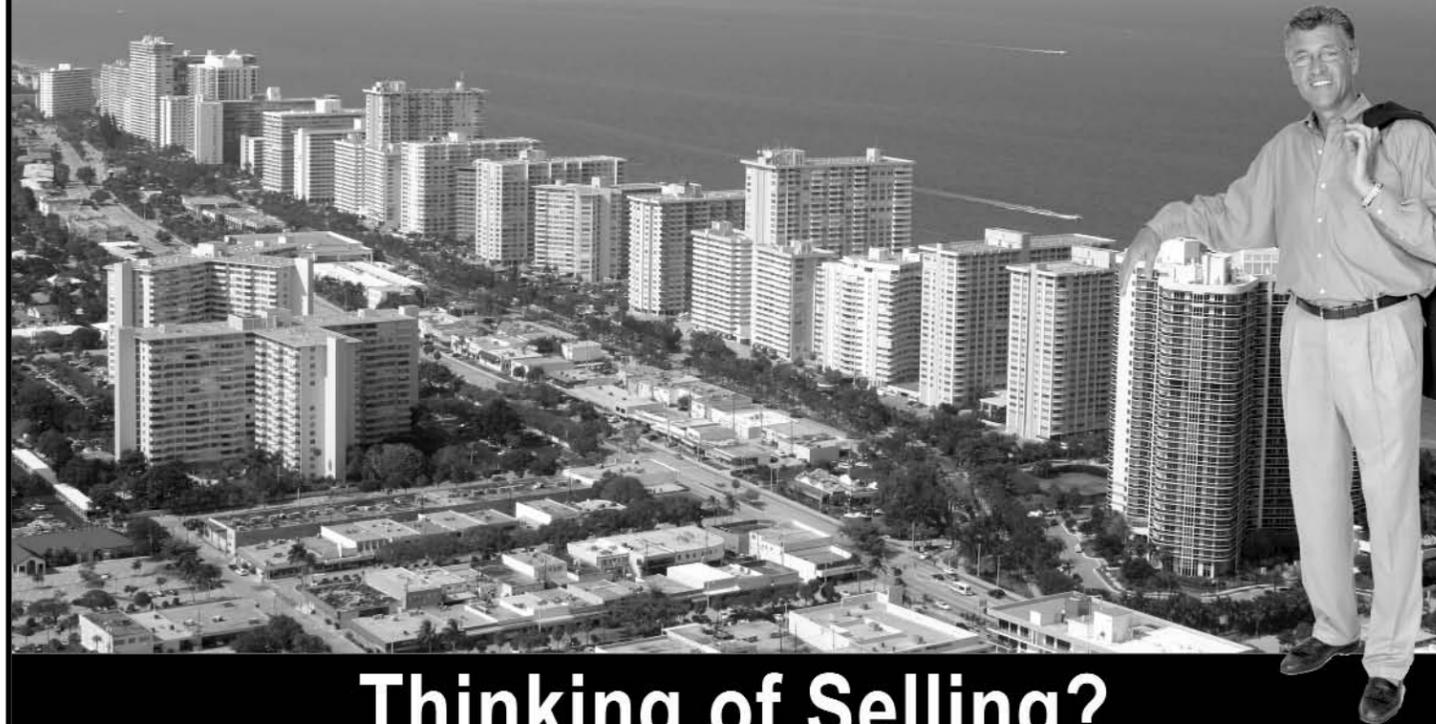




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Broward Officials Scramble For

TAX DOLLARS



The Old Florida East Coast Railroad

Article by Eric Berkowitz

In Yogi's words, "its déjà vu all over again!" On September 21, 2004, the Fort Lauderdale City Commission passed a budget that raised 24.22% more revenue for the city than the previous year's budget (known as the "rollback rate"). This was done through an 11% hike in the millage rate from 5.19 to 5.77 (\$5.77 due for every \$1000. of assessed property value). One year earlier, city officials revealed that their proposed budget hit a "snag". A runaway health insurance plan, unexpectedly Herculean pension contribution shortfalls, stomach churning overtime pay and a plethora of fiscal oversights forced the City to admit that it was "paying last year's bills with next year's income." On a personal scale, this scenario might be considered akin to kiting checks. Fort Lauderdale City Hall declared a fiscal emergency.

They rolled out a new budget along with the head of the former City Manager. They engaged an "Acting City Manager", Alan Silva, to help deliver the bad news to the populace and create an austerity budget that would serve as a springboard for the City's recovery. After spending the year walking a tightrope of layoffs, employee reassignments, service cuts and fee increases, the City Commission swallowed hard and increased taxes to adequately fund necessary city services. We are about halfway through the "recovery plan" designed to put the city back on a solid fiscal footing.

Fort Lauderdale hired a new City Manager, George Gretsas, to keep the ball rolling in the right direction. Employee morale, after spiraling to rock bottom, is starting to recover. In keeping a promise to avoid layoffs of Police and Fire-Rescue personnel during the crisis, Parks and Recreation Department personnel and programs were alternatively sacrificed to help make ends meet. The new budget is now breathing some life into the survivors of this devastation. Wounds are starting to heal. Fort Lauderdale residents are slowly coming to terms with the new taxes and higher fees.

Don't take a deep breath just yet. Broward County is cooking up a surprise for us. The Broward County Commission and the Broward County School Board have serious designs on your wallet. They both are nurturing expensive projects that can only happen if we finance them. Strangely, the Commissioners and the School Board members aren't bickering among themselves about whether or not the projects are necessary. At issue is how to raise the money.

Broward Mayor Kristin D. Jacobs made it clear that one of her core objectives would be to find a balance among growth, public services and respect for the environment. A volcanic real estate boom has fanned development throughout South Florida. For the past few years, the key platform deciding the outcome of State, County and municipal elections has been controlled development. Residents delighted with the unexpected increase in the value of their homes and the growth in their neighborhoods

Continued on page 5

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Taxes..Continued

we think the community will really embrace?" Wexler is rightfully dubious about either project passing if the Commission and the School Board continue to ignore the combined fiscal burden that they are asking the electorate to shoulder. They would do well to also take into consideration that residents of the County's main municipality are still recovering from their 2003 budget surprise.



Commissioner Wexler



Commissioner Eggelation

If our County and School officials are laboring under the misconception that these plans, despite the advantages they promise, will all be funded on one ballot, they are enjoying a pleasant dream... perhaps about a highly mobile... insolvent... tropical paradise!

For additional information, go to the Galt Mile Community Association web site (www.galtmile.com) and

click on "Issues" on the navigation bar atop each page. Scroll down to "Broward County" and click again. A wide variety of Broward issues are supported by links to expansive resource data. •

The Galt Mile News

The Galt Mile News is the official newsletter of the Galt Mile Community. Published 12 times a year, this publication is designed to educate the Galt residents of neighborhood-oriented current events and issues, and to offer residents Galt-specific discounts from various local merchants.



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JULY/AUG 2005



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10 Marlins v CHC Dolphins Stadium 1:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	11	12 American Idols Live Office Depot Center Tix.: ticketmaster.com	13	14 Stevie Nicks Office Depot Center 8 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com	15 Starlight Musicals "Jimmy Stowe Band" Tropical Rock Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	16 The Prince & the Pauper (Through 7/17) Ft. Lauderdale Children's Theatre Tix.: 954-763-6701
17	18 Commissioner Teel: Pre-Agenda Meeting Beach Community Center Info.: 954-828-5033	19 Ft Lauderdale City Commission Meeting City Hall 6 p.m. Storytime and Activity, Ages 5 - 11. Stranahan House Info.: 954-524-4763	20	21	22 Starlight Musicals "The Bulldogs" Classic Rhythm & Blues Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	23 Michael Bublé Broward Center Tix.: 954-462-0222
24	25	26 Sym of America— Summerfest (Austria's Arpeggione Chamber Orchestra) Broward Center Tix.: 954-462-0222	27 Marlins v PIT Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	28 Marlins v PIT Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	29 Marlins v WSH Dolphins Stadium 7:35 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com Disney Live! Winnie the Pooh Broward Center Tix.: 954-462-0222	30 Marlins v WSH Dolphins Stadium 1:20 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com Maroone Moonlight Movie at Huizenga Plaza "Casablanca"
31 Marlins v WSH Dolphins Stadium 1:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Sunday Jazz Brunch Riverwalk, Downtown FL 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Info.: 954-828-5985	8 Public School Begins	9 Marlins v ARI Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	10 Marlins v ARI Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	11 Marlins v ARI Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	12 Marlins v SF Dolphins Stadium 7:35 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com	13 Marlins v SF Dolphins Stadium 6:05 p.m. Tix: florida.marlins.mlb.com

A l o o k a h e a d

- August 14 Marlins v SF Dolphins Stadium, 1:05 p.m., Tix.: 954-462-0222.
- August 22 - 23 Young Repertory Show Auditions Fort Lauderdale Children's Theatre, Info.: 954-763-6882.
- August 26 Green Day Office Depot Center, Tix.: ticketmaster.com
- August 27 - 28 Florida Beach Volleyball Tour South Beach, Noon - 8 p.m., Info.: 954-224-5739.
- October 1 Luciano Pavarotti Office Depot Center, 8 p.m., Tix.: ticketmaster.com



Taxes...Continued

are concerned about that growth outstripping public services and the transportation system. Few provisions have been made to accommodate the huge increase in traffic and the additional demands placed on hospitals and schools. City and County police and fire safety services are desperately playing catch-up with the heretofore unbridled development. The County Commission and the School Board have independently engineered plans to contend with differing objectives. The County Commission wants to relieve the traffic while the School Board wants to cut class size.

The County Commission realizes that simply adding a few busses and extending some routes will have a negligible impact on the waves of traffic drowning local neighborhoods and tying up major highways. What they have in mind is a \$6 billion transit plan built over a 25 year span. Projected operational expenses hover around \$300 million annually. Mayor Kristin Jacobs exhorted that the plan's scope should be adequate to handle future growth in addition to relieving the already overburdened county roads. "We are growing rapidly, and transit systems take a long time to build. We will not be able to accommodate that growth and have a good quality of life unless we have a premier transit system."

The plan, part of a 326 page report composed by consultants hired to map an answer to the impending congestion, calls for 90 miles of commuter rail lines along Interstate 595 connecting east and west Broward and similar lines along State Road 7 (U.S. Route 441) connecting north and south Broward. They envision a high speed rail connection between Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and Port Everglades. A rail line will also shadow the Florida East Coast Railroad right-of-way.

The FEC Corridor could connect many city central business districts and residential areas including Pompano Beach, Wilton Manors, Oakland Park, Fort Lauderdale, Dania Beach, Hollywood and Hallandale Beach. The FEC component also opens the possibility of a tri-county cooperative project, creating efficient connections between Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade locations. A VisionBROWARD 2004 Transportation Task Force Report even considered connecting university and research centers spread throughout South Florida, for example, connecting Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton Campus with the Scripps Center in Northern Palm Beach County and the downtown campus in Fort Lauderdale. The VisionBROWARD plan also provides for premium connections to the South Florida Education Center, Nova University, Lynn University, Barry University and the University of Miami. Bus routes would come into their own, claiming dedicated lanes on existing major east-west thoroughfares such as Oakland Park Boulevard and north-south routes like University Drive. Altogether, the county plans to triple the current number of busses to almost 700 and add 60 miles of rapid bus routes.

Continued on page 7

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The Galleon #1102 (1/1.5) \$325,000 - closed 6/6/05	Ocean Club #1206 (2/2) \$450,000 - closed 6/6/05
Fountainhead #16F (2/2) \$420,000 - closed 5/26/05	Galleon #801 (3/2.5) \$625,000 - closed 6/10/05
Commodore #204 (1/1.5) \$300,000 - closed 6/2/05	Southpoint #1508S (1/1.5) \$370,000 - closed 5/24/05
Playa del Mar #416 (2/2) \$445,000 - closed 6/10/05	Plaza South #21H (2/2) \$620,000 - closed 6/2/05



Taxes...Continued

The VisionBROWARD Transportation Task Force, co-chaired by Joe Giulietti of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority and Bill Keith of Keith and Associates, enumerated the weaknesses in any mass transit plan that needed to be addressed in a comprehensive project. They pointed out that the automobile remains the dominant mode of travel despite increasing traffic congestion. As such, there are policy issues that do not lend themselves to the use of public transportation. They include land use planning, lack of developer incentives to address transit, and the inexpensive cost and availability of parking. However, the Task Force identified the main weakness as the lack of funding to develop a world-class transportation system. They explained, "Public transportation is a tremendous investment and there must be a level of understanding that failure to make the investment will cost us even more in the long run, particularly if we are to remain a quality place to live, work and play."

The County Commissioners expect to fund the project with a one cent sales tax increase, similar to the half-cent sales tax passed in 2002 by Miami-Dade to pay for expansions to the Metrorail system and other transportation improvements. The \$260 million that the tax would yield annually isn't adequate to pay for the project. In addition to leaving the project \$10s of millions short in operational expenses, it ignores inflation and the possible runaway construction costs that often afflict county projects. Delays in the County's beach renourishment project, for instance, effectively doubled related construction costs. The fierce competition for Federal dollars has removed that option from serious consideration. Nevertheless, the County Commission is intent on placing the dedicated tax hike on the 2006 ballot, in hopes that residents are willing to tolerate a 7% Sales tax. The overt shortfall, however, portends future calls for additional funding, either through another sales tax increase or a bond issue. Commissioners, nervous about public perception of their intentions, have directed staff to develop detailed proposals that they can present to voters, enumerating the various projects and their anticipated order of implementation.

Jacobs considers this project critical to preserving "the quality of life" in Broward County. Aggressively supporting the plan's placement on next year's ballot, she stated, "I'm not willing to go slow at all. I think we need to put this item on the ballot for 2006, and we need to count backward. What does it take, what is our staff going to have to put in, in order for this issue to be successful?" While most of the other Commissioners are following Jacob's lead, Josephus Eggelletion threatened to subvert the project unless working people and residents of minority neighborhoods were the primary beneficiaries of the mass transit plan. Commissioner Eggelletion warned, "If I don't see a rail system benefiting those folks that are suffering dealing with public transit today... I will not support any system. I will go out and I'll speak against it and campaign against any sales tax if those

Continued on page 9

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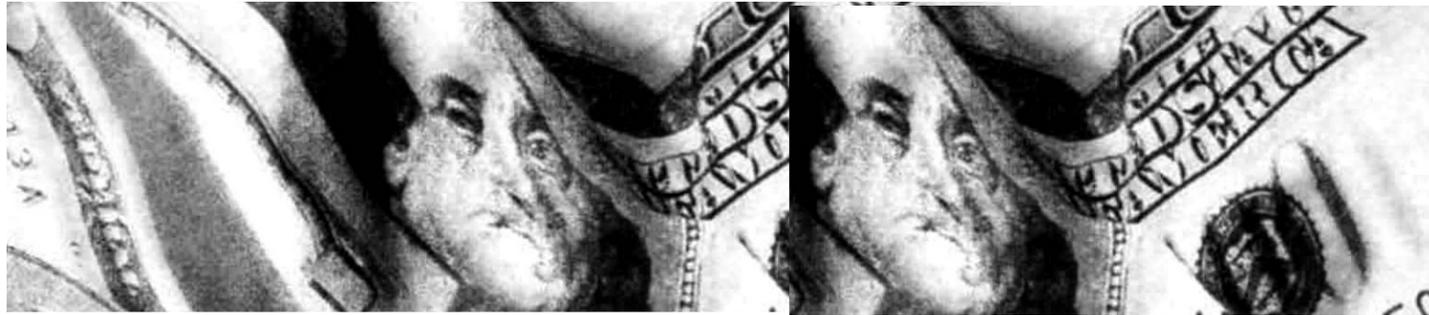
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In fact, if you've ever lived in Florida, you are enrolled in the OOP's lottery. People who plowed money into bank accounts or safe deposit boxes that they've forgotten about, invested in insurance policies that they've lost track of or simply forgot to pick up or cash a check can still recover their proceeds. Irresponsible executors who haven't adequately notified inheritors have contributed to this orphaned mountain of loot. Neglected escrow accounts used to collateralize some long-forgotten financing deal or "direct deposit" arrangements that weren't severed in a timely manner also serve to feed the phantom fund. Last year, rightful owners were reunited with about \$99 million of their money and property.

The State has a statutory responsibility to collect unclaimed property from individuals and institutions holding unassigned equity on behalf of absent, unidentifiable or untraceable clients. Unclaimed money is deposited into a state school fund and used exclusively for public education. There is, however, no statute of limitations governing its recovery. When the mood strikes them, the owners can retrieve their resources from the State.

Since 1961, Chapter 717 of the Florida Statutes requires financial institutions and other entities to report intangible personal property they are holding that is considered unclaimed or abandoned. If businesses (holders) are unsuccessful in their required attempts at locating the property's owner, they must report the property and the owner's name to the Department. The property must have been inactive for a set period of time, usually between one and five years. These reports are filed prior to May 1st each year, reflecting

funds newly classified as "unclaimed" during the previous calendar year. The Department acts as custodian for the State of Florida, holding the unclaimed property in trust until such time the property is claimed. While the state temporarily uses the unclaimed money for public education, Florida never takes legal ownership of the property. It is always available for legal retrieval by the owner at no cost. However, no interest is paid on claims other than that reported and remitted to the Department by the holder. According to the Bureau, they use Internet database searches, driver's license matches and credit bureau searches to locate and notify an owner or an heir to begin the claim process. This search venue, along with intermittent media alerts, delimits the extent of the State's efforts to find and make whole the myriad of unidentified owners.

Florida Chief Financial Officer Tom Gallagher is injecting new life into a campaign designed to assist businesses in reporting unclaimed property. He is concerned about the tendency for banks, mortgage holders, insurance institutions and other mass repository vehicles to "overlook" ineffectively tracked funds. To that end, gubernatorial candidate Gallagher has arranged business workshops to facilitate the transfer of these resources to his Bureau of Unclaimed Property. Gallagher's Department of Financial Services conducted an 8:30 A.M. workshop on June 29th at 1400 W. Commercial Blvd., Suite 135, in Fort Lauderdale. Similar "Holder Education Workshops" were also scheduled in Orlando, Tampa, and Jacksonville from June 14th - July 12th.

Given the enormous size of the fund and the voluminous number of potential clients, a cottage industry of private investigators and fund locators has proliferated throughout the State. In one of the Department's Consumer and Claims FAQs, a question is posed, "What should I do if I am contacted by a private investigator/locator regarding unclaimed property or missing funds?" The Department answers, "Claiming your unclaimed property from the state can be done on your own, free of charge." They recommend that before signing any contract, those contacted should go to the Bureau's Unclaimed Property web site to search for unclaimed property and, if successful, to order a claim form.

Continued on page 13

Taxes...Continued

folks don't benefit first." Commissioner Sue Gunzberger focused on the pitfalls suffered by the Miami plan, alluding to Dade's loss of the public's confidence when an appointed watchdog agency, the Citizens Independent Transportation Trust, allowed supposedly dedicated sales tax receipts to be siphoned off to address old debts instead of the promised shiny new transit components. Gunzberger expounded, "Dade County passed a transit tax, and then started taking money away from the transit tax for other things, which I think is already setting a very bad model, and I think it's also making the public be a bit wary about it."

The other half of this fiscal lemon is being served up by the School Board. Due to the failure of Broward and Dade legislators to form an adequate united front, South Florida has been short-changed by Tallahassee for education dollars. The State Legislature has blessed us with a double whammy. They married a cutback in the county's share of education funds with a mandate to reduce class size. A recently unveiled five-year plan for building and renovating schools was \$514 million short of what administrators claim would be needed to meet the State's class-size standards. In response, school officials created a Task Force to forage for the resources needed to help plug the gaping discrepancy.

Thus drops the other shoe. Their initial options include a half-cent sales tax increase and a \$350 million bond issue. The sales tax hike would yield \$130 million annually which, coupled with the bond issue, would still leave the schools with less than they need. I'll bet you forgot that the schools can levy property taxes! That's right; if need be, they can pump up the old millage rate a few points to fulfill the State's unfunded mandate. The County Commission's one cent sales tax hike together with the School Board's half-cent increase (so far) and the State's 6% sales tax will put Broward in rare company. Only three other Florida Counties levy more than a 7% sales tax.

The chilling effect this would have on the Broward economy is making Chamber of Commerce officials apoplectic. President Christopher Pollock of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce admonished, "We can't have the transportation guys against the education guys. I'd like to think we could avoid that." The Chamber of Commerce supports the County's transportation project. They carry a similar plan composed by the South Florida Regional Planning Council on their web site. They are, however, rightfully concerned about the enactment of a sales tax in excess of 7% sounding a death knell for struggling Broward businesses. The overwhelming reaction to the Governor's declared "Sales Tax Holiday" for hurricane supplies (which quickly depleted the well-stocked inventories of Home Depot and Lowe's) is a clear demonstration of the relationship between sales and sales tax. Last year, School Superintendent Frank Till stated that he would contact County Administrator Roger Desjarlais to explore the possibility of the commission and the School Board working together to raise money. Apparently, this "contact" is still pending.

Lois Wexler, the Broward Commissioner who filled the seat vacated by Broward Property Appraiser Lori Parrish, isn't comfortable with the impending tax explosion. A former school board member who's disappointed with the irresponsible lack of communication between county governments, Wexler queried, "How much do

Continued on page 18

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Galt Mile's War On NOISE

Eric Berkowitz

Galt Mile residents endure incessant noise from construction crews busily rebuilding the neighborhood. The 8 AM jack hammers and tile grinders are the price we pay for bringing our homes up to code and into the 21st century. As every building is experiencing these growing pains, the irritating "wake-up" calls are reluctantly tolerated. However, this inconvenience has sensitized residents to pervasive noise pollution. This recently developed aversion has elicited a response by the City. On April 7th, Vice Mayor Christine Teel, City Manager George Gretsas and Police Chief Bruce Roberts convened a meeting at the Beach Community Center to address offensive (and often illegal) sources of noise pollution. While the primary targets were "gunning motorcycles" and "muffler-challenged" vehicles whizzing along A1A, officials expanded the agenda to include a spectrum of dangerous and illegal driving practices that have proliferated along the neighborhood's main artery. The meeting concluded with a promise by Chief Roberts to develop a "Traffic Enforcement Action Plan" aimed at curbing these abuses. On May 23rd, Police Media Relations Coordinator Sgt. Andy Pallen issued

a press release reviewing the tenets and outcome of the Chief's plan.

"On May 20th, 21st and the 22nd, the Fort Lauderdale Police Department conducted a successful traffic enforcement action plan. This action plan is an example of one more tool available to law enforcement to make an impact on crime reduction, making streets safer and to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Fort Lauderdale."

Speaking to Chief Robert's commitment to residents attending the public meeting, Pallen explained, "This action plan was devised in response to numerous citizen complaints concerning unlawful driving practices. There has been a noticeable increase in this activity and local residents and vehicular traffic has been negatively affected. The goal of this high visibility enforcement was to aid in the reduction of crime, reduce unlawful speeding, reduce excessive noise created by unlawful equipment installed on vehicles, educate offenders who are committing violations and to improve the quality of life for residents."

Continued on page 11



Sgt. Andy Pallen

Noise...Continued

Sgt. Pallen endeavored to elucidate the details of the plan. "Over this three-day time frame, a total of four locations were addressed, with three separate operations being conducted simultaneously. The four locations affected during this initial operation were the 2700 block of North Federal Highway, A1A at SE 5th Street, 3700 block of North A1A, and Federal Highway at Broward Blvd."

While this will promote public safety for all Fort Lauderdale inhabitants, the area of particular interest to Galt Mile residents is the 3700 block of North A1A. This "hot spot" is the northern end of a dangerous stretch of Route A1A wherein multiple automobile accidents and literally hundreds of close calls have taken place with increasing frequency. Drivers habitually run the traffic light on A1A where Galt Ocean Drive traffic merges into the "Ocean Highway". Collisions stemming from vehicles illegally turning off or onto A1A at intersecting side streets have created a pedestrian DMZ. Civic leaders and City officials have offered a variety of explanations for the light being ignored and the illegal turns. Some say that the light placement or the existing signage is confusing; others opine that anxious drivers concentrate on the traffic light at the Oakland Park Boulevard intersection and overlook the light and the signs a few blocks north. Recently, Ocean Club President Rose Guttman was involved in one of the many accidents at this "Bermuda Triangle" for traffic. This incident inflamed community concern about this accident-prone stretch of road. Not surprisingly, it was also one of the noisiest intersections in the Galt Mile area. It was a natural target site for the Chief's plan.

Sgt. Pallen continued, "During this extended operation, the following results were obtained:

- 592 Citations
- 162 Motorcycle Violations (49 for loud exhausts)
- 3 Felony Arrests
- 5 misdemeanor Arrests
- 6 traffic offense Arrests
- 1 Wanted person Arrest
- 1 DUI Arrest
- 60 grams of cannabis seized
- 10 crack cocaine rocks seized
- \$400 and 2 vehicles were seized for civil forfeiture for being utilized to commit a felony

A total of 25 Officers and 6 Police Service Aides were utilized for this operation; it is important to note that there were no injuries or incidents to Officers or the public. Due to the success of this operation, similar action plans are pending. In addition to this operation, a total of 108 additional citations were written on the beach since May 21st, including 23 Boom Box violations and 85 loud mufflers."

We are delighted that the City moved so quickly to mollify the noise pollution and, more importantly, the dangerous driving recently exhibited by visitors and residents. We are grateful to Vice Mayor Christine Teel for focusing attention on the problem and bringing City Manager Gretsas and Police Chief Roberts to the table. We are particularly encouraged by the statement that "similar action plans are pending" as a result of the plan's initial success. When trying to modify behavior - good or bad - the key to success is education and repetition. Those drivers who learned that they could break traffic laws with impunity must now learn that they can't!

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Condo...Continued

Despite this tactic's obvious "common sense" disconnect, it enjoyed some initial success. However, when hundreds of condo owners descended on Tallahassee in heated opposition to the bills, the game was up - the charade was blown. One day after the March 30th Community Association Day demonstration, the Condominium Advisory Board publicly opposed passage of Robaina's ill-fated bill. During the month of April, Representative Robaina frantically but unsuccessfully tried to fuse his bill onto some other piece of legislation. He couldn't. Siplin had a different problem. He couldn't even get a committee to schedule his bill for consideration.

The problem here is uncomplicated. Too much political capital has been invested in these efforts by their sponsors to simply allow them to pass away peacefully. As such, next year we can expect to see another permutation of the senseless regulations exemplified by these bills. Since these legislators get paid for their time in Tallahassee and we don't, their strategy anticipates that condo owners will ultimately weary of fighting to preserve their rights. This situation has created a "Groundhog Day" syndrome, wherein the same battle is fought annually in shifting battlefields. Therefore, instead of individual condo owners reacting to each piece of destructive legislation with a blizzard of objections, it would be more effective to develop a comprehensive response and direct it to the source of the problem.

Every State Legislator and the Governor need to be made aware of three critical facts. Primarily, legislators need to be disabused of the claim by this small self-serving coalition that they "represent" condo owners. They have clearly demonstrated that they are speaking only for themselves. They are the sole beneficiaries of the empowerment that their bills cynically promise to all condo owners. Secondly, the enactment of indiscriminate regulations to cure anecdotal allegations is an irresponsible and unacceptable basis for legislation. The bills' enigmatic provisions uniformly fail to balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the community as a whole. Finally, burdening Associations with onerous, expensive regulations and additional layers of governmental bureaucracy is a poor substitute for democratic self-governance. The success of democracy presupposes that those directly affected by and closest to the issues are best equipped to address them. There is no evidence that the problems anecdotally claimed as the basis for these punishing regulations are widespread or require legislative action.

This multi-year onslaught has served to unite many of its intended victims. A broad diversity of groups throughout Florida is coalescing in defense of their homeowner rights. Members of Condominium Associations, neighborhood associations and Homeowner Associations across the State are going to meet between legislative sessions and formulate a strategy to accomplish their shared objectives. Stay tuned...

The Galt Mile Community Association is actively involved in preserving the rights of our Association's members and their thousands of residents. We monitor legislation and issues on all levels of government that could impact our investment and lifestyle. For historical perspective of the current threat and other factors that deserve your attention, please go to the GMCA web site (www.galtmile.com).

Money...Continued



The Bureau has set up a web site to alert residents about possible windfalls. Appropriately, the web address is "http://www.fltreasurehunt.com/". Simply surf to the "Treasure Hunt" web site and pop in you "or anyone else's" name and click to see if you "or they" lucked out. If you hit the jackpot, you can order a claim form right on the web site. If, however, you are online-challenged, a technophobe, or simply do not trust computers, you can call the Department's TOLL-FREE Customer Service Hotline at 1-888-258-2253 or their local Tallahassee number at 850-410-9253 for assistance. You need to provide identification and proof of ownership in the claims process. The money is returned within 90 days—as per statute.

Upon contacting the Bureau, I queried the Bureau's customer service representative as to why the fund had achieved its current colossal proportions. "Don't people want their money?" After offering the mandatory disclaimer, she reluctantly proposed that, "most people believe that they wouldn't forget being owed money." Coupled with misconceptions about the difficulty of verifying and ultimately recovering the property, she opined, "The average owner rationalizes that the funds are OPM - other peoples' money."

Surprisingly, the reactions exhibited by several of my neighbors confirmed the representative's evaluation of the "syndrome" that prevents hundreds of thousands of residents from retrieving their assets. With one exception, the residents I contacted were all confident that they "would know if someone owed them money." The single individual conceding the possibility that she was owed money expressed concern about "opening a can of worms" in claiming the property.

In an effort to verify the relevance of this program to Galt Mile residents, I compiled a random list of unit owners living in five buildings on Galt Ocean Drive and one of the Coral Ridge Towers co-ops to perform consecutive unclaimed property searches. While this was an uncontrolled sample, almost 14% of the searched entries had property sitting in limbo! I personally know some of the unclaimed property owners uncovered in the search. In fact, one of them is a member of GMCA's Advisory Board and serves on his Association's Board of Directors. I also know that most of them drive cars and hold mortgages. This clouds the State's claim that they've checked driver's license matches and credit bureaus to locate owners. I strongly recommend that you visit the Department's "Treasure Hunt" web site and check for yourself.

Financial institutions lose income through the prolonged disuse of a safe deposit box in default. To limit the loss, the State auctions off the contents of unclaimed safe deposit boxes annually. This year, about 40,000 unclaimed items from those abandoned safe deposit boxes will be sold at public auction; the proceeds of which are deposited in the State School Trust Fund for the benefit of public schools in Florida. The auction is scheduled for Saturday, July 30, 2005, at the Wyndham Hotel—1870 Griffin Road (I-95 and Griffin Road)—Fort Lauderdale International Airport (phone: 954-920-3300). Auction items are available for preview one day before the actual event—on Friday, July 29, 2005. To be added to the auction mailing list, e-mail Mr. Gallagher at thomas.egler@fldfs.com. Links to the Bureau and the "Treasure Hunt" web site are provided from the Galt Mile Community Association web site (www.galtmile.com) in the "State of Florida" section of "Government" links. Check it out. After all, these are pretty good odds for a bet that costs nothing! •

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CONDO RIGHTS REMAIN INTACT

WHAT ABOUT NEXT YEAR?

Eric Berkowitz

For those of you familiar with the damaging anti-condo legislation that was floating around Tallahassee this year, Good News... it flopped. For those of you unfamiliar with the damaging anti-condo legislation that was floating around in Tallahassee this year, Good News... it flopped. Thousands of condo owners from all over the State contacted Representatives and Senators to oppose the legislation. The two bills, Representative Julio Robaina's HB 1229 and Senator Gary Siplin's SB 2632, never got out of committee. Actually, Siplin's bill never fully made it into committee.

Condo owners essentially want to get on about their lives. Their objectives and beliefs reflect those of the population at large. The lone factor that binds them, owning a home in a vertical community, is a feeble source of "political" cohesion. Until recently, condominium ownership has never lent itself to persecution or abuse. This marked lack of "political identity", instead of cloaking condo owners in protective anonymity, has ironically made them a target in Tallahassee. Several legislators decided that people living in condos wouldn't really care if their rights were savaged as long as they were told it was for their own good. With some self-serving outside help, they scripted a fairy tale that would cost condo owners millions, freshen campaign resources and help to get them repeatedly re-elected.



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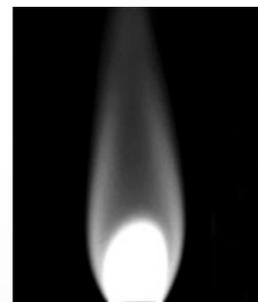
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To their dismay, and the chagrin of their cohorts, they encountered an obstacle that short circuited their scheme. They mistakenly assumed that no one would actually read what they were proposing. From Coral Ridge Towers to Caribé, hundreds of Galt Ocean Mile neighborhood residents joined thousands of other condominium owners throughout the State in notifying a variety of State officials of their opposition to the disruptive provisions embodied in these bills. The residents of Galt Ocean Mile have earned that warm fuzzy feeling that bubbles up when defending one's rights. This is the second consecutive year that the bills' sponsors proposed legislation to burden Associations with expensive, senseless and damaging regulations. When last year's "Condo Killer" bills were defeated by outraged Condo owners, the sponsors blamed their failure on the naivety of those people that they were purportedly protecting. Also, they were no longer able to credibly claim to speak on behalf of the same people that defeated their legislation. Instead, they focused their attention onto their fellow legislators, again masquerading as "spokespersons" for condo owners, and intimated that we would somehow be "empowered" by being regulated and taxed into oblivion.

Continued on page 8



CONDOMINIUM COSTS ABOUT TO TAKE GAS

By Donna D. Berger Esq.

This is a communication received from Donna Berger, Executive Director of the Community Association Leadership Lobby (CALL). A coalition borne of necessity, CALL was founded as a forum to review issues that impact people living in community associations across the State of Florida. While communication is the primary basis for its implementation, CALL also affords participating associations a voice of sufficient magnitude to resound in Tallahassee. By balancing the needs of the Association with the needs of the individual, CALL addresses the dual perspective that governs every association issue. - Editor

Dear Association Member,

Many of you may be unaware that the Public Service Commission (PSC) issued an Order in 1988 mandating that gas utilities should consider service to commonly owned areas of condominium associations, cooperative associations and homeowners' associations to be considered residential service as opposed to commercial service. However, up until now, these community association accounts have been treated as commercial accounts rather than residential. Effective August 1, 2005, however, this Order will now go into effect and community association accounts will be required to be treated as residential accounts.

What does this mean for your community? If your community association purchases gas to heat your common facilities (i.e. pool heating) or in bulk on behalf of your owners (to heat water tanks, etc.) it means two things: (i) your choice of suppliers will be reduced drastically and (ii) you will pay up to 30% more for the same service.

Up until now, independent energy marketers have been able to sell natural gas in competition with TECO, the Tampa Electric Company. Bulk sales are allowed by marketers to commercial clients only. Commercial clients pay a much lower rate than residential accounts. By reclassifying community associations as residential accounts rather than commercial accounts, these associations will no longer be able to have a choice in terms of supplier. You will have to purchase through TECO and, as already stated, the rates for your residential account will go up dramatically.

Since this issue can affect many of our CALL members, we are in the process of formulating a strategy. If your community association is a natural gas consumer, please email me at Dberger@beckerpoliakoff.com. Remember, this Order will be implemented on August 1st and at that time your choices regarding suppliers will cease and your rates will rise. This will apply to all types of community associations (condos, coops and HOA's) that use natural gas to heat common facilities or purchase in bulk on behalf of unit owners.

Continued on page 17

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Gas...Continued

The Community Association Leadership Lobby is the leading organization working to enhance the quality of life and protect property values for Florida's community association residents. CALL advocates on behalf of more than 4,000 member communities, including condominiums, homeowners' associations, mobile home communities and cooperatives throughout the state. CALL monitors and responds to legislation emerging from Tallahassee that can significantly impact members and provides educational services that promote better association management. Additionally, CALL conducts research about attitudes, opinions, understandings and perceptions of the general population of community association residents across Florida to better understand the needs and concerns of this important segment of the population. For additional information, please go to the CALL web site (www.callbp.com) or contact Donna Berger at the above email address or at 954-985-4163. •

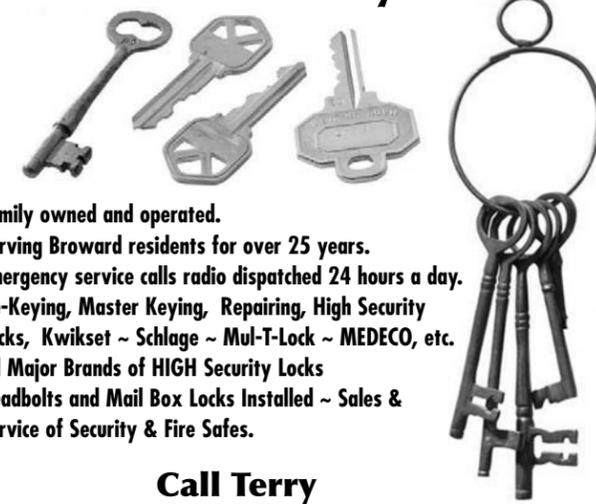


Best Regards
Donna D. Berger, Esq.
Executive Director, CALL

The Galt Mile Community Association will participate with CALL in the development and implementation of an effective strategy to respond to this inequitable onus placed on association homeowners. When a response has been formulated, it will be posted on the GMCA's web site (www.galtmile.com). - Editor

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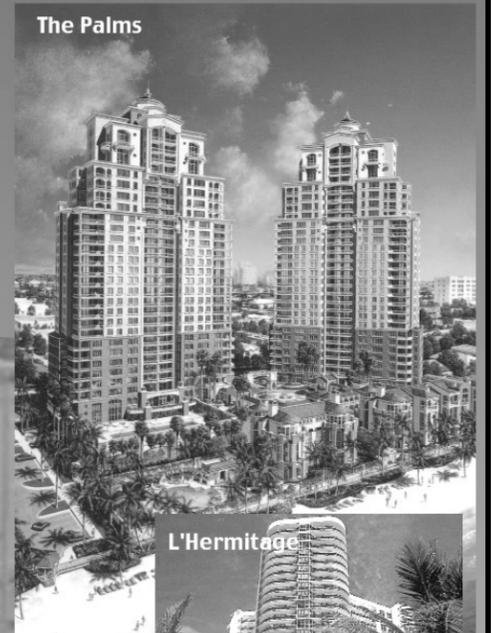
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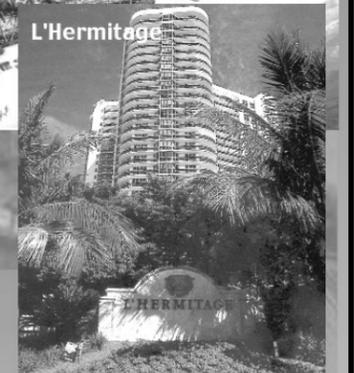


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