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Sweeping it under the rug

Good morning. Times were hard in the mid-1930s, when my parents hired Essie Mae Banks to wash and press our family clothes. Her pay was \$1 a day and car fare. When she got a better offer, it was raised to \$2 and no car fare.

In the empty lot next door to our small rental cottage on the north end of Miami Beach, Essie boiled the clothes with a slice of yellow soap and lye in a large galvanized tub set on a stone and two salvaged concrete blocks. The fire was supplied by scrap lumber my brothers and I gathered from nearby building sites.

Although Georgia-born, her accent was a softer version of that anywhere USA voice that was the local accent in much of Dade County where New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Georgia had blended into just plain radio American. Her dark eyes expressed a mixture of gentleness and shrewdness. She came to Miami by way of Valdosta, Ga. She went to school through the ninth grade, which was as far education went in the public school for black children in rural Georgia in the 1920s. The brightest child in her class, she stayed on as the teacher for a year until they found someone more qualified.

Our Dad was serving an apprenticeship in downtown Miami to become a CPA. Mother was working in a dress shop on Lincoln Road. Essie would leave in the evening for Liberty City on the bus that dropped our dad off on Collins Avenue, a block from the house.

As the depression weakened, an FHA loan helped us get our own home, a mile north in Surfside. Lucky us, Essie Mae came along to work five days a week, to cook and to look after our new home and the three brothers. The wash tub went in the vacant lot next door. The ironing got spread over Tuesday and Wednesday.

Not only did we not have a washer or dryer, we did not own a vacuum, and Essie swept the rug each day from our tracking in the outside world. When in a hurry, she lifted the corner of the rug and swept the little pile under the carpet. "Your mother will never notice," she said, "but she will notice if I don't have supper ready when they get home from work."

Essie was able to keep only a loose rein on the three rambunctious, independent boys. Her most persuasive enforcement of discipline was the lure of some special dish. With plenty of flour, Crisco and butter, she could promise corn fritters or an apple and raisin cobbler that would get our commitment to good behavior.

Essie did not let the snuff tucked between her front teeth and lower lip slow her from insisting on proper grammar, and she took some satisfaction in correcting our slang.

I don't ever remember her being a tattletale to our parents. The bond that developed over the years was one of love and trust. I think it was because she treated us with respect that we reflected those feelings back.

U.S. 17 to be focal piece

Corridor study to blend with other county plans

By **GREG MARTIN**
STAFF WRITER

Charlotte County's mission to design a future for the U.S. 17 corridor that reflects the vision of its inhabitants is starting to materialize into a plan that will emphasize eco-friendly development and public access to the Peace River and Shell Creek.

And that plan, in turn, will provide a keystone for several other planning efforts that encompass a much broader area, according to Jeff Ruggieri, county

growth management director.

The U.S. 17 Corridor Planning Study, once completed within the next few months, will establish special development standards and define the urban boundary for the area. That information is needed to set the scope for an East County Planning Study that kicked off two weeks ago, Ruggieri said in interviews this week.

The East County study, to be completed within the next year,



SUN PHOTO BY SARAH COWARD

Public relations consultant **Mary Briggs**, from left, planning consultant **Dan DeLisi** and Charlotte County Growth Management Director **Jeff Ruggieri** look over an aerial photograph of the U.S. 17 corridor. The team is working to draft a plan that guides the future development of the area.

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'Bar Stool Open' a hit



SUN PHOTO BY MOLLY DEMPSEY, mdempsey@sun-herald.com

Perri Turner celebrates a hole-in-one at Presseller Delicatessen where she, her sisters and daughter, team Perky Perri and her Putting Posse, participated in the Bar Stool Open Saturday. The trophy for this year's best bar putting hole is named for Turner, who is currently undergoing chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer. The trophy was donated by Peace River Distributing.

Mini golf tourney a success

By **JASON WITZ**
STAFF WRITER

PUNTA GORDA — Sandra Stracci had a knack for finding every obstacle on the miniature golf hole.

But she didn't care.

Stracci smacked the ball along the green, only to have it fall in the water dish. Everyone chuckled, and the Port Charlotte woman tried again. She hunched over the putter, stared down the green, and swung.

The ball spun around a corner straight

into the sand trap.

"You may not think it, but it took years of practice to do that," Stracci said, laughing.

So went the afternoon for many amateur golfers, although they had fun doing it.

About 360 residents participated Saturday in the first-ever "Bar Stool Open," a nine-hole tournament to raise money for breast cancer screening.

OPEN | P6

Diedricks win chamber Pacesetter Award

STAFF REPORT

PORT CHARLOTTE — Melinda and Lane Diedrick on Saturday night became the first couple to receive the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce's Pacesetter Award. The couple were honored with the award at the chamber's 83rd annual banquet.

Outgoing president Teri Ashley said the Diedricks have given unselfishly of their time, talent and treasure to at least 10 nonprofit organizations for more than 20 years. For example, Lane was president of Habitat for Humanity, the United Way, the YMCA and the chamber. Melinda was also president of the YMCA and serves on the board of the Fred Lang Foundation at Charlotte Behavioral Health Care, the Edison State College Foundation, the chamber board, and as campaign chair for United Way.

"As pacesetter recipient David Klein said, Melinda and Lane have made a difference for every age and every person and every cause, and they are his — and our — role models," Ashley said.

Lane Diedrick, president of Englewood Bank, graduated from Charlotte High School, Florida Atlantic University and the Graduate School of Banking at the University of Wisconsin. He's also the immediate past president of the Englewood Cape Haze Area Chamber of Commerce.

More than 350 members and guests gathered to celebrate the chamber at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. Ashley also presented the Business of the Year awards. There were 10 nominations from businesses that showed growth in workforce and/or company sales and demonstrated commitment to the community.

In the small-business category, the winner was The Bicycle Center and owners Kim and Gerard Campanella, who worked out of five, 40-foot shipping containers for almost three years after Hurricane Charley. They have grown from one to seven employees and support many community organizations with new

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Desguin running for re-election

By **PAMELA STAIK**
STAFF WRITER

After 12 years in office, incumbent Frank Desguin is not ready to give up his position as Charlotte County's property appraiser.

"I am just not ready to hang it up yet," he laughed. "Hopefully, the citizens of Charlotte County agree with that and will vote me into another four years."

For the past 34 years, the 56-year-old Democrat has worked at the county's appraiser office in some capacity.

Beginning as Appraiser I in August 1974, Desguin was later promoted to assistant director of tangible personal property in 1978. He then assumed this division's director position in 1982.

Twelve years later, Desguin



DESQUIN

DESQUIN | P6

Customer service is key in Spacco's campaign

By **PAMELA STAIK**
STAFF WRITER

Republican Lou Spacco is hoping to become Charlotte County's next property appraiser, an elected position he said is in need of some changes.

While the 56-year-old Gulf Cove resident has made promises to lower property assessments to the lowest they can legally be in an effort to reduce property taxes, his campaign is focusing on the idea of serving

Charlotte's citizens with courteous customer service.

"I just want the people to know that I am going to be there to work with them, that they'll be treated with respect when they come into the office, and that people will be treated fairly despite who they are," he said.

To accomplish this, Spacco plans to assign at least one office employee to the task of directly assisting citizens who

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Arts & Humanities

The Visual Arts Center Plein Air Group meets from 9 a.m. to noon Mondays.

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MAIN STREET

The 'Think Thursday' tourism initiative

At 6 p.m. Monday, a gathering important to Punta Gorda will take place at the Visual Arts Center, 210 Maude St., Punta Gorda.

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Will once-weekly trash collection have curbside appeal?

Staff Report

Monday is a big day for 77,000 Charlotte County homes.

Well, maybe about one-fifth of those homes, depending on location, scheduling and time.

Monday begins once-weekly garbage collection in unincorporated areas.

County commissioners approved the once-weekly collection cycle in June when they agreed to a seven-year pact with Waste Management, Inc.

Faced with a substantial increase in retaining a twice-weekly collection, commissioners opted to go with the less expensive alternative.

The annual sanitation tax on unincorporated residences will drop from \$164 to \$148 with the once-weekly service.

Waste Management claims the reduced service will trim truck mileage by 300,000 miles a year, cutting the company's carbon dioxide emissions by 1.775 million pounds annually.

The once-weekly service was specifically cited by 48 percent of residents as a way to save tax dollars.

Details

- Single-family residences will receive a 64- or 96-gallon trash "cart" with attached lid; 35-gallon carts are available upon request.

- No Saturday collection unless it falls on a holiday week.

- Bulk, appliance, yard waste and recycling services will continue as scheduled.

- Twice weekly collections at pro-rated charges available on request.

For more information, call 941-883-3533 or go to www.CharlotteCountyFL.com.

OPEN: First-ever nine-hole fundraiser for cancer screening.

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The event, sponsored by Girls Night Out and Peace River Distributing, was a different way to generate support during Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

However, even Denise Dull wasn't expecting this type of response for a new idea.

"We are very excited by the turnout," said Dull, co-

chairwoman of Girls Night Out, a local social group of businesswomen who help with charitable functions.

Throughout the afternoon, residents tried their luck at the custom-made holes at Punta Gorda restaurants/bars.

Clayton Scott was the pro of his group, "Aquaholic Gators."

The North Port man had little trouble navigating the

traps at Benedetto's Steakhouse, sinking his putt in two shots.

Scott's teammate wasn't as lucky, joking she hadn't drunk enough this hole.

All kidding aside, the benefit will help expand Dollars for Mammograms, a nonprofit public foundation established to provide free screening for uninsured or underinsured women. The goal is to raise

\$10,000, Dull said.

The holes varied in difficulty, but everyone struggled at River City Grill.

Walter Kuchen watched 10 times as his ball went up the incline, only to roll back down.

"It's like bowling: The ball will be back," said the Punta Gorda man. "But it's a lot of fun and it's for a damn good cause."

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AWARD: First couple to receive the Pacesetter

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and used bikes, gift certificates, repairs and more.

Ashley read from their application: "We refused to be defeated by our circumstance — only to learn from it ... and are living proof that small business can not only succeed, but thrive, no matter what the odds."

In the large-business category, the winner was Ambitrans Ambulance and Lorraine State Rep. Mike and Lorraine Grant, who have grown their business from five to 130 employees in 20 years.

"This year, Ambitrans started an in-house training program so employees can become certified as EMTs and paramedics and move forward in their

career while working full time," Ashley said. "Ambitrans also moved into a 6,000-square-foot facility in the Charlotte Harbor CRA and has plans for additional buildings, and their employees serve on many nonprofit boards and committees, and won the chamber's Business Education Partner of the Year award in August."

Tom Hannon of Community Home Mortgage was recognized as Ambassador of the Year for going above and beyond the call of duty for the chamber.

During a brief business program, outgoing board members, Timothy Janz, M.D., Harborside Internal Medicine; and Larry Sandles, Arthur Rutenberg Homes/Sandstar Homes;

were thanked for their years of service to the chamber.

Officers for 2007-2008 were sworn in. They are: Tom Rice, Fawcett Memorial Hospital, president; Dr. Pat Land, Edison State College, president-elect; Benji Dees, Dees & Dees, CPAs, treasurer; Tom Natoli, Integrity Employee Leasing, vice president, membership services; Sue Sifrit, Charlotte County School Board, vice president, community affairs; Jack Williams, Harvard Jolly Inc., vice president, government affairs; Stacy Calvino, Punta Gorda Marina, vice president, leadership division; and Teri Ashley, past-president.

Additional chamber board members are Roger Baltz, Charlotte County

Administrator; Jeff Brown, Ashley & Brown, CPAs; Jon Clark, Clark & Christopher Creative Marketing; Kathleen Dailey, city of Punta Gorda; Melinda Diedrick, Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith; Andy Dodd, Peninsula Property; Shannon Doolity, State Attorney's Office; Judy Malbuisson, Arts & Humanities Council; Mark Martella, Martella Law Firm; Sharon Neuhofer, Coldwell Banker Sunstar Realty; Gary Quill, Charlotte County Airport Authority; Donald Root, Office of Economic Development; and Chris Wenzel, Peace River Distributing.

— *From information provided by Julie Mathis, executive director, Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce.*

DESGUIN: A seasoned appraiser

FROM PAGE 1

became the assistant property appraiser in June 1994, a job he held until he ran for his predecessor's seat in 1996.

While he has spent most of his life in the appraisal business, Desguin said he didn't originally intend for his life to take that route.

As a graduate of Charlotte High School, Desguin always dreamed of becoming a math teacher and a coach at his alma mater. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Florida State University's College of Education, the aspiring teacher returned to his hometown.

While there were no openings at Charlotte High, the property appraiser's office was hiring.

"I applied, and I guess the rest is history," he said. "I have really enjoyed it and I still do."

While he said he has never looked back on his time at the office, he said it has been a challenge at times.

This includes dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, which left 30,000 structures in

"I am just not ready to hang it up yet. Hopefully, the citizens of Charlotte County agree with that and will vote me into another four years."

— Frank Desguin

Charlotte County Property Appraiser

Charlotte County damaged to some extent.

During this time period, Desguin was involved with helping those affected by Charley's wrath to save their money during the rebuilding process by getting the property tax laws changed.

"It's been a tremendous challenge that my staff has done an outstanding job with," he said. "We've been able to work through all the adversity and workload by thinking outside the box. Plus, we did it without any significant budget increases."

Because he feels the county is about to "crawl" out of the hole created by

Charley, he wants to stay in office to see that other priorities are addressed.

This includes beefing up the office's Web site with more resident-friendly information.

In the past couple of months, the office has added more search capabilities to the Web site, posted duplicate TRIM notices online and worked with the county's geographic information systems department to convert the real property tax roll into a comprehensive land parcel maintenance system.

"We're putting a lot more out there and we're always looking for new and better ways to do things in order to produce a more efficient and accurate product," he said.

And if what he has done and vows to do for the county is still not reason enough to re-elect Desguin, he said there is one more reason.

"I turn 57 the day after the election," he laughed. "If they can't find another reason to vote for me, they can vote for me because of that. It would be a nice birthday present."

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SPACCO'S: Customer service and respect the theme of campaign

FROM PAGE 1

come in with questions about their property assessments. This would give the community face time with an employee from the question stage, through the process of filing an actual petition.

"The assessment process is going to change from an 'us-against-them' system to one that works for the taxpayers of the county," he said.

Spacco also said he wants to be proactive in getting property values to come back down as quickly as possible, while utilizing whatever tools he needs to, in order to meet the needs of the public.

And while he has no experience as a property appraiser, Spacco boasts of having the right personality to deal with people.

"The purpose of this position is to manage and lead people," he said. "I have experienced

"I just want the people to know that I am going to be there to work with them, that they'll be treated with respect when they come into the office, and that people will be treated fairly despite who they are."

— Lou Spacco,

Candidate for Charlotte County Property Appraiser

doing that, and I hope to turn that office into an office that offers customer service — community service, if you will."

Spacco said he has spent more than 30 years working in various middle-management, executive-management and headquarters-

management operations at several companies.

While he currently works as the director of operations for the franchise system for Obee's sandwich shop, he previously worked for various security system companies that served banks.

Spacco also attended Massachusetts College of Pharmacy for one year, and spent six years in the U.S. Navy.

He said these experiences have prepared him for the challenges of the property appraiser's office.

"I am a person that believes our elected officials should serve the people who elected them into office, and I just don't feel that that position is working for the people today," he said. "I want to win to work for the people."

Attempts to obtain a picture of Spacco to run with this story were unsuccessful.

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FOCAL: U.S. 17 corridor vision materializing into eco-friendly plan

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will consider ways to develop agricultural lands to the east of the U.S. 17 corridor. The standards would be drafted so the development won't compromise the attractive qualities of the area or spur urban sprawl, he said.

Both those plans will then be incorporated into a rewrite of the county's comprehensive plan, which could be ready for adoption in early 2010, Ruggieri said. The plan won't be scheduled for another major rewrite until 2050.

The county is within two weeks of finalizing a countywide buildout study. The study, which predicts the county's population will top out at 450,000 in 2110, will give county planners projections for the total amount of housing, industrial and commercial units that will be needed in the future.

The U.S. 17 study, the East County study and the revised comprehensive plan each are likely to contain some planning concepts that, while not new to planning professionals, should be considered

"innovative" in Charlotte County, Ruggieri added.

The new concepts call for relying less on land-use ordinances to dictate allowable densities or to designate where such activities as industrial, commercial or residential can be located, he said.

Instead, the county would set standards for the various land uses to ensure quality development.

The standards would include appropriate setbacks from neighbors and more protection for natural resources such as wetlands and streams in drainage plans, he said.

That would allow businesses and industries to be located closer to where people live, he added.

Along 17, Ruggieri said the county will avoid dictating where the various land-use categories will be located. But the design standards will provide incentives for locating more intensive land uses in appropriate places, he said.

The county's Transfer of Development Units ordinance, which requires property owners to purchase development rights in order to win boosts in the number

of units allowed per acre, may also get revised, he suggested.

At times, the TDU ordinance has been "used as a weapon" to enforce a de facto cap on density, Ruggieri said. However, that strategy often results in developers creating sprawling low-density developments in rural areas, he said.

"It's wrong to think that you've succeeded by limiting the amount of density, because all that demand is now is being spread across the county," he said.

Building steam

The County Commission budgeted funds to study U.S. 17 six years ago, but the planning staff didn't take on the project until last spring. Ruggieri, director for the past two years, said he decided to make it a priority.

He pointed out that DeSoto County has already approved some 1,400 acres of industrial property just north of the Charlotte line. That includes the 400-acre Wal-Mart Distribution Center.

DeSoto has also approved 12,000 residential units, plus a mix of commercial and

industrial uses, on a 4,000-acre tract a few miles farther north, between Fort Ogden and Nocatee, said DeSoto County Planning Manager Jason Green.

The Florida Department of Transportation plans to four-lane U.S. 17 from the Wal-Mart Distribution Center north to Fort Ogden.

The DOT also considers the railroad that runs along the highway a "diamond in the rough," a DOT official told county staffers, according to a summary of public input on the county's Web site.

At least one 100-acre industrial park with a railroad siding is planned in DeSoto County, Green said.

In Charlotte County, the developer of a 20-acre site between U.S. 17 and Riverside Drive at Regents Drive is planning a truck-to-rail transfer station. The goal is to provide a Wal-Mart or Publix distribution center access to rail, according to Don Root, economic development director.

"We saw a real opportunity here to get ahead of the economic engine that DeSoto County is creating," Ruggieri said.

"It's not just a corridor

study," he added. "We're trying to really do something great, we're trying to create a sense of place, a real attractive area for people to locate their businesses."

In March, the county hired urban planning consultant Mary Anne Bowie of Sarasota for \$49,500. She'll focus on drafting environmentally friendly development codes, Ruggieri said.

A group of landowners also hired Dan DeLisi, a planning consultant, to help draft the study. The county and the consultants have since solicited input from some 30 individuals and held two public meetings to gather input about the corridor.

Reaching consensus

The input ranged from environmentalists who called for the preservation of wildlife corridors to business advocates who wanted "unbridled development," DeLisi said.

At least one couple said they just wanted the county to "leave us alone," he added.

Many residents called for more access to the

waters of the area, and more boat ramps.

A number also want to see redevelopment occur in Solana and Cleveland, riverfront towns platted in the 1880s.

New development should include "neighborhood commercial nodes" at several key locations, some suggested.

Also, some roads could be rerouted to better serve truck traffic.

The Charlotte County Economic Development Department is already working with the developer of a 20-acre site between U.S. 17 and Riverside Drive, west of Regent Road, to create facility to transfer truckloads to rail.

That site is across the highway from the 4,000-acre Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park.

"Hopefully, it will function so well that people with quality, environmentally focused businesses will want to be there," Ruggieri said of the corridor.

For more information, go to www.charlottecountyfl.com, click on "planning," and look for the U.S. 17 corridor study.

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