

Martin County CURRENTS

Volume 4 Issue 1 • March 2014

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Ready or not, here it comes Pg 5



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Get the Muck Out T-shirts. Pg 17



Artist Pam Hoke talks about
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Saving Indiantown's Cracker House
may lead to much more. Pg 10



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Martin County CURRENTS

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EDITOR
BARBARA CLOWDUS
772.245.6564

editor@MartinCountyCurrents.com

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LAKE POINT VS MARTIN COUNTY

Attention shifted from Martin County Commission Chair Sarah Heard's

missing emails from her "hacked" personal computer to Commissioner Ed Fielding's personal computer at the Feb. 24 hearing before Circuit Court Judge James McCann.

"This will be to eliminate suspicion," the judge said, after he instructed John Fumero, the outside attorney representing Martin County, to have Fielding's personal email account searched by a qualified third party for any deleted emails referencing Lake Point, particularly between him and former Commissioner Maggy Hurchalla.

Lake Point attorney Ethan Loeb made his first public records request in January 2013 for all public and private emails exchanged between between county commissioners and former Commissioner Maggy Hurchalla, who had made public claims, among others, that the Lake Point mining operation had destroyed 60 acres of wetlands—a fact disputed by the Martin County Growth Management Director Nicki Van Vonno at a County Commission meeting in January 2013.

Four other emails between Fielding and Hurchalla were found by Fielding in mid-February 2014, who was described

by Fumero as "technologically unsophisticated," causing Lake Point attorney Ethan Loeb to request a third-party expert be retained to examine Fielding's computer for more emails, which by law is part of the discovery (of evidence) procedure to which all parties are entitled.

Fumero objected—first saying he could not authorize that search without Fielding's permission—which was rejected by Judge McCann, who agreed later that qualified county staff could perform the forensic examination instead of employing an outside professional.

Lake Point contends that Hurchalla's public claims, private emails and other actions, including meetings with SFWMD personnel, formed the basis for an alleged breach of contract by Martin County and the South Florida Water Management District, and thus filed a tortious interference claim against Hurchalla.

Lake Point filed the public records request for the commissioners' correspondence with Hurchalla, which would confirm the content of Hurchalla's messages to county commissioners. (They since have made additional public records requests that also include copies of text messages in reference to Lake Point.) In October 2013, nine months after the original request, Lake Point attorneys received a copy of a secret email between Hurchalla and Commissioner Ed Fielding from county staff, in which Hurchalla had given Fielding specific instructions for voiding the county's agreement with Lake Point.

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RIVERS COALITION

The storytelling qualities of Nat Reed's anecdotes, accompanied by his depth of experience, kept a standing-room-only

crowd fully engaged during the Feb. 27 meeting of the Rivers Coalition in Stuart City Hall. His message, however, got mixed reviews.

Jupiter Island resident, noted environmentalist and former assistant secretary of the US Dept. of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife, Reed minced no words when he told the gathering that Plan 6 to send water south was the wrong solution to restoring the health of the Everglades and ending the environmentally devastating discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers.

"There's no division in the thinking on what the solution needs to be," he said. "We need to move water south." But Plan 6 is expensive and impractical, according to Reed, because of the cost of purchasing the most valuable farmland in the U.S. at the center of the Everglades Agricultural Area, plus the cost of moving the infrastructure of roads, canals, electrical utilities, etc., estimated to be an additional \$2 billion. Reed also said that Plan 6 would not remove sufficient phosphorous from the water to meet federal requirements prior to entering the Everglades.

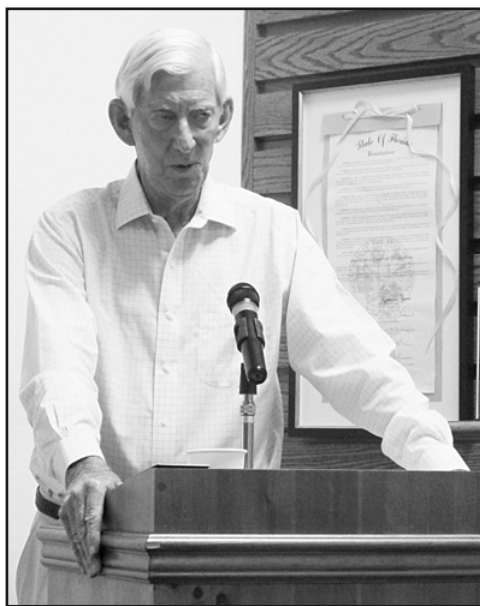
He suggested targeting the east side of the Everglades Agricultural Area instead where canals already exist, and to purchase sufficient farmland there to build a 5,000-7,000 acre reservoir that would leak water slowly enough to reduce the phosphorous to no more than 10 ppm to meet the federal requirement.

"The US Sugar purchase is a must," he advised, as is constructing the remaining five and a half miles of the Tamiami bridge to eliminate the southern roadway that currently acts like a dam, blocking the flow of water into the Everglades.

Water Conservation Area #3 thus gets "overwhelmed" with water, Reed added, resulting in wildlife that drowns, and threatening the tree islands that are the sacred grounds of the Miccosukee. "And they deserve to be protected," said Reed, who spared no criticism of the South Florida Water Management District, "controlled by land developers;" the sugar industry, "sugar's extreme profit allows 42 lobbyists to protect sugar interests;" and the Army Corps of Engineers, "Personally, I've lost any faith in the Army Corps of Engineers."

He called for the governor to tell the president of the University of Florida to begin a study by its engineering department (Water Resources Research Center) to examine—along with the engineers from the Army Corps and the South Florida Water Management District—all the proposed plans for moving Lake Okeechobee water south to determine the most viable alternative.

"I want a rational plan that I can examine and you can examine," Reed



Noted environmentalist Nat Reed addresses the Rivers Coalition, shakes up some ideas.

added, "...but you should not rush into any plan—any plan—without knowing the environmental impacts and financial costs."

He acknowledged that the federal government is unlikely to fund a plan fully, particularly since so many projects, including those currently in the Water Resources Development Act along with the Central Everglades Planning Project, are deserving projects. "There are no turkeys," he said; therefore, he gave the CEPP a 50/50 chance of getting funded.

The only choice, then, is for Floridians themselves to fund the projects required to keep polluted water out of the St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee, according to Reed.

"Taxes in Florida are ridiculously low," he added. "If everyone paid just a small tax, a tiny tax, we could do it. In Florida, you're undertaxed...We can afford almost anything. Let's go it alone."

Carl Wickstrom, publisher of Florida Sportsman, objected to Reed's analysis of Plan 6, saying that the key to successfully removing sufficient phosphorous in the Plan 6 flow way to meet federal requirements is by planting a pond apple forest.

And with 76,000 acres already state owned, the purchase of the additional 50,000 acres of optioned U.S. Sugar farmland makes Plan 6 more desirable than building such a large, expensive reservoir.

Mark Perry, executive director of Florida Oceanographic, was quick to add that "we're all on the same page." The need to move water south is indisputable; however, no plan exists now among the Everglades restoration projects for a flowway of any kind, in any place, he added.

"There is no Plan 6 on the books...We need to all decide on a plan," he said, "and then get it funded." ■

continued from PAGE 3

Fielding did not mention his correspondence with Hurchalla during the Jan. 15 County Commission meeting at which the commissioners instructed county staff to issue code enforcement violations against Lake Point for not following their development orders, and at which Commissioner Anne Scott said it was time to shut down the operation immediately.

The county maintains that Lake Point is a housing development, regardless of its state mining permits, until the county signs a revocation order for the original development, and as such, has conducted mining operations illegally, the basis of its code violations.

Lake Point attorneys point to a 2009 signed agreement between Lake Point and Martin County that would change the operation from a housing development to a rock mining and water restoration project following successful mining permit applications from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, which were granted in 2012; however, the county has not yet signed the revocation of the development order, which Lake Point requested in early 2013.

Part of the 2009 agreement is to convey ownership of the water restoration project lands to the South Florida Water Management District, and provide additional acreage to Martin County to expand the Dupuis Wildlife Conservation Area; however, Lake Point's attorneys charge that Martin County's unwillingness to sign the revocation order is impeding the property transfers.

The hearing was continued to March 11, at which time, Loeb requested a forensic examination of Maggy Hurchalla's personal computer, in addition to Fielding's. Hurchalla's attorney, Cristina Cambo, argued that Lake Point had not met established legal standards to justify "such an intrusive invasion of privacy."

To satisfy one of the standards that all means possible have been undertaken by Lake Point to obtain the records, Hurchalla, who has already spent two days giving a detailed deposition to Lake Point attorneys, will sit again for an additional 30-minute deposition regarding her Lake Point emails to commissioners and to the SFWMD.

Also remaining is Lake Point's deposition of Commission Chair Sarah Heard, who told Lake Point attorneys that she was unable to comply with their request for her personal emails because her computer had been hacked and most of her emails were missing. Her outside attorney, Scott Zappolo, told the judge that her emails were "unrecoverable."

The next hearing is set for May 29 at 9:45 a.m. at the Martin County Courthouse. ■

APOLLO SCHOOL

It took a long time, but it was worth the wait. The freshly

renovated Apollo School in Hobe Sound is now that community's crown jewel.



The distinctive windows of the Apollo School are one of the renovations of the historic building in Hobe Sound that will be celebrated with an official ribbon-cutting and community celebration at the school March 29 at 10 a.m. The public is invited to attend.

To celebrate its renovation, the Board of Directors of the Apollo School Foundation will host an official ribbon-cutting ceremony on Saturday, March 29, at 10 a.m.

"The entire community is invited," said Kathy Spurgeon, board president, who led the fund-raising and rehabilitation effort for more than 15 years. "Without the community's generous support and their contributions—along with the state grant, of course—this dream would never have been realized."

The Olympia School (now called Apollo School) was built in 1924. In 2000, the Apollo School Foundation purchased the building to rehabilitate it as a historical museum and cultural arts and educational facility.

The foundation's mission is to provide "a window on the past, a focus on the future." The school is at 9141 SE Apollo Street in Hobe Sound. ■

SALES TAX

No question that a referendum will be on the November

ballot to increase the county's sales tax, in all likelihood by at least one penny for a minimum of five years, and perhaps for as many as 10 years.

Unless the Florida legislature passes a bill this session to give counties the option to impose additional sales taxes without taxpayer approval. In that case, the sales tax will be a certainty. The legislature also is considering lifting its restrictions on how sales tax revenue may be spent to include maintenance, in addition to capital projects as is now mandated.

"If that happens," said Commissioner Doug Smith, "it certainly will aid us in funding inlet dredging."

In a short discussion at the March 4 commission meeting, all the commissioners agreed that the \$220 million backlog of infrastructure repairs demanded action by the board. Each year, the road repairs alone add an additional \$10-\$12 million to the backlog.

County staff will prepare a report for the March 18 meeting that will outline various options, but the board consensus thus far is to restrict the funds to road and bridge repairs and maintenance, as well as stormwater treatment projects. ■

ALL ABOARD FLORIDA

Like a train blowing its horn, warning people to get out of

its way, Federal East Coast Industries announced in March 2013 that All Aboard Florida's 235-mile, high-speed rail proposal between Miami and Orlando is on track to offering passenger service by January 2016.

Railroad officials announced at the same time that "scoping" meetings would take place throughout southeast Florida to gather public input with a target of beginning construction in 2015.

Within weeks of the initial announcement, All Aboard officials met with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, the City of Stuart, the Martin County Metropolitan Planning Organization and county officials, as well as others along the route, to explain that a second track will be added to FEC's 100-foot right-of-way to accommodate 16 round trips daily. Public officials and residents, however, have yet to see concrete plans.

As information began dribbling out to Martin County residents about 32 additional train trips daily, public criticism began to mount—particularly about blocking boat traffic on the St. Lucie River and increased noise and congestion within city limits—the public meetings suddenly stopped, including the most recent one scheduled by the Martin County Commission during the first week of March.

"There's no point in having a meeting to answer the public's questions about All Aboard Florida," said Martin County Commissioner John Haddox, who had requested the public forum initially, "if no one will be there who knows the answers."

All Aboard Florida, a private venture owned by Florida East Coast Industries, sent its engineers to Martin County on Feb. 28 to inspect the county's 28 crossings to determine the upgrades needed to handle the high speed trains. The upgrades do not include the additional gates and other features required to create "quiet zones" through the county's



Martin County Deputy Engineer Terry Rauth, right, accompanied representatives from FECI, All Aboard Florida, and the Federal Railroad Administration as the group inspected all the county's railroad crossings Feb. 28.

urban neighborhoods, which are considered "quality of life" choices, rather than a necessary element to meet safety requirements.

Other counties and city commissions have been exploring funding options in order to add these enhancements to crossings.

"Quiet zones are nothing but a red herring," said County Commissioner Anne Scott, who often expresses the desire during commission meetings to prohibit the project from traveling through the eastern part of the county, particularly since All Aboard Florida will not stop in Stuart and does not intend to replace the FEC railroad bridge crossing the St. Lucie River in Stuart.

Estimates of the time required to close the bridge to boat traffic in preference to train crossings range in time from 35 to 45 minutes per hour between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. when passenger trains are running. Those train trips are in addition to the 14 trips a day by freight trains, which are double the length of passenger trains and travel at less than half the speed.

"There's already a western route through Martin County," said Commissioner Ed Fielding, "and that's the CSX track through Indiantown. That's what All Aboard Florida needs to use."

It is unlikely, however, that All Aboard Florida would pay a lease to use their competitor's rail line, especially

since they also would lose proprietary advantages, according to observers.

Fielding also has proposed to FECI as a "public benefit" to counter All Aboard Florida's planned disruption of the county's quality-of-life standards to lay broadband cable as the company "digs up the ground anyway" to lay new track.

"A 288 fiber count backbone cable from Orlando to Miami would be more than just a public benefit," Fielding wrote in a letter to FECI officials, "it would be a revolution of change allowing South East Florida to leap forward into the outreaches of technology, education, medicine, commerce and of course governmental communication and services."

The City of Stuart, however, has pushed railroad officials from the beginning to have at least a few stops in Stuart, since the trains must slow anyway to cross the river's single-track railroad bridge.

City Manager Paul Nicoletti and current Mayor Troy McDonald have visited All Aboard's parent company, Florida East Coast Industries in Coral Gables, to discuss the city's concerns.

Commissioner Doug Smith added his support for a train station in Stuart, and encouraged the commission also to investigate the extension of south Florida's Tri-Rail commuter trains on FEC tracks to Stuart.

"The railroad was here first and they are sovereign," Smith said. "This is a privately funded project, so we're not going

to be able to stop it...We should be concentrating on mitigating its effects on our citizens....in whatever way we can." ■

PUBLIC COMMENT

All Aboard Florida will need to obtain a permit from the

U.S. Coast Guard for its bridge operations, which has been receiving public comment about the effect that the All Aboard project will have on Martin County marinas and boaters.

— Federal marine navigational laws prohibit bridges being closed without authorization, and with the combined freight and passenger service running on the same tracks, many Martin County boaters anticipate at least some periods of complete shutdown.

When the bridge is reopened, boat traffic from both directions will be attempting to cross under the bridge at the same time, creating a boating safety hazard, which also is a Coast Guard responsibility.

Letters may be sent to Gene Stratton, Bridge Management Specialist for the Seventh Coast Guard District in Miami, who was a panelist at a recent meeting for the Martin County Metropolitan Plan-

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David Berger, one of a dozen fine artists represented at Hobe Sound Art Gallery.

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ning Organization's Waterways Plan.

His address is: Gene Stratton, Bridge Management Specialist, Seventh Coast Guard District, Miami, FL 33131, or email: allen.e.stratton@uscg.mil.

Evelyn Smart, from the Bridge Management Office, currently is handling the bridge permitting work for the FEC line. She can be reached at (305) 415-6989 or Evelyn.Smart@uscg.mil.

Other bridge operations affected are across the New River in Ft. Lauderdale, which has the highest level of commercial boat and barge activity, the St. Lucie in Stuart, and the Loxahatchee River

bridge in Tequesta, which is already double-tracked.

Engineers from All Aboard Florida recently accompanied Tequesta Mayor Abby Brennan on board the village's Marine-85, Tequesta's Police Patrol and Advanced Life Support boat, to inspect the undercarriage of that bridge. Due to the age of the bridge mechanism that raises and lowers the bridge, freight trains traveling north to south can block all three road crossings separating approximately 95% of commercial, retail, and restaurants east of the tracks from the predominantly residential neighborhoods to the west should the bridge not reopen, according to Brennan.

Tequesta's Public Safety building, which houses both fire rescue and police, is also west of the tracks; therefore, the Tequesta Village Council is recommending that All Aboard Florida make all available bridge equipment upgrades and replacements at its own expense. The crossing may also require that a bridge tender be on site, since the bridge is operated remotely from Jacksonville, causing long delays in reopening after a train has passed.

Public input also will be sought by the Federal Railroad Administration this summer as part of its required Environmental Impact Study. Public hearings in all affected counties will be conducted during the 60-day comment period and noticed in local newspapers.

The FRA, which targets rail safety and noise abatement, will announce the contact EIS email and standard mailing addresses at the time of its comment period; however, prior to that time, public comment can be entered on the FRA Facebook page at www.facebook.com/USDOTFRA.

Click on "Message" and identify the project, All Aboard Florida, prior to making your comment, which will be reviewed and recorded by FRA staff during normal business hours, Monday through Friday.

The U.S. Dept. of Transportation utilizes a team of engineers to analyze transportation routes. The issue that has arisen from All Aboard Florida's plans

not to replace the St. Lucie River railroad bridge results in one Strategic Intermodal System (railroad) forcing a near-shutdown of a SIS connector, the Okeechobee Waterway/St. Lucie River, a relevant topic for the federal Transportation Industry Analysis team.

The proposed route of All Aboard Florida will severely limit ocean access for local, state and international commerce, as well as for recreational boaters. To contact the Transportation Industry Analysis team, email John Winkle, transportation industry analyst, at john.winkle@dot.gov.

In addition, a grassroots movement of concerned citizens has established its own web page at www.FloridaNotAllAboard.com, which includes a petition, and sample letters to be sent to elected officials. (Elected officials addresses are included at the website.) The group also maintains a Facebook page to keep citizens informed at www.facebook.com/FloridaNotAllAboard.

Since the St. Lucie River is also the Okeechobee Waterway, it has been designated a vital connector in the state's Strategic Intermodal System that is projected to play a significant role in global trade after the current widening of the Panama Canal is completed. It is the only waterway that connects the east and west coasts of Florida, providing shorter access to the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern seaboard of the U.S. for international shippers. ■

STRONG TOWNS

CITY OF STUART PRESENTS

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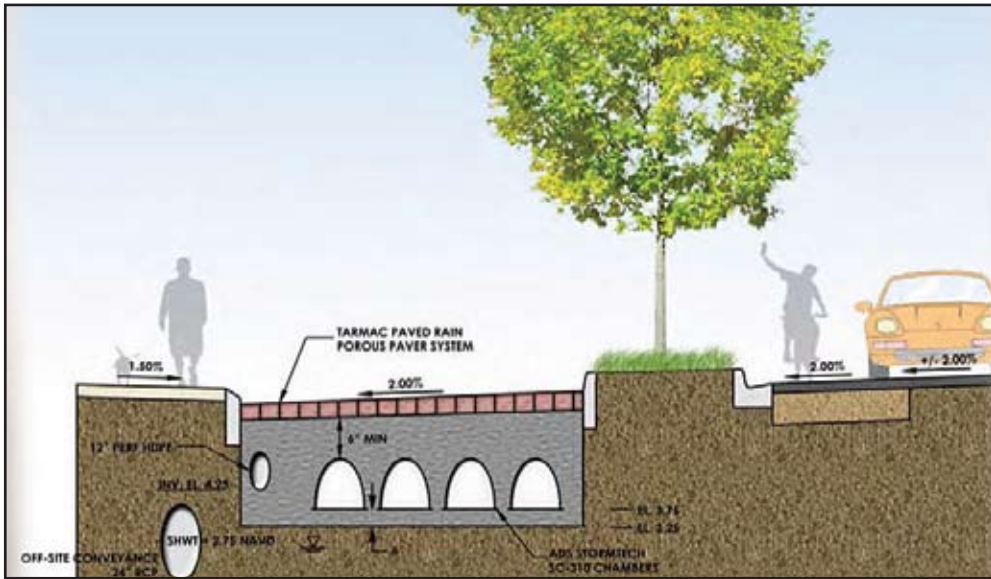


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OLD PALM CITY

Palm City heralds major change to stormwater treatment

Major changes to the Palm City Community Redevelopment Area plan for the Mapp Road Town Center may herald a significant impact for other projects throughout the county, according to Kev Freeman, director of the county Community Development Department.

"With have developed, along with the county Engineering Department, an innovative plan for treating stormwater within the roadway that cuts stormwater treatment costs significantly," Freeman said at a recent Palm City Neighborhood Advisory Committee meeting, "but what's most exciting, perhaps, is the project's potential for additional grant funding."

Treating stormwater in the roadway eliminates the need for large pipes to transport stormwater to retention ponds, which in turn require the purchase of large tracts of property for lakes, removing them from the tax rolls and also requiring maintenance. The reduced cost to address a common problem for all municipalities appeals to agencies seeking innovative projects to fund, which could have wide application, Freeman explained.

The Community Development Department already has begun making grant applications, and the technology likely will transfer to other CRAs that need to address stormwater treatment areas, such as the Bridge Road retrofit project in Hobe Sound.

The changes to the Palm City CRA project were among the topics of a Palm City Town Hall meeting March 12, hosted by the Palm City Chamber of Commerce. Panelists also addressed questions regarding the impact of the Veteran's Memorial Bridge, local schools and waterways. Panelists included John Haddox, County Commissioner; Edward Erfurt and Kevin Freeman, Community Redevelopment Agency; Eric Ferguson, Engineering, and Michael DiTerlizzi, county School Board.

The Old Palm City NAC's plan to improve pedestrian safety by slowing traffic with on-street, back-in parking, to create a

more pedestrian-friendly environment for shoppers with wide sidewalks, and to enhance the business environment had required an investment of \$1.3 million just for the stormwater treatment, more than currently is available in the NAC budget.

In addition to the high cost, many residents who are not active in the NAC complained to county commissioners about the potential loss of the only major connector road between Martin Downs Blvd. and Martin Highway.

"This plan preserves the present traffic flow," Freeman said, while the other elements of pedestrian safety and on-street parking also can be offered in what is called a Multi-modal facility that includes both fast lanes and slow areas—such as Dixie Highway in Hobe Sound—landscape improvements, the application of the innovative stormwater solution, visible improvement for the entire corridor, and a modular design flexibility, so that the road can be developed in sections as funds become available.

The next meeting of the Old Palm City NAC will be Monday, May 19, at 6 pm at the Palm City Community Center. For more information, contact the Community Development Department at www.martin-countycra.com, or call 772.288.5400. ■

COMP PLAN CHALLENGES

An administrative law judge, Suzanne Van Wyk, will hear challenges to the

recent rewrites of the Martin County Comprehensive Growth Management Plan beginning March 31.

Lake Point, however, may no longer be a party to the challenges if a preliminary agreement between Martin County and Lake Point signed March 10 dismissing charges is approved. Both sides also have agreed to pay their own attorney costs as part of the settlement.

The other parties to the suit against Martin County, Consolidated Citrus, Running W Citrus, Tesoro Groves and Midbrook 1st Realty, filed an amended complaint to address the county's subsequent changes to the rewritten amendments, since those amendments will not take effect will after the legal case is settled. ■

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Editorial: Public records should be public, period

Circuit Court Judge James McCann determined at a February hearing in the Lake Point suit against Martin County, the South Florida Water Management District and Maggy Hurchalla that the private email account of Commissioner Ed Fielding needs to be searched by a qualified third-party expert.

This is to ensure that all of Commissioner Fielding's private emails to or from Maggy Hurchalla regarding Lake Point's mining project have been recovered and turned over to Lake Point as part of their discovery (seeking evidence), to which they are entitled by law.

The judge's request came as a result of several facts: A private email between Commissioner Fielding and Hurchalla surfaced in October, eight months after Lake Point's request. Fielding had not disclosed the correspondence, which had urged Commissioner Fielding to void the county's contract with Lake Point, just prior to the January county commission meeting at which Fielding took similar action.

After the county attorney assured Lake Point in November 2013 that no more commissioner emails existed regarding Lake Point, four more emails from Fielding's private computer were turned over to Lake Point in February.

That same Hurchalla-Fielding email, which had not been recovered by Hurchalla, formed the basis of Lake Point's most recent motion to compel a forensic search of Hurchalla's computer hard drive as well. That issue still is before the court.

Adding to the public records quagmire, Commissioner Sarah Heard was unable to turn over all of her private emails regarding Lake Point, because she reported that her computer had been hacked, and the emails were unrecoverable even by Yahoo, which houses her private account, or by an independent computer company, which searched her hard drive.

Not once from the array of attorneys representing Martin County and individual commissioners has anyone argued

that these emails are not public records—even though the correspondence was conducted on private computers. That's because there's no question that they are, indeed, public records.

But had there been no public records request as a result of these lawsuits, we would not have known that these public records existed. That violates the public's trust. That should not have happened.

All of those emails should have been copied as they were sent and turned over to the county, which is charged with their care and protection.

We can just imagine the outcry if any of the previous commission majority been found to be secretly carrying on email conversations with developers about proposed projects or actions that commissioners were to take. Yelling "foul!" would have been the least of it. Those commissioners likely would have been brought up immediately on ethics charges.

Instead of being outraged that public records are not being kept, are not being protected, are not being turned over to

the county in a timely manner for safe-keeping, the back-room cronies are crying that this merely is a SLAPP suit filed to stop public participation by a citizen.

Not so, says the judge, who refused to dismiss the case on those grounds. Now he has ordered at least one forensic examination, and perhaps two more will be coming. SLAPP suit? We don't think so.

We need a policy that at least states that commissioners who conduct public business on their private computers are compelled to make copies also of those emails for the county to include in the public record. Then no commissioner ever can claim ignorance of the law.

Anything less leads to what we have now: very real suspicions that commissioners are engaging in back-room secret deals. Anything less tells residents that the transparency in government so treasured in Martin County is merely an illusion. Anything less and we will never reach Martin County's full potential—to be different than every other county around us. ■

Guest Editorial: State puts thumb on vaca rentals



Nancy Smith

*Former Editor,
The Stuart News*

In the current mood of the regulation-busting Florida Legislature, it's puzzling -- and, frankly, a little disturbing -- to see legislation that invites local officials to run all over one of the state's most robust economic engines.

Two measures, Senate Bill 356 and House Bill 307, basically eliminate a provision in a 2011 law prohibiting local governments from imposing rules and regulations that restrict short-term vacation rentals.

The bills would wipe out their protections. They would allow locals to zone these popular tourist accommodations out of existence if they wanted, literally stripping them of their property rights and opening the door to litigation.

Short-term vacation rentals offered over the Internet and listed by owners can be as much as 50 percent cheaper than hotels. They are growing in popularity. But the numbers of cities trying to curb the trend are growing, too.

SB 356 and HB 307 come just as an economic study of the vacation rental industry has been released. The study concludes that vacation rentals played a critical role in the state's economic recovery, sheltering more than 17 million tourists during 2013.

Consider that in 2013 they generated a total annual economic impact of \$31.1 billion.

Whatever are we doing messing with a number like that?

Have a look at the report, "Economic

Impact: Florida's Vacation Rental Industry," prepared for the Florida Vacation Rental Managers Association by a group called Thinkspot.

"The vacation rental industry is a contributor to Florida's economy whose impact until now has been largely overlooked," said Dale Brill, founder of Thinkspot, the primary investigator conducting the study.

"Like any business sector competing in a global market, changes to the regulatory environment can have devastating results," he said. "Regulatory burdens intentionally created by state or local governments negatively impact the full spectrum of job creators who also generate more than one out of every five total taxable sales dollars collected in the Sunshine State."

The Florida League of Cities supports the bill, and has said, "Cities mentioned that too little oversight could expose guests to dangerous situations, create unfair competition in the tourism industry, and rob the state and local governments of tax dollars."

That statement is code for "we want to decide if they stay or go, they hurt our hotel business because they're cheaper, and we can't tax them to the hilt like we do businesses."

Short-term rental properties generally are larger single-family homes popular for family reunions, for people who don't like structured vacations in hotels or motels and who like to be slightly outside the hustle and bustle of Tourist Attraction Central.

The study integrated expenditure data compiled from more than 11,000 individual rental units in the state with 2012 visitor spending estimates recently published by Visit Florida, the state's official tourism marketing corporation.

Here's a breakdown of the impact of the vacation rental industry, as shown in the study:

-- Florida's vacation rental industry directly or indirectly supports a total of 322,032 jobs in Florida annually.

-- The total labor income generated by those 322,032 jobs is approximately \$12.64 billion per year.

-- The total estimated spending by visitors staying in vacation rental units is \$13.43 billion.

-- Total owner-management spending across all licensed rental units in Florida is \$3.3 billion.

-- For owner/managers, "maintenance on existing units" and "services to units" reflect the two largest categories of owner/management spending with \$6,465 and \$5,516 average annual expenditures, respectively.

It's idiocy for lawmakers to ignore the central role the vacation rental industry plays in the Florida economy and instead work to kill the golden goose. Senate Bill 356 is sponsored by John Thrasher, R-St. Augustine; House Bill 307 by Travis Hutson, R-Elkton, and Daphne Campbell, D-Miami.

"It's hard to imagine why any lawmaker would support a bill that would harm such a vital economic engine," said Paul Hayes, president of the Florida Vacation Rental Managers Association. "Vacation rentals provide meaningful work for a variety of other industries, including fishing charters, cleaning and maintenance crews, and jobs at local entertainment and dining establishments around the state. It's mind-boggling that lawmakers would turn their backs on so many hard-working Floridians."

Tim Doyle, spokesman for the Short-term Rental Advocacy Center, which works with stakeholders and policy-

makers to create fair and reasonable short-term rental regulations, told Florida Watchdog regulations on the industry aren't good for the economy.

Doyle said he wants "fair and reasonable, simple registration systems." He said that if the legislation is approved, local municipalities will impose onerous rules and exorbitant fees.

Short-term rentals, by driving down the cost of visiting a destination and increasing the supply of accommodations, can boost tourism and contribute millions to the local economy. In Orange County, room-tax collections soared to \$15.2 million in July. Okaloosa County got a similar boost and used the windfall to fund tourism and restore its beaches, Doyle said.

Hopefully, Visit Florida will be in every pertinent committee meeting waving the economic impact study and flying the flag for Florida tourism. This legislation is an affront to private property rights and a painful blow to a strengthening state economy. ■

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Never easy to say good-bye to good friends



Barbara Clowdus

Unfiltered

Starting about the same age as I am now, my father would lament the loss of old friends even more than his loss of hearing and teeth, or the growing limitations imposed on him by advancing arthritis. "The worst part of getting old is seeing your friends die," he used to tell me, "because they are irreplaceable by anything else, even a good woman."

He graduated from medical school at age 20, too young to be licensed as a medical practitioner, he worked as an orderly in a Missouri hospital, where he met and married his second wife, my mother. He also had been employed by a chemical company developing a mosquito repellent. The company sent him to Key Largo as a human guinea pig, but in addition to mosquitoes, he was bitten by the allure of the Florida Keys. He promised himself he would one day return to live.

He did, after building a boat, abandoning my mother and their son for a

year, to float down the Mississippi River, then across the Gulf of Mexico and down Florida's Intracoastal Waterway to Tavernier, where he became a charter boat fisherman.

He met two fishermen who became my father's lifelong friends, who helped convince my mother to forgive my father and follow him first to Tavernier, then to Homestead.

My father sold his boat, and took a job running a bull-dozer for a local farmer, who later financed his Florida license and his doctor's office in the second story of the First Federal Bank building on Krome Avenue. They continued their friendship for more than four decades.

One of his first patients also was a local farmer who had been Homestead High School's valedictorian, giving his valedictory speech in spite of an unrepaired cleft palate. My father arranged for a Miami surgeon to repair Anton's face, creating a bond between the two men that grew exponentially with the passing years.

The contrasts were stark: this tall, awkward farmer with dust and dirt perpetually under his fingernails, who ate dinner with us nearly every evening, and my father, handsome and dashing as Errol Flynn, their different worlds

bridged by the force of two, insatiably inquisitive minds and a deeply abiding respect for the other.

After sharing his life with these same friends for decades, revolving in and out of each other's orbits like spinning tops, their successive passings left my father adrift. When Anton was the last to go, I knew my father would soon follow.

My own life has few of that kind of deeply bonded friendships, at least, not as many as my father had, but whenever I believe I may lose one, I think of him, and I know how deeply he regretted not telling them what their friendships had meant.

This month, I will attend a 50th high school reunion, and I learned that one of my lifelong friends from grade school also will attend, even though he is suffering from terminal cancer. He will be at the Florida reunion simply to say good-bye to those who had once made an impact on his life.

He and I bonded at my mother's funeral before we started public school, when he stood in the doorway of his father's mortuary staring at me. Our eyes locked, and immediately I felt less alone, less confused because he, too, was surrounded by these strangely buzzing adults who towered over us to hover at my mother's casket.

This young stranger walked over to me and wordlessly took hold of my hand as I stood in front of my beautiful, lifeless mother.

When I started first grade at Neva King Cooper Elementary School, frightened again at the overwhelming sea of strangers, there was my friend, sitting calmly in my classroom, almost as if he'd been expecting me. He stood, took me by the hand to lead me to the desk next to him.

Year after year, we shared successive classrooms, sitting next to each other, because my last name started with an A and his started with a B. We drifted apart in high school, where we no longer shared any classes, and we lost track of the other, only to reconnect periodically, to talk for an hour or so, laugh hard, then spin away from each other again.

I was unsure why after so many years, I had felt so compelled to attend this reunion. Then I heard that he would be there. Our orbits will once again intersect briefly. I shall have the chance to do what my father so longed for: to tell a dear friend what he had meant to me so long ago, and the comfort he had given to me, but this time, I will be the one to reach out for his hand. ■

Mister Cool and the snakebite



Gordon Barlow

Outside, Looking In

Our son and his girls returned to their home last week, so Linda and I can get back to killing cockroaches and centipedes. Oh, and snakes. A baby snake somehow got inside the house, and Linda demolished it with a machete before it could reach a hiding place.

Ross and his daughters strongly disapprove of killing animals without just cause – including all insects besides mosquitoes. Flies, roaches, centipedes and lizards all have to be caught and released outside. The ten-year-old trapped a cockroach under a tumbler, and I had to find a thin-yet-sturdy sheet of cardboard to slide underneath so the beast could be carried out to safety.

Linda and I have never felt comfortable squashing geckos and other lizards, I have to say – even those who live in the house. We tolerate their nesting-places in the secluded spots where they

lay their eggs, although our principles slip a little when their pellets of poop become too intrusive. Poop in the cutlery drawer, and on our pillows? Way too intrusive!

Iguanas are lizards, technically, but they grow to six or seven feet long including the tails, and they poop more like cows. The stench is more like cows' poop, too – embarrassing when they drop their bundles beside our underground septic-tank just outside the bathrooms. We have to explain to visitors that our tank is not overflowing, and that we are having the problem seen to. In fact it is our next-door neighbour who sees to it, in order to protect the ripening mangoes on her mango-tree.

She hires an experienced iguana-catcher, who sends his wife up all the nearby tall trees with a noose at the end of a rickety pole. She manoeuvres the noose over their heads, and he collects them on the ground and duct-tapes their mouth and legs before they can gather their wits. The wife is from Honduras, and Honduraneans love eating iguana meat.

Traditional Caymanians eat mud-crabs and turtles, and also agoutis, which are the rabbits of the region. Not

snakes, though, which is surprising. After all, we are regularly assured by our authorities that all Cayman's snakes are non-venomous, so (implicitly) safe to eat. I can vouch for the non-venomosity, although my one experience probably doesn't constitute a credible statistical sample.

Here's what happened. Two summers ago I was walking around the house checking the security of our outside back windows, filling in time until our Saturday evening flight to Norway. I caught my foot in the tendril of a weed, and tried vigorously to shake myself free. In irritation, I looked down to find that the tendril was a middling-sized snake – maybe three feet long. Struggling to get out from under, it nipped me (gently, be it said) above the ankle.

Now, then...! My early childhood was full of the fear of snakes, in the Queensland bush where all snakes are poisonous. Linda tells people I went white with fright, but as I recall the event, I was Mister Cool from start to finish. A nurse at the Hospital reminded me that Cayman snakes were indeed non-venomous, and if I did come by she would just give me a tetanus shot and

an aspirin. So I sat down and reviewed my options.

We had to check in at the airport in two hours, and the wait at the hospital would be at least two hours. Either the snake was local and non-poisonous or it was an illegal immigrant and poisonous as likely as not. I decided to wait for a clear sign of danger, before panicking. Linda dabbed some Dettol on the tiny punctures while I sat and sipped a cup of tea, on the alert for a sign. Pain or swelling would mean a trip to the Emergency Room and maybe a night or two in hospital; no pain would mean no problem. And that's how it was.

A week later, in Ross's forest-cabin, a nasty boil appeared on the side of my shin, for the first time in my life. But it went away again, and probably had nothing to do with the snakebite anyway. ■

Gordon Barlow, an independent political commentator and writer, was born and educated in Australia. He has lived in several countries throughout his career, and visited more than 80. He currently lives and writes in the Cayman Islands, and occasionally gives an objective "outsider's" look at America and its policies.

HERITAGE WORKSHOP

SPARKS NEW IDEAS, REINFORCES OLD ONES

Indiantown's community activism is top-notch: Its Neighborhood Advisory Committee, which historically scheduled meetings two or three times more often than any other Community Redevelopment Area in Martin County, never once failed to produce a quorum over the past 10 years.

Its monthly Chamber of Commerce meetings are well attended, even though they begin at 7:45 a.m. with members coming from throughout the county, and their volunteer-staffed rodeo draws thousands to the county's largest rural community.

And the town points with pride to a successful relationship with area businesses that have led to a new building for the YMCA, as well as responding to activists' bootstrap approach to creating a new medical center in Indiantown.

Therefore, few locals were surprised when more than three dozen people arrived at a community meeting Feb. 15 to talk about commemorating the town's history; however, Community Development Department Director Kev Freeman acknowledged his surprise.

"I must admit, I am delighted to see so many people attending this workshop," Freeman said. "I wasn't expecting this breadth and the scope of expertise and experience that are in this room."

The workshop, designed to develop a community-wide plan to create a center for living history in Indiantown, also reinforced Indiantown's NOW vision planning completed more than a decade



Volunteers Elisa Ackerly and Sandy Newville, who helped organize the Indiantown heritage workshop, stand in front a board filled with ideas, goals and dreams for Indiantown.

ago, forming the basis of the Indiantown CRA goals.

"We've already done all this," said Indiantown NAC Chair Art Matson, during the "visioning" process, led by a professional facilitator who steered the group toward identifying the history project's guiding principals, programming, physical framework, marketing, and or-

ganizational goals using many of the same methods of the earlier visioning process used for the Indiantown CRA.

"Indiantown has worked 10 years to get this plan for this community," Freeman said, acknowledging that many of the objectives just identified were nearly exactly the same as those identified by the CRA a decade ago.

The difference is that the Heritage Center group focused on preserving and creating a living history of Indiantown, identifying the need for a community friendly location with interconnectivity to neighborhoods and historic sites and buildings that would foster both local participation and attract visitors.

The CRA's plan, implemented through the NAC, focused on preserving Indiantown's character as it also fostered economic revitalization, addressing the need for improved, safer transportation systems—pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular—that would move local traffic off Warfield Blvd (Route 707), attract residents and foster business growth.

"The Indiantown NAC is Indiantown Heritage, which is Indiantown," Freeman added. "The glue that holds all this together is the fact

that you have three Strategic Intermodal Systems (Route 707, the CSX railroad, and the Okeechobee Waterway with the Indiantown marina) all converging in one place....there may be only one place in the state where that happens, and that's in Indiantown."

Freeman said he "got goosebumps" listening to the various visioning ideas that came from Indiantown pioneers, the school system, the library, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, Indiantown NAC members, churches, environmental groups, tourist attractions and civic clubs, all interested in forming an Indiantown historical society. Many of those ideas included tapping into areas outside of the traditional Indiantown boundaries, including Okeechobee.

"The reason behind my excitement is a \$5 million TIGER grant that the Community Development Department applied for two years ago, and it was nearly awarded to Indiantown," Freeman added. "We came in second."

The federal Dept. of Transportation TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grants seek opportunities to invest in road, rail, transit and port projects that promise to

THE CRACKER HOUSE PLANTED A SEED TO PRESERVE HISTORY

The Jan. 8 meeting of the Indiantown Neighborhood Advisory meeting featured Brian Powers, an Indiantown native, businessman and community activist, who spoke to the group about the need to preserve a piece of Indiantown history, the Cracker House, which currently sits vacant on land owned by the King Ranch in Indiantown.

He was seeking the NAC's support of a fledgling historical society for Indiantown, and got the NAC's unanimous vote in support of the new initiative.

"As you know, our priority for many years had to be 707 (Route 707 bridge across the Okeechobee waterway)," he said. "Now that 707's done, we can move on to other things that deserve our attention."

Convinced that the Indiantown Cracker house—the name given to homesteads of Florida ranchers who

cracked their whips to herd cattle—is one of the oldest structures in the county, Powers said he'd grown increasingly concerned about its deteriorating condition.

He and others in the community had decided to bring the community together for a workshop in February to share ideas. Among those expressing a keen interest in preserving Indiantown's unique heritage was Elisa Ackerly, who grew up in western Palm City, then moved to Indiantown in the '80s, where her children were born.

"I too have watched the places I loved fall to the hand of father time," said Ackerly. "We, even as a young couple, looked into purchasing the old post office, but it was too much for us at the time to undertake."

Another voice of support came from Sandy Newville, who had been introduced to Indiantown for the first time in 2010, when she worked on a grant project for Indiantown children. Two years later, she helped to secure and direct a Journey Stories grant that brought a Smithsonian Institution installation to the Elisabeth Lahti Library in Indiantown.

"During Journey Stories, commu-



nity leaders came together who had never really talked to each other before," she said. "These leaders are now joined together in starting an Indiantown Historical Society. My full attention is now given to this effort."

She also attended meetings of the Martin County Historical Preservation Board in Stuart last year, who gave their support to the project, but had no funds to contribute; however, the In-

diantown Community Redevelopment Area's previous vision document had established a priority for heritage preservation and may be a vehicle for securing grants.

"I, like many, thought about it (heritage preservation) but never really did anything with it," said Powers, who served on both the Indiantown NAC and the Community Redevelopment Agency representing Indiantown, before it was taken over by the county commission.

"Things like making sure we got a new bridge before the old one collapsed always took up our limited resources," he added. "Meanwhile, special places like the Cracker house begin to crack and crumble. It's a helpless feeling."

"Reinforcements" is what Powers calls the volunteer efforts of Ackerly and Newville, which resulted in a highly successful community workshop in mid-February.

"I have lived in Indiantown my whole life," Powers added, "and if ever there was a town wanting to tell its story, it's this one. Like so many things in life, if you aren't actively working to preserve them, then things decay." ■



A workshop for the Indiantown community started with a nearly blank idea board that residents filled before the day ended.

achieve critical national objectives that impact a region or a metropolitan area in areas of safety, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, livability and environmental sustainability. DOT officials also evaluate projects on their expected contributions to economic recovery, ability to facilitate innovation and form new partnerships, particularly within Enterprise Zones, as is Indiantown.

In determining what differentiated the winning grant application from Indiantown's, Freeman was told by DOT officials that Indiantown "didn't have the partnerships in place that add value" to the grant application, and which will bring the Indiantown CRA's ideas to life.

"This room is full of partners," he said.

The visioning plan that evolved during the morning sounded similar in many respects to Barberville's Pioneer Settlement in Volusia County, estab-

lished more than three decades ago, which has now grown to include 10 historic buildings on site, vast numbers of collections and artifacts, but also ongoing workshops, tours, festivals, trails and classes, including a state-certified public school teacher on the premises to teach classes based on a Florida-approved curriculum.

The TIGER grant application was based on the NAC plan to promote interconnectivity among Indiantown neighborhoods by linking neighborhoods to neighborhoods, building sidewalks, and adding bike and hiking trails, which also would have moved local traffic off the main intermodal system.

Now, there's an additional element that will make any grant application for adding roads to improve a neighborhood's design even more attractive—an innovative approach to cost-efficient, yet effective stormwater treatment.

The Community Development Department, in conjunction with the county Engineering and Utilities departments, has developed a solution that nearly halves the cost of stormwater treatment projects by keeping and treating stormwater runoff within the roadbed, instead of by installing large pipes and acquiring large tracts of land to build stormwater treatment ponds.

"We're going to resurrect that TIGER grant," Freeman said, "but we're not stopping there. Indiantown has great potential, all the necessary elements are in place....This program (in Indiantown) will get on the desk of a lot of grant agencies." ■

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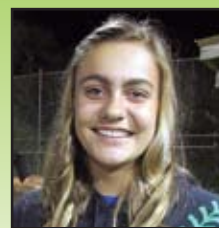
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Hobe Sound



Ashley Gamache
Catcher
Palm City



Alex Batton
Shortstop
Jensen Beach

In August 2012, when pitcher and third baseman Barbara Cook of Tequesta,

then only 12 years old, walked into the Atlanta Braves' stadium in Orlando to play in the USSSA World Series of girls fastpitch softball, she knew it was a special moment.

"The stadium was so big," she said her eyes widening to match the scope of her memory, "and there we were, our whole team, standing right in the middle of the Atlanta Braves stadium. The Braves! I just started bouncing up and down, I was so happy."

She bounced up and down on her toes again as she talked about her World Series experience two years ago during a recent practice at the Lance Corporal Justin Wilson Park softball field in Palm City.

After graduating to the 14-U Cruisers travel team of the Martin County Girls Fastpitch Softball League, Cook and her

teammates earned the right to play in the World Series again in 2013, but they were unable to raise enough money—in spite of all the car washes and bake sales.

This season, though, they're determined to make the World Series trip again in July—a trip that players said gave them more than they had expected, according to Kalli Kossick, a shortstop and second baseman from Stuart.

"We learned that as a team, we can work harder and come together when it's something big like the World Series," she said. "We learned that we're all in it together."

Playing in the "awesome" Atlanta Braves stadium with its air-conditioned dugouts, "kind of made us want to play harder," added this straight-A student from Anderson Middle School, who has her eye on a career in the medical field after college. College. That's the word that creeps into parents' sleepless nights and coaches' pep talks, followed by another word: scholarships.

"That's important to parents," says Travel Teams Director and Coach Chris LaBella, "and there are opportunities,

especially at our 'exposure' tournaments, where college coaches come to recruit players."

Although only a limited number of college softball scholarships are available from large universities, many private colleges also offer scholarships. Cruisers won scholarships last year to Eastern Florida State College in Brevard County, Palm Beach Atlantic College, and Agnes Scott College, a woman's college in Decatur, Ga.

It's the major impetus behind creating travel teams that require a higher level of play and a greater commitment from families, so players can test their skills against other teams from Key West to Orlando. At the World Series, they play teams from throughout the U.S.

"But it's not all about winning, or about chasing trophies," LaBella adds. "It's also about learning how to be part of a team, how to be competitive, and what I see most probably is the self-confidence that a girl develops, especially when she's bonded with the other players on her team."

LaBella considers "bonding" to be an



Coach Chris LaBella with a recent gift from a parent, a portable scoreboard. "Our parents and our coaches form the heart of this league," he says. "None of it would be possible without them."

important element of how he teaches softball playing skills, which he says he's learned over the past 11 years as a coach, five of which with the still-new league he formed five years ago with the help of John Pierson of Stuart Toyota.

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Kalli Kossick
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Stuart

Area businesses are chipping in to help send the girls of the 14-U Cruisers travel team of

the Martin County Fastpitch Softball League to the World Series this summer.

"They played in the World Series two years ago and qualified again last summer," said their coach, Chris LaBella, who helped organize Martin County's all-girl league, "but the cost was just too great for parents, and we just couldn't hold enough car washes to get it done!"

This year, the team is taking a new approach with the help of *Martin County Currents*. For each \$250 donation toward one MCFPS League player's World Series fees, a business receives a free 1/4 page, full-color advertisement in *Currents*. With one donation, a business becomes a Bronze sponsor.

For three \$250 donations, the business becomes a Silver sponsor, and gets three, free *Currents* advertisements and its logo on the team banner.

For five \$250 donations, the business becomes a Gold sponsor, receiving a team plaque, its company logo on the team banner displayed during tournaments leading up to and during the World Series, and five free advertisements in *Currents*.

All sponsorship levels will receive emails and photos regarding their players' progress on the road to the World Series.

"We want to thank these businesses for sharing the faith our girls have in themselves to be able to reach their dreams," LaBella added. One hundred percent of the donations go to MCFPS.

Individuals or businesses may participate by emailing: Cheryl Kossick, kosscrew@yahoo.com, or contacting any member of the Cruisers team.



MCGFP board member and team mother, Cheryl Kossick. "I look forward to the breaks (between seasons), but not for long. Soon I start getting antsy about when we're going to start playing softball."

out John Pierson," says LaBella, who gives credit to Little League for his initial training. He left the program to form the Martin County Fastpitch Softball League.

"Little League was a mix of girls and boys," LaBella explained, "but the girls always were secondary to the boys.

Now they've got their own teams and their own fields. Here, girls come first. Just like the movie, they really do have a league of their own."

He learned the importance of gender identity from his three daughters. The two eldest, Kate and Kristen, played softball in high school and college after Little League. "I learned how NOT to coach girls from coaching them," he says, with a grin. His youngest, Lori, is a Cruiser, which now has travel teams in the 10-U, 12-U, 14-U and 18-U age brackets, all of whom come from the recreational side of the Martin County Fast Pitch Softball League that feeds players into the travel teams and all three Martin County high schools.

Rosa Brancalone, board president, estimates more than 300 girls currently play in the league, which keeps registration open year round.

"Families will move here, then move away," Brancalone said, "so we never close registration. If a girl comes to us and wants to play softball, we put her on a team. It was a board decision to be open to all girls."

Currently on the Cruisers 14-U travel team, two girls come from Okeechobee, one from Vero Beach, one from Tequesta, and most recently, one from Jupiter may join, although the practices are in Palm City with home tournaments at Halpatiokee Park.

"I'd really like to have an 8-U travel team," LaBella added, who already coaches teams in four age groups, with seasons that begin each fall, spring and summer. The travel teams play tournaments that can last 14-16 hours over two days, earning World Series qualifying points along the way.

"What I'd really like to see," LaBella said, a tad wistfully, "is to take all the Cruisers to the World Series, all four...maybe five...teams, all at the same time."

That likely would be just as impressive to the 30,000 or so fans sitting in the stadium stands as to the Cruisers standing on the field—except Barbara Cook. She'll be the one bouncing up and down. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

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Martin County's S.P.A.M. Robotics Team at Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

S.P.A.M. ROBOTICS

With the United States in 28th place in science and math worldwide, a group

of scientists and engineers decided two decades ago to combine the appeal of a sports competition with science and technology to reach teenagers. Their effort is beginning to show real results.

Martin County teens won the National Championship two years ago, the "World Series" of robotics, beating out the favorite—the NASA robotics team—and have won a national runner-up and two regional championships in its 13-year history. They're all preparing now for the next round of competition, leaving behind the accolades that followed

their nationally televised appearance in the Macy's parade on Thanksgiving, marching alongside their S.P.A.M. robot.

It took more than 60 kids to build a robot capable of shooting — and making — baskets in basketball and balancing itself on a seesaw. "Krumm" was able to do both, according to S.P.A.M. team leader and mentor Rich Brooks, who accompanied the team to its national competition, but on its all-expenses-paid trip to New York City, as well.

"These students are our future engineers and techies," says Jill Marasa, of the Business Development Board, which has attempted to integrate the S.P.A.M. Robotics program with the area's local businesses. "For years, this program was under the radar a little with athletics generally in the spotlight; however, over the years technology, robotics and engineering has really become prominent in our schools and in student interest."

Many parents cover the costs of participation—estimated to be more than \$1,000 an event, with a total for the team of around \$70,000 per event—with an eye on their son or daughter earning part of the \$19 million scholarships now awarded annually by F.I.R.S.T. (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), the non-profit that created the program, sponsoring its regional and national robotics championships.

"S.P.A.M. has a great, small group of parents that keep this program moving," Marasa adds, "and they try to have scholarships so that every child can participate who wishes to do so."

Their competitions are conducted under strict rules, limited resources, and time limits, with teams of 25 students or more who are challenged to raise funds, design a team "brand," hone teamwork skills, and build and program robots to perform prescribed tasks against a field of competitors—as close to "real-world engineering" as a student can get. They also attracts CEOs from Boeing, Google, and other high-profile companies watching for signs of that early talent, as if they were scouting for an athletic team.

The SPAM acronym combined those who were involved initially: South Fork High School students, Pratt-Whitney and the Martin County education system. Now the team, which comprises students from every high school and the Clark Advanced Learning Center, and more than a dozen businesses has adopted the name SPAM (Student Programmers, Animators and Machinists).

"We began a Challenge Grant last year, introducing local business leaders to the students and the students to the leaders," Marasa adds. "We had a robotics showcase at Martin County High School for the kick off to raise awareness and funds for the program. Our efforts raised approximately \$7,500 but it also planted the seed for the integration."

This year, the BDB did not have the \$1,000 to kick off a challenge grant, but they assisted with the kick-off breakfast at the Clark Advanced Learning Center in January, and they have continued to promote the program in other ways in order to encourage business sponsorships.

"We stay in touch with the group to maintain our commitment and partnership," Marasa says, "and keep our efforts moving forward."

The high school students also conducted a Legos competition for grade school youngsters in order to plant that spark for engineering and math, earning some community service hours in the process.

The team also has been busy preparing their next robot for the "Aerial Assist" challenge, a competition that begins this month. They are also busy seeking sponsors to help cover expenses.

There is no minimum or maximum amount of money to become a sponsor, according to Marasa, and any size donation will help the team continue with its work.

Visit their website at www.spamrobotics.com for more information, or contact Susan O'Rourke at seorourke@comcast.net. ■

SOUTH FORK HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL

VETERANS APPRECIATION DAY

APRIL 1, 2014

All military veterans are invited to come enjoy the South Fork baseball team take on their crosstown rivals, Martin County H.S. on April 1, 2014.

All veterans will receive priority parking, free game admission and a free drink and pulled pork meal. A special pregame ceremony to honor all veterans will begin at 6:30 pm, followed immediately by a great game of baseball.

South Fork and Martin County JV teams will play at 4:00. We invite all to come out early to see our areas future stars.

Call or email to reserve your parking, admission, and meal, as well as ensure you are honored during our pregame ceremony. Join us and plan on watching some exceptional young men play the game that you made possible.

Bonus Game:
S.F. Lady Bulldogs Vs. Centennial H.S.
Starts At 6:00

SOUTH FORK BULLDOGS vs. **MARTIN COUNTY TIGERS**

APRIL 1, 2014 SCHEDULE

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MILITARY CEREMONY 6:30

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Tammy Simoneau, retiring after eight years as President and CEO of the Economic Council of Martin County, was honored during the group's annual meeting in February. Photos by Hobie Hiler.



Jimbo Fisher, head coach of the Florida State Seminoles and keynote speaker at the Economic Council's annual meeting, addressed the group of business leaders about team building.

ECONOMIC COUNCIL

The Economic Council of Martin County hosted its annual meeting

and a retirement party Feb. 26 at The Floridian in Palm City for Tammy Simoneau, former CEO and president of the privately funded economic development group, that guests will long remember.

John James "Jimbo" Fisher, the Florida State University Seminoles' head coach, gave the keynote address, which mirrored the central theme of Florida's Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam's remarks—developing leadership in business and in the community.

Speaking to more than 170 businessmen and women at the sold-out event, Putnam recalled a Time Magazine article five years ago describing the end of Florida "as we know it," yet today the state has a \$1 billion surplus, which will allow water issues and other priorities to be addressed.

"Florida is on the move today because of the businessmen and women in this crowd," Putnam said.

Fisher, the head coach of the BCS National Championship team, said that accountability and dependability are the two most important skills a football should learn, and he likened his role of creating a championship culture to the challenges business people have every day.

"You have to create a culture, atmosphere and environment that creates success," he said, and he tells his players: "Be who you are, be yourself, people don't follow people who are imitating someone else."

Simoneau's leadership contributions also were heralded after serving more than eight years at the Economic Council helm.

"I can truly say I've seldom worked with anybody with the kind of passion and heartfelt authenticity that you brought to really caring about Martin County and the future," said Indian River State College President Edwin Massey as part of a videotaped tribute to Simoneau.

The annual meeting also provides the opportunity to install new officers and directors, including: Edward Weinberg, chairman, Joseph Capra, vice chair, Tom Hurley, treasurer, Dan Carmody, secretary, Tom McNicholas, past chairman, as well as Robert Raynes Jr., Alex Beringer and Dan Morris as executive committee at-large members.

Debra Duvall, Jeff Leslie, Mark Libratore, Stephen Page, Ryan Strom, Michelle Tierney, Bill West, Sara Wingfield and Peter Kemp are 2014 board members.

Founded in 1985, the Economic Council of Martin County is a membership organization comprising community and business leaders dedicated to building a quality community that provides a healthy economy and improves its quality of life. For more information, visit www.mceconomy.org. ■

GREAT AMERICAN CLEANUP

For 92 days each spring, Keep Martin Beautiful, along with Keep America

Beautiful affiliates across the country, will change the face of their communities by coordinating the Great American Cleanup. Local businesses are an integral part of the effort, as neighborhood groups, civic clubs, schools, and individuals organize their own cleanup activity or sign up for a site already identified by KMB. All cleanup projects that take place between March and May will count as part of the GAC, and volunteer groups will be provided with supplies including trash bags, water and T-shirts (while supplies last). Already scheduled are cleanups in Rio Nature Park in Jensen Beach on March 29; cleanups in the Banner Lake, East Stuart and Golden Gate communities on April 12; and a beach cleanup at Stuart Beach in Stuart on May 3.

The Golden Gate Neighborhood Advisory Committee is contemplating hosting a community festival at the same time as the clean-up, to help instill

community pride and cohesiveness.

In addition to community cleanups that occur during the three-month campaign, KMB hosts the Extreme Martin Makeover, a series of projects that focus on litter removal, revitalization and beautification efforts in specific neighborhoods throughout Martin County. This year the Extreme Martin will focus on the New Monrovia neighborhood in Port Salerno on April 5.

For more information, to participate in a cleanup, or to learn about sponsorship opportunities, visit www.keepmartinbeautiful.org or contact KMB at 772-781-1222 or info@keepmartinbeautiful.org. ■

BUSINESS PLAN CONTEST

ITS Fiber, LLC, of Indiantown won first place March 6 from a pool of 31

businesses entered in the Research Coast Principium competition at the Chastain Campus of IRSC. Six Business Plan Contest finalists and four semi-finalists each gave their presentation "pitch" to a panel of distinguished judges staged in the Wolf Technology Center.

ITS Fiber's business idea revolved around expanding its underground, end-to-end fiber network to fulfill the growing local area demand for more reliable Internet connections, cloud-based services and local disaster recovery options for businesses.

As the winner, ITS Fiber automatically receives a presentation slot at Florida Venture Forum's 2014 Early Stage Conference in Orlando this May. They also won \$25,000, along with a consultation package, additional training/education for employees, and promotional radio spots.

The Principium Foundation's Business Plan Contest was created to give local companies and entrepreneurs with innovative ideas the opportunity to present them annually to seasoned

business executives, mentors and potential investors.

Over the last few months, each company submitted detailed plans and perfected their pitches with the assistance of a team of local business executives/mentors. After the process of elimination, 10 companies were chosen as semi-finalists for the "shark-tank-like" format. The six finalists gave a 10-minute visual presentation followed by a series of questions from the judging panel. ■

JOB FAIR

Forty Martin County companies have registered for the April 9 Job Fair,



and will be posting available positions at their respective businesses. Organized by the Business Development Board of Martin County, the Job Fair will be at Indian River State College's Chastain Campus, Wolf High-Technology Center, at 2400 SE Salerno Road Wednesday, from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Current companies looking to hire include Infinity of Stuart & Audi of Stuart, HealthSouth, Paradigm Precision, Waterblasting Technologies, Lenco Marine, Waste Management, Primerica, Awareness Technology, ARC of Martin County, Spherion, Liberator Medical Supply, Stuart Lodge, Treasure Coast Forensic Treatment Center, Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers, Edward Jones, Treasure Coast Irrigation & Rood Landscaping, Ferreira Construction, YMCA, Home Depot, FPL, NuCO2 ValleyCrest, A&A Associates, CVS, The Fur Seasons, Lowes, Martin County, SPS - The Builders Store, Manpower, Ivov Solutions, UCT Coatings, Martin Health System, Sailfish Splash Waterpark, Allegro Living, Centerline Utilities and Menezil Engineering. ■

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Hobe Sound won't be the same without Pauline

A heartbroken Hobe Sound community will bid Pauline Ellen MacArthur, 99, adieu and honor her life at a memorial service on Saturday, March 22, at the Hobe Sound Bible College on Gomez Avenue.

She leaves behind a well-loved family and hundreds of individual stories from those who shared her life, even when only brief encounters made lasting impressions, because of her smile, her wit, her love of flowers and of people—even strangers. Maybe, especially, the strangers.

Born Nov. 23, 1914, in Fairgrove, Mich., she and her husband, Jack MacArthur III, and their three daughters moved to Hobe Sound in 1952 to the SW corner of Bridge Road and US 1. They

called their business, The Farm, since they had both grown up on Michigan farms. Two more children were born, John and Harry, and after they all were in school, she returned to teaching, utilizing her bachelor of arts degree in home economics to teach at the Stuart Middle School until the mid-'70s.

As her children reached adulthood and moved away, she and her husband transformed the restaurant to a beverage-only hangout, and in their retirement years Jack and Pauline poured coffee and served beer to the Natives. Jack died in 1986.

Harry, now a chef, returned in 1989,



Pauline MacArthur

remodeling the kitchen, and renaming it Harry and the Natives, where you always expected to find Pauline—chatting with customers, singing while she served plates of food, or behind the register keeping track of the finances—unless she was traveling.

She walked a section of the Great Wall of China when she was 80, and

climbed Machu Picchu at 86, after which, she cruised down the Amazon and planted a tree in the Amazon Rain Forest. She also volunteered at The Manors at Hobe Sound for more than 40 years, and was named Volunteer of the

Year for the State of Florida Home Health Care Association in 1993.

A member of Hobe Sound Community Presbyterian Church, she taught Sunday school and sang in the choir for more than 50 years. She died Monday, March 10, at Martin Nursing and Restorative Care in Stuart.

She is survived by her children, Paula Cooper of Hobe Sound; Linda Thurm of California; Sally McNeilan of Virginia; John MacArthur, IV, of Hawaii; J. Harry MacArthur of Hobe Sound; and 13 grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to Pauline MacArthur Scholarship Fund, Indian River State College Foundation, Inc., 3209 Virginia Avenue, Fort Pierce, FL 34981. ■

Insufficient numbers lead to NAC cancellation

The Hobe Sound Neighborhood Advisory Committee meeting was canceled March 12 due to a lack of members, according to Kev Freeman, director of the Community Development Department. A recent committee resignation dropped the number to four, leaving up to five possible vacancies on the committee that determines the direction of the Hobe Sound Community Redevelopment Area.

Hobe Sound NAC Chair Angela Hoffman released an appeal letter to the neighborhood encouraging residents to apply for the open positions, which are appointed by the County Commission.

"I truly believe that Hobe Sound is a charming and distinctive, 'small-town' unlike any other area in Martin County and I hope to keep it this way," Hoffman said. "The ability to work with the Community Redevelopment Agency and

County staff will afford this opportunity through noteworthy community enhancement projects."

The committee currently is undertaking a review of the CRA code, regulations and guidelines to ensure that they meet community expectations, that language is simplified, conflicts with county code eliminated and graphics are included in one document. They also are charged with appointing a sign committee to review all

sign permit applications for businesses that fall within the CRA boundaries.

The next meeting is Wednesday, April 23, at the Hobe Sound Community Center at 6 p.m.

Hobe Sound NAC applications are to be submitted by Friday, March 21. For an Application, call 772-288-5756 or go to http://www.martin.fl.us/web_docs/cdd/web/aid_Hobe_Sound/400_NAC_Application_Form.pdf. ■

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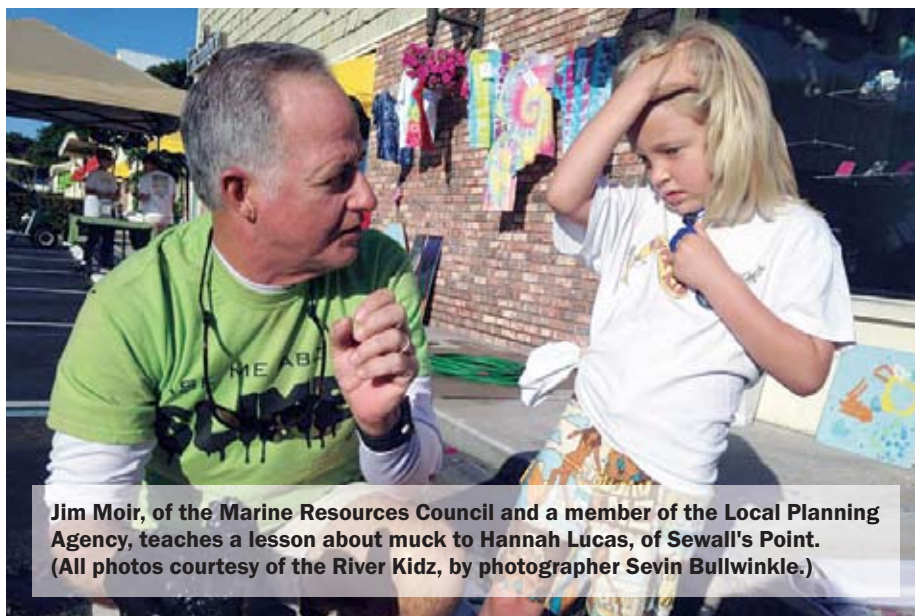
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Jim Moir, of the Marine Resources Council and a member of the Local Planning Agency, teaches a lesson about muck to Hannah Lucas, of Sewall's Point. (All photos courtesy of the River Kidz, by photographer Sevin Bullwinkle.)

Kevin Powers, of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, and his wife, Marsha, (in the line behind him) tackle the steps to the "muckaraina."



Music and dancing enlivened everyone's spirits during the Get the Muck Out event hosted by the River Kidz of Martin County.



Black, sticky, ooey, gooey river muck from the bottom of the St. Lucie River/Indian River Lagoon estuary.

A great day for an important message

The idea of tie-dyeing T-shirts with muck from the bottom of the St. Lucie River estuary sounded like a fun project to the River Kidz, an adjunct of the Rivers Coalition of Martin County.

After they got their hands into the black, sticky river goo on Saturday, March 1, they found the reality was indeed fun, yet definitely more challenging than many of them had first imagined.

Event organizers Jacqui and Ed Lippisch of Sewall's Point.

"We've been wanting for some time to teach kids about how much muck has accumulated on the bottom of our estuary," said River Kidz leader Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, a Sewall's Point commissioner, during a recent Rivers Coalition meeting. "We really want them to see how bad it is, but we also want to make it a fun activity."

Sponsors for the "Get the Muck Out" project donated more than 200 T-shirts to give away, along with rubber gloves and plenty of paint. With lots of muck readily available, the project came to life at the Harbor Bay Plaza in Sewall's Point.

Amid the laughter, the costumed river activists, the music, the dancing and hula-hooping by dozens of kids, parents and organizers, onlookers could also hear "oh, YUCK" and "this is DISGUSTING," as child after child—and a few adults—were introduced to the black sediment that covers the bottom of the St. Lucie River estuary.

The "Get the Muck Out" project certainly succeeded on all counts, and included muck education, dancing the "muckaraina," and parking lot chalk art, in addition to tie-dyeing at least 200 T-shirts, under the guidance of Stuart artist Brenda Leigh.

Muck education came from Marty Baum, Indian Riverkeeper, and Jim Moir, of the Marine Resources Council. Showing the best sportsmanship may have been Martin County School Board Member Marsha Powers and her husband, Kevin Powers, vice-president of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, as they tackled the "muckaraina" among a throng of youngsters who seem to have known the dance since infancy.

Leon Abood, president of the Rivers Coalition, stopped by the gathering, as did Martin County Administrator Taryn Kryzda, and Stephen Leighton, business and government affairs director for the Martin County Sheriff's Department, who photographed the River Kidz by the pink Sheriff's vehicle for posting on the Sheriff Department's Facebook page.

The River Kidz group was started in 2011 when two 10-year-old students, Naia Mader and Evie Flaugh, raised \$85 for the Rivers Coalition by selling lemonade, which now is the signature beverage at nearly all River Kidz events.

Members of the River Kidz have circulated petitions to limit fertilizer runoff, appeared in a documentary filmed by the Everglades Foundation, attended rallies against Lake Okeechobee discharges, addressed a state government symposium, attended a Congressional hearing in Washington, D.C., and created their own YouTube videos about the plight of the St. Lucie River/Indian River Lagoon estuaries.

St. Lucie County recently started its own River Kidz chapter. For more information about the River Kids, go to the River Kidz Facebook page, or visit www.riverscoalition.org. ■



Thursday, March 13 Deb Drum at Nature Center

The Hobe Sound Nature Center welcomes guest speaker Deborah Drum from Martin County's Ecosystem Restoration and Management Division on Thursday, March 13, at 7:30 p.m. She will address Martin County's Ecosystem Management Issues viewed through her 21 years of experience working on South Florida environmental issues, from the Kissimmee River valley to the Florida Keys. With a focus on the Loxahatchee River and St. Lucie Estuary, she works directly with stakeholders, which she finds is "where real restoration can find true success." Free and open to the public at the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, 13640 SE Federal Highway, Hobe Sound. For information, call the center at 772.546.2067 or visit www.hobesound-naturecenter.com.



Thursday, March 13 Whim n' Rhythm at the Blake

Yale University's all-female, a cappella group will perform on Thursday, March 13, at 6:30 p.m. in the John F. Armstrong Wing of the Blake Library on Monterey Road in Stuart. Presented in association with the Journey Stories Music Series, the performance is free and open to the public. All ages are welcome.



Weekend, March 14-16 Stuart ArtsFest 2014

Martin County's longest running event that celebrates the arts is back! Enjoy live music, dancing and fine art at Memorial Park and East Ocean Boulevard in downtown Stuart. On Friday, March 14, from 7-11pm, kick off the weekend at ArtsFest After Dark. On Saturday, March 15, hours are 10am to 7 pm, and 10am to 5pm on Sunday, March 16.

Through March 22 The 2014 Martin County Fair

The pig races and the Lady Houdini show have topped the lists of fair-goers' favorite things to do at the 2014 Martin County Fair (on Old Dixie Highway across from the Witham Field Airport), which will be open through March 22. Of course, you also can enjoy country music, country crafts, and cotton candy. Exceptional livestock shows, a variety of gospel, country and Latin bands will perform, including some favorite local bands, crafters booths and a midway. 2616 S.E. Dixie Highway, Stuart. Tickets: \$3-\$15. For more information, call 772-220-3247 or visit: www.martincountyfair.com.

Saturday, March 15 2nd Annual Shamrock Fest

The unforgettable Saint Patty's Day party returns for its second year with more music, fare and St. Patrick's Day fun from 6-10 p.m. on Saturday, March 15, at the Gazebo Park in downtown Stuart. Guests will enjoy live Irish music by Up-root Hootenanny, Irish Step Dancers, Bagpipers, an Irish Whiskey Bar, Cold Green Beer and delicious Irish fare. The title of King and Queen of the Green will be awarded to the best-dressed male and female. Admission is \$5 and guests who purchase their tickets in advance online at www.kaleidominds.com receive a free drink ticket. A portion of the proceeds benefits Moustache March for the Military, providing support to the families of fallen soldiers.

Sunday, March 16 St. Patrick's Day Celebration & Parade

A can't-miss, fun day to wear your green will be Sunday, March 16, from 11am - 7pm for the St. Patrick's Day Celebration that includes a genuine St. Patrick's Day Parade at 3pm in downtown Jensen Beach, courtesy of Mulligan's Beach House Bar & Grill (who better than this to know the Irish!) and the Jensen Beach Chamber of Commerce on Jensen Beach Boulevard. For more information, call 772-600-7377, 772-334-3444 or email: mullymary@gmail.com, or go to www.jbstpatricksparade.com.



Sunday, March 16 Stuart Community Concert Band

The Stuart Community Concert Band goes Irish in celebration of St. Patrick's Day at the Charles & Rae Kane Center, 900 SE Salerno Road, Stuart at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 16. Tickets are \$5-\$8. For information, call 772.223.7800.

Tuesday, March 18 Birding at Wakodahatchee Wetlands



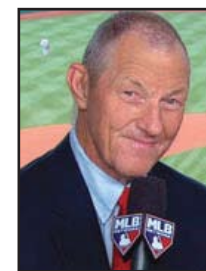
Join Hobe Sound Nature Center naturalist Debbie Fritz-Quincy on a birding trip to Wakodahatchee Wetlands on Tuesday, March 18, at 10 a.m. The three-quarter mile boardwalk wends through a wetland ecosystem near Boynton Beach that attracts a variety of wildlife, including nesting wading birds. The site is a constructed wetland managed through the Palm Beach County Water Utilities Department. Reservations are required. Call 772.546.2067.

Wednesday, March 19 Marc Cohn Benefit Concert at The Lyric

To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Helping People Succeed, enjoy "An Intimate Evening with Marc Cohn" at The Lyric Theatre in downtown Stuart on Wednesday, March 19, at 7 p.m. First known as Pioneer Occupational Center, the non-profit served families of adults with disabilities, providing work and communications skills as part of its programs. The premier tickets are \$100 per person, and include a pre-event reception at 6 p.m. at The Gafford restaurant on Flagler Avenue, south of the theatre. All proceeds from the special tickets will benefit Helping People Succeed programs and services. The tickets can be purchased from Lynn Austin by calling 772.320.0773.



Thursday, March 20



Jim Kaat to speak at the Elliott

Celebrate Spring Training at the Elliott Museum on Thursday, March 20, at 7pm with award-winning

broadcaster and former Major League Baseball pitcher, Jim Kaat, in an inspiring and insightful conversation about America's favorite pastime. Seating is limited and RSVPs are suggested. Call 772.225.1961. Elliott Museum, 825 NE Ocean Blvd.

Saturday, March 22 Oceans Alive, Tides of Time

The "Oceans Alive, Tides of Time" gala will commemorate Florida Oceanographic Society's 50th anniversary and its commitment to environmental education and excellence. The event is at 6 p.m. on Saturday, March 22, at the Elliott Museum, 825 N.E. Ocean Blvd., Stuart, located across the street from the Coastal Center.

"We're transforming the Elliott Museum into a coastal wonderland. In addition to live enter-



tainment and a bountiful auction, we'll have special presentations to pay tribute to Florida Oceanographic's service to our community throughout the

past 50 years," says Victoria Brown, event co-chair. Tickets are \$250 per person and include dinner and dancing with music by "The Fifth Avenue." Attendees can participate in live and silent auctions featuring fine jewelry, travel and entertainment opportunities, artwork and more. The live auction features a painting commissioned for this event by local artist Randall Scott, "La Tortuga Verde," depicting a Green Sea Turtle swimming through the sea grass of the Indian River Lagoon.

Weekend, March 22-23 Home & Garden Show



The 28th Annual Home & Garden Show, presented by the Stuart/Martin County Chamber of Commerce and the Martin County Fair Association, returns to the

Martin County Fairgrounds March 22-23 for the area's largest, most comprehensive home & garden showcase of local businesses. Admission is free. More than 90 exhibitors showcase everything from cookware and fine art to recreation & leisure, remodeling specialties, interior design and orchids. The Home & Garden Show weekend will kick off with a Chamber Business after Hours on Friday, March 21, 5:30-7:30, where members and exhibitors can sample food from area restaurants and get a sneak peek of the show. For more information or to register, contact LisaT@stuartmartinchamber.org.

Monday, March 24 Hearts of Hope Luncheon

The power of "thank you" is the central theme of House of Hope's 15th Annual Hearts for Hope Luncheon on March 24 at Sailfish Point Country Club, beginning at 10:30 a.m. John Kralik, author of "A Simple Act of Gratitude," is the featured speaker. In his book, Kralik discusses how – during a period of hardship – he was inspired to begin writing thank you notes as a way to feel grateful for the good things in his life. The event is part of the agency's 30th anniversary celebration. A variety of prizes have been donated for a special drawing. The grand prize is a necklace valued at \$5,500, donated and designed by Terry Rieger of Diamonds by Terry. Reservations for the luncheon are \$125 per person and can be made online at www.hohmartin.org/hearts or by calling 772.286.4673, ext. 1011.

Thursday, March 27 Julia Whorf Kelly & the Artistic Process

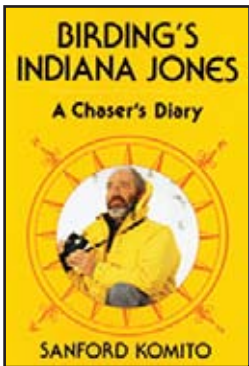


Join this prolific artist at the Elliott Museum on Thursday, March 27, from 6-7 p.m. as she discusses what growing up in an artist's family was like, and the importance of creativity in

every walk of life. This lecture delves into the creative process, explaining the concept of "keys" and how important they are for an artist and the fervor to collect them. Seating limited. RSVP suggested. \$12, free for members.

Call 772.225.1961. Elliott Museum, 825 NE Ocean Blvd.

Thursday, March 27 The Big Year



The Hobe Sound Nature Center welcomes avid birder Sanford Komito for a presentation entitled "The Big Year" on Thursday, March 27, at 7:30 p.m. In 1987 he set the American Birding Association

record for 722 birds in one year, and in 1998 during Mr. Komito's 270 days away from home, he recorded 748 species, a record that still stands today making him the only person in North America to record two "big years." For details, call 772.546.2067 or at www.hobesoundnaturecenter.com.

Through March 23 "Curtains" at the Barn Theatre

Set in 1959, "Curtains," a musical comedy thriller, follows the fallout from the murder of a supremely untalented star during her opening night curtain call. The award-winning play will be presented by The Barn Theatre through March 23 with performances at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, and at 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$25 and are available Mondays through Fridays at the Barn Theatre box office, 2400 S.E. Ocean Boulevard, Stuart from noon to 4 p.m., or call 772.287.4884 or go online at www.barn-theatre.com.

Saturday, March 22 Every Woman is My Sister

Florida's former first lady, Columba Bush, will be an honored guest at the annual Every Woman Is My Sister event on March 22 at 5:30 at Willoughby Golf Club. Bush has been a champion of domestic violence for many years and is actively involved with the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Tiffany Carr, President/CEO of the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, will be the keynote speaker and tell her own personal survival story. Every Woman is My Sister is hosted annually to benefit SafeSpace, a local non-profit organization and the only Certified Domestic Violence Center on the Treasure Coast. Tickets are \$150. For reservations: 772-223-2399, or go to www.safespacefl.org.

Weekend, March 22-23 Secret Gardens Tour & Garden Ramble Bazaar

The Garden Club of Stuart's Secret Gardens Tour happens only every two years, and 2014 is the year! The self-guided tour of seven private home gardens and outdoor living spaces is Saturday and Sunday, March 22-23, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and is the largest fund-raising event for the Garden Club. Tour tickets are \$25, available at area garden centers and online at www.gardenclubofstuart.org. Free admission to the Garden Ramble Bazaar at the Audubon of Martin County and Possum Long Nature Center is part of the tour with numerous vendors selling garden-related items. Proceeds goes toward youth gardening programs, high school scholarships, library books and youth camp programs. The Garden Ramble is free and open to the public.

Saturday, March 29 Century in Review Gala: Celebration of Stuart's Centennial



With tickets priced at only \$20 each, you'll want to get yours early before they're sold out! The Century in Review Gala: Celebration of Stuart's Centennial will be Saturday, March 29, at 7 p.m. at the Lyric Theatre, 59 S.W. Flagler Ave. in downtown Stuart. A warning: You must be over 18 to purchase a ticket. A joint project of the Stuart Heritage Museum and the Woman's Club of Stuart—and we don't know whose members are having more fun putting this event together—the entertainment gala celebrating the City of Stuart's founding 100 years ago, which coincides with the founding of the Woman's Club of Stuart, will feature music, singing, dancing, skits, a fashion show and a narrated photographic retrospective. For tickets or for more information, call 772-220-4600 or email stuartheritage1@yahoo.com.

Monday, March 31 Wildlife Friendly Communities

Joseph Sowards, Urban Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator for UF/IFAS Extension in Volusia County, will discuss techniques for attracting wildlife to the urban environment in a lecture entitled "Creating a Wildlife Friendly Community." on Monday, March 31, at 6 p.m. at the Blake Library's Armstrong Wing. Light refreshments will be offered, courtesy of the UF/IFAS Extension Martin County Master Gardeners. For more information, call 772.288.5654.



Weekend, April 5-6 18th Annual Car Show: Classics at the Beach

Elliott Museum's 18th Annual Juried Car Show: Classics at the Beach will open on Sunday, April 6, on Hutchinson Island in Stuart, celebrating the art, history and technology of classic cars. Proceeds from the Car Show go to support year-round programs. An Invitational Benefit Reception will be Saturday, April 5, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tickets are \$75 each and available at www.classicsatthebeach.org.

Saturday, April 7 Ft. Pierce Oyster Festival

Music, family fun and arts and crafts, as well as educational exhibits on marine ecosystems, marine items, boats, seafood and fresh oysters will be Saturday, April 7, from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. at the Fort Pierce City Marina. Patrons get to eat oysters, and the lagoon gets the shells. The Sunrise Theater will oversee the entertainment. The Manatee Center will run the children's activities. The Fort Pierce Yacht Club will hold a marine flea market. The Fort Pierce Authentic Tours will promote eco-friendly things to do in the region and will be one of the benefactors of the event, along with Sea-Life Habitat Improvement Project, Inc. (SHIP). Sponsors, vendors and volunteers are welcome. For more information, contact April Price at 772-285-1646 or go to www.FtPierceOysterFest.com.



Wednesday, April 9 Career and Job Fair



All job-seekers are invited to a free Career and Job Fair on Wednesday, April 9, from 9am to 2pm at the Indian River State College Wolf High Tech-

nology Center at 2400 SE Salerno Road in Stuart. Full and part time positions are available and veterans preference opportunities are also available. This event is hosted by the Business Development Board of Martin County in partnership with United Way, Chapter 1041-Vietnam Veterans of America, Indian River State College and Martin County Veterans Services.

Organic psychology: blueprint to wonderland



**Maya
Ellenson**

*Art
Kaleidoscope*

Pamela Hoke's newly published book, "Natural Self Discovery, A creative journey to sanity in an increasingly insane world," is a real door opener—not only metaphorically but literally. I had to read it outdoors to appreciate fully its beautiful flow of dancing and sparkling thoughts passing like floating clouds in the sky, sitting in the backyard or in a park on my lunch break, breathing in not only the meaning but its very fragrance.

Launched as part of her doctorate research in applied ecopsychology, the book sheds light on nature therapy, or organic psychology as Pam Hoke prefers to call it, that is free like the wind and pulsating as a bird, spilling out to where it belongs—to Mother Nature, our role model for balance and harmony.

It's the book that shares her life-transforming personal epiphany, and because it's so intimate, the reader instantly taps into its emotionally charged content.

"Nature inspired me," Hoke replied, when asked why this accomplished artist and entrepreneur would write a book, adding that the "synergy between art and



Sophie's Serenity, a portrait of a rescued Bobcat now residing at the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center.

writing is quite possible because they both communicate the same truth. As soon as I balanced the non-verbal tongue of nature with the verbal language of literacy and culture, I realized I could pen the book".

In the footsteps of Goethe and American transcendentalists as nature artist and therapist, Pam reveals her unique first-hand experience in plugging back into Mother Nature, inviting us to join the quest; however, her mission is so much more multifarious than that of her predecessors, for even the greatest luminaries of the past could not possibly imagine the magnitude of the impact that modern technology has on our lives.

Neither could they picture the scale of what Pam's mentor, Dr. Michael Cohen, calls "tropicmaking." As Pamela explains in her book: "Tropicmaking is a subversive, and yes, ultimately self-destructive activity—it's when we create, then prioritize comforts, to the point where we are essentially destroying the very source that creates that comfort," which is planet earth.

"Our addiction to tropicmaking denies us the freedom to relate to earth in a mutually beneficial way," she asserts. "It has gone way past unnatural, and worse, we are paying for it with literally our lives and health."

Pamela S. Hoke, of Stuart, holds a bachelor in fine arts degree from Ohio State University in painting/business/marketing. A successful brand designer and artist, she worked as an art teacher in Martin County High School a decade ago, and currently serves as guest teacher of en plein air art events for visual art students in Stuart, sponsored by the Arts Council of Martin County.

Pam's motive is to inspire her students to embrace their creative impulses and develop sympathy for the endangered species.

"Painting wildlife shapes a totally



Pamela Hoke's "Independence Day," acrylic on canvas.



André; Portait of a Champion



Amber, Gentle Mom, a rescued Great Horned Owl, resident and "Education Ambassador" for the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center.

for manifesting our inherent talents and staying healthy on all levels.

Both Pam's research and art are imbued with what Goethe called the "delicate empiricism," according to which natural objects should be sought and investigated respectfully, as if they were divine beings. Pam allows things to speak for themselves and lays blueprints for connecting us with the cosmos, a great leap forward in knowing oneself. It's mostly animals who mirror our deep and multidimensional souls, she explains, whether it's a rescued owl, André, at the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center, bobcat Sophie or the

new type of awareness of the unity of all in this precious web of life," she said. "Without it, there is no sanity."

She also helps the Treasure Coast

captivating poignant turtles, we hear their non-verbal planetary language that speaks louder than any conceptual text.

Their beauty and voices are enhanced and amplified to such a surrealistic degree that we bow our heads in front of their inner intelligence, totally enchanted with the message of timeless wisdom they emanate. This kind of respect is Pam's magic wand in overcoming "collective madness" and our obsession with what we have rather than what we are.

Even environmentalism can become utterly destructive, she adds, when it's centered on spite and disrespect of the other side, for imbalance is as unnatural and harmful as hurting the planet. Organic psychology is not about us or them, but about "treading softly" on any road we take.

And foremost, Pamela Hoke concludes, it's about discovering our own "rabbit holes" with all the wonderlands each of us innately carries within. ■

Russian-American Maya Ellenson, who holds M.A. and PhD degrees in Russian language and literature from Moscow State University, has lived in Martin County for eight years. A free-lance writer, she has a particular interest in world culture and art.

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Legacy of Rio's Pat Mark honored by new sign

A new park sign honoring county skatepark supervisor and Rio community activist, Pat Mark, was unveiled March 2 by county staff and members of the Rio Civic Club, where Mark had also been an active member prior to her death in 2013.

The dedication was followed by SKATE COMP 2014, an annual skateboard competition for dozens of youngsters, many of whom Mark had worked with and mentored as park supervisor after the county facility opened in 2003. Considered "a fixture" at the skatepark, Mark coordinated all activities there, interacting with children of all ages, and earning the trust of parents and grandparents.

Almost immediately following her death, those who used the skatepark circulated a petition to either rename the park the Pat Mark Skate Park or to allow the Rio Civic Club to erect a plaque commemorating her life and efforts. The County Commission, which owns the property, approved changing the park name and erecting a new sign, following a recommendation by the Local Planning Agency.



The new sign at the Rio-Jensen Skatepark.

"It's hard to accept that we won't experience her warm welcome, giving spirit and courageous smile at Rio-Jensen Skate Park anymore," said Julie Preast, of the Rio Civic Club, adding that the sign was a fitting tribute to Mark's legacy—her caring concern for the area's youngest residents.

The skatepark, one of Martin



Specators begin settling in to watch the annual skateboard competition at the popular Pat Mark Rio-Jensen Skatepark.



Skateboarders of all ages prepare to compete for trophies and cash prizes.

County's jewels, dips below ground with concrete banks, walls and two cement bowls, including a beginner bowl with a three-foot drop and three-foot ledge and a more advanced bowl with corners, boxes, a hand rail, a six-foot drop with ledges and banks.

It is completely fenced and open only when park staff is on duty. All skaters are required to wear hard-shelled helmets and full pads.

Competitors are divided into age groups of 9 and under; 10-12; 13-15; 16-18, and 19 and up, and in the advanced division (more advanced skill level), the competition age brackets are

14 and under and 15 and up.

The Martin County Parks and Recreation Dept. also requires that youngsters purchase an annual pass, at a cost of \$10.60 for a Martin County resident and \$21.20 for others. Skate cards may be purchased at the Vince Bocchino Community Center in Langford Park in Jensen Beach, or at the Martin County Parks and Recreation Dept. in the Administrative Building on Monterey Road in Stuart.

The skatepark, 2269 NE Dixie Highway in Rio, is open Tuesday through Friday from 2 pm to 9 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10 am to 9 pm. ■



Rio's former marina begs for new life.

Rio area on cusp of adding two developments

Two properties at the heart of Rio's revitalization dreams, the razed Rio Village Mobile Home Park and the Rio marina, both on Route 707 that bisects this small village between Stuart and Jensen Beach, seem to be moving closer to long-awaited redevelopment.

"The closing for the Rio Village Mobile Home property has not yet taken place," said Kev Freeman at a recent Rio Neighborhood Advisory Committee meeting, "but we do know the developer plans to have small cottages on the property."

Freeman had not seen the most recent proposal for the marina property adjacent to the Indian River Lagoon, he said, which is owned by iStar Financial based in New York with regional offices in Chicago, Dallas and Georgia.

Original plans called for a marina, condos, a small shopping area and restaurants, Freeman added, with public access to the waterfront being sought by residents.

"I really cannot say what the plans call for now," he said, "but as soon as we have more formal proposals, we'll be sure to bring them before the NAC."

Another project anticipated to make a significant boost to pedestrian safety and improved presentation of the Rio community is the installation of sidewalks; however, not all rights-of-way have been donated to the county to build an uninterrupted line of walkways on both sides of Route 707.

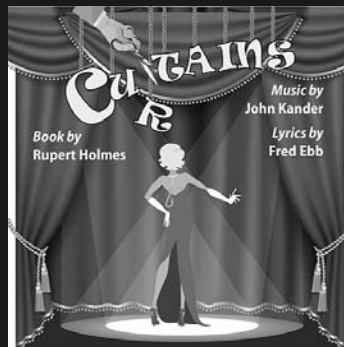
In addition, the sidewalks end at the FEC railroad tracks. After the double tracking is installed to accommodate All Aboard Florida, according to Rio activist Julie Preast, the community will be presented with significant challenges to crossing the tracks safely.

"It's terrifying to watch an elderly person trying to cross them now," Preast added. "I just cannot imagine what will happen after we have 32 trains going through here at high speed every day." ■

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Tickets are \$20 EXCEPT for Curtains at \$25.

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Tickets can be purchased at www.barn-theatre.com or 772-287-4884 or at the box office at 2400 East Ocean Blvd. in Stuart Monday-Friday 12-4pm or one hour prior to shows.

APR. 18 -
MAY 4



Deathtrap

MAY 30 -
JUNE 15



Six Dance Lessons
in Six Weeks

Important to remember it is 'just a number!'



George Kleine
The Right Bite

The late great “comic philosopher,” George Carlin, cautioned us against fixating on numbers: age, weight, dollars and countless other things we try to quantify with a number. We use that number to determine if we are too old, too fat, too poor or too rich (what?). The venerable Mr. Carlin challenges us to disregard those numbers and, instead, to embrace the happiness and joy in our lives.

Good idea. In theory. But arbitrary or not we need some kind of guidance and reference point in our journey through life, so we can aspire to a better journey and a better life. We can and must use those references to take action and “move on up.”

The question that comes to mind is “How do we determine what numbers are actually important and useful?” Simple! A little research, a little enlightened advice and a lot of common sense.

Take some time online or in the li-

brary to determine where you are, then make a list of questions (yes really write them down) and take the list with you when next you visit your primary care practitioner. Ask what you should do while reviewing your list with him/her. Then set yourself up for success by setting goals you can reach. Then, here is the hard part—get busy!

Can you exercise? How much? What kind? A slow walk is better than no walk. A little exercise still counts. Do what you can until you can do more. As a well-known ad slogan goes: “JUST DO IT!” Walk, run, dance, swim, bike or all of the above. You will surprise yourself, your friends and family and reap the benefits in all areas of your life.

The next big question: How do I judge my progress? I have found that a daily weigh-in keeps me focused. I have found that keeping track of those weigh-ins keeps my mind on what I am trying to achieve, and how close I am getting to success.

A better way, perhaps, to evaluate your progress may be to abandon the “how much do I weigh” approach and consider the weight loss in terms of percentages and pounds. I recently realized that I have lost almost TWENTY-FIVE--IT IS ONLY A NUMBER!--PERCENT of my starting weight. Let me tell you that figure is way more

pleasing than just pounds and ounces.

It is also a better indicator when the two are combined and compared (best on a line graph). Yes it is work but it is WORTH IT! As your weight decreases your percentage of loss increases, and you can clearly see what you are accomplishing. Try it.

Now let's eat! Here is a winner-of-a-chicken dinner:

ROASTED CHICKEN ALA GRECQUE

Pre-heat oven to 450 degrees
1 (3-4 pound) chicken
1 garlic clove, minced
1 lemon (a key ingredient in Greek cooking)
1 cup cooked brown rice
1 large egg or egg equivalent
3 tsp. dried oregano (preferably Greek)
3 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley (not dried!)
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp grated nutmeg
Fresh ground black pepper to taste (try a “rainbow mix” of pepper)

Remove the “junk” from inside the chicken, and rinse the chicken in cold running water. Pat dry with paper towels, and rub the insides with the garlic.

Slice 4 thin slices of lemon and slip them under the skin of the breast. Chop

the rest of the lemon into medium-sized pieces. Protect the breast with foil.

In a medium bowl mix the rice, chopped lemon, egg, oregano and the seasonings, and stuff the mixture into the chicken. Tie the legs together loosely and place into a foil-lined roasting pan. Roast for 20 minutes, then reduce heat to 400.

Remove foil from breast, and roast 20 more minutes, basting frequently. Reduce heat again to 350, and roast until cooked through, juices run clear and an instant read thermometer reads 180 in the thickest part of the thigh.

REST THE CHICKEN 10 MINUTES (makes for a juicy and tender bird). Remove the skin, slice and serve.

Invite over a few good friends or family, and enjoy this traditional chicken with a Greek salad, and ice cold lemon water. OPA! (Do not smash the china.)

The numbers: 1/4 chicken, 1/4 cup stuffing, (approx.) 368 calories, 8g Fat, 13g sat fat, 0g trans fat, 189mg chol, 151mg salt, 13g carb. ■

George Kleine, a professional chef, writer and entrepreneur in Hobe Sound, recently lost a few tons of extra weight. He won't say how many pounds, but enough to make him an expert on healthy cooking and eating. Send your questions, comments and recipes to TheRightBite@MartinCountyCurrents.com.

Timing is everything when taking your meds



Nicolette Christie
Ask Florence

Spring forward, fall back....right into bed for a few more moments of sweet, sweet sleep. Such is my reoccurring daydream whenever we're on the sleep-deprived side of Daylight Savings Time. The power of an hour isn't always appreciated until it's deducted from your daily rest.

In short order, our systems adjust, and we get back on schedule—and schedules remain vital for anyone who routinely takes prescription medication.

A study a few years ago supported by The Commonwealth Fund and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed 17,000 Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and older. More than 40 percent of participants admitted to not taking their medications as directed by their physicians.

Some medications work better when taken at night, others first thing in the morning, still others only as needed. AARP offers some general guidelines, though always consult your doctor before making any changes to your medication regimen. This can prove especially true for medications taken for high cholesterol, high blood pres-

sure, heartburn, asthma and rheumatoid arthritis.

The treatment for symptoms of conditions varies with each individual. Your age, gender and weight—compounded by any medication you may be taking for another ailment—all factor into consideration when your doctor writes you a prescription. It's important to discuss with him or her any and all concerns, as well as reactions, you may have regarding your medication.

For seniors, particularly those living alone and in need of help with daily activities, look for home-healthcare services that include medication management. Also investigate as to whether the home health aide will attend doctors' appointments to ensure all medication instructions are clearly understood, which will give you greater assurance that they will be followed.

And you can sleep a little easier.

CHEER UP!

“He who is of a calm and happy nature will hardly feel the pressure of age, but to him is of an opposite disposition, youth and age are equally a burden.”—Plato

Health equals happiness, or does happiness lead to health? Eager to answer this chicken-and-egg question of the mind-body connection, researchers recently studied the attitudes and physical aptitudes of several thousand seniors. Their findings will make you smile—or at least plan to a lot more.

The Canadian Medical Association

Journal published a study conducted by University College London involving 3,200 seniors aged 60 and older over an eight-year period. The study covered many aspects of daily life, separating participants by age: 60-69, 70-79 and 80 and older. Some questions/statements seniors rated included:

- “I enjoy the things that I do.”
- “I enjoy being in the company of others.”
- “On balance, I look back on my life with a sense of happiness.”

Turns out, sourpusses risk more than extra wrinkles. They hazard an 80-percent greater chance of developing at least two physical impairments as they age. Meanwhile, their Pollyannish counterparts, lead author of the study Dr. Andrew Steptoe told the Daily Globe and Mail newspaper, “show links between positive well-being and reduced risk of impairments in activities of daily living.”

Seniors with a sunny view reported fewer troubles performing daily acts and activities, and head-to-

head, the mirthful lapped the melancholy, even walking faster and more smoothly.

Of course, the jubilant shared other qualities. The younger group, as well as wealthier, married and better-educated participants, reported higher levels of happiness and ease of mobility. In making adjustments that accounted for social, socioeconomic and marital status, researchers found participants with gloomy views were three times more

likely to later struggle with bathing, dressing and other daily activities.

The power of positive thinking indeed.

The researchers—who found in an earlier study that happiness helps blood pressure and stress levels—concluded a positive outlook triggers biological responses that contribute to healthier functioning. Researchers issued a pretty simple prescription: Enjoy life.

Even if you've always been the glass-half-empty type, there's good news. A different, separate study of more than 10,000 seniors in two continents found people becoming happier as they age. Researchers theorized the seniors benefited from the development of keener coping mechanisms and more realistic life expectations—as well as dealing with diminished work pressures.

In fact, the findings showed trends in human happiness starting at a high in childhood, lowering later, cratering in the mid-40s and then rising with each successive year.

Now there's something to look forward to. And better to start now, so you can enjoy all the health and increased mobility that accompanies a life of looking on the bright side.

Most medical inquiries are best served by consulting your physician or a qualified specialist and this “Ask Florence” is no substitute for professional exams and insights. To reach Ask Florence, email AskFlorence@MartinCountyCurrents.com.

Dramatic changes lead to great pompano bite!



**Rich
Vidulich**
*Pompano
Reporter*

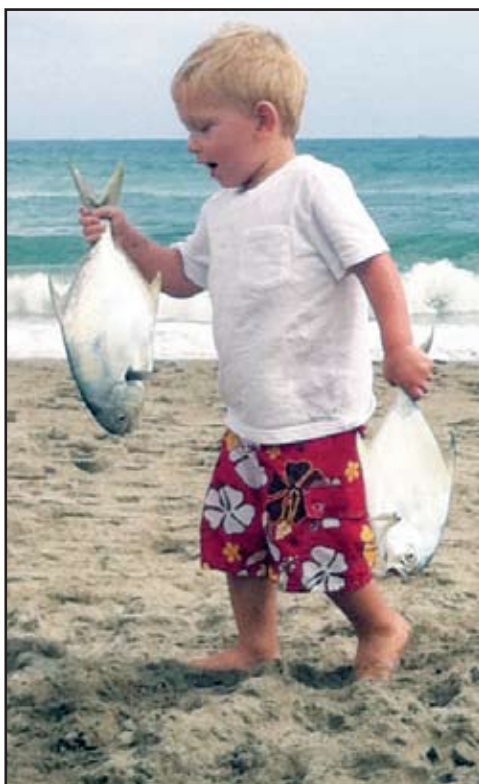
February ends with a smokin' pompano bite! It's about time Hobe Sound public beach enjoyed a sweet week of fishing. No more chatting about the good ole days! Anglers were busy reeling in silvery sparkly sidewinders everywhere!

Major catches happened simultaneously at Port St. Lucie, Vero Beach, Sebastian and New Smyrna beaches, as well. Sand fleas and cut clams were the enticers, and it was evident something had changed dramatically.

My take on the change? First and foremost, the seashore took on its historic natural essence of a pristine, south-Florida azure. The Army Corps of Engineers had contemplated some early releases from Lake Okeechobee after heavy January rains—theorizing that intermittent, smaller releases in advance of the rainy season might be easier on the estuary than the full-open-wide gates later that wiped out the estuary last summer—but decided against it. Perhaps they heard the public outcry just from thinking about it.

The West Coast and Sanibel Island, however, took the hit when double the Lake O water that was needed—and had been expected—to keep the Caloosahatchee River flowing into the Gulf got dumped on them by the Corps.

**Dad, Meir
Genoune,
cannot be
outfished
by his son!**



**Luke Salinger on Hobe Sound beach
depositing his daddy's pompano catch
in the bucket to take home.**

We escaped the terroristically vile water, and after months of bad water and no fish, we emerged with a short-lived victory. At this point, I bow to the "pompano gods."

In addition, from my mounds of historic data, the poms normally spawn during February and don't come shoreline. They have tight bladders and give birth in 90 to 120 feet of water. Years ago, though, when our estuary had abundant sea grass and shrimp to feed on, pompano would spawn in the river. That's what we now call, "the Good Ole Days."

My silver-lined archives also predict a sluggish bite that occurs three days before the full and lasts through the three to five days of the waning moon. Southeasters are the traditional spring bite mechanism, but it ain't spring. I would not be happy if I predicted this, and thus it could be a very short season.

Something else to consider: Even when snowing like crazy up north, the jet stream constantly stalls out around Orlando. Well, we've been begging for fish this winter and have gained some self-satisfaction from this nice run. The only thing that appears to be challenging the near-future bite is a forecast of flat seas and west winds. We don't need overly clear water, because this will move them to hide at the nearby reefs. Remember that clean water provides 20/20 vision for our all



Etyan Genoune with a great catch.

untimely friends, the sharks!

February 19 was an overwhelming great day for Pompano Rich. First and foremost, my daughter, Kelley, gave birth to our second grandchild and our next (some day) beach boy! Alex was a healthy 8.25 pounder—the same weight as the world record pompano! Mrs. Pompano (better known by our first grandson, Benjamin, as Mimi) is in Texas helping son-in-law Stephen with family duties. A tidbit about Stephen: He's a great dad, provider, teacher and long-distance surfcaster. He owns a ton of various martial arts belts that I have no clue as to meaning or rank.

Humph, a long-distance caster in Texas, you say? On a mini-vacation to Sarasota last spring, I gave him a five-minute lesson, and he launched a 100-yard cast on the first try! A few more casts, and he half-emptied the Akios reel, which has a capacity of 260 yards! Bar none, I'm the most blessed grandfather in my world.

Okay, let's continue Feb. 19 to another wonderful story. I took Ray Salinger and his two-year-old, Luke, on a beach fishing charter. I've been mentoring Ray for a couple of years, and he's showing Luke the way. The caption for our little fishing party should say something like, Surf Kids Gone Wild!

Ray is very accomplished, and it's obvious by the photo that Luke is daddy's handsome, strong fishing accomplice! While waiting for the bite, Luke is a master sand castle designer. He's been studying construction under

the popular animated TV character "Bob the Builder."

Luke doesn't know it, but Ben, our two-year-old grandson, is designing architectural feats at his home while also charting "Builder Bob."

That concludes a great February on every front I can think of, and I do foresee the fishing to be good well into March—as long as good easterly winds prevail. So if you personally have given up on this season, I say, "Get back in the game! Game not over!" If you need additional info on anything to do with pompano fishing, just contact me. Tightlines! ■

Rich Vidulich, a commercial pompano surf fisherman who traverses the beaches of Martin County and points

north for his "golden nuggets," lives in Jupiter. Send comments or questions to Pompano@MartinCountyCurrents.com.

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Kwik Stop's bounce house and slide helped kept youngsters distracted while waiting for the parade to start.



The Art Stroll brought lots of vendors to Mars Street, including Deb Aldrich of Palm City, along with her American Girl and Barbie doll clothes.



No one had more fun at the Kwik Stop party than owner Moe Nasser.



Hobe Sound Chamber Christmas Parade won praise

Many of the 75 units comprising the 28th Annual Hobe Sound Christmas Parade were of such exceptional quality and demonstrated such creativity that comments flowed constantly from the crowd of 4,000 onlookers in December: "Wow, look how high he can kick!" "Can you believe that's from an elementary school?" "Anne Scott sure shows she's got a sense of humor...I'd never wear that."

The praise for the parade entries extended to the balcony of the Mancuso building on Bridge Road, where the judges had gathered to observe and select winners. It's also where Chamber volunteer Lillian Johnson, who solicits parade entrants each fall, stood next to the announcer to identify participants, whisper names in his ear and give the facts that add color to the event.

Prior to the parade, Christmas music floated along Hobe Sound sidewalks compliments of DancenSound, adding significantly to the festive air.

The end of the parade was punctuated with the arrival of Santa and Mrs. Claus seated in a vintage wagon pulled by parade sponsor Scott Fey of Treasure Coast Irrigation/Rood Landscape like a period at the end of a sentence—except it wasn't the end. Following Santa and Mrs. Claus was the much-anticipated Treasure Coast Irrigation Truck, spilling thousands of souvenir beach balls for parade goers.

Several local businesses opened their doors to offer treats, snacks and beverages to visitors, and the Kwik Stop parking lot teemed with laughing youngsters in the bounce house and on the inflatable slide, while their parents enjoyed Kwik Stop's free craft beer and wine tastings from among the store's vast inventory.

"Each year, this parade gets better and better," said Moe Nasser, owner of Kwik Stop. "People just love coming here, not for an hour or two, but to spend the whole day."

The parade awards included: Most Humorous to Sponge Bob Fan Club Float by Martin County Tax Collector Ruth Pietruszewski and her staff. Hidden Oaks Middle School Band & Color Guard was selected the Best Marching Band. The Most Original float went to the Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida, Martin County, led by Meribeth Manning. The Best Religious entry went to Kids Kickin' for Christ; and the Best Overall went to Hobe Sound Elementary School for its holiday float.

Parade supporting sponsors included Bridge Boat and RV Storage, the Hobe Sound Soccer Club, Coast 101.3 and the Stuart News. ■



Presenting sponsor Scott Fey on his little green tractor pulling the Treasure Coast Irrigation/Rood Landscape vintage wagon.



A parade sponsor, the Hobe Sound Soccer League.

One of the winning floats, Spongebob Squarepants, by our Tax Collector Ruth Pietruszewski.



South Fork High School Band.



Hobe Sound Elementary School float was a crowd-pleasing winner!



Jason Hoffman & Laney.