

BELLEAIR BEE

Isley Brothers headline New Year's Eve show in Treasure Island

Meantime, legendary disco singers from the 1970s perform in St. Petersburg ... See page 1B.



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COUNTY

World record try comes up short

Bill Marra of Seminole attempted to achieve a feat that would last a lifetime, breaking a Guinness World Record at Tropicana Field. For nearly 20 years, he wanted to break the world record for the longest indoor flight of a paper airplane. On Dec. 2, he got his chance. ... Page 2A.

Reversal fails on fluoride issue

County Commission Chair Susan Latvala relinquished the gavel to her vice chair, John Morroni, so she could make a motion Dec. 20 – the commission's last meeting date of 2011 and a final opportunity to reverse a decision made Oct. 4 to stop providing fluoride in the water supply. Her effort failed. ... Page 2A.

Local group sends cards to soldiers

A Seminole organization called Cards 4 Soldiers brought cheer this holiday season to a large number of the nation's military personnel overseas. The card giving crew, headed by Cheryl Mesick and Sheilanne Carlin were able to send over 18,875 Christmas cards to soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. It was a small idea that blossomed into a holiday tradition. ... Page 3A.

OUTDOORS

Vidalia, mom doing quite well

It's been a month since the successful rescue of little local bottlenose dolphin calf Vidalia, cut free on Nov. 15 from the body noose of discarded fishing line that cut him for half of his young life. For the first time since the rescue, we saw Vidalia and his mom Valiant over the weekend. Both seem to be doing quite well. ... Page 9A.

BUSINESS

Chamber plans economic seminar

The Central Pinellas Chamber of Commerce will present Focus on 2012: A Tampa Bay Economic Forecast, on Tuesday, Jan. 10, at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort, 1160 Gulf Blvd. The program will feature business experts who will discuss significant global, national and regional issues destined to impact the Tampa Bay economy. ... Page 11A.

VIEWPOINTS

Mary Sanchez

Columnist says we need a TV sitcom to promote Muslimism.



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Photo by BRIAN GOFF
Matt Cummings, managing member of the Belleview Biltmore ownership group, stands in front of the historic, deteriorating hotel. The owners plan to ask for a demolition permit in January.

End of an era Belleview Biltmore's fate is becoming apparent

By BRIAN GOFF

BELLEAIR – The year 2012 could finally see a resolution of the fate of the Belleview Biltmore Hotel.

The hotel has been closed and deteriorating for years and has upset town officials, nearby residents, historical proponents and the owners themselves. But the day of reckoning appears near.

The town recently received a consultant's report that outlined what would happen if the owners decided to demolish the building and build upscale townhouses as they have indicated.

Town Manager Micah Maxwell says the report was necessary because of the historic nature of the property.

"The town has never gone through such a demolition before," he said. "New rules were passed four years ago which requires a certificate of appropriateness so we had to know where we stood and what the correct action would be."

That certificate would require the owners to meet certain standards and answer certain questions before being allowed to proceed. Nothing in the report has discouraged the owners, according to the managing member of the ownership group, Matt Cummings.

"We realize how much work there is to demolish an historic property. So it will take time. We have put our intentions through an exhaustive legal review and hopefully we will have all that done in January and we can begin the process," he said.

What the owners, the Ades brothers of Miami, intend to do with the property is no secret. They are proposing to tear down the existing structure and build townhouses. They in-

tend to save part of the hotel and re-create other parts. The townhouses will contain an artifact from the hotel, likely a pane of stained glass from the Tiffany Ballroom ceiling. How many townhouses there would be is now under review. They will likely seek permission to build more than the 83 mentioned in the initial plan.

Cummings says it is now practically a certainty they will proceed to seek permission to move on with that plan. He says there is no way the hotel can be salvaged.

"We've talked to hoteliers from New York to Los Angeles, in Europe, everywhere and they are just not interested," he said. "It will be close to \$200 million by the time this is finished to fix this hotel up. And history indicates that whoever puts up that kind of money will lose in the end. They will end up selling for pennies on the dollar."

Cummings has said they aren't interested in selling to anyone who doesn't intend to keep the property as a hotel.

"We got an offer recently, for a lot more than we paid, but the buyer wanted to build 500 apartments on the site. We figured that the plan would never pass and the property would revert back to us anyway. By that time six months would have passed and nothing would have been done. We weren't interested in that."

Maxwell says the consultant's report does outline some hurdles that the hotel owners would have to overcome, but he says they could do it.

"When you look at the list of items you will see there are some difficulties. How many remains to be seen, I just can't answer that at this point."

See BILTMORE, page 4A

Holiday donation



Photo courtesy of BRUCE SOBUT

Claire English and Michael Schulz of The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach display the club's donation to the Beach Community Food Pantry at Calvary Episcopal Church for holiday meals for the hungry. The support of the local community allows the club to assist the food pantry and numerous other organizations throughout the area. The Rotary Club of Indian Rocks Beach meets Wednesday mornings at 7:15. For more information, call 403-4060 or visit www.irbrc.com.

County renews Sunstar contract

By SUZETTE PORTER

CLEARWATER – After more than two hours of debate Dec. 20, Pinellas County commissioners approved a contract extension with Paramedics Plus, giving the Texas company exclusive rights to transport service for at least two more years.

According to the terms of the current contract, the commission had to inform Paramedics Plus of their intentions to renew by Jan. 1, 2012. The alternative was to find another service provider by Sept. 30, the date the current contract expires.

County Administrator Bob LaSala and staff recommended approval of a three-year contract that included \$10 million in savings over the life of the agreement. But commissioners were reluctant to tie their hands for that long in light of current proposals for changes in the county-wide emergency medical service system.

Outgoing commission chair Susan Latvala favored the three-year extension.

"Until we find a better, cheaper way to do something, this contract is cost-effective," she said.

The other six commissioners weren't so sure. The majority of the public favored letting the contract expire – something that almost seemed a possibility after commissioners failed to agree on the first two votes.

They had three options to consider. Option 1, a three-year extension with a savings of \$10 million. Option 2, a two-year extension with the possibility for a third year, allowing six-month pilots to allow fire departments to do emergency and nonemergency transport.

A third option, passed out to commissioners just before the meeting, prompted harsh words from Commissioner Ken Welch, who asked why it was received at the last minute.

LaSala explained that the county didn't receive the offer until late Monday. Then it went to the county attorney's office for review.

"Personally, I think the contractor dropped the ball," Welch said.

LaSala said Paramedics Plus had presented the third alternative at the county's request. Welch still wasn't satisfied.

"I haven't read it," he said. "Are we going to take a break and let me read it?"

Later in the discussion, Commissioner John Morroni said he was responsible for the last-minute addition. He explained that he had been talking on the phone with Ed Armstrong, a local attorney representing Paramedics Plus, on another matter Dec. 16 when he mentioned he wasn't happy with either contract proposal.

Morroni outlined what he would like to have in a contract, and Armstrong ran it by his client, who agreed to work on a third option, which was presented to the county on Monday. This option provided \$2 million in savings in the second and third years of the agreement, but does not allow for pilot programs – something Welch and Commissioner Neil Brickfield wanted.

Commissioner Norm Roche pushed for a fourth option – three one-year extensions, which he said gave the county the most flexibility to move forward on po-

See SUNSTAR, page 4A

Seats change, but no council election in Belleair Beach

By WAYNE AYERS

BELLEAIR BEACH – Council member Mitch Krach is giving up his council seat after serving five years.

Rob Baldwin, who is returning to council after a one-year absence, will replace him. Vice Mayor David Dumville and Councilmember Leslie Notaro will remain on council and begin new terms in March.

No council members will be on the ballot in the municipal elections to be held March 13, as Baldwin, Dumville and Notaro were the only candidates to qual-

ify for the three seats up for election.

During his previous terms in office, Baldwin oversaw the construction of the new City Hall, a \$3.9 million undertaking. He left council soon after the project's completion. Baldwin said when he returns to council he wants to be involved with public works projects and making sure the city is well maintained.

While a vote on council members will not be needed, the city will still hold an election in March to allow voters to decide a referendum issue and charter amendment.

The referendum question to be decided asks voters whether the city council "should develop a plan and financing to underground all public utilities throughout the city, with the cost to be amortized over the full term of the obligation and be repaid as an assessment to run with the land for those properties benefited by utility undergrounding."

Most of undergrounding utilities in the entire city will be substantial, and city officials have indicated a mil-

See BELLEAIR BEACH, page 4A

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