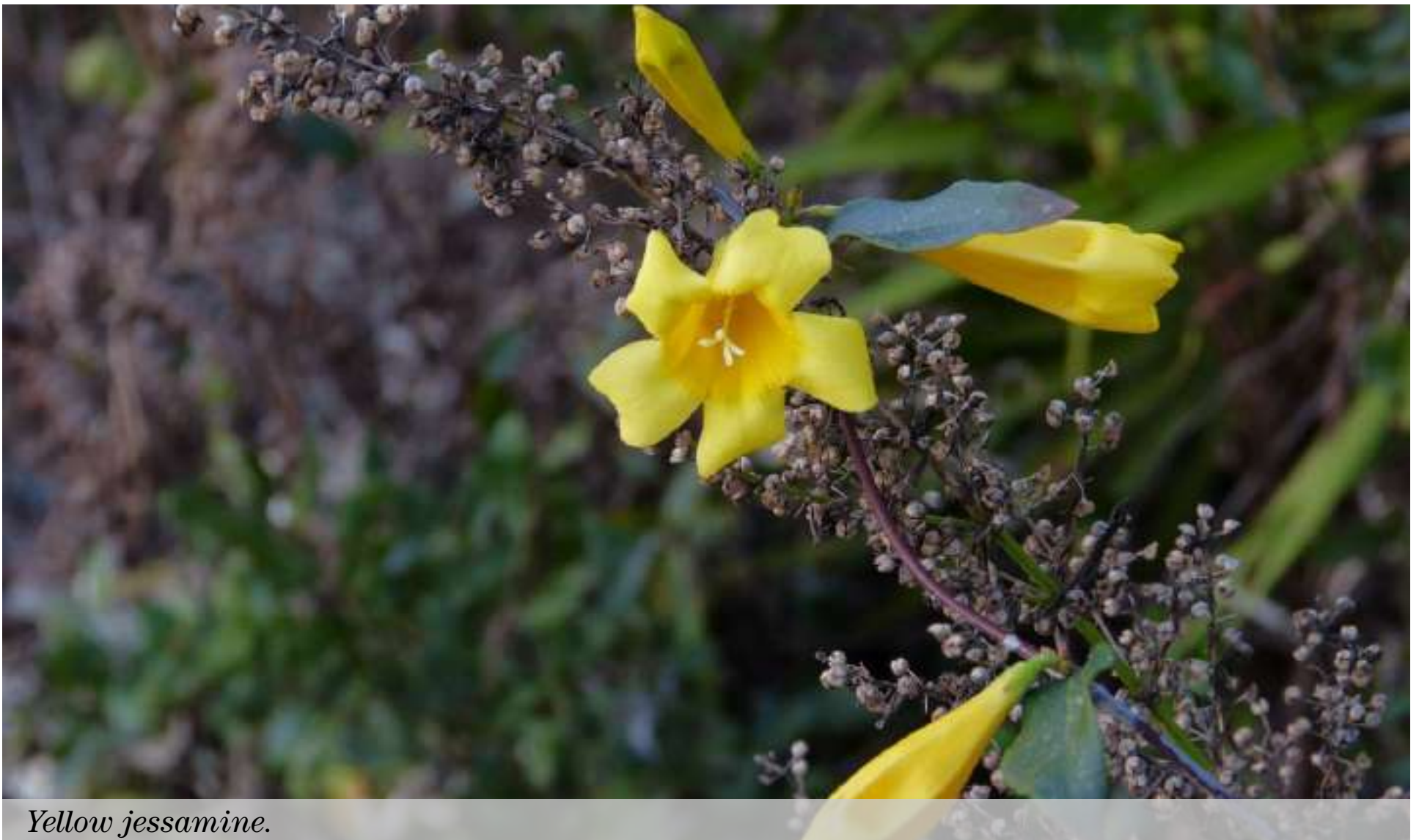
Florida violet



Long-leaf violet.



Glossy ibis at Carlton Reserve.



Yellow jessamine.



Lyonia blooming at Curry Creek Preserve.



Pennyroyal



Pawpaw



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

About 7,000 people were expected for the fifth annual Sarasota Invitational Regatta at Nathan Benderson Park Feb. 22-23, organizers said. All photos by Norman Schimmel

SEASON MEANS A PLETHORA OF PEOPLE ENJOYING A VAST ARRAY OF ACTIVITIES

Staff Reports

Rowers, fast horses, faster cars, baseball, circus acts — it is season for sure in Sarasota County.


From the fifth annual Sarasota Invitational Regatta at Nathan Benderson Park to the Sarasota Exotic Car Fest in downtown Sarasota to an event hosted by the Baltimore Orioles for Spring Training season ticket-holders, the past weekend was packed with events that drew residents and tourists.

The regatta alone was expected to bring more than 7,000 rowers to the University Parkway area, organizers said.

“We have 692 entries. Most regattas don’t get anywhere near that,” said regatta Co-Director

Norm Thetford in a news release. “It’s one of the largest regattas in the state, if not the country,” he added.

Competitors representing 52 clubs from as far away as Washington, Indiana and New York rowed head-to-head on the 400-acre lake against teams from four local organizations: Sarasota County Rowing Club Masters, Sarasota Scullers, Sarasota Crew and Manatee Youth Rowing, the release pointed out.

Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel made a tour of county sports and entertainment venues to capture a wide variety of the activities on Feb. 22 and 23. 



Rowing teams compete in the fifth annual Sarasota Invitational Regatta.



People check out some of the models during the Sarasota Exotic Car Fest.



Call it 'eye candy' for sports car enthusiasts. Vehicles were angled in on Main Street for the Sarasota Exotic Car Fest on Feb. 22.



Season ticket holders stand in line for refreshments during an Ed Smith Stadium celebration on Feb. 22 in anticipation of the 2014 Spring Training season for the Baltimore Orioles.



Cake awaits Baltimore Orioles season ticket holders at Ed Smith Stadium on Feb. 22.



Competitors thunder across the field during the Suncoast Porsche Cup at Lakewood Ranch on Feb. 23, an event of [Sarasota Polo Club](#).



Polo ponies are not the only equines to strut their stuff on the polo field at Lakewood Ranch.



Trapeze artists dazzle the audience during Circus Sarasota's Wonderstruck show on Feb. 23.









THE NEW 'NO RIGHT ON RED' SIGN AT THE STICKNEY POINT ROAD INTERSECTION HAS SPARKED MULTIPLE COMPLAINTS; MORE FEATURES HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE BEACH IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT; AND THE SEARCH IS ON FOR A SPEEDING MOTORCYCLIST AS WELL AS A BURGLARY SUSPECT



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

If the crawl of traffic over the Stickney Point bridge seems even slower than usual this season, “thanks” go to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

Because of complaints that motorists turning right on red from Stickney Point Road onto Midnight Pass Road — headed north — were not yielding to pedestrians as they should,

FDOT recently put up signage prohibiting those turns, I learned this week in discussions with Chief Sarasota County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. and Lauren Hatchell, a public information officer with FDOT.

FDOT was “receiving complaints that people were not yielding to pedestrians” at that intersection, Hatchell said, and, as she pointed out,



The loss of the ability for drivers to turn right on red from Stickney Point Road onto Midnight Pass Road is causing more traffic backups on the Stickney Point Road bridge. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

“A lot of pedestrian-related accidents happen when people fail to yield.”

Drivers pulling up to the intersection would look left, Harriott noted, but they would fail to watch out for people crossing Midnight Pass Road on their right.

FDOT ran a quick analysis of traffic counts after reviewing the complaints, Hatchell added. The “No Right on Red” signage went up either Feb. 17 or the end of the preceding week, she said. “Of course, now we have received complaints [from drivers].”

Because of the ensuing “slow crawl” involving traffic from U.S. 41 approaching Siesta

Key at the height of season, Harriott told me, “We have asked [FDOT engineers] to take a look at the signal timing.” Harriott said he is hopeful it can be adjusted to ameliorate the situation, though he conceded, “I don’t think you’d ever add enough green [light] time to offset the loss of [right on] red.”

Moreover, Harriott pointed out, if the traffic coming onto Siesta is given a longer green light at the Stickney Point Road intersection, that will mean less green-light time for traffic headed in other directions.

Hatchell said FDOT will be reevaluating its traffic analysis, though she noted it is too



An aerial view shows the Midnight Pass Road intersection with Stickney Point Road with pedestrian crosswalks. Image from Google Maps

Siesta Seen

early to say whether the department will take down the signage or implement “something totally different” at the intersection.

“We don’t want pedestrians feeling like they’re in danger,” she pointed out; nor does FDOT want drivers to feel they cannot move at the red light if no pedestrians are in sight.

Like FDOT, Harriott told me, the county received a number of emails about the situation as soon as people noticed it.

One of those notes went from SKA Director Joe Volpe on Feb. 19 to Paula Wiggins, the county’s transportation planning manager.

Volpe wrote, “I have received several complaints that a change in the traffic signal at Stickney Point and Midnight Pass Road has created a mess. ... These people say that traffic is now backed up all the way to [U.S.] 41 and again on the turn lane on 41 to try to get on the island. It apparently has become a nightmare and the police are sitting there writing tickets to people who continue to make the turn on red.”

Volpe added, “I have no idea why this change was made but it certainly seems to be a backward move in traffic flow.”

MORE FEATURES AT THE BEACH

During the County Commission’s Aug. 28, 2013 meeting, it voted on the ranking of several additions to the Siesta Public Beach improvements project *if* it appeared work was coming in under the \$16.7 million maximum construction budget.



*Jim Harriott is the county's chief engineer.
File photo*

When Brad W. Gaubatz, the project manager, and Carolyn Brown, director of parks and recreation, presented an update on the work to members of the SKA on Feb. 6, Gaubatz said he could not make it public at that point, but at least two more items on that “extras” list were going to become a reality. This week, Gaubatz was kind enough to give me details.

Through “value engineering,” he pointed out in an email, the top two alternates were added back to the project when the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract was approved. Those were the replacement of the existing portion of the dune walkovers, at an estimated cost of \$214,500; and a new west pavilion, at a projected cost of \$241,697.50.

The next two alternatives have been added back as well, he continued:

Siesta Seen

- Alternate No. 3: Ten additional “two pole” shelters. The term “two pole” refers to the Parks and Recreation Department’s typical small wooden design in which a roof structure is held up with two vertical columns, he noted. These structures are usually about 12 feet square — “big enough for one picnic table.”

Gaubatz added, “The design for the Siesta Beach Improvements project will be a bit different and will match the project architecture. These won’t be installed until later this year.”

- Alternate No. 4: Tree size upgrade. This alternate increases the size of 64 Green Buttonwoods within the general area where

the east concessions will be located. Instead of 10-foot-tall trees, 20-foot-tall trees will be planted, “providing more shade right off the bat,” he wrote.

Further, part of Alternate No. 5 has been added back in, Gaubatz wrote. “This alternate was to change all of the concrete sidewalks to standard brick pavers,” he pointed out. “At this time, we are just changing the pavers in the main esplanade along the parking lot. We couldn’t pick up the full alternate at this time.”

The esplanade will provide pedestrians, bicyclists and even rollerbladers a pathway from one end of the park to the other without having to contend with parking lot traffic.



An artist's rendering shows the view people will have of the east concession area at Siesta Public Beach once the improvements project is complete. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

Gaubatz noted that the total cost of the latest items is \$217,100. “They will be paid for entirely by cost savings achieved by the Construction Manager,” he added, so the total GMP for the project will not change — a point on which the County Commission was firm. “Clearly, this is great news for the project!” he wrote.

HOW FAST WAS HE GOING???

My former colleague at the *Pelican Press*, longtime Editor Anne Johnson, put me on the trail of a vehicle chase story this week. She was among witnesses who saw a motorcycle roar through Siesta Village late in the afternoon of Feb. 19.

According to the report from the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office, the suspect — who escaped, but not with his bike — was driving a matte black Suzuki motorcycle when Deputy Michael Jackson spotted him heading southbound on Higel Avenue as Jackson was headed northbound on Higel near Faubel Street. “The driver glanced back at me and drew my attention to him,” Jackson wrote in his report. “I then observed that the motorcycle did not appear to have a license plate on it.”

Jackson made a U turn, but, because he was behind other traffic, he did not catch up to the bike until they reached the intersection



Observers say it was fortunate that Ocean Boulevard was not that busy with pedestrians when a motorcyclist sped through Siesta Village on Feb. 19. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Siesta Seen

of Ocean Boulevard and Avenida Milano, he continued.

After confirming the motorcycle did not have a license plate — or lights or mirrors — Jackson was able to maneuver around traffic. He activated his flashing lights and gave a blast on the air horn, he noted in the report. Traffic moved, and the bike headed toward the Village. Jackson turned on his siren and continued to follow it. However, he wrote, because the bike had “a really loud exhaust,” he was not sure the driver knew he was behind him.

The driver turned east onto Canal Road at the four-way stop in the Village, Jackson wrote. At that point, the driver glanced over his shoulder and saw Jackson. The driver “took off down Canal ... and made a quick left onto Avenida Del Norte,” Jackson noted in the report. “He accelerated to about 45 mph in an apparent attempt to flee.”

After rounding the bend, the driver slowed down to about 2 mph, enabling the deputy to pull up alongside him. The driver then told Jackson he was unable to get the motorcycle to stop and acted as though he were having problems with it. When Jackson instructed him to stop, the driver repeated that he could not do so. Jackson then told the driver to remove the key from the ignition and turn off the bike. Jackson pulled up in front of the driver at an angle to block the road.

“As I was exiting my patrol car I heard the motorcycle fall to the ground,” Jackson wrote in the report. He looked back to see the driver

running west on Avenida Del Norte. Jackson ran after him, reporting his location on his radio.

Although other Sheriff’s Office personnel arrived and set up a perimeter — and the office’s helicopter and K9 unit arrived to help with the search — deputies were unable to locate the driver. They think he might have jumped into the canal on the north side of Avenida de Mayo, Jackson wrote.

They did get some fingerprints off the helmet the driver threw to the ground before fleeing, as well as from the motorcycle, and they impounded the bike.

The driver was last seen wearing a long-sleeve black shirt and dark jeans. He has short hair, is about 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighs about 150 pounds.

Anyone with information about the incident is encouraged to call the Criminal Investigations Section at 861-4900, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or go online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.

SPEAKING OF SIESTA CRIME ...

Regular readers will recall that the Sheriff’s Office also has been looking for a suspect in a number of burglaries reported at condominiums on the island, especially along Midnight Pass Road.

This week, the office released a new and better surveillance photo of the suspect.

Siesta Seen

During the Feb. 6 SKA meeting, Deputy Chris McGregor explained that the majority of the burglaries at that point had taken place in the 6000 block of Midnight Pass Road. In most cases, he said, people had left their doors unlocked. The island seems so wonderful, he pointed out, many tourists think it is safe enough that they do not need to lock up valuables. "And it is paradise," McGregor said, "but we do still have crime here."

The suspect is very careful, McGregor added, because he takes a few items and a little bit of money. That makes it less likely people will know they have been robbed as soon as they return to their condo units.

The latest photo of the suspect accompanies this column.


STORMWATER PROJECT UPDATE

In his report this week to the County Commission regarding progress on the stormwater project next to Siesta Public Beach, Isaac Brownman, director of capital projects for the county, wrote that completion of the permanent pump station was on hold "until fabrication, delivery and connection of the electrical control building is completed. This partially prefabricated structure has been undergoing constructability changes to ensure that the building remains watertight in the event of submergence from a storm driven tidal surge. Final testing of the pump station will be delayed as a result of the fabrication lead time and to fully install this item."



The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is continuing to ask the public's help in identifying this suspect in recent burglaries on Siesta Key. Image courtesy Sheriff's Office

Brownman added, "It was unknown until recently what impact, if any, this component would have on the project schedule," as staff and the contractor worked to ensure they could get a flood-proof structure from the manufacturer.

Brownman added that fill from the stormwater project is being used for the parking areas at Siesta Public Beach, and construction of the new maintenance facility remains under way, along with work on general site grading and the landscape berm. 



The Hermitage Artist Retreat has become known in the community for its artistic programs on the beach. Image courtesy of the Hermitage

HERMITAGE TO PRESENT SONGS AT SUNSET AND ART AFTER DARK

The next beach performance at the [Hermitage Artist Retreat](#) will be held on Friday, Feb. 28, starting at 4:30 p.m. with an open house of the historic Hermitage House and campus tours, the retreat has announced.

Afterward, *Songs at Sunset* will start on the beach at 5:30 p.m. with visiting composer [Anna Clyne](#), “who will share a recording of music she wrote at the Hermitage and give an insider’s view into the mind of a contemporary composer,” a news release says. Following Clyne’s performance will be Sarasota’s own [Annie Morrison](#), a Broadway star who will present songs and stories from her current

life and work as a writer of solo plays, the release adds.

Sunset about 6:30 p.m. will be followed by *Art After Dark*, featuring video art by Ringling College of Art and Design professor and Hermitage fellow [Michael Wyshock](#), the release notes. He will project the art he made during his Hermitage residency. “These video streams of consciousness drawings represent the world he sees in a creative, meditative state,” the release adds.

This program will be free, but visitors are requested to bring their own beach chairs and refreshments, the release points out.

“Our beach readings have grown, not only in audience numbers, but in program offerings,” said Bruce Rodgers, Hermitage executive director, in the release. “We no longer limit ourselves to readings when we have the opportunity to share artists and their work.”

According to her website, London-born Clyne “is a composer of acoustic and electroacoustic music, combining resonant soundscapes with propelling textures that weave, morph and collide in dramatic explosions,” the release continues. Clyne was a guest composer at the 2011 Mizzou New Music Summer Festival.

Morrison is an award-winning actress and singer who has starred on Broadway in *Merrily We Roll Along* and *Lovemusik*; in the London West End production of *PEG*; the Off Broadway shows *Goblin Market* and



Anna Clyne/Contributed photo

Forbidden Broadway; and in numerous musicals and plays at regional theaters across the country, the release adds. “As a singer, she can be heard on more than a dozen albums. As a playwright, she has created *Linda Lovely Goes To Broadway*, *Discourse Of A Maid* and *Trevor’s Fire*,” the release says.

“Wyshock creates still and moving artwork by fracturing color and using narratives to question the moral responsibility of consumers,” the release notes. His work has been exhibited around the country and in other parts of the world, including Paris, Switzerland, Ireland and Germany.

All beach programming is subject to weather conditions permitting. For up-to-date information, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org or call 475-2098.



Annie Morrison/Contributed photo

FAIRY HOUSE FESTIVAL SET AT HISTORIC SPANISH POINT

“Historic Spanish Point will be aflutter with fairies” Friday and Saturday, March 7 and 8, at a Fairy House Festival, the site has announced.

The event will take place during regular museum hours, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Fairy houses “are small structures where fairies live in harmony with nature,” a news release explains. “Sticks, bark, dry grasses, pebbles, shells, feathers, seaweed, pine cones and nuts are just some of the natural materials used. Ranging from rustic to intricate “Fairy Mansions” are “whimsical habitats [that] can be built by anyone who wants to get out, enjoy nature and energize their creative juices,” the release adds. The “houses” will be located throughout the 30-acre property for viewing by museum visitors.

In addition to the fairy houses, the festival will feature Janice Williams playing crystal bowls, enchanted forest walks, arts and crafts vendors and food stands, the release notes.

The festival also will feature a competition for the best fairy house. Cash prizes will be awarded in the following categories: \$100 for Best Overall, \$50 for Most Playful and \$50 for Most Livable. The release points out, “[T]he coveted Fairy House Trophy, along with bragging rights, will also be awarded.”

Fairy Houses can take many forms and can be created in different ways, the release points out. Historic Spanish Point asks each participating individual or team to build a fairy house on a base so it may be transported to Historic Spanish Point “and placed easily on the site,”



Historic Spanish Point invites the public to create ‘fairy houses’ for a March festival. Image by Janny Sandholm via Wikimedia Commons

the release adds. “Fairy houses should look natural so they blend into the site. They may have a beach or woodland theme,” the release notes.

Admission to the festival is included in regular museum admission of \$12 for adults; \$10 for seniors; and \$5 for children under age 12.

Fairy house entries must be brought to Historic Spanish Point’s Visitors Center by noon on Thursday, March 6, to be included in the event, the release points out.

For more information about the festival, call Jane Glennan at 966-5214, Ext. 255, or email jane@historicspanishpoint.org.

SUN CIRCLE ART FESTIVAL PLANNED FOR MARCH 8 IN SARASOTA

The annual Sun Circle Art Festival, sponsored by the Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Association (IBSSA), will be held Saturday, March 8, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., the association has announced. The setting will be Sapphire Shores Park, located on Sun Circle at Acacia Drive, just blocks from The Ringling complex, a news release notes.

The IBSSA neighborhood organized the first event to highlight its resident artists in a juried setting, the release explains.

Among the more than 55 artists registered for the event this year are Elena DeLaVille, who creates mixed-media paintings; sculptor Joni Younkins-Herzog; Gail Williams, who designs jewelry; and musicians Chance Mason and Jon Petus, the release continues.

“We invite everyone to take time to tour our historic IBSS neighborhood, known as the Museum District, [and] meet the talented artists and performers while enjoying the park on the bay,” said event coordinator Jane Nutter Johnson in the release. “This is a family-friendly event with kids’ activities and food trucks,” she continued in the release. “Ride bikes along Sarasota Bay from the north by New College, south to Whitaker Bayou. Along the way you will see historic homes, a variety of architecture ... and experience the excitement of true *old* Florida living.”

For more information about the festival, call 351-1920.

For more information about the neighborhood association, visit ibssa.ws.



Sapphire Shores Park will be the setting for the Sun Circle Art Festival on March 8. Image from Google Maps

FIRST CHURCH TO PRESENT *SINGSPARATION III* ON MARCH 9

The Music Fine Arts program at the First United Methodist Church in downtown Sarasota will present Belle Canto and Sarasota Young Voices in *Singspiration III: And Then There Was Music* on Sunday, March 9, at 7 p.m.

The church is located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave.

The groups will perform works of renowned composer Gwyneth Walker, who will be in attendance, a news release says.

The concert will spotlight great American poets whose writing inspired music, the release adds.

Jonathan Spivey, accompanist and principal pianist for the Sarasota Orchestra, and Adam DeSorgo, principal oboe for Sarasota Orchestra and Chroma Quartet, will accompany the groups.

A \$10 ticket donation is requested. Tickets are available at the church office (955-0935) or online at firstsrq.com/music/fine-arts-series.

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Belle Canto and Sarasota Young Voices will perform at the First United Methodist Church in Sarasota on March 9. Image from bellecanto.org

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH TO HOST ST. PATRICK'S TRIBUTE

Called “one of the greatest musicians to ever come out of Ireland,” vocalist/guitarist Paul Duffy will team up with Dan Cartlidge on the Irish drum and Teresa Hassard on the fiddle to celebrate an early St. Patrick's Day on Sunday, March 9, at 3 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Sarasota.

The church is located at 3975 Fruitville Road. Tickets, which are \$15, include a complimentary wine and cheese reception in the church courtyard with the artists, a news release says. For more information, call 371-4974 or visit uusarasota.org/duffyconcert. Proceeds from the concert will benefit the [BackPack Kids program of All Faiths Food Bank](#), which provides meals for underprivileged children in the Sarasota area.

“Duffy is known for presenting a multi-faceted program of Irish lore, sea shanties and folksongs,” the release explains. He toured the world with the Irish rock band The Commitments for six years, it adds.

A musician, composer and vocalist, Duffy was born, literally, under the big tent. His parents were Irish circus entertainers; he was delivered by a midwife after a performance in North Donegal, the release notes. “Their act was called Duffy's International Circus and he was the youngest person to walk the tightrope while playing the saxophone — self-taught, of course,” the release continues. He was only 9 years old.

At 17, he played sax for the popular Irish band The Miami Showband. At 21, he joined The Irishmen “and gained a reputation around Dublin as a talented and reliable studio musician,” the release points out. “At 26, Duffy



Paul Duffy/Contributed photo

started his own band, MPH, with his siblings. Noticed by a promoter while he was touring with MPH in Texas, Duffy received an invitation to tour internationally with the legendary Irish band, The Commitments, and remained with the group for the next six years, the release continues.

Duffy plays the saxophone, trumpet, flute, guitar, keyboards, drums, bass, tin whistle and bagpipes, the release adds. Duffy was the owner of the Irish Rover in Sarasota until its closing in 2011.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH TO OPEN MARCH 12 AT ASOLO REP

The Asolo Repertory Theatre will continue its 2013-2014 season with Frank Galati's adaptation of John Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, the theatre has announced.

Asolo Rep Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards will direct the production.

Galati's adaptation premiered at the Steppenwolf Theatre of Chicago in 1988. The Broadway production won the Tony award for Best Play and Best Direction of a Play in 1990 and was nominated for six additional Tony Awards, a news release points out. Galati also won a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Director in 1990, and the play was nominated for four additional Drama Desk Awards.

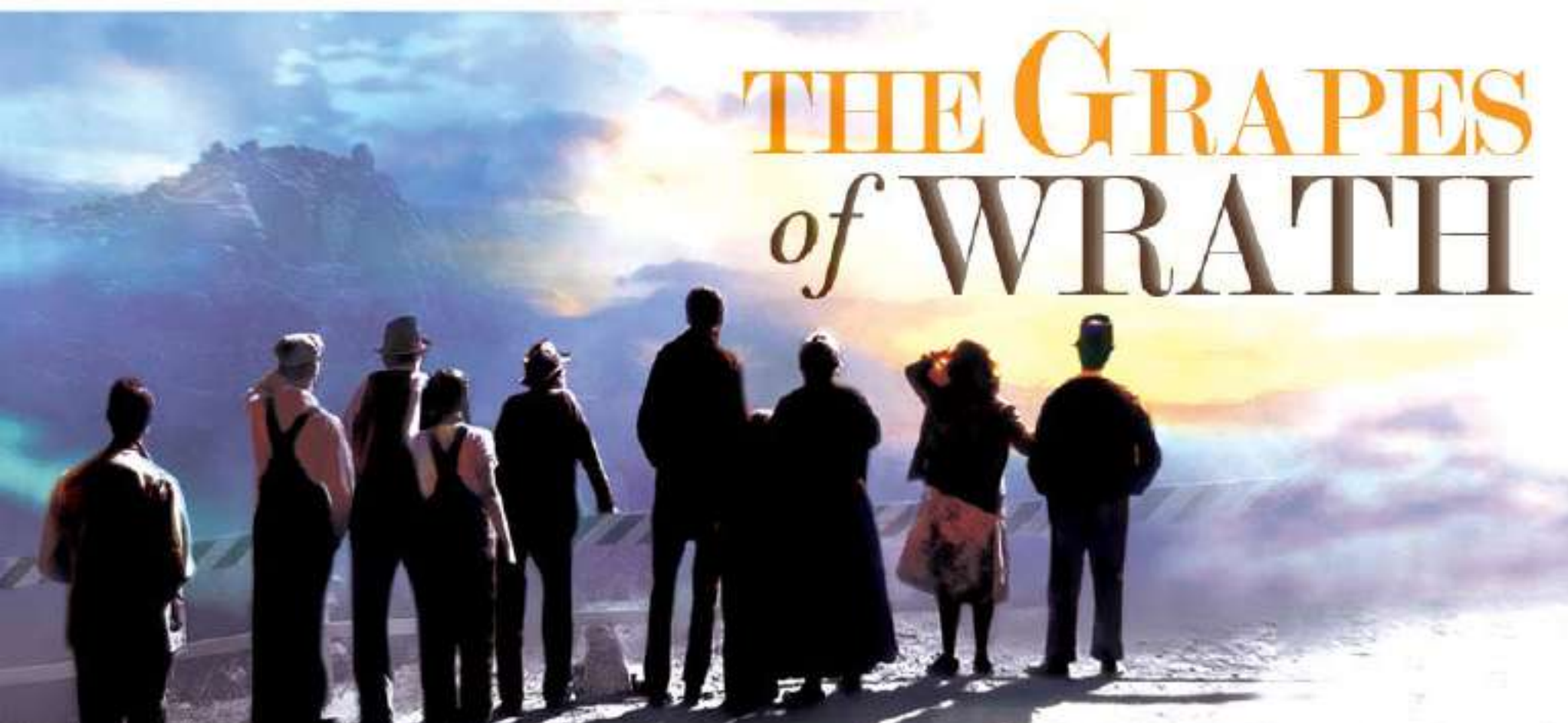
Previews will be March 12-13, and opening night will be March 14. The play will run through April 19, the release adds.

"A true American masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* chronicles the hardships of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, particularly its detrimental effects on the nation's farmers," the release points out. "Also transformed into the 1940 Academy Award-winning film starring Henry Fonda, the play tells the inspirational story of one family of farmers, the Joads, and their harrowing cross-country journey from their depleted farm in Oklahoma to the supposedly thriving grape farms of California."

The release adds, "The family's resilient matriarch, Ma Joad, and her son, Tom, who

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE



The Grapes of Wrath will be the next production at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota. Image courtesy Asolo Rep

has been released from prison for killing a man at the beginning of the play, spearhead the family's adventure." The frail Granma and Grampa Joad; the family's patriarch, Pa Joad; newly pregnant Rose of Sharon; Rose's husband, Connie Rivers; and the disheartened preacher, Jim Casy, join Tom and Ma on the road to California. The Joad family's uplifting 2,000-mile quest for its own Eden "by way of an old, beat-up jalopy reveals the insurmountable fortitude and tenacity of mankind," the release says.

"In addition to the captivating set, designed by Scott Bradley, Asolo Rep's production features 28 cast members, including five local child actors," the release notes. Onstage musicians will enhance "Steinbeck's powerful

story of strength, perseverance and hope," it adds. The play's composer/music director, award-winning American folk musician Tim Grimm, explains in the release that Americana singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie, who grew up in Oklahoma and lived through the Dust Bowl, and Pete Seeger, one of the fathers of American folk music, served as his greatest inspirations. Grimm will perform on stage alongside local musicians Sara Moone and Carmela Pedicini, the release says.

Tickets for *The Grapes of Wrath* start at \$21. To purchase them, call 351-8000, visit asolorep.org, or visit the box office 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.

FRANKIE VALLI AND THE FOUR SEASONS COMING TO SARASOTA

With his three-and-a-half-octave vocal range and more than 100 million records sold over a multi-decade career, Frankie Valli will be back in Sarasota with The Four Seasons on March 10 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Frankie Valli and the Seasons came to fame in 1962 with their No. 1 hit *Sherry*, a news release notes. Now "they are hotter than ever, thanks to the raving success of the Tony-winning musical *Jersey Boys*," which chronicles the life and times of Valli and his iconic group, the release points out.

Valli, has toured almost continuously since 1962, and his songs have been keystones of several movies, from *The Deer Hunter* to *Dirty Dancing* to *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the release notes. He and The Four Seasons "have influenced countless other recording artists" as well, the release says.

Among their biggest hits are *Big Girls Don't Cry*, *Grease* and *December 1963 (Oh What a Night)*.



Frankie Valli/Contributed photo

Tickets are priced from \$85 to \$120. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit www.VanWezel.org.

ART CENTER SARASOTA TO PRESENT THREE EXHIBITS STARTING MARCH 13

Art Center Sarasota will present its third exhibit cycle of the season from March 13 to April 25 featuring *Confluence: Israel* in Gallery 1, an exhibit of works by emerging Israeli artists; *The Secret Life of Jewelry*, with fine art jewelry in Gallery 2; *MASHterpieces* in Gallery 3, a collaboration with Goodwill Manasota and ThisWeekinSarasota.com of repurposed donated artwork; and *One World*, an open all-media, juried exhibition in Gallery 4.

An opening reception for all four exhibits will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. on March 13. Art Center Sarasota is located at 707 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. For more information, call 365-2032 or visit artsarasota.org, a news release says.

Confluence: Israel showcases works by young emerging Israeli artists, the release points out. Lisa Berger, the center's executive director, explains that it evolved from collaboration with The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee. "It will be the first exhibit of its kind in our area," she says in the release. "The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee has wanted to produce an exhibition of Israeli art for a long time. We're thrilled to help make that happen."

Berger adds in the release that her team worked closely with Shosh Dagan, a leading Israeli curator, to showcase a broad spectrum of Israeli artists working in a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, photography,



Okafim is a creation of Joseph Dadoune. Contributed photo



Sculpture by Sara Shuraki will be part of the Confluence exhibit. Contributed photo



Daphne and Apollo jewelry is by Kathleen Carricaburu. Contributed photo

drawing, woodwork, video, jewelry and embroidery. She notes in the release that one of the artists, Ohad Zlotnick, who creates three-dimensional metal sculptures of Hebrew letters, will give an artist's talk on Friday, March 14, at 2 p.m.

For *MASHterpieces*, Berger explains in the release that selected artists were asked to choose a piece of art found at a Goodwill retail store. They then transformed those pieces by adding elements that are, according

to Berger, "humorous, irreverent, ironic and totally unexpected while keeping the integrity of the original piece," the release adds.

The Secret Life of Jewelry will include contemporary pieces from internationally recognized jewelry artists, including Americans Christine J. Brandt, Andrea Williams, Cheryl Eve Acosta and Kathleen Carricaburu, the release notes. Works by two Israeli jewelers, Vered Babai and Edda Vardimon, will also be featured.


FUZIÓN DANCE ARTISTS TO MELD ART WITH DANCE

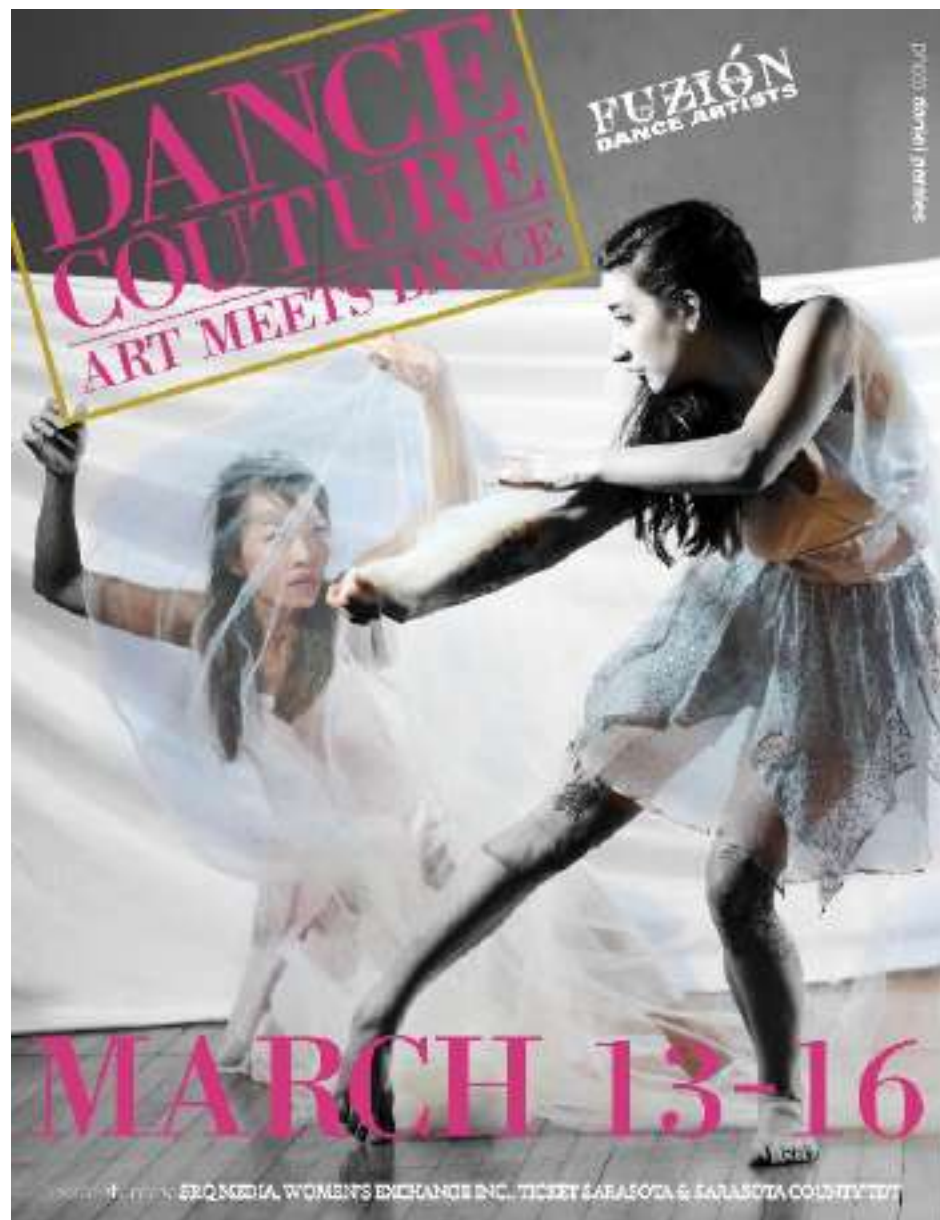
From Thursday, March 13, through Sunday, March 16, Fuzión Dance Artists will present Dance Couture: Art Meets Dance in the Jane B. Cook Theater at the Florida State University (FSU) Center for the Performing Arts.

The shows will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and at 2 p.m. on Sunday. The FSU Center is located at 5555 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.

The company's eighth annual concert will feature imaginative works by guest choreographers Tennille Lambert, Alyson Dolan, Terrance Henderson and Kira Blazek, a news release says. "The program derives its title from its relationship to visual art and design, as a select group of *iconcept* designers from Art Center Sarasota are creating original costumes for the production," the release notes.

New this year will be a Q&A with the artists following each performance, the release adds.

Tickets are \$36 or \$15 for student rush. Group discounts are also available. For more information and tickets, visit the Fuzión Dance Artists [website](#). 



FUZIÓN
DANCE ARTISTS



The Church of the Redeemer is located on South Palm Avenue in Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER TO HOST FUNDRAISING CONCERT

On March 2, the Church of the Redeemer, located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, will host a memorial concert in honor of Patricia Stenberg, former principal oboe for the Sarasota Orchestra, the church has announced.

The event is scheduled for 4 p.m.

Each year, the Sarasota-Manatee Alumnae chapter of Sigma Alpha Iota (SAI), an international women's music fraternity, presents a concert in Stenberg's name to raise funds for local music education efforts, a news release explains. Stenberg, who passed away in 2002, served as both local chapter president and national president of the fraternity, the release notes.

"Patricia Stenberg was a musician's musician, and an outstanding player," said Redeemer organist and choirmaster Ann

Stephenson-Moe in the release. "This concert, which raises money to help aspiring musicians, is a fitting tribute to her passion for music."

Stenberg also served as a conductor with the Sarasota Pops Orchestra.

Tickets are \$10 if purchased in advance through Redeemer's parish office; \$12 at the door the day of the concert. The parish office is typically open between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, visit redeemersarasota.org or call 955-4263.

Founded in 1903, SAI is an international women's music fraternity that works to bring together women who are interested in music on college campuses around the world, the release adds. The fraternity encourages female musicians of all ages, races and nationalities while cultivating excellence in music performance, it notes.

TEMPLE EMANU-EL TO WELCOME BERK AS SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE

Temple Emanu-El is inviting members the community “to a fascinating and engaging weekend of learning at the synagogue’s annual Peck Scholar-in-Residence program on March 21 and 22,” the Temple has announced in a news release.

This year’s scholar-in-residence is Dr. Stephen Berk, the Henry and Sally Schaffer Professor of Holocaust and Jewish studies at Union College in Schenectady, NY, the release points out. “A superb and sought-after speaker and lecturer,” Berk has served as a scholar-in-residence at congregations around the country and on trips to Russia, Spain, the Caribbean, Western and Eastern Europe and Israel, the release adds. “He is acclaimed for his vast knowledge not only of the Holocaust and

Judaica but also of Russia and Middle Eastern politics and contemporary American Jewish history,” the release notes.

Berk will offer two presentations that are free and open to the community. He will join Rabbi Brenner Glickman on the pulpit and speak on the topic *American Jews and the Struggle for Civil Rights* during Shabbat services on Friday, March 21, at 7:30 p.m., the release continues. He will also present a lecture titled *The American Jewish Experience: Are We at Home Here or Not?* on Saturday, March 22, at 10 a.m.

The Temple is located at 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota. For more information, call 371-2788.



Temple Emanu-El is located on McIntosh Road in Sarasota. File photo

MORRISON TO BE GUEST SPEAKER AT CONGREGATION PROGRAM

Annie Morrison, an award-winning actress and singer, will talk about her experiences working with the “Prince of Broadway” — Harold Prince — as well as Stephen Sondheim, Alfred Urhy and other well-known theater personalities when she addresses members of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, March 1, the Congregation has announced.

Morrison made her debut in Sondheim’s *Merrily We Roll Along*, for which she won the 1982 Theater World Award. She has gone on to perform on stages in London’s West End, Off Broadway and numerous other venues, and she continues to pick up prestigious awards for her work, a news release notes.

During the CHJ program, she will also sing several songs “and talk a bit about the Jewish legacy to Broadway,” the release adds.

Carole Kleinberg, who originally was scheduled to appear on March 1, had to cancel her plans, the release says.

The program is free for CHJ members. Non-members are asked to pay \$5 at the door.

CHJ meets at Unity, located at 3023 Proctor Road in Sarasota. For more information, call 929-7771 or visit chj-sarasota.org.

COMMUNICATION THAT HEALS TO BE NEXT FREETHINKERS TOPIC

Communication that Heals will be the title of the next Freethinkers Briefing at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, featuring Dr. Barry Bub, a former family physician who specializes in medical communication and counseling skills, the Freethinkers organization has announced.



Annie Morrison/Contributed photo

The program will be held from 10 to 11:30 a.m. on Friday, March 14, at the church, located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota, a news release says. Admission is free.

In his presentation, Bub will describe an encounter at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery with a prize-winning painting


of a little boy and its aftermath, the release adds. The audience will learn about health-care, communications, healing and society's attitude towards perfection, the release notes. The audience members will be invited to explore the meaning of the painting, the release continues. As they listen to the artist's message, they will learn "about the nature and expression of suffering and how it relates to serious disabilities," the release says. The result will be "a deeper insight into how to listen and respond to suffering in ways that are affirming, healing and transformative," it explains.

Bub, a native of South Africa, "has had an extraordinary and eclectic career as a family physician, gestalt psychotherapist, volunteer chaplain, writer and educator," the release points out. Author of numerous

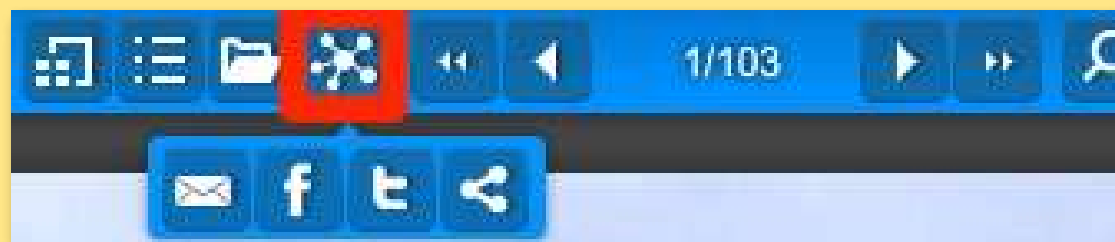
journal articles and a groundbreaking book, *Communication Skills that Heal*, he writes, lectures and leads creative interactive workshops, it adds. He is also the innovator of the Confidential Litigation Stress Mentoring program, designed to assist physicians "traumatized by medical mistakes or litigation," the release says.

Bub is on the adjunct staff at Temple University Medical School in Philadelphia. His latest passions are art and photography, which he uses extensively in his teachings, the release notes.

For more information, call David Ryan at 365-4027 or email d2mryan@verizon.net.

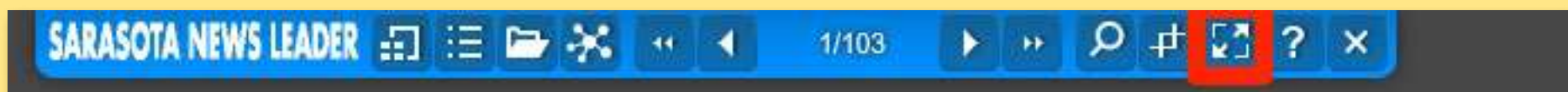
The Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota is a Welcoming Congregation serving Sarasota and Manatee counties. More information may be found at uusarasota.org. 

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QUICK TIP



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

28
FEBRUARY
WSLR presents Dayna Kurtz, with John Howard

Feb. 28, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media & Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance/\$12 at the door. Information: 894-6469 or WSLR.org.

28+
FEBRUARY
Dabbert Gallery presents *Nouveaux Two Déjà Vu*

Through March 3; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

28+
FEBRUARY
FST presents *Thurgood*

Through March 8; times vary; Keating Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$36 to 39. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

28+
FEBRUARY
FSU/Asolo Conservatory presents *How I Learned To Drive*

Through March 9; times vary; Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$27 to 29. Information: 351-8000 or AsoloRep.org.

28+
FEBRUARY
Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents *Harry and Lena*

Through March 23; times vary; 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or wbttsrq.org.

01
MARCH
Duquesne University Tamburitzans Folk Ensemble

March 1-2, 7:30 p.m., Glenridge Performing Arts Center, 7333 Scotland Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$27. Information: 552-5325 or TheGlenridge.com.

16
MARCH
Sarasota Pops presents *Music of 007 and Other Movies*

March 16, 3 p.m., Riverview Performing Arts Center, 1 Ram Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$5 to \$25. Information: 926-7677 or SarasotaPops.org.

YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST



PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

The Sarasota News Leader

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**SCHIMMEL
SIGHTINGS**

**'I CAN'T READ A THING WITH
THESE NEW SUNGLASSES.'**

PLEASE DO NOT SIT,
STAND OR PLACE ITEMS
ON DUGOUTS

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.