

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 33 — May 2, 2014

News Leader



THE PINELLAS PARADOX

19 COUNTS OF RENTAL FRAUD

OUCH!

Inside

Old school journalism. 21st century delivery.

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A.K.A. HELP

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Welcome

One topic I seldom have mentioned in this space — but one that is vital to our publication — is quality of photographs.

Many of you have taken the time to remark on how good the *News Leader* looks. Those of you who view it on an iPad get the fullest sense of my husband's vision for this weekly news magazine; yet, regardless of whether you are using an Apple device or something else, we want the images accompanying our stories to look as good as possible.

When I first learned to lay out pages years ago at the *Pelican Press*, one of the first things I heard — from General Manager Karen Koblenz and from Cleve Posey, the *News Leader's* production manager who held the same position at the *Pelican* — was that we had to use high-resolution images. It was not always easy to make people understand what constituted such a photo, since I am not as technologically literate as I would like to be.

Now, even cellphones have the capability of taking photos of sufficient quality to work well in the *News Leader*. And we readily welcome readers' contributions of images they have taken with their smartphones, especially when they have captured activities that illustrate a story exceptionally well.

The past couple of weeks, Cleve has had to tell me several times that photos I have given him for stories just would not work. I have made it plain to him that he is the final arbiter on that point.

Do not ever hesitate to send us pictures! Just understand that some work better than others.

Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor and Publisher





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FEATURED PRESENTERS

Justin Bloom Esq. - Environmental attorney and Director of Suncoast Waterkeeper

Jono Miller - Environmental activist who has studied the Myakka River, and shared duties coordinating the Environmental Studies Program at New College

Rob Patten - Former Executive Director of the Sarasota County Environmental Services Business Center

Dr. David Shafer PhD - Population ecologist and Principal of Shafer Consulting

Peter van Roekens - Environmental activist focused on navigation; Founder and Chair of the Boaters' Coalition

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R.S.V.P.

THE PINELLAS PARADOX



The Pinellas Safe Harbor near Clearwater has been called a model for a Sarasota County homeless shelter. Image courtesy Pinellas Safe Harbor

ANALYSIS: STATISTICS FROM THE CLEARWATER SHELTER SEEN AS A MODEL RAISE HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSISTANCE TO THE HOMELESS

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

How many free meals does it take to turn one homeless person into a productive member of society? Thanks to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, there is a method to solve that equation.

Pinellas Safe Harbor (PSH) is promoted as the model shelter for indigents. It is a "come-as-you-are" facility offering a full gamut of social services to help people get back on their feet. Run by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO), it opened on Jan. 6, 2011. Since that date, the PCSO has kept detailed statistical records on it. Those three years offer insights into homelessness and vagrancy on the west side of Tampa Bay.

Because Pinellas Safe Harbor is the model proposed for a homeless shelter in Sarasota, the PSH experience provides a window into what Sarasota can anticipate if it opens a similar facility.

WHO IS HOMELESS?

PSH is not a jail. But it is administered by deputies familiar with jails and the record keeping required in those facilities. The deputies at PSH are joined by 17 social service providers from private and public agencies, plus representatives of the Public Defender's Office and the St. Petersburg Police Department, all trying to put lives back together one by one.

The magnitude of the problem is eye-opening. In 2013, PSH served 5,110 individuals, many more than once. Among them were 433 described as having a “special need” because of “mental illness.” Alcohol and drug addiction were listed as reasons for 639 people seeking help. Therefore, roughly 20 percent, or one-fifth, of the people assisted had mental illness or addiction issues.

Among the 5,110 people served by PSH in 2013, 638 were also veterans of active military duty, or roughly 12.5 percent of the PSH population. That was down slightly from the 2012 percentage of 13.6 percent and the 13.1 figure for 2011. Overall, roughly one-eighth

of the people coming to Pinellas Safe Harbor were veterans who served on active duty at some point in their lives.

People coming through the PSH gates are overwhelmingly male, but with some differences by age. The deputies reported statistics for age and sex, and the differences may portend an unfortunate trend. The oldest age category — 62-plus — shows a consistent ratio of 4:1, men-to-women in the shelter. To add humanity to that ratio, in the second quarter of 2012, there were 46 males and 12 females in the shelter older than 62. Quarter by quarter and year by year, the ratio of 4:1 has been steady over the past three years.



A Cardno consultant created this concept drawing of a shelter on the 1330 N. Osprey Ave. site in Sarasota. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The youngest group, however, has a different ratio. For 18- to 30-year-olds, the figure fluctuates between 2.5:1 and 3:1. Taking the third quarter of 2013 as an example, 203 men were in PSH along with 72 women.

By far, the greatest number of people in the shelter continues to be those between 31 and 50 years old, with a slow change from 4:1 to 3:1 for the gender ratio over the three-year period. More women are showing up in Pinellas County's shelter as homeless.

IS IT WORKING?

Pinellas Safe Harbor is not only a come-as-you-are shelter. Drunk, stoned, sopping wet, broken leg, no difference. Welcome. But it is also a leave-when-you-want shelter. It offers outdoor lodging, providing refuge from the rain. But to get inside the climate-controlled building, you need to agree to sign up for programs.

A case manager is assigned to help. The objective is simple: housing; going from "homeless"

SARASOTA



PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES- SHELTER OPERATIONAL COSTS



Pinellas Safe Harbor (PSS) =

\$1.6 million to serve an average daily population of 400

Sarasota =

\$1.2 million to serve an average daily population of 250

- Key assumptions:

- In-kind partner contributions = \$1.2 million
 - Includes 100% meal donations and re-directing current agency case managers to shelter.
- Utilization of inmate workers (4 to 5 daily)
- Contingency included due to unknown the layout of facility or quality of building materials that hold up to intense use
- Bathrooms are built within housing PODs

During a presentation to a joint meeting of the City and County commissions on April 22, staff presented this slide with cost estimate comparisons for Pinellas Safe Harbor and a Sarasota shelter. Image courtesy Sarasota County

to “homed.” While there are a myriad of other issues, the fundamental objective is finding for its clients a clean, dry, safe and permanent place to sleep. How does PSH rate?

One of the tables provided by the Sheriff’s Office has the heading “Destination upon Discharge.” It shows how poor the success rate is. Of the 5,110 who entered PSH in 2013, 126 left to occupy a “rental house or apartment.” Sixteen bought a home. The 142 people who returned to a non-subsidized life represented about 2.8 percent of the 5,110. To provide perspective on that, the chance of being accepted after applying for admission to Harvard is 5.9 percent (the graduation rate is 97 percent). A person is twice as likely to get into and graduate from Harvard than to come out of PSH and move into a non-subsidized home.

What about the other 97.2 percent of people at PSH in 2013? In the same table, “Destination upon Discharge,” is the label “unknown.” It accounts for 3,370 people, or 66 percent, of the persons who came in the door. Add the 287 who went to “places not meant for human habitation (street),” and that means 68 percent — more than two-thirds — were back on the street or staff could not account for them.

In reality, the number is larger. A huge majority of the people coming to PSH is expelled. The facility has an 8 p.m. curfew; statistics from the Sheriff’s Office listed “missed curfew” as the reason 4,653 persons had “for leaving PSH.”

In this table, there is a also line for “completed program.” In 2013, only two people — both



Cardno, the consulting firm working with Sarasota County staff, produced this concept drawing of a shelter on the 1800 N. East Ave. site in Sarasota. Image courtesy Sarasota County

in the first quarter of the year — “completed program.” Fourteen left for “housing opportunity,” and two “reached maximum time allowed in program.”


The remainder fell into “noncompliance with program” (50), “criminal activity” (60) and “disagreement with rules” (234). Combined with the 4,653 who could not meet curfew, a total of 4,997 did not express a willingness to change their behavior. That is 98 percent of the people who entered the shelter in 2013.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

When PSH opened, the Sheriff’s Office fed the occupants. In 2011, it served 228,102 meals; the following year, the number was 69,527.

The Metropolitan Ministries began to help and by May 2012, it was serving three meals a day, taking over from the Sheriff’s Office. In 2013, the Ministries provided 335,350 meals.

If you divide that last number by the 142 people that year who moved into non-subsidized rental housing or bought a home, it took 2,362 free meals to move one person into housing. If you use the number of people who “completed program,” that indicated it took 168,675 free meals for a person to make the transition.

Assuming an individual eats three meals a day, that would be 153 years of meals. 

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19 COUNTS OF RENTAL FRAUD

On July 16, 2013, several vehicles with out-of-state license plates were parked in the driveway of the house at 6537 Sabal Drive. File photo

A SARASOTA CHIROPRACTOR IS ARRESTED ON CHARGES RELATED TO HIS MISREPRESENTATION OF ACCOMMODATIONS IN A SIESTA KEY HOUSE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

After a months-long investigation prompted by reports of rental fraud that *The Sarasota News Leader* turned over to the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, a Sarasota chiropractor was arrested on April 28 on 19 counts of Scheme to Defraud, with victims across the country saying they are owed more than \$53,000, the Sheriff's Office reported.

The charges against Craig Siegel, 44, of 5174 Sandy Cove Ave.

on Siesta Key came after his arrest earlier the same day for throwing a bucket of urine on a county Code Enforcement Officer, the Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

“Unfortunately we cannot give all the guest (sic) their money back since we have had to litigate this situation. Again, were (sic) sorry, but we cannot draw blood from a stone.

Craig Siegel
In a March 12 Email
To A Renter
Of the 6537 Sabal Drive House

The rental fraud incidents allegedly occurred between Jan. 14, 2013 and April 28 of this year, according to the Sheriff's Office report.

In late January, the *News Leader* contacted the Sheriff's



Craig Siegel is shown in the mugshot taken after his arrest on April 28. Contributed photo

Office after people emailed the publication with allegations that Siegel had refused to refund money to them after they entered into rental agreements for a house at 6537 Sabal Drive on south Siesta Key. The readers had learned online of the *News Leader's* articles regarding a lawsuit Sarasota County filed against Siegel in [July 2013](#) for his refusal to respond to a Special Magistrate's orders to address code violations at the house.

The April 28 Sheriff's Office news release said, "Multiple people reported paying Craig Siegel, operator of Siesta Resorts LLC and Siesta Vacations Inc., to rent a 12-bedroom home in the 6500 block of Sabal Drive. Siegel modified the structure in 2013 but did so without the proper permits, so Sarasota County Code Enforcement ordered him to dismantle the lower level new construction. The home



An aerial view shows the location of the house at 6537 Sabal Drive on Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps

Option #1

*If you had a reservation with us, we will honor it. The property can be rented, **but only the top level** . This is the 5 bedroom floor only!!! . We will use what you gave as a deposit as the amount of this top floor only.*

Option # 2

*You and your guests cannot use our facility at all now. We will just give you a credit towards a future stay for the full amount you gave us . We will honor this credit in the future. **We would love to give a full cash refund as it states in our agreement, unfortunately litigation and expenses have limited our funds.** We can only give **credits** for future stays with us. We deeply apologize for this, but i'm being up front and honest with you.*

OPTION # 3

There will be some that will want to go the litigation route. I would understand this since in the contract it clearly states that its a 100% full refund. YES,, that is EXACTLY what it says. Unfortunately we cannot give all the guest their money back since we have had to litigate this situation. Again, were sorry , but we cannot draw blood from a stone. Option # 3 is litigation

***** SO , this is what i need from you. I need you to tell me which option you want . Just send me an email, and i will either put you into our new reservation schedule if you choose option # 1 , put you in our books for a credit for future stay if you choose option # 2. Or just wait for a letter from your attorney if you want option # 3 .*

has just five bedrooms, but Siegel still advertises it as a 12-bedroom property.”

The release added that the 19 victims in the case “were either forced to stay at the property without adequate accommodations or sacrificed the money they spent and had to pay to stay elsewhere.”

The release continues, “Siegel told the victims to sue him, claiming he did not have money to return. However, detectives obtained financial records showing Siegel paid \$172,500 to a Fidelity Investment Plan last year.”

Detectives identified additional victims, but they said they did not want to be part of the criminal investigation, fearing they would lose money they already had paid Siegel, the release says.

Siegel was ordered held on \$55,000 bond, according to the Sheriff’s Office report. He was released on a cash bond in the evening of April 28, jail records show. His arraignment has been set for May 23.

Siegel was listed as unemployed on his arrest record. An April 29 check of state chiropractic licensing documents shows Siegel’s license expired on March 31. It originally was issued by the state on Feb. 13, 1998.

The *News Leader* learned earlier this year that Siegel was in the process of selling his State Street Spine practice to a couple relocating to Sarasota.

THE VICTIMS

One victim, who asked that her name not be used, provided the *News Leader* with an

email Siegel sent her on March 12 after she inquired about a refund for the house (the *News Leader* has not corrected spelling, punctuation or grammar):

“I deeply deeply apologize for this unfortunate news,” Siegel wrote. “I have been doing vacation rentals for the last 12 years. In all this time I have been able to bring great places to visitors from around the world. In this time we have built quite a reputation, many, many return visitors, and great first hand recommendations throughout the industry. Unfortunately, this will change drastically due to the very, very unfortunate circumstances we have come to experience over the past several months.”

He continued, “We cannot give very specific details due to ongoing litigation, but I will give a broad reason for this email.

Several months ago, a renter caused a major incidence at our managed property. We had to gut and demolish the entire lower level. We also were contacted by local county officials with zoning ordinance issues that stated we legally cannot manage or lease the lower level of the property in its current state.”

Siegel added, “Trying to understand the zoning, ordinances, and rebuild this property has been a total nightmare to say the least. We have ongoing litigation, and the cost of rebuilding, engineering, liens to the property, and many, many other issues have put us at a financial crossroads.”

Siegel also wrote that he could not offer a refund, but he could give the family a credit for future use of the house, adding, “We would



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NOTICE OF VIOLATION / NOTICE TO OBTAIN PERMITCASE NO. CB- 12-23ISSUED TO: The Daniels Law Firm, PLLC Registered Agent For
DBA Siesta Resorts LLCADDRESS: 1605 MAIN STREET, SARASOTA, FL 34236 PHONE: _____LOCATION OF VIOLATION: 6537 Sabal Drive, SARASOTA, FL 34242PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: 0108-09-0002DATE OF VIOLATION: November 7, 2012 TIME: 1400 pm

YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT YOU ARE IN VIOLATION OF SARASOTA COUNTY CODE, SECTION 22-34.104.1.1 AND/OR FLORIDA STATUTE 553.79 (1)

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Obtain an after-the-fact permit, which shall be charged the usual permit fee and a penalty fee of (3) three times the usual permit fee. Notify Code Enforcement at (941) 861-6403 or (941) 861-3280 when the permit is issued to avoid any further penalties. Failure to apply for the required permit within 30 days of the date of this notice will result in the issuance of a Citation.

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THIS FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH YOUR PERMIT APPLICATION

love to give a full cash refund as it states in our agreement, unfortunately litigation and expenses have limited our funds.”

He further wrote, “There will be some that will want to go the litigation route. I would understand this since in the contract it clearly states that its a 100% full refund. YES,, that is EXACTLY what it says. Unfortunately we cannot give all the guest their money back since we have had to litigate this situation. Again, were sorry, but we cannot draw blood from a stone.”

Among the other victims in the rental fraud case were Ken and Sharon Thibodeau of Howell, MI, who contacted the *News Leader* earlier this year after reading its articles about Siegel and the Sabal Drive house.

Ken Thibodeau provided the following statement to the *News Leader* regarding his family’s involvement in the case:

“My wife, Sharon, and I were shocked to hear of the ‘urine throwing’ felony battery charges facing Dr. Craig Siegel, but also felt a bit of a stress relief knowing that he is also being charged with 19 counts of felony Scheme to Defraud after being jailed for the first incident that occurred Monday morning. We knew that the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office was working hard on the rental fraud case against Craig Siegel, which kept growing as other people were coming forward with similar complaints to ours. We would like to commend the professionalism and hard work that Detective Mark LeFebvre has put forth in this case over the past 4 months. We are trusting that Craig Siegel will step up and honor his statement that he made after posting bond

and being released from jail when asked, ‘So they will get their money back?’ and he replied, ‘Absolutely. Absolutely.’”

Thibodeau was referring to [video](#) that accompanied an April 28 report by Evan Axelback of FOX 13 News in Tampa.

Thibodeau added, “If Dr. Craig Siegel does not follow through with refunding our \$5,040 immediately, then we are hopeful that the court system will take action and seize all of his properties and assets and consequently force him to pay FULL restitution to all of the victims named in the suit against him.”

Others victims are in Louisville, KY; Reston, VA; Ballston Spa, NY; Buffalo, NY; Alto, MI; Olathe, KS; Neenah, WI; St. Louis, MO; Old Orcutt, CA; Fairview, NC; North Prairie, WI; Monroeville, PA; Anoka, MI; Warner Robins, GA; Sarasota and Venice, according the Sheriff’s Office report.

BATTERY ON THE CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

Siegel was charged with Criminal Mischief and Battery on a Code Inspector in connection with April 28 incident involving James S. Holderby of the Code Enforcement Office.

The Sheriff’s Office report on that incident says Holderby “has been involved in ongoing investigations with [Siegel] with regards to [Siegel’s] residence [on Sandy Cove Avenue]. The victim and [Siegel] were in court approximately one week earlier, further confirming that [Siegel] was familiar with [Holderby],” the report adds.

According to the agenda for the April 25 hearings of the Special Code Enforcement Magistrate, Holderby was present to testify in a case involving 5174 Sand Cove Land Trust. Siegel sold the property at 5174 Sandy Cove Ave. to that trust for \$450,000 on Nov. 26, 2013, according to the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's Office. The trustee of the corporation is James Radcliffe.

About 7:20 a.m. on April 28, Holderby arrived at the Sandy Cove residence in his Sarasota County truck with the county emblem on the doors, the Sheriff's Office report says. After Holderby knocked on the door, the report continues, he heard a dog barking for about 30 seconds and then he heard footsteps coming up behind him. As Holderby turned, Siegel "threw a bucket filled with urine" on him, the report says, and asked Holderby what he

was doing on the property. Holderby told a Sheriff's deputy that he began filming Siegel with his smartphone. At that point, according to the report, Siegel grabbed a hose and began to wash off the area where the urine had covered the ground and steps. Then Holderby called the Sheriff's Office.

When Deputy Michael Day arrived, the report says, Holderby showed him his shirt and shorts, "which were soaked in urine," the report notes. Holderby had a replacement shirt to wear, the report adds, but Day could smell the odor on the shirt Holderby was wearing when Siegel allegedly threw the urine on him.

The battery charge in that case is a felony, the report says, while the Criminal Mischief count is a misdemeanor. The combined bond on those counts was set at \$1,620. **SNL**

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OUCH!

Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta. File photo

COUNTY COMMISSIONER HIT WITH FLORIDA COMMISSION ON ETHICS COMPLAINT

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

A Sarasota activist this week filed a formal complaint against Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta with the Florida Commission on Ethics, accusing him of casting votes on matters involving companies with which he has financial ties.

On March 19, Adrien Lucas — one of the founders of the annual Atomic Holiday Bazaar and an often-outraged voice in local politics — appeared in the County Commission Chambers to oppose the county's long-term

operating agreement with Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates. SANCA is the nonprofit associated with Benderson Development that is managing the work-in-progress rowing facility at Nathan Benderson Park. Lucas, fired up, called SANCA a “slush fund” and criticized Barbetta for SANCA’s hiring of Mary Kenealy Events for nearly \$21,000 in catering services in 2013.

“*I have no reason to believe this is going to go anywhere. I don’t trust these people.*”

Adrien Lucas
Resident
Sarasota County

Kenealy Events is an event planning company run, according to Barbetta, by his wife. But paperwork filed

with the Florida Division of Corporations listed Barbetta as Kenealy Events' "manager," leading Lucas and others to question Barbetta's true relationship with the company and SANCA. At that March 19 meeting, Barbetta, in fact, recused himself from voting on the SANCA operating agreement, telling the board he was doing so despite receiving "no remuneration" from Kenealy Events.

The operating agreement with SANCA was eventually approved 4-0, without Barbetta. Five days later, updated state paperwork began showing Mary Kenealy as the "manager" of the company, rather than Barbetta.

Lucas remains unsatisfied.

This week, she filed a formal complaint with the state Commission on Ethics and posted

the info to her personal blog, [Exile on Main Street](#). In it, she charges that while Barbetta recused himself from that March vote, he should have done so on previous SANCA-related votes as well. In addition, she alleges that Barbetta has voted on economic development grants involving companies in which he holds stock: Venice's PGT Industries and Lakewood Ranch's Sunovia (now known as Evolucia). Barbetta's so-called Form 6, filed with the Commission on Ethics, does indeed list both companies, among others, as ones in which he holds stock.

Florida Statute 112.3143 dictates that "no county, municipal, or other local public officer shall vote in an official capacity upon any measure which would inure to his or her special private gain or loss," but the law's



Atomic Holiday Bazaar organizer Adrien Lucas (left) with past Atomic Holiday Bazaar participant Richeal Parisi. Photo courtesy of Adrien Lucas

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF CORPORATIONS



Detail by Entity Name

Florida Limited Liability Company

MARY KENEALY EVENTS, LLC

Filing Information

Document Number	L08000101390
FEI/EIN Number	263275600
Date Filed	10/28/2008
State	FL
Status	ACTIVE

Principal Address

1255 N. GULFSTREAM AVENUE
1103
SARASOTA, FL 34236

Changed: 04/19/2011

Mailing Address

P.O. BOX 2624
SARASOTA, FL 34230

Changed: 04/19/2011

Registered Agent Name & Address

REEGLER, SARI L
1521 SOUTH TAMIAMI TRAIL, STE 304
VENICE, FL 32485

Authorized Person(s) Detail

Name & Address

Title Manager

Kenealy, Mary E.
1255 N. GULFSTREAM AVENUE
1103
SARASOTA, FL 34236

2013 FLORIDA LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY ANNUAL REPORT

DOCUMENT# L08000101390

Entity Name: MARY KENEALY EVENTS, LLC

Current Principal Place of Business:1255 N. GULFSTREAM AVENUE
1103
SARASOTA, FL 34236**Current Mailing Address:**P.O. BOX 2624
SARASOTA, FL 34230

FEI Number: 26-3275600

Certificate of Status Desired: No

Name and Address of Current Registered Agent:REEGLER, SARI L
1521 SOUTH TAMiami TRAIL, STE 304
VENICE, FL 32485 US*The above named entity submits this statement for the purpose of changing its registered office or registered agent, or both, in the State of Florida.*

SIGNATURE: _____

Electronic Signature of Registered Agent

Date

Authorized Person(s) Detail :

Title	MGR
Name	BARBETTA, JOSEPH AMGR
Address	1255 N. GULFSTREAM AVENUE, #1103
City-State-Zip:	SARASOTA FL 34236

I hereby certify that the information indicated on this report or supplemental report is true and accurate and that my electronic signature shall have the same legal effect as if made under oath; that I am a managing member or manager of the limited liability company or the receiver or trustee empowered to execute this report as required by Chapter 605, Florida Statutes; and that my name appears above, or on an attachment with all other like empowered.

SIGNATURE: JOSEPH BARBETTA

MEMBER

04/13/2013

Electronic Signature of Signing Authorized Person(s) Detail

Date

The 2013 annual report for Mary Kenealy Events, filed with the state Division of Corporations, lists Joe Barbetta as the manager and is signed by Barbetta. Image from Florida Department of State

definition of a “special private gain or loss” isn’t exactly crystal-clear to the layman. Your guess is as good as mine.

“I have no reason to believe this is going to go anywhere,” Lucas tells *The Sarasota News Leader* — but not because the allegations aren’t valid. “I don’t trust these people,” she says. “They bend the rules.”

According to Sarasota attorney [Morgan Bentley](#), the chairman of the Commission on Ethics, the process works like this: Virlindia Doss, the commission’s executive director, will determine whether the complaint has “legal sufficiency” — i.e., does the complaint actually describe an ethical violation the commission is empowered to investigate?


If the answer is “yes,” commission staffers will begin their investigation and return to the commission board to report whether there is probable cause to believe a violation has occurred. If they feel one has, the case will then be made public and it will be considered during a secret hearing. Bentley says the whole process can take anywhere from six months to eight years.

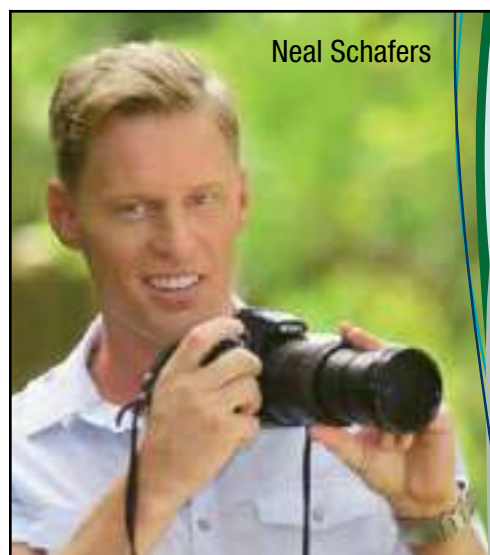
Barbetta tells the *News Leader* he cannot comment on the case. “The state Ethics

Commission basically points that out — that things should remain confidential until they have a finding,” he says. “I did nothing wrong and I have no comment.” He adds that he doesn’t know how long the investigation will take, but he is planning to respond next week.

Bentley, likewise, cannot comment on the case and he tells the *News Leader* he hasn’t even seen the complaint. In her blog post, Lucas writes that she wants Bentley to “recuse himself” from the process since he is Barbetta’s attorney. While not commenting on Lucas’ complaint, Bentley tells the *News Leader* he would never be involved in any case involving Barbetta. “I wouldn’t be in the room.”

Lucas says the commission informed her that she could end up being liable for attorneys’ fees if her complaint goes nowhere, a prospect she admits is worrisome. “I don’t have a large pot to p*** in,” she says. “I’m not getting paid to do this.”

Even if the commission finds a problem, it could simply ask Barbetta to correct some paperwork, Lucas points out. “People may think that I’m being a naysayer,” she says, “but I have no reason to believe this is going to go anywhere, considering how influential Mr. Barbetta’s friends are.” 



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A SHRINKING DEFICIT

Chairman Charles Hines asks a question during the fund balance discussion on April 29. Photo by Roger Drouin

THOUGH A PROJECTED COUNTY REVENUE SHORTFALL IN 2016 HAS BEEN SHRINKING, A COUNTY COMMISSION DISCUSSION THIS WEEK REFLECTED DISAGREEMENT OVER SOME RESERVE LEVELS

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Sarasota County's budget outlook for future fiscal years is looking a little brighter.

During a workshop on Tuesday, April 29, county staff reported that a projected 2016 general fund short-fall has shrunk from a projection of \$18.9 million as recently as February to \$8.7 million.

New property tax value projections initially lowered that

number to \$16.3 million. (See the related story in this issue.)

However, the projected gap will be cut further, thanks to a plan to utilize money freed up from reducing various departments' reserve funds. Those accounts had accrued \$7.6 million.

I am much more comfortable with where we are heading. Our budget is in much better shape.

Christine Robinson
Vice Chairwoman
Sarasota County Commission

"This is very good news," Steve Botelho, the county's financial management officer

and acting assistant administrator, told the commissioners.

The commissioners, in turn, lauded County Administrator Tom Harmer and his staff for reining in expenses and for starting the budget workshops early this year so the board could take a close look at the county's fiscal health.

After reviewing the projections, Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson pointed to the predicted FY 2016 shortfall being below \$10 million and called it "less worrisome."

"I am much more comfortable with where we are heading," Robinson said. "Our budget is in much better shape."

UP FOR DEBATE

Despite the stronger overall budget outlook, some disagreement arose over just how much money the commissioners should leave in 18 different general fund reserves, an issue that will likely be debated this summer during later workshops as they hammer out the final spending plan for the 2015 fiscal year.

A discussion Tuesday about the current level of a "compensated absence reserve" is reflective of the board members' contrasting views. The fund sets aside \$8.8 million in case a large number of employees resign or retire and must be compensated for days of leave they have built up.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta suggested lowering that reserve by \$5 million. "I thought we've had too much money in there," Barbetta said, "when compared to other counties."

Commissioner Nora Patterson countered that while she is not opposed to taking a look at that reserve level, she does not want to lower it so much that in future years, a large number of employees could leave at one time, making it necessary for the commission to take money from the general fund to cover their compensation.

Patterson also argued against tapping into the county's general fund reserve and economic uncertainty reserve accounts. "I don't want to take the reserves down to nothing," Patterson said.



County Administrator Tom Harmer (second from left) addresses the County Commission during the April 29 workshop. At left is Glen Zimmerman, chief information officer for the county; to the right of Harmer is Assistant Administrator Steve Botelho. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Further, she pointed out that having “rainy day” reserves helped the county cope with the recession. “Thank heavens they were put in place,” she said.


Patterson noted the economic uncertainty fund will be depleted in the 2016 fiscal year, based on current projections. “In future years, we should try to build something back up,” she told her colleagues.

The commissioners did agree to lower the medical fund reserve from a level reflecting 20 percent of total projected claims to 16.67 percent, which is more in line with the amount

kept in such funds in Lee and Hillsborough counties, for example.

Rising expenses for the medical reserve, an insurance program self-funded by the county, has led to less money in the account, staff has pointed out since last year.

“We are not meeting the reserve policy [of 20 percent],” Botelho said, “and that is not a good thing.” However, he pointed out, that policy previously set by the County Commission was higher than the industry standard.

The actual reserves in the fund reflect 18 percent of projected claims, according to data provided to the board. 



FY13 (year-ending) Reserve Policy Review

FY13 Year Ending Reserves Policy Calculations	Dollars	Days	Adherence to Reserves Policy
General Fund			
Contingency/Emergency/Disaster Relief Reserve (Fund 001)	\$41,427,721	75	✓
Budget Stabilization and Economic Uncertainty Reserve (Fund 001)	\$29,244,876	53	✓ (policy is 30-60 days)
Planning and Development Services			
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 102)	\$747,797	60	✓
Budget Stabilization and Economic Uncertainty Reserve (Fund 102)	\$747,797	60	✓
Emergency Services			
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 130)	\$6,091,506	60	✓
Budget Stabilization and Economic Uncertainty Reserve (Fund 130)	\$6,091,506	60	✓
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 153)	\$5,759,489	60	✓
Budget Stabilization and Economic Uncertainty Reserve (Fund 153)	\$5,759,489	60	✓
Utility System			
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 402)	\$13,999,691	90	✓
Solid Waste			
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 420 & 423)	\$5,872,680	90	✓
Debris removal of \$20M to \$40M. (Fund 420 & 423)	\$25,000,000	N/A	✓
Stormwater			
Maintain a reserve of operating expenditures (Fund 440)	\$2,927,722	90	✓

A chart shows totals in several reserve funds for Sarasota County at the end of the 2013 fiscal year on Sept. 30, 2013. Image courtesy Sarasota County

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A BACKUP PLAN

Teams compete in an event during the Florida Scholastic Rowing Association (FSRA) Sweep Championships on April 26 at Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

LATE-HOUR STATE FUNDING CUT FORCES BENDERSON PARK SUPPORTERS TO ACCELERATE PRIVATE FUNDRAISING EFFORTS — AND THE SETBACK COMES AMID RISING SCRUTINY

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

In a late-hour reversal Monday, April 28, state lawmakers killed \$2.5 million in funding for the Nathan Benderson Park rowing venue.

That setback forces the nonprofit that was created to manage the facility to come up with a plan to accelerate its private fundraising efforts.

Despite the denial of state funding this year, Paul Blacketter, president of Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center

Associates (SANCA), is “very confident” the \$52-million rowing complex will be ready to go by 2016, well in time to host the 2017 World Rowing Championship.

But it is going to take \$11 million in private donations in one year, and another request next year for state funding from the Legislature.

The increasingly controversial rowing park — touted by

“*The message we got from our legislators is ‘Show us you have a private-public partnership.’*”

Paul Blacketter
President
Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates



supporters as a state and local economic generator and scrutinized by county governance watchdogs — has already received nearly \$30 million in public funding, including \$10 million the state signed off on and \$19.5 million from Sarasota County. Yet, state legislators this week balked at giving the project more public funding. They want to see a successful fundraising effort under way before funneling more state dollars into it.

Late Monday, following legislative negotiations, the \$2.5 million appropriation for the rowing complex appeared on a list of new projects for the state budget. Then the funding disappeared.

“The message we got from our legislators is ‘Show us you have a private-public partnership,’” Blacketter told *The Sarasota News*

Leader Tuesday as he was preparing to leave Tallahassee, where he had been lobbying for the state funding. “They want to know the private [money] will be there for the facility, which I think is fair.”

The funding setback comes amid rising scrutiny for SANCA, the nonprofit charged with managing the rowing complex. In early April, the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* reported that SANCA had failed to file the proper state paperwork to allow it, as a charitable organization, to collect tax-deductible donations. That filing problem was quickly corrected, but not before it caused “heartburn” and “egg on the face” for the SANCA board as well as county commissioners, as Commissioner Carolyn Mason told her colleagues during their April 23 meeting. The incident also raised more



Some people watch events from the shore as others stroll through Benderson Park during the Florida Scholastic Rowing Association Sweep Championships on April 26. Photo by Norman Schimmel

questions about the financial management of the rowing venue.

The project has been fiercely criticized by a group of residents concerned the nonprofit is relying too heavily on Sarasota County and state funding instead of private monies the organization has promised to collect.

Cathy Antunes, president of Sarasota Citizens for Responsible Government, has pointed to what she characterizes as the alarming lack of a competitive bidding process and other fiscal safeguards that could have kept the costs of the project in check.

“The worst combination is to have a public-private project without any competitive bidding that is run by a private entity,” Antunes said. “The county recently formally exempted rowing center construction from procurement

and bidding, which is unfortunate and fails to protect the public purse.”

A NEW PLAN

Amid all the scrutiny and this week's setback, Blackketter is determined to see concepts for a boathouse and world-class racing center become reality at the park, which he and other supporters say will become a magnet for more sports tourism.

SANCA will spend the next year fundraising, with the goal of raising \$11 million in private donations for necessary equipment and structures before the World Championships can be held. “The pendulum has swung to the private sector to fund-raise and get the park started,” Blackketter told the *News Leader*.

If that \$11 million goal is met, representatives of the nonprofit will go back to Tallahassee in



*Participants in the FSRA Sweep Championships gather under a tent at Benderson Park on April 26.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

2015 and ask for a matching \$11 million contribution from the state.

That is a switch from the group's previous strategy, which had settled on snaring additional state funding before SANCA went after private donations. That plan also called for SANCA to wait a few months for the completion of architectural renderings before launching its fundraising campaign.

Although designs for the park, including a layout of a boathouse, have not been finished, accelerated fundraising efforts will start soon, Blackketter told the *News Leader*.

There is enough interest to "probably start immediately," Blackketter said.

Blackketter also told the *News Leader* he did not think the paperwork slip-up specifically was the reason state legislators pulled the funding for the park this year as the budget was finalized.

"The paperwork was something that got fixed very quickly," Blackketter said. "They are 'big picture' people up here, and [our] showing them the partnership is intact is what they want to see."

The SANCA president was referring to the concept of the rowing venue as the creation of public-private partnership — the way it originally was pitched to local and state officials.

If anything, the funding setback has a silver lining for Blackketter: "[Development of the rowing facility] started at the very beginning as a private-public partnership, and this will allow us to demonstrate that," he said.

RISING COSTS

The project's estimated final price tag keeps going up. As costs rise, so do worries.

With \$30 million already having come in the form of taxpayer support, Antunes, the Citizens group president, questions the new plan to bring in only \$11 million in private

“*The worst combination is to have a public-private project without any competitive bidding that is run by a private entity.*

Cathy Antunes
President
Sarasota Citizens for Responsible Government

”

Tents are set up for an event at Benderson Park before the USMasters Rowing Championships began in August 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel

contributions, half of the \$22 million SANCA says it still needs to complete the project.

“SANCA ought to take ownership of funding the remaining \$22 million through their fundraising efforts,” Antunes said. “A partnership implies a 50/50 commitment.”

The estimated public cost of the project is exceeding the \$31.2 million expense of renovating Ed Smith Stadium to serve as the Spring Training home for the Baltimore Orioles.

In addition to the county signing off on \$19.5 million for the rowing facility’s creation and the state allocating \$10 million toward that effort, the county has pledged another \$788,000 annually for maintenance and personnel costs for the complex. The County Commission also authorized the county administrator to direct up to \$100,000 more each year for nonrecurring expenses without consulting the board.

“To call it a public-private partnership is a joke,” Antunes told the *News Leader*. “It is a public project.”

In comparison, while the effort to bring the Orioles to Sarasota was not perfect in her view, Antunes said, at least the Orioles’ contribution to the undertaking was much clearer.

‘HEARTBURN’

During the County Commission’s full-day budget workshop on Tuesday, April 29, the topic of the Benderson Park funding cut did not come up during a review of legislative issues affecting the county.

Last week, the board debated whether [recent missteps at the rowing facility suggested more oversight was needed](#).

SANCA had failed to file the necessary paperwork in time with the state to maintain its



Paul Blackketter. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ability to take in tax-deductible donations. Although the filing problem was quickly corrected, Commissioner Carolyn Mason said the controversy had caused her “heartburn” and that perhaps the county should be exercising more direct “oversight” of the non-profit. Mason added that she wanted SANCA to succeed, but she was concerned about the situation.

“For whatever reason, this happened, and we got egg on our faces as well, because we have an investment, and Manatee County does, too,” Mason said.

However, no other commissioner backed Mason. Chairman Charles Hines did say that along with embarrassing SANCA, the incident had left “mud” on the county commissioners’ faces. County Administrator Tom Harmer and Manatee County Administrator Ed Hunzeker both attend SANCA board meetings, Harmer told the board, offering a level of oversight with which the commission seemed comfortable.

Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker contributed to this report. 



My Sunday Paper...

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THE PRIVATIZATION TRACK

A Sarasota County Area Transit paratransit bus (right) is stopped at Southgate Mall in Sarasota at the same time a SCAT hybrid bus is picking up passengers. File photo

THE COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES A STUDY OF ITS BUS SERVICE'S OPERATING EXPENSES

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

The Sarasota County commissioners this week gave staff the go-ahead to conduct a thorough study of the operating expenses of the Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus system.

The independent cost estimate (ICE) will focus on ways the system can be run more efficiently. More significantly, it will mark the first step toward evaluating whether privatization of the transit system would save money.

County Administrator Tom Harmer told the commissioners on April 29 that before staff undertook any further exploration of the privatization proposal, he wanted to know whether they would prefer a study of that option for just some of SCAT's services or all of them.

“We are reviewing this to see if we can get the same level of service or better level ...

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission

“I’m very much in favor of pursuing a study on this,” replied Commissioner Nora Patterson, referring to a review of the entire system.

However, “If we go ahead and say explore this, that doesn’t mean we are going to do this,” she added, speaking of privatization.

The county has been [studying two big potential changes](#): privatization as well as merging SCAT with Manatee County’s transit system. The latter option hit a snag after the Manatee County commissioners backed away from discussions earlier this year. Nonetheless, the ICE will analyze the possibility of a merger.

During previous meetings, Sarasota commissioners have discussed leasing the SCAT buses to a private operator while

retaining ownership of the fleet and oversight of operations.

On Tuesday, Chairman Charles Hines said he, too, was “in favor of proceeding with this evaluation.”

After the cost-estimate results are completed, public meetings can be held to share the information with residents, he added.

The study will be conducted in-house, led by Sarasota County Interim Transportation Planning Director Jonathan Paul. The vote approving the review was unanimous.

- The evaluation will also include a comparative analysis of overall transit service with 11 peer transit agencies based on data from the National Transit Database (NTD).
- Transit Service provided by SCAT and Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) will also be evaluated as a combined entity based on data from the NTD.
- The information gathered will provide the Board of County Commissioners with the information needed to effectively evaluate proposals for the future provision of transit service.

DIFFERENT OPTIONS

“The intent [of the study] is to give the board the information needed to make a decision whether to do a privatization or a merger,” Paul told the commissioners.

It will look at data from comparable counties throughout the Southeast, especially how much their bus operations cost. It also will analyze SCAT’s miles of service and its costs per mile, per hour and per passenger.

Paul pointed out that several companies throughout Florida offer transit management services, if the County Commission ultimately chooses to pursue that option. Both Volusia and Collier counties have privatized bus systems.

Hines reiterated Patterson’s message that pursuing the study does not mean a decision has been made on SCAT’s future, although he said he expects to hear from residents who will have misunderstood the board’s April 29 action. “We will receive emails tomorrow saying the county is privatizing,” Hines pointed out.

“We are reviewing this to see if we can get the same level of service or better level” while saving money, he added.

Bus riders and drivers may oppose any attempt at privatization, but residents might support the potential cost savings, Patterson noted.



I’m very much in favor of pursuing a study on this.

Nora Patterson
Sarasota County Commissioner




Glama Carter, general manager of SCAT, addressed members of the Siesta Key Village Association last month. File photo

One option — privatizing paratransit service which is offered for residents with special needs, veterans and the elderly who have difficulty taking regular buses — would save the county \$1.5 million alone, reported SCAT General Manager Glama Carter.

The average cost per such trip is \$39, higher than the expense reported in communities that outsource the service. They pay an average of \$27 per trip, Carter's statistics showed.

Patterson took issue with the Sarasota figure, asking why it is so much higher.

Paul said county staff could not provide an answer at this point, but the study would delve into that.

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson pointed out that the topic of privatizing services is a tough one for Carter, who, as the chief of SCAT operations, has come to know the bus drivers. Robinson thanked Carter for proposing to undertake the study with an eye to achieving efficiencies. 



Current Paratransit Service Business Model

SCAT provides approximately 168,000 paratransit trips per year

- 50% of trips are provided by SCAT
- 50% of trips are outsourced to 2 Contractors

Resources:

- 31 Paratransit bus operator
- 2 Supervisors
- 7 Scheduling Coordinators
- 31 Paratransit buses

In-House reservations, scheduling and dispatch is performed by SCAT

A chart outlines the county's current paratransit service business model. Image courtesy Sarasota County



DID OPPOSES PAID PARKING

Meter stumps remained in downtown Sarasota in late summer of 2012 after the City Commission nixed the idea of paid parking. Photo by Norman Schimmel

WORRIES AIRED ABOUT SHOPPERS DESERTING DOWNTOWN FOR THE MALL AT UNIVERSITY TOWN CENTER AFTER IT OPENS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sarasota's Downtown Improvement District (DID) board took a stand Tuesday, April 29, to oppose any effort to reinstitute paid parking in the city.

With Chairman Ernie Ritz absent, the group voted 3-1 on the issue, with member Eileen Hampshire in the minority.

It was Hampshire who started the discussion. She is a member of a small board advising City of Sarasota Parking Manager

Mark Lyons. During the past two meetings, the Parking Advisory Board has discussed ways to reintroduce paid parking.

Parking now is free both on the streets and in city-operated garages. As a consequence, Lyons' department is \$544,000 in the red,

necessitating a subsidy from property tax revenue. The Sarasota City Commission late last year considered instituting paid parking for the Palm Avenue parking garage. But it backed

“Writing letters is a waste of time. You should designate a person to make a presentation to the City Commission.”

John Moran
Operations Manager
Downtown Improvement District

off when merchants said starting the plan at the beginning of tourist season was a bad idea.

That was a sentiment echoed on April 29 by DID board members. “We should have paid parking and attach a map to the new [University Town Center] mall,” said member Tom Mannausa. “In a few months, they’ll just bypass the city and go straight to the mall.”

There is a fear the new mall, which will open in October, will sap discretionary spending at downtown stores. Hampshire, who runs a shop on Palm Avenue, said she is unconcerned. “In the mall, you could be in Peoria. I’m not worried.”

Dr. Mark Kauffman, another DID board member, owns a substantial amount of downtown

commercial property. He, like Mannausa, opposes reintroduction of paid parking. “It’s too soon,” he said, referring to the previous fiasco during which the city installed and then took down new parking meters. “Please relate to your committee the feelings of this board,” Kaufman told Hampshire.

Mannausa then made a motion to draft a letter to the Parking Advisory Board and City Commission, urging no change in parking for two years, “until May 1, 2016.” The district’s operations manager, John Moran, told the group, “Writing letters is a waste of time. You should designate a person to make a presentation to the City Commission.” The motion passed 3-1, and Moran said he would draft the letter.




Considerable progress was visible in early March at the site of the Mall at University Town Center off University Parkway. Photo by Norman Schimmel

For the past two months, the Parking Advisory Board has flirted with the idea of recommending paid parking, but its members differ in views relating to location, equipment and strategy. Hampshire is adamant that the meters used last time were — in her words — “awful.” After eight people showed up at a commission meeting with bags over their heads to urge “bagging” the new meters, the commissioners caved in and killed the initiative.

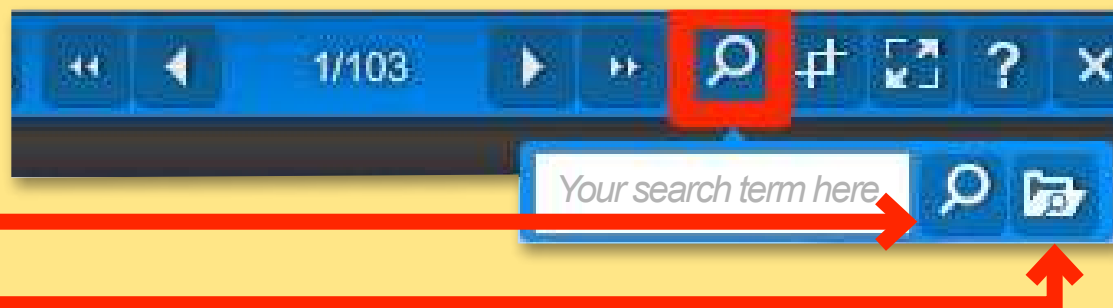
Lyons knows he faces opposition from merchants, who have been vocal on the issue, but he also knows city commissioners are concerned about the perpetual half-million-dollar hole in their budget. Even if parking is “free” to motorists, it still takes money to maintain the parking garages and enforce two-hour time restrictions in various areas of the city,

including St. Armands Circle and Southside Village.

The latest idea floated by the advisory committee is to use meters to enforce very short-term parking periods for a handful of spots in the busiest areas. That would open up places where a driver could pull in, get a cup of coffee or pick up a pre-ordered lunch or a clutch of flowers. But if there are no spaces in downtown Sarasota, the driver will take his business elsewhere.

“Who parks on the street?” asked Hampshire during the DID meeting. “Employees; store owners; waiters. They are not shopping. Cleaning ladies at 1350 Main (a condominium complex). There are no spaces available, but there are no shoppers in the stores.” 

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DISTRESS OVER A DUNE

Although the Ritz-Carlton (the tallest building, at the center of the photo) is close to the city's waterfront, its beach facilities are on Lido Key. Photo by Norman Schimmel

COUNTY STAFF HAS BEEN FIELDING RESIDENTS' QUESTIONS ABOUT A RITZ-CARLTON PROJECT ON THE LIDO KEY SHORE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The City of Sarasota signed off on a Sarasota Ritz-Carlton project that calls for reshaping the profile of a dune at the hotel's [Beach Club on Lido Key](#), *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned.

In early April, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued a permit for the work, which calls for the seaward portion of the dune to be moved further landward, according to an April 2 letter sent to

DEP by Courtney Mendez, senior planner for the City of Sarasota.

"The proposed changes do not contravene any applicable provisions of the Zoning Code provided beach pathways are maintained and native habitat is not negatively impacted,"

Mendez added, later referencing those stipulations as findings by another city staff member.

Mendez included a memo from David L. Smith in the city's Department

I know of several properties that have requested from the DEP in the past to do some similar work and were unequivocally turned down.

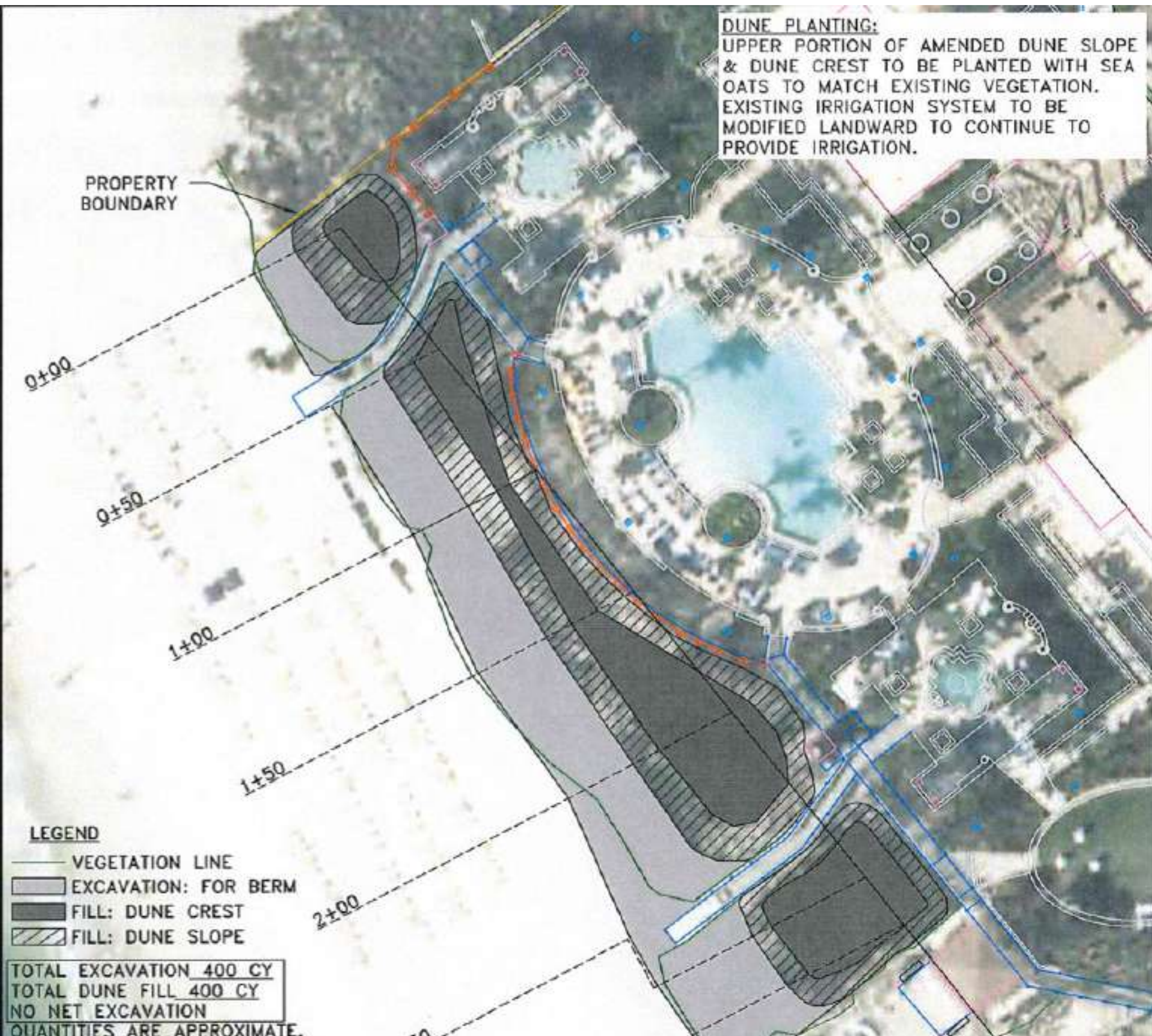
Carl Shoffstall
President
Lido Key Residents Association



of Neighborhood & Development Services, which said he had reviewed the Ritz-Carlton's proposal to determine whether it was consistent with the city's comprehensive plan. He added that in his opinion, it was, as long as the "two existing pathways to the beach [are] maintained or, if [they will be] replaced, dune

walkover structures shall be constructed over the reshaped dunes ... to prevent impacts to native vegetation and the dune system" and as long as native habitat did not suffer any negative effects from the project.

Dee Ann Miller, a DEP spokeswoman, responded with an April 30 email after the



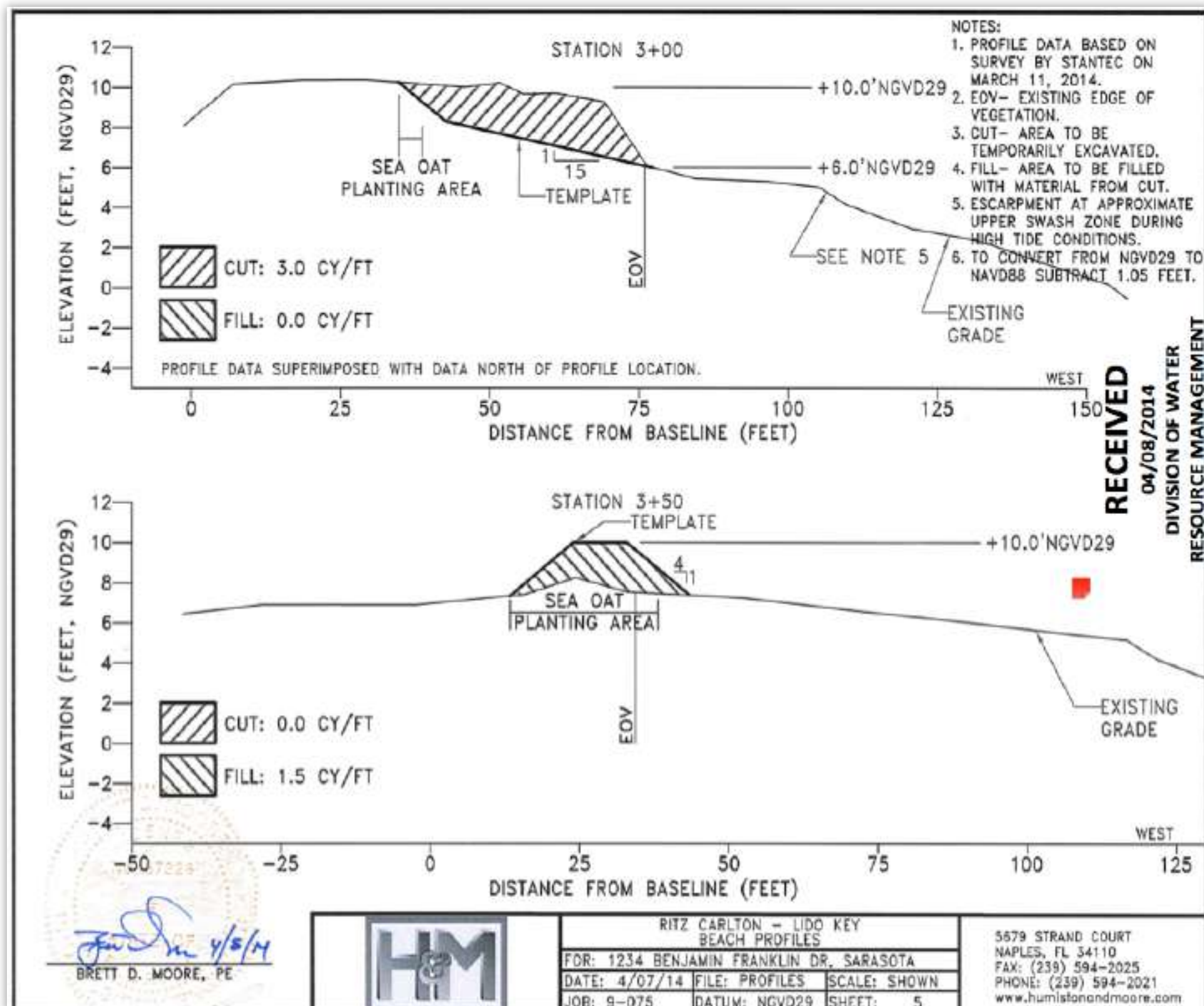
A section of the Ritz-Carlton permit approved by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection shows the area and details of the work. Image courtesy State of Florida

News Leader requested information about the project. “[T]he applicant ... had a study conducted that demonstrated that there would be no net loss of sand as a result of this project and no loss of the protective value of the dune (as required by our rules and regulations),” she wrote. “That information was submitted as part of the application.”

The Ritz-Carlton Beach Club is located at 1234 Ben Franklin Drive on Lido Key.

Sarasota County staff has been fielding emails from people inquiring about the project, Matt Osterhoudt, acting director of the county’s Natural Resources Department, told the *News Leader* on April 30. However, given the fact that the property is within the city’s jurisdiction, he said, the county’s Coastal Setback Ordinance does not apply to the project.

After he began receiving emails from the public, Osterhoudt said, “I did talk to the local



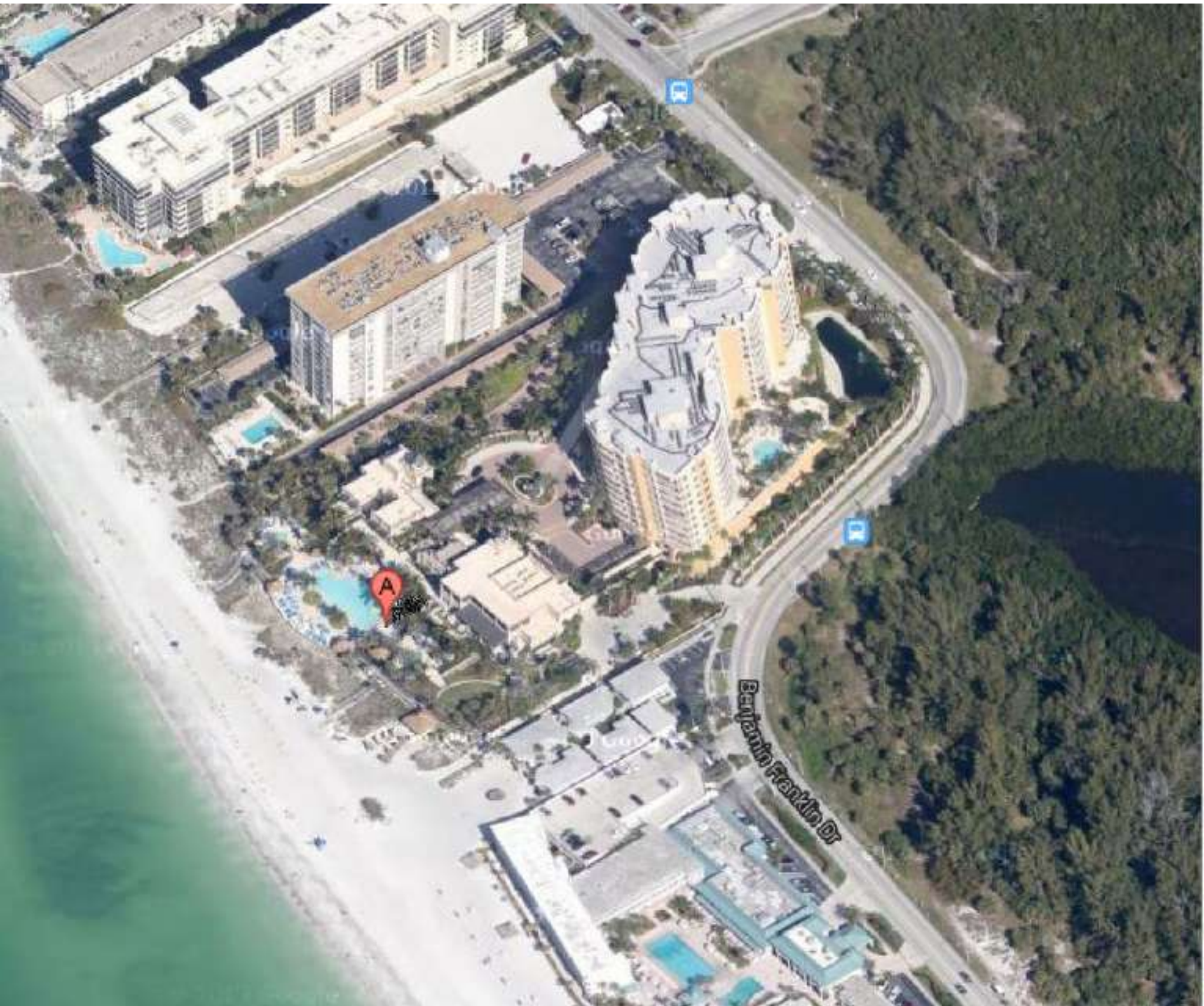
An engineer's drawing shows plans for reconfiguring the dune at the Ritz-Carlton Beach Club. Image courtesy State of Florida

field rep” for DEP. That person informed him the permit had been issued to the Ritz-Carlton by DEP staff in Tallahassee.

Carl Shoffstall, president of the Lido Key Residents Association (LKRA), was one of those who contacted the county commissioners about the project. In an April 25 email, he expressed alarm that the work had opened up a “Pandora’s Box.”

“To say the least, I am very disappointed that the Ritz management did not inform [the [Lido Key Residents Association](#) board] of this work,” he wrote. “From what I have been told, some of our members who live next door to the Ritz were notified prior to work starting and they did not inform [the board] either.”

Regardless of whether it was an oversight of the Ritz management not to inform the



An aerial view shows the Ritz-Carlton Beach Club at 1234 Ben Franklin Drive on Lido Key. Image from Google Maps

association, Shoffstall continued, “my opinion is that since DEP approved this work I don’t see why anyone on the beach who would want to do what the Ritz has done should not be able to also. I know of several properties that have requested from the DEP in the past to do some similar work and were unequivocally turned down.”

He added, “In 30 years of my construction career, wetlands, beaches, as well as mangroves were strictly OFF LIMITS. Only an act of God could get a permit to change something.”

PERMIT DETAILS


In an April 9 letter to SLAB L.L.C., in care of Brett D. Moore of Humiston and Moore Engineers in Naples, S. Muthuswamy, an engineer with the Coastal Construction Control Line Program of DEP, wrote that the permit for the dune reconfiguration had been approved.

However, construction could not commence until the firm complied with special conditions outlined with the permit, Muthuswamy pointed out. First, those conditions required a preconstruction conference at the site “among the contractor, the owner or authorized agent, and a staff representative of [DEP] to establish an understanding among the parties as to the items specified in the special and general conditions of the permit.”

Muthuswamy directed Moore to contact Steve West, a department field inspector, to set up that conference.

The letter included the other following special conditions:

- “All excavated sand material is to remain on the site in the immediate vicinity of the existing dune.”
- “The reshaped dune shall be re-vegetated with sea oats or other dune stabilizing salt-resistant grassy or ground cover vegetation prior to completion of the authorized work. Existing native dune vegetation shall be disturbed only to the minimum extent necessary.”
- “All imported fill material shall be compatible with native sand both in grain size distribution and color.” Sand sources also had to be free from clay, marl, cobble or construction debris.
- “No construction, operation, transportation or storage of equipment or materials is authorized seaward of the dune crest or rigid coastal structure in marine turtle nesting habitat during the marine turtle nesting season, May 1 through October 31.”
- “All debris and equipment associated with the dune restoration project or exposed due to recent erosion must be removed from the beach prior to May 1. The sandy area exposed by the landward relocation of the dune shall be kept free of obstructions that could interfere with nesting marine turtles or emerging hatchlings. This requirement shall apply during nighttime hours during the marine turtle nesting season May 1 through October 31.”
- “No additional permanent exterior lighting is authorized.”

Osterhoudt told the commissioners in his April 25 email that DEP staff had advised him that “if citizens are seeking more information about the FDEP permit, [the department recommends] reaching directly out to the FDEP at (850) 245-7636.” 



POSITIVE TRENDS

The Sarasota County commissioners and County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh (far right) listen to a presentation during the April 29 budget workshop. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SARASOTA COUNTY GETS A GOOD MID-YEAR FISCAL CHECKUP

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Jumps in estimates of taxable property values for Sarasota County were among numerous pieces of good economic news for the County Commission on April 29 as staff reviewed the first half of the current fiscal year and looked ahead to FY 2015.

County Administrator Tom Harmer also won praise from commissioners for his efforts to improve the county's financial future by holding down expenses.

"We've tried to be frugal," Harmer said.

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson pointed to that as an example "of the leadership of this administration."

“ We have to budget for the worst-case scenario. ... Mr. Harmer, you’ve gotten the message from the County Commission that this is what you have to do ... and it’s refreshing to see.

Christine Robinson
Vice Chairwoman
Sarasota County Commission

When she has talked one-on-one with staff members, she added, they have noted Harmer's emphasis on conservative spending.

"We haven't seen that in the last two years," Robinson added.

During the preparation of the past two fiscal year budgets — especially in 2013 — Robinson voiced consternation at times with then-County Administrator Randall Reid for recommendations regarding higher outlays of funds. Robinson voted against both the FY 2013 and FY 2014 budgets.

“We have to budget for the worst-case scenario,” Robinson said during the April 29 workshop. “Mr. Harmer, you’ve gotten the message from the County Commission that this is what you have to do ... and it’s refreshing to see.”

Harmer thanked her and expressed appreciation for the work of county staff members.

During the review of property value projections, Botelho showed the board a chart with state predictions calling for a rise of 6.6 percent in the 2015 fiscal year, up from the December 2013 estimate of 5.4 percent.

The state prediction has property values climbing another 5.5 percent in FY 2016 — down just slightly from the 5.6-percent estimate released in December. However, the FY 2017 and FY 2018 numbers are both 6.2



General Fund Update

- New State estimates of taxable values released in March:

	Current Estimates as of March '14	Previous Estimates as of December '13
FY15	6.6%	5.4%
FY16	5.5%	5.6%
FY17	6.2%	5.9%
FY18	6.2%	5.8%
FY19	5.9%	5.7%

- New estimates lowered the projected shortfall in FY16 from \$18.9M to \$16.3M.
- Preliminary taxable values will be received June 1st (final values on July 1st)

Projections assume 3% growth in sales taxes, FPL and CST and 3% growth in most expenditures. Does not include Sarasota CRA extension (payments end in FY16).

A chart compares property value estimates from the state provided in December and in March for the next five fiscal years. Image courtesy Sarasota County

percent — higher than the 5.9 percent and 5.8 percent figures, respectively, that the state released in December.

The preliminary tax values for this year are due June 1 from the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's Office, with the final numbers expected by July 1. County property values went up 4.22 percent last year.

The County Commission is scheduled to vote on its "not-to-exceed" millage rates on July 9, according to the schedule Harmer has laid out for the board.

Major revenue sources are up 5.2 percent cumulatively through the first half of FY 2014, another chart showed, while

permit applications for the construction of single-family homes are up 32 percent.

REVENUE SOURCES

The county's Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue projections remain the brightest item in charts comparing actual revenue to what was budgeted for the first half of FY 2014. It was up 16.9 percent through March, and staff projections call for it to continue to climb, though more modestly, in FY 2015. The budget called for total collections of \$5,290,756 for the first six months of this fiscal year, but the actual number is \$6,183,051.

In response to a question from Commissioner Nora Patterson, Acting Assistant County



Taxable Value Estimates

	<u>Current Estimate as of March '13</u>	<u>Previous Estimates as of December '12</u>	<u>Previous Estimates as of August '12</u>	<u>Previous Estimates as of January '12</u>
FY13				-1.5%
FY14	1.0%	2.5%	0.7%	0.2%
FY15	2.4%	3.1%	3.2%	3.0%
FY16	3.4%	3.7%	4.0%	3.8%
FY17	4.1%	4.2%	4.4%	4.4%
FY18	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	

Each percentage increase/decrease in taxable value estimates equates to approximately \$1M in revenues

A chart presented to the County Commission in April 2013 shows far lower property value estimates for the next five fiscal years compared to the most recent values released from the state. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Administrator Steve Botelho, who is also the county's chief financial management officer, explained that staff is projecting the TDT funds to show an increase of 8.6 percent for FY 2015 compared to the current fiscal year. "We're still trying to stay somewhat conservative," he told Patterson.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta joined Patterson in voicing concerns that the average member of the public does not understand that TDT revenue, by law, can be used only for certain purposes — and not for road improvements, for example.

In second place behind the TDT revenue for the first six months of the fiscal year, the

county has seen a 9.6-percent rise over budget in Communications Services Tax revenue. The money comes from a 5.42-percent tax on retail sales of communications services, according to a chart presented to the board. The state collects the funds and remits them to the counties.

Sarasota County had budgeted \$4,931,776 for the first six months of FY 2014, but it has received \$5,404,450 for that period.

Botelho and his staff predict the revenue stream will increase by 8.5 percent in FY 2015.

Yet another bright note is an increase of 4.7 percent in the infrastructure surtax revenue

Revenue Source	FY14 YTD Budget*	FY14 YTD Actual	% Over / (Under) YTD Budget	FY15 vs FY14 Budget
Infrastructure Surtax <i>One-cent sales surtax approved by voter referendum to finance County infrastructure projects; collected by the State and remitted back to the County</i>	\$14,180,018	\$14,846,711	4.70%	3.00%
Gas Taxes <i>Five separate taxes (3 local and 2 state) on the sale of fuel in the County; collected by the State and remitted back to the County based on actual sales (County taxes) and allocation formulas (State taxes)</i>	\$7,930,193	\$8,222,718	3.70%	2.30%
Tourist Development Tax <i>5% tax on all hotel rooms and residential units which are rented for six months or less to finance tourism-related assets and promote tourism; collected by the Tax Collector's Office</i>	\$5,290,756	\$6,183,051	16.90%	8.60%
Total	\$27,400,967	\$29,252,480	6.80%	4.20%

* YTD budget and actuals represent first 6 months of data (revenues shown are on a cash basis which may differ from accounting system)

A chart shows mid-year revenue projections for a number of Sarasota County funding sources. Image courtesy Sarasota County

so far this fiscal year. The county had expected \$14,180,018 for the first six months, but it collected \$14,846,711. Nonetheless, the projection for FY 2015 is for a 3-percent rise over this year's total.


Just last month, during their capital projects workshop, commissioners bemoaned the lag in collections of the surtax revenue since the recession began.

The only source of revenue below projections for the first six months of the fiscal year, according to the staff presentation, is the Florida Power & Light (FPL) franchise fee. The company charges a 5.9-percent assessment on its sales of electrical energy in unincorporated areas of the county, collects the money and turns it over to the county. The budget projection at this point of the fiscal

year was for \$8,203,836; however, the county has collected \$8,158,421, or 0.6 percent less than predicted.

County staff is calling for an overall drop in that revenue of 1.1 percent in FY 2015.

Altogether, the chart shows, staff had estimated income of \$29,203,166 for the first six months of the fiscal year for revenue from the half-cent sales tax, the FPL franchise fees, the Communications Services Tax and state revenue sharing. Instead, it has collected 3.4 percent more for a total of \$30,189,520.

The total for the Infrastructure Surtax, gas taxes and the TDT revenue streams is \$29,252,480 for the first six months, a 6.8-percent hike over the projected amount of \$27,400,967. 

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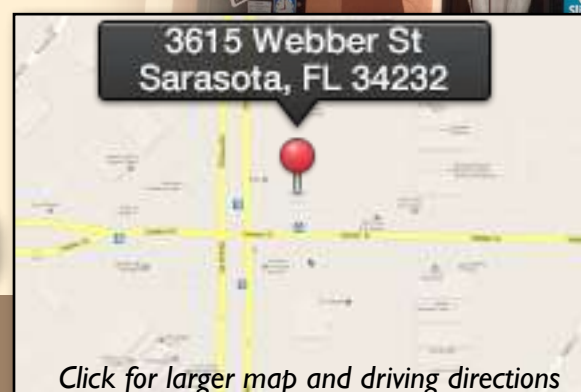
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Sarasota County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Tom Knight has guided his office with his 'intelligence-led policing' philosophy. Contributed image

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE CONTINUES TO BUILD ON THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED SINCE TOM KNIGHT WAS FIRST ELECTED

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Crime in the unincorporated areas of Sarasota County fell 13 percent for the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2013, Sheriff Tom Knight announced on April 30 — a continuation of a decline Knight has linked to his implementation of an intelligence-led policing philosophy.

The latest statistics reflect a 33-percent reduction compared to the first quarter of 2009, when he first took office, a news release points out.

The Sheriff's Office previously reported that Part 1 Offenses in the unincorporated areas of the county — the most serious crimes, such as homicide, robbery and aggravated assault — dropped 11 percent in 2013 compared to 2012 records. They have fallen 30 percent since 2009. "This is significantly different" from the situation in the state of Florida as a whole, the news release says. The state has reported that Part 1 crimes have

“We are committed to our intelligence-led policing model, Intelligence 2 Action, which certainly contributed to this unprecedented drop in crime.”

Tom Knight
Sheriff
Sarasota County



decreased 4 percent in the past year and 21 percent since 2009.

“We are committed to our intelligence-led policing model, Intelligence 2 Action, which certainly contributed to this unprecedented drop in crime,” said Knight in the release. “These results can be directly attributed to the tireless efforts of our personnel. They not only accepted this model but took complete ownership of it. And, despite our impressive accomplishments in the first few years of the program, the men and women of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office did not grow complacent.”

Knight added, “The mission now is to maintain our quality workforce and continue to adapt to crime trends to further improve the

quality of life here. I could not be more proud of our people.”

During an appearance before the County Commission in mid-January, Knight noted that his office’s statistics continued to show Sarasota County with the greatest decrease in crime of the 33 Florida counties with populations of 100,000 or greater.

In reporting on the department’s workforce, Maj. Kurt Hoffman, head of the Administrative Division and general counsel, said, “We’re starting to get a reputation as the place to go” for people interested in law enforcement careers.

Between mid-November 2012 and mid-February of this year, Hoffman pointed out, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office scheduled



(From left) Sheriff Tom Knight, Col. Steve Burns and Maj. Kurt Hoffman prepare to discuss their office’s proposed 2014 fiscal year budget with the County Commission in June 2013. File photo

Adult Males - Felony	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Sentenced	118	116	122	132	122
Non-Sentenced	386	370	401	415	393
Probation Violation (Technical Only)	46	56	62	53	54
Probation Violation With Open Charges	26	29	40	36	33
Average Number of Felony Inmates	576	571	625	636	602

Adult Females - Felony	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Sentenced	41	40	33	29	36
Non-Sentenced	78	76	80	72	77
Probation Violation (Technical Only)	20	17	19	17	18
Probation Violation With Open Charges	8	12	19	14	13
Average Number of Felony Inmates	147	145	151	132	144

Adult Males - Misdemeanor	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Sentenced	27	22	22	22	23
Non-Sentenced	60	58	65	69	63
Probation Violation (Technical Only)	5	9	10	12	9
Probation Violation With Open Charges	4	2	2	2	3
Average Number of Misdemeanor Inmates	96	91	99	105	98

Adult Females - Misdemeanor	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Sentenced	5	4	4	5	5
Non-Sentenced	12	12	13	16	13
Probation Violation (Technical Only)	2	3	3	1	2
Probation Violation With Open Charges	0	0	1	0	0
Average Number of Misdemeanor Inmates	19	19	21	22	20

Juveniles	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Sentenced	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Sentenced	7	3	4	8	6
Average Number of Inmates	7	3	4	8	6

Total Inmate Population	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Average YTD
Adult	910	894	968	978	938
Juvenile	7	3	4	8	6
Average Total Number of Inmates	917	897	972	986	944

A chart in the 2013 Annual Report of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office offers statistics on the inmate population in the jail. Image courtesy Sheriff's Office

interviews with 30 people already certified as Florida law enforcement officers who were interested in joining the force. Many of them had military experience, too, he added.

ANNUAL REPORT

The Sheriff's Office's 2013 annual report, released a couple of weeks ago, says the department had 413 sworn law enforcement officers, 206 correctional officers and 380 civilians on the job last year. Of those, 628 were men and 335 were women. The agency hired 59 new people in 2013 to fill open positions or to replace persons who were leaving or retiring, the report adds.

While it notes the decrease in crime, it also says, "Traffic safety remains a top priority ... and traffic enforcement is the main request from citizens as well." To that end, its officers wrote 34,415 traffic citations in 2013 and made 653 arrests for Driving Under the Influence.

Regarding corrections, the report says the Sarasota County Jail processed 13,415 inmates in 2013, including those arrested by local police departments, the Florida Highway Patrol and other state and federal agencies. The average total number of inmates per quarter was 944.


The declining jail population, county commissioners have pointed out, has enabled them to delay plans to construct a new jail; before Knight was elected, that project had a much higher priority.

Along with its statistics regarding people, the office also reported on the work of its Animal Services division. Last year, officers in that part of the agency took in 3,386 dogs and cats, the majority of which were strays,



Sheriff Tom Knight receives a Siesta Key Association (SKA) T-shirt from then-SKA President Catherine Luckner (not shown) on March 1 as a show of appreciation from the neighborhood organization. File photo

the report notes. "While 905 animals were returned to their owners and another 534 were adopted," the report says, "the large and loving network of shelters and rescue groups" enabled another 927 pets to be transferred to other facilities.

The report also offers information about the office's community outreach initiatives, pointing out that the office donated \$100,000 to a number of nonprofit organizations last year. The funds came from unclaimed property and forfeitures by criminals. Among the groups that benefited from those contributions were [Do the Right Thing of Sarasota County](#), Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Suncoast, All Faiths Food Bank and [Operation Second Chance](#). 

Lift Station 87



SEWER SYSTEMS AND OPEN FIRES

The Lift Station 87 project will be back on the City Commission agenda Monday. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

THE CITY COMMISSION WILL HEAR MORE ABOUT LIFT STATION 87 AND CONSIDER SEVERAL MATTERS REGARDING THE HOMELESS WHEN IT MEETS ON MAY 5

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Sewer lift stations serving the eastern portion of the city and more homelessness issues will be on the agenda for the Sarasota city commissioners on Monday, May 5. They will receive more information on Lift Station 87 between Mound Street and Hudson Bayou. And they will be asked to embark on the rehabilitation of another lift station north of Fruitville Road.

The city is rehabilitating its gravity-feed sewer system, and the latest project will install three new submerged pumps at Lift Station 40, at the southwest corner of Eighth Street and Shade Avenue. The \$1 million project is

expected to be awarded to TLC Diversified of Palmetto during the May 5 meeting.

All-new electrical and instrumentation equipment will be put in, and a new overhead “bridge crane” will be installed. The overhaul will include interior and exterior painting and some plumbing replacement. Work will be under way by summer.

The commissioners will get another update on Lift Station 87. Two weeks ago, residents of the Central Park condominiums, who live near the lift station site, asked for screening to hide or disguise their view of the abandoned

construction area. Since the previous design engineer walked off the job in frustration, the site has been relatively inactive.

Work is expected to start back up with new designs, including several options the commissioners will see for the first time Monday. The new design engineer will discuss the advisability of putting some of the equipment aboveground; the old design put everything below ground and out of sight.

However, the belowground equipment could prove vulnerable to hurricane-driven storm surges, so the commissioners at their last meeting asked about putting some of the gear aboveground. They and the neighbors will see what the enclosure and landscaping could look like.

ON THE FIRE FRONT

Following our report of open fires in two homeless camps near a fuel storage facility in the center of town, the city attorney was asked to report on “open burn” ordinances. His April 24 memo says, in part, “The city does not currently have an ordinance that makes it unlawful to have open campfires or open cooking fires on private or public property.”

While Sarasota County has a ban on open fires, the ordinance has several large loopholes. It allows fires without a permit for “Girl or Boy Scout troops, church groups and organized youth groups.”

Fournier’s memo asks, “Couldn’t a fire set by a church group become just as dangerous as a fire set by an atheist?”



An alarm raised last month about homeless people’s campfires getting out of control near Midco Petroleum on Sixth Street will have the city attorney discussing ‘open burning’ ordinances on May 5. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Fournier said the City Commission “might want to consider an ordinance to make it unlawful to start ground fires or cooking fires in certain locations, or to prohibit open cooking fires unless the fire is in a device designed to prevent it from spreading.”

City staffers could find only a 1992 ordinance prohibiting “any person to burn or bury any solid waste within the city limits.” Before organized garbage pick-up, virtually every house had an outdoor fire pit to burn cardboard, paper and other flammable wastes.

VAGRANCY BY THE NUMBERS

On Monday, City Manager Tom Barwin will deliver his biweekly update on homelessness and vagrancy in Sarasota. This time, he will be armed with statistics. He will be presenting the results of the annual “Point in Time” survey of the homeless and offering details from three years of records kept at the Pinellas Safe Harbor “come-as-you-are” shelter (see the related story in this issue).

The annual “homeless census” is conducted nationwide on a single day. This year, the date




(Middle row, from left) City Attorney Robert Fournier, City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini and City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo listen to resident Manuel Chepote during a past commission meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

was Jan. 27. Detailed results have not been released yet, but Barwin will provide the big picture. Homelessness in Sarasota County “appears to have declined by 99 from 2013,” he reports in a memo. But homelessness in Manatee County “appears to have increased by 277.”

The census is conducted by the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness. Its preliminary results indicate the “regional homeless” number increased 8.7 percent. The number of homeless children dropped to 361 from 439 in 2013. The nonprofit organization reports, “The number of Black/African-American individuals counted jumped from 241 to 443 and is statistically higher than the county demographic.”

It found 316 people were “sleeping in a place not meant for habitation in Sarasota County,” and 233 people were considered “chronic homeless,” defined as homeless at four or more times in the past three years.” The partnership stressed the annual survey always “undercounts” the actual number of homeless.

Barwin is offering 53 pages of statistics gathered by the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office while it has been operating the Pinellas homeless shelter for the past three years.

A third agenda item concerning vagrancy and homelessness will be the second and final reading of a new ordinance banning loitering in the middle of a roundabout. One individual is found almost daily on the inner apron of the roundabout at Pineapple Avenue and Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota. 



City Manager Tom Barwin discusses homelessness issues during a joint meeting of the City and County commissions in February 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel



A NEW START FOR HEALTHY START

New Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County Executive Director Shon Ewens (left) chats with Healthy Start supporters at the organization's April 25 luncheon. Photo by Peter Acker

HEALTHY START FUNDRAISING LUNCHEON OFFERS OPPORTUNITY TO MEET THE NONPROFIT'S NEW CHIEF

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

One hundred twenty community leaders packed the Grand Foyer of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall last Friday, pledging their support for the Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County, now under the leadership of a new executive director for the first time in 13 years.

Healthy Start offers countless support services to pregnant women, new mothers and infants, helping

women gain access to care and offering programs, such as smoking cessation classes, intended to ensure healthy pregnancies and deliveries.

After years of fighting for policies to reduce America's high infant mortality rate, then-Gov. Lawton Chiles established Florida's Healthy Start program in the early '90s. Healthy Start today subsists on a



It's something that I wanted to be involved in; it's something I believe in.

Shon Ewens
Executive Director
Healthy Start Coalition
Of Sarasota County



combination of government grants and private donations, the latter prompted by events like last week's *Giving Sarasota a Healthy Start* luncheon, the first of its kind for the Sarasota Healthy Start.

Sarasota City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell, who was MC of the event, proclaimed April 25 Giving Sarasota a Healthy Start Day and spoke about her time serving as the president of her local La Leche League when she was a new mom. She called women Sarasota's "most disadvantaged" population and argued that a "healthy citizenry" leads to a healthy democracy and good government.


Former Mayor Kelly Kirschner — a longtime supporter of the organization — also took the podium, introducing the keynote speaker: Jack Levine, the founder of Tallahassee's [4Generations Institute](#). Kirschner talked about the \$1 million-plus hospital bill he and his wife racked up when their first child was born three months premature. He estimated that just treating the "symptoms" of unhealthy birth outcomes costs Sarasota County more than \$60 million each year.

The luncheon also offered an opportunity to meet Healthy Start's new executive director,

Shon Ewens, who took over early this year after the nonprofit's longtime leader, Jennifer Highland, announced her retirement. Ewens previously worked for the Literacy Council of Sarasota, whose offices are located near Healthy Start's in the sprawling 17th Street Glasser Schoenbaum Human Services Center. That proximity allowed Ewens to learn about Healthy Start's mission and observe its work.

"It's something that I wanted to be involved in; it's something I believe in," Ewens told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the luncheon. "It's where I'm supposed to be."

Ewens' primary objective in her first years is to get the word out. "I just don't think the community really knows who and what we are," she said. "My main goal as the executive director is to let every single person in Sarasota County know who we are, what we are and what we do."

Her application came at a providential time: She interviewed for the Healthy Start job just two weeks after giving birth to her third child. "I actually had to leave my interview in the middle because I was still breastfeeding," Ewens said with a laugh. "My husband was in the car with the baby." 

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HIGHER PARKING FINE SUGGESTED

Drivers continue to park illegally just north of the Canal Road intersection. Vehicles were left there early on Saturday morning for Siesta Fiesta. File photo

THE LEADER OF A SIESTA KEY ORGANIZATION SAYS THE \$25 COST OF A PARKING TICKET DOES NOT DETER REPEAT OFFENDERS ON A NEIGHBORHOOD STREET

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Residents of Siesta Key's Avenida de Mayo are continuing to call the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office about people violating the parking restrictions the county recently imposed on their street, but the president of the Siesta Key Association (SKA) has suggested raising the parking fine may be the key to the solution.

Michael Shay, who was named president of the neighborhood

advocacy organization on March 1, wrote *The Sarasota News Leader* in an email this week that if the countywide \$25 fine is supposed to be a deterrent to illegal parking, "then here on the Key it is not working."

“In an ideal situation, you would have enough public parking. ... I would say that we're pretty much at capacity [on Siesta Key] in season.”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



Moreover, Shay says, while deputies are responding to calls about vehicles in "No Parking" zones on the street, he feels more regular patrols of Avenida de Mayo would be helpful.

On April 18, Shay emailed County Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on the island, to say that while the “No Parking” signs had been up for only about two months, he did not feel they were “working as a deterrent to keep the [right of way] completely open and safe.” He proposed a higher fee or signage indicating violators would have their vehicles towed.

That same day, Shay reported in an email to other SKA board members — a copy of which he provided to the *News Leader* — that he had called the Sheriff’s Office about six cars being parked illegally on Avenida de Mayo. When a deputy arrived about 15 minutes later, he added, the deputy said he had observed many of the tickets written on Avenida de Mayo were going to repeat offenders. The deputy — whom Shay declined to identify — also told Shay that as he completed writing one citation on April 18, the owner of the vehicle approached him and asked why the deputy was giving him a ticket. The driver added that he had been parking there for years.

Shay said the deputy concurred with him that the \$25 fee is not a deterrent in such cases.

In interviews with the *News Leader* this week, two county commissioners had differing views on raising the fine.

“It’s true; people may decide that \$25 is worth it so they can park” and not worry about their vehicle being towed, Patterson told the *News Leader* on April 30. Asked if she would be willing to raise the fine, she replied, “I hate to do it. There is a bad taste in somebody’s mouth when they have to pay a fine.”



A homeowner near the intersection of Avenida de Mayo and Avenida de Cortez reportedly violated the county code by selling parking spaces in his yard during Siesta Fiesta. Contributed photo



Cars were parked in a homeowner’s yard near the Avenida de Mayo/Avenida de Cortez intersection on April 27. Contributed photo



Add-A-Closet at 329 Avenida de Mayo was advertising parking spaces for \$10 during Siesta Fiesta, according to residents on the street. Contributed photo

She added, “You do the best you can to create a balancing act” between residents and the needs of businesses.

However, board Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson said she would consider increasing the fine if the Sheriff’s Office provided the County Commission with information indicating that would ameliorate the situation.

“I would want to make sure that’s the issue,” she said of Shay’s concern that the fine is too low to stop repeat offenders. She agreed that someone with multiple citations should be aware of the cost of a ticket.

Still, Robinson pointed out, “Most people don’t know what the fines are.”



An aerial view shows the proximity of Avenida de Mayo to Siesta Village. Image from Google Maps

In all her travels around the country, she added, she could recall only one place that had “No Parking” signage indicating the amount of a citation: Miami Beach.

Chairman Charles Hines could not be reached for comment because he was out of town, his assistant told the *News Leader*. Neither Commissioner Joe Barbetta nor Commissioner Carolyn Mason responded to the *News Leader*’s messages seeking their views.

THE BACKGROUND

On Oct. 23, 2013, the commission approved restrictions calling for no parking on the street or the public right of way from the intersection of Avenida de Mayo and Canal Road to the intersection of Avenida de Mayo and Avenida de Cortez. Beyond that, no-parking zones are staggered in 500-foot sections from Avenida de Cortez to Avenida Del Norte.

The goal is to ensure emergency vehicles have sufficient room to traverse the street, as stipulated by the National Fire Protection Code.

County staff finally erected signs on the street in early February, but Deputy Chris McGregor told SKA members at their Feb. 6 meeting that the wording and arrows — as well as the location of some of the signs — [were too baffling to be enforceable](#). Staff made some adjustments, which satisfied Sgt. Scott Osborne, leader of the Sheriff’s Office’s Community Policing Station on the island, so deputies began writing tickets when residents alerted them to illegally parked vehicles.

THE LAW

News Leader research into county and state laws shows that Section 122-141 of the



A proposal for public parking on a vacant lot at Treasure Boat Way and Ocean Boulevard, shown in May 2012, was shot down by residents fretful about the noise its use would create in their neighborhood. File photo

Sarasota County Code of Ordinances says, “Any person Parking a Vehicle in violation of or contrary to the Signs, and/or posted instructions located thereon, on any County road, street, bridge or right-of-way shall be punishable by a civil fine of \$25.00, and the disposition thereof shall be governed by the provisions of [the Florida State Statutes].”

Additionally, Sgt. Osborne of the Sheriff’s Office confirmed for the *News Leader* that the county’s \$25 fine is for the day of the violation. Another citation may be written only if the driver moves the vehicle and then returns and parks it illegally again, Wendy Rose, community affairs manager for the Sheriff’s Office, told the *News Leader* after checking with Osborne.

The state laws referenced above say that if a person has outstanding parking tickets, the Tax Collector’s Office is to refuse to issue a license plate or revalidation sticker “until the person presents a receipt from the governmental entity or the clerk of court [providing] the data showing that the fines outstanding have been paid.”

Rose also noted that licenses can be suspended or revoked for unpaid fines, but that action is handled by the courts or the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Deputies receive such information when they run driver's license checks during traffic stops, she added.

THE BUSY KEY

Shay and Avenida de Mayo residents reported numerous violations over the past weekend, when the 36th Annual Siesta Fiesta fine arts and crafts show was taking place in Siesta Village.


Not only were vehicles parked illegally on the street, but people at [Add-A-Closet](#), located at 329 Avenida de Mayo, "were selling parking and blocking off the free public access to the right of way," Shay wrote in an email to county Code Enforcement staff. Additionally, a homeowner at the intersection of Avenida de Cortez and Avenida de Mayo was selling parking spaces in his yard for \$10 apiece. Shay noted that the yard had about 20 vehicles in it when he went by there.

Charles Marchione, a supervisor in the Code Enforcement Office, responded to Shay that staff would investigate those situations, which are a violation of the county code.

"In an ideal situation," Patterson told the *News Leader*, "you would have enough public parking. ... I would say that we're pretty much at capacity [on Siesta Key] in season."

The ultimate solution would be for the county to provide more public parking spaces near Siesta Village, Patterson said. However, her past attempts to garner support from her colleagues for taking such action have failed.

Several years ago, Patterson pointed out that she was among those who proposed the county look into purchasing a vacant parcel at the corner of Ocean Boulevard and Treasure Boat Way, even though it was a bit of a walk to the main part of the Village. Patterson said neighboring residents complained that people using the lot would create too much noise at night.

"I think we have to realize it's not a perfect world," Patterson added of the parking problems on Siesta Key. "I think there will always be some conflicts." 

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SCAT RELOCATES ONE OF THE PICK-UP POINTS FOR VETERANS' SERVICE

On Monday, May 5, Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) will move one of the six pick-up points it offers for veterans' transportation to Bay Pines Veterans Affairs Healthcare System in Bay Pines and to James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, the county has announced.

The pick-up point at the closed Bank of America branch located near the corner of U.S. 301 and 12th Street in Sarasota is being moved to the North Sarasota Library, which is at 2810 Newtown Blvd. in Sarasota, a news release says.

Because the bank branch is closed, the release continues, moving the pick-up location to the library will provide veterans a safer place where they can catch a SCAT bus, according to SCAT officials.

The new North Sarasota Library pick-up location joins five others that SCAT offers to those who need to reach Tampa-based veterans' services, the release adds:

- Walmart — U.S. 41 and Jacaranda Boulevard, Venice (SCAT transfer point).
- Publix — Nokomis (parking lot in front of store).
- JCPenny at Westfield Sarasota Square, 8201 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota (west side facing U.S. 41).
- Sarasota Pavilion/Gulf Gate — SCAT transfer point (north side of Old Navy store).
- Veterans Office — 2200 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota.

Reservations for SCAT veterans' services are required, and seating is limited, the release points out. There is a charge of \$8 to \$13, depending on the pick-up point.

To register, call SCAT Plus at 861-1234, TTY 7-1-1 or 1-800-955-8771. To learn more about the service, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000.



SCAT hybrid bus. File photo.

SARASOTA AUDUBON CO-SPONSORING NATURE PHOTO CONTEST

Sponsored by Sarasota Audubon and Johnson PhotoImaging, *Connecting With Nature at the Celery Fields*, a juried photo contest, invites members of the public to visit the Celery Fields, a 440-acre habitat of wetlands, birds and wildlife, and submit up to three photos that show a connection with nature, Sarasota Audubon has announced.

Entries must be received by the end of the day on Sunday, May 4, a news release explains. Visit the Sarasota Audubon [website](#) for complete contest rules, the release adds.

[Johnson PhotoImaging](#) will arrange the juried panel and award the prizes, the release continues. First prize is \$150; second, \$100; and third, \$50.

Sarasota Audubon will announce the winners on its Facebook page and share the winning photos throughout the 2014 Giving Challenge on May 6 and 7, the release says.

To garner community support for completing the [Visitor & Nature Center](#) at the [Celery Fields](#), *Connecting with Nature at the Celery Fields* is the Sarasota Audubon theme for the [2014 Giving Challenge of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County](#), the release points out.

In addition to the photo contest, the chapter is offering a free class on May 6 with master bird photographer Robert Bolcik and scheduling bird naturalists on the Celery Fields boardwalks on the mornings of May 6 and May 7, the release notes. Further, “celebrated

bird and wildlife photographer Lou Newman” will open *Birds & Bears*, a wildlife photography exhibit at [Plymouth Harbor](#) on May 6.

By inviting the public to participate in a photo contest and sharing photos on Facebook throughout the 2014 Giving Challenge, “Audubon is hoping to inspire community members” to donate \$25, the release adds.

“Photography is a tremendously inspiring and educational tool,” said Sarasota Audubon President Jeanne Dubi in the release. “With so many eyes on this 24-hour event [the

Giving Challenge], we’re hoping to promote awareness of our efforts in building what will become an outstanding environmental education center for all ages,” she noted.

For more information on the photo contest and other *Connecting with Nature at the Celery Fields* activities, visit [sarasotaaudubon.org](#). To donate to Sarasota Audubon during the 2014 Giving Challenge, visit [GivingPartnerChallenge.org](#) on May 6 and 7 and enter “Sarasota Audubon” in the search bar.



A boardwalk and covered shelter at the Celery Fields offer good vantage points for bird-watchers. Photo by Roger Drouin

COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TO SHOWCASE STARS

Community Youth Development (CYD) will showcase the *Pathway of STARs* near the food court at Westfield Sarasota Square Mall from Friday, May 2, through Wednesday, May 7, during mall hours, the organization has announced.

Each of the 162 stars will represent a current STAR student, a news release explains: a high school student who has completed CYD's comprehensive, 75-hour STAR Leadership Training Program. "Students learn important skills such as team-building, communication and leadership" through the program, the release points out. After they complete it, they are eligible to serve on a nonprofit board of directors or on a city or county advisory board as a full voting member, the release adds.

"We are so excited to team up with Westfield Sarasota Square Mall to feature our STARs," said Karen Bogues, CYD executive director, in the release. "We are eager to share the importance of the STAR Leadership Training

and the immense impact it is having on teens in Sarasota County. The *Pathway of STARs* is a great way for us to educate the community on this program."

The display coincides with the [2014 Giving Challenge](#), which will be held May 6-7 to promote nonprofits in Sarasota County and the surrounding areas, the release continues. Visitors to the *Pathway of STARs* will have the opportunity to learn more about the STAR Leadership Training Program, create their own stars, take photos on the pathway and show their support by posting a photo with the hashtag #BeASTAR, the release adds.

Youth in grades 6 through 12 participate in a variety of social and personal skill development programs through CYD, the release notes. In 2013, the organization served 2,192 young people throughout Sarasota County. Community Youth Development is funded in part by Sarasota County Government.

COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
we shape the future

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TEEN FIRST

WE SHAPE THE FUTURE

"Teens need to know they matter. When they know this, they will care about everyone's future, including their own. CYD teens matter, and they care."
-Sandra Terry, CEO Laurel Civic Association

LEADERSHIP STAR TRAINING
(click to learn more!)

welcome to our website

Community Youth Development (CYD) creates environments, events, and activities that cultivate leadership and support positive choices. Launched in 1996, CYD is an unqualified success serving thousands of middle and high

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CENTER FOR BUILDING HOPE TO HOST OPEN HOUSE ON MAY 6

The Center for Building Hope will hold an open house on Tuesday, May 6, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. to showcase the free programs and services on its 5-acre campus in Lakewood Ranch, the center's staff has announced.

The facility is a "healing environment" for adults, children, couples and families in the community, a news release points out. "When an individual or family member is impacted by cancer," the Center for Building Hope provides a place where the person or family members can go to talk with people who can offer support and to participate in activities "to build their bodies and spirits," the release adds.

The open house is being held in conjunction with the Giving Partner Challenge of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

It will highlight several programs provided by the center, including demonstrations of yoga, classes teaching painting with watercolors, Qigong games, pottery sessions for beginners, expressive writing classes, massage sessions for two people and support groups.

"Our energetic and compassionate staff will be available to answer questions and show visitors how we improve the quality of life of those dealing with a cancer diagnosis through exercise, education, social activities and support," said Andrea Feldmar, program director, in the release. "Our participants have logged in 32,000 hours in visits annually, and we want to provide even more support in 2014."

For more information about the Center for Building Hope, visit centerforbuildinghope.org.



A support group meets at the Center for Building Hope. Contributed photo

ABOUT 90 POUNDS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS TURNED IN LAST WEEK

Residents turned in 64 pounds of prescription medication to the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and 23 pounds to the Sarasota Police Department during the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) national turn-in event on Saturday, April 26, the offices have announced.

Since the Sheriff's Office launched Operation Medicine Cabinet in 2009, the total amount of pharmaceutical drugs turned in has reached the mark of 6,126 pounds, a news release says.

Anyone who missed the Saturday event can drop off unused or expired prescription medication year-round, the Sheriff's Office and Police Department point out. The Sheriff's Office has permanent drop boxes at the Criminal Justice Center, located at 2071 Ringling Blvd. in Sarasota, which is open 24 hours a day; and at the South County office, located at 4531 State Road 776 in Venice, where the hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The Sarasota Police Department headquarters has a permanent drop box located in its lobby at 2099 Adams Lane in Sarasota.

"While there has been a decline in the number of prescription drug overdose deaths in Sarasota County and a drop in the number of babies born addicted to prescription painkillers, the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office continues educational outreach efforts and promotes drug turn-in opportunities since many misused and abused medication is obtained from home medicine cabinets," the Sheriff's Office news release notes.

The Police Department release also reminds the public that flushing medications down



A prescription medication drop-off box is located in the lobby of the Sarasota Police Department on Adams Lane in downtown Sarasota. Contributed photo

the toilet or throwing them in a trash can "be harmful and cause health hazards to humans and animals."

Last October, Americans turned in 324 tons (more than 647,000 pounds) of prescription drugs at about 4,114 sites operated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and its thousands of state and local law enforcement partners, the Police Department release adds. Combining those results with the amounts collected in the seven earlier drug take-back events shows the DEA and its partners have taken in more than 3.4 million pounds of pills, the Police Department release says.

POLICE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES RINGLING COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

On April 25, the Sarasota Police Department announced a partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design called *Blue + You*, an initiative that will create programs and events to allow the public to interact with the police force.

Ringling students unveiled an improved website for the Police Department, sarasotapd.org, and then, on April 26, helped host the showing of a movie for the community, a news release points out.

The Police Department has been partnering with the college as a client of “The Collaboratory” during this spring semester, the release notes. “The project intends to fortify and reestablish the visual and communicative aspects of the Sarasota Police Department through design and social media, such as use of our website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram,” the release adds.

“We’re proud to unveil and reveal a new brand for the Sarasota Police Department,” said Chief Bernadette DiPino in the release. “When you see *Blue + You*, it’s an extension of our community policing outreach. The color blue represents law enforcement. The plus sign means we work together and we combine with each other,” she pointed out in the release. “The ‘You’ is our community and citizens.”

The goal, she continued, is to create a safe place to live, work and play. “Any time you see the *Blue + You* [logo], you’ll know it’s a Sarasota Police Department event,” said DiPino.



Ringling College students created this poster for the first Blue + You movie night. Image courtesy Sarasota Police Department

“We are honored to be partnering with the Sarasota Police Department during our pilot phase in The Collaboratory,” said Cynthia Gravino, associate vice president of collaborative enterprises at the college, in the release. “The Collaboratory provides opportunities for Ringling College students to obtain real-life, client-based project experience in a multidisciplinary studio setting,” she added in the release.



Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino gathers with attendees of the first Blue + You movie event on April 26. Photo by Norman Schimmel



People watch a movie projected on a wall at the Sarasota Police Department. Photo by Norman Schimmel

VENICE BOARD OF REALTORS AWARDS \$40,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS

The Venice Area Board of Realtors has awarded \$40,000 in scholarships to 20 area students, with each receiving \$2,000, the organization has announced.

The money came in as proceeds from the board's annual golf tournament, yard sale and other fundraisers, a news release explains. State Sen. Nancy Detert matched the board's \$20,000 to double the amount of the awards, the release points out.

Since 1992 the Board has donated more than \$260,000 to local graduating seniors, the release notes.

This year's recipients are David Holcomb, Lisa Fusco, Collin Naaman, Alexandra Flerlage, Patrick Collins, Katie Dunn-Rankin, Cassandra Kasmirski, Andre Juliao, Taylor Hughes, Brenna Steffanni, Chase Leonhard, Taylor Hill, Deaven Palm, Gianna Pecora, Olivia Russo, Douglas Orther, Carly Grimes, Morgan Meadows, Jordan Rosa and Jordan Cunningham, the release says.

All will be Venice High graduates with the exception of Katie Dunn-Rankin and Carly Grimes, who both attend Pine View School in Osprey, the release adds. 



The honored students gather with members of the Scholarship Committee of the Venice Board of Realtors. Contributed photo



OPERATION INTERCEPT III

CRIME BLOTTER



Brian Hawley



Blake Holiday



Raymond Kidder



Daniel Abbey



James Baker



Edgar Covarrubias-Garcia



Jameson Fahey



Daniel Ferris



Edmond Jones



Dwight Meek



Michael Parent



Harry Walters

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office released a composite of the mug shots of the 12 people arrested in Operation Intercept III. Contributed image

12 ARRESTED IN ONLINE PREDATOR STING IN SARASOTA COUNTY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested 12 people in Operation Intercept III, an initiative to protect Sarasota County children from online predators, the office has announced.

Suspects ranging in age from 20 to 50 "responded to Internet-based ads, online apps or social media sites and engaged in sexually explicit written and verbal conversations," a news release explains. "One of the suspects is an armed security guard who thought he was going to have sex with a mother and her 12-year-old daughter," the release adds.

Some of the men sent explicit photos and one brought drugs, it says. For another example, it notes, "A 44-year-old man agreed to get a 14-year-old girl pregnant." The release continues, "Ultimately, they all traveled with the intent to have sex with a male or female child."

"You would think the frequency of Internet predator operations here in Sarasota County and surrounding jurisdictions would reduce the number of criminals prowling online for the sole purpose of sexually exploiting children," said Sheriff Tom Knight in the release. "Most adults probably aren't aware of the sites kids are using, so law enforcement will continue to stand between children and these disturbed individuals, but parents need to pay attention to what your kids are doing online. Be a parent," he added. "It's OK to check."

The following suspects were arrested in this three-day operation and charged with the following:

- Brian Hawley, 37, of 17678 Sabal Palm Drive North, Fort Myers; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted, and

two counts of Transmission of Materials Harmful to Minors.

- Raymond Kidder, 50, of 123 S. McMullen Booth Road, Clearwater; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Blake Holliday, 24, of 1015 Marlin Lakes Circle, No. 722, Sarasota; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Daniel Ferris, 24, of 204 Katelyn Cove, Sarasota; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Edgar Covarrubias-Garcia, 38, of 2126 11th Place, Sarasota; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Michael Parent, 43, of 1721 Parakeet Way, Unit 703, Sarasota; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted, and Transmission of Materials Harmful to Minors.
- Harry Walters, 44, of 3451 Queens St., No. 901, Sarasota, Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Daniel Abbey, 30, of 2218 Metro Drive, Ruskin; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious

Battery — Attempted, and Transmission of Materials Harmful to Minors.

- Dwight Meek, 43, of 725 18th Avenue West, Palmetto; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Jameson Fahey, 20, of 1145 Martha Place, Englewood; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- James Baker, 33, of 5002 E. Colonial Drive, Apt. 7, Tampa; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted.
- Edmond Jones, 20, of 4510 Third Street Circle West, No. 314, Bradenton; Use of a Computer to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Act, Travel to Solicit a Child to Commit Sex Acts, Lewd & Lascivious Battery — Attempted, Possession of less than 20 Grams of Cannabis and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia.

Detectives seized two motorcycles during the operation, the release points out. In addition, some of the information obtained during this initiative resulted in further investigations, which are ongoing, it notes.

“Operations such as this are manpower-intensive and require high-tech surveillance and monitoring systems,” the release explains. The Sheriff’s Office thanks the Orange County Sheriff’s office, Manatee County Sheriff’s Office, Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security and the Sarasota and Bradenton police departments for assistance, the release adds.

POLICE DETECTIVES SEEKING SUSPECT IN BURGLARY CASE

Detectives with the Sarasota Police Department are working to identify a suspect who burglarized a vehicle at Bird Key Park, allegedly stole several credit cards and then used one of the cards at an area Shell station, the department has announced.

On April 2 between noon and 12:30 p.m., a vehicle was reported to have been burglarized at the park, a news release says. A beach bag, a wallet and its contents were reported stolen, the release adds. The suspect allegedly used one of the stolen credit cards a short time after the vehicle burglary

occurred. He was seen on video surveillance at the Shell station located at the intersection of U.S. 301 and Fruitville Road in Sarasota, the release continues.

The suspect was a passenger in a dark blue or black, newer model sedan, possibly a Nissan or Toyota, the release points out. Anyone with information about the suspect or incidents is encouraged to call Detective Dwayne Shellhammer at 954-7014, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or going online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.



The suspect in a vehicle burglary and stolen credit card case is shown in an image from video surveillance at a Sarasota Shell station. Image courtesy Police Department

WOMAN ARRESTED FOR SHOOTING NEAR RIVERVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested the woman responsible for a shooting two weeks ago at a home across from Riverview High School, the office has announced.

Deputies were called to a house on Lords Avenue in Sarasota around 1:30 p.m. on April 16 after a neighbor reported a lengthy disturbance had escalated to shots being fired, a news release says. Responding deputies found Jeffrey Bell had been wounded in the leg, the release adds. He was transported to the hospital, where he was treated for his injury and released.

Also at the home was his wife, Lauren Bell, along with another man and a 7-year-old child, the release continues. During the investigation, detectives learned that Lauren shot Jeffrey during a domestic dispute when the child was standing nearby, the release says.

Lauren Bell told detectives she did not mean to shoot Jeffrey Bell, according to the report. The Bells have been married for five years, the report adds, though they have been a couple for 10 years.

Jeffrey had gone to pick up the child from school, the report says. When he returned home, he expected that Lauren and the other man were still inside the house. He started knocking on the door and banging on the windows to get them to open the door, the report says. However, Lauren told him to leave "because she wanted the house to herself," the report adds.



Lauren Bell/Contributed photo

Lauren then threatened to call law enforcement officers if he did not go away, the report continues.

When Lauren came to the door a second time, she was armed with the handgun, which she pointed at Jeffrey, according to the report. He told her to shoot him if that was what she planned to do, the report says. The gun went off as she lowered it, the report continues.

When detectives interviewed the other man in the house, he told them he was in the master bedroom the entire time of the incident and that he was "hanging out" with the Bells the previous night, according to the report.

A detective's "cursory review of the cellular phone provided by Jeffrey Bell revealed that he took videos, still photographs, and participated in Lauren Bell and Roger Wolf having sex and sleeping together in the morning hours of [April 16]" in the house, the report says.

Lauren Bell is charged with Aggravated Assault with a Firearm, Aggravated Battery with a Firearm, Child Neglect without Bodily Harm and Discharging a Firearm on Residential Property.

DETECTIVES SEARCHING FOR WOMAN CAUGHT ENTERING HOME

Detectives with the Sarasota Police Department are searching for a woman who was caught on camera entering a home in the 100 block of South Boulevard of the Presidents in Sarasota, the office has reported.

The woman is unknown to police or the homeowner, a news release says.

The homeowner, who is out of town, alerted the Police Department after logging into his home security system and noticing the

woman inside the residence on at least two different occasions, the release adds. At one point during the video, the woman is seen waving at the camera.

Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call Detective Dwayne Shellhammer at 954-7014, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or going online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.



*Video taken inside a Sarasota home that reportedly was entered unlawfully may be viewed on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).
Video courtesy Sarasota Police Department*

SHERIFF'S OFFICE TAKING OVER DISPATCH FOR VENICE AS OF MAY 1

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office assumed full law enforcement dispatch service for the City of Venice as of May 1, the office has announced, making its transition to a regional law dispatch service on that date.

The Emergency Operations Bureau assumed overnight dispatch service for the Venice Police Department (VPD) on Jan. 2 in preparation for this consolidation, a news release points out, and residents "did not experience any change in service." City of Venice residents should continue to dial 911 for all emergencies, but they should note the new non-emergency number to call is 941-316-1201, the release adds.

The Venice Police Department is the first law enforcement agency to consolidate

dispatch services with the Sheriff's Emergency Operations Bureau since the Sarasota Police Department did so in 1996, the release continues. Last year, Sarasota County Government offered each municipality the opportunity to save money and improve efficiency, it says. The Sheriff's Office now provides 911 call taking and dispatch services for five fire departments and three law enforcement agencies.

"Regional law dispatch service throughout Sarasota County is the same concept used for more than 17 years with the fire agencies we serve," said Sheriff Tom Knight in the release. "While the change will not be noticeable to citizens, it is designed to increase effectiveness and improve safety for law enforcement personnel and the public in general."



A sign marks the entrance to the Sarasota County Justice Center on Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota. The county's 911 dispatch services will be relocated to the new Emergency Operations Center when it is completed next year on Cattlemen Road. File photo

SHERIFF'S OFFICE SEEKING ROBBERY SUSPECT; SAFETY TIPS OFFERED


The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is investigating a robbery during which a woman's purse was stolen in the parking lot of the Publix located at 3690 Bee Ridge Road in Sarasota, the office has reported.

Around 3:40 p.m. on April 28, a 73-year-old woman was walking through the parking lot when a suspect rode by on a bicycle and snatched her purse off her shoulder, a news release says. The suspect fled toward Bee Ridge Road, dropped his bike near Porter Oncology and continued northeast on foot, it adds. The suspect was not located, but evidence — including the gray 26-inch Ross mountain bike he was riding and the victim's purse — have been recovered, the release points out.

The suspect is described as a white male in his 20s who, at the time, was wearing a tan hat, brown shirt and long pants, the release says. Anyone with information is asked to

call Crime Stoppers at 366-TIPS (8477) or go online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.

To help guard against purse snatching, women should keep these tips in mind, the release adds:

- Carry the smallest purse possible and keep it close to the body at all times.
- Take only the cash, card or identification you will need, not everything you have.
- Expensive bags can be bigger targets, so choose carefully, based on each trip.
- As a safeguard, be sure to keep a current list of credit cards, their numbers and the issuers' toll-free phone numbers at home or in your glove compartment. If you ever need to report the cards stolen, it helps to have this information written down instead of trying to remember all of it. 

Simply put, Crime Stoppers relies upon the cooperation between the police the media and the community to provide a flow of information about crime and criminals.

Call: (941) 366-TIPS (8477)

Click: SarasotaCrimeStoppers.com

Text: Text "TIP109" plus your message to CRIMES (274637)

All submitted tips are secure and anonymous

941-366-TIPS (8477)

Crime stoppers
of
Sarasota County
www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com

OPINION



COUNTY COMMISSION SHOULD USE EXCESS TOURISM TAXES FOR ASSET DEVELOPMENT INSTEAD OF PROMOTIONS

EDITORIAL

In the decades following World War II, northern manufacturers were looking for locations in the South, where the weather was more moderate, property taxes were considerably lower and average wages were a lot less than those paid to a mostly union workforce in their current locations.

Southern states reacted by establishing offices for economic development, which would work with companies contemplating new plant locations in the South.

Counties and larger cities, not content to trust their states to direct industrial prospects to their corners of the state, established their own industrial development

commissions, with staffing and budgets for industrial recruitment.

And thus began what has been disparagingly referred to as the “Great Buffalo Hunt” — scores of industrial recruiters from cities, counties and states falling all over themselves to solicit fewer and fewer manufacturing plant relocations. Rather than call off the effort when that truth became evident, all of those agencies “doubled down,” offering more and more incentives to lure dwindling industrial jobs to their areas.

In the latter days of the Great Buffalo Hunt, forward-thinking communities realized that tourism had almost as significant an impact on their local economies as industrial

OPINION

recruitment, with far less environmental impact, and should be developed in the same way. This new effort was financed in most cases by an additional sales tax on lodging.

Tourism Development Authorities (TDAs) and Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) sprang up across the country like the prairie grass on which those proverbial buffalo might munch. Almost overnight, travelers found that rooms in even tiny communities cost as much as 6 to 7 percent more with the addition of a “bed” tax.

Unlike the mantra of a popular baseball movie — “If you build it, they will come” — these TDAs and CVBs maintained that if you *promote* it, they will come.

Communities with natural tourism assets, such as beaches or mountains, tended to fare better than those that were shilling their annual Possum Festival or whatever. But even beachgoers and mountain scenery lovers desire more than one or two activities to lure them to a destination again and again.

What most managers of TDAs and CVBs never understood — and many still do not understand — is that promotion is only a small part of the equation. Much more of tourism tax revenue must be expended on upgrading

existing assets, improving infrastructure and developing new attractions.

It is in this context that we were gratified to hear Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta propose that a portion of the local room tax — specifically all revenues that exceed \$15 million — be set aside for just those regenerative purposes: improving what we have and adding new tourism assets.

But the reaction of Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County (which used to be the Sarasota County Convention and Visitors Bureau), would lead one to

believe Barbetta had instead suggested she dart back and forth across Interstate 75 in the dark.

Haley was before the County Commission to ask for almost \$800,000 in additional funds for promotion, which mostly had materialized through higher than expected tax collections. Barbetta’s contention — the correct one, we believe — was that increasing tax revenues should not just be spent on more and more promotion and advertising. At some point, we need to build on what we already have, or visitors will tire of the sameness and go somewhere else.

All the advertising dollars in the world will not lure visitors to a location that has lost its luster.

“What most managers of TDAs and CVBs never understood — and many still do not understand — is that promotion is only a small part of the equation. Much more of tourism tax revenue must be expended on upgrading existing assets, improving infrastructure and developing new attractions.”

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Haley claimed such a plan would make Sarasota unknown to the rest of the world. Only her promotion efforts were the key to bringing more and more tourists to the Suncoast, she implied.

She was aided by Commissioner Nora Patterson, who chairs the county's Tourist Development Council. Patterson and the other members of that council have long been indoctrinated by Haley with the "gospel of promotion," so Patterson's words of support sounded as if they had been uttered by Haley herself.

"I've been told Sarasota is pretty much a well-kept secret," Patterson stated, in defending Haley's request for more promotion dollars.

Really? We suspect the locals who find navigating seasonal traffic a maddening affair would beg to differ. If Sarasota is such a well-kept secret, why are all of these people coming here?

If anything, Sarasota is much better known than either Haley or Patterson would have us believe. The years-long ranking of Siesta Beach in the top five of Dr. Beach's list of best beaches in America — and its eventual claim to the No. 1 spot — did a great deal to raise awareness of our area. And promotion dollars spent by Visit Sarasota County did not influence Dr. Beach in making his assessment of our nonpareil beach. Mother Nature did that.

Yet, Haley and Visit Sarasota County crowed about the No. 1 beach designation as if it were the end of a longtime promotional campaign on their part.

After the county added the last half-cent Tourist Development Tax increment in 2011, making the room tax a full 5 percent (and that half-cent was earmarked exclusively for "promotion"), total tourism tax revenues jumped by more than 21 percent, for a total in Fiscal Year 2012 of \$13,976,000. So the \$15 million cap that Barbetta proposes is a very reasonable one.

Even at \$15 million, the established allocation for promotion would be more than \$5 million each year. The current revised budget of Visit Sarasota County is much larger — \$6,360,718 — because of other statutory allocations that are administered by the CVB.


In fairness, that cap should be adjusted upward each year by the amount of annual inflation. But tax revenue that exceeds that amount should be earmarked for tourism asset and infrastructure development.

One would think that, with the opening of Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista in 1971, Orlando had all the tourism assets for which it could possibly hope. Yet, Disney has constantly upgraded and improved the theme park over the past four decades, knowing that newer and better experiences are what keep the crowds coming back.

And the many companion theme parks that have sprung up in the area since Disney opened — Universal Studios and SeaWorld, to name just a couple — have further bur-nished the reputation of Greater Orlando as a destination of international renown.

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Sarasota County has some nice beaches. Period. Despite Ed Smith Stadium, the Ringling Museum, Myakka River State Park, Oscar Scherer State Park and Nathan Benderson Park, there are no destination attractions that compare with Siesta Beach. But there could be.

Let us hope that Barbetta's vision will not be squelched by the provincial thinking of those who subscribe wholly to the "Promote, promote, promote!" mantra. Let us hope that some of the tax dollars our visitors pay to us can help develop attractions that will bring them back for more ... along with their friends and acquaintances. 



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*.

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Sarasota Leisure

**AN EVENING OF UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS
COMMUNITY CALENDAR
SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS**

Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast

Inside

AN EVENING OF UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS



Johan Kobborg and Alina Cojocaru starred in Sir Peter Wright's Giselle for Sarasota Ballet several years ago. Contributed photo Frank Atura

KOBORG, COJOCARU AND FRIENDS WOW SARASOTA AUDIENCES

By Elinor Rogosin

A&E Writer

A big thanks to Iain Webb and the Sarasota Ballet for inviting a group of international ballet stars to wow Sarasota audiences with an evening's feast of exciting, beautiful dancing that, above all, allowed Alina Cojocaru to capture the audience's heart.

The program opened with the familiar *The Rose Adage* variation from *The Sleeping Beauty*, which challenges a ballerina in terms of grace and ability as she balances in attitude while projecting the yearning of a young girl choosing a suitor. Cojocaru was spectacularly

perfect as she collected a rose from each of the four courtiers. As each man left, she posed for a moment, arms circling above her head, until the next suitor stepped up to partner her. She is so light on her feet that when she dances, she appears to float across the stage like a fairy. But this illusion is made real by her strong technique.

This *Sleeping Beauty* role is often associated with the legendary Margot Fonteyn, with whom Cojocaru shares a liquid musicality and an easy grace; but in this evening's





performance, Cojocaru added a touch of 21st century technical dazzle to this famous 19th century variation.

Cojocaru had an opportunity to explore a less traditional role in *Les Lutins*, Johan Kobborg's charming ballet. He has set this smooth, light-hearted work as a conversation between music and dance. A lone dancer — loose-limbed Daniel Ulbricht in his best performance of the evening — challenged a violinist, Kurt Nikkanen, to an imaginary conversation/competition. There is an aura of improvisation to the quirky, quicksilver choreography. After a pause, Herman Cornejo came bounding in. The two men challenged one another with spins and jumps; but then a girl, with her back to the audience, slid into view. It was Cojocaru, who was both charming

and playful as she flirted with the two men and the violinist.

Les Lutins, one of the evening's surprises, is a delightful story ballet, and it left me with the feeling that Kobborg has an interesting future as a choreographer.

The evening's choice of ballets offered Cojocaru the opportunity to show her range of emotions as a dancer/actress, going from the innocent playfulness of *Les Lutins* to the role of the intense passionate lover in the *pas de deux* from Kenneth MacMillan's ballet *Manon*, based on the Abbe Prevost tale of a tragic love story.

From one moment to the next, Cojocaru (Manon) was elegant, expressive and ecstatic, turning each step of the choreography into



Daniel Ulbricht/Contributed photo

an emotional language as she flirted with Kobborg, urging him to stay with her.

Cojocarú is small, a slip of a girl whose waiflike appearance belies her technical strength. Her unusually expressive legs sliced through the air like a sharp-edged sword.

As Manon, she was coy, hesitant and, finally, rapturous, clinging to Kobborg, the ardent lover who returned her tender caresses at last.

In the evergreen traditional *pas de deux* from the ballet *Le Corsaire*, which is always guaranteed to thrill audiences, Daniil Simkin and Misa Kuranaga were a stunning combustible duo. He was like a sprite, joyously soaring through the air in a series of unique barrel



Erica De La O/Contributed photo




Misa Kuranaga/Contributed photo

turns and open-legged leaps, and then performing numberless pirouettes, all with an understanding of the choreography's intrinsic shading of dynamics and musicality. And Kuranaga was equally a wonderful discovery. She was precise and sparkling in her numerous pirouettes, which matched the brio of Simkin's exciting performance. As I watched these two energetic dancers graze the stage in response to the flamboyant, energetic and driving rhythms of the Adolphe Adam score, it was not only fun to observe them, but it was also easily one of the highlights of an evening filled with special moments and gorgeous dancing.

Another surprise highlight was Simkin's marvelous solo interpretation of a Jacques Brel song, *Les Bourgeois*. It was an entertaining and delightful characterization of a weary *boulevardier*, or man about town. Simkin has a way of throwing himself into the air as he leaps around the stage. However, it was his subtle, quick gestures — whether flicking a wrist, searching his pockets for cigarettes or nonchalantly shrugging a shoulder — that revealed the character's story in this short piece.

As for the evening's other ballets, the *Coppelia Pas de Deux* was gentle but uninspired, while Erica De La O and Kristopher Wojtera collaborated in *Freeflow* — a pared-down duet that nicely connected to the Bach music — for one of the interesting contemporary pieces on the program.

Of course, there had to be a grand finale, but before the entire company of nine dancers filled the stage, performing a series of pirouettes that made them appear like a gathering of turning tops or whirling dervishes, each dancer had an opportunity to shine in the *Don Quixote Divertissements*. Among the memorable moments: Cornejo, in the white costume of a prince, striding onto the stage with the familiar panache of a *premier danseur*; a fiery Kuranaga tossing off a series of *fouettes*; and Cojocarú reprising the well-known flirtatious solo with a fan from the *Don Quixote* ballet.

And as the evening came to a close, I am certain that I was not alone in feeling that a return engagement of *Johan Kobborg, Alina Cojocarú & Friends* would be a welcome and happy occasion. 

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A&E BRIEFS

Michael Royal will perform on LeBarge on May 4. Contributed photo by Carol LoRicco

JAZZ CLUB TO PRESENT JAZZ ON THE WATER CRUISE MAY 4

The Jazz Club of Sarasota will present its popular *Jazz on the Water* cruise on Sunday, May 4, from 3 to 5 p.m. aboard LeBarge, which departs from Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota, the club has announced.

“Guests will enjoy the swinging sounds of the Michael Royal Trio with Michael Royal on keyboards, Johnny Moore on drums and Michael Ross on bass,” a news release notes. Tickets are \$30 for Jazz Club members and \$35 for non-members. Snacks and beverages will be available for sale; guests are requested not to bring coolers, the release adds.

Boarding will begin at 2:30 p.m. For tickets, call 366-1552.

Pianist and composer Royal “is considered to be a pioneer in the establishment of jazz in Florida,” the release says. He “developed

his own unique idiom for the piano, merging classical influences of Ravel and Debussy with the sounds of John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk and Bill Evans,” it points out. Royal has performed at major jazz venues around the world, and with such acclaimed jazz and pop artists as Clifford Jordan, George Morrow, John La Porta, The Count Basie Orchestra, Ira Sullivan and Mark Murphy, the release adds.

“The jazz cruise has been a favorite for more than 10 years,” says Dave Walrath, president of the Jazz Club of Sarasota, in the release. “What better way to enjoy a beautiful spring day than by sailing around Sarasota Bay while enjoying the sounds of exceptional jazz?”

For more information about the Jazz Club of Sarasota, call 366-1552, or visit jazzclubsarasota.org.

EXPRESSIONS OF SPRING TO OPEN AT DABBERT GALLERY ON MAY 2

Dabbert Gallery will present *Expressions of Spring* from May 2 through May 31, with an opening reception scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, May 2, the gallery has announced.

The gallery is located at 76 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

Five Florida artists will be featured in the show, a news release says: Luke Steadman, William Jerdon, Jeff Cornell, Nancy Turner and Beatrice del Perugia.

The release describes the artists' styles as follows:



Dancer in Blue by William Jerdon



The Sisterhood by Nancy Turner

- Steadman: “His work is quiet and contemplative, enveloped in atmosphere and mood.”
 - Jerdon: His “[a]uthentic nudes and sensuous still lifes are always compelling.”
 - Cornell: His “[s]oft pastel pigments are meticulously blended to create dreamlike imagery of superb figurative realism.”
 - Turner: Her “[e]loquent women’s narratives are revealed with soft-color harmonies.”
 - Del Perugia: “Her offbeat way of seeing things makes you wonder and smile.”
- For more information, call 955-1315 or visit dabbertgallery.com.

RINGLING’S SENIOR THESIS EXHIBITIONS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The Ringling College of Art and Design will present Senior Thesis Exhibitions through early May, giving members of the community a chance to enjoy the best work of its graduating seniors, the college has announced.

Among the events will be *Freak Show* at 7 p.m. on Friday, May 2, in the Roskamp Exhibition Hall (see the accompanying map).

The following is the schedule of events:

- Fine Arts — Tuesday through Saturday, May 3; noon to 3 p.m., Two Columns Gallery, 1947 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota.
- Graphic Design — Friday, May 2, 7 to 10 p.m., Diane Roskamp Exhibition Hall in the Ulla Searing Center (Building 8 on campus map).
- Illustration — opening reception, Friday, May 2, 5 to 8 p.m., Selby Gallery, 1174 Dr. Martin Luther King Way (Building 20 on campus map). The exhibit will be in the Selby Gallery from May 2 through May 6; hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. An exhibit also will be in the Christ-Janer Gallery in the Arland and Sally Christ-Janer Center (Building 27 on the campus map), May 2 through May 8; hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- Digital Filmmaking — Friday, May 2; Sunday, May 4; Sunday, May 11. May 2: Screening Part 1, beginning at 7 p.m. May 4: Screening Part 2, beginning at 7 p.m. May 11: Graduation Screening beginning at 1 p.m. All events will be in the Academic Center Auditorium in the Academic Building, 2363 Old Bradenton Road, Sarasota (Building 34 on the campus map).



- Motion Design — Saturday, May 3, Thesis Screening from 7 to 8 p.m., Academic Center Auditorium in the Academic Building (Building 34 on the campus map); reception from 8 to 10 p.m., Diane Roskamp Exhibition Hall in the Ulla Searing Center (Building 8 on the campus map).
- Photography and Digital Imaging — Saturday, May 3, through Wednesday, May 7. Opening Reception: May 3, 6 to 9 p.m., Willis A. Smith Construction Inc. Galleries in the Academic Building (Building 34 on the campus map); and Crossley Gallery in the Whitaker Bayou Studios, 2698 Old Bradenton Road, Sarasota (Building 28 on the campus map).



A Ringling College campus map shows the location of all the exhibition facilities. Image courtesy Ringling College

KEY CHORALE SEEKING AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Key Chorale is seeking an executive director, the group has announced.

The Sarasota-based Chorale “is a 110-voice auditioned volunteer choral ensemble dedicated to performing and promoting choral music of the highest quality,” a news release says. This leadership position will be responsible year-round for overall administration, financial management and daily operations, the release adds.

The executive director will need to develop “a focused strategy consistent with the Chorale’s mission and, by advocating, prove the Chorale’s growing presence in Southwest Florida,” it notes.

For additional information visit keychorale.org and click on the “About Us” tab.



Bach selections are among those in the Key Chorale repertoire. Image from Wikimedia Commons

VENICE THEATRE TO PRODUCE THE MUSICAL *HOW I BECAME A PIRATE*

Venice Theatre’s Generations Series will present the musical *How I Became a Pirate* from May 8 through May 25, the theatre has announced. Performances will take place on Venice Theatre’s Pinkerton Stage Thursdays through Saturdays at 7 p.m. Matinées will be offered on Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for students and \$17 for adults, a news release says. They may be purchased online at venicestage.com or by calling the box office at 488-1115.

How I Became a Pirate tells the story of young Jeremy Jacob (played by Ryan Hunek), who spots a pirate ship in the distance while playing on the beach, the release explains. The boat comes ashore and Jeremy meets Capt. Braid Beard (Toni Hajroja) and his mates.

“They recruit him to help find the perfect digging spot for their treasure,” it says.

During time with his new friends, Jeremy is instructed on how to be a pirate; in turn, he shares with them what a typical kid’s day is like, the release notes.

“Janet Yates Vogt and Mark Friedman have written upbeat music, humorous lyrics and a script based on the popular children’s book of the same name,” whose author is Melinda Long, with illustrations by David Shannon, the release points out.

The cast features 12 students who are in kindergarten through 10th grade. The majority have taken classes through Venice Theatre’s Education Department, the release adds.

The theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. in Venice.



(From left) Toni Hajroja, Ryan Hunek and Ava Podewitz (as Pirate Scurvy Dog) will star in Venice Theatre's production of How I Became a Pirate. Contributed photo by Renee McVety


CONCERT SERIES TO PRESENT EXCERPTS FROM *THE MERRY WIDOW*

Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota will present excerpts from Franz Lehár's romantic operetta *The Merry Widow* on Saturday, May 10, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, May 11, at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at the Historic Asolo Theater, located at 5401 Bay Shore Road in Sarasota, the organization has announced.

Tickets, which are \$25 to \$45, may be purchased online at artistseriesconcerts.org or by calling 360-7399.

Lehár's operetta premiered in Vienna in 1905, a news release points out. It "has long charmed audiences with its light-hearted tale of suitors seeking the hand of a wealthy young widow in *fin-de-siècle* Paris," the release adds. "Set in a whirl of dazzling parties, well-heeled

ladies, dashing bachelors and ever-flowing bubbly," *The Merry Widow* follows the story of Ambassador Baron Zeta — the part will be sung by bass-baritone John Fiorito — "who is desperate to save his country from bankruptcy," the release notes. "His plan? To prevent the rich and beautiful heiress Hanna Glawari (to be sung by soprano Susana Diaz) from marrying a foreigner — thus keeping her fortune in place," the release continues.

Baritone Andrew Garland will sing the part of Danilo, the handsome playboy, while Valencienne, the ambassador's wife, will be portrayed by soprano Lindsay Russell, the release adds. The role of Count de Rosillon will be performed by tenor Gregory Schmidt. 



Andrew Garland/Contributed photo





The Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota is located at 3975 Fruitville Road. File photo

BISHOP MEEHAN TO PRESENT NEXT FREETHINKERS' BRIEFING

The next Freethinkers' Briefing will feature Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, who will share an overview of the international women priests' movement and "her journey from obedient nun to leader" in an initiative focused on "Gospel equality in inclusive grassroots communities in the United States, South America and Canada," the Freethinkers have announced.

Her topic for the free May 2 program will be *Roman Catholic Women Priests: A Spiritual Revolution or a Holy Shakeup?* It will begin at 10 a.m. and conclude at 11:30 a.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, located at 3975 Fruitville Road, a news release says.

Meehan was born in County Laois, Ireland. She and her parents, Jack and Bridie, and her

brothers, Patrick and Sean, immigrated to the United States when she was 8, the release notes. They lived in Arlington, VA.

Meehan entered the Immaculate Heart of Mary Order at the age of 18 and left 10 years later, the release adds. Subsequently, she joined the Sisters for Christian Community (SCC), an independent religious order whose focus is "on nurturing spiritual unity and community among all religions," the release says.

Meehan worked for 15 years in pastoral ministry at Ft. Myer Chapel in Arlington, VA, the release continues. Additionally, she has written 20 books, including *The Healing Power of Prayer*, *A Promise of Presence*, *Delighting in the Feminine Divine* and *Living Gospel Equality Now*.

Further, Meehan has been a television producer, the release adds. Her *Godtalk* programs have aired on Fairfax Cable, a local access channel in northern Virginia.

On July 31, 2006, Meehan was one of 12 women who were ordained Roman Catholic priests by the Roman Catholic Women Priests' Movement, the release points out. On April 19, 2009, she was ordained a bishop. She serves the [Association of Roman Catholic Women](#)

[Priests](#). Her email address is sofiabmm@aol.com.

She also serves as a co-pastor of the Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community, which meets at 4 p.m. each Saturday at St. Andrew United Church of Christ, located at 6908 Beneva Road in Sarasota.

For information about Freethinkers' Briefings, call David Ryan at 365-4027 or email at d2mryan@verizon.net.

SCHAEFER TO SPEAK ON TOPIC *ACTING IN LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY*

Frank Schaefer will speak on the theme *Acting in Love Unconditionally* during the annual spring service of the Gulfcoast Affirming Interfaith Network (GAIN), the organization has announced.

The program will begin at 7 p.m. on May 8 at the Suncoast Cathedral of the Metropolitan Community Church, located at 3276 E. Venice Ave. in Venice, a news release says.

Schaefer is a former ordained minister of the United Methodist Church, a position he held for more than 20 years, the release adds. In December 2013, Schaefer was tried by a United Methodist court for officiating at his son's same-sex marriage and was defrocked over his refusal to uphold the Book of Discipline. To uphold the book would have meant having to denounce gay marriage rights, the release explains.

He and his wife, Brigitte, have four children, the release continues. Now a United

Methodist Church layperson, speaker and activist, he continues to advocate for human rights, the release notes.

GAIN represents diverse faith communities, affirming the dignity of all, the release says. It comprises 15 churches and synagogues, "plus innumerable allied groups and supporters," the release adds.

The Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches will introduce Schaefer and serve as moderator of the May 8 program.

The program also will feature a discussion by parents about raising LGBT children, as well as music by Diversity and the GAIN ensemble, the release notes. A reception will follow the service.

Everyone is welcome, the release points out. There is no charge.

Press Releases & News Tips
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TEMPLE SINAI SENDS CARE PACKAGES TO TROOPS OVERSEAS

It started with a simple passing of a hat at a Temple board meeting and has since evolved into an integral part of Temple Sinai's Social Action Committee initiative, a Temple news release explains.

Some years ago, a Temple board member casually suggested sending little gift packages to Jewish members of the Armed Forces serving overseas. "The idea struck a chord with the Temple Sinai board members and, soon, the congregation as a whole," the release continues.

Before long, the project found a home in the Social Action Committee and it became an ongoing effort, undertaken three times a year, the release says. The packages first went to

troops in Iraq and Afghanistan for the observances of Rosh Hashanah, Hanukah and Passover.

Inside were paperback books, magazines, music CDs and movie DVDs, which Temple members had collected. Snacks of hard candy, nuts and gum were added, the release notes. Then, items appropriate to the holiday were included, such as honey for the New Year and dreidels at Hanukah.

Packages continue to be sent to soldiers serving overseas, enclosing the above items as well as handmade greeting cards and drawings saying, "Thank you for your service," the release adds. These cards are often made by



Betty Liner (left) and Nita Ettinger proudly display the certificate of appreciation presented to Temple Sinai from a squadron in a cavalry regiment for the care packages the soldiers received. Contributed photo

the religion school students at Temple Sinai and also by adults during Mitzvah Day.

“Temple Sinai has received many heartfelt thank-you notes over the years,” the release continues.

Recently, Temple members were surprised to receive a certificate of appreciation mounted on a plaque. It came from Chaos Troop 1st Squadron 112th Cavalry Regiment, recognizing Temple Sinai “for leadership and dedication to the Troop,” the release says.

A note also arrived from a soldier named Samuel: “Thank you for the generous Passover

care package. Always nice to get a reminder of home out here in Afghanistan. I am lucky to be on a large base and I will be able to attend a Passover Seder here. I appreciate your time and effort. My day was made brighter.”

The goal of the Social Action Committee of Temple Sinai is to educate and motivate the congregation and the community to participate in *Tikkun Olam*: repairing the world, the release explains. “This care package project exemplifies that goal,” it points out.

“Please call 924-1802 if you would like to contribute in any way to this effort,” the release concludes.




The Temple Sinai Social Action Committee recently sent care packages for Passover to Jewish members of the Armed Forces serving overseas: (from left) Dottie Katz, Richard Brown, Sid Rothschild, Jerry Danoff, Zvi Rogovin, Natalie Tate, Howard Katz and Mike Benesch, vice president of programming. Contributed photo

TEMPLE EMANU-EL WELCOMES NEW SISTERHOOD BOARD

Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood formally installed its new leaders at a “Sisterhood Shabbat” on Friday evening, April 25, the Temple has announced.

Welcomed to the pulpit and blessed by Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman were incoming Sisterhood President Linda Weiss and officers Joanne Maguire, Judy Thibault, Joan Zaroff, Marlies Gluck-Upton, Elaine Klein, Barbara Gerber, Rabbi Elaine Rose

Glickman, Mona Salomon and Ethel Gross, a news release says.

Two days later, on April 27, the new Sisterhood board undertook its first formal action by presenting a check for \$22,500 to Temple Emanu-El Religious School in support of the school’s educational and scholarship programs, the release adds. For more information about Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood and its slate of programs for the upcoming year, call 371-2788. 



Incoming Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood President Linda Weiss (front row, center) joins her officers (back row, from left) Joanne Maguire, Judy Thibault, Joan Zaroff, (middle row, from left) Marlies Gluck-Upton, Elaine Klein, Barbara Gerber, Rabbi Elaine Rose Glickman (front row, from left) Mona Salomon and Ethel Gross.



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

02+ MAY	Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents <i>Bubbling Brown Sugar</i> Through May 11; times vary. 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or wbttsrq.org .
02+ MAY	Florida Studio Theatre presents <i>Tom Jones</i> Through June 1; times vary. Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$19 to \$42. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org .
02+ MAY	Asolo Repertory Theatre presents <i>Hero: The Musical</i> Through June 1; times vary. Mertz Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$21 and up. Information: 351-8000 or AsoloRep.org .
02+ MAY	Florida Studio Theatre presents <i>Too Darn Hot</i> Through June 1; times vary. J.C. Court Cabaret, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$18 to \$36. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org .
04 MAY	Selby Gardens Spring Music Series: Kim Betts & the Gamble Creek Band May 4, 1 p.m. Selby Botanical Gardens, 811 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Admission: \$19 for adult non-members; members and children 11 and under admitted free; \$5 for members' guests. Information: 366-5731 or Selby.org .
09 MAY	WSLR presents Kim Lenz and the Jaguars May 9, 8 p.m. Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door. Information: 894-6469 or WSLR.org .
12+ JUNE	Players Theatre presents <i>The Dixie Swim Club</i> June 12-22, times vary. 838 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$18. Information: 365-2494 or ThePlayers.org .



READY FOR THE RACE

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.