

# Triple Whammy Hits Public School Enrollment

BY JOHANNES WERNER AND CAROL LERNER

A radical new universal state voucher program makes everyone - including wealthy parents who already send their children to private schools - eligible for up to \$8,000 a year in government subsidies, to cover private-school tuition and homeschooling expenses.

A pro-public school think tank - the Education Law Center - last year put the cost at \$4 billion in just the first year. That estimate turned out to be too high in its first year. Even so, advocates say that public schools in Sarasota should expect a triple whammy to hit student enrollment, leaving them to struggle with shrinking budgets while accommodating the needs of students private schools don't want.

School district officials both in Manatee and Sarasota counties have suggested these kinds of fears are not justified - at least not yet.

At a recent school board work session, Sarasota Schools Chief Financial Officer Bonnie Penner took the glass half-full approach when analyzing student enrollment in 2023, which included declines in the

last months of the year. Penner said that, while the growth was half of what was anticipated, it was still growth. But then, she told the five school board members this: "For the 24-25 year, we are looking at an anticipated decrease in our students within Sarasota County Schools." This would be the first drop in school enrollment in Sarasota since the Great Recession 2007-2009. Penner said a decrease in families was caused by families moving out of the county, or the state altogether - a phenomenon triggered in part by low salaries and high housing costs. She also said that she expects the pace of migration towards private schools to remain the same. But as the chart shows, the largest projected decrease in enrollment next year will likely be caused by an increase in students using vouchers to attend (or continue to attend) private schools as well as a smaller increase in students attending charter schools.



From School Board presentation: Green shows the growth in Charter School students; yellow shows the increase in students using vouchers (Educational Savings Accounts)

Another factor in shrinking enrollment is the fact that a drip-drip drain on public schools has already begun, as Sarasota has been Ground Zero of privatization in Florida. Nearly 4,200 students now go to private schools here. Another 2,700 are home-schooled. Between those two groups, that's almost 14 percent of all students in Sarasota.

Continued on pg 12

# Roadmap for Healing Sarasota Community

BY ANDY BLANCH

In his second visit to Sarasota, Father Paul Abernathy, founder and CEO of the Neighborhood Resilience Project in Pittsburgh, spoke movingly about healing community divides. He emphasized that authentic relationships are the basis for all healing, and that while creating a unified community is difficult, it is within our reach.

"The tale of two cities applies in all cities, but the divides are starker and wider in Sarasota," he said. "And yet, after a week here, I can see that a very fundamental transformation is taking place."

He began his visit with a "pilgrimage" through the Newtown neighborhood, soaking up stories of local history from Walter Gilbert and other community leaders. He also presented at the Unitarian Universalist Church, led a discussion with outreach workers about the power of partnerships at the Love-Art-Repeat Gallery, preached about post-slavery trauma and resilience to a group of ministers

at Community Bible Church, met with foundation and nonprofit leaders, and facilitated a wrap-up and planning session at SEE (Social Equity Through Education) Alliance.

Father Paul reflected on the importance of creating an ecosystem to support change, including a broad coalition with a common goal, adequate resources, a pipeline for community leadership, established values, and clear measurement. He cited as an example a coalition to reduce violence led to a 26 percent reduction of gun violence in Pittsburgh and a 16 percent reduction in Allegheny County. He also emphasized breaking intractable issues down to solvable problems, and working at the micro-community level.

Participant Jennifer Johnston said Father Paul's roadmap for change was inspiring and actionable. "I left with further clarity on the importance of starting small, at the individual, family, block and neighborhood level," Johnston said. "I am optimistic that by sharing needs and hopes we can build a more peaceful and just community, from the inside out."

By the end of the week, the level of energy and commitment had soared. Almost 40 people crowded into the SEE Alliance space on South Orange Avenue to discuss what to do next. Participants were multi-generational and from all walks of life; all were passionate about staying involved.

"I will forever be grateful to that young man," said Pastor Josephine Thomas of Community Bible Church. "We can do this!"

### Next Steps

One indication that the message of healing is taking hold in Sarasota is the recent formation of a network of groups that have signed up in support of

developing a trauma-informed, resilient community. To date, more than 50 "Catalyst" organizations from a wide range of sectors have joined. The list of organizations and a link to sign up is at [srqstrong.org](http://srqstrong.org)

The next meeting of the Catalyst planning group



Father Paul at the Love, Art, Repeat Gallery. Photo credit: Annelise Adams

will take place on **Friday, April 12** from 3-5 p.m. at Community Bible Church, 1959 Dr Martin Luther King Way. The meeting will explore how to support the great work already happening in Sarasota and how to take the message to the broader community. For more information, email [SarasotaStrong@gmail.com](mailto:SarasotaStrong@gmail.com)

Also SEE Alliance will be hosting a group for young professionals working in nonprofits every Monday at 5:30 p.m. and a support group for social justice advocates every Thursday at 1 p.m. Daisy Martinez-Dicarlo is the facilitator. For more information, email Julie Forestier at [julie@seeourpower.org](mailto:julie@seeourpower.org)

Andy Blanch is the founder and director of SRQ Strong. More information at [srqstrong.org](http://srqstrong.org)

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**Support WSLR+Fogartyville during the Giving Challenge - April 9-10**



# Show Your Pride

The Be Fabulous Music & Arts Pride Fest is a celebration of LGBTQ+ art, music, and community, spanning three days of vibrant and inclusive events. Kicking off on May 2nd, the festival opens with the "Empowered" art exhibition at SEE Space, located at 615 S. Orange Ave in Sarasota. This exhibition showcases the empowering works of LGBTQ+ artists, offering a visual feast of creativity and expression. The second day of the festival, May 3rd, features an intimate and immersive in-studio dance and performance by Swamp Yell at Players Studio, situated at 1400 Boulevard of the Arts #200. Swamp Yell, a Queer art collective under the Fabulous Arts Foundation, will present works focusing on dance, movement, and sound, exploring intersectionality and embracing change. This event promises to captivate the audience with its innovative and boundary-pushing performances.

The festival culminates on May 4th at the Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center from 3-10 pm. This final day is a celebration of music, speakers, vendors, and food trucks, creating a vibrant atmosphere filled with community spirit.

The event aims to uplift and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community and its allies, providing a platform for voices to be heard and stories to be shared.

Throughout the three days, the Be Fabulous Music & Arts Pride Fest seeks to create a space where LGBTQ+ individuals and allies can come together to celebrate diversity, creativity, and unity. It is a festival that not only entertains but also educates and empowers, showcasing the richness and talent within the LGBTQ+ community. Attendees can expect a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, where they can enjoy a variety of performances, art installations, and interactive experiences. The festival is a testament to the power of art and music in bringing people together, fostering understanding, and creating positive change.

Overall, the Be Fabulous Music & Arts Pride Fest is a celebration of love, acceptance, and pride. It is a testament to the strength and resilience of the LGBTQ+ community, and a reminder of the importance of standing together in unity and celebration of diversity. To learn more, visit: [www.fabaf.org](http://www.fabaf.org).



Jess Pope puts the Soap Box to good use.

# Suncoast Remakes Learning

## STAFF REPORT

Suncoast Remake Learning Days is a 15-day festival of free events for children and families... think of it as the world's largest multi-site open house from April 20 to May 4, 2024.

This will be the third year for the festival in the Suncoast region. Scheduled events will allow youth, families, grandparents, caregivers, and educators to explore creative and fun ways of learning. Build a robot, make an art product, explore the outdoors, learn to code, or 3D print! Attend events at schools, museums, libraries,



Singing with Sara - join us at Fogartyville on April 20!

after-school organizations, childcare centers, tech companies, and more.

Suncoast Remake Learning Days will build on the assets and strengths of our region, reinforcing the knowledge that *Learning Happens Everywhere* and affirming that we are working together toward greater outcomes for our children and families. Suncoast Remake Learning Days events will be organized by [learning themes](#), including the arts, maker spaces, outdoor learning, science, technology, and youth voice. In addition, there will be professional development opportunities for school, out-of-school, child care, and non-traditional educators.

WSLR+Fogartyville will be offering three hands-on experiences for families during Remake Learning Days. On April 20th, two family music classes will be offered, one at 10am and one at 11am. Sing and play with your tiny tots at this family-friendly Suncoast ReMake Learning Festival kick off event! The class will be led by Sara Nelms, a licensed Music Together® teacher and independent singer-songwriter. Designed for

children ages 0 - 5, families will engage in making and moving to music together while fostering early childhood experiences of self-expression and creative play. Siblings are welcome to participate. Space is limited, so please register at [wslr.org/events](http://wslr.org/events) if you are interested.

We'll also be offering a Radio Camp at WSLR on April 20th from 10am-1pm. The radio camp will offer an exciting opportunity for students, ages 11-14, to dive into the world of radio broadcasting and share their voices with the community. Participants will engage in various activities aimed at sparking their creativity, teaching essential radio skills, and fostering an understanding of the ethos of community radio.

Thanks to the generosity of [The Patterson Foundation](#), these multi-generational hands-on learning experiences will be robust, free, accessible, and open to the public.

Experience what's coming next for your child. Let's remake learning together. Visit <https://remakelearningdays.org/suncoast/> for a complete listing of events.



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# Compost...Nature's Climate Champion

**BY TRACIE TROXLER  
FOUNDER, SUNSHINE  
COMMUNITY COMPOST**

Every year during the first full week in May, Sunshine Community Compost celebrates International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) in collective partnership with compost educators, enthusiasts and industry professionals around the world. The goals are to raise awareness about the benefits of composting and get more people involved in composting organic materials and using compost. This educational initiative is led by The Compost Research and Education Foundation (CREF) in association with the International Compost Alliance (ICA) and with support from the U.S. Composting Council (USCC). It is then translated into hundreds of creative, community-based initiatives and activities. This year the designated theme of ICAW is, "Compost... Nature's Climate Champion!"

The benefits of composting are impressive and form the roots of why composters are so passionate about this practice. People don't usually wake up one day and decide to dive into the business or daily practice of managing food scrap rot. Yet once people gain access to the well-researched benefits and future possibilities that composting holds, the effort of composting becomes so much more than managing scraps. It becomes the hope for, and manifestation of positive change, a constant reminder of nature's incredible capacity to transform and heal, and a pathway to participate with nature to create local and global benefits for multiple levels of life. International Compost Awareness Week is a time to share and invite others to tune into the joy and practice of transforming food scraps into soil resources instead of waste - which ultimately results in us transforming ourselves and our relationships with people and planet.

The 2024 ICAW theme, "Compost...Nature's Climate Champion!" was selected through a collaboration of international partners focusing on the UN Sustainable Development Goal to "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts." Composting is a climate champion because it decreases methane emissions as organics are recycled instead of landfilled. It helps store carbon in soil instead of the atmosphere. It reduces the need for fertilizer and the associated



*Sunshine Community Compost collects and processes hundreds of pounds of Sarasota's food scraps each week.  
Photo credit: Arlene Sweeting*

pollution that occurs from fertilizer manufacturing. It also increases resilience to weather extremes and drought.

Composting is much more than a climate solution. We encourage you to learn more about how composting impacts people and the planet by visiting [sunshinecommunitycompost.org](http://sunshinecommunitycompost.org) or signing up for our newsletter to receive updates about educational activities during ICAW, including any known events hosted by other local composters.

The team at Sunshine Community Compost has diverted nearly 250,000 lbs of food scraps since 2017. Our signature food scrap drop-off program now has 10 residential drop-off stations and we've started to work with food scrap producers like small restaurants and healthcare facilities who are adopting food scrap recovery in their operations. Let's keep this momentum going, Sarasota! If you are interested in registering for a food scrap drop-off station, consider joining the new station recently installed at WSLR + Fogartyville. If you'd like to support SCC, please consider donating during the upcoming Giving Challenge and "Be The One" to help SCC find a place to call home. Happy Composting!



**Celebrate with US!**

**Sat, April 27, 6:30-10:30pm**

Tickets: \$96.50

Includes buffet dinner, 2 drinks, & music  
Guest speaker Rob Lorei

(Host of WEDU's Florida This Week)

**Can't make it?** Buy a program ad to send a special message to Dave & Arlene or consider making a contribution to the Founder's Fund.

Learn more at [WSLR.org](http://WSLR.org)



## TRIANGLE RANCH

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owned by ELIZABETH MOORE



# League Launches Get Out the Vote Campaign

BY NANCY MORRISON

*“As the region’s only public health system, Sarasota Memorial is unique in placing decision-making power in the hands of local residents.”*  
- Sarasota Memorial Hospital website (smh.com)

According to SarasotaVotes.gov, only 28% of registered voters voted in the August 2022 Hospital Board Election. Either voters didn’t know who to vote for or they didn’t think their vote mattered. This is concerning since this unpaid, publicly elected board of nine private citizens sets the strategic direction and provides independent oversight for our highly rated \$1,664,000,000 hospital district.

In this August’s “primary” election for At Large Seat 1 and Central District Seat 1 there are currently only two candidates from the same party running for each of these seats. That means the August Primary could become a Universal Primary, making it the final election for these two seats. In that case, all voters would be able to vote; thus filling two of the four available seats. At Large Seats 2 and 3 will be voted on in November.

In this crucial election year, the League of Women Voters of Sarasota County is launching “2024: Get Out the Vote”. This integrated advertising and public relations campaign is a call-to-action to educate and engage registered voters and drive voter turnout. As part of this effort, we have two events planned which specifically focus on the Hospital Board Elections.

On **April 8, 2024, from 6pm-7pm**, at the Selby Library Gelbart Auditorium, the League will present a panel of experts in the healthcare field to discuss the role of the SMH Board and how their decisions might impact the future of medical care in our community. Hot button issues to be discussed include the possible abolishment of the hospital’s taxing authority and privatization. Our panel of experts include: Sandra Stuart, Sarasota



From left to right: LWV Members Vilia Johnson, 1st VP, Shawn Bartelt, President, Ron Turner Supervisor of Elections, Rhonda Peters 2nd VP

Memorial Hospital Foundation, former Assist. Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs; Kirk George Voelker, MD., pulmonologist, Medical Director of Sarasota Memorial Health Care System’s Clinical Research Center; and Alan Unell, a researcher of healthcare systems and policies who publishes the daily newsletter “Healthcare Advocacy”.

For more information and to register go to [lwvsrq.org](http://lwvsrq.org). You can also sign up for our newsletter here or on our homepage.

The second event will be a Hospital Board Candidate Forum where all candidates have equal time to answer our well researched questions. Date and location to be determined. Both of these events will be in person, live streamed and recorded.

We urge voters to check their registration status and renew their vote-by-mail request for this election year. The League of Women Voter’s [vote411.org](http://vote411.org) website will also have information on all our local races and candidates.

## Hospital Board: Meet the Candidates

BY FLORENCE FAHRINGER

Sarasota’s Hospital Board was something of a spectacle two years ago during the midterms. Conservatives fielded a “health freedom” slate of candidates for 4 of the 5 seats available. Three of them won, which in turn produced

an internal investigation into COVID protocols, underlined with threats of privatization by Michael Flynn - former Trump National Security Advisor, and subscriber to the Q-Anon conspiracy theory - who inspired the health freedom run on our local hospital.

This year, there are four seats up for grabs.

### AT-LARGE SEAT 2

At-Large Seat 2 incumbent Republican Tramm Hudson is retiring, and both parties have already picked his prospective replacements. From the Democrats comes John Lutz, current Executive Vice President of Integrated Delivery Systems for Capital District Physicians Health Plan. Lutz has over 40 years of hospital, physician practice, health insurance, and consulting experience. He graduated from the State University of New York/Oneonta with a degree in chemistry and holds a master’s degree in public health in hospital administration from Yale. “I will support the Board’s continuing efforts to develop state-of-the-art technology and facilities; recruit and retain the best health care staff; and ensure fiscal responsibility,” Lutz said.

Republican Kevin Cooper is also running for this seat. He’s not a veteran of the healthcare system like Lutz is, though he is a veteran in the more literal sense, having served in Iraq. He currently serves as Vice President of Communications

and Strategic Initiatives for Mote Marine Laboratory. He’s also an executive committee member of the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance Board of



John Lutz



Kevin Cooper

Directors. Cooper previously served as President and CEO of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce and he previously chaired the Sarasota County Planning Commission. In regards to his candidacy for the Hospital Board, Cooper, whose two children were born at Sarasota Memorial Hospital, says: “It’s about ensuring the highest quality care for Sarasota County residents.”

### AT-LARGE SEAT 3

At-Large Seat 3 incumbent Britt Riner has not announced her intention to run for reelection, meaning that as of right now, the field is open for both parties. Democrat George Davis has declared his candidacy. Davis practiced family medicine in New York State for over 35 years, specializing in end-of-life and palliative care. He received his bachelor’s from Harvard, a medical degree from Columbia, and a master’s in bioethics from Union University and Albany Medical Center. “I want the Hospital Board to strongly support primary care,” Davis said.

Republican Pam Beitlich is also running for At Large Seat 3. She’s been the quietest candidate of the bunch. She’s retiring from her position as the Executive Director of SMH’s Women and Children’s Services after a decades-long career at the Hospital. She has made no comment on where she stands when it comes to the “health freedom” camp of the party.

### AT-LARGE SEAT 1

Incumbent Republican Sharon Wetzler DePeters is running for reelection for At-Large Seat 1. She’s another healthcare veteran, having spent time in the Air Force as a healthcare worker. She predates the “health freedom” movement, which has picked its own champion to challenge her. Tamzin Rosenwasser doesn’t have a campaign website, though she did provide an email to the supervisor of elections: [tamzin@healthfreedomsrq.us](mailto:tamzin@healthfreedomsrq.us). She is a licensed dermatologist



George Davis



Pam Beitlich



# Hospital Board: Meet the Candidates

continued from pg 4



Sharon Wetzler Depeters

in Florida. She has a sizable digital footprint and was featured in an article titled, "An Enlightening Conversation with a Critical Race Theory Opponent, Dr. Tamzin Rosenwasser." Her LinkedIn says she is currently a director at "Birdspirit," a business she created in 1999, whose purpose is not immediately clear. If no other candidate files to run in this race, the Seat will be decided in the August Primary Election and ALL voters will be eligible to vote.

## CENTRAL DISTRICT

Finally, there's the Central District where Incumbent Republican Sarah Lodge is running for reelection. Lodge is currently a Financial Advisor at RBC Wealth Management. She was first elected in 2020, again predating the "health freedom" movement, and was recently named chairwoman of the Board. Challenging her is Tanya Marie Parus, known for opening the We the People Health and Wellness Center in Venice. The Health and Wellness Center does not provide vaccinations of any kind, though it does prescribe ivermectin and

Dallas earlier this month. If no other candidate files to run in this race, the Seat will be decided in the August Primary Election and ALL voters will be eligible to vote.

## RECAP

All in all, that's 4 of 9 hospital seats up for grabs: two of them feature showdowns between fresh faces - Democrats who define themselves in contrast to health-freedom politics and Republicans who avoid the label; the other two races feature incumbent moderate Republicans facing a challenge from health-freedom candidates. The qualifying period for these offices is noon on Monday, June 10, 2024, to noon on Friday, June 14, 2024. noon on Friday, June 14, 2024, which means if anyone else still wanted to throw their hat into the ring, they are still able to do so. Assuming that doesn't happen, these elections will be decided on two different dates: August 20th for the Republican primaries, where there are no Democratic challengers, and November 5th for the Democrat-Republican showdowns.



Sarah Lodge



Tamzin Rosenwasser

hydroxychloroquine as treatments for COVID-19. She moderated a panel on Medical Freedom at the Moms for America 20th Anniversary Celebration in



Tanya Marie Parus

## IMPORTANT ELECTION DATES

**Primary Election: Tues., Aug. 20**  
**Registration deadline: Mon., July 22**  
**General Election: Tues., Nov. 5**  
**Registration deadline: Mon., Oct. 7**

Request a Vote-By-Mail Ballot:  
[Online using the Mail Ballot Request Service](#)  
 In person at any elections office  
 By phone - 941.861.8618, By fax, mail or email  
 Request form in English Formulario de solicitud en Español

Voters with disabilities: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible voting options are available to voters who are blind or with disabilities. Please call 941.861.8618 for assistance.



CityPAC's FREE email newsletter reports on the climate at Sarasota City Hall, & keeps tabs on civic leaders - so that residents like you will be informed voters.

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Find out by subscribing to CityPAC's free newsletter: Sarasota City Hall Monitor

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# LIVE FROM Fogartyville

COMMUNITY MEDIA AND ARTS CENTER  
at 525 Kumquat Court's West entrance.  
(in the alley, Sally)

Sarasota's premier listening room, but concerts aren't all we do. In addition to our live concerts, we also host other arts and cultural events, educational events, and sponsor events in the community.



Tourist Development Tax  
Paid for in part by Sarasota County



ALL SHOWS: Student tickets available at 1/2 price (show ID at door); Kids 12 and under are free.


**\$24/\$28**  
**APPALACHIAN ROADSHOW**  
8pm Friday 04/05  
5-piece High & Lonesome super-group- they are what bluegrass should sound like



**\$30/\$35**  
**Gypsy Jazz of Stephane Wrembel**  
8pm Saturday 04/06  
World-renowned guitarist- in the style of Django Reinhardt, composer for Woody Allen films



**\$5/\$8**  
**Fogartyville Songwriter Series**  
7pm Monday 04/08  
Karlus Trapp and Sara Nelms join host Dean Johanesen for a performance in-the-round, open mic follows



**\$20/\$24**  
**LOWDOWN BRASS BAND**  
7pm Thursday 04/11  
Multi-faceted all-horn band from Chicago, providing a modern take on soul, funk, hip hop and jazz




**\$22/\$26**  
**THE BIRDWATCHERS & Uke workshop**  
7:15p Friday 04/12  
Acoustic trio who specialize in the ukulele and 3-part harmonies




**\$15 Will McLean Foundation Audible Art Series presents:**  
**BEAR & ROBERT**  
2pm Sunday 04/14  
Acoustic duo plays a deep well of folk, blues and Americana with a high energy je ne sais quoi



**\$20/\$24**  
**Hanneke Cassel**  
7pm Thursday 04/25  
Band exuberant and absorbing neoCeltic



**\$20/\$25**  
**Liz Longley**  
7pm Sunday 04/28  
Nashville folk singer who is a gifted vocalist and lyricist




**\$28/\$32**  
**Chuchito Valdés Trio**  
8pm Friday 05/03  
Piano player recognized as a master of Cuban music, including Son, Danzon, Cuban Timba and Guaguanco



**\$20/\$24**  
**KYSHONA**  
7pm Thursday 05/09  
R&B, folk and roots singer-songwriter *Kyshona*: channels the power of music to help heal and speak to those around her.



**\$18/\$22**  
**Tim Grimm + Passerine**  
8pm Friday 05/10  
*Double Bill*: Tim Grimm is a storytelling balladeer/actor/travel guide + one of SWFL's favorite Americana bands!



**\$15 Will McLean Foundation Audible Art Series presents:**  
**Holt & Cabe**  
2pm Sunday 05/12  
young folk duo (brothers) from Southwest Florida



**\$5/\$8**  
**Fogartyville Songwriter Series**  
7pm Monday 05/13  
Emily Frost and Bill Vinhage join host Justin Layman for a performance in-the-round, open mic follows.



**MEMBER PRICE \$32 / NONMEMBER PRICE \$36**  
**ALEX CUBA**  
8pm Friday 05/17  
Grammy/Latin Grammy and JUNO-winning Cuban-Canadian pop artist

CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR FOOD TRUCKS AT SHOWS



**\$24/\$28**  
**ADAM EZRA Group**  
8pm Friday 06/07  
Fusing folk intimacy and rock energy with soul power and pop charm



**2024 WSLR+Fogartyville Spring Pledge Drive**  
**April 3-10**  
Support your favorite shows!

On April 9-10 Please **Be The One...**  
to Amplify the Voices of OUR Diverse Community!

Take advantage of \$25-\$100 Matching Funds!

**2024 GIVING CHALLENGE**  
Be The One

Presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County

THE PATTERSON FOUNDATION

The 2024 Giving Challenge is presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County with giving strengthened by The Patterson Foundation.



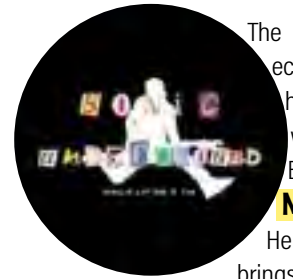


# What's New on air?



By: Leon Kerber  
WSLR Program Director

WSLR just wrapped up a fantastic **Gender Equality Month**. On March 8 from 7 a.m.-late night we overthrew the patriarchy with an **International Women's Day Takeover** that showcased all womxn programmers and guest voices. It was a celebration of stories and achievements through music and discussion.



The station continues to expand its eclectic lineup of shows. **New Radio** has been *re-vamped* this semester with current New College of Florida English/Music student **Sarah Malickson** taking the helm. Her show **Sonic Underground** brings feminist electronic punk, grunge,

guitar instrumentalism and some slower gothic rock/industrial tunes to **alternating Saturdays 7-9pm**. The show alternates with **Elissa Bello's Velvet Radio** which celebrates the smooth, sultry sounds of exotica and shares avant-garde musical gems.

On **alternating Sundays from 9-11pm The Backbeat** with **Andy Franklin** brings listeners the classic sounds of the '60s and '70s intertwined with stories that connect listeners to the roots of the sounds that many grew up listening to and loving.



Then, by moonlight **every week Dylan and Libby The Witching Hour** airing late-night **Sundays at 11pm**. The duo go deep into witchcraft, paganism and spirituality interspersed with music inspired by the movement of the planets, mythology, and whatever else they are reading in the tea leaves that week.

You'll find a few of your favorite shows at different times. Grab your favorite tropical drink and tune in **every Monday at 2pm to The Longboat Luau** with **The Ho Dad**, who plays surf music and island tunes that serve as the perfect weekly escape.



Moving into The Longboat Luau's previous slot, **John Haupt** brings the eclectic rhythms and esoteric energy of **Positive Friction to Thursdays (7-9pm)**. **Big Willy's Juke Joint (alternating Fridays at 2pm)** delves into the unifying power of music alongside the deep roots of blues, soul and rock 'n' roll.



**Bullwinkle's Corner**, hosted by **Keith Winkle**, makes its much-anticipated return on **Tuesdays from 9-11pm**, enriching the weeknight lineup with an unusual blend of storytelling and music.

And WSLR will present a special remote broadcast from the **Ringling College of Art and Design Senior Thesis Show on Friday, April 26**. This event will shine a spotlight on the incredible talent of Ringling students, offering an exclusive peek into the future of art and design through live coverage and interviews.

**Look for WSLR to be out in the community more in 2024!**

## wslr lp 96.5 fm WEEKLY PROGRAM GUIDE

### listen on the air

■ WSLR-LP 96.5 FM Sarasota

### listen online

■ WSLR.org (desktop)  
■ WSLR App at wslr.org (mobile)

### listen on demand

■ archive.wslr.org Music shows are archived for two weeks. News and public affairs are available for download, and expire later.

### listen to it all

Music	Public Affairs
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	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	
12 mid.	The Witching Hour Dylan Howell	Down The Road (Syndicated)	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	In My Room (Syndicated)	Dystopian Lullaby Nice Guy Eddy	All Mixed Up (Syndicated)	Dave Radio Dave Wilkens	Milo After Hours Milo
1 a.m.						Synthelectico (Syndicated)	Cafe Chill (Syndicated)	
2 a.m.	Deep Threes (Syndicated)	Midnight Special (Syndicated)	Music Automated playlist	Upfront Soul (Syndicated)	Music Automated playlist			
3 a.m.						And You Don't Stop (Syndicated)		
4 a.m.	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)		Music Automated playlist	
5 a.m.						Music Automated playlist		
6 a.m.	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Donne Del Mondo (Syndicated)	Keeping Democracy Alive (Syndicated)	
7 a.m.								
8 a.m.	Blues to Bluegrass John D.	Corduroy Sebastien Wegeng	Music with a Purpose Pat Monahan	Eclectic Blender Dave Pedersen	Latin Explosion Juan Montenegro	Saturday Morning Gospel Beat Jonah Ray	Interfaith Voices	
9 a.m.			Indie Psych Show Alecia Harper				Wings of the Heart Carol or Salima	
10 a.m.	ArtBeat Kathleen Murray	Our Changing Environment	Peace & Justice Report Tom Walker & Bob Connors	The Detail Cathy Antunes	Surreal News Lew Lorini & Steve Norris	Radio Reset Sharon Preston-Folta	The Bradenton Times Mitch Maley	
11 a.m.	Voices Up Shai & Andrew	Healthy Living Hour	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)		Law and Disorder (Syndicated)	
NOON	Music of the World Marco Ciceron	World Rotations Rotating	The Blue Groove Mark Gruder	Metropics Carlos Pagan	Complex Waveforms Mark Zampella	Juke In The Back (Syndicated)	Folk Alley Elena See (Syndicated)	
1 p.m.		Afro Cuban Jazz Frankie Piniero				WSLR NEWS (Rebroadcast)		
2 p.m.	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Thom Hartmann Show (Syndicated)	Shortwave Report (Syndicated)	Dadee-O's Collector's Corner Dadee-O	
3 p.m.	Longboat Luau The Ho-Dad	Second Wind Seany G	Louisiana Gumbo Kid Red	Outta the Basement, On the Road Purple Mike	High Tide Susan Runyan	Attitude of Gratitude The GratiDude		
4 p.m.				ALTERNATE WEEKS	ALTERNATE WEEKS	Community Conversations Mel Lavender	Velvet Hammer Blues Beth Hammer	
5 p.m.	Music Museum Ed Foster	Synthetic Age JR	Jazz And More Brian Jones	Ted's Head Ted	Friday Happy Hour Bartender Tommy D.	Rhythm Revival Reverend Billy C. Wirtz		
6 p.m.		Indie-licious Sheila Jane					Discovery Road Louise Coogan	
7 p.m.	Economic Update	Ralph Nader Radio Hour (Syndicated)	WSLR NEWS	Alternative Radio (Syndicated)	WSLR NEWS	The Detail (Rebroadcast) Cathy Antunes	A Deconstructionist Mind Nef	
8 p.m.	Capitol Update State News		Ruthless Truth Ruth & Ali		Counterspin	Book Show		
9 p.m.	Yesterday's Dead Today Mark Binder	The Root Cellar Roger & Peter	The Cat's Meow The Cat Lady	Positive Friction John Haupt	Ripper's Rarities Russ Yodice	Velvet Radio Elissa Bello	Sonic Underground Sarah Malickson	Soul Kitchen Paul Junior
10 p.m.	SynthWorld Damon	First Voices	The Old Folk & Americana Festival					Lavender Blue Radio Lindsey Hudson
11 p.m.	Indigenous Nation	Bullwinkle's Corner Keith Winkle	Random Precision Alex	Music Is The Best Mark Markus	Microgroove Fallon Markwell	The In Between Jay Ackermann	That Driving Beat (Syndicated)	The Backbeat Andy Franklin
12 mid.	Down The Road (Syndicated)	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	In My Room (Syndicated)	Dystopian Lullaby Nice Guy Eddy	All Mixed Up (Syndicated)	Dave Radio Dave Wilkens	Milo After Hours Milo	The Witching Hour Dylan Howell

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# Founders Bestow Gift to Community

BY GRETCHEN COCHRAN

Gifts often come in boxes, wrapped in shiny paper, tied with a big bow. But for the Sarasota community, this present comes in a building, broadcasting sound waves of news and entertainment and a cavernous black box embracing music, opinion and passion. Its crafters, Arlene Sweeting and David Beaton, after 20 years of molding a community of peace and love, are handing WSLR LP 96.5 FM and Fogartyville Community Media & Arts Center over to all of us.

A diverse, six-person team is taking the management reins (see related story) but they will need the community's help.

"While we have a diverse team committed to our vision, we are counting on our community to stay engaged," Sweeting said. "This place runs on people power."

She gives a nod to the radio station's schedule with 112 hours of locally produced shows ranging from "The Detail" with Cathy Antunes, to the incredible variety of music programming, to the recently ramped up Local News Department.

## Big Shoes to Fill

Our first view of Sweeting is of her scrambling up a seven-foot ladder into the crawl space above the broadcast studio to manage a tangle of wires overhead. She's agile at 56, trim, at once intense and open, wearing fashionably red-rimmed glasses, blue jeans and a black tee shirt. In between rounding up toilet-repair pieces and talking to Ben & Jerry's about its April 16 Free Cone Day benefit, she co-chairs a staff meeting with her partner, Beaton, 66.

They are like muscle and brains wrapped in sturdy tissue paper.

Beaton is handsomely scruffy-looking with a graying stubble, raggedy kerchief around his neck, slender body. He's a mix of professor with dark-rimmed glasses and hitchhiking folk singer thumbing his way to New Orleans.

He and Sweeting will soon be heading for Elberta, Michigan, a small town on the edge of Lake Michigan, where they will launch another low-power radio station and continue to renovate a former railroad worker's boarding house that they purchased in 2019. Unusual digs are a pattern.

They met in 2000 when Sweeting was running for the Florida State House and Beaton brought his communication skills to her campaign. She did not get elected but their progressive political views

matched, so they set out to find a print shop and launch a newspaper. Instead, they bought a vacated Trailways bus station in Bradenton, moved in upstairs, and opened a coffee house below that they called Fogartyville.

The coffee house evolved, with people attracted to the music and the relationships brewed in that safe place, Sweeting said.

Folk and acoustic blues music were the thing then.

"Folk music is a great way to cross bridges," Beaton said. "It's not just a wall of sound—it's people telling their stories. Building community reduces fear and allows us to all get along."

In 2004, Beaton and Sweeting were given the opportunity to shepherd a new low power radio station into existence. WSLR had its first broadcast in August 2005 and has been going strong for 18 ½ years.

The station grew such that in 2010, when the real estate market was floundering, they found a 4,000-square-foot space on the edge of the Rosemary District, and WSLR moved in. The PEACenter, another nonprofit Sweeting had helped found, operated the adjacent space bringing Fogartyville back to life and providing a space for live music to flourish again. Ownership of Fogartyville was transferred to WSLR in 2018 allowing it to become what we know of today as Sarasota's "premier listening room," as Beaton calls it.

## New Venture

Sweeting and Beaton's ability to reel people in and motivate them to give extraordinary effort is demonstrated in their newest venture in Michigan. They founded the Elberta Labor Heritage Center that is focusing on the history of the workers in the former railroad timber town. Of course, it needed a radio station.

Less than a year old, the nonprofit has an Elberta-based board of directors, required to acquire the new LP station (WUWU 100.1 FM). The public owns the airwaves, Beaton explains, so there is no charge for the LP license. But equipment is required to send out the signal carrying the programs. Start-up equipment can cost from \$7,000 to \$30,000. Their summer project will be introducing their new community to the wonders of low power radio, raising funds for start-up, and getting the station on the air.



WSLR founders Arlene Sweeting and Dave Beaton.  
Photo Credit: Gretchen Cochran

Collaboration is their brand. Just as they are mobilizing tiny Elberta with a population of 371, they have been partnering for two decades with hundreds of organizations in the Sarasota area, hosting events at Fogartyville and joining others at church sites, Newtown's Leonard Reid House, even at St. Armand's Circle.

Their focus remains not on the decision makers, but on "the workers," the people impacted by them.

Musicians gather for the Fogartyville Songwriter Series or regular jam sessions. Ten shows of nationally touring artists were booked for the month of February. Performers ranged from House of Hamill (upcycled folk) to acoustic folk rocker Steve Forbert to Reverend Raven and the Chain Smokin' Altar Boys.

Beaton and Sweeting have built a broad communication network here, including the radio station, WSLR-LP 96.5 FM; the newspaper, The Critical Times, with a print circulation of 2,500 supplemented with an online version; a website, WSLR.org; a YouTube channel; weekly emails; and podcasts.

As they turn over care and management of their 24-hour love child, Sweeting and Beaton will be watching from afar.

"People refer to WSLR as Dave and Arlene's radio station, but it's really never been ours," Sweeting said. "It's always belonged to the community - and now it's time for the community to really step up and embrace WSLR+Fogartyville and support the new leadership team"

"Get down here and meet these great new people," Beaton said.

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# WSLR Serves as a Training Ground for Future Journalists

BY NAOMI NERLIEN

This semester WSLR had three students intern with the News Team at the radio station for some portion of the semester. Learn more about them below.

**Arianna Lockman** is a second-year student and is also an Editor for the school newspaper, The Catalyst. Going into college, Aria had settled for a major in English or Literature because she had always liked writing. However, working as a Staff Writer for the Catalyst is what sparked her interest in journalism. Aria found WSLR in the fall and was offered a position as their Communications Intern. In January she was able to transition to be on the News team where she is working on WSLR's Election 2024 webpages and serves as a community reporter. Aria will be transferring to the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus to study Digital Communications and Multimedia Journalism. After graduating, she hopes to build a career as a reporter.

Aria believes in the mission of journalism. "Journalism is a way of keeping the public informed," she said. "The general population isn't going to go digging around to find out what our legislators are doing. That's our job. That's why it's important. I genuinely love what I do and I really hope to find my place in the field of journalism once I graduate."

**Bernadette Estrada-Brown** is a third-year transfer student and is involved with her school's Archaeology and Housing & Residential Life

programs. Bernadette's inspirational story starts long before she stepped foot into the newsroom. Born and raised in New York City, she joined the military at the age of 16 to escape the inner city life of a South Bronx teenager. Lifelong dreams of becoming a journalist were put on hold to focus on being a mother and wife. Now, she is a proud grandmother and her fiery passion for journalism hasn't left. She



WSLR News Director Johannes Werner with NCF news interns

graduated from Hillsborough Community College with an Associate's in Arts with a concentration in Education. She is currently at New College of Florida to finish her Bachelor's degree. As a WSLR intern, you'll find her covering stories on education

and justice. Next, Bernadette plans to continue her education by pursuing a Master's in International Studies and Global Leadership.

Bernadette wants to make a difference with her work as a journalist. She told WSLR, "I want to inform those that may not know better in hopes they do better." Her story tells us it is never too late to chase your dreams as long as you are bold enough to set them.

**Naomi Nerlien** is a first-year college student and is involved with her school's Chinese program and Treeleader club. She hopes to study abroad and visit Taiwan during her years in college. Naomi found her passion for journalism in her first year of college, when she joined the school newspaper course, writing for The Catalyst. She had written poetry in high school, but stopped after taking a gap year. The journalism course reinvigorated her passion for writing and showed her that she had the ability to speak truth to people through her work.

In the future, Naomi wants a career where she can write moving articles and visit different countries while doing so. She wants to explore different avenues of communication such as broadcast, magazine, or even publishing. "It took a long time for me to consider myself a journalist," Naomi said. "I'm just a cheerleader, right? But I realized that as a Black woman, I have a diverse perspective to offer. I'm a cheerleader and a journalist –and I'm really good at both."

## Spring Brings New Leadership to WSLR

BY KATHLEEN MURRAY

With the arrival of spring comes big transitions in leadership at WSLR+Fogartyville. Co-founders Arlene Sweeting and David Beaton will step away from their roles (see related story) and current Station Manager Jesse Coleman will lead a new team as General Manager.

For the past few months, Coleman, Sweeting and Beaton have been training and introducing to the community WSLR Program Director Leon Kerber, Fogartyville Director Ariel Aparicio-Jerro and Fogartyville Events Manager Joe Vermilya.

"I'm here to support, improve, and lift everyone up," Kerber said of his new role with WSLR.

A multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, Kerber is



WSLR Program Director Leon Kerber

a familiar name and face to local music fans who followed Tuff Sons, Big Blu House and Fiasco. He participated in open mics in the original Fogartyville location in Bradenton, and the current Sarasota venue even features a portrait of him playing during a live painting event.

"We (Kerber and bandmates, including his brother, Jeph) realized there's a lot of cool stuff happening here," he said. "It made us want to do better, be better. It was something that was authentic."

On the radio side, Kerber collaborated with Matt Dakan and Jamiel Livingston on their "Open A.I.R." show, which launched from WSLR's original studio on Myrtle Avenue.

"It was a cool, welcoming spot, with everyone deep into the love of music," he said.

Kerber brings with him experience working as a producer, soundboard engineer and on-air personality from his days at 610 WTVN AM / CD 101.5 FM in Columbus, Ohio.

"Leon understands the importance of WSLR as a community institution and brings a love of people, a passion for music and technology, and a wealth of management experience," Coleman said.

Kerber also teaches music to everyone from toddlers to teenagers and even some adults at the School of Rock Lakewood Ranch.

"I teach them how to play guitar, bass, keys, and sing, how to rehearse as a band and perform," he said. "Some of my students have special needs; learning to play music can be very therapeutic."

Kerber will be tasked with managing day-to-day operations of the low power FM station and working with Coleman to build out the programming schedule with an even more diverse mix of community voices.

"Leon will grow our outreach with remote broadcasts and expanded listener engagement, and look for opportunities to improve our technology and processes to strengthen our sound," Coleman said.

Kerber said he is looking forward to building on what makes WSLR such a beloved community asset.

"We already have so much to be grateful for," he said. "I just want to try to do even more of it."

Aparicio-Jerro brings a decades-long hospitality background combined with experience as a singer-songwriter and independent recording artist to the director role at Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center.

"I've spent most of my adult life playing with my band (Ariel Aparicio & The Hired Guns) at places like Fogartyville" – including the final week of New York's legendary CBGB – "so being involved at the back-end of all this is truly exciting for me," he said.



Fogartyville Events Manager Joe Vermilya and Fogartyville Director Ariel Aparicio-Jerro

Anyone who has spent any time in Brooklyn has probably had a meal at Joya, Song and/or National, restaurants that Aparicio-Jerro managed and co-owned for two decades.

"Front of the house meet and greet is a very comfortable place for me," he said.

Aparicio-Jerro will report to Coleman and work alongside Vermilya, who will focus on sound, tech, and booking acts.

Vermilya, a musician by nature and event director by trade, works on event strategy for DMI Music & Media Solutions and is currently on tour with the Rolling Stones, producing the experiential marketing for tour sponsor AARP.

But he'll be back in Sarasota and at Fogartyville in between dates and after the tour concludes in July.

Vermilya has experience as a concert/event producer, artists and repertoire A&R representative, booking agent, conference services host, venue manager, customer service manager, and strategic idea person.

"I've been wanting to use my skills to connect more locally within the Sarasota community and be a part of something special here," Vermilya said. "When I discovered WSLR/Fogartyville, I was surprised and excited to find a community of folks that felt really compatible with me."



# 2024 Florida Legislative Review

## STAFF REPORT

Friday, March 8, 2024, marked the end of Florida's 2024 Legislative session. Lawmakers passed a \$117.46 billion budget for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, which will start July 1. In Florida, the Governor has what is known as line-item veto power, which gives him the authority to veto individual items in the budget without having to veto the entire budget. So while an appropriation may have made it into the final budget approved by the Legislature, it isn't final until it's included in the budget signed by the Governor. The budget includes just under \$50 billion in general revenue, over \$68 billion in trust fund spending which is allocated for various pre-approved purposes, and \$10 billion in reserves. This is the lowest state budget since the COVID-19 pandemic. (During the pandemic, the state budget was largely supplemented with Federal dollars). The budget includes increased funding for public schools and a 3% pay raise for state employees.

**SOCIAL MEDIA BILL:** In perhaps the highest-profile issue of the session, lawmakers passed a plan aimed at keeping children under age 16 off social media. After Gov. DeSantis vetoed the original bill, the legislature passed another bill that would limit the use of social media for some minors. Under the revised bill, kids 13 and under would not be allowed to have an account, and 14- and 15- year olds would have to have parental permission. The ban only applies to websites with "addicting features." Under the bill, those features include infinite scrolling, push notifications and alerts, auto-playing video, live-streaming, and displaying personal metrics such as likes or views. House Speaker Paul Renner made a priority of the issue, saying that social media harms children's mental health. *(How our legislators voted: YES – Buchanan, Beltran, Gregory, Robinson, McFarland, Gruters, Boyd)*

**EXPANDING STOP WOKE :** Though the courts have already blocked the original "Stop Woke" law because it is unconstitutional, the Legislature doubled down yet again by passing House Bill 1291, a government censorship bill prohibiting discussions of institutional racism, oppression, and identity politics in teacher training programs. It seeks to expand the same unconstitutional Stop WOKE prohibitions to teacher preparation courses. Kara Gross, legislative director and senior policy counsel at the ACLU of Florida, said: "HB 1291 will infringe upon freedom of speech and continue to keep Floridians uneducated and keep them from having honest discussions about our country's past. This is a blatant effort by certain lawmakers to limit discussions and censor viewpoints that they do not agree with. Florida already has a teacher shortage crisis, and this legislation will only make it worse." *(How our legislators voted: YES – Buchanan, Beltran, Gregory, Robinson, Gruters, Boyd; ABSENT – McFarland)*

**LOOSENING CHILD LABOR LAWS:** Backed by the tourism industry which is facing a labor shortage because of low wages and harsh

immigration crackdowns, lawmakers passed a bill that would loosen work restrictions on 16- and 17-year olds. The bill that ultimately passed (HB 49) is a lot less expansive than originally proposed. Current restrictions that prevent 16- and 17-year olds from working before 6:30 a.m. or after 11 p.m. would remain in place, but only on days when they have school the next day. They would be prevented from working more than 8 hours a day on Mondays through Thursdays with an exception for holidays and would limit hours worked to 30 per week when school is in session unless their parents sign a waiver to allow them to work beyond the 30-hour limit. Critics of the bill say it will lead to exploitation of kids by employers and hurt their ability to do well in school. *(How our legislators voted: YES: Buchanan, Gregory, Robinson, McFarland, Gruters, Boyd; NO - Beltran)*

## STOP WOKE Loses on Appeal

On March 4th, a Federal appeals court ruled that Florida can't enforce a state law restricting private companies from including diversity and inclusion in their workplace training. A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit ruled that the "Stop Woke Act" violates employers' rights, upholding a lower court ruling from August of 2022 that blocked the law. The enactment of this legislation was a priority for Gov. DeSantis. Passed in 2022, HB 7 sought to prevent teaching about systemic racism in both school settings and workplace training programs. In the opinion striking down the law, Judge Britt C. Grant wrote "By limiting its restrictions to a list of ideas designated as offensive, the Act targets speech based on its content, and by barring only speech that endorses any of those ideas, penalizes certain viewpoints – the greatest First Amendment sin."

**POLICE REVIEW BOARDS:** The Legislature voted along party lines to approve a bill to effectively disband civilian review boards that investigate misconduct allegations against law enforcement officers in Florida. Existing civilian police oversight boards would be barred from convening after July 1, 2024 and the only oversight bodies that would be able to review police conduct would be those with members appointed by sheriffs or police departments. The bill prohibits municipalities from facilitating civilian oversight of law enforcement investigations into officer misconduct. *(How our legislators voted: YES: Buchanan, Gregory, Robinson, McFarland, Gruters, Boyd; ABSENT - Beltran)*

**ANTI-WORKER BILLS:** The Legislature also passed one of the most anti-worker bills we've seen in years in Tallahassee. House Bill 433 would preempt local living wage ordinances, which would allow government contractors to slash pay for tens of thousands of workers in places like Miami, St. Petersburg and Orlando. The bill would also preempt any local ordinances requiring businesses to provide



*During the session Senate President Kathleen Passidomo effectively killed a number of 'culture war' bills in the Senate including prohibitions on the government display of Pride flags and taking down Confederate memorials, regulations of the use of pronouns, and a rollback of age restrictions for firearms purchases.*

workers with any kind of benefits at all, which would prevent any communities in Florida from doing things like adopting "Fair Work Week" laws. The bill would even block local governments from setting heat protection rules that would require employers to provide things like cool drinking water and regular, shaded breaks to employees that work outside in extreme heat. This would prevent communities from passing local laws meant to help people like farmworkers, roofers and construction crews. *(How our legislators voted: YES: Buchanan, Gregory, Robinson, Boyd, Gruters; NO: Beltran, ABSENT - McFarland)*

**HOMELESS:** Lawmakers passed a plan that would bar cities and counties from allowing homeless people to sleep on public property outside of secured camps set up by local governments. It's an implicit criminalization of homelessness that's being supported across the country by Cicero Institute, a right-wing think tank founded by a tech billionaire in Texas. No funding was allocated to local governments in the bill. *(How our legislators voted: YES- Beltran, Buchanan, Gregory, Robinson; ABSENT: McFarland)*

**INSURANCE:** After making major changes over the past two years, lawmakers took limited steps to address property insurance problems. That included a bill that could lead to second homes exiting the state's Citizens Property Insurance Corp. and moving to private carriers. House Bill 1503 would allow unregulated "surplus lines" insurance companies – which charge even higher rates than regular insurers – to take over policies from Citizens Property Insurance Corp. covering people like snow birds and other second homeowners. This could lead to much higher prices for some senior citizens who spend their winters in Florida. *(How our legislators voted: YES – Beltran, Buchanan, Gregory, Robinson, Gruters, Boyd; ABSENT: McFarland)* NOTE: This bill passed with no nay votes in both the House and the Senate.



*Equality Florida and their supporters were a constant presence in Tallahassee this year, and by mobilizing were able to stop or neutralize 21 of the 22 anti-LGBTQ+ bills.*

Equal Ground, a Black-led voting rights organization, had this to say about the 2024 session: *"With Floridians struggling to make ends meet in a state that is becoming increasingly unaffordable, this session was a missed opportunity to address the substantive issues that affect our collective quality of life. Issues like affordable housing and healthcare, meaningful criminal justice and insurance reform, substantial investments in public education, and protecting our democracy by supporting laws like the Harry T. And Harriette V. Moore Florida Voting Rights Act."*



# Opinion: Prioritize the Public at Ken Thompson Park

BY DIANE DESEMBERG

Without soliciting any feedback from the public, the Sarasota City Commission let a private business propose taking over swaths of Ken Thompson Park for an adventure-type theme park. Commissioner Erik Arroyo requested a presentation from Ride Entertainment to the City Commission. Ride is proposing several revenue-generating attractions, including a zipline, a why-drink-on-the-ground-when-you-can-drink-in-the-sky Aerobar, a nine hole "park golf" course, kayak and paddleboard rentals, and a tree climbing experience. Nothing could be further from what Sarasota residents want, and yet a City Commission majority recommended the proposal for review by the City's Parks Recreation and Environmental Preservation Board (PREP Board).

Soon thereafter, a Ken Thompson Park agenda item showed up on the next PREP Board meeting agenda. Although the item was pulled at the last minute, many residents showed up to voice their displeasure. Richard Harris from the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations reported unanimous opposition to this proposal from delegates from every recognized neighborhood group in the city. Carl Shoffstall, a former PREP Board Chair, pointed out that there have been many proposals to privatize Sarasota parks, but the citizens have been adamantly opposed. A bit of satire was offered up by Ron Kashden. His counter-proposal was to build giant water slides atop City Hall.

City parks, in general, are available for anybody to use at no cost. They encourage active lifestyles. They can be community gathering spaces. People

of all socio-economic levels are able to enjoy local green space. Ken Thompson Park is a proud example of this. In addition, Ken Thompson Park grants us all a spectacular waterfront space with a view. Several years ago, the City of Sarasota had the foresight to commission a Parks Master Plan. The Parks

Master Plan reports the most important amenities to Sarasota households are restrooms, benches, trails, sidewalks, and natural areas. Ken Thompson Park provides these amenities and was also highly rated. Residents would like more shade and better parking. Nobody is clamoring for "activation" of this park, as suggested by Ride Entertainment.

Myriad other issues plague this proposal. The traffic to and from City Island, where Ken Thompson Park is located, is horrendous. We don't need to make it significantly worse. The environmental concerns are numerous, including sea level rise and shoreline erosion; herbicide/pesticide use inherent in most golfing turf that might affect the seagrass, oyster beds, shorebirds, and mangrove; impact to endangered manatees in the area; and effects on the bird rookery opposite the boat ramp. City Island is home to a number of water-related, community-oriented non-profits.



Concept submitted by Ride Entertainment for Ken Thompson Park

What impacts might an adventure-type theme park have on their operations?

Rather than considering one unsolicited proposal to privatize portions of Ken Thompson Park, the City Commission and PREP Board should continue following the Parks Master Plan. If there is a spike in interest for additional improvements to Ken Thompson Park, the city should ask its residents for suggestions that support public use. And then let's only spend time pondering amenities that don't dramatically increase the traffic burden and those that minimize environmental impacts. Ride Entertainment tried to fly in under the radar with their privatization scheme. The public must stay vigilant.

Link to Ken Thompson Park proposal: [https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2402309/Ken\\_Thompson\\_Park\\_at\\_City\\_Island\\_Backup.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2402309/Ken_Thompson_Park_at_City_Island_Backup.pdf)

## Planet vs. Plastics - 2024 Earth Day

Since the very first Earth Day in 1970, millions of people from more than 190 countries worldwide have come together every April 22nd to stand up for the planet and champion a greener, more equitable future for us all. Now in its 54th year, Earth Day serves as a poignant reminder of our collective responsibility to safeguard the environment and our own future. The [‘How to Do Earth Day 2024’](#) toolkit provides practical guidance and actionable steps for everyone to participate in the environmental movement, all in accordance with the Earth Day 2024 theme, [Planet vs. Plastics](#).

The Planet vs. Plastics campaign is demanding a 60% reduction in the production of plastics by 2040 and an ultimate goal of building a plastic-free future for generations to come.

“The word environment means what surrounds you. In the case of plastics we have become the product itself – it flows through our blood stream, adheres to our internal organs, and carries with it heavy metals known to cause cancer and disease. Now this once-thought amazing and useful product has become something else, and our health and that of all other living creatures hangs in the balance,” said Kathleen Rogers, President of EARTHDAY.ORG. “The Planet vs. Plastics campaign is a call to arms, a demand that we act now to end the scourge of plastics and safeguard the health of every living being upon our planet.”

As plastics break down into microplastics, they release toxic chemicals into our food and water sources and circulate through the air we breathe. Plastic production now has grown to more than 380 million tons per year. More plastic has been produced in the last ten years than in the entire 20th century, and the industry plans to grow explosively for the indefinite future.

More than 500 billion plastic bags—one million bags per minute—were produced worldwide last year. Many plastic bags have a working life of a few minutes, followed by an afterlife of centuries.



Even after plastics disintegrate, they remain as microplastics, minute particles permeating every niche of life on the planet.

100 billion plastic beverage containers were sold last year in the United States. That's more than 300 bottles per inhabitant. A few of them will be converted into park benches; none of them will be made into new plastic bottles and 95% of all plastics in the US won't be recycled at all. Even the 5% of plastics being recycled are “downcycling” to inferior products or shipped to poorer countries for “recycling”, leaving the demand for virgin plastic undiminished.

People seldom think of water when they think of plastics. But making a plastic water bottle requires six times as much water as the bottle itself contains.

EARTHDAY.ORG demands the International Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC) mandate the end of production of single-use plastic by 2030 in the Global Plastics Treaty. Moreover, it demands the treaty be implemented

using the precautionary principle and the polluter pays doctrine.

The fast fashion industry annually produces over 100 billion garments. Overproduction and overconsumption have transformed the industry, leading to the disposability of fashion. People now buy 60% more clothing than 15 years ago, but each item is kept for only half as long.

Approximately 85% of garments end up in landfills or incinerators, with only 1% being recycled. Nearly 70% of clothing is made from crude oil, resulting in the release of dangerous microfibers when washed and continued contribution to long-term pollution in landfills.

To learn more about Planet vs. Plastics and join the movement for a plastic-free future, please visit: [Earth Day 2024](#). To educate yourself on the impacts of plastic on human health, check out the [Plastics Health Research Module](#) and EARTHDAY.ORG's [Earth Hub](#) for all fact sheets, toolkits, press releases, and articles.



# How Listener-Supported Radio Began

*"The Pacifica Network is a vital cornerstone of our independent media landscape that depends on your financial support. Please donate to safeguard the future of listener-powered community radio."*

– Amy Goodman, Host and Executive Producer, Democracy Now!



WSLR's programmers amplify the voices of our diverse community. Photo by Kathleen Murray

Pacifica, and indeed all public radio, was the idea of Quaker pacifist and poet Lewis Hill, and his artist friends at the work camp for World War II conscientious objectors. These intellectuals saw the proliferation of pro-war propaganda—by both the government and corporations—and felt that American citizens needed better information coming from outside the power structure.

Once the war was over, this group applied for a radio license and acquired one of the first FM frequencies, that of KPFA in Berkeley, CA, the founding Pacifica station - one of five that Pacifica now owns. Pacifica also has a global affiliate network of more than 200 stations, including WSLR, that share programming, ideas, and knowledge.

In the 1940s, the idea of a listener-sponsored radio station was a new one which had never been

implemented. Many people doubted the viability of a broadcast model which didn't rely on some kind of corporate or government funding. But over the years, it has been proven to work.

Hill said, "I imagine we can agree that if a sound is worth passing through the magnificent apparatus of a microphone, a transmitter, and your receiving set, it ought to convey some meaningful intelligence."

His ideas were incorporated into the Pacifica Mission which include the following purposes for radio broadcasting:

*To engage in any activity that shall contribute to a lasting understanding between nations and between the individuals of all nations, races, creeds and colors; to gather and disseminate information on the causes of conflict between any and all of such groups; and through any and all means compatible with the purposes of this corporation to promote the study of political and economic problems and of the causes of religious, philosophical and racial antagonisms.*

*To promote the full distribution of public information; to obtain access to sources of news not commonly brought together in the same medium; and to employ such varied sources in the public presentation of accurate, objective, comprehensive news on all matters vitally affecting the community.*

Pacifica Radio Archives (PRA) is considered by historians and scholars to be one of the oldest and most important audio collections in the world. Chronicling the political, cultural and artistic movements of the second half of the 20th century, Pacifica radio programs include documentaries, performances, discussions, debates, drama, poetry readings, commentaries and radio arts.

In a world riven with conflict, the need for the kind of broadcasting that Lew Hill and his friends imagined is more vital than ever. And WSLR and other Pacifica affiliates are still the best place to find that programming. The diversity of voices on our airwaves and points of view often unavailable in mainstream media help to fulfill Lew Hill's mission of **creating peace and understanding** through a more **open, accessible communication network**.

Join with us this Spring. Pledge your support to keep this valuable resource going strong in Sarasota!

# Get Ready to Give

BY JESSE COLEMAN

For the past few months, change-making organizations in the region have been planning and preparing as The Community Foundation of Sarasota County gears up to host the 2024 Giving Challenge. This 24-hour online giving event takes place on **April 9-10** from noon to noon and offers an opportunity for community members to have their charitable donations to non-profit organizations in Sarasota, Desoto, Manatee and Charlotte Counties matched by the Patterson Foundation. Individual gifts from a minimum of \$25 to a maximum of \$100 will be matched.

This unrestricted match given by the Patterson Foundation is designed to transform nonprofit organizations through relationships and partnerships. A hallmark of the Giving Challenge is its "Be The One" philosophy, which reflects the Community Foundation's belief that everyone can be a philanthropist and have the potential to impact a person, cause, and community.

The event is a crucial opportunity for local non-profits to grow their support base by allowing donors to have their charitable donations matched, and giving added incentive for organizations to grow their support from all segments of the community. Since 2012, the Giving Challenge has provided more than \$75 million in unrestricted funding to organizations over eight challenges.

"The opportunity to build relationships with people in the community who want to help us in our mission and multiply their impact is huge," says Shannon Fortner, Executive Director of the Fabulous Arts Foundation. "We are working to amplify LGBTQ+ voices while building safe spaces in our community, and building our capacity to do that is an important part of what The Giving Challenge can do."

WSLR+Fogartyville will be hosting their Spring Pledge Drive from **April 3-10** where we encourage supporters to Be the One to support independent media and arts during the Giving Challenge. Listeners can call in their support to the radio station by calling **941-894-6469** to make a pledge or by visiting [GivingChallenge.org](http://GivingChallenge.org) on **April 9-10** and make a donation to our organization or one of the value-aligned non-profits looking to make a positive impact in the community.

"With the Florida Legislature zeroing out Culture Builds Florida funding during this legislative session, the Giving Challenge gives us the opportunity to fill some holes in next year's budget," says Arlene Sweeting, Co-founder and General Manager of WSLR. "Community support at this critical time is vital to our ability to continue the level of service and programming that WSLR+Fogartyville have brought to Sarasota this year."



**LIVE MUSIC LIVES HERE**

**FOGARTYVILLE**

*"With WSLR broadcasting right next door, the entire location could be considered a true "preservation hall" experience — this place is all about the music!"*

– Steve Forbert, nationally touring Americana artist

# Triple Whammy Hits Public School Enrollment

*continued from pg 1*

There are 37 private schools in Sarasota now. Most of them aren't your top-quality Out-of-Door-Academies or Saint Stephens Academies that charge tuition of upwards of \$20,000 a year. Rather, they tend to be small outfits in churches, operating with little oversight.

And then, there's a third, and new, factor: charter schools that are run by corporate for-profit companies. The Sarasota School Board approved two of those, one last year and one in March. If these two schools, run by the second largest for-profit charter school management company, Charter Schools USA reach full enrollment, that would take away at least \$25 million from the district's public schools.

Over the past decade, the state legislature has stripped local school boards of their final say in the creation of certain kinds of charter schools. If they reject an application, for-profit charter school operators can appeal to a state panel now, which may reverse the local decision — while leaving the school boards to pay the legal bills of the applicant they rejected.

Amid all this, local school administrators now have to rely on the state to keep track of public-to-private school migration numbers. The state Department of Education has taken over tracking of private-school and voucher enrollment. And that has prompted at least two school board members to

request staff take that accounting back in house.

NOTE: School choice is not a huge problem for school districts as long as the number of enrolled students in the public schools is increasing or even staying the same. But when the number of students actually enrolled in the public schools start decreasing, that is when you have to have cutbacks. Broward County has been hit hard with enrollment decline (again mostly families moving out for financial and culture war attack reasons) but it is very serious there and the superintendent is holding town hall meetings about which schools to shut down. They are looking at shutting down at least 5 schools this year and dozens more in the near future.