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 being 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

The next meeting of the Catalyst planning group 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

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 Forester at julie@seeourpower.org

Andy Blanche is the founder and director of SRQ Strong. More information at srqstrong.org
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 Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center boundary-pushing performances. 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 celebrating diversity. To learn more, visit: www.see.space.

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, 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 festival kick off events! 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 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.

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 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 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

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

Experience the untamed beauty of Florida’s wilderness.  
Visit our website to book your overnight stay and experience a bit of old Florida.  
941 315.7064  
the三角洲牧场@gmail.com  
Visit: TheTriangleRanch.com

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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 taxping authority and privatization. Our panel of experts include: Sandra Stuart, Sarasota Memorial Hospital’s former 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. 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 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 our local hospital.

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

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.
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.

ALL SHOWS: Student tickets available at 1/2 price (show ID at door); Kids 12 and under are free.
What’s New on air?

WSLR just wrapped up a fantastic Gender Equality Month. On March 8 from 7 am, late night we threw open the patriarchy with an International Women’s Day Takeover that showcased all women 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 with Neu Radio which has been revamped this semester with new College of Florida English/Music student Sarah Mallickson taking the helm. Her show Sonic Underground brings feminist electronic punk, grunge, guitar instrumentalism and some slower gothic rock/industrial tunes to alternating Saturdays 7-9 pm. The show alternates with Elissa Bello’s Velvet Radio which celebrates the smooth, sultry sounds of exotica and shares avant-garde musical gems.

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

Dylan Howell & Libby bring listeners the classics sounds of the 50s 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, an alternative Sundays from 9-11 pm, The Backbeat with Andy Franklin brings listeners the classic sounds of the 50s and 70s intertwined. 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 2 pm to The Longboat Luau with The Ho Dad, who plays surf music and island tunes that serve as the perfect weekly escape.

International Women’s Day Takeover which just wrapped up a fantastic sounds of the ‘60s and ‘70s intertwined with tales that showcased women programmers and guests. It was a celebration of stories and achievements through music and discussion.

Those who play surf music and island tunes that serve as the perfect weekly escape.

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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 creators, 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.

“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 dark-rimmed glasses and hitchhiking folk singer the neck, slender body. He’s a mix of professor with vigor.

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.

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.

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 to 3,000; 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 the time for the community to really step up and embrace WSLR and Fogartyville and support the new leadership team”

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

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

WSLR founders Arlene Sweeting and Dave Beaton.

Photo Credit: Gretchen Cochran

Community Media & Arts Center over to all of us.

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 creators, 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.

“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 dark-rimmed glasses and hitchhiking folk singer the neck, slender body. He’s a mix of professor with vigor.

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.

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.

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.

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Community Media & Arts Center over to all of us.
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, so 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.”

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 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 Teenleader 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 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.

“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 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.”

WSLR News Director Johannes Werner with NCP news interns
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 research indicates that 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 from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. 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 narrower version 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 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 health 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 explicit 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 insurers. House Bill 83 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.

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.”

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.
Opinion: Prioritize the Public at Ken Thompson Park

BY DIANE DESENBERG

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 can be found flying kites or meeting friends at a popular 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.


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. Plastic.

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. City.”

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 plastic 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 Fish 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-supported community radio."

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

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 magnificient 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 cultures; 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 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. Each donation 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 base of support.

“The opportunity to build relationships with people in the community who want to help us in our mission and multiply their impact is huge.”

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 Sweeck, Co-founder and ‘General Manager of WSLR’.”

Community support at this critical time is vital to our ability to continue to operate as one of the leaders of the value-aligned non-profits looking to make a positive impact in the community.

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 on April 9-10 and make a donation to our organization.

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Triple Whammy Hits Public School Enrollment

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 a lot. Some are 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, which may reverse the local decision — that when the number of students actually enrolled 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.

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, which may reverse the local decision — that when the number of students actually enrolled in the public schools is increasing or even staying the same.

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.

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Broward County has been hit hard with enrollment decreasing, that is when you have to have cutbacks.

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