

August 20 Primaries Heat Up

GOP Factions Vie for Hospital Board Seats; Democrats to Face Winners in November



Photo credit: Kathleen Murray

BY FLORENCE FAHRINGER

Sarasota County Public Hospital Board’s elections were turned upside down when the “medical freedom” slate made big gains two years ago. This year, three groups are vying for the four hospital board seats up for grabs. They are: establishment Republicans, well-connected executives defending their simple majority on the board; “medical freedom” Republicans, critics of the hospital’s COVID-19 pandemic response aiming to translate last election’s surprise victory into an absolute domination of the board; and Democrats, late arrivals who explicitly define themselves in contrast to the “medical freedom” Republicans. Some registered Democratic voters have been discussing switching party affiliation in order to vote in the Aug. 20 primary for hospital board.

Establishment Republicans

The faction that currently dominates the board might best be described as

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All Voters Can Cast Ballots for Nonpartisan School Board

BY ARLENE SWEETING

With controversies and culture wars aplenty over the past year, this year’s Sarasota County School Board election is sure to attract a lot of attention. Qualifying for local races closed on June 14 and only two candidates filed to run for the District 2 seat on the board, which means the **Aug. 20** election will decide who will fill this seat and serve with continuing members Tim Enos, Robyn Marinelli and Bridget Ziegler.

In District 2, incumbent **Karen Rose** faces a challenge from **Liz Barker**, a former school psychologist and current public school parent. The race for the District 3 seat has three candidates. If a candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote on Aug. 20 a winner is declared. Only if no candidate receives more than 50 percent will the top two advance to the November general election.

Voting is county-wide and school board races are nonpartisan, so **ALL REGISTERED VOTERS CAN VOTE** in the school board election in August.

SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 2 CANDIDATES

Karen Rose has 30 years of service in Sarasota County schools as a teacher, principal, executive director of middle schools, and sitting school board member. Her voting record has aligned consistently with that of embattled Board Member Bridget Ziegler. She was the board member that made the

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Aug. 20, 2024 Primary Election

Voter registration deadline: Monday, July 22

Deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot be mailed: **Thursday, Aug. 8, 5 p.m.**

Early Voting: **Saturday, Aug. 10-Sunday, Aug. 18**

Election day: **Tuesday, Aug. 20:** Polls open 7 a.m.–7 p.m.; vote-by-mail ballots must be received in the elections office by 7 p.m.

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Moran’s Successor to Be Decided in GOP Primary

BY FLORENCE FAHRINGER

District One is the site of an ongoing battle between Lakewood Ranch developers and Old Miakka residents. It covers the northeastern-most corner of the county; essentially, everything east of the City of Sarasota. The decision on whether **Teresa Mast** or **Alexandra Coe** will succeed term-out Mike Moran on the Sarasota County Commission will rest with registered Republican voters in the Aug. 20 primary as write-in candidate Hope Williams filed and closed the primary to all other voters. (Note: Democrats did not field a candidate.)



Alex Coe

Mast announced her candidacy early on. Her husband is the CEO of the Manatee-Sarasota Building Industry Association, “a membership driven networking and advocacy group focused on the needs of the building & development industry and related business in Manatee and Sarasota Counties.”



Teresa Mast

Mast has not endeared herself to many Old Miakka residents, including activist Becky Ayeche. The phone number associated with her campaign is the number for Venice accounting firm Robinson,

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High-Profile District 3 County Commission Race Draws Big Money

BY FLORENCE FAHRINGER

Republican **Neil Rainford** was appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis to fill the District 3 Sarasota County Commission seat held by Nancy Detert, who died during her term in 2023. A year later, Rainford faces a challenge from Republican **Tom Knight**, who announced his candidacy early, and independent candidate **Shari Thornton**, who more recently joined the race.

Though it may seem only natural for Rainford to run for re-election for District 3, there’s a detail that complicates this decision: he didn’t live there prior to his appointment. Rainford’s residency at the time was in the northern part of the county, an area

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City Commission Races May Yield Shift in Priorities

BY JOHANNES WERNER

This year’s elections could switch the Sarasota City Commission back to a majority of neighborhood association-rooted commissioners.

During the current term, the five-member panel has not been easy to predict. In their 3-2 vote to incentivize workforce housing construction by allowing developers to build taller and bigger buildings along major corridors, the commission overrode opposition from two city commissioners and the better-off condo and neighborhood organizers that support them. On the other hand, this commission risked friction with the state,

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Florida History Educators to Gather in Sarasota

BY KATHLEEN MURRAY

Community culture keepers and storytellers have essential history to share. That's the message Rolando Herts of The Delta Center for Culture and Learning will bring to his keynote at the Sip & Scholarship Social at Fogartyville on July 26. The gathering is part of the 8th Annual Conference for the Florida Council for History Education, which takes place in Sarasota this year.

"We're very much about community engagement, which is a two-way, multipronged transfer of knowledge," Herts said. "Young people, connect with your elders in your community and with your family, record their voices. That's just one little thing that can happen in showing and demonstrating that you value the knowledge of these culture keepers."

The Delta Center, based at Delta State University, promotes greater understanding of Mississippi Delta culture and history and its significance to the world through education, partnerships and community engagement.

During his keynote Herts will present The Center's work – which includes the International Delta Blues

Project and Mississippi Delta Heritage Area – with the goal of inspiring the Florida educators in the audience to bring more experiential learning rooted in place and community back to their students.

Conference organizer and history teacher Jean Faulk attended The Delta Center's Most Southern Place on Earth Workshop for K-12 educators, which is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. She wanted her fellow Florida educators to learn from Herts about how the teaching of history can be enriched with first-hand accounts.



Rolando Herts of The Delta Center for Culture and Learning.

"Anytime you can hear somebody with a different perspective and can bring in more knowledge, that is just good for the kids," Faulk said.

"Rights and Responsibilities in History" is the theme of the July 26-27 history education conference, which will take place mainly at Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe. Optional events include a tour of Historic Spanish Point, The Ringling Circus Museum and a Newtown Alive Trolley Tour.

The gathering of educators and lovers of history from across the state comes just a couple of months

after the Florida Board of Education approved the continued use of language in the social studies standards that calls for students to learn "how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit" and that the 1920 Ocoee massacre and the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre were acts of violence perpetrated "against and by" African Americans.

The president of the Florida Education Association in late May criticized the Board for not reversing course and the Florida Council for History Education website echoes a statement from its national organization that "Omission, insinuation, and lack of context have no place in our classrooms. Our students deserve better."

Engaging with scholars and community storytellers who can illuminate the history and culture of a place is key, Herts said.

"We have found if you root a lot of your work in place and in community, some of those diversity, equity and inclusion pieces or themes naturally come out."

IF YOU GO

What: Florida Council for History Education's **Sip & Scholarship Social** with Rolando Herts

When: Friday, **July 26**, 4-6 p.m.

Where: Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court

Tickets: \$25

Information and registration: flche.net

Academic Freedom Advocates See Signs That 'War on Woke' Is Fizzling Out

BY SOPHIA BROWN

Ask anyone to give you their first impression of Florida—maybe they'll mention beaches or Disney. But in the eyes of many across the nation, Florida has also cultivated a reputation of intolerance and censorship.

Gov. Ron DeSantis has led a censorious campaign, and two of its key pillars—the Stop WOKE Act and the Don't Say Gay bill—have inspired copycat legislation elsewhere, driven teacher shortages, and created a culture of fear and intimidation in schools and communities.

Starting in 2021, amidst national protests following George Floyd's murder, the Florida legislature engaged in a strategy of stoking panic around public education, particularly targeting diversity efforts, the teaching of full and accurate history, and LGBTQ inclusion.

In 2022, new rules were set forth in law with the passage of HB7 (Stop WOKE Act) and HB 1557 (known as the Don't Say Gay bill). These laws rendered racism, aspects of history, sexism, gender and sexuality as topics too "divisive" to be taught to Florida's students.

In 2023, the campaign continued with the passage of SB 266, which forbade university spending on anything under the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) umbrella, putting student affiliation centers, faculty unions and entire academic departments under fire.

All together, this suite of educational gag orders have been vague, over-applied, and have been invoked as justification to curtail the rights of students, parents, teachers and community members when it comes to the freedom to read and learn. Instead of protecting Floridians, many legislators have sought to censor and erase identities and viewpoints they find unfavorable.

But 2024 has brought some signs that the tide may be turning. Most notably, both the Stop WOKE and Don't Say Gay bills faced major legal setbacks. Already temporarily blocked from enforcement in higher education in 2022, the Stop WOKE Act's preliminary injunction in places of employment was affirmed by the Eleventh

Circuit Court of Appeals in March. And a recent settlement of the Don't Say Gay bill in a challenge brought by Equality Florida clarifies some of its inherent vagueness.

This year's legislative session has also brought reasons for academic freedom advocates to have hope. While some censorious legislation still passed—including a version of the Stop WOKE Act that applies to teacher preparation programs (which is bound to be challenged

in court like its predecessor)—many "culture war" bills failed to pass, including one that would have banned pride flags from public schools and universities, and another that would have threatened students' financial aid for exercising their right to protest.

After years of pushback at the local level, including students and parents fighting for free expression in school board meetings right here in Sarasota, the governor's proclaimed "war on woke" may finally be fizzling out. But only if this resistance is sustained can we push forward to create the Florida that all citizens deserve, one that does not stand for hate or censorship—a Florida that feels sunny once again.

Sophia Brown is the program coordinator of PEN America Florida, a graduate of New College of Florida, and a former intern for WSLR News.

Source: "Cracks in the Facade: Lessons Learned From Florida's Ongoing Censorship Campaign," by Katie Blankenship and Sophia Brown, PEN America Florida



Protesters promoted the right to read ahead of a Sarasota County School Board meeting in 2023. Photo credit: Kathleen Murray


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Analysis: The Six Million Dollar Man

BY CATHY ANTUNES

Throughout U.S. history restrictions have been put in place to limit campaign donations in local, state and federal elections. The idea is to prevent those with the gold from making the rules.

When wealthy people exert excessive influence on our government through their campaign donations, democracy declines. The Constitution begins with “We the People...” Our founders intended that the government would serve the people, not the interests of a special few.

But the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United v. FEC decision blew the roof off of campaign finance rules. The controversial 5-4 decision effectively says money is “free speech” and corporations are people. In a related 2010 court decision, SpeechNow.org v. FEC, the Citizens United decision was cited when a U.S. Court of Appeals struck down limits on the amount of money that individuals can give to organizations that support political candidates. This is when our dark money political action committee (PAC) problems began.

In Sarasota and Manatee counties, a handful of developers are exploiting their ability to legally bankroll campaigns. Some of these developers claim they are succeeding in a “free market.” In reality they use lavish donations to support friendly candidates’ campaigns to rig the system in their favor. Because local government approvals and investments are always involved in their projects, these developers aren’t really operating in a free market. When they successfully game the system with PAC money to get their preferred candidates elected, our “We the People” government becomes a bought government.



Pat Neal

Pat Neal is one such developer. Neal is a former state legislator who embarked on the family business – residential development – after serving 12 years in Tallahassee. After a review of his state campaign contributions, I like to call him the “Six Million Dollar Man.”

The Neal contributions I’ve gathered are contributions to state candidates and PACs. It isn’t easy to gather information on contributions from Neal and his corporate affiliates. While I can document all the donations included here, I cannot rule out that there may be more that I missed.

The majority of donations I found – \$4,655,661.74 – were made by Neal in his name. Most of those funds went to various political committees, and the vast majority were made since the 2010 Citizens United decision. The rest of the donations I found – \$1,072,265.36 – were made by various corporate affiliates of Neal, located at his corporate addresses and administered by his firm’s corporate executives.

The total – \$5,727,927.10 – is quite a lot of money for a local builder to be pumping into political campaigns. And note: this does not include all of Neal’s contributions to county and city candidates. Those numbers must be gathered report by report, candidate by candidate. Our County Supervisors of Elections do not make it easy to search for information by donor. Maybe they should.

Neal must believe his \$6 million investment in political campaigns is good for his business. Ask anyone who has paid close attention to local government in Sarasota and Manatee counties about this, and they will tell you: he is right.

Cathy Antunes is host of “The Detail,” which airs every Thursday at 9 a.m. on WSLR-LP 96.5FM.

New Book by Transition SRQ Founder

BY KATHLEEN MURRAY

Longtime activist Don Hall has a simple message for both experienced and aspiring changemakers in the face of mounting environmental, economic and social crises: “Start wherever you are.”

Hall is the author of “The Regeneration Handbook: Transform Yourself to Transform the World,” which offers insights, stories, tools, practices and resources for anyone who seeks to step into their full power to envision and manifest



a regenerative community in the place they call home.

Hall says a regenerative community “might look like one where there’s an abundance of small farms and gardens, a vibrant culture and economy powered by sustainable local

businesses, solar panels on every rooftop, more bikes than cars, good public transit, and plenty of spaces to gather and commune with nature.”

But what does a just and regenerative future look like to the Sarasota community at large or even on a smaller neighborhood scale? Hall looks forward to helping Sarasotans come together to dream, discuss and design their own destiny as part of his “Regenerative Communities Roadshow,” which stops at Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center on July 8. He will also lead two workshops on July 9, one at Fogartyville and the other at the Unitarian Universalists of Sarasota.

Hall answered some questions from the Critical Times about his personal experience and the messages in the book.

Q. Many will recognize your name from your work as a founder of Transition Sarasota (now Community Harvest SRQ). In “The Regeneration Handbook” you discuss that experience and some of the wisdom you gained from it. What’s the takeaway?

A. When I started Transition Sarasota I still had a lot to learn, and the way I learned most was just by doing. You can start wherever you are with whatever you care most about and scale up gradually over time. You do something that creates the conditions for

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Unitarian Universalists Launch Democracy Action Team

BY HILLES HUGHES

The Unitarian Universalists of Sarasota, the largest UU congregation in Florida, recently initiated the UUSRQ Democracy Action Team, a non-partisan effort to strengthen democracy and counteract voter suppression.

The team is centered on creating an inclusive democracy where citizens are encouraged to vote for their values.

Unitarian Universalism has a long history of working to advance democracy through every justice movement in U.S. history. The Board of Directors for UUSRQ recently voted that one of its three goals for 2024-2025 is to preserve democracy and pass Florida Amendment 4, the right to abortion initiative.

More than 3,000 petitions to put Amendment 4 on the ballot were collected by UUSRQ volunteers as part of the first trained petition hub in the state. The congregation is serving as a Super Saturday host on the third Saturday of July, August, September and

October as part of the statewide effort to educate voters on the Yes on 4 Campaign.

UUSRQ is providing workshops and ongoing communication open to the broader community with the goal of informing citizens about the more than 68 elections that will take place across the Sarasota region in the next six months. The focus of these programs is to educate about how the electoral process works and where the candidates stand on the issues.



Photo courtesy of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

This community-organizing project is connected to UU the Vote, a non-partisan effort that began during the last presidential election as a way to engage people in voter registration, issue education, get-out-the-vote drives, voter protection, state leadership development and more. UU the Vote shifted from just election-year organizing to year-round movement-building to shape an inclusive democracy.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has developed a “Good Trouble Congregation” designation named for John Lewis, the late Civil Rights leader and Georgia congressman,

which provides infrastructure and goals to assist congregations in staying engaged and tracking their efforts.

By working collectively to advance justice, the UUSRQ Democracy Action Team is collaborating closely with state advocacy networks and other local and regional partners. Aligning with social movements that situate their electoral work within broader struggles for liberation is a key goal of the Democracy Action Team and connects directly to the Unitarian Universalist values of justice, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism and generosity.

One of the Unitarian Universalist principles is “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in the society at large.”

To learn more about being involved in the UUSRQ Democracy Action Team efforts to ensure that democratic values are upheld in our community, visit uusrq.org/democracy-action-team.html

Hilles Hughes is communications coordinator for Unitarian Universalists of Sarasota.

Founders of Save Florida Home Rule Have History of Activism

BY GRETCHEN COCHRAN

Finding one's way into Barb and Tom Ehren's Anna Maria Island home is like grooving on a blues guitarist as he pulls in the audience. The one-story house is entirely wrapped in a four-foot-deep forest of towering green arca palms.

But one step inside reveals a couple dedicated to fixing what they believe is wrong in the same way their favorite musician is so focused on playing his guitar he breaks the strings.

The Ehrens are the driving spirit behind Save Florida Home Rule, a grassroots organization of residents speaking out against the possible consolidation of the three cities of Anna Maria Island (Holmes Beach, Bradenton Beach and Anna Maria).

"You can't sit and do nothing," Barb says.

The Ehrens have just returned from a blues concert in New Haven, Conn.

"Siri, play some Buddy Guy," Tom, the couple's techy half, directs. Music courses through the house. Barb and Tom light up, vibrating to the beat.

The Ehrens are career teachers, both retired from Florida public schools and universities. They specialize in language and communication.

Both fear a move by state and county politicians to consolidate the three cities will result in the loss of their local laws and subsume the municipalities under Manatee County or the City of Bradenton.

Activists like the Ehrens say loss of home rule could open the cities to high rise complexes, higher taxes, and complete loss of the meager supply of affordable housing.

Throughout their decades of mobilizing for causes, they've learned to pull in supporters. Barb is education chair of the Manatee branch of the NAACP, president of the AMI/West Manatee Democratic Club, and president of a corporation that helps children and adolescents who struggle with learning.

As of June 1, Save Florida Home Rule had already amassed more than a thousand letters pleading with state Rep. Will Robinson, R-Bradenton, and state Sen. Jim Boyd, R-Bradenton, to leave the three communities alone.

"Until now, we are approaching them as their friendly constituents," Barb says. "If that fails, we go to Plan B." She declined to elaborate.

Some of the organizing, including messaging about home rule rallies, takes place on the Save Florida Home Rule public group on Facebook, which launched in March and has nearly 250 members.

Tom talks as if he is Barb's cheerleader.

"I know when I get behind Barbara, it is going to lead to something good," he says. It was Tom who hired Barb back in the day to do consulting work. They are clearly a team.

The Ehrens describe a project they developed a while back when they both were school administrators, he in Broward County, she in Palm Beach. They specialized in communication disorders/speech language pathology.

There were many administrators in charge of those programs statewide, but nobody at the state level providing leadership. So, they started an academy to teach people to be leaders.

That vision reflects their view of Anna Maria Island's scene. Local government control is being snatched away across Florida, not just here, they say.

Tom told of a similar situation. When Manatee County loosened wetland protections, Bradenton Times publisher Joe McClash filed a lawsuit. But he bumped into another law: if someone challenges the county and the county wins,

they must pay the county's legal costs. McClash, by himself, faced seven lawyers.

The loss of local control is apolitical, Barb says. "Residents, visitors from off the island, out of staters: this is a local issue that will affect you."

Barb and Tom don't just organize and mobilize. Barb retreats to her converted carport-studio, where she makes jewelry under the moniker of Brezza Marina Designs by Libby. "Libby" is her creative persona.

Tom is now trying to plumb his passions "to relieve oppression, using his helping ability," he says. Where does that desire come from? Both his parents fled Hitler in 1939, losing their homeland, everything, he says.



Barbara Ehren



Tom Ehren

This summer Tom and Barb are working on a program for RECESS Education, a nonprofit that strives to promote equity and inclusivity through initiatives that bridge the achievement gap in Manatee County. They are teaching high school students to write and produce podcasts centered around the significance of Juneteenth, the national holiday commemorating the ending of slavery in the U.S.

Barb particularly likes working with teenagers, citing their sense of humor and creative thinking. She is focusing on developing a prototype for teaching African-American History so the programs can be scaled. She'd like to see Manatee replicate community programs like the Freedom School in Sarasota's Newtown.

"If the state decrees we can't teach the fullness of American history in our schools, then we'll do it ourselves," she says.

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Episode Two: From Pulpit to Politics
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Episode Three: The Liberal Bias Bogeyman
How did the Right get their vice grip of the airwaves, all the while arguing that they were being silenced and censored by a liberal media?? (32:42)

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Dreamers Academy Founder: ‘Positive, Individualized’ Learning Experience Is Key to Success

BY CAROL LERNER

How is it that Dreamers Academy--a Sarasota dual language Spanish immersion charter school in its second year of operation--scored near the top in Sarasota school rankings in the 2022-23 Florida FAST standardized assessment and scored 10th out of 1,231 low-income Title I schools in all of Florida?

The Dreamers Academy scored higher in English language arts and mathematics than both the Sarasota district average and state average. It scored sixth in the ranking of all elementary schools in Sarasota, and it almost tied with the high-achieving Venice and Tatum Ridge elementary schools in English language arts and beat both schools in mathematics. These successes happened even though the school was not even two years old at the time of testing and had sought out students, particularly English language learners (ELL), who were amongst the lowest achieving demographic group.

Osprey resident Geri Chaffee, the founder and visionary of the Dreamers Academy, explained that as excited as she was with FAST testing results, the real proof of the pudding of the school's effectiveness is in the day-to-day achievement of the students in Spanish-English language acquisition, reading achievement, cultural sensitivity, and an eagerness to learn.

“There is no teaching-to-the-test at the Dreamers Academy,” she said. “Instead, the staff turns learning into a positive, individualized experience.”

The Dreamers Academy currently serves 440 students, grades K-4, but student enrollment will rise to full capacity of 650 students next year with the addition of 5th grade and a new group of kindergarten students. There are three groupings of children at the academy: ELL students with Spanish as their primary language; children from dual language homes (Spanish and English) with a wide range of language skills; and English-speaking children with no exposure to Spanish.

Chaffee, who switched careers from communications to education and now has two master's degrees in education, has just started a doctoral program at Vanderbilt University. She explained how Dreamers Academy's dual language program works. “It is structured so that two classes in the same grade are paired together, with children in one class learning grade-level content and standards in English from a licensed teacher and children in the adjacent, connected class receiving the lesson in Spanish from a partner, the Spanish-speaking licensed teacher. The next day, the students switch and are immersed in the partner language,” she said. “They are learning content in and through two languages simultaneously.”

The two classes work together as a unit all year, so the children benefit from exposure to two different Florida-licensed teachers who also plan together, share insights on the children, and engage parents, an essential component of the program.

Studies of dual language programs have shown that children who become bilingual often show higher academic performance and enhanced cognitive skills. An article by the Association for Language Learning, “Immersion Learning: What Impact Does It Have?” said that dual language immersion students “typically develop greater cognitive flexibility, demonstrating increased attention control, better memory, and superior problem-solving skills.” Furthermore, they develop a more “positive attitude towards other cultures.” Finally, “immersion students are better prepared for the global community and job markets where a second language is an asset.”

In touring Dreamers Academy with Chaffee,

it became clear why students are thriving. This is the academy's first year at the Newtown site, a beautifully designed, bright, and airy two-story building with separate wings for each grade cohort. Dreamers Academy's first two years were spent in temporary quarters on the campus of Temple Beth Shalom.

This is what Critical Times saw and learned on the tour:

The students observed were all eagerly engaged in learning.

The school staff, from the highest level of administration down to the cafeteria workers, were supportive of students and the school's mission. They all seemed excited to work there.

The school founder, Geri Chaffee, has secured multiple grants, including a \$100,500 grant to create a state-of-the-art culturally sensitive bilingual library. The school also raised \$200,000 to build a student-designed playground and is now working on outfitting a sophisticated science lab.

Parent outreach and engagement are at the heart of the school; the ability of staff to converse with Spanish-speaking parents and guardians is a game-changer.

The Dreamers Academy has high-level support services, including a part-time bilingual psychologist and a full-time bilingual speech therapist—both based on observed need, with the full-time bilingual speech position being unique to any Florida school.

Chaffee's own experience as an ELL student in New York City and especially raising her own two children bilingually convinced her of the value of the dual language approach. She was further convinced when she volunteered at a Sarasota Title I school.

In 2017, Chaffee approached the Sarasota County School District about establishing dual language programming, but only the superintendent at the time, Todd Bowden, was on board. He said he could not move forward without broader staff support and suggested that Chaffee develop a charter school to prove the model's effectiveness. Simultaneously, she pitched her ideas to the Manatee County School District and found a receptive audience. With Chaffee's help, they moved forward in establishing a dual language program in one school and have since expanded to five schools.

Currently, Chaffee is in contact with Sarasota school administrators and is hopeful that



Gerri Chaffee with Dreamers Academy students

dual language programs in Spanish and Russian/Ukrainian, a burning need in the North Port area, will be developed within the district.

It should be of no surprise that “think-outside-the-box” Chaffee applied to NASA to receive a “moon tree” seedling. This is a seedling grown from seeds taken into orbit in NASA rockets around the moon. The sweetgum “moon tree” seedling will arrive shortly and will be planted on the Dreamers Academy's campus. Chaffee is worried about who will care for the tree this summer. “It needs attention and loving care to thrive,” she said.

Now, isn't this “moon tree” the perfect metaphor for Chaffee and her Dreamers Academy?

Carol Lerner is a retired educator and the director of Support Our Schools.

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

5pm Tuesday 7/16 Free

Irish Session & Learning Hour

Informal monthly gathering of acoustic musicians sharing Irish Traditional music



7:30pm Sunday 8/04 \$20/\$25

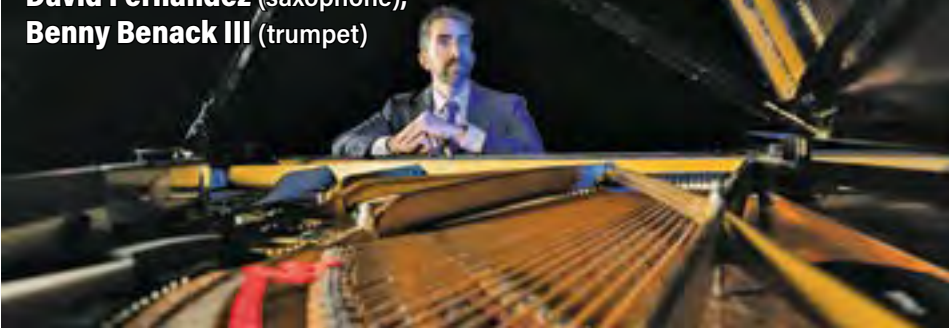
Liz Longley (rescheduled)

Nashville singer-songwriter known for her stop-you-in-your-tracks voice and deeply emotional music

7:30pm Wednesday 7/24 \$24/\$28

ZACHARY BARTHOLOMEW QUINTET

Award-winning jazz pianist and composer will be joined by Marty Quinn (bass), Rodolfo Zuniga (drums), David Fernandez (saxophone), Benny Benack III (trumpet)



5pm Tuesday 8/20 Free

Irish Session & Learning Hour

Informal monthly gathering of acoustic musicians sharing Irish Traditional music



8pm Saturday 8/24 \$30/\$34

DIEGO FIGUEIREDO

Grammy Award-nominated Brazilian guitar virtuoso hailed for innovation that respects tradition



8pm Saturday 7/27 \$18/\$20

Doug MacLeod

Multiple Blues Music Award winner is known for superb songwriting, guitar wizardry, soulful vocals, and unforgettable live performances



7pm Monday 9/9 \$7/\$10

Series Kickoff SONGWRITER in the ROUND

(Second Monday of the Month through May)
Best of our local musicians share stories in between playing original songs

7pm Monday 9/23

Free for members \$5 not-yet-members

Fogartyville OPEN MIC

(Fourth Monday of the Month through May)
Coffeehouse-style gathering for the community; bring your instrument and/or voice and get on the list!

8pm Saturday 8/03 \$30/\$34

Emilie-Claire barlow

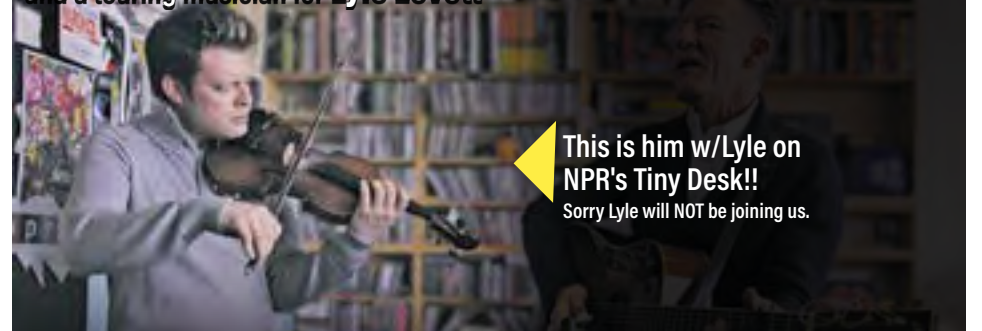
Canadian jazz singer, arranger and record producer is a two-time Juno Award winner



7pm Sunday 10/06 \$22/\$26

LUKE BULLA

Nashville-based fiddle player is a favorite among the bluegrass community and a touring musician for Lyle Lovett



This is him w/Lyle on NPR's Tiny Desk!!
Sorry Lyle will NOT be joining us.

What's New on air?

By: Leon Kerber
WSLR Program Director

A: It could be YOU!



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Music

Public Affairs

	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)	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 Indie Psych Show Alecia Harper	Eclectic Blender Dave Pedersen	Latin Explosion Juan Montenegro	Saturday Morning Gospel Beat Jonah Ray	A Way With Words (Syndicated)
9 a.m.			ALTERNATE WEEKS				Wings of the Heart Carol or Salima
10 a.m.	ArtBeat Kathleen Murray Voices Up Shai & Andrew	Our Changing Environment	Healthy Living Hour	Peace & Justice Report Tom Walker & Bob Connors	The Detail Cathy Antunes	Surreal News Lew Lorini & Steve Norris	The Bradenton Times Mitch Maley
11 a.m.	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	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 Afro Cuban Jazz Frankie Piniero	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.		ALTERNATE WEEKS				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	Everything But The Kitchen Sink Art on the Air	The South End Reggae Show (Syndicated)	
4 p.m.				ALTERNATE WEEKS		Community Conversations Mel Lavender Afrosonic Taxi (Syndicated)	Velvet Hammer Blues Beth Hammer
5 p.m.	Music Museum Ed Foster	Synthetic Age JR Indie-licious Sheila Jane	Jazz And More Brian Jones	Ted's Head Ted	Friday Happy Hour Bartender Tommy D.	Rhythm Revival Reverend Billy C. Wirtz	
6 p.m.		ALTERNATE WEEKS					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 Progressive Page Turner		
9 p.m.	Yesterday's Dead Today Mark Binder	The Root Cellar Roger & Peter	The Cat's Meow The Cat Lady The Backbeat Andy Franklin	Positive Friction John Haupt	Ripper's Rarities Russ Yodice	Songs For Knitting & Mayhem Laura Sonic Underground Sarah Malickson	Soul Kitchen Paul Junior Lavender Blue Radio Lindsey Hudson
10 p.m.	SynthWorld Damon	First Voices Indigenous Nation	Bullwinkle's Corner Keith Winkle	Random Precision Alex	Music Is The Best Mark Markus	Microgroove Fallon Markwell	The Good Part Jay Ackermann
11 p.m.							Broken Reel Leon Kerber That Driving Beat (Syndicated)
12 mid.	Down The Road (Syndicated)	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	In My Room (Syndicated)	All Mixed Up (Syndicated)	Dave Radio Dave Wilkens	Milo After Hours Milo	The Witching Hour Dylan Howell

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GOP Factions Vie for Hospital Board Seats; Democrats to Face Winners in November

continued from page 1

establishment Republicans, representing business as usual. The two incumbents running for reelection take advantage of the local Republican Party funding machine set into motion by accounting firm Robinson Gruters.

They certainly mean business as well. While establishment Republicans raised around \$4,000 in their battles against their “medical freedom” challengers last election cycle, this year’s candidates had raised more than \$77,023 between them as of press time. Last election, candidates from both GOP factions raised comparable amounts of money for their campaigns. This time, establishment Republicans have so far outraised their “medical freedom” counterparts by about 6 to 1.

Some of them have a background in healthcare; others are more transient executives. Their political stances as a unified block are not as starkly defined as that of their opponents, and their outreach to the public has been comparatively minimal. Most of all, they generally ignore medical freedom more than confront it. They put emphasis on their own experience and/or incumbency while avoiding the thorny discourse around mask wearing and vaccines.

For Central District Seat 1, **Sarah Lodge** is defending her incumbency. She is the current chairwoman of the board, and has been a board member since 2020. Lodge is a financial advisor at RBC Wealth Management. Of the \$19,000 she had raised as of press time, \$15,000 of it came from her own pocket.

For At-Large Seat 1, **Sharon Wetzler DePeters** is also defending her incumbency. Like Lodge, most of the money she’s raised has been out of her own pocket — though she’s only working with half of what Lodge has, currently sitting at \$8,250. She has been on the board since before 2020, being one of its most seasoned members. She also has a history in healthcare, having served as a nurse in the Air Force, later becoming an associate professor of nursing.

For At-Large Seat 2, **Kevin Cooper** is running for an open seat. Unlike Lodge and Wetzler DePeters, Cooper lists contact info that isn’t just Robinson Gruters, and has raised almost all of his campaign funds from dozens of individuals and businesses who had given him \$28,128 as of press time — that’s the most of any individual hospital board candidate. Many of those businesses are developers, which makes sense, considering his membership to the Lakewood Ranch Business Alliance. Cooper is the vice president of communications and strategic initiatives at Mote Marine Laboratory.

For At-Large Seat 3, **Pam Beitlich** started out as a nurse, and has worked her way up at Sarasota Memorial Hospital for 40 years. She’s also crowdfunded, with \$21,645 raised at press time.

Medical Freedom Republicans

Last election’s upset victors, who are critical of the hospital’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and have roots in the anti-vaccine movement, have a simple majority within reach. They only need two more seats.

This year **Mary Flynn O’Neill**, the sister of retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, is running for At-Large Seat 3 on the “medical freedom” slate. Gen. Flynn is the highest-ranking Trump official to formally and publicly adhere to the QAnon conspiracy theory and has said privatizing the hospital should be considered. Flynn O’Neill — who had raised \$400 as of press time — and fellow “medical freedom” candidate **Tanya Parus** deny any interest in privatization on the medicalfreedom.srq.com website.

For Central District Seat 1, Parus’s claim to fame is her “We the People Health and Wellness Center,” a clinic that treats COVID-19 with hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin and refuses to vaccinate its patients. Parus raised \$470 as of press time, \$20 of which came from her own pocket, a far cry from her opponent’s \$15,000 self-contribution.

For At-Large Seat 1, **Tamzin Rosenwasser** has apparently become a lone wolf “health freedom” candidate. When the medicalfreedom.srq site first launched, the dermatologist’s headshot was included alongside Parus and O’Neill. It has since been removed. As of press time Rosenwasser had raised \$5,975, mostly from over a dozen retirees.

For At-Large Seat 2, **Stephen Guffanti** is a big time anti-vaxxer that was not supposed to be the “medical freedom” candidate for this seat. That honor was supposed to go to Kendra Becker-Musante; in fact, mentions of her candidacy can still be found littered across the medicalfreedom.srq.

com website. But she joined the Republican Party too late, making her ineligible to run. Guffanti says he was deeply disturbed by how Sarasota Memorial Hospital treated his case of COVID-19; his outcry over his treatment helped sow the seeds of last election’s “medical freedom” victory. He had raised \$5,501 as of press time; like Rosenwasser, he’s almost entirely funded by retirees.

Democrats

Vicki Lynn Nighswander, Alan Jerome Sprintz, John Lutz and **George Davis** emphasize the crisis presented by the “medical freedom”

Republicans, and their resolute rejection of their opponents’ principles. The website saveyourhospital.com, which aligns with Democrats, says the candidates are experienced in the healthcare industry and resolutely opposed to what medical freedom represents.

Unlike the Republican candidates, none of the Democrats have a primary to worry about. That means they can fundraise for the Nov. 5 election while their opponents have two battles to fight, the first one taking place on Aug. 20. The October issue of Critical Times will include profiles of Nighswander, Sprintz, Lutz and Davis.

Recap

Last election, though an upset, did not throw into question who dominated the hospital board; the majority held by the establishment Republicans was never in question. This election, the majority is up for grabs, and it’s anyone’s game. Establishment Republicans are offering voters business-as-usual. “Medical freedom” Republicans are calling for a radical and conspiratorial departure from it. Democrats are offering a bulwark against medical freedom.

Republican candidates that win the primary on Aug. 20 will then face Democratic opponents in the fall along with several write-in candidates that have thrown their hats into the ring. The future of one of Florida’s only publicly-owned hospitals hangs in the balance.

**Hospital Board August Primary
Candidate Forum**
Hosted by League of Women Voters
of Sarasota County
Thursday, July 11, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Jacaranda Library, 4143 Woodmere
Park Blvd., Venice
More information or to submit questions:
lwvsrq.org



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For a Vibrant & Livable Sarasota



Karen Rose

motion to terminate the district's previous superintendent, Brennan Asplen. During his departure address, Asplen described a toxic working relationship with the board that developed following the August 2022 election, which saw three conservatives elected. (Note: Asplen himself identified as a conservative Republican.) Rose then upset far-right groups when she pushed for Terry Connor to become the new superintendent, supporting him over Michael Flynn's chosen candidate because he was the only candidate with classroom teaching experience. Rose has been a vocal advocate for increasing the district's reading achievement and described herself as a "fiscal conservative and champion for parental rights" in her campaign announcement. Rose has raised more than



Liz Barker

Formerly a school psychologist, **Liz Barker** is now a stay-at-home mom. She serves as the president of the PTO and member of the School Advisory Committee at her children's elementary school (Lakeview Elementary). Barker is a member of the National Association of School Psychologists and also served as the parent representative for the K-8 Math Textbook Adoption Committee for Sarasota County Schools. If elected, she says she plans to focus on student achievement, teacher support and keeping culture war distractions out of the boardroom. Barker is not a fan of universal vouchers as they siphon money from public schools, putting it into private schools that are not accountable to the public. Barker is endorsed by the Network for Public Education Action. She has raised more than \$111,000* from over 750 individual donors, including donations from Lisa Schurr (co-founder of Support Our Schools

- \$1000) and Georgia Court (owner of Bookstore1Sarasota - \$500).

SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICT 3 CANDIDATES

Incumbent **Tom Edwards**, who was first elected in 2020, faces two challengers for the District 3 School Board seat: **Gregory Wood** and **Thomas Andrew Babicz**.

Tom Edwards has more than 40 years of experience as an entrepreneur



Tom Edwards

and is the co-founder and owner of two businesses. He is often the lone dissenting voice on a 4-1 conservative-leaning majority on the current Sarasota County School Board. Edwards, who is gay, is one of 14 school board members in Florida targeted by Gov. Ron DeSantis for defeat in the upcoming elections. While more progressive than the conservative school board majority, Edwards describes himself as a moderate. He is the only school board member to have visited every school in the district. His website states he is the "only moderate voice advocating for the freedom of teachers, the rights of ALL students and parents, and the preservation of public schools



Gregory Wood

from the destructive, political winds of privatization." Edwards has been endorsed by the Network for Public Education Action. He has raised more than \$124,000* from approximately 700 donors, including Michael Bennett, retired Manatee County Supervisor of Elections - \$500; Laura Kingsley, retired assistant superintendent of Sarasota County School District, \$500; and Jon Thaxton, former Republican County Commissioner - \$500.

Gregory Wood describes himself as "a life-long conservative who believes in family first, freedom, and our Country." He works as a realtor, having moved to Sarasota to work as head coach and executive director of Sarasota Scullers Youth Rowing Program, a position he held for

Sarasota School Board Candidate Forum

Hosted by League of Women Voters of Sarasota County

Wednesday, July 17, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Jacaranda Library, 4143 Woodmere Park Blvd., Venice

More information or to submit questions:

lwvsrq.org

approximately 3 years. Wood filed to run against Tim Enos for the District 5 seat on the School Board in 2022, but withdrew from the race before the primary. In February 2023, he filed to run for the District 3 County Commission that Nancy Detert was due to vacate because of term limits. When Detert passed away in April, Neil Rainford was appointed by Gov. DeSantis to fill the seat and Wood shifted his attention to the school board race. Wood has been endorsed by Sarasota County Young Republicans and the Florida High School



Tom Babicz

Republicans. He has raised more than \$12,000*, with \$5000 coming from his own donations/loans to the campaign. Notable other contributions include \$150 from School Board Member Robyn Marinelli and \$500 from Bob Weachter (former Sarasota GOP party chair convicted of fraud in 2012 for making campaign contributions to Democrats in Republican Lourdes Ramirez's name to undermine her primary campaign).

Thomas Babicz retired in 2019 after working in IT management for 35 years in New Jersey and moved to Venice with his wife Barbara, where they currently reside. He is a strong supporter of school vouchers and tax credits, and policies that put parents in charge of their children's education. Growing up in Gdansk, Poland during Soviet occupation, he is strongly anti-communist. Listed among his core focus areas he includes eliminating pornography and rejecting the "WOKE DEI/SEL/CRT Agenda," bringing back phonics to improve reading and writing skills, and eliminating wasteful spending. He strongly opposes any introduction to any sexual orientation throughout the elementary school years. Babicz has largely self-funded his campaign up to this point (\$4982).

*Note: Campaign Contributions as of 5/21/24.

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City Commission Races Could Change Direction in Sarasota

continued from page 1

when it expanded vacation rental regulations — a core demand of neighborhood organizers — even after the Florida Legislature passed a law preempting local regulations.

Downtown noise — music in the ears of others — has probably been the most emotionally charged issue. On noise control, condo and neighborhood organizers have been on the losing side. The battles were so heated they led to a public accusation by one city commissioner, blaming a neighborhood activist for a racist social media post. That post turned out to be a fake, and prompted the activist to sue the commissioner.

Meanwhile, concerns in the heavily African American District 1 about too much planned public housing there went unheeded by the board majority.

The swing vote has been Liz Alpert, the current mayor. The more predictably pro-business votes have been coming from Erik Arroyo. He is usually seconded by Kyle Battie, who is primarily on a quest to represent the concerns of District 1 voters.



Kyle Battie

All three of those incumbents are defending their seats in the upcoming elections,

which are nonpartisan.

One of the three seats — District 1 — will be up for a first round of voting on Aug. 20. Districts 2 and 3 won't be up until Nov. 5. The race pitting Liz Alpert against Ron Kashden (the well-to-do District 2, covering all of the city's waterfront and most of downtown), and the race between Erik Arroyo and Kathy Kelley Ohlrich (District 3) feature only two candidates, which means that Nov. 5 will be the only election. The District 1 candidates — incumbent Battie, and challengers Sequoia Felton and Melissa Morrill-Furman — will go through a first vote on Aug. 20, with the two leading vote-getters heading to a runoff on Nov. 5.

The candidates, and what they stand for District 1

Kyle Battie (incumbent)

He does not have a campaign website and did not respond to a request for information. In the last election, he expressed concern about rising living cost and gentrification, and about rising crime in his district. This year on the City Commission, he was the sole “no” vote on a request by the Sarasota Housing Authority to build taller and bigger public- housing structures in Newtown. He is the defendant in the lawsuit mentioned above.



Sequoia Felton

Born and raised in nearby Oneco, she has lived in Newtown since 2006. She says she is concerned about unchecked development. Key quotes: “Overtown [the neighborhood now known as Rosemary District] historically has been replaced by gentrification. I don’t want this to happen to Newtown. The people being displaced have nowhere to go, and the city needs them as a workforce. So I want to address the fact that there is less homeownership.” and “I currently work downtown and often commute home to Newtown on a Veo. Like all my neighbors, I have a vested interest in safe, shaded mutli-modal transportation and clean streets.”

Melissa Morrill-Forman had no campaign website as of press time. The Critical Times was unable to reach her.



Liz Alpert

her efforts to improve and/or maintain quality of life in four areas: “charm and walkability,”

Sequoia Felton

Born and raised in nearby Oneco, she has lived in Newtown since 2006. She says she is concerned

about unchecked development. Key quotes: “Overtown [the neighborhood now known as Rosemary District] historically has been replaced by gentrification. I don’t want this to happen to Newtown. The people being displaced have nowhere to go, and the city needs them as a workforce. So I want to address the fact that there is less homeownership.” and “I currently work downtown and often commute home to Newtown on a Veo. Like all my neighbors, I have a vested interest in safe, shaded mutli-modal transportation and clean streets.”

District 2

Liz Alpert (incumbent)

The family law attorney and mom of three is currently serving as the ceremonial mayor. Alpert is often the decisive swing vote. Her re-election website touts

her efforts to improve and/or maintain quality of life in four areas: “charm and walkability,”



Ron Kashden

back against higher-density incentives to build workforce housing along major thoroughfares. On his website, he cites as his “grounding” principles: “Give the public a seat at the table,” “support



Erik Arroyo

local businesses,” “preserve Sarasota’s charm,” “promote law & order” and “ensure fiscal balance.”



Kathy Ohlrich

for starting a charity in the city’s name that counted big developers doing business in the city among its financial donors. She also was the campaign manager for sitting Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch. Rather than specific issues, her campaign website lists “grounding” principles. They include “protect community,” “work together” and “grow wisely.”

affordability and safety, arts and culture, and environment.

Ron Kashden

The former chief financial officer of a private equity fund and CEO of a tech company is a frequent appearance at the City Commission meetings. He has pushed

District 3

Erik Arroyo (incumbent)

The lawyer was born in the Dominican Republic and raised here by a single mom. He lists as his accomplishments, among others, incentives for affordable housing construction and property tax decreases. He raised eyebrows for bringing a for-profit proposal in a city park on behalf of a client of his law firm. He also got pushback for starting a charity in the city’s name that counted big developers doing business in the city among its financial donors.

Kathy Kelley Ohlrich

Among others, she served as the president of her neighborhood association, and on the

planning commission. She also was the campaign manager for sitting Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch. Rather than specific issues, her campaign website lists “grounding” principles. They include “protect community,” “work together” and “grow wisely.”

Moran’s Successor to Be Decided in GOP Primary

continued from page 1

Gruters & Roberts. Robinson is former Sarasota County School Board member and treasurer for multiple campaigns Eric Robinson and Gruters is state Sen. Joe Gruters (R).

Mast, in an email, responded to a request for

should be weighed against citizen concerns. I’ll always side on protecting the quality of life of our residents.”

In February, Coe threw her hat in the ring. She is a current member of the Sarasota Charter Review Board, where she took some positions that did not please builders and developers. She is a former chair of the Republican Liberty Caucus of Florida, a part-time farmer, and a New College graduate in anthropology.

“...I believe that the people in east county have the right to their way of life ... The basic premise of the entire campaign is that we cannot continue to elect people involved in the development industry to office, and think that we are not going to get development,” she said.

Days before deadline, a Hope Williams who lives at the same address as the woman who identifies as Mast’s campaign manager filed

as a write-in candidate. No party is listed on the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections website. Her write-in candidacy locks out all independents and Democrats - a significant part of the electorate in District 1 - from the primary.

County Commissioner District 1 Candidate Forum

Hosted by League of Women Voters of Sarasota County

Monday, July 22, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Selby Library, 1331 First St., Sarasota

More information or to submit questions:

lwvsrq.org

comment regarding where she falls in the ongoing fight between Lakewood Ranch developers and Old Miakka: “Growth in any shape and size

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District 3 County Commission Race *continued from page 1*

covered by District 1, which is also up for grabs this campaign season. Rather than running for the district where he already lives, Rainford has decided to move into District 3. “I was appointed by our Governor, Ron DeSantis to represent my friends and neighbors in District 3,” he wrote in an email. “It is my home and will continue to be so.”

Rainford is a member of the Suncoast Builders Association, and while his campaign website does not provide a means of contacting him, accounting firm Robinson Gruters is listed as the campaign address and means of contact on the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections website.

Knight, in an email, said he anticipates the race will be “the biggest, ugliest and most expensive commission race in Sarasota County history.” Money raised as of press time far exceeded that of any other county-level race, with the three candidates already having amassed nearly half a million dollars between them. At press time, Rainford had raised the most money of any current county-level candidate, at \$251,344. Knight wasn’t too far behind, with \$178,005. Thornton was at \$5,105.

Both Republican candidates are friendly to developers. Rainford describes himself as “heavily invested in construction and county planning,” while Knight describes himself as “pro-business” and “not against building.”

Their positions come with caveats. Rainford suggests a government-driven solution is necessary for the preservation of Warm Mineral Springs, elaborating by saying he “think[s] we can find a balance and have slow, planned growth without hurting our quality of life.” Knight says the county has “a problem with planning for growth and following the laws and regulations that are on our books.”

Thornton has taken the most aggressive stance against developers. One of her key issues is “over-development,” in which she attacks the county’s “subsidization” of private development. “I, along with the vast majority of people in the county, share the frustration and outrage of over-development, traffic congestion, and destruction of natural habitat and resources.”

Citing her background as a healthcare executive, Thornton says another key issue is health and

human services. “I am in favor of working with the advisory committee to refund programs,” she said. “When programs benefiting children-at-risk, early childhood care and education, and other marginalized populations are unfunded, we risk jeopardizing our community’s future success. Several of these organizations received federal or matching funds, so the negative impact on the community was multiplied when the commissioners cut funding.”

Knight has a background in mental health advocacy, and when asked about his stance on county-funded services, said: “With mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness, I believe partnering with nonprofits that have a history of cost-effective success with these issues will save taxpayers in actual dollars ... I’m not saying we should write them a blank check or the nonprofits should not be held accountable.”

In this realm, Rainford made his stance clear. In recent commission meetings, Rainford supported slashing 211’s funding because it listed Planned Parenthood among possible organizations to which it could refer callers. It was revealed shortly after by United Way that Planned Parenthood had not been referred to by 211 in the past fiscal year. Answering a reporter’s question as to whether or not this revelation had influenced his viewpoint, Rainford said: “In the county commission meeting, the representative from United Way stated that they do refer calls to Planned Parenthood.”

On immigration, Knight stands out among his opponents. “I want to create a task force to gather data on the number of illegal immigrants using resources in our community and the financial impact of that (not a record of names and private information) [...] I am not so naïve as to think we can use county resources to take direct action on deportations, but what we can do is better advocate for our county in Tallahassee and even at the federal level.”

Rainford and Knight are squaring off in the Republican primaries, whereas Thornton started her run as a Democrat before switching to independent status. That means Republican voters will choose between Rainford and Knight on Aug. 20, and between the Republican victor and Thornton on Nov. 5.

Don Hall Visits Sarasota

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something bigger to happen. Hosting a discussion is an accessible entrypoint. But you also need a pathway for scaling up.

Transition Sarasota helped to serve as a catalyst and connector for the local food movement. By bringing together existing organizations that are working together on a common issue like food, energy, land conservation, then we can start to have some real influence on the community. To bring local organizations together is very powerful. It can then become a major priority for the community as a whole – the story of who we are and what we want to be.

Q. In Chapter 7, “The Power of Vision,” you lead readers on a thought exercise of imagining one full day in a “post-transition world.”

A. It’s so powerful, and each time I facilitate it I go through it myself. I do find that I see different things; my vision does change, maybe a little bit sharper each time. Once we have that vision of the world, we can ask ourselves, “What is my role in this?”

Q. What should attendees expect from your talk?

A. I really want people to come away with a sense of “What role might I play in regeneration?” The greatest power that we have to make change is when we can fully integrate it into our life, into our work, into our career.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

IF YOU GO

“The Regeneration Handbook” Talk With Author Don Hall

Monday, July 8, 7 p.m.

Fogartyville, 525 Kumquat Court

Tickets \$5; \$25 includes copy of the book

Reservations: wslr.org or call 941-894-6469

WORKSHOPS WITH DON HALL

Inner Transition and Evolutionary Journey

Following a presentation about the meaning and importance of the Inner Transition, participants will create their own personal action plans.

Tuesday, July 9, 10 a.m.-noon

Fogartyville

Tickets: \$20 or \$30 for both workshops

Reservations: fogartyville.org

Effective Collaboration and Integral Activism

Following a presentation about effective outreach and collaboration, participants will create, present and revise an “elevator pitch” for an initiative they would like to see happen in Sarasota.

Tuesday, July 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Unitarian Universalists of Sarasota, 3975 Fruitville Road

Tickets: \$20 or \$30 for both workshops

Reservations: fogartyville.org

Federal Funding May Ease Stress for Sarasota County Families

BY BERNADETTE ESTRADA-BROWN

The Sarasota County Commission in June voted 4-1 to slash funding – \$500,000 – from Early Learning Coalition, the latest in a series of decisions that defund longtime health and human services providers, including the United Way.

ELC’s School Readiness program provides financial support for early childhood education and care. The cuts directly impact some 300 children from low-income and working-class households who rely on it to access quality childcare services.

Losing access to affordable, high-quality early education can have severe and long-lasting consequences for children, particularly during the crucial brain development phase before age 5, according to the National Academies Press.

Sarasota resident Natalia Jones, an early childhood education teacher and parent of two preschoolers, voiced concerns about the impact on families like hers.

“I feel like I am working just to pay for childcare, and I do not qualify for subsidies due to my income,” she said.

Commissioner Mark Smith was the lone “no” vote. Commissioner Neil Rainford, one of the four who voted in favor of the defunding, is being challenged this election season by a Republican and an independent who have criticized the series of budget cuts.

In the meantime, the federal government has made access to quality and affordable childcare a priority. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has finalized a rule to strengthen the Childcare and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program. This program provides childcare assistance to more than 1 million children and their families monthly. The new rule includes provisions that cap co-payments at 7 percent of family income, eliminate co-payments for families with specific needs, ensure fair compensation for childcare providers, and streamline eligibility

and enrollment processes to reduce red tape and improve access to childcare services.

The CCDBG proposed budget also aims to provide high-quality, affordable childcare (center-based or family childcare) and free preschool for children. The investment of \$600 billion over the next 10 years will help states offer more childcare options to more than 16 million children.

If the proposed budget passes, families in Sarasota County would have a little more certainty, as the federal assistance could ensure that vital childcare services remain accessible to those who rely on them most.

For information about state assistance, visit myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance

Bernadette Estrada-Brown is a student at New College of Florida and was an intern at WSLR News during the spring semester.

People-Powered Radio Returns to Bradenton

BY RUTH BELTRAN

WBPV-LP is a listener supported, nonprofit and low-power radio station broadcasting at 100.1FM in Bradenton. The station, which returned to the airwaves on May 26 after a yearlong hiatus, serves the needs of the Manasota community and provides real democracy in public media by making it accessible to everyone. It's commercial-free, independent radio programmed by activists and community members involved in multiple struggles across the metro area.

Independent progressive media is more important than ever in an era when Florida's right-wing governor and legislature have banned books, attacked public education, reversed child labor laws, gutted diversity programs, and outlawed community oversight of the police. Gov. Ron DeSantis and his billionaire backers have canceled independent thought with the help of the corporate-sponsored media, creating an ever-deeper demand for independent community media.

WBPV is a community radio station for the working class and by the working class, who seek to educate listeners about political, cultural and social issues impacting our communities today. It enables residents to share ideas, opinions, debate, news and music in partnership with the community it serves. WBPV will provide a voice to the voiceless, while instructing and educating citizens to be involved in their communities and help create the change they want to see in the world.



In coordination with local non-profit, after-school and summer programs, WBPV leadership will instruct teenagers in the basics of broadcasting, audio production, news reporting, podcasting and news and public affairs show hosting so they can produce their own shows under the guidance of experienced studio staff. The shows and content produced by the students will be aired on WBPV, providing a direct line of communication among our communities.

For the first few months the majority of WBPV programming will be provided by WSLR-LP 96.5 FM in Sarasota. The station will transition to its own live and pre-produced radio broadcasts featuring local people – activists, workers, students, community leaders, musicians and subject matter experts – who will focus on cultural literacy, labor laws, community forums for civic and educational purposes, music and poetry, and other cultural and arts-related programming.

Listeners will also hear updates about anti-working class legislation coming from City Hall as well as an anti-war and anti-imperialist



Ruth Beltran and community members

view on world events. WBPV is dedicated to the issues, lives, struggles and organizing of the working class.

Getting WBPV-LP on the air at 100.1FM is only the first step in this exciting project. We need many resources to fully establish the station back in the community, transfer the license from The PEACenter to our new nonprofit, find a permanent home, and create a well-equipped permanent studio before the beginning of the new school year. As independent media, we rely on donations from people like you. We appreciate your support!

WBPV Station Manager Ruth Beltran is a community organizer and co-host of *The Ruthless Truth*, which airs Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. on WSLR. To make a tax-deductible donation to WBPV-LP, email: rmbeltran1@gmail.com

'2Gen Approach' of Supporting Whole Families Helps Close Gaps

BY REBECCA ABRAHAMSON

There's an old saying: "A parent is only as happy as their least happy child."

For many, this sentiment illustrates the interdependency of parents and their children, cementing the notion that parent and child well-being are inextricably connected.

It stands to reason, then, that the most effective way to propel families out of instability is to support them holistically, with a focus on the needs of children and the adults in their lives that's simultaneous and intentional.

This is the basis of the 2Gen (Two-Generation) Approach that has been at the root of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County's work for more than a decade. Earlier in 2024, the foundation hosted its third regional 2Gen Summit to explore creating systemic change that interrupts intergenerational poverty through supporting whole families. The Summit convened practitioners, policymakers, parents and philanthropists at Florida Studio Theatre, recrystallizing community focus on 2Gen.

While conventional interventions for vulnerable families often focus on either children, with education, or adults, with social services, 2Gen approaches intentionally consider the whole family together to provide wraparound services and opportunities for self-development that lead to economic and social asset building.

"When you empower families, you provide the opportunity to achieve their potential and create a foundation that can be built upon through generations," said Roxie Jerde, President and CEO of the Community Foundation. "Families can transform when supports are offered to parents and their children together, with the goal of building social, educational, and financial assets."

Since 2012, the Community Foundation has partnered with Ascend at the Aspen Institute, a catalyst of the 2Gen approach and a convener for diverse leaders working across systems to build intergenerational prosperity and well-being. In that time, the Community Foundation invested nearly \$90 million in 2Gen strategies.

Voice and Vision

A major tenet of 2Gen approaches is centering parent voice, a notion that springboarded a new opportunity, the Parent Leadership Grant, which awards nonprofits for soliciting parent input, whether that's through the creation of parent advisory councils (like the one the Foundation established years ago), or another way. That first round of grants--\$57,000 in total to eight area nonprofits—was awarded in late May.

"Too often, we create systems of support without first learning what will help," said Kirsten Russell, the foundation's Vice President of Community Impact. "The input of parents and caretakers must be the most critical element in developing programs and services for them."

Along with parent input, the foundation's new Community Indicators Dashboard provides insight through components of community well-being including economic, education, housing and health. A repository of data from reputable sources, the dashboard offers visualizations

of current trends and projections, providing an understanding of where needs exist and how factors of well-being are interdependent, equipping philanthropists and practitioners with information that's vital to formulating strategies for disruption.

Some datapoints are sobering. Currently, in Sarasota County, 52 percent of students enrolled in public schools qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch; and 38 percent of all households live below the ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, but Employed) threshold, meaning that nearly 75,000 families in the county struggle to afford necessities like housing, transportation, utilities and childcare. 2Gen approaches can help close the gap.

"The research is clear that the top predictors of a child's academic and financial success later in life are their parents' income and education level," Russell said. "It makes sense to focus on parents as an integral part of helping children reach their full potential."

To learn more about the Community Foundation's 2Gen philosophy and how it is being put into practice locally, visit cfsarasota.org

Rebecca Abrahamson is the senior manager, communications, of Community Foundation of Sarasota County.



Speakers at the 2Gen Summit included (from l-r) Marjorie Sims of Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Raquel Hatter of The Kresge Foundation; and John Annis of Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation. Photo courtesy of Community Foundation of Sarasota County