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Article by Eric Berkowitz

Galt Ocean Drive Gets Trees, Lights, & Signs

Hundreds of Galt residents had been scratching their heads every time they noticed the block's brownfield landscaping. As they walked the block at dusk, the blacked out street lamps seemed to sneer at passers-by. The once unique special fixtures have become statuary. They blend seamlessly with the scraggly leafless stumps that were once trees. Perplexed residents, merchants and visitors have grown increasingly angry and frustrated. Seven months after Hurricane Wilma indiscriminately tore up huge sections of South Florida, Fort Lauderdale has recovered the vast majority of what was lost to the storm. Blown-out windows, doors and roofs have been replaced in City buildings. The streets are clear, traffic lights are working, landscaping is coming back and the city's population is preparing for the upcoming hurricane season... except on Galt Ocean Drive.

The Galt Mile appeared to be caught in a time warp. Recovery progress seems to have ground to a halt about 5 months ago. The Galt Mile Community Association had repeatedly queried City officials about the City's dilatory strategy.

Traveling miles in any direction reveals well-lit, neatly landscaped thoroughfares. City Manager George Gretsas, Assistant City Manager Kathleen Gunn and Parks Department Chief Phil Thornburg had all offered bits and pieces of information with a plea for patience. Patience, however, is wearing thin. Aware of the neighborhood's frustration with the City's lack of progress, City Commissioner Christine Teel offered this update to the Galt Mile Community Association's Advisory Board during their April 20th meeting.

At the March 7th City Commission Regular Meeting, the Commission finally authorized the purchase of trees costing \$87,276 from the Atria Landscape Development Corporation in Pembroke Pines, the lowest of eight bidders. The contract includes the removal of tree trunks and rootballs for \$28,080, the planting of 80 Myrcianthes Frangrans - Simpson Stoppers (in Sidewalk Cutouts) for \$34,276 and 60 Clear Trunk Sabal Palmetto Sabal Palms for \$11,400.

Continued on page 5

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—T.G., Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Unfortunately, Florida legislative leaders once again ignored the wishes of taxpayers and failed to act on our proposed constitutional amendment. This means there will be no "portability" on the November ballot. With the State Legislature adjourned for the year, 2008 looks like our next opportunity for the ballot.

Many of you joined us and fought hard to pass this important property tax reform measure. Please remember this important issue when candidates for public office ask you for your family's votes this November. Let's make property tax reform a major issue for this election year!

Be assured, our office will continue supporting a new constitutional amendment allowing homesteaded owners to move their sheltered SOH value from one primary residence to the next within the same county. This concept is called "portability."

Only then will you and your families feel the financial freedom to make real estate decisions without being financially "locked" in your homes – because families cannot afford the high property taxes if they move.

We're doing so much to improve this office...but I need your help. If you have any ideas on making our office even better, please drop me a note or email me at lori@bcpa.net.

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 **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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**YELLOWDOG
P R E S S : L L C**

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THIS MONTH AT-A-GLANCE

JUNE/JULY 2006

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
11 Urban Outdoor Gourmet Market 1201 E. Las Olas Blvd. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.	12	13 Neighborhood Services Night Marlins V ATL Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. (Through 6/15) Tix.: ticketmaster.com	14	15 GMCA Advisory Board Meeting Pa DeGennaro's 11 a.m. Sidewalk Art Expressions - Galt Ocean Village Shoppes 3 to 6 p.m. Info.: 954-566-3332	16 BOA Starlight Musicals RUFFSHOD - Country Music Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	17 Jazz at the MOA Museum of Art Larry Coryell-Trio 7:45 p.m. Marlins V TOR Dolphins Stadium 6:05 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com
18 Marlins V TOR Dolphins Stadium 1:05 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com Father's Day Brunch at the Veranda Restaurant 10:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Fairchild Tropical Garden	19 Vice Mayor Teel Pre-Agenda Meeting Beach Community Center 6 p.m. Info: 954-828-5033	20 Ft. Lauderdale City Commission Meeting City Hall 6 p.m.	21	22 Int'l Age Group Swimming Invitational Aquatic Complex Info.: 954-828-4580 Super Scientific Circus Broward Center Info.: 954-462-0222	23 Super Scientific Circus Broward Center Info.: 954-462-0222 BOA Starlight Musicals THE BULLDOGS - Classic Rock Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	24
25 FIESTA! Fort Lauderdale Riverwalk 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Info.: 954-527-0627	26 Marlins V TB Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. (Through 6/28) Tix.: ticketmaster.com	27	28	29	30 BOA Starlight Musicals JIMMY STOWE & THE STOW-AWAYS - Tropic Rock & Jimmy Buffet Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	1 Marlins V BOS Dolphins Stadium 6:05 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com
2 Marlins V BOS Dolphins Stadium 1:05 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com Sunday Jazz Brunch Riverwalk, Downtown FL 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Info.: 954-828-5985	3 Vice Mayor Teel Pre-Agenda Meeting Beach Community Center 6 p.m. Info: 954-828-5033	4 Ft. Lauderdale City Commission Meeting City Hall 6 p.m. Fireworks Ft. Lauderdale Beach 9 p.m. Info.: 954-828-5363	5	6 Dive In Movies Bootlegger Restaurant Info.: 954-566-6960	7 BOA Starlight Musicals THE FLEETWOODS - Southern Rock Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	8 Int'l Mango Festival Fairchild Tropical Garden 9:30 to 4:30 p.m. (Through 7/9)
9	10	11	12	13 Marlins V HOU Dolphins Stadium 7:05 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com Dive In Movies Bootlegger Restaurant Info.: 954-566-6960	14 Marlins V HOU Dolphins Stadium 7:35 p.m. Tix.: ticketmaster.com BOA Starlight Musicals THE FABULONS - 60s - 70s Holiday Park 7 to 10 p.m.	15 Marlins V HOU Dolphins Stadium 6:05 p.m. Disney Live: Mickey's Magic Show Broward Center (Through 7/16) Info.: 954-462-0222

A look ahead

- July 20 - 23 Florida Gold Coast Junior Olympic Swimming Championships Aquatic Complex, 7 to 9 p.m., Info.: 954-828-4580.
- July 21 BOA Starlight Musicals Valerie Tyson Bank/R&B, Holiday Park, 7 to 10 p.m.
- July 30 Butterfly Day Fairchild Tropical Garden, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., 305-667-1651, ext. 3344.
- Sept 2 - 3 Ft. Lauderdale Museum of Art Labor Day Art Festival Museum of Art, 9 a.m., Info.: 954-525-5500.

Lights...Continued

On April 17th, Ricardo Lanati of the Atria Landscape Development Corp. notified Urban Forester Gene Dempsey about their progress on the Galt Mile. The message was quickly disseminated to information-hungry officials up and down the municipal food chain - reaching Parks Commissioner Phil Thornburg, Assistant Terry Rynard, City Manager George Gretsas, Assistant City Manager Kathleen Gunn and Commissioner Christine Teel. Mr. Lanati stated that Atria had "completed the 1st stage of the Galt Ocean Mile Project, by removing and stump grinding around 300 trees and Palm stumps and trunks." The 244 Green Buttonwoods (reminiscent of the trees on the Addams Family front lawn) and 50 Coconut Palms had been cut to a height of 4 feet and carefully removed in stages to avoid damaging water and utility lines entangled in their rootballs. Lanati explained, "We have capped all of the irrigation lines that were broken, and we are coordinating with Mr. Cliff from the City of Fort Lauderdale for the reinstallation of the irrigation where possible." The extensive root systems of the trees slated for removal also threaten damage to the sidewalks and the cover grates upon extraction. Lanati said, "There was no damage reported on the sidewalks or tree grates."

Lanati described the 2nd stage of the project. "This week we are going to proceed on the repairs of the irrigation and the electric lines and by the middle of the week will start bringing the trees." Lanati expects to plant the Myrcianthes Frangrans - Simpson Stoppers - on the east side of the block. Evidently, the number of trees required to adequately line the block was underestimated by about 25- or more. Evidently, seven months was not enough time for the city to actually count the number of trees necessary to relandscape the block. If he cannot locate 25 additional Simpson Stoppers, Lanati offered to substitute Silver Buttonwoods (Conocarpus erectus sericeus) 6' - 8' standard, at the beginning and end of the block. 80 Silver Buttonwoods are also scheduled for planting on the west side of the street. Lanati said, "The Silvers will blend very well in the area, and with the Washingtonians, and Sabals, around the Publix* [sic* - Winn Dixie] parking. There is an existing group of Silvers, as well, in the area near L'Hermitage." Unfortunately, they ran out of Simpson Stoppers after planting the new trees in front of the Galt Ocean Club. Starting at Regency Tower and heading north, Galt Ocean Drive Assoc. sidewalks will receive the less desirable Silver Buttonwood (substitutes).

Our street lights are plagued by three problems. Installed in 1995 as part of the \$3.7 million, resident-financed Galt Mile Improvement Project, the decorative fixtures selected to aesthetically enhance Galt Ocean Drive are unique. Difficulty with replacing the fixtures and/or securing the parts for their repair surfaced as an unexpected consequence to their "exclusivity". In contrast with the majority of Fort Lauderdale's off-the-shelf street lighting, the Galt Mile fixtures, or their parts, need to be special ordered.

The second problem was WILMA. The lighting equipment manufacturer that makes the lamps and their parts is utilized by municipalities throughout the region. Given the damage to fixtures incurred in hundreds of towns and cities across South Florida, the time ordinarily needed to order the equipment was substantially extended. When the equipment is received and installed, the lights will either work or they won't. This is the third problem. Until the fixtures are made whole, there is no certain method of determining whether the problem was equipment-related and/or in the power lines, the connections, adaptors, etc. If the lamps fail to illuminate once repaired, the daunting task of checking every link in the buried power lines to the lamps will fall to FP&L.

Continued on page 6

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Bedfellows...Continued

To help mitigate damage from the questionable actions taken by the Fire Marshals Association in trying to pressure the Governor to veto a bill unanimously passed and universally supported, the august membership of that organization might reconsider the wisdom of serving as the public face of their alliance. After all – while their partners will continue to be flush with financial resources – the Fire Marshals' most valuable asset is their credibility.

What Can We Do?

To stave off a veto – and another expensive assessment – we must contact Governor Bush, urging him to sign HB 391 into law and to resist attempts to veto this bill – ASAP! This universally supported bill only asks for more time to install these costly sprinkler retrofits while still digging out – literally – from the effects of multiple hurricanes. Please contact Governor Bush at job.bush@myflorida.com and the Secretary of the DBPR (Department of Business and Professional Regulations), Simone Marstiller, at simone.marstiller@dbpr.state.fl.us. Email links to both are posted on the Galt Mile Community Association web site (www.galtmile.com) following the article entitled "Strange Bedfellows". For those who do not have computers, please call the Governor's Office at 850-488-2272. It is imperative that the Governor's Office hear from community members on this very beneficial bill. A complete history of the "Fire Safety Legislation" is also available on the GMCA web site under "Fire Safety" in the "Issues" section. •

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Bedfellows...Continued

By 2025, the National Hurricane Center's predicted 15 – 20 year meteorological hurricane cycle we currently suffer through will have passed and the bulk of the financed recovery expenses will have been addressed.

The Problem

As expected, the sprinkler coalition decided to oppose the badly needed relief promised by HB 391. Of their participants, only the Fire Marshals had the credibility necessary to weather the resulting public backlash of suspicion and antipathy. As such, the Fire Marshals donned their dress uniforms, converged on the Capitol and fought to expunge the threatened delay to their partners' payday. Despite their efforts, the legislature favorably passed HB 391 by a 113 to 0 vote in the House and 40 to 0 in the Senate.

This created an additional dilemma. Since the Fire Marshals were at the forefront of every municipal and county hurricane recovery effort, they are intimately familiar with the damage suffered by the homeowners seeking relief brought by the bill's deadline extension. If successful at defeating the extension, they would force homeowners to neglect critical hurricane recovery and protection in favor of the questionable fire protection afforded by installing sprinklers in unit foyers and certain common areas. On the face of it, this trade-off is absurd. While no sane human being advocates that dangerous firetraps be excluded from complying with the Fire code, the one-size-fits-all nature of the legislation precludes the Fire Marshals from distinguishing between dangerous

tinder box structures and Associations fully compliant with all Fire and Safety codes. The danger to life and property from the upcoming hurricane season far outweighs the comparable threat posed by next year's possible fires in unit foyers and hallways of structures with hi-tech detection and alarm, automatic elevator recall, code compliant containment and building-wide communications.

Having seen the suffering caused by hurricanes and fires, most rational Fire Marshals outside the political arena would favor a solution that addressed both life safety issues as opposed to supporting one at the expense of another. While explaining the rationale for HB 391's sprinkler deadline extension, legislators apprised the Fire Marshals that when limited resources are available to address multiple

Continued on page 13

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Bedfellows...Continued

Politics is an oft postulated stewpot for strange bedfellows. The various proponents of the sprinkler law are fueled by different objectives. While Fire Marshals are primarily guided by their aspiration to save lives, their partners in this venture have a huge financial stake in preserving those parts of the statute that require the purchase and installation of \$billions in fire sprinkler equipment and its adjunctive plumbing. Despite their differing motives, the political components of their representative organizations have forged an alliance in furtherance of their respective agendas. The value of each party to the alliance is measured by the resources they can contribute to their mutual objective. While the Plumbers and Pipefitters and the Sprinkler Associations bring deep pockets to the table, the Fire Marshals can deliver public and political credibility.

The Issue

We are grateful for those times that legislators in Tallahassee “get it right”. House Bill 391 by Representative Carl Domino benefits condo owners, coop owners and members of Homeowner Associations. The bill contains lender consent language (making it easier for condominium associations to amend their documents when faced with the requirement to obtain lender consent to amendments), extends reinstatement relief to voluntary homeowners' associations whose covenants have been inadvertently extinguished by the Marketable Record Title Act (MRTA) and clarifies the HOA mediation procedures. In view of the crushing fiscal hardship suffered by Associations from the recent hurricanes, it extends the deadline to retrofit high rise common areas with expensive sprinklers from the current 2014 to 2025.

Associations are being forced to finance \$millions for code compliant mitigation upgrades required by windstorm insurance carriers in addition to the \$millions in uncovered hurricane damage suffered by every building last year. Many Associations had to scramble to secure long-term (15 - 20 year) financing to preclude a mass exodus of fixed-income residents unable to pay the individual assessments needed to address the damage and/or the threatened increased maintenance costs of “windstorm protection”. Every one of our buildings is also amid expensive construction upgrades to 30-year old elevators, 30 year-old parking decks, 30-year old HVAC risers, waterproofing the building, etc. Associations are being forced to postpone desperately needed modernization to aging mechanical and/or structural components to financially offset the unexpected hurricane damage and spiraling insurance costs. If the expensive measures taken to protect the buildings from future storms are less than 100% effective, they stand to sustain additional damage – and expense – this year.

Aware that associations around the State are still reeling from the horrific results of the last two hurricane seasons and are scrambling to pay for increased insurance premiums, astronomical deductibles, uninsured losses, extensive repairs and code-compliant windstorm mitigation, lawmakers struggled to offer relief for beleaguered constituents. Requiring them to address the additional expense of a “compromise” fire safety system of questionable benefit during this unprecedented fiscal onslaught is tantamount to an eviction notice for thousands of financially besieged homeowners. By giving Associations until 2025 to comply; HB 391 affords them the time to accumulate resources adequate to install effective fire safety systems, not some “minimum alternative” political compromise and certainly not at the expense of sacrificing protection from Hurricanes.

Continued on page 12



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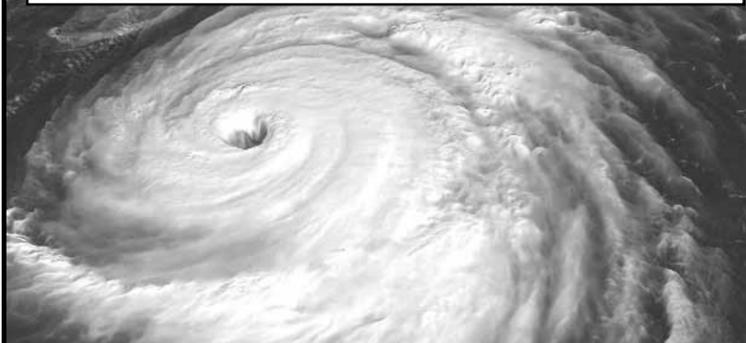
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Lights...Continued

Hurricane Wilma reminded us that the business of recovering from statewide or regional catastrophes is highly competitive. Hopefully, the residual hardship and inconvenience suffered by Galt Mile residents was part of a learning curve. Planting saline and wind-resistant flora ecologically adapted to the local environment should help protect the new landscaping. Maintaining an ample supply of the parts required to repair our lamps doesn't seem too difficult. The expense of filling a warehouse with an inventory of specialized lighting equipment is negligible and would also facilitate ordinary repairs. Mass sign fabrication presents a greater challenge. However, since most important locations, alerts and events are marked by several signs; the county could identify sites lacking such redundancy and simply store targeted replacements. Alternatively, they could resort to distributing maps, enhance the block with plastic plants and institute an "Adopt-a-Flashlight" program (bring your own batteries)!



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STRANGE BEDFELLOWS!

Article by Eric Berkowitz



Gov. Jeb Bush

Associations and their Fire Safety Engineers to compose effective Fire Safety systems (the "opt-out amendment") instead of the questionable \$multi-billion sprinkler retrofit. However, the opt-out amendment that passed over the virulent objections by the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union and the American and Florida Fire Sprinkler Associations still requires that Community Associations retrofit every unit foyer and common area with sprinklers by 2014.

Technological advances over the past few years have introduced acceptably safe alternatives – certainly to "the sprinkling of unit foyers". Intelligent Fire Detection and Alarm systems (VESDA – Very Early Smoke Detecting Apparatus – an air-sampling smoke-detection system that collects and analyzes room air conditions and identifies incipient fire development prior to visible smoke), automatic elevator recall systems, redundant control panels, code-surpassing containment features (firewalls, stairwells, doors, etc.) and dedicated building-wide communications (annunciator contact with units) would provide substantially greater safety at less cost than a half ton of plumbing supplies in your foyer. A mechanical ratchet device recently demonstrated at the Broward County Fire Academy turns every window,



VESDA aspirating smoke detector

balcony or catwalk into a viable escape egress. Subsequent to the original sprinkler mandate, the initial pork barrel payday was being legislatively modified into effective protection. However, the sprinkler vendors are chaffing at the bit to retrofit every unit foyer and hallway with sprinklers before acceptable alternatives render them superfluous.

Continued on page 9

Five years ago, the Florida Legislature passed a clandestine bill requiring every Florida Association housed in a structure 75 feet above grade to install a Full Sprinkler System or, alternatively, establish an acceptable "Alternative Minimum Life Safety System". Scrutiny of the new law revealed it to be a \$multi-billion payday for certain vested interests instead of effective fire protection. This "midnight legislation" was engineered by several political power-houses – the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union, The American Fire Sprinkler Association, the Florida Fire Sprinkler Association and the Fire Marshals Association (FFMIA). While the State Fire Marshals are motivated by altruistic intentions for both firefighters and the general public, the legislation's details (wherein the devil resides) were the handiwork of the bill's major sponsors. Not surprisingly, the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union and the Florida and American Fire Sprinkler Associations (well-financed trade organizations) were intent on creating a need for the sale and installation of \$billions in plumbing equipment.

Since the major cause of fire-related deaths is from smoke inhalation and property loss from water damage drives insurance companies to distraction, the law to impregnate every existing high rise building in Florida with sprinklers was, at best, incomplete. Following a State-wide outcry against the suspect \$multi-billion expenditure, the legislation was somewhat modified to allow

Bedfellows...Continued

life safety issues, allocation is prioritized according to the imminence and danger portended by each threat. The Fire Marshals failed to convince lawmakers that investing scarce Association resources in limited sprinklers would yield a more productive safety benefit than a comparable investment in hurricane protection. After confronting the Fire Marshals with the inherent "imbalance" in their priorities, the lawmakers unanimously passed the bill and forwarded it to the Governor for his approval.

Unfortunately, fulfilling their responsibility to the alliance has compromised the Fire Marshals' perspective and clouded their motives. Two items in the Fire Marshals' October 2005 Newsletter shed light on the basis for their alliance. In his page 3 article, "From the Director's Chair... ", Executive Director Chuck Akers of the Florida Fire Marshals and Inspectors Association states, "Have you ever been to the Business Meeting at the conference and hear Rick Butcher, the Secretary/ Treasurer for the association give his report. YOUR organization is out of money? Now, how crazy is that? What in the world does the Executive Board do with all that money they raise from the Fire Prevention and Fire and Life Safety Educators Conference along with the membership monies?" In another article on page 18 entitled, "Partnerships, How Important are They?", Akers states, "As our organization continues to grow, partnerships carry a more important role. We have successfully partnered with and continue to work legislatively with our friends from the Florida Fire Sprinkler Association and the American Fire Sprinkler Association." Not surprisingly, Akers is also the Executive Director of the American Fire Sprinkler Association! Other key Fire Marshals Association officials are also employed by the National Fire Sprinkler Association, another sprinkler trade organization behind the original legislation. FFMIA Past President and lifetime member Steven Randall is also the Florida Regional Manager of the National Fire Sprinkler Association (AKA Florida Fire Sprinkler Association). FFMIA lifetime member Buddy Dewar also serves as the National Fire Sprinkler Association's Director of Regional Operations.

The Fire Marshals found themselves in the precarious position of having to choose between their commitment to the public or to their alliance partners. It appears as if they have made their decision. They have vowed to pressure the Governor into applying a veto to HB 391 for the sole purpose of overturning the deadline extension.

An unfortunate consequence of this political accommodation will be the diminished credibility for many of the excellent and ethical Fire Marshals across the State. Fort Lauderdale Fire Marshal Steve Kastner has been a bulwark against the catastrophic effects of the past season's hurricanes. Within 48 hours after Hurricane Wilma, he sent 3-man emergency service teams to every high-rise in the Galt Mile neighborhood to check on possible medical shut-ins, invalids or isolated elderly residents. He has also kept his promise to meet with any Association with questions about or problems with code compliance.



Fort Lauderdale Fire Marshal Steve Kastner

Continued on page 14

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Lights...Continued



Commissioner Christine Teel

Commissioner Teel delivered some encouraging news to the Advisory Board. She said, "The City's Public Works Director reported to me the replacement parts for the lights on A1A north of Oakland Park Blvd have arrived." These are the standard lamps found throughout the city. The Commissioner continued, "The more difficult to obtain parts for the custom lighting on Galt Ocean Drive are due in the week of 4/24/06."

Explaining the project's plodding pace, she confirmed, "The major delay was caused by the manufacturer's lack of inventory after Hurricane Wilma. Florida was not the only state attempting to restore the street lights thereby causing a long waiting period." Advisory Board members let out a collective sigh of relief when Commissioner Teel stated, "Work will begin shortly on the installation of lighting on both roadways and should be completed in 6 - 8 weeks." Galt Mile residents need only wander around in the dark for another two months.

Of concern to drivers are the downed signs (stop, informational traffic, street names, etc) in the neighborhood. Broward County, responsible for their replacement, suffered the loss of 40,000 signs during the storm. According to Jihad El Aid, Broward's traffic engineering director, "An ordinary stop sign or street name sign can be punched out locally and put up the same day, but it's a different story when you're talking about replacing thousands of signs, many of which must be custom-made and sized with individual street names." El Aid explained that the aluminum overhead signs on major highways can take up to 90 days to create. If the giant steel trusses that hold the signs must also be rebuilt, the delay is prolonged. Echoing the rationale for repair delays to Galt Mile's singular street lights, El Aid exclaimed, "The process has dragged on longer than usual because Florida is competing with other Gulf Coast states that also lost hundreds of interstate signs."

Broward officials hope to replace all of the 40,000 lost or damaged signs in three months. That will put us into June - and the 2006 hurricane season. However, missing or damaged signs on state roads and I-95 in Broward and Palm Beach counties should be restored by mid-May.

Are the reasons given for six months without landscaping, street signs and street lamps addressable? Commissioner Teel clearly spelled out the issues and obstacles for the Advisory Board. The landscaping dilemma is rooted in inappropriate plant selections made without deference to environmental compatibility or respect for the targeted eco-niche. While local road agencies and the small businesses that service them can easily manage limited sign replacement, they can't quickly respond to high-volume demands. Similarly, boutique lighting manufacturers that ordinarily fulfill custom orders within a few weeks are ill-equipped to respond to high-volume catastrophic damage.



Galt Ocean Drive Bullet Lamp

Continued on page 10

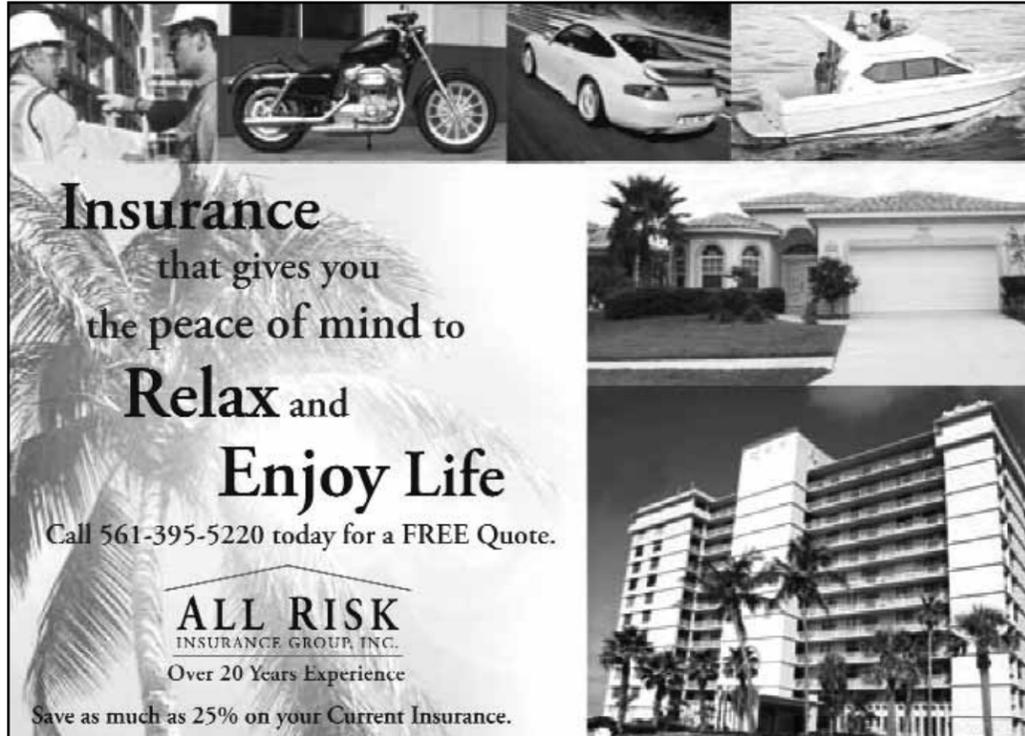
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FROM THE OFFICE OF REPRESENTATIVE

ELLYN BOGDANOFF

Our District 91 Statehouse Representative Ellyn Setnor Bogdanoff sent an update to constituents participating in her "Legislative Update" email program on April 15th. The House and Senate passed her Guardianship bill, placing its enactment into the hands of the Governor. Her "Direct Ship Wine bill" and her "anti-bullying" bill were still under Committee scrutiny while the DNA bill reached the House Floor. Ellyn speaks to the Wilma-driven proliferation of greenbacks washing through the Capitol and the effect that the fiscal abundance has on legislators. The tension created by differing opinions over whether they should return it, sock it away for a rainy day, hold bread and circus style "Tax Holidays" or use it to address some of the fallout from the deteriorating windstorm insurance crisis will set the tone for their Budget package. Ms. Bogdanoff also offers a funding suggestion for the RTA (Regional Transportation Authority) – parent of the Tri-Rail. Her concept centers on using the some of the resources generated by the gas tax in conjunction with Federal matching funds to build an efficient public transit system. Sound interesting? Read on: - [editor]

Hi again...

First, let me thank you for the incredible feedback on the survey results. I have printed and saved all of your comments. I think there are some great ideas for our book next year... 100 Ideas for Florida's Future. I really appreciate the effort.

We are headed back on Monday to finish the last three weeks of session. Things will begin to pick up speed so keep your eyes and ears open. The House met this past Monday and Tuesday, but the Senate took off the entire week. I figured I would wait and combine week 5 and the two days in week 6 before writing. We had back to back meetings the two days this past week and pushed a lot of bills through the system. It was a nice break. Things get tense toward the end of session. Going home for a few days to celebrate the holidays helps.

Budget conference starts this week and now that the state has estimated another billion in revenue, the negotiations should be more interesting. This huge increase from last year's budget is in large part due to the Hurricane and hopefully, this won't happen again. We need to save a large portion of the increase for a rainy day and make sure that the extra money is not spent on recurring expenses. There are still so many different ideas out there on how to spend it, but I hope we

Continued on page 17

Bogdanoff... Continued

figure out how to return a large portion of it to the citizens in an equitable manner.

The Guardianship bill that I have been working on for three years passed off the House Floor last week. It is a technical fix to the Guardianship law, but will hopefully protect a lot of people who are losing their trust funds due to fraud or undue influence. The Senate passed it as well, so it is off the Governor for his signature.

There is a new (old) issue on the horizon and I would like to get your feedback. The RTA (Regional Transportation Authority) is looking for a dedicated funding source. I have argued in the past that with all of the new tax money generated over the years that the County could use a portion of the gas tax to draw down matching federal dollars. The money will be used for building transportation systems to ease the congestion. Many of you know the Tri-Rail, which is an RTA service. I have talked with a number of folks who are experts in this funding area, and they believe using the gas tax can work and we would not compromise local road projects if we were to do it. The RTA has dismissed that option and each year comes to Tallahassee with a new proposal. They have not been successful. This year the RTA has a new proposal, and we are being asked to vote on a bill that will give each county an option to place a tax proposal on the ballot. The proposal adds \$2 to each rental car fee. There seems to be a great deal of interest growing among the members because most feel it will not burden the local taxpayers.

There is also the position that transportation is a need like any other and should compete for existing tax dollars. I receive hundreds of emails from folks who are trapped in their homes because of rising property taxes and it seems counterintuitive to talk about a tax increase, yet at the same time work to reduce the property tax burden. Well, what are your thoughts on this? Do we potentially add another tax or do we encourage the County to use gas tax money? I think the bill comes up for a vote this week in committee. This may not be a good time to ask the question. Like many of you, I just sent a check to the IRS...boy, I feel lighter!!! I may not have been very objective in my presentation, but I think you get the point...if you think it is a good idea, please let me know. If not, I want to know that too. What do you think the solution is to fixing the traffic problems, assuming we cannot stop the inevitable growth?

No solid solutions on the insurance issue yet. I will keep you posted, but I think we will have a new state pie soon. Next week should provide for some interesting comments.

I think that is it for now. It is 3:30 on Saturday and I have a few hours of daylight left to do something fun. Maybe I'll pick the weeds out of my front yard?•

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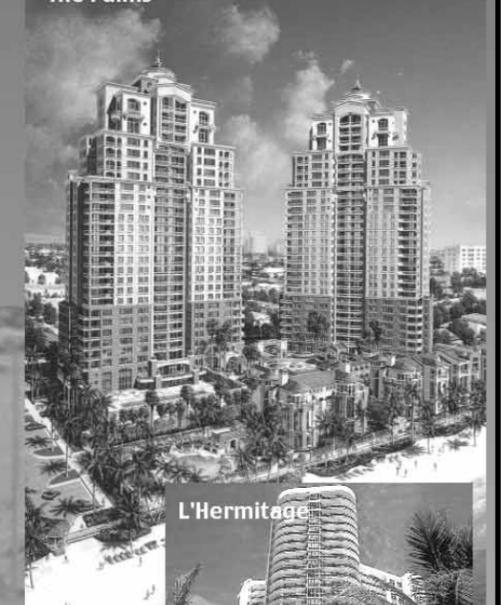
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