

Martin County

CURRENTS

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Water farm gives hope for estuary pg 10



Anne Scott faces Hobe Sound p16



LNG now on FEC rails? p7

Stuart-Martin Chamber President & CEO Joe Catrambone , right, is joined by chamber members Will Carson, left, and John Hennessee on a recent tour of the Caulkins Water Farm. pg 10

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C-44 gets 3-story pump station

Drivers on their way to Indiantown soon will see a three-story structure begin to take shape at the construction site of the C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment area on Citrus Blvd. It is a pump station that will house four remotely operated electric pumps within the 21,000 square-foot, three-story building that, when complete, will deliver 1,100 cubic feet (about 8,228 gallons) per second from the C-44 canal into the new reservoir.

Capable of storing about 16 billion gallons of water, the 3,400-acre reservoir will feed the Stormwater Treatment Area (STA), which will include 32 miles of berms, 30 miles of canals and 56 concrete water control structures, and a variety of plants to remove and store nutrients from the water before it flows into the river and estuary.

The South Florida Water Management District approved the contract in March for the \$40 million pump station, which should be completed in September 2018.

"One after another, the District has approved construction contracts in recent months for the major components

of the C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area," said SFWMD Governing Board Member Kevin Powers, whose area includes Martin County.

"This is the kind of progress needed to complete the project and begin operations to improve water quality for the St. Lucie River and Estuary."

In July 2014, the SFWMD Governing Board approved a major agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — which was originally constructing all components of the project — to allow the SFWMD to expedite construction of the stormwater treatment area, a pump station and a portion of the project discharge canal.

In August 2014, the SFWMD awarded approximately \$5.4 million for construction of the spillway that will serve as the single point of water movement out of the entire project, allowing the SFWMD to retain local runoff on approximately 7,000 acres of the 12,000-acre project site.

These investments were in addition to the \$101 million allocated last fall by SFWMD to build the stormwater treatment area. ■

Customs facility not forgotten

Although the Florida Department of Transportation grants that would have been used to build a U.S. Customs facility at Witham Field are now dead, residents still wonder "if and when" the project will return to the county commission.

"Those of us in the marine industry especially want to see a customs facility built in Martin County," said John Hennessee, who owns a marina in Port Salerno. "This was fully funded, had been approved once, was widely supported throughout the county, and should be under construction right now."

First approved by a business-friendly commission majority in 2009, the fee-based facility proposed for Witham Field underwent multiple hearings before the current commission. In addition to the FDOT grants, the project would have also been funded through airport enterprise funds, which come from fuel purchased at the airport.

The facility was approved, reconsidered, approved again and finally voted down when construction bids exceeded estimated costs, even though FDOT offered grants to cover the overage and private marine and aviation businesses contracted with the county to pay for any operating shortfalls.

Support for the facility came from the City of Stuart, Stuart Main Street, the Downtown Business Association, the Marine Aviation Industries of the Treasure Coast, Preserve Martin County, the Realtor Association of Martin County,

all five chambers of commerce, the Martin Health System, among others, including individuals who urged the commission to consider the convenience factor for boaters traveling to and from the Bahamas, many of whom have family members in the islands, as well as

residents and visitors traveling to the area by air.

Many prominent residents also emailed county commissioners seeking support for a customs facility, including John



Payson, of Jupiter Island, who wrote that he "did not believe the rumor" that customs would make Witham Field a commercial airport.

Highly regarded environmentalist Nathaniel Reed stated that a customs facility would create "much needed, high-paying jobs in this county," and Lou Gerstner called the plan "a very low cost (perhaps a NO COST) opportunity to do something for the local businesses that represent the backbone of a community."

Commissioner John Haddox wrote a letter to customs supporters, urging them "to stay engaged" with the issue. "Despite the most recent defeat of Customs," he said, "I continue to hold out hope that this facility will again come forward and get another chance to gain commission approval." ■



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Comp Plan changes fail to clear judge's scrutiny

The legal challenge to an amendment to the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan crafted by Maggy Hurchalla has been blocked from becoming law, at least, for the time being.

Administrative Law Judge Christine Van Wyk entered a recommended order June 2 that Amendment 13-5, first adopted August 13, 2013, then amended in April 2014 to resolve challenges by four large Martin County landowners, is not in compliance with state statutes.

One of the environmental groups that had intervened, Martin County Conservation Alliance, posted online the "good news" that the four-story height limit had been successfully defended—although it was never at issue—and Commissioner Ed Fielding remarked during the June 9 commission meeting that only "two relatively minor points" remained to be resolved, which he expected to be settled out of court soon with Midbrook 1st Realty, the last remaining challenger.

Both sides have 15 days in which to respond to the judge's recommended order to note "exceptions" to the judge's ruling, after which each side then has an opportunity to comment on the other's comments. Attorney Linda Loomis Shelley of Tallahassee is representing the county. Comments will be reviewed by Van Wyk prior to her final order, but her decision then can be appealed.

Amendment 13-5 revised Chapters 1, 2, and 4 of the Martin County Growth Management Plan, and was originally challenged by multiple landowners, including Becker Holdings, Consolidated Citrus, Lake Point, and Midbrook 1st Realty, which owns the Hobe Grove property west of the Florida Turnpike and south of Bridge Road. The case was heard Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, 2014, in Stuart.

Intervenors in addition to the conservation alliance included the Indian Riverkeeper, 1000 Friends of Florida, City of Stuart, Town of Sewall's Point, and the Town of Jupiter Island.

The landowners challenged the amendment on the basis that "relevant and appropriate data and analysis" had not been used in crafting the rewrites, thus leaving landowners unable to determine the county's "predictable standards" for use of their land.

The current Comp Plan, which had undergone a state-mandated review of relevant conditions and changes in state requirements, was approved in 2011, and had been in effect only one year prior to Hurchalla's rewrites.

Also currently under consideration by Van Wyk is a separate challenge to

the county's revision of Chapter 10 of the Comp Plan, also written by Hurchalla, that eliminates the commercial zoning district at the county's interchanges with I-95, bans the extension of sewer lines into the secondary urban services district, bans on-site sewage disposal systems (septic tanks and package plants) larger than 2,000 gallons, and prohibits more than one septic tank per parcel regardless of size of the parcel.

The arguments were heard April 28-29 in a challenge by 10 Martin County farmers, some of whom also are challenging the first rewrites, but Van Wyk's recommended order in that case is not expected for several more months due to the state's backlog of hearings.

Preponderance of Evidence Required

In an administrative law hearing, the burden of proof that a Comp Plan amendment is not in compliance with state statute falls to the petitioners to prove beyond fair debate. "This means that 'if reasonable persons could differ as to its propriety,' a plan amendment must be upheld," Van Wyk wrote in her order. "The standard of proof to establish a finding of fact is preponderance of the evidence."

The majority of the judge's rulings found the challenger's arguments "fairly debatable," however, two points were found conclusively in favor of the challengers that verified their charge that the Comp Plan amendments lacked substantive data and analysis, as required by state law.

That ruling blocks the amendment from becoming a county ordinance to change the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.

Midbrook challenged the county's methods for determining the need for future residential development, which is based on population projections, residential demand analysis, and residential capacity analysis.

The judge upheld the county's methodologies in calculating residential demand and population projections, but rejected the county's methods for determining capacity, including the county's method of determining the capacity of vacant acreage in already approved, multi-family residential projects not yet built. The judge declared that it was not a "professionally-acceptable method for gathering the data."

The judge also rejected the county's

assertion that there is only one urban services district, classifying the eastern and Indiantown areas as simply subsections of one Urban Services District, thus using their combined acreages and populations to determine residential capacity.

By combining the two areas into one urban services district, the analysis for the eastern portion of the county, which is more populated and more in demand, went from accommodating 94 percent of the residential need for housing in the Eastern Urban Services District and 1,569 percent in the Indiantown Urban Services District to accommodating 466 percent of the need for residential housing in the entire county over the next 10 years.

The amendment "does not take into account the separate and distinct housing markets in the Eastern and Indiantown USDs (urban services districts)," according to the order, thus upholding the petitioner's contention that by combining the urban services areas, the county was limiting choices, limiting supply, and increasing prices, which violates state statutes.

County's Positions Upheld

Other points contested by Midbrook, but upheld by the judge, included the "stricter use" clause in determining which policy to follow in the case of conflicts, and the super-majority vote (four of the five commissioners) being required to determine any changes that could affect the St. Lucie River, the water table or the county's water supply. "The fact that the County Commission may have to adopt those changes by

four votes rather than three," she said, "does not relieve the County Commission from supporting its legislative changes with appropriate data."

Although Van Wyk conceded that the county had acknowledged a shortage of commercial property, she disagreed with Midbrook that the county was basing its determination of commercial and industrial uses of property solely on population. "Further analysis is planned (by the county) to continue refining the inventory," she added, "and to consider whether population demands for retail/commercial services should be applied to the vacant land."

She also pointed to the county's approval of the Ag-TEC Future Land Use Map amendment which added "substantial amounts" of industrial and commercial property to the county's inventory, thus whether or not "adequate lands for commercial use to serve future needs is at least fairly debatable."

Van Wyk also said that the stated mission of the Comp Plan to provide a balance of uses, including the balance of future economic development with environmental concerns, as written in the amendment, did not differ substantially from the wording of the current Comp Plan mission, contrary to the petitioner's assertion that the plan did not balance economic concerns.

Van Wyk also found that Hurchalla had provided adequate public input during the crafting of the changes, and Midbrook had not proven "beyond fair debate" that Hurchalla had prejudiced Midbrook by the county's adoption of amendments she had written.

The complete 64-page administrative order can be read in full or downloaded at: www.doah.state.fl.us/ROS/2013/13003397.pdf. ■

--Barbara Clowdus



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City and county boards agree to seek better relationship

A "Government 101" mediation session conducted by Florida Gulf Coast University Professor Bob Lee, an expert in governmental affairs and training, took place in Stuart on June 2 to smooth future relations between the county's two major governing bodies. It appears to have at least paved the way for more one-on-one face time between them.

Differences in philosophy regarding economic development and river restoration often is blamed for the strained relations between the City of Stuart and Martin County. The City of Stuart's commissioners encourage both, but is hampered in raising revenue by the number of older homes that qualify for property tax exemption within city limits, thus the majority of its tax revenue comes from its business district.

Annexation often has entered city commissioners' comments during meetings, but a plan for annexing properties has not been developed, according to City Manager Paul Nicoletti. "The only annexation petition we have before us now is Baker Road (hotel)," Nicoletti said, "and our annexation policy is voluntary; there are no plans to change that."

The Board of County Commissioner's opposing philosophy seeks to restore the river primarily by quashing further development, and is wary of the city's interest in annexing unincorporated areas that lie along its borders.

The city-county relationship was

strained further when the city resorted to filing a lawsuit to obtain nearly \$1,000,000 in tax increment financing funds for its Community Redevelopment Area that had been calculated incorrectly in the property appraiser's office, going instead to the county's general fund.

Snug Harbor widens the rift

Shortly, after the TIF issue was settled, and the city obtained its misappropriated CRA payment, several Snug Harbor residents complained to the county commission that the city had offered them sewer hookups, but only if agreeing to voluntary annexation by the city. The city had cut the cost of hook-ups to approximately \$5,000 per resident, around \$20,000 less than to hook up to the county's system.

A Snug Harbor resident, Walter M. Goldberg, spoke out at several commission meetings, presenting a petition representing 72 of the 100 properties in Snug Harbor, to contest what he considered to be "coercion," since most residents wanted to hook up without annexation.

He also appealed to the state Department of Environmental Protection in an unsuccessful attempt to block grant funding for the sewer expansion.

In response to the Snug Harbor community's concerns, County Commissioner Doug Smith insisted that the county "protect its residents" and called for a city-county meeting to discuss not only potential Snug Harbor annexation,

but the city's annexation policies as a whole. That was in 2013.

Several attempts followed by County Administrator Taryn Kryzda to set a joint meeting date to discuss the city's annexation policies; however, the city had responded by requesting a mediated, joint meeting with Dr. Lee. The county agreed, if the ethics portion of the professor's course was dropped.

The session June 2 at Flagler Place included a professorial lecture by Lee on the types, roles and responsibilities of government, one-on-one sessions rotated among commissioners, and groups of two to determine the topics of highest interest to each commission, which included improved communication, the fire services merger, and annexation. Instead of quarterly joint meetings, Mayor Kelli Glass-Leighton called for the two commissions to meet monthly in a joint session to discuss issues of mutual interest, including Palm Beach Road, the Willoughby road extension, and the apportionment of sales tax revenue and impact fees, etc.

Commissioner Eula Clarke also suggested that perhaps the commissioners should attend each other's commission meetings to become better informed.

Merging fire services top issue

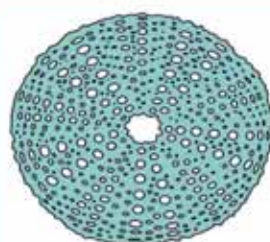
The most pressing issue, both governing bodies agreed, is the merger of fire services, which currently is being studied by an outside consultant, Fitch & Associ-

ates LLC, at a cost of \$98,000, being shared by the city and the county. After completion of the study, expected by the end of the year, Fitch will recommend a structure and finance model, or if consolidation is not an option, an alternative strategy to reduce the cost of fire services without impacting homeowners' insurance rates.

The merger has been attempted previously several times, according to City Commissioner Jeff Krauskopf, but the last proposals by the county in 2009 resulted in higher costs to city residents. The city and county disagree also on funding source, the city preferring an independent fire district, and County Commissioner Sarah Heard saying, "absolutely not."

The idea of a merger re-emerged in February 2014, when the Martin County Taxpayers Association and County Commissioner Ed Fielding suggested revisiting the idea. Taxpayers Association President Richard Geisinger, after a cursory analysis, suggested that \$1 million could be saved annually with a merger.

When the city commission voted to take part in the study, Stuart resident Helen McBride urged commissioners not to proceed. "Our city cares about their residents," she said, "but every time the county gets involved in something with the city, it's us, the city's residents, who are the ones who get hurt. Please, do not let the county take over the city's fire department." ■



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Millions of gallons of LNG will be riding the rails

Liquid natural gas is poised to be either a best friend to Martin County residents, or its worst enemy.

An LNG plant in Indiantown, after spending years jumping through all the required federal and state regulatory hoops, will soon be under construction and operational by 2016, adding significantly to Martin County's tax and employment base.

At the same time, the ever-increasing number of FEC rail cars, which soon will be carrying thousands of tons of LNG to Florida ports from less tightly regulated plants than Indiantown's, will also most likely be burning LNG for fuel. The 24 new GE locomotives purchased in 2014 by FEC Railroad can be converted from diesel fuel to LNG, with a conversion kit and an LNG tanker car, according to a GE press release.

All Aboard Florida locomotives likely also will be running on LNG. Two companies related to All Aboard Florida's parent company, Fortress Investment Group, are building two LNG facilities, one in Titusville and one near Miami International Airport in Medley at the Hialeah Rail Yard owned by FEC Railway.

Despite the billions of tons of liquefied natural gas projected to be traveling the rails through Martin County, LNG is not one of the hazardous materials identified by Martin County Fire Rescue Division Chief Daniel Wouters in his recent report to the Martin County Commission on the county's vulnerability in chemical spills.

"The concern we have is the increase of the high-speed passenger trains along with the cargo, which travels at a lower speed," he said, referring to All



The Fortress Investment Group-related liquefied natural gas plant in Medley is nearing completion without any apparent federal regulatory oversight. The LNG will be used to fuel FEC trains. The U.S. Department of Energy also authorized sale of the LNG it produces to both Federal Trade Agreement and non-FTA countries.

Aboard Florida's projected 32 trains daily crossing more than 26 intersections in Martin County. "That has the potential to increase our risk for these types of accidents."

The chemicals Wouters listed, including liquefied anhydrous ammonia and liquefied chlorine gas, are toxic, however LNG is not. It is the preferred fuel for trains and trucks because of its far lower cost. It also burns cleaner than diesel fuel. Since natural gas is cooled to around minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit, LNG also is non-flammable and floats on top of water. It vaporizes quickly, so a spill does not threaten the water supply; however, LNG still poses hazards during production and transporting.

In the event that a LNG tank is ruptured in a transport accident, spilling LNG, a high probability of a fire exists. A flammable natural gas vapor/air mixture

will be formed immediately in the vicinity of the LNG pool, according to the Federal Transit Administration, but there is no odor associated with its vapors to warn first-responders. If ignited by a spark or other external ignition, the heat released from an LNG pool fire is approximately 60 percent greater than that of a gasoline pool fire of equivalent size.

To obtain authorization to export LNG from any Florida port, another Fortress company, American LNG Marketing LLC in New York, obtained two Department of Energy authorizations, one on March 19 and the other May 29, to export a combined 33 billion cubic feet (600,000 metric tons) of LNG internationally from the Medley and Titusville plants. The authorizations each took less than three weeks to obtain.

Although American LNG pledged in its Department of Energy application that all the applicable permits would be obtained for the Titusville facility, no such



The storage tanks for the liquefied natural gas are in place at the Medley plant, ready to hold the 100,000 gallons of LNG produced daily to fuel FEC trains and to export internationally.

promises were made for the Medley plant. In fact, American LNG said that the company was "categorically excluded" from requiring state or federal permits, including from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which normally oversees LNG facilities.

The Medley plant, under the name LNG Holdings LLC, incorporated in Florida a year ago, purchased from Chart Industries an LNG liquefaction plant the same month, which is already nearing completion within months of arrival. The plant is expected to produce 100,000 gallons of LNG daily, according to Chart.

Indiantown residents have waited nearly eight years for the proposed LNG plant there, confident in the state and federal oversight of its operations and the 30 high-paying jobs it brings to the county. For Martin County residents, however, the prospect of trainloads of LNG from a plant with no energy commission oversight, traveling on the soon-to-be crowded FEC tracks, probably not so much. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

Coast Guard listening to AAF protests

Although the legal efforts to thwart the issuance of private activity bonds to All Aboard Florida got shut down by the U.S. District Court, efforts to get the Coast Guard to pay attention to boaters may have paid off.

A full-time bridge tender may soon be stationed at Jupiter's Loxahatchee River and St. Lucie River drawbridges as the U.S. Coast Guard conducts tests on the New River whether a bridge tender decreases boater backups caused by passing Florida East Coast Railway trains.

The Loxahatchee River railroad drawbridge in Tequesta is 90 years old and takes approximately 30 minutes to go down for trains, according to Tequesta officials; the St. Lucie River drawbridge takes less time, but bridge closure times are a major issue that drew the Village of Tequesta, the City of Stuart, the Town of Jupiter, and Martin County to oppose All Aboard Florida's addition of 32 trains daily to FEC's anticipated 20 trains. FEC currently runs 14 trains daily.

Barry Dragon, director of the district bridge program for the 7th Coast Guard

District, issued the proposal following public meetings and 3,000 written comments regarding wait times at the three railroad drawbridges.

The experiment began in May at the New River Bridge in Ft. Lauderdale where boaters can now call the bridge tender to find out if a train is on its way. The test is scheduled to run through Oct. 16, but Dragon said the changes could be applied more quickly to the other bridges, depending on test results.

The Florida East Coast Railway must cover the cost for the bridge tender, and other upgrades such as lights and a countdown clock ordered by the Coast Guard to "address the inability of the bridge owner, FEC, to operate the bridge under current regulations."

Awaiting decision from FRA

All Aboard Florida announced that it would begin selling bonds on June 22 to raise \$1.75 billion, but it also is awaiting approval of a Federal Railroad Administration loan pending release of the final Environmental Impact Study.

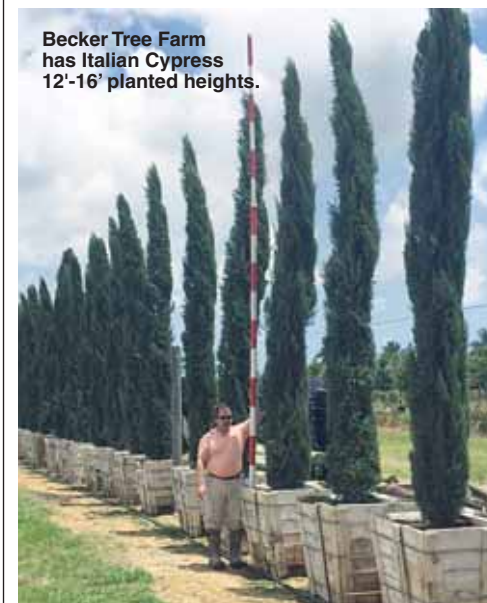
Terry Rauth, assistant director of engineering for Martin County, reported

at a recent meeting in Hobe Sound that the county had received copies of the draft 90-percent-complete design plans from AAF, but many questions remained unanswered, she added, such as the grade percentages at crossings that will change with the addition of a second rail.

"We have asked repeatedly for those final grade percentages," Rauth said, since they will determine how steep the grade will be for drivers attempting to cross the railroad tracks, "but we haven't gotten a response."

She cautioned that the public may not have a second opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Statement, since the Federal Railroad Administration is not required to release a second draft.

The first phase of All Aboard Florida's 235-mile project from Miami to West Palm Beach is under construction will begin service in early 2017. The second phase of the \$3 billion project, from West Palm Beach and nonstop through the Treasure Coast to Orlando International Airport, is set to begin running in late 2017, according to AAF officials. ■



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Editorial: Our commission meetings are just fine

We agreed this week with Stuart attorney Virginia Sherlock, who objected to the county commission's sudden proclivity toward conducting "workshops" on important topics outside of commission chambers. Not only did we agree with Sherlock, so did Commissioners John Haddox and Doug Smith.

When those two commissioners opposed leaving commission chambers for yet another workshop session, Sarah Heard suggested having just one of their two scheduled workshops in the upstairs conference room. Smith's impassioned response was that commissioners had to choose: Either they were going to conduct the people's business in the open, transparently, as they all profess is their much-heralded goal, or they were just pretending to want open government.

As a result, both of this week's workshops—one examining new rules for meeting procedures and the other about the county's secondary urban services districts—were in commission chambers instead of in a conference room. Both were televised. Both elicited much public comment. That's the way government is supposed to work. Kudos to Doug Smith.

Five other workshops have been held within the past 12 weeks, but without close public scrutiny: on the budget, on capital improvement projects, on code enforcement, on the analysis of county facilities and buildings, and on strategic

planning, which was around the same time as the City of Stuart's strategic planning workshop. Theirs, however, was at Flagler Place, a venue that would accommodate hundreds of residents. Not upstairs in a conference room smaller than commission chambers.

And Stuart's session was at 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning. Saturday! Which government body do you suppose serves its constituents more openly and responsively?

Had all the workshops this year been in commission chambers, the public would have had fewer surprises. They would have heard Fielding and Heard direct Kevin Freeman, of the community development department, to investigate "pooling" of all seven of the Community Redevelopment Areas' \$6 million annually in Tax Incremental Financing funds to help pay for the projected \$250 million in sewer projects, or maybe for resurfacing some county roads, or maybe to dredge the inlet—never mind that TIF funds collected are from taxpayers who live in those districts and cannot by law be spent outside of the district from which they were collected.

Never mind that those CRA projects were selected by the residents who live or work within those boundaries to be necessary to the health, safety and well being of their residents, and that they'd been investing their time and tax money for 15 years or longer to see them accomplished.

Never mind that that a TIF fund investment into a CRA more likely would pay far more in the long term by attracting tourists and visitors to these historic communities, which would help fill restaurants and boost retail sales, stimulating the local economy, stabilizing small businesses, which would invest their own private dollars in building renovations and upgrades that increases impact fees, and attract more businesses into revitalized areas that, in turn, help create a desirable neighborhood, thus increasing property values, which, ultimately, increases county tax revenue.

"I think we'd be far better off to leave the CRAs alone," said Haddox, during the workshop, "and to allow those (TIF) funds to do what they were intended to do—to stimulate the local economy."

We also would have heard commissioners direct Kevin Abbate, parks and recreation director, to bring a revenue-enhancing plan to the commission that included charging for beach parking and for use of boat ramps—and specifically to start with Hobe Sound beach, which lies adjacent to the home of Commissioner Anne Scott, who also wants alcohol banned and the beach closed at night to "improve security." Oh, yes, and also to protect those nesting turtles.

Scott wants also to conduct commission meetings "more efficiently," and complains that "this just isn't working." Quite to the contrary, we believe Ed

Fielding has done a superb job of conducting commission meetings, extending respect to citizens at all times and to most of the commissioners most of the time. We applaud also the way he handles proclamations: with genuine gratitude for citizens' community service and without short-changing their message or recognition. He keeps the meeting flowing, and if he can fill a gap by moving items around in the agenda, he'll do it. There's nothing about commission meetings that needs to be "fixed."

Scott wants the commission run like a courtroom. She wants no public comment other than what's on that day's agenda, otherwise, it's "politicking." She wants a certain amount of time allotted to each agenda item, to be followed closely, in order for people to know in advance when to show up, so "they don't have sit here for hours." She wants a certain decorum followed to prohibit applause or outbursts from the audience. Shoot, she probably wants men to take off their caps when they enter, and to prohibit women wearing bermuda shorts!

But this is democracy. Yes, it's sometimes messy and burdensome, and since we live in the sub-tropics, we're a little more casual and informal than in Chicago, where Scott lives. Haddox said it best: "Just like (a public speaker) said, we asked for these jobs...If there's two or three hours of public comment, so be it." Amen. ■

Guest Editorial: Blessings and curses of technology

If I am on an operating table, I will be more than happy for all the computers and gadgets that are in that operating room. And, in my line of work as a CPA, I would be lost without a cell phone and a computer. E-mail and texting are tremendous blessings to those of us who use them in business and personal communication, and for people who travel, they are blessings that enable them to contact their world back home.

For all the blessings, though, are many curses: In days gone by, it was common for the average family to sit around the supper table and have meaningful conversation. Their whole life now seems centered around the latest technology, and all the apps that go with it. Their attention deteriorates into a constant stream of texting, Facebook, Twitter, video games, and on and on.

Now smart phones can even act as alarm clocks. One parent actually sends texts to his children to wake them up, as their iPhone sits beside their bed in place of the alarm clock.

Those phones have become the ruling force in many people's lives. They can't even sit in church for an hour without checking out the latest "whatever" on their iPhone. Children and parents seldom read anymore or even talk to each other.

I refuse to be part of the herd. Just because others are doing it, must I do it, too? Does anyone think for themselves anymore, or question the validity of what is happening in society?

My wife has a Facebook account, but spends very little time on it. The few times I have ventured onto it, I see why it wastes so much time: There is a comment from someone, so you go to their site. Oh, there is so and so, I will check out their site, and on and on it goes, until you have wasted countless minutes—maybe even hours.

Facebook shares with the whole world information about yourself and other people that may or may not have any value, or should not even be shared. A study by a US market research firm

reports that 40% of the messages on Twitter are "pointless babble" along the lines of "I am eating a sandwich now." When we must tell the world, "I just got up, showered and ate breakfast," (and hopefully they brushed their teeth), we have lost something somewhere. I think it might be our sanity.

Texting destroys not only spoken communication, but is an extremely dangerous weapon. We need to pass a law forbidding use of hand-held phones while driving. I have been guilty of dialing a number on my cellphone while driving, catching myself about to cross over, not only the center line in the road, but to cross over into the great beyond!

Video games control preteens. Texting controls teenagers. Facebook controls young adults, and maybe seniors are safe only because many of them don't have computers. They still read books and talk to each other – how boring! If they only had Facebook or Twitter, they could know who just got up, showered and ate breakfast!

Internet companies used to watch usage levels increase when people booted up at work. Now they see the uptick earlier in the day. "It is a rocket ship that takes off at 7 am," says Craig Labovitz, as quoted in the New York Times. He owns Arbor Networks, a company that analyzes Internet use. Akamai, which helps sites like Facebook, says traffic takes off even earlier – at 6 am on the East Coast.

If you are guilty of excessive dependence on technology, ask yourself: Am I addicted? What impact does this have on my family and/or me? Has our family drawn closer, or drifted apart, as each does his or her own thing? Could I use that Facebook time in a more profitable way? Am I caught up in peer pressure to do it, because they're doing it?

Try something new: Read a good book. Talk to someone—face to face. If you do, I think you'll have a very good day.

Jim Olsen
Hobe Sound

Allow our CRAs to live up to potential



**Barbara
Clowdus**

Unfiltered

The people who live in Martin County, particularly those who have lived here their entire lives, are what give form and substance to the fabric of this place. The rest of us absorb their heritage and become part of their legacy without the sweat, blood and tears they shed—from the commercial fishermen, citrus growers, cattle ranchers, artists, charter boat captains, boat builders, farmers and teachers to the Seminoles and the Bahamians who were among our earliest pioneers. Their character set this place apart, and it flows through the DNA of those who came after.

The rest of us are just lucky we stumbled upon this spot.

Making this our home, though, requires of us that we continue the legacy of those founders—a much greater responsibility than just preserving an era's historic buildings. It means ensuring that their history does not slip away from us, even as we modernize and embrace new technology and lifestyles. Perhaps more than anything else, that's what the community redevelopment areas mean to most of us—taking responsibility to protect and enhance our somewhat undeserved legacy.

Think for a moment about how different each of these historic areas are from the rest of the county: Port Salerno, Old Palm City, Rio, Golden Gate, Indiantown, Jensen Beach, and Hobe Sound. Each has its own flavor, its unique history, and its own perplexing issues. All of them qualify under the state statute as a "blighted" area—not how we typically define that word—but because each has sections with their old buildings, or outdated infrastructure, or poor roadway layouts, or lack of streetlights, few if any contiguous sidewalks and generally a lack of neighborhood connectivity.

Those conditions impede each CRA from reaching its full potential to create healthy, safe and desirable places for people to live, to work and to ensure the "story" of that place will endure—the safety nets to stop their slide into a non-descript oblivion. The Hobe Sound and Old Palm City CRAs were on the cusp of making genuine strides toward reaching that potential when their projects were killed.

Considering that our population is aging (50 is now the median age in Martin County, and the number of families with children under the age of 18 has declined over the past 15 years) we should recognize that these are the neighborhoods that can increase the quality of life of our older generation by making them walkable and bikeable, with streets that are safe to cross, and with friendly gathering places with shops, parks and playgrounds for children and grandchildren—exactly the

same qualities that young people are starting to appreciate and desire for themselves.

All of our county's CRAs have a plan in place to improve connectivity, to address stormwater and flooding issues, and to improve safety, which in turn lends itself to improved health, happiness and quality of life. These plans have been thoughtfully, sometimes painfully, constructed by those who live there, because no one else quite knows the needs, the history or the flavor of a place, or what streets flood, and where shortcuts reveal the patterns of foot-traffic.

Residents who take an active part in developing their plans, the members of the Neighborhood Advisory Committees, realize and accept the responsibility required to spend hours of their personal time. They recognize also that it's a privilege to have an opportunity to help shape the vision and outcomes for their neighborhood.

Ideally, as a community translates its vision into reality with improved infrastructure, affordable housing where needed and revitalized commercial areas with a combination of grants and TIF funding—a portion of the tax that comes from only the increase in property values within the boundaries of the CRA—renovation by business owners follows. A revitalized commercial area attracts other businesses, more residents, creating the kind of desirable neighborhoods that increases property values over the long term, spreading from the commercial areas to the residential.

Look at the City of Stuart, an exam-

ple of successful revitalization, the result of city commissioners working alongside residents to make it happen—and they still plan more to come.

Martin County's seven CRAs fit the county's vision of itself, keeping development within urban districts, creating a strong infrastructure in the county's core areas, and strengthening small businesses, all while enhancing the quality of life of residents. Now their very existence is being threatened by powerful voices who object to mixed uses that allow livings spaces among commercial areas, and to a population density that's allowed in downtowns, but unavailable elsewhere.

Those voices have the audacity to blame the Hobe Sound CRA for the manufactured-home debacle that cost the county \$200,000, which happened because there was no Neighborhood Advisory Committee at the time. It had been dismantled by the county commission, thus could not review what was coming.

Any failings of the county's Community Redevelopment Agency can be borne only by the County Commission itself, which is directly responsible for every decision and every direction given to the county's Community Development Department and the CRAs for 13 of the past 15 years.

We have commissioners who say the right words about celebrating the culture and history of this place, nurturing small business, and ensuring a good quality of life for all residents, but their lofty words now sound hollow. ■

Comments on CRAs circulating on the Internet

The CRAs were an experiment. By identifying the seven areas of the old 1920's train stations that remain as small town "mainstreets" would CRA land use incentives and CRA TIF funding help address the lack of basic urban infrastructure?

The car wasn't king back then. There are no parking lots. There were no drainage and stormwater retention requirements or wetland or upland native preserves. There was no sewer and water utilities and septic systems were the only alternative. The TIF funding was a strategy that depended on investment in these core areas providing a return in terms of increased taxable value. TIF funds are general fund taxes that normally would go to the general fund. We all pay those taxes. They are NOT like special taxing districts where residents are taxed extra and provided with extra service.

In a sense, the TIF funds are "borrowed" from the general fund with the expectation that increased taxable values will return those funds to the general fund. For the payback to happen, the CRAs have to sunset at some point when the goals are met and the areas are no longer determined to be "blighted". CRAs and TIF funding are supposed to be

about blighted areas where infrastructure improvements will make the blight go away and improve property values. The original design of CRAs included large sections of mostly residential property around the core Mixed Use Overlay (MUO) area and designated them as "blighted. Most of them are not blighted by any stretch of the imagination.

As a result, the TIF funding doesn't act as designed. The whole CRA area pays the same taxes as everyone else. The CRA gets to keep 65-95% of their tax increment to build projects that will overcome the blight. The tax increment is the amount of taxable value in any year that is more than the base year. The base year for different CRAs varied from 1999 to 2002. Analysis shows that most of the \$25 million plus that has been spent on CRAs has been spent on projects that benefit the core area. Most of the tax increment has come from the unblighted area of the CRA outside the core MUO. A second unforeseen problem has been the change in the cap on taxable value for non-homestead property. Prior to 2011 a constitutional amendment put in place a 10% cap on increases in taxable value.

This means that if a one million dol-

lar investment in a CRA causes a one million dollar increase in market value, it will be ten years before the taxable value catches up to the market value.

As long as there is not a dependable large revenue stream to take on major projects like sewer and water, the CRAs will continue to do smaller projects that benefit only a few parcels. The TIF funds are General Fund revenues. They should not be spent for special perks with limited benefits when there are serious unmet maintenance and capital project needs countywide.

If the thesis is that neighborhood advisory boards should determine how general fund revenues are spent in their neighborhoods, then all neighborhoods should have a NAC and be allowed to determine how money is spent in their neighborhood. That would require a substantial increase in property taxes if the County continued to provide basic services. Analysis of the ten year history of CRAs shows that the MUO core areas cannot support any major projects. The investment of \$25 million from the general fund over ten years has not increased taxable value significantly in those areas. Including areas outside the MUO that are not blighted does not

meet the criteria for a CRA. More important, using taxes from the residential areas around the MUOs without providing benefits there is simply not fair.

Finally, there is the question of the land use incentives offered by the CRAs. They are designed to give bonus densities to Mixed Use projects that tear down existing structures or build on vacant land in the CRA. They simply have not worked. The CRAs were put in place prior to 2002. It's 2015. One Mixed Use project has been partially built—Rennar River Place. It has not been a striking success. It has not delivered the promised benefits.

CRA incentives have caused problems in some areas. The modular home that appeared in a stable residential area in Hobe Sound was located there because of CRA incentives. Where design standards have been mandated outside the MUO, residents have been unpleasantly surprised to find out that they had to build porches and garages in a certain way. It's time to lay out all the factual information about CRAs. ■

--Attributed in Email Posts to
Former County Commissioner
Maggy Hurchalla

(Clipped due to space constraints)

Caulkins water farm gives new hope to estuaries

Florida's first, true "water farm" exceeds all expectations, according to state officials, and it's right here in Martin County. An expanded Caulkins Water Farm on 3,200 acres near Indiantown holds the promise of relief to the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon estuaries from annual deluges of polluted water—up to half of the water storage needed to reduce annual discharges by 90 percent, according to recent studies.

Situated along Citrus Boulevard adjacent to the C-44 canal, the Caulkins pilot project stunned South Florida Water Management District engineers almost immediately by storing more than double the amount of water expected. Despite its unexpectedly superior performance, however, the project still must overcome two major hurdles: Funding ends within seven months, so the project must appeal to state legislators now embroiled in budget battles for funds to expand the project, at the same time that water farming itself has come under fire by some environmental activists.

"I wish there was some other term for it than 'water farming,' just because it sounds crazy," says George Caulkins III, whose father planted the orange grove on Citrus Boulevard in the early '60s that now stands fallow in four feet of water, as he addressed a group of Stuart-Martin County Chamber members on a tour of the South Florida Water Management



Project manager of the Caulkins Water Farm, Tom Kenny, points to the tree line on the horizon, the boundary of the Caulkins 3,200-acre farm.

District pilot project in May.

"I'm a citrus farmer, and when the water management district first approached me about turning my orange groves into a water farm, I said no, not interested," said Caulkins, educated at Yale and a former Marine helicopter pilot and veteran of Desert Storm.

The Caulkins groves next to the C-44 canal were considered an ideal location to test the concept of water farming early in the Dispersed Water Management Program, which began in 2006, when the SFWMD began paying ranchers to hold stormwater on their lands, rather than drain them. The first early

successes resulted in an expansion of the program in 2011, after citrus greening had decimated thousands of acres of Florida orange groves, including those of the Caulkins Indiantown Citrus Company, then fallow orange groves were looked at to store water as Everglades projects came online.

"We'd survived everything that could be thrown at citrus farmers," Caulkins said. "Drought, freezes, hurricanes, canker...but greening killed us, just took us to our knees...We stopped picking oranges four years ago, but now we've got a new use for old technology (the irrigation infrastructure for farming), dreamed up by the South Florida Water Management District."

The infrastructure already in place—the water pumps and canals throughout the property—dramatically reduces the upfront construction cost of a water farm, although until the Caulkins project, no other true "water farms" were part of the district's Dispersed Water Management program anywhere in the state.

State's first water farm

SFWMD, with a matching \$1.5 million grant from DEP, published a request for proposals for water farm pilot projects in 2012 and three farms were selected in 2013, just as raging rains were causing unrelenting discharges from both Lake Okeechobee and the local drainage basin. Of the two pilot projects in Martin

County and one in St. Lucie County, Caulkins is the largest and the first in the state to be operational.

Other Dispersed Water Management Projects plug ditches to retain stormwater runoff. The Caulkins project instead pumps billions of gallons of water from the C-44 canal onto the Caulkins site, now a shallow-water reservoir that looks like a slice of the Everglades with alligators swimming among hyacinths toward a flock of baby gallinules, with an eagle overhead and stilted herons picking at the shoreline.

"It's as different as a farm is to a factory," said Tom Kenny, the Caulkins project manager, who struggles to find the right words to outline clearly the enormous benefits of a water farm over other types of Dispersed Water Management sites. Essentially, in addition to storage, the water farm also cleanses billions of gallons of water while recharging the surficial aquifer, capturing about 75 percent of the phosphorous and 50 percent of the nitrogen that otherwise would foul Martin County's estuaries.

The project, enclosed entirely by a seven-foot levee built with the spoil from a newly dug canal, provides a total of 413 acres of permeable land to treat polluted water from the C-44 and to capture the 55 inches of annual rainfall. Operational since mid-February 2014, the Caulkins pilot project—including the existing 22 miles of irrigation canals, within and around the perimeter—has stored 8.6 billion gallons of water, more than 25,000 acre-feet of water, nearly 2.25 times what had been expected, according to project engineer Melissa Corbett of the MilCor Group.

Designed to hold 6,780 acre-feet of water, the SFWMD statistical report—which excludes the water stored in the existing canals on the property—shows more than 12,000 acre-feet of water have been stored within the reservoir's 413-acre reservoir proper.

"Right off the bat, it was so successful," Kenny added, "that they (SFWMD engineers) made us stop pumping so they could come in here to dig a monitoring well right smack in the center to see where all that water was going, so those numbers do not include the month it took to do that."

An independent technical analysis by the University of North Florida's engineering department confirmed what SFWMD had discovered—that the water was not going right back into the C-44, Kenny said.

With the addition of 14 additional

Brown water enters the Caulkins Water Farm from the C-44 canal.



George Caulkins, III



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Some of the canals are covered completely with water lettuce and hyacinths, which will need to be removed mechanically to keep the water farm functioning at peak levels.

monitoring wells on the perimeter of the project, the results are continuing to be studied by multiple agencies. Dr. Christopher Brown, an UNF engineering professor, has confirmed that around 82 percent of the water percolates downward into the sandy soil to recharge the aquifer, 11 percent is lost to evaporation, and around six percent remains static within the reservoir.

"The first question people are going to ask is, does this water drain back into the C-44, and, yes, some of it will, eventually," said Dr. Brown, "but it will take from one to 10 years, and it will be a slow seep from the aquifer, not the deluge that's so damaging now."

Estuaries hang in the balance

Although area scientists, including Dr. Edie Widder, founder of the Ocean Research Conservation Association in Ft. Pierce, often caution that the Indian River Lagoon/St. Lucie River estuaries are now at a critical "tipping point of no return," most of the public's focus has been on long-term solutions, leaving the estuaries at the mercy of incessant, polluted stormwater drainage from the Okeechobee/St. Lucie River drainage basin and the unpredictable, periodic deluge of Lake Okeechobee discharges.

"We all know that the St. Lucie River and the IRL (Indian River Lagoon) needed projects completed yesterday," said Martin County resident Kevin Powers, vice chair of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, who addressed a tour group on June 1.

Powers, under fire since he led the SFWMD vote not to exercise the state's option to purchase 48,000 acres south of Lake Okeechobee, pointed west toward the C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment construction site, explaining to visitors that it will not be operational until 2020; however, the privately constructed Caulkins project took only 16 weeks to complete.

"The most abused resource we have is

time," Powers added, "and for whatever reasons, federal projects take a long time....but these (water farms) are deliverables that we can count on now, and since we don't need to purchase the land to do this, the upfront cost is much lower."

Even an expanded Caulkins Water Farm, plus the two additional water farms on the C-43 and C-44 canals currently under construction will not handle hurricanes or major rains, such as the 136-billion gallons of water going to tide in 2013, Powers conceded, but they could meet and exceed the additional storage required to end the regular, annual discharges to the St. Lucie River while the full range of 68 Everglades restoration projects are completed.

"This really is a win-win-win," Caulkins said. "This resolves an immediate, pressing issue for the St. Lucie River as we wait for other restoration projects to come on line. It will also allow time for researchers to find a possible cure or solution to citrus greening, which means I can hope one day to return to citrus farming."

As long as Caulkins keeps alive that hope and still can earn an income from his land, he's far less likely to sell it to developers. In the meantime, the land remains on Martin County's tax rolls, can help restore the estuaries, and gives hope that the county's citrus industry can one day rebound.

"When he first bought land in Martin County, my father was told the soil was too sandy here to grow oranges," Caulkins said, "but after a hurricane wiped out all their groves up on the ridge, he said that sandy soil had saved him. After I took over, he reminded me again: 'Son, this sandy soil will save you.'"

What he could not have foreseen was that sandy soil would help save not only an orange grove and a family business, but an estuary, too. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

Caulkins keys: Location and sandy soil

The success of the Caulkins Water Farm pilot project, 450 acres of a 3,200-acre fallow orange grove within a quarter mile of the C-44 canal, is its sand.

"When we drilled down, there wasn't a bit of marl in 40 feet of soil," said Tom Kenny, project manager. "It's all sand."

As a result, the water recedes at about one-tenth of a foot per day through percolation and evaporation; thus that amount is available to be refilled by additional water each day.

"If we were to expand to 3,000 acres," says landowner George Caulkins, "we could continue to take 300 acre-feet per day, even after the reservoir is already 'full.'"

With 325,853 gallons of water in an acre-foot, this translates to 97,755,900 gallons of water taken out of the C-44 canal everyday that would not flow into the St. Lucie River.

At the peak of the 2013 discharges, about 4.8 billion gallons were being released daily.

"We could not make much of dent in that," Caulkins concedes, "but there is no project contemplated that could do much with that volume."

Even a reservoir contemplated for the 28,000 square mile parcel of U.S. Sugar land south of Lake Okeechobee would hold only 100,000 acre-feet of water, according to SFWMD engineers, so eliminating discharges at that high a volume will require multitude projects and an overall, statewide water strategy that includes the Kissimmee River Basin.

"However, if you look at the 2015 discharges, it is a different story," Caulkins adds. "The Army Corps was releasing about 400 million gallons a day into the C-44 from the Lake (when releases started Jan. 16). We could have been taking 25 percent of that daily release."

Every day. ■

A bargain in the making

The University of North Florida analysis, using Department of Environmental Protection on-site monitoring gauges, shows that the Caulkins Water Farm pilot project removed 2.66 metric tons of phosphorus and 13.10 metric tons of total nitrogen from February 2014 to March 31, 2015, similar on a per-unit-basis as to what is predicted for the C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment area under construction by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District as part of the Everglades restoration plan.

The C-44 reservoir/storm water treatment area's total capacity is expected to be 56,000 acre-feet of water storage that includes a 3,400-acre reservoir under construction by the Corps of Engineers and a 6,300-acre stormwater treatment area under construction by the SFWMD.

The Caulkins Water Farm pilot project cost, based on the SFWMD original estimates of 6,780 acre-feet of water stored, is \$76 per acre-foot, as compared to the C-44 project, which is an estimated \$268 per acre-foot of water retention based on a 50-year life span. The total construction costs of the C-44 project will top \$500 million, which includes land acquisition, according to a recent audit, plus about \$12 million annually to maintain and operate.

The controversial Alico water disbursement project, according to a 2014 state inspector general report, costs \$136 per acre-foot to hold back 91,000 acre-feet of water west of Lake Okeechobee on about 35,000 acres.

Local environmental activists insist that the water farm projects should be restricted to only government-owned lands because of cost and because they are not a permanent installation.

Dr. Brown's calculations of the cost of the Caulkins project, however, using conservative storage numbers, shows that the pilot's cost has been about \$37 per acre-foot. The initial investment by the SFWMD was \$1.36 million for the three-year project.

Adjusting for what had been unanticipated costs for the pilot project, the expanded Caulkins Water Farm is estimated to cost \$125 per acre-foot of water. ■

Opportunity knocks with central Florida initiative

The Central Florida Water Initiative holds great potential in helping resolve some of our most perplexing water issues. Their task is to create more storage in the headwaters of the Everglades to stave off water shortages in central Florida, but it also will slow the amount of runoff that reaches the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee, only to be flushed to tide through the St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee rivers.

One of the biggest challenges to stopping the Lake Okeechobee discharges has been our (natural) tendency to be parochial. In other words, we want to solve our own immediate problems without looking at the entire Everglades system, which includes the whole Kissimmee River and Okeechobee basins, south to Florida Bay. The solutions we seek do not begin at Lake Okeechobee's rim; rather, they begin at the headwaters of the Everglades—the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes.

Before the Kissimmee River was "straightened" to provide more land for development, much of the Kissimmee basin was flooded, especially during the wet years, which contributed to the natural recharge of the Floridan aquifer. The water sitting on land for longer periods of time also evaporated faster and fed the rain cycle. The water system was in balance.

Now, water flowing from Orlando reaches Lake Okeechobee in six days, when it used to take six months. By altering the Kissimmee River's natural flow, we pay the price with estuary-damaging Lake Okeechobee discharges, and central Florida now faces a serious water shortage in the not-too-distant future. The Central Florida Water Initiative finally will address those issues.

The group is a collaborative, water-supply planning effort comprising three state water management districts, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, county water utilities, environmental groups, business organizations, agricultural communities and other stakeholders.

The CFWI planning area includes Orange, Osceola, Polk, and Seminole counties and southern Lake County. It



Nyla Pipes

One Florida Foundation

includes the headwaters for seven river systems: the Alafia, Peace, Hillsborough, and Withlacoochee rivers in the Southwest Florida Water Management District; the Kissimmee River/Chain of Lakes in the South Florida Water Management District; and the Ocklawaha and St. Johns rivers within the Saint Johns River Water Management District.

We have been attending these meetings as representatives of One Florida Foundation, and, frankly, much needs to be improved. The plans currently being considered do not give enough priority to water conservation, a frequent criticism by others too, and alarmingly call for drilling deeper into the Floridan aquifer to tap resources we haven't tapped yet, which could negatively impact surrounding lakes. They reaffirm the old patterns of unsustainable water use. We should all know better by now.

We believe more can be done and should be done to conserve water in

urban areas by adopting and encouraging use of bio-swales, green roofs, permeable pavements, and xeriscaping. At the very least, planting less water-intensive lawns should be a requirement for new development.

Water doesn't stay put in our own cities and counties. This is especially true with our karst landscape of limestone and our sandy soils, which allow water to flow freely from one place to another on top of the ground and below, bringing with it our neighbors' pollutants. But it also gives us a supply of water. The flip side of that, the water can also be manipulated with reservoirs, dams, canals, etc., which cause positive or negative changes downstream. Let's push for something positive!

It would be wise for all of us to educate ourselves and pay attention to the Central Florida Water Initiative, for their decisions could be part of a solution—or potentially create more problems.

To study their draft plans for the central Florida region, go to www.cfwewater.com. The comment period ends July 31 and may be our best opportunity ever to give input on the future of our water. ■

Nyla Pipes is a founder of One Florida Foundation, which addresses water issues throughout the state.

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One Florida's monthly projects define their mission

In addition to hosting river clean-ups, raising funds for scholarships, and launching educational initiatives, an essential part of the One Florida Foundation mission is instilling a sense of stewardship among the youth who live along our waterways.

One Florida members organized an outing in May for the youngsters of the Sword Outreach Ministries, who had worked hard over the past few months to help clean up Moore's Creek in Fort Pierce.

"We decided it was time to enjoy some recreation and introduce them to our Indian River Lagoon and spoil islands," said Nyla Pipes, a One Florida Foundation founder. "We can't thank Lisa of Lisa's Kayaks enough for loaning us a paddleboard and several kayaks. Her continued support is invaluable."

The group, some of whom had never been on a boat, spent the day on a spoil island, learned to paddle, improved their swimming skills, and ended the day with a hike and barbeque picnic.

"We were also treated to the sight of three manatees hanging out in the ma-



FAU's Dr. Jim Masterson takes measurements and scientific samples to provide the Florida Wildlife Commission with information to assist with invasive species control.

rina as we wrapped up our day," Pipes added.

In addition, One Florida Foundation's fundraising efforts will send some deserving high school students from Martin and St. Lucie counties to Florida Atlantic University's Pine Jog Center's residential research institute, H2O to Go, in conjunction with FAU John D. MacArthur Campus, FAU Harbor



Judges for the Linda Hudson, S. Gayle Harrell, and others.



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The solution is possible, if we do the math . . .

A major stumbling block to stopping Lake Okeechobee discharges is the sheer amount of water that needs to be displaced—1.6 million acre-feet of water—a huge amount without a home. It constitutes three feet of depth in Lake Okeechobee.

During the height of the rainy season, with discharges raging, all its gates and spillways fully opened, the level of Lake Okeechobee can be reduced by merely one inch a day; therefore, when it rains in north-central Florida and the Lake already is dumping, no progress can be made to reduce Lake levels.

Since that is the case, if the gates to the St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee rivers are closed to stop the discharges, how can we expect to move all that water south using only one gate, when having all of them wide open could not do it?

Something else to consider: South Florida Water Management District estimates the amount of water that can flow south to supply the Everglades ranges from 1,250 to 2,500 acre-feet per day, a total of 430,000 acre-feet per year—a far cry from the 1.6 million acre-feet that was dumped to tide in 2013.

Why can't more water go south? It is polluted to upwards of 400 parts per billion phosphorus. Court mandates require that water must be no more than 10 parts



**Capt.
Don Voss**

*One Florida
Foundation*

per billion phosphorus when it reaches the Everglades and Tamiami Trail.

The STOZE and WATER INSTITUTE reports

One Florida Foundation's STOZE report addresses these issues in a similar fashion as does the University of Florida Water Institute/Negron Report. The following are some of their similar points:

1. Address the "faucet."

As Nyla Pipes reports, the Central Florida Water Initiative is beginning to address the issue of water drainage from the entire Kissimmee River Basin north of Lake Okeechobee. More than 50 percent of the water discharged in 2013 came from this area. One Florida Foundation (and others) consider this to be the "faucet." If we can control the faucet, we can control the discharges.

The current Kissimmee Basin Ranch Reserves Project is addressing the future



Nyla Pipes and Capt. Don Voss present a One Florida Foundation check to fund student scholarships to FAU Pine Jog Summer Institute representatives Anne Henderson, Chris Hill, and Ray Coleman.

need for that area's surface water use in the coming years as drinking water levels drop to a critical level. Their initial effort will hold an additional 100,000 acre-feet of water in the middle basin.

Although that's just 28 percent of the amount sent to Lake Okeechobee from the Kissimmee Basin, it is a start; however, considering that 860,000 acre-feet of water was sent to the Lake in 2013, the upper and middle Kissimmee

Basin should plan to hold, use and/or store closer to 500,000 acre-feet in future rain events.

2. Dredge Lake Okeechobee.

When Lake Okeechobee reaches more than 16 feet of depth, the threat of a dike breach comes into play: over 16 feet, the chances move to one percent; over 17.6 feet, the chances move to 25

continued on PAGE 15



Lionfish Safari Chef's Challenge included Ft. Pierce Mayor St. Lucie County Commissioner Jim Oppenborn, State Rep. and Ft. Pierce City Marina Manager Dean Kubitschek.



Seafood and vendors' wares lined the waterfront of the Martina in May or the Lionfish Safari.

Branch Oceanographic Institute and the CES Riverwoods Field Laboratory.

Students will work with research scientists to develop an understanding for the interconnectedness and complexity

demand for this tasty fish.

"We are already planning for next year," Pipes said, "as this event has proven both productive and popular. Stay tuned for details as they develop!" ■

of South Florida water systems and the environmental issues facing them, conducting research on the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, and the Indian River Lagoon.

"We donated \$2,600 during the Great Give," Pipes said, "which allowed FAU Pine Jog to leverage our donation for a little bit more money for scholarships."

One Florida also was a major sponsor and helped organize the Treasure Coast Lionfish Safari on May 16-17 to rid near-shore reefs, inlets, and bridges of the invasive lionfish. In spite of poor visibility and windy conditions, dive teams removed 224 lionfish from the waterways of Indian River, St. Lucie, and Martin counties.

Scientists from Harbor Branch Oceanographic, Sea Grant, The Smithsonian, and the Fish and Wildlife Commission took samples, measurements and shared their knowledge with the public. The first-ever Lionfish Chef's Challenge also now is an important part of the safari, designed to create a market



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**The #1 recommendation of the
University of Florida Water Institute report
on reducing discharges to our estuaries:**

**“Accelerate funding and
completion of existing
approved projects”***

**Let the Florida Legislature know
that the priority for our
Amendment 1 dollars should be
to finish the essential water quality
projects already underway.**

Ask lawmakers to fund/accelerate:

**The Comprehensive Everglades
Restoration Projects (CERP)**

**The Central Everglades
Planning Project (CEPP)**

**Kissimmee River and the Herbert Hoover
Dike (Lake Okeechobee) Restorations**

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patrickmurphy.house.gov/contact

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Senator Tom Lee:
(850) 487-5024
lee.tom@flsenate.gov

Senator Andy Gardiner:
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gardiner.andy@flsenate.gov

Rep. Steve Crisafulli
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steve.crisafulli@myfloridahouse.gov



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*Source: University of Florida Water Institute Independent Technical Review, March 2015

Land purchase sets new record by district

The first day of June officially marked the largest single purchase of land by the South Florida Water Management District in the state, according to South Florida Water Management District officials.

“And that \$22 million purchase, that investment, was right here in Martin County,” said Kevin Powers, vice chair of the South Florida Water Management District’s Governing Board and a Martin County resident, referring to the purchase of the Harmony Ranch development. “That’s something that’s not gotten much media coverage, but it should. It’s significant.”

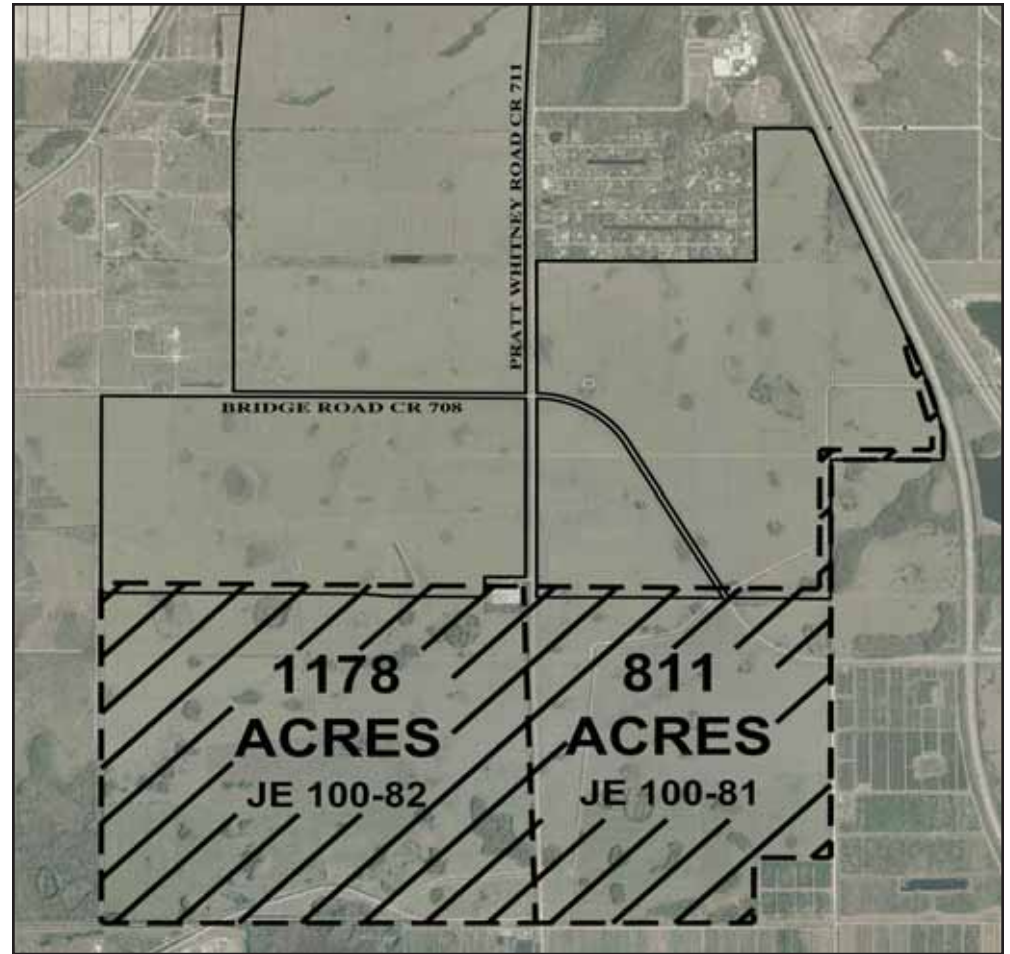
The water management district first pursued the purchase of Harmony Ranch land in 2008, but funds dried up due to the recession. Negotiations began again in 2011, and in December 2014, the governing board announced that it had approved the purchase of 1,780 acres of land, jointly funded by Florida Forever funds and the remainder of Martin County’s half-cent sales tax initiative to purchase conservation land.

The final purchase, however, amounted to nearly 2,000 acres as negotiations proceeded, according to officials.

“That land will help improve water storage and water quality for the C-44 canal and the South Fork of the St. Lucie River,” Powers added.

The property is in two parcels, plus a 100-foot strip of land north and east of the FPL easement that gives a direct connection to the drainage outfall. The 2,000 acres lies within the Palmar Complex of the C-44 drainage basin, part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Indian River Lagoon-South Project.

The property represents the first acquisition for the Palmar project component of IRL-South, with future purchases to total around 90,000 acres, much of which lies in Martin County. ■



After final negotiations, nearly 2,000 acres of Harmony Ranch were purchased for \$22 million by the South Florida Water Management District and Martin County. The land lies south of Bridge Road, with parcels on each side of Pratt-Whitney, as indicated by the dotted line. Courtesy of MilCor Group Engineering.

Capt. Don Voss

continued from PAGE 13

percent; and over 18 feet the chances move to 40 percent.

Understanding that 1.6 million acre-feet of water causes a three-foot rise in Lake level, we could technically hold all the excess stormwater drainage inside the lake, as long as the starting level was below 13 feet at the beginning of the season, and, of course, as long as all that water was not dumped on us at one time, such as from a major storm event or hurricane.

Taking the lake depth lower than 13 feet, however, interferes with the mandates of navigation that require a channel depth of seven feet, and with agricultural mandates that sufficient water be maintained in the Lake to meet irrigation needs.

As a result of those mandates, the Lake generally is held at a 13-foot level; however, if just the Lake’s navigational channels were dredged by three feet, the Lake’s level could be lowered to 12 to 12.6 feet at the beginning of the season, thus allowing significant, additional water storage and improving the likelihood that Lake levels would not exceed 16 feet during the rainy season. The gates to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee could stay closed (except of course when the Caloosahatchee River needed the fresh water to combat its seasonal high-salinity levels).

3. Let's do the math.

– 1,600,000 acre feet of water was discharged in 2013, so that’s our target number.

– 430,000 acre-feet can be sent south and cleaned, trickling out of the Lake at 1,250 acre-feet per day

– 100,000 acre-feet of water can be retained by the Ranches Reserve Project.

– 400,000 acre-feet of water could be/should be stored or retained in the upper Kissimmee drainage basin.

– Therefore, the amount remaining of the 1.6 million acre-feet of water that would need to be contained to prevent discharging to the estuaries is 630,000 acre-feet—all of which could be stored in Lake Okeechobee, except in the case of major rain events. Instead of expecting no more water than we received in 2013, we must plan for more.

4. Look at creative ways of storing water.

Water retention and water farming

allow for large land areas to clean water—upwards of 250,000 acre-feet of water annually—holding it back when needed for agriculture and for municipal water supplies. As other projects come online, and if we can work to increase water storage at its origins, the stopping all the Lake Okeechobee discharges is closer than it appears.

Fix the faucet and stop the discharges. ■

Capt. Don Voss, nationally recognized for his environmental initiatives to improve the water quality of the Indian River Lagoon, will be a regular contributor to Martin County Currents. All advertising on these pages will benefit One Florida Foundation, dedicated to addressing water issues throughout the state.



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Martin County Commissioner Anne Scott faces Hobe Sound residents at a recent town hall meeting, assuring them she "hopes" to spend TIF funds in Hobe Sound that were collected from taxpayers within the Hobe Sound CRA boundary, although she opposes their CRA project.



The intersection at Bridge Road and Dixie Highway that Hobe Sound residents want reconfigured so residents are able to cross safely. It also will reduce the number of "fender-benders" that result of having a service road entrance at the same intersection.

Divergent opinions aired at Hobe Sound town hall

Perhaps Hobe Sound and Palm City residents should not have been quite so surprised in May when the Martin County commissioners nixed their Community Redevelopment Area projects. After all, Commissioners Fielding and Heard have had a long history of objecting to them particularly, and to the concept of neighborhood revitalization in general.

It was Commissioner Anne Scott's vote in 2014 that saved Old Palm City's Community Redevelopment Area project, after Heard said it sounded to her as if it would benefit only businesses, which is her long-standing criticism of all the Community Redevelopment Areas. There are seven in the unincorporated areas, all older, historic neighborhoods including Hobe Sound, Old Palm City, Indiantown, Rio, Golden Gate, Jensen Beach and Port Salerno.

Neither Hobe Sound's nor Old Palm City's project survived this year's Capital Improvement Plan workshop, where all the capital projects must be approved by commissioners prior to being funded. Sufficient funds are already in

trust from Tax Increment Financing funds collected from within the CRA boundaries to build both CRA projects, but critics are beginning to complain loudly that the tax funds should go to the general fund instead.

Tax Increment Financing, called TIF funds, are a percentage of the increase in taxes as the result of an increase in property values within the CRA boundaries. By state law, those funds are to be spent only within the CRA where they were collected. If unspent after three years, they are transferred into the general fund.

"I'm very interested as to why anyone thinks the CRA is doing them any good," said Scott within minutes of introducing herself to a Hobe Sound crowd of more than 100 residents at a town hall meeting May 14, which set the tone for her comments the rest of the evening.

"We're going to be looking at this whole business of CRAs," she said. "Is it doing what we want it to do, and is it an appropriate way to address county infrastructure needs."

Scott made it clear, she thinks the CRA projects are not relevant in light of the current county infrastructure backlog, particularly because All Aboard Florida may change the configuration of the intersection at Bridge Road and Dixie Highway in Hobe Sound, and because plans for the 17-acre Winn Dixie Plaza are unclear.

"Either of those could make any of the CRA improvements obsolete," she added, although resident Harry MacArthur reminded her that two tracks ran through Hobe Sound, plus a spur, until the late '70s. "That intersection is not going to be any different now than it was then," he said.

Expending taxpayer funds that belong to the entire county, Scott said, was her primary concern, which "should be done in a productive and frugal and fiscally responsible way."

Community members, including former and current Neighborhood Advisory Committee members, remained polite, but also shot back.

"I have two questions," said Angela Hoffman, current chair of Hobe Sound's volunteer advisory committee. "Why now? We are all volunteers. We take time away from our families to work on this, to make our community a better place, and this is essentially the same project that we've been working on for years."

Scott reiterated the comments by Fielding and Heard at the CIP workshop: The funding for CRA projects actually belongs in the general fund to be used "in the highest and best" way for all county residents, not just for projects that benefit only select areas.

"Over the past 15 years," Scott said, "the Hobe Sound CRA has received \$6 million, and where did it go?"

Laying sewer lines in Hobe Sound and in Banner Lake, which was one of the most expensive projects, as well as a host of smaller projects, such as gate-

way signs and bike racks, she was informed by NAC members. The project that has caused the most recent flak, however, is burying power lines underground along Bridge Road to create a more attractive streetscape and to be less vulnerable to weeks-long power outages after hurricanes.

Residents also want to reconfigure a dangerous intersection for pedestrians at Bridge Road and Dixie Highway, where a service road to A1A shops is accessed from the same intersection. The cost is \$1.2 million, \$800,000 of which will go to FPL to bury the lines.

NAC member Gretchen Reich, who has served nearly all the 15 years the Hobe Sound CRA has existed, underscored Hoffman's remarks that the project had remained the same, and that the only changes have come as a result of changing county commissioners.

"It amazes me that we've had this exact plan for at least eight years now," she said, "and we're just finding out now that there's something wrong with it? Why have we been working so hard on this all these years?"

Mike Ennis, former chair of the NAC and a long-time Hobe Sound resident, walked to the front of the room to address the crowd.

"We wanted to do basic infrastructure first," said Ennis. "These are the basics, the very basics. Let's get these done, then we can do other stuff."

Ennis said that the NAC members decided to work on the premise that if the commercial areas are addressed first, that the economic benefits would spread over time to the residential areas.

"I watched that CIP meeting," he said, "and I want you to know, we have two commissioners who support and who understand the CRAs, and that's Doug Smith and John Haddox." Anne Scott did not disagree. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

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Old Palm City ready to fight for their CRA project

Everyone believes he or she already knows about the Mapp Road project in Old Palm City, says Old Palm City Neighborhood Advisory Committee Chair Chuck Smith, "But they don't really. They don't understand it's actually a stormwater project, even more than a road project."

Now that the county commission may have killed the funding for the project, the Old Palm City advisory committee is on a mission to educate residents as to the project's purpose and to assure them that it's worth a \$1.2 million or so investment of CRA funds.

The members met June 8 to plan a presentation they hope to give to the commissioners at their upcoming workshop on Community Redevelopment Areas, currently scheduled for Monday, July 6, at 5 p.m. at the Blake Library. That date, however, is subject to change.

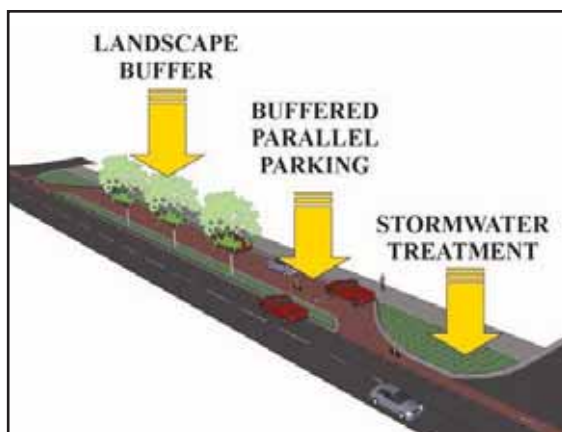
One of the most innovative projects to be developed by the Martin County Community Development Department in conjunction with the county engineering and utilities departments, the Mapp Road project will store stormwater in place under the roadway parking spaces. The engineering cost is somewhat higher than standard stormwater designs initially, but the construction cost is a fraction of the old stormwater treatment projects that required large culverts, pipes and large parcels of land in order to create stormwater retention ponds.

"We really think that this project will also bring us some grants," Smith added, "if not for Old Palm City, then definitely in other places in the county where the underground stormwater storage can be used."

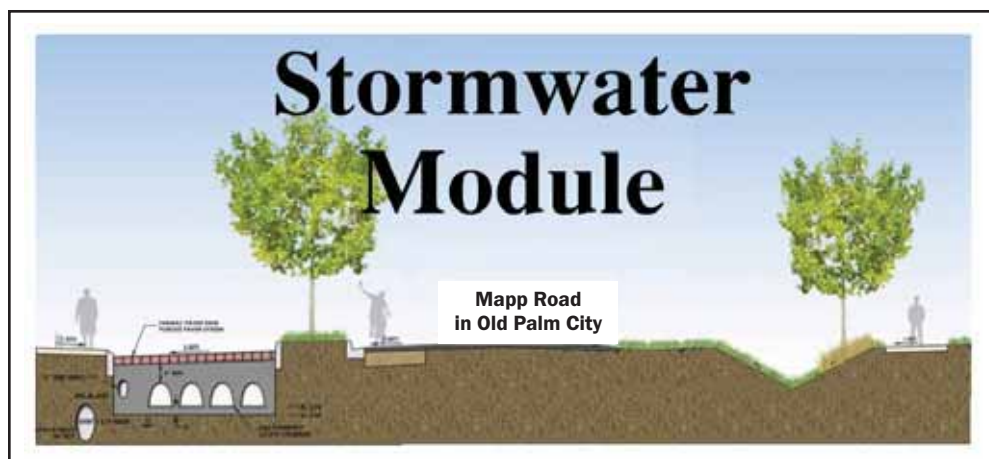
The idea behind the project is to create water storage beneath parking spaces in a roadway, which will interrupt the sheetflow of water from west to east, flooding properties in the older, residential neighborhood of Old Palm City. The excess water saturates the drainfields of septic systems, resulting in system failures and drainage of effluent into the St. Lucie River. The Old Palm City drainage area has been targeted as a "hot spot" for enteric bacteria in the river for several years.

The NAC members have created a PowerPoint presentation, made stickers for audience members, have visited commissioners personally, and are starting to write letters to editors of local publications. They also hope to hold their own town hall meeting to provide an educational opportunity to explain the role of CRAs and to engender community support.

"If people really understood what a CRA is," Smith adds, "I feel that we'd



have their support. It's just a matter of getting out the message to as many people as possible in a very short period of time." ■



Mapp Road, which already is on the county's list of priority roads to pave within months, would be expanded under the CRA's project to add baffles under new parking areas that would capture and clean stormwater drainage. For more information and maps of all the CRA boundaries, go to www.martincountyCRA.com.

What is a CRA? How is it funded?

The country's first Community Redevelopment Agencies, created in the '60s, were established to address only urban blight and slums, but it soon became apparent that identifying a distressed area was insufficient to address its needs, which is why boundaries were drawn around the districts, which collected Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds.

It soon also became apparent that drawing a district boundary tightly around a blighted area did not provide ample revenue to address any issues related to crime, safety, deteriorating buildings and infrastructure, since the intent was to make a public investment in order to increase private property values, that in turn would increase property tax revenues. Those new revenues then could pay (or be leveraged) to pay for improvements that attract more private investment that in turn increases property values over a long period of time.

Every state, except two, has established its own Community Redevelopment Act, and most have undergone numerous changes/amendments/revisions, including Florida, which established its Community Redevelopment Statute in 1969.

Martin County recognized its areas of need in 1997, and over the next few years, established seven separate Community Redevelopment Areas (then called Neighborhood Redevelopment Areas) with appointed advisory boards in each: Rio, Jensen Beach, Golden Gate, Old Palm City, Hobe Sound, Indiantown and Port Salerno. The county commission served as the Community Redevelopment Agency that directed the county staff, the Community Development Department, and approved

all projects for each CRA.

Florida statutes permit a plethora of special bonding and financing options in order to pay for major development projects based on future tax revenues, as many other states also allow; however, Martin County did not/has not ever authorized any of those special financing options available in other Florida counties, even those that do not incur long-term debt, which usually cause the most criticism.

The funding of CRA projects come from Tax Increment Financing, which is determined by the difference between assessed property values at the time the Community Redevelopment Area was established (which are "frozen" for the length of the CRA term) and the current increase in assessed value. Right now, the county commission has that amount set at 75 percent. State statute allows a maximum of 95 percent and a minimum of 50 percent of that increase.

The length of time that the Martin County CRAs will be established is another 15 years, unless abolished by the county commission sooner than that, and the monies may be spent only within the CRA boundaries from which the revenues were taken and only on the projects included in the official CRA plan that was approved by the county commission.

State governments recognized early that the CRAs needed to include semi-thriving areas as well as blighted areas in order to have sufficient funds to make a difference and thus attract the private investment to compound the effect. They also changed the definitions of "blight" to include such things as the lack of sidewalks or other obstacles that threaten pedestrian

safety, and the lack of or inadequate sewer lines, inadequate or unsafe roadway patterns, etc. The Florida statute changes in 2004 also allow for conservation, renovation and rehabilitation of old buildings.

Many of property owners donate land to increase the county's right-of-way to accommodate such things as sidewalks, bike lanes and on-street parking. As basic infrastructure improves, more businesses are attracted, which increases pedestrian traffic, which improves the economic climate, which increases sales tax revenue and spurs the economy.

To create a more efficient process, the county commission in 2010 appointed a representative group -- following the philosophy of the United States' own representative form of government -- to establish the Community Redevelopment Agency and Neighborhood Advisory Committees to implement each CRA plan based on that community's input.

That was the most effective form of CRA implementation that Martin County has had, but the new commission majority abolished the agency in 2012 and took control. It lay dormant for one year as the county commission decided on new requirements for Neighborhood Advisory Committees, which all had been disbanded.

The Neighborhood Advisory Committees were re-formed a year ago, and their input ensures that their CRA plan aligns with their community's unique character, history and values. Commissioner Anne Scott calls them a pseudo-government, but others call it "the best form of government, from the bottom up, not the top down." ■

--Barbara Clowdus

Costco gets serious about Martin

Martin County departmental staff met with Costco officials in May in a preliminary meeting to discuss issues, challenges and expectations related to Costco's development application, which has not yet been submitted.

Discussions have been ongoing for about 12 months, as the membership-only wholesaler continues to look at sites in Martin and St. Lucie counties. The property in Martin County, which seems to be their preferred site, is 27.6 acres just south of Southwest Martin Highway between Florida's

Turnpike and Southwest High Meadow Avenue. The warehouse store would be 148,000 square feet.

Traffic and adjacent wetlands were outlined by county staff as the most significant impacts to be considered. County traffic engineer Lisa Wichser said that a widened Martin Highway could not handle additional traffic without being widened from Citrus Boulevard to the turnpike, which the county has requested from the state Dept. of Transportation. The state currently does not have the project funded, according to FDOT officials.

Costco has retained the Thomas Engineering Group to explore Martin County's development requirements and procedures. ■



BDB leads effort to train workers

A seven-week manufacturing training program at the new Indian River State College Training Facility at Paradigm Precision in Stuart will begin June 15, announced Business Development Board Executive Director Tim Dougher. Participants will have the opportunity to gain targeted skills for employment in the manufacturing sector and to earn industry certification.

The BDB, in partnership with the Martin County Board of County Commissioners, the Martin County School System and the Vietnam Veterans Chapter 1041, two scholarship programs are being offered to assist with tuition and related costs, with 20 of the available 30 going to qualified U.S. military veterans. For more information, contact the BDBMC at 772-221-1380 or jill@bdbmc.org. ■



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Jacque Lewis

Jacqueline Lewis, manager of the Courtyard by Marriott in Stuart, was recently named one of only three managers in North America by Marriott International as "Diamond General Manager of the Year" at the 2015 managers conference in National Harbor, Md. This is the second time Lewis won the hotel chain's top manager's award, earning it previously in 2011.

The awards event also honored the local hotel with the Platinum Circle Award for being within the top 5% of overall guest satisfaction ratings among the entire Marriott chain, a designation it also earned in 2010, 2012 and 2013. Since its opening, the Courtyard Stuart at the Kanner Highway/I-95 interchange has often been recognized for its performance. It is currently ranked seventh of the 906 Courtyard-branded hotels in North America. ■

Now you can wear Dan Mackin art

You can be immersed in renowned-artist Dan Mackin's artwork with new T-shirts and shower curtains being offered at the Sea Urchin gift shop in Hobe Sound. The designs are taken from Mackin artwork, and have been licensed to the Sea Urchin.

"I'm so excited about adding these unique items at the Sea Urchin," said owner Marie Scholl. "I just love Dan's artwork, but don't we all?"

The Sea Urchin is on Mars Street in Hobe Sound. ■



Owner Marie Scholl shows off the Dan Mackin designs available now at the Sea Urchin.

IRSC creates new advisory council

About 5.6 percent of Martin County's jobs in 2010 were in manufacturing, a total of 2,787 jobs, which increased to 2,866 in 2011 from 212 manufacturing companies; however, the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) expects those numbers to surpass 5,000 by 2015, eclipsing even pre-recession numbers, according to the Business Development Board of Martin County.

In recognition of an increased demand for manufacturing skills, IRSC recently created an advisory manufacturing council that will provide input into the college's education and training programs. "As the level of technology has increased, workers need to have different skill sets than in the past," she said, in a news release. "We have a lot of very high-tech manufacturing environments today. On the other hand, there are still jobs for welders almost everywhere." ■

Sale brings changes to The Manors

The Manors at Hobe Sound, one of 11 nursing homes owned by Donald Bortz of Michigan, will be purchased by Villa Healthcare of Chicago. Bortz established the homes more than 50 years ago, and is now retiring, according to the Ann Arbor Times.

"He's 89 years old," she said. "It's not that he wanted to sell, it's just time to do it."

Bortz Health Care Facilities filed a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification notice on May 5 with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, saying the entire 164-member staff could be laid off August 1, but a spokesperson for Villa Healthcare said most of those workers will be employed by Villa Healthcare.

Villa Healthcare from Chicago is purchasing all 11 of Bortz's facilities and has said it has no intention of closing any of the locations, according to the Times.

The Manors at Hobe Sound has two wings, a 120-bed assisted-living facility that will be renamed Hobe Sound Manor and a 48-bed skilled-nursing facility to be called the Terrace at Hobe Sound. ■

Race track thrills and skills at Martin County

By Robin Barrack

Special to Martin County Currents

Nineteen-year-old Taylor Moxley of Hobe Sound, an accomplished race-truck driver, boasts she wasn't even born yet before her first go-kart race, and she has certainly made her mark on the sport. The sport also has made its mark on Taylor.

She says her parents are karting enthusiasts. She grew up watching races on weekends in Hobe Sound. When she was 11, after two years of begging her dad, she finally got her first taste behind a go-kart wheel.

"I always knew that was what I wanted to do with my life," she says, "and from the second I got in that seat, it was a second home for me."

Taylor now races in the Florida Pro Am Truck series. She says she's gone above and beyond what she thought she could do as a racer, and it all started with a go-kart.

The popularity of auto racing has exploded in recent years. Fans young and old fill the stands each weekend of NASCAR and Formula One racing tracks. On a smaller—but no less thrilling—scale, kart racing is available for the whole family in Hobe Sound. The Martin County Kartway is a one-sixth-mile long asphalt oval four miles west of US 1, just off Bridge Road. It's here that weekends are filled with families and their karts and racers, some as young as five!

South Florida Karting at the Martin County Kartway offers a place for beginners, for the young, and for the young at heart to explore the sport in a safe, professional, and fair racing environment. South Florida Karting is the main organization at the Kartway, which manages, promotes, and grows the racing program.

Manager Terry Grove boasts: "It's a way to bring the whole family together with an activity that is as much fun to watch as it is to participate, and the atmosphere for participants is one of teamwork, camaraderie and good sportsmanship."

Taylor agrees: "Everyone is so welcoming," she says. "Folks who are interested in exploring the authentic racing experiences are invited to watch races and can even get up close and personal with the karts as drivers are often very proud to show off their rides



Taylor Moxley now races trucks, as well as go-karts.



VanZane team member Van Hetherington, 11, of Palm City, shows off his trophy for a win at the Martin County Kartway in Hobe Sound. Photo supplied.



11-year-old driver Van Hetherington prepares for the final heat race.



Zane Hetherington, 9, the other half of the VanZane Race Team sponsored by Precision Jet Service. Photo supplied.

with hands-on demonstrations."

Racers are always willing to help others out, she adds, to orient those who are either new to the sport or just

trying to improve their skills, by sharing tips and experiences with karts or driving techniques.

"My favorite thing is when young kids who don't even know me, come up to me and ask how I did something they watched during the race," she says. "It's such a great feeling to be able to give something to the next generation of racers."

She says the experience of racing also helps drivers deal with the ups and downs of life, since not every race makes you a winner, but the community is still there to support your next time on the track.

South Florida Karting offers novices and experts an authentic racing experience that can satisfy the adrenaline needs of even the most demanding driver, Grove says. Racers can invest as little as \$1,000 for a kart, but some racers have invested

upwards of \$3,000 for adult class karts that can achieve the highest speeds. Most karts are gasoline powered, but some drivers prefer methanol-powered karts.

He assures participants (and their parents) that driver safety is the organization's number-one priority. Younger drivers are limited to speeds that do not exceed 30 mph; older drivers can reach speeds up to 50 mph. A new track surface is being planned now, Grove adds, which will be smoother and will in-

crease wheel traction for drivers.

Other improvements planned for the facility include a new electronic scoring system to keep track of the karts and is more reliable than manual tracking. Plans also call for permanent restroom facilities.

A racer's day does not end after the race, since all members of the karting

family tend to linger for an afternoon of good sports talk and mentoring to new drivers—and welcoming new spectators. Race day takes place the second and fourth Saturdays each month, with gates opening at 10am. Open practice begins at 11am, and races begin at 1:30pm, ending at 5pm. Concessions offered include hamburgers, hot dogs and soft drinks.

Racers must be members of South Florida Karting, which can be purchased for a \$50 annual member-

ship or \$5 for a single day. Admission is \$10 for adults, and \$5 for children aged 7-12, and free to children under six when accompanied by an adult. Race entry fees are \$30 per kart for 10-lap heat races and one 20-lap feature race.

For more information about South Florida Karting, log onto www.SouthFloridaKarting.com. ■

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Essence of Anton Chekhov in Stuart's cityscape

Assume that you have been transplanted from cold Moscow to sunny Florida. You still are madly in love with Moscow's architecture—the late classical Empire mansions of the first half of the 19th century—and the unique face and “soul” of its streets. You deeply miss it all.

You feel trapped in a sort of architectural vacuum for which there is no recompense. Neither the ocean, nor the warmth, nor the beaches can offset this architectural deficiency.

Then, unexpectedly, out of the blue, serendipitously, you discover that not all is “terra incognita.” In a small area of your current city, the architecture is reminiscent of the city you loved and left. It is Stuart's historic downtown. It is the Lyric Theater.

Moscow and Stuart could never be viewed as twin cities, not at all. But there's an ambiance that extends a bridge between their diversities and makes two entirely different worlds reflective of each other: There's something in their local colors, something in the way things are put together, that changes “terra incognita” into joy of recognition.

Stuart's tiny and cozy downtown has no “resident notable” to the degree that Key West has Ernest Hemingway; however, Anton Chekhov's image comes to mind intensely, though neither of his plays can be found in the repertoire of Lyric Theater. His persona, however, is much in tune with the riverwalk under the Roosevelt bridge, in the beautiful park stretching along the water, and in the impressionistic pastel sky.

Chekhov's Russian universe is projected on the local colors of another world, enriching it with its own fullness and being augmented in return. The



**Maya
Ellenson**

*Art
Kaleidoscope*

drama of subtle borders between shade and light, the remorselessly fleeting time, the swinging moods and half-tones resonates everywhere. Even in the occasional Harley crowd, you can “see” Constantine Treplev and Petia Trofimov riding their Harleys while hiding their utter vulnerability under a helmet and tough posture.

“The Cherry Orchard,” Chekhov's last play (1904), emerges when you walk in downtown Stuart. What calls it to mind is the acute sense of frailty of these very local colors in the age of corporate greed and thoughtless construction with a total disregard for the environment and the people who not just function, but live and breathe fully into the very ambiance they're used to.

The All Aboard Florida high-speed project personifies that typical threat of globalization that is about to run in linear and crude fashion, not only through the bridges and streets of Stuart, but through human hearts and lives as well. What will happen to them? What will happen to their lives, businesses, lifestyles, to the entire ambiance? Do All Aboard Florida or Florida East Coast Railways care, or listen to those who do?

“The Cherry Orchard” was one of the first amber, blinking-light warnings against the forthcoming age of globalization with its tendency for gauche stan-



Stuart's historic downtown with The Lyric Theatre as a centerpiece evokes memories of longed-for, Old World architecture.

dards that destroy not only the cityscape, but small business, lifestyle, culture and much-loved atmosphere.

In spite of his dire prediction, Chekhov was a believer in progress and a great perfectionist in all respects. His whole life and writings personified what Matthew Arnold called “the pursuit of perfection.” Chekhov truly believed that progress would make our planet a better place to live.

One of his protagonists says: “A human being should be entirely beautiful: the face, the clothes, the mind, the thoughts.” And, certainly, the place one lives in should be evenly beautiful: a home, a hometown, a foreign land, a world itself, a human setting in its full spectrum.

Like all great classics, “The Cherry Orchard” needs not to be overhauled to appear modern. It reveals a simple and universal truth: what good does it if you gained the whole world, but lost your

soul. The story is this: Lopakhin, a young, brilliant businessman, buys an estate of the Russian aristocrat, Lady Ranyevskaia, with a magnificent cherry orchard in order to use the land for building dachas (summer villas) along the railway tracks.

The estate and the cherry orchard mean a lot to the main characters.

They are strongly pervaded by its spirit. This splendid setting reflects the characters' identity, their sublime hopes and the deepest affections, but they can do nothing to save it. Lopakhin does what he has to do. The axe is falling on the cherry orchard, and the reader knows that something vitally important is gone.

Regrettably, the same thing may happen if All Aboard Florida's trains pass inexorably through the veins of Stuart without listening to what its inhabitants have to say...or, perhaps, someone as beautiful as Chekhov preserves Stuart's unique atmosphere while it's still vibrant in something as timeless as “The Cherry Orchard.” ■

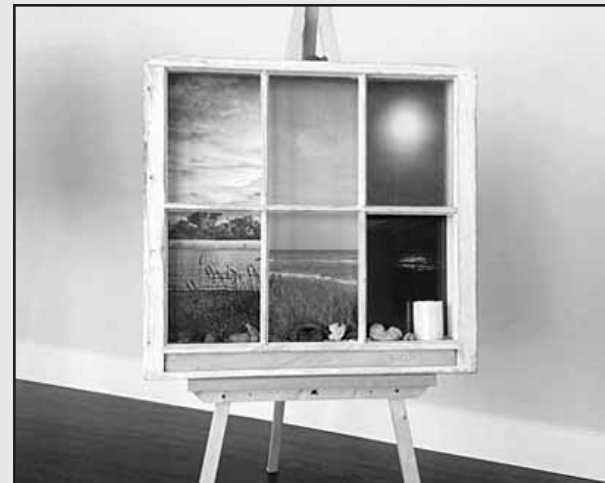
Russian-American Maya Ellenson, who holds M.A. and PhD degrees in Russian language and literature from Moscow State University, has lived in Martin County for eight years. A free-lance writer, she has a particular interest in world culture and art.



Harry MacArthur, auctioneer extraordinaire for the Apollo Foundation, and his sister, Paula Cooper, who donated a 1905 photograph of the Hobe Sound train station on Dixie Highway.



Artist Narika Mlinar with her donated painting, “Inez.”



The hauntingly beautiful “Morning, Noon and Night at Hobe Sound Beach” was donated by artist Nadia Utto.

Artists give new life to old windows for auction

The Apollo School Foundation's major fundraiser of the year, A Night at the Apollo on May 16, brought hundreds of attendees to pur-

chase donated works of local artists at a live auction at the historic school in Hobe Sound. Windows salvaged from the rehabilitated building were “re-purposed” by

artists Suzanne Briley, Cynthia Cooper, Paula Cooper, Dan Mackin, Mimi McCallum, Marika Mlinar and Nadia Utto, collaborating with Leo Arbezniak and Josef

Utto. The proceeds benefit the historical, educational and cultural programs of the Apollo School Foundation, according to its president, Kathy Spurgeon. ■

June pompano at home off Hobe Sound and Juno



**Rich
Vidulich**
*Pompano
Reporter*

If you are able to cast around the piles of sargasso floating offshore and washing onto the beach, you can catch some nice pompano! Otherwise, the stiff easterly winds have created nearly "unfishable" conditions with patches of the brown algae covering the ocean from Boynton Beach to Sebastian Inlet. Lines draped with weed pulling sinkers and rigs littorally along the beach are not uncommon.

May and June typically signal the finale of the pompano season, but, truly, the poms aren't totally gone.

Every day, anglers are snatching a few on the Juno Beach pier by, perhaps, a half dozen pier citizens using pink Goofy jigs and sand fleas to score nice catches. Terry Friend, a seasoned surf veteran, recently witnessed a school of about 100 poms in the two-pound range under the pier 50 feet from the shoreline.

One of the more proficient commercial fishers caught 12 at the Hobe Sound Federal Beach on May 30, and the following day came a flood of short releasable poms. William Raymond has reported steady pompano and some ocean perch.

If you catch an ocean perch, and you enjoy eating a delicate sweet fish, don't throw him back. The true name for this sand perch member is mojarra, and they grow from one to eight pounds. They love shrimp and will take a clam.

The point to remember is to come to the beach well armed with a variety of bait to catch every potential fish that June offers. I always bring a bag of frozen clams, blanched fleas and some fresh dead shrimp. I don't tear down my pompano rigs and make any changes to adapt to the summer conditions, because everything out there will hit a fluorocarbon pompano rig, plus or minus the floats. The synthetic scented "Fish Bite" strips, when paired with bait, can



**Old sargassum on
the beach, even more
off shore**

really charge up the bite at times!

The current bucket list of species include poms, whiting, croakers, ladyfish, jack crevasses, moon fish, mojarras, blue fish, blue runners and snook.

Timing your fish-

ing safari should be planned to consider the time of day rather than the tides. During the summer, most fish are in close to shore, feeding in the early morning and reapproaching the surf break a couple of hours before sunset. The full moon phases will dictate an even earlier start and later evening start. With a 6 p.m. moonrise on May 31, I hit the Jupiter beaches at 6 p.m., put out my three graphites and spread out a six-pack of silver nuggets by 7 p.m. The weed problem had dissipated and there was a polite northeast swell accompanied by 15 mph. southeast winds—a totally cool evening for fishing—breezy and, of course, productive. Whiting, jacks and moonfish were the bycatch.

One of the coolest things about an early evening moonrise is the definite possibility of catching pompano in the dark. They are wild-eyed visual feeders,



Proof that pompano can be caught in summertime!

which accommodates feeding at night. So if you have time within a few days after the fullest moon, give it a try! If you land dinner and enjoy a light traditional east wind in your face with a night lit up with a smiling summer moon, it's the best!

More about sargassum: Picture a sea without land boundaries. A sea within an ocean with a loop current situated among northern Africa, Europe, Alaska and the east coast of Florida. The sea is surrounded by currents produced by the Gulf stream, the North Atlantic Ocean and various equatorial currents from the south. In the middle of this calm desert of water is where the sargassum algae is born. So why am I boring everyone with this geographical trek? Well, heck, I wanted to know where all this seaweed comes from that messes up our fishing, particularly where we fish.

Global and local marine biologists concur that sea temps are rising, which increases sargassum growth. The west coast of Florida through Galveston, Texas, are witnessing huge influxes of sargassum. Scientists also are studying the aftermath of the BP oil spill, since oil residue produces nutrients that sargassum feed on. The bottom line is: we are in for a weedy summer, probably until the storm season evolves and the water temps cool down.

But there is a positive side of all this fresh weed. Huge amounts of crustacea and fish live among the mass, and fledgling turtles hide in the floating reefs. Pompano and numerous oceanic pelagic fish feed off these shady islands. With all that food holding these delicate fish, perhaps they won't go offshore anytime soon. Have an awesome summer and catch 'em up! ■

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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Thursday, June 25

Annual Food from Fans Night

The annual Food From Fans night once again has stepped up to the plate to help House of Hope's food pantries. With a donation of two cans of food, fans can receive a free ticket to the game between the St. Lucie Mets and the Bradenton Marauders, 6:30 p.m., on June 25 at Tradition Field, 525 NW Peacock Blvd, Port Saint Lucie. Thrivent Financial Community of the Treasure Coast, event sponsors, has a goal to raise 4,000 pounds of food for House of Hope, equivalent of nearly 3,300 meals.



Saturday, July 4

Stuart Stars & Stripes for the Fourth of July

Stuart Mayor Kelli Glass-Leighton personally invites you to join her at the Stuart Stars & Stripes celebration of independence on Saturday, July 4, in downtown Stuart. The one-of-a-kind, family-friendly Fourth of July festival will take place at the waterfront Flagler Park and Riverwalk Stage. This year's festival features children's activities, face painting, pony rides, vendors, beer and wine, live music on two stages, and more starting at 3 p.m. and lasting through Stuart's largest-ever Fourth of July fireworks display. Live music will happen all day on the Audi Stuart Stage at Flagler Park and Infiniti Stuart Stage at Riverwalk, featuring Biscuit Miller & The Mix, Humdingers, Stuart Community Band, Slip & Spinouts, Random Play, and Raquel Renner. Treasure Coast Harley-Davidson will be on-site with a prize drawing for a 2015 Harley Street 750 motorcycle. Tickets for the prize drawing are \$50. Advance prize drawing tickets are available at the Treasure Coast Harley-Davidson store. This FREE event takes place at 3 p.m. on Saturday, July 4 at Flagler Park in Historic Downtown Stuart. Tickets for the VIP lounge, sponsored by Treasure Coast Harley-Davidson, are available at The Lyric Theatre Box Office and at www.lyrictheatre.com. Tickets are \$50 for adults, \$30 for children under 21, and children 5 and under are free. VIP includes air conditioning, reserved seating area for the fireworks show, all you can eat, and beer and wine and a cash liquor bar for guests over 21. For more information, visit www.facebook.com/stuartstarsstripes.

Saturday, July 4

Annual Zeus Park Fourth of July Parade

You love parades, but not the part about finding a place to park or the crush of big crowds? Then the 15th Annual Zeus Park Fourth of July Parade in Hobe Sound is for you! Organized (mostly) by the Fucigna family and hosted by the Hobe Sound Community Presbyterian Church, the event begins at 9 a.m. in the church social hall for a quick patriotic program to celebrate the nation's independence with neighbors and friends. A fun and patriotic dress code is encouraged either as a participant or an on-looker as the parade marches, or rides (decorated bikes, wagons, baby carriages or golf cars) around the shady Zeus Park Circle. Refreshments after the parade will be served in the air-conditioned, park side Social Hall and kids activities that include artwork, music, songs, readings, skits, or dances. For more information, or to volunteer, call 545-9672. The VFW will collect worn American flags in need of proper disposal. For everyone's safety, no fireworks and all pets on leashes.



Now until July 11 2nd Annual Jr. Angler Fishing Tournament

The 2nd Annual Jr. Angler Fishing Tournament, hosted by the Loxahatchee River District's River Center, is accepting photo submissions online or by smart phone until July 11. Anglers will accumulate points in this unique catch-and-release tournament by having the anglers photographed with the fish they catch, then they submit their catch logs and photos. In addition, the contest awards points not only for the number of fish caught, but also for the number of different species represented in the submissions. The tournament is open to anyone between the ages of 5 and 17, but registration is required before submitted photographs can be awarded points. Register online or pick up a registration packet at the River Center located at 805 N. US Highway 1 in Jupiter. A registration fee of \$25 per angler includes a T-shirt and an invitation to the "Tournament Fish Fry" where the winners will be announced and prizes awarded on Saturday, July 18, at noon. All anglers also will receive a prize bag with gifts.



Now Until August 5 Insects Real & Imagined

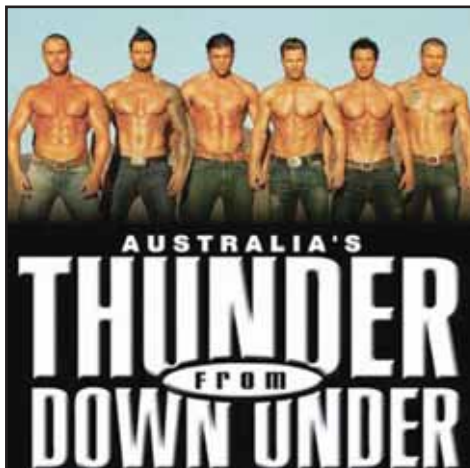
The Elliott Museum's summer exhibit, "Insects Real & Imagined," combines the spirited watercolors of artist Claus Hoie and the stunning nature photography of Gabby Salazar and Rick Stanley in a collection of fanciful insects – some real and some imagined. The exhibit is open daily from now until August 5, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Call 772-225-1961 or visit www.elliottmuseum.org.

Saturday, July 11 Tropical Nights Dinner/Dance at Lost Lake



The public is invited to share in a tropical evening of good fun, great music and delectable eats at the Lost Lake County Club on Saturday, July 11, from 6-10 p.m. Tickets are \$50 per person, and RSVPs are required by July 7 by calling 772-286-0615 or Gloria 772-223-5529. Make Checks Payable to: MCREC or via PayPal on the REC website www.martingop.org. Entertainment will be by Dennis G. & Company, and a silent auction and 50/50 raffle will be part of the fun. The Lost Lake Country Club is off Seabranche Blvd., at 8310 SE Fazio Drive in Hobe Sound. The proceeds will benefit the Martin County Republican Executive Committee.

Saturday, July 18 Thunder from Down Under



Get ready for the Thunder from Down Under at the Lyric Theatre in Stuart on Saturday, July 18, at 5 and at 8 p.m. Voted the best male revue show on the Las Vegas strip, Thunder from Down Under features sculpted abs, seductive choreography, saucy humor, and some boy-next-door charm. Every performer takes a unique female fantasy and brings it to life in this interactive girls-night-out show. Featured on a special episode of the popular television show Project Runway, the boys from Thunder from Down Under have amazed audiences for years with their commanding stage presence and irresistible moves.

July 26, July 30, July 31 Spanish Treasure Fleet Disaster at House of Refuge

To commemorate the 300th anniversary of the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet Disaster off the Treasure Coast, an exhibit and two lectures will be presented at the House of Refuge on Hutchinson Island in July. The exhibit will begin July 26 and run through August 2, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$8 per person for adults, \$6 for seniors and children ages 6-12. Children under six are free. The lectures about the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet Disaster will be Thursday and Friday, July 30-31, at 7 p.m., at the House of Refuge. Admission is \$10 per person, and RSVPs are required. For more information, call 772-225-1875 or visit www.houseofrefugefl.org.

Thursday, July 23 Wildlife photographer lectures

Who isn't fascinated by insects? Professional wildlife and conservation photographer Gabby Salazar, who has traveled the world photographing insects and butterflies, will share her compelling, first-hand adventure stories in a lecture suitable for the whole family July 23 from 7-8 p.m. at the Elliott Museum, 825 NE Ocean Boulevard, Stuart. Part of the Elliott's Wilmington Trust Lecture Series, the lecture is free to museum members. Non-members pay \$14 per person. RSVP is required: call 772-225-1961.

Thursday, August 20 Dr. Edie Widder at the Elliott

"Optimism for the Indian River Lagoon" by Dr. Edie Widder, founder of the Ocean Research Conservation Association, will speak at the Elliott Museum on Thursday, August 20, from 7-8 p.m. The museum is at 825 NE Ocean Boulevard, Stuart. Admission is \$10 per person for members, \$14 for non-members. RSVP required: 772-225-1961.



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'Trashy' designer frocks shown on Pine School runway

In eco-oriented Martin County, what could be more fitting than an art teacher who inspires her students to find creative uses for materials normally destined for the trash? Maria Miele's art classes at The Pine School showed off their creations prior to summer break as part of the school's Fifth Annual Earth Day Eco-Art fashion show photographed by Pine School teacher Nathaniel Osborn. They may never look at trash the same way again!