

Estero Village Council

Sunshine Laws a challenge for new officials

By Maryann Battle
mbattle@naplesnews.com; 239-263-4790

Estero's councilors are getting used to Florida's Sunshine Laws, but the process is awkward for them and slowing them as they work to organize the new village.

The village's seven newly elected officials are beholden to Florida's open government rules, known as Sunshine Laws, which were enacted in 1967 and provide guidelines to ensure the public has unfettered access to state, county or municipal meetings.

The council also has to follow

“It's a whole different culture. It slows you down to a snail's pace.”

Bill Ribble, Estero councilman and former United Parcel Service executive

Florida's public records rules, which are among the broadest in the country.

Penalties for violating the laws can be stiff and embarrassing. Estero councilors who spoke with the Daily News said they are embracing transparency but conceded the commitment comes with challenges.

“It's new, so it's not a natural thing,” said Mayor Nick Batos,

a retired hospitality industry executive.

“It's a whole different culture. It slows you down to a snail's pace,” said Councilman Bill Ribble, a former United Parcel Service executive.

One of their major gripes is Sunshine Laws ban elected officials from speaking to one another about village business outside advertised public meetings.

That rule is meant to prevent secret deals made in smoke-filled rooms.

But being unable to speak with colleagues before or after meetings makes it harder to keep up with all the work that needs to be done, District 2 Councilman Howard Levitan said.

Batos and Levitan both served on the Estero Council of Community Leaders, a nonprofit organization that led the incorporation push — but operated outside the state's Sunshine Laws.

Before getting elected to the

council, Levitan could meet at a coffee shop with Batos, for example, to discuss whatever they wanted. That's now a no-no.

“Things are going to slow down a little,” Levitan said.

“It may be a little more cumbersome for public officials, but on the other hand, it's more open for the media and the public,” he said.

The Sunshine Law is not meant to stop elected officials from spending social time together. They can be friends and

See ESTERO, 10A

Celebrate Immokalee Festival



CAROLINA HIDALGO/STAFF (2)

Anaya Dieudonne, 7, plays with Village Oaks Elementary School classmates before a Main Street parade Saturday at the Celebrate Immokalee Festival.

Family, fun, fundraising meet in fest

By Kalhan Rosenblatt
kalhan.rosenblatt@naplesnews.com; 239-403-6153

In Immokalee, everyone is family.

The unincorporated area just east of Naples might be small in size. But when it comes to heart, it's the biggest community around.

“It's one of these things that it doesn't matter if you're Hispanic, or you're white, or you're black, or whatever the case may be. You're a part of Immokalee, and we're all in this together,” said Immokalee Chamber of Commerce President Bernardo Barnhart.

On Saturday, in collaboration with Lipman Produce, the Immokalee Chamber of Commerce hosted the Celebrate Immokalee Festival. The event offered a good time for Immokalee residents and help for schoolchildren.

“The top 25 readers of elementary schools will get a scholarship out of here,” Barnhart said. “We also give scholarships to the high school kids.”

The inaugural festival, which began at 8 a.m. with a 5K run by Lipman Produce and continued throughout the day with a parade, live performances, music and a barbecue cooking

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Subscribers can see more photos of the Celebrate Immokalee Festival.



See IMMOKALEE, 14A Ashley McKay, of Immokalee High School, practices chants before the parade.

3-2 votes lead to question: Is School Board dysfunctional, as deemed before?

Does disagreement equal dysfunction?

Maybe it's a question for a math class. Or an English class. Or philosophy.

But someone in the schools should figure it out.

A facilitator from the Florida School Board Association will visit the Collier County School Board on Tuesday in a special meeting called to help the five-member board work better together.

Two recently elected



OPINION

board members and their supporters suspect the session really is aimed at silencing their criticism of the status quo.

The word dysfunction keeps cropping up in the

conversation, conjuring up memories of 2007 and 2008, when a mediator similarly was brought in and the school district's accreditation was threatened over the behavior, described by the accrediting agency as dysfunctional, of the school board members serving then.

“Just because we all don't agree, it doesn't mean decisions aren't being made,” said Kelly Lichter, one of the two School Board members often on

the short end of 3-2 votes.

“It doesn't bother me that the votes aren't all 5-0,” said Erika Donalds, the second of the two.

Both Lichter and Donalds, who ran on similar platforms opposing Common Core standards and promoting school choice and local control of what's being taught in the classrooms, believe the effort to label their opposition as accreditation-threatening dysfunction dates to the 2014 election.

Before the Aug. 26 primary, board member Julie Sprague had published a letter to the Pelican Post urging voters to study the candidates in the School Board race.

“When I joined the board in 2008, the school district had been placed on ‘warning’ status by the school accrediting organization SACS CASI for two consecutive years and was in jeopardy of losing its accreditation because of board dysfunction,” she

wrote, adding the present board had worked hard to correct the situation.

“This election has the potential to either continue that trend or send us back to a time of dysfunction.”

Sprague didn't mention any candidates by name but asked voters to back candidates who support “our traditional public schools.”

Lichter and Donalds

See BATTEN, 18A

Ovarian cancer
Specialists
back Jolie's
prevention
surgeryBy Liz Freeman
lfreeman@naplesnews.com
239-263-4778

Angelina Jolie is educating women again to take charge of their health.

Two years after she had a double mastectomy as a preventive move against breast cancer, the actress recently had her ovaries and fallopian tubes removed to reduce her risk of ovarian cancer.

Jolie, 39, is a carrier of the BRCA1 gene, one of two defective genes that greatly elevates risk of both cancers.

She had the recent surgery after a blood test showed inflammatory markers that could indicate early cancer.

Jolie made the right decision given her circumstances and will bring greater awareness to women about their risk, according to several genetic counselors.

“Removing the ovaries can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer by roughly 90 percent,” said Joy Larsen Haidle, president of the National Society of Genetic Counselors and a board-certified genetic counselor in Minnesota.

“Women with a BRCA1 mutation have up to a 45 percent chance over a lifetime to develop ovarian



Angelina Jolie recently had her ovaries and fallopian tubes removed to reduce her risk of ovarian cancer.

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What do you think of preventive surgery? Subscribers can take part in our online poll.



CAROLINA HIDALGO/STAFF (2)

Vehicles are lined up along Ninth Street North before the Main Street parade at the Celebrate Immokalee Festival on Saturday.

IMMOKALEE
from 3A

competition, was deemed a success by Barnhart.

The festival also helped raise money for Lipman's backpack drive, which provides Southwest Florida kids with backpacks and school supplies.

"Immokalee is one of those areas when it comes to back to school, when mothers have to go buy shoes and clothes and get haircuts, sometimes the school supplies is the one thing that gets lost out on," said Jaime Weisinger, director of community relations for Lipman Produce.

"So if we can ... make sure they have those tools, they can worry about the other things," Weisinger said.

Lipman gives backpacks on a first-come, first-served basis to students in middle school or younger.

This is Lipman's fourth year doing a backpack drive. Because of the amount of participation from the Immokalee community, Lipman probably would be able to give out more backpacks than anticipated this year, Weisinger said.

As Barnhart and Weisinger raised money throughout the day for Immokalee children, the kids themselves were able to just have fun.

"It's good to be around with the community," said Liliana Cruz, 18.

The Immokalee High School senior, who came with her friend, Julio Robles, 17, said the best part of the festival was getting to support her community.



Marley Star Villarreal, 5, who was crowned Little Miss Tomato, sits in a wagon near her family at Immokalee Airport Park during the festival Saturday.

"(What I love about Immokalee is) everybody is treated like a family," Cruz said.

For the adults, the good times at the festival were all about the competition — the barbecue competition, that is.

Benny Barnhart was born in Immokalee in 1963 and has called it home ever since.

He won the barbecue cook-off in Immokalee last year. He said even though he has been doing it for 25 years, cooking the best barbecue in town is just a hobby for him, not a profession.

It's one he wouldn't want to practice anywhere else.

"Immokalee is our home," he said. "It's been home forever. I'll never move."



ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Barack Obama is greeted Saturday by Rep. Patrick Murphy, D-Fla., and Fort Pierce Mayor Linda Hudson at St. Lucie International Airport in Fort Pierce.

Obama visits Florida for golf

By Tyler Treadway
tyler.treadway@tcpalm.com; 772-221-4219

naplesnews.com

For a social media archive of President Obama's visit to Florida's Treasure Coast.

PALMCITY — President Barack Obama arrived Saturday in Florida for a golf weekend getaway and teed off with former NBA star Alonzo Mourning and former sportscaster Ahmad Rashad.

Obama arrived on Air Force One shortly before noon at St. Lucie County International Airport north of Fort Pierce on the Treasure Coast. He was greeted by Fort Pierce Mayor Linda Hudson and U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy, a Jupiter Democrat who carried a small bottle in a paper gift bag.

"What have you got, a present?" the president asked, the congressman said afterward.

Murphy said he showed the president a small bottle filled with gray-green water from the St. Lucie River. Murphy didn't give the water to Obama because "it stinks too bad," he said, "but I wanted to show him what we're fighting for here on the Treasure Coast."

A crowd of 30 to 40 people stood outside the fence to see the president arrive.

"It was just so amazing," said Justin McGraw, 8, of Fort Pierce, one of the people behind the chain-link fence. "Everyone should come out and see him."

After taking photos of Air Force One, Arthur Guthrie, of Vero Beach, and his family posed for more pictures with the flight attendants.

"Never in a million years did we think we'd get this close," Guthrie said.

Others stood along the route to the Floridian National Golf Club to wave, cheer or just watch the motorcade pass by.


Obama planned to be out of public view during his stay at the Floridian, with no official events scheduled. After arriving, he immediately hit the links with Mourning, Rashad and Cyrus Walker, a cousin of Obama senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, the White House said.

Two years ago, Obama visited this coastal golf resort and played 18 holes with golf legend Tiger Woods and practiced with Woods' former swing coach.

This time, the president's foursome included pro athletes Obama has gotten to know well over the past few years and has golfed with frequently. Obama last year headlined a Democratic fundraiser at Mourning's home, and the former Miami Heat player also has pitched in to boost first lady Michelle Obama's childhood nutrition campaign. Rashad and Jarrett dated earlier during the president's term, and he has been an Obama dinner guest.

The president planned to return to the White House on Sunday evening.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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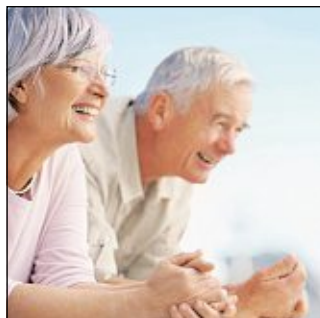




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