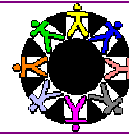


CONA COMMENTS



SARASOTA'S ONLY COUNTY-WIDE ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS
SINCE 1961

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President: Ann Kaplan

Editor: Bill Earl

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County Controller Karen Rushing reports on impact of Wall Street collapse on county finances and services at May 11 CONA meeting

County lost \$40 million in Wall Street collapse?

Sarasota County Controller, Karen Rushing, talks about the impact of the Wall Street collapse on Sarasota County finances at CONA's May 11 meeting at 7 PM at the Sarasota Garden Club. According to Rushing, Sarasota County had \$40 million in Lehman Brothers bonds before that firm went under. Because of that, she says the county cannot build or staff a new fire station, two new libraries or new parks.

Rushing has been Sarasota County's elected Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller for the past 20 years. She received a BA degree from the University of South Florida and an MBA from Nova University. Members of the public and the media, as well as CONA members, are invited to attend. The meeting will be at The Sarasota Garden Club, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts).



Representative Keith Fitzgerald of Sarasota led successful efforts to defeat an anti-citizen voter bill in Florida legislature

Representative Fitzgerald leads battle to defeat anti-voter legislation

By Kindra Muntz

Florida Senate Bill 956 and its companion House Bill 7149 would have limited the number of IDs that voters could use at the polls, restricted voter registration efforts, hamstrung petition-gatherers (who have a constitutional right to petition their government), and put almost all power over elections in the hands of the Florida Secretary of State, a political appointee. In addition, these bills would have opened the floodgates to unlimited political contributions by out-of-state lobbyists, thus making our already outrageously costly political races even more expensive and making elected offices simply baubles to be bought by the highest bidder.

Voters are waking up! Over 40 nonpartisan public interest groups around the state roused their members to call and email their representatives and senators to oppose these two horrendous election bills. Newspapers all over Florida editorialized about the travesty of this naked power-grab. A team of progressive legislators led by Representative Keith Fitzgerald (D-69) and Representative Scott Randolph (D-36) worked hard to stop these bills from passing. They succeeded.

Thank you Keith and Scott and all progressive legislators who fought for the voters. *Kindra Muntz is President of the Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections (SAFE) and Co-Founder, Florida Voters Coalition. She can be reached at: safevote@comcast.net*

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There *are* "right" choices

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

Lately I have been more concerned than ever about the state of our world. Knowing my limitations, I try to stay focused on the more local level so that I don't become too overwhelmed, but sometimes my internal filter goes down and I can't avoid absorbing all of it!

In contemplating the current state of affairs in the world, nation, state, county, cities and neighborhoods I have recently come to a conclusion that gives me hope and encouragement: most of the actions taken by people we consider to be "wrong" are NOT done with a desire to harm anything. Usually it is simply a lack of knowledge as to how their specific actions affect the **whole**. **The BIG PICTURE is something that many of us miss when we become too involved with the details BEFORE we understand the greater goal.**

It's like a worker sitting in a cubicle, focused on a few specific tasks, who has no idea how his efforts will affect the outcome of a project at another location or even what the final product/project is or should accomplish. This scenario exists all too often in business and government. Technology has compartmentalized things to the point of giving us blinders. The reason the worker has no knowledge of how his efforts affect the whole is because that is usually **not** part of his job description and his supervisors have not taken the time and effort to tell him how his task relates or contributes to the end product because that's **not** in **their** job description (and they're already overworked). And so on..... This lack of communication and knowledge contributes to unnecessary problems.

The cubicle illustrates how we can go through life focused on **details** because we are not **aware** of the big picture. If we take the responsibility to understand the whole with all of the consequences and potential, we may make different choices or take different positions. This can be a great personal leap and some of us will have the courage and open mindedness to take it. In the workplace, it must begin with management so employees will not fear the loss of their jobs (especially now).

There may be a few people in the world who purposely cause suffering or harm while the other 99% of us make bad choices out of ignorance, but that does NOT excuse us from the responsibility to become aware of how our decisions affect the larger scenario. When we have the foresight to do this, we will begin to see far less opposition and there will be obvious "right" choices. Until the majority of us choose a higher level of awareness, we will still have to do battle of one kind or another because the process takes patience and persistence but, we *will* see progress.

Englewood neighborhood leader impressed with county Civics 101 course and county programs

By Cathy Cevoli

Did you know that the Carlton Reserve is both a park and water facility, or that in addition to becoming a Master Gardener there are other county programs for wildlife specialists and naturalists? In the area of health, Sarasota County offers sliding scale clinics to accommodate residents from birth to 55 and beyond. Every time a county fire truck or rescue vehicle is deployed, it has a cross trained team that could include emergency medical technicians, paramedics and/or fire fighters. Many departments like parks, libraries, health and human services, co-operative extension and even disaster preparedness, welcome citizen volunteers.

For ten weeks this spring, my husband and I are attending Sarasota County's Citizen's Academy-Civics 101. At the halfway mark, we are awed by the services, professionalism and attitude of everyone we have encountered whether elected, appointed or employed in our County.

Our County has its own 911 Call Center and disaster preparedness for everything from hurricanes to fires, and an incredible think-tank room where the latest in GIS (that's geographic information systems) can be explored with a click of the mouse. An in-house TV station covers a wide variety of County and Sarasota City meetings such as Board of County Commissioners and the Planning Commission. There are also weekly programs.

So for those of us, who usually encounter the County only when exploring sometimes thorny development and legislative issues, Civics 101 offers a good opportunity to step back and see the big picture. Our Spring Session is entitled People-Place-Prosperity. Civics 101 is held in the spring and fall each year. For information on how you can be involved in this most interesting and enlightening program contact: Vickie French, Neighborhood Coordinator at 861-5145. *Cathy Cevoli is an active member of CONA member Olde Englewood Village Association.*

State investigates Venice building official

Excerpted from Sarasota Herald Tribune April 30, 2009

By Kim Hackett

"The state Department of Business and Professional Regulation has filed charges against Venice building official Hans Behrens for allegedly overlooking permit violations at a property with a long history of problems. The state cited Behrens with a "failure to require code compliance" and "willful misconduct which could result in significant danger to life or property." Behrens could lose his building inspector license, be fined \$5,000 per violation and have to pay legal fees if he is found guilty. A hearing has not been scheduled but Behrens' attorney, Bob Moore, said the charges are not valid."



Community Thoughts.... By Bill Zoller

Citizen power: Our Tallahassee representatives need to hear from Sarasota citizens

The dust is settling after the recent election in the City of Sarasota, and now the focus is on the final days of the Legislative Session. Is oil drilling dead? Will there be a renewable energy program? Will there be new requirements limiting citizens' ability to petition for charter amendments? What other goodies or baddies will we have to contend with once our elected legislators leave Tallahassee?

Do you have a sense of confidence in the Tallahassee process? Are you among those who have little confidence in your power to be heard by even your own legislator? Perhaps you are among those who believe that you get lip service, but that the big-money boys get the real goodies

Take heart, folks! Let's do a quick review of Citizen Power (CP) as has been demonstrated right here in Sarasota County over the past few years. When a small citizen group asked the County Commission to institute a recycling program, they got a big NO. So these citizens launched a charter amendment petition to require recycling... and it passed! We have recycling because of a group of dedicated citizens who did not take NO for an answer. More recently, CP got the County to put the Annexation Charter Amendment on the ballot, and it passed by 70%. Next, CP, through the petition process, over and against the objections of the County Commission and in the face of a nasty attack campaign, passed the Super Majority and the USB charter amendments. The citizens of the City of Sarasota also passed a Super Majority charter amendment. All passed by approximately 70%.

CP elected Joe Barbetta, Terry Turner, and Keith Fitzgerald, and defeated the Elected Mayor Now charter amendment in the face of very expensive campaigns waged against "our side". CP elected a slate of three new commissioners in the City of Venice who represented the citizens' views, not development money. We have had success, folks!!! So what might our next step be?

Perhaps we need to be thinking about how we can bring our CP to focus on our local state legislators. As they recognize that CP at the ballot box can defeat the big bucks of the attack campaigns, it may become clear to them who really, truly hires them!

Zoller continued next column



Water shortages are appearing worldwide.

Award winning film on world water problems to be shown on May 15th

At 6:30, FLOW, a documentary film investigating the world water crisis will be shown at Ringling College of Art & Design in Sarasota. A reception starts at 5:30 with displays of The Summit for Environmental Action projects.

FLOW builds a case against the growing privatization of the world's dwindling fresh water supply with a focus on politics, pollution, human rights, and the emergence of a domineering world water cartel. Interviews with scientists and activists reveal the rapidly building crisis at the global and human scale, and the film begs the question "can anyone really own water?" Beyond identifying the problem, FLOW shows viewers the people and institutions providing practical solutions to the water crisis which are fast becoming blueprints for a successful global and economic turnaround. The event is sponsored by Sarasota County's Summit for Environmental Action SEEWater Committee and SCOPE.

Zoller, continued

Once they get that idea, they may come to realize that we can fire them as well. The Legislature can undo almost anything we do locally, one way or another. We know that there are some (formerly) powerful forces ranged against some of the efforts that citizens have endeavored to get passed in order to protect our environment, economy, and resources. The old way of doing things has certainly not disappeared. It is alive and well in Tallahassee. Still, there may be the first glimmers of recognition by our elected officials that CP is on the rise throughout the state... and certainly in Sarasota.

This is not a call to arms yet. It is a call to begin thinking about how we can organize even better our CP. We have the vote, and we have committed voters. When they understand the issues, they will go to the polls. We have won many battles, and we have proved we are up to the task. We are still in a war, though, to preserve and protect what is best about Florida and our own part of it. Put on your thinking caps. Send us your ideas.



Traffic will get worse in many areas of Florida under new law just passed by Florida legislators.

How local legislators voted on “developers’ dream law” gutting Florida growth management act

If you like traffic congestion, you will love the new anti-growth management law just passed by the Florida Legislature. In a move that Sarasota County Commissioner Jon Thaxton called catastrophic, Tallahassee legislators resurrected and passed a bill originally filed by Senator and developer Mike Bennett which gutted Florida’s Growth Management Act. The new law passed in the closing minutes of the legislative session gives many developers a free pass on adverse transportation impacts of their projects and allows them to bypass regional and state review of large developments of regional impact.

How Sarasota area state legislators voted on new anti-growth management/developers’ dream law

Name	Voted for developers dream law	Voted against developers dream law
Sen. Bennett	X	
Sen. Detert	X	
Rep. Holder	X	
Rep. Reagan	X	
Rep. Fitzgerald		X
Rep. Rousan		X
Rep. Roberson	X	

Next time you are stuck in traffic remember those area legislators who voted to gut growth management in Florida.

County Charter Review Board rejects another attempt to take away the right to vote

Three years ago, the Charter Review Board rejected by a six to three vote a move by member Cathy Layton to amend the County Charter to take away the right of citizens to elect their Charter Review Board, and to make the CRB members appointed by the County Commission. Fast growth advocates on the Charter Review Board tried again at the CRB’s May meeting. The CRB rejected taking away citizens’ right to vote on a 5 to 5 tie vote on a motion by member Bob Wacheter.

Special interests don’t want an elected Charter Review Board because they fear it might fall into the hands of citizens working in the public interest such as the recent successful measures obtained through voter petitions by Citizens for Sensible Growth. They also know that in decades past the Charter Review Board got many items in the Charter that strengthened citizen rights, such as caps on County taxes and a prohibition on county borrowing without voter approval, campaign contribution limits, rezoning testimony under oath and disclosure of the true owners of property for which land use changes are sought.

The unmet need for such public interest measures in the charter, which can only be changed by a vote of the citizens, is the very reason the Charter Review Board should be elected and not appointed by county commissioners.

Elections make a difference: Sarasota city commissioners reject realtors’ offer to sell property for parking garage

Sarasota City Commissioners voted to reject an offer by realtor Michael Saunders and her son Drayton to sell the city a lot to build a parking garage. The vote came despite the Saunders donating tens of thousands of dollars to multiple PACS in efforts to elect fast growth city commissioners. The public interest won out over the private interest. This concern for the public interest may continue as both Sarasota and the City of Venice now have a majority of smart growth commissioners.

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