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Legal, Political Paths Defining Term Limits Issue

By Leo Coughlin

CLEARWATER - The advocates of term limits for members of the County Commission showed up in force at the commission's last meeting and railed about the issue, targeting in their comments four commissioners who are defendants in a pending law suit.

The legal action is asking the Circuit Court in a complaint for Declaratory Judgment that a referendum passed overwhelmingly in 1996 that limits the terms of County Commission members to eight consecutive years be implemented.

A recent court decision has revived the issue that has lain dormant for many years.

While the lawsuit goes forward, the dormancy of almost 16 years raises the question of why four members of the commission have remained in office that would putatively violate the dictate of that referendum.

That is what the lawsuit is about. That is the legal aspect, and the approach that is going to count when all is said and done.

In the meantime, the issue is also running on a political track and that is what almost two dozen people were doing at the County Commission meeting July 24 demanding that Susan Latvala, Karen Seel, John Morroni and Ken Welch stand down. Right now.

Those members are the defendants in the legal action in which Maria Scruggs, Beverly Billiris and H. Patrick Wheeler are the plaintiffs.

Wheeler, active in civil affairs and a watchdog, was one of those speaking at the July 24 commission meeting.

Scruggs is a candidate opposing Welch in the Democratic primary and Billiris is a former mayor of Tarpon Springs.

John Burgess is a very active member of the "Eight is Enough" group, which has fought for years for the implementation of the term limits that they say was decided long ago but never added to the County Charter.

Burgess claims that the limits amendments that passed with 72 percent of voters favoring the issue actually took effect January 1, 1997 and has been in effect since.

Term Limits, Sec A4

County Struggles With EMS Cost; Study Approved

By Leo Coughlin

CLEARWATER - "If your house catch a fire, they ain't no way around," Hank Williams used to sing in those words that captured the persona of that genius, dead at 29.

A song is one thing, reality another, as citizens in Pinellas County wonder how safe they are when it comes to their personal safety.

Bad enough the situation described by the priorities of taxpayer spending in Largo where if cuts persist a resident's home can be burning down, but nothing can be done until four firefighters are present.

And now the emergency medical situation has taken on a grim aspect with the county, which oversees the EMS program, facing what Bob LaSala, the county administrator, calls bankruptcy.

The latest wrinkle in the struggle is the decision to spend more money on a study by a consultant that will look at a plan already proposed by LaSala.

While the idea got some opposition from the County Commission, including Ken Welch, in the end the idea to hire the consultant (described as the "high bidder"), was approved with Welch caving in.

He was joined by Susan Latvala, Karen Seel and John Morroni in the approval. Commissioners Norm Roche, Nancy Bostock and Neil Brickfield opposed it.

As a footnote to those proceedings, those voting in the affirmative, in effect, ratify a plan already proposed by LaSala, are the

County, Sec A4

'Don't Fence Me Out!'

By Jane Bongo

CLEARWATER - The best defense is a good offense...or rather a fence in this case.

The City Council will decide tonight whether to go forward with a "Courtyard Enhancement Project," a plan to erect a fence to "define pedestrian patterns and create a public arts area" around the Main Library at an estimated cost of \$188,291.

Challenged by ongoing issues of vagrancy and loitering at the library, city officials sought to deter the issue by surrounding the building with a fence and gate entry.

The first design was presented in April but the City Council thumbed down the seven-foot-tall black wrought-iron fence as it gave the appearance of fencing-in the library while fencing-out citizens.

The City Council requested staff go back to the drawing board and look at designs with a more "artful flair" that would "enhance the appearance of this signature downtown building."

City staff ultimately designed a fence more in alignment with the "spirit of the building," library director Barbara Pickell told the City Council on Monday during its work session.

"It's more of an entry way versus just a gate," said Pickell. "The curve at the top of the fence mirrors the curve of the library's roof top alignment." Just inside the entrance, the courtyard might include various "art elements" such as planters, mosaics, ambient lighting and improved landscaping.

Council member Jay Polglaze said, "We need to be frank about this. We have ulterior motives for this fencing and our motive is to protect our investment and make it a desirable place that all citizens can go to."

Council member Bill Jonson referred to a letter sent to the City Council from Robert A. M. Stern Architects, the original building designer, who inquired as to why the firm was not consulted and expressed opposition to the design citing it "detracts from the Library design, creating a cage-like appearance for what was and should be an open and welcoming entrance."

"We spent a lot of money with Robert Stern and I really would like to get some suggestions from him before we go off on some direction that is inconsistent with that (building) design," Jonson said. "I'd like to have at least run by his partner. I don't want to make the library a stockade or walled-off from the community."

Fence, Sec A3



Brooke Bennett

Medalist to Host Water Safety Event for Big Brothers Big Sisters

CLEARWATER - Three-time Olympic gold medalist, Brooke Bennett, will host a Water Safety event for "Littles" (children) and their "Bigs" (mentors) in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

The event, called "Wet & Wild Water Safety with Brooke Bennett," will take place on Saturday, August 4, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Clearwater YMCA, located at 1005 South Highland Avenue in Clearwater. 150 guests are expected to attend.

Bennett will speak to the group about setting goals, how to be a successful athlete and her experiences at the Olympic games. Then, "Bigs" and "Littles" will participate in several interactive stations about water safety, both in the pool and on the pool deck.

After spending her entire life being interviewed by newspaper and television journalists

all over the world, the three-time gold medalist always wondered what it would be like to work on the other side of the camera. She is now pursuing her second dream, a broadcasting career. In February 2009, that dream began at Bright House Sports Network. Her specialty is obviously swimming, with intentions of covering all sports in the Tampa Bay area.

Along with her television career, Bennett is a certified personal trainer and nutritionist, and is spending hours in the kitchen, currently working on her own cookbook. At the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, she won gold and began her four-year reign as the top distance swimmer in the world. She went on to win two more gold medals at the 2000 games in Sydney. Her 800-meter freestyle victory was an Olympic record.

Shoring Up the City's Seawalls

By Jane Bongo

CLEARWATER - The City Council will likely approve an expenditure of \$152,807 tonight as a "coastal line of defense," protecting the city's waterfronts against erosion caused by tides and wave action.

Miles and miles of seawall, now aging and deteriorating, protect the city's waterfront and the Engineering Department is taking steps to identify the signs of potential failure prior to a catastrophic event in order to reduce long term costs associated with maintaining city-owned seawalls.

Earlier this year, the engineering staff performed visual inspections of all city owned seawalls to develop a schedule of which seawalls to address first. Staff identified the top three most critical seawalls in need of immediate repair:

Rogers Street, Turner Street and the Seminole boat ramp.

The city has sufficient revenue available in the seawall replacement fund of the Capital Improvement Program budget, \$400,000, to fund the cost associated with the three locations identified in this contract, according to City Engineer Ed Chesney.

The three prioritized seawalls were used in the request for proposal as the baseline for bidders to submit their best estimate for repair work. Based on the review and ranking of four bidders, the

Seawalls, Sec A3

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Youngsters Find Fun at Dunedin Library

Photos/text by SANDI FAHY



Mary Coules and son Gavin, 3, seated, are pictured with Dunedin Public Library teen volunteers (standing l-r) Megan Anderson, Zac Robison and Anissa Cruz at the Youth Services special crafts day on July 26. Gavin shows the Green Monster hand puppet he made using a paper bag.



(from left) Sophia Harmon-Greene, Aevan Vinson and Alleen Vinson were among the children who turned out to make Green Monster hand puppets at the Dunedin Public Library on July 26. That's Aevan's mom Dana assisting him with the project.

The Life and Legacy of Aldo Leopold to be Presented

ST. PETERSBURG - Join staff at Weedon Island on Saturday, August 4, from 2-3:30 p.m., for a matinee showing of Green Fire, a full-length documentary film about legendary environmentalist Aldo Leopold.

This film highlights Leopold's extraordinary career and how he "shaped and influenced the modern environmental movement." This film sponsored by Clearwater Audubon in partnership with the Friends of Weedon Island is about conservation ethics and connecting people and the land. The matinee is free, advanced registration is required, and light refreshments, donated by the FOWI, will be served.

Discovering Nature with Your Child

TARPON SPRINGS - Nature discussions are available on the second Saturday of every month from 1-3 p.m., at Brook Creek. Learn what is the difference between a carnivore and an herbivore, whose tracks are those and more. Stop by education center at Brook Creek to participate in a variety of self-guided nature games and activities. A Brook Creek Education Center volunteer will be available to answer your questions.

For more information please contact (727) 453-6800

Teens Dream Up Puppet Shows at Clearwater Libraries

CLEARWATER - Clearwater's Main Library, 100 N. Osceola Ave. will feature a Thursday, Aug. 2 performance by the library's teen volunteer puppet troupe, the Dascalio Puppeteers. The performance will be in the youth area on the library's second floor.

The 10:30 a.m. show, geared toward children ages six and up, includes hand puppets that perform classic folktales, modern stories and songs. Puppeteers will also come out from behind the curtain to perform skits and songs without puppets.

The Dascalio Puppeteer Troupe has been a fixture at the Clearwater Public Library since the 1970s, recruiting teen volunteers from the community who work together and perform in the community each summer and at holidays.

For more information, please call (727) 562-4970 or visit www.myclearwater.com/cpl.

County, From A1

defendants in a law suit designed to kick them off the commission.

The EMS problem is all about money - increased expenses and diminishing property values with a concomitant loss of ad valorem revenue have brought the vital service to the brink of disaster.

One idea that has had strong support from some firefighters is to abandon the private ambulance service that works in conjunction with EMS and have transportation of medical cases done by fire crews.

That was rejected by the county as unworkable. Actually, the county realizes money from the private ambulance service.

It is hard to imagine the county doing away with EMS but the county budget makers say an 18 percent increase is needed for the service to keep it going. A 45 percent increase in the current budget year was necessary and another raise might be politically infeasible.

You Need To Keep Your Doors Locked Because

By Anne McKay Garriss

All the way from Miami, two weeks ago, two women arrived on Clearwater Beach in a rented car. Their missions was simple - keep trying doors to the houses on North Clearwater Beach until you find one unlocked, then open it, go inside and help yourself to whatever jewelry you can find. This was in broad daylight.

There is a house on Astor Street where the owners always keep their doors locked but, this time, they accidentally left the back one unlocked as both husband and wife were in and out most of the time. The next morning, when the wife went looking for a piece of jewelry, she found that it was gone. All of it! Shocked, she called the police.

When the Clearwater Police arrived they asked if she had a beach bag missing. She discovered her favorite bag was gone and, unbelievably, the police had it, with her jewels in it.

It seems that the Miami women made one big mistake. They went on to ring the doorbell at a nearby house and, when the very well trained 14-year-old young man at that house did not respond, they tried the door. By the time they were in the

back of the house, also trying to get in, the young man had called police and, with his descriptions of the car and the women (one of whom was reportedly pregnant) in hand, the police were able to apprehend the thieves and took them to jail.

It turns out, the thieves had also robbed the house of a lady in South Tampa. Here they stole a suitcase in which to carry the loot and that, too, was found in their car. An identification tag in the suitcase with the Tampa lady's address on it allowed the police to contact her and return her jewels also. According to one policeman, this lady didn't know she had been robbed until the police called.

"I'm thankful to get the jewels back," said the Clearwater Beach robbery victim, "but knowing someone was roaming at ease around my house makes me feel vulnerable. I hope everyone who hears about this remembers to keep their doors locked, even in the day time."

At press time, one of the thieves is out on bond. The other, who has an arrest record, is still in jail.

Term Limits, From A1

He claims that the four members are in "willful violation of law."

The law suit asks the court to recognize the 1996 referendum as legal, that the four commissioners are in violation of term limits and be ordered to relinquish their offices immediately and that an election date be set to have the vacancies filled.

If a court did order the four out of office immediately, which some legal observers see as unlikely because of the inherent problem of reducing the commission to three members and perhaps as counter to public policy.

One aspect of a three member County

Commission is that such a number would not constitute a quorum.

Legally, a quorum is taken to be a majority of all the members of a given body, but the county Charter in Sect. 3.02 says, "All ordinances and resolutions shall be passed by an affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the board of county commissioners voting..."

That language clearly could be interpreted as constituting three members voting as a quorum.

Jim Bennett, the county attorney, was queried on the question, but failed to respond.

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ISLAND WALK - 2/2, Poolhouse - Mint cond.

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