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SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2023 | HERALDTRIBUNE.COM



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North Port won't allow FEMA mobile home on lot 'It blows my mind'



Earle Kimel
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

NORTH PORT – A North Port couple with an autistic daughter say they have been forced to live in their Hurricane Ian-ravaged home partly because the city refuses to allow a FEMA trailer to be placed on their property.

The couple, Jeffrey and Virginia Rapkin, sued the city in circuit court Wednesday – the day after the North Port City Commission ignored a plea from Federal Emergency Management Agency officials to allow suitable mobile homes to be placed temporarily on the Rapkins' home site and two other city residences.

North Port does not allow manufactured homes to be placed on single-family lots and city leaders indicated they were unwilling to suspend that rule for hardship, despite FEMA's urging, citing fears it would be hard to later get rid of the units.

See HOME, Page 12A



ABOVE: The Libby Road home of Jeffrey and Virginia Rapkin was heavily damaged by Hurricane Ian. The city of North Port has refused to allow FEMA to put a two-bedroom mobile home on their property because of a city ordinance that does not allow manufactured homes in single-family lots.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY
JEFFREY RAPKIN

LEFT: Holes in the attic of the Libby Road home open up to blue skies. When it rains, the water flows in and seeps down through the ceiling and walls.

Mast declines interim Manatee position

Commission back where it started following saga

Jesse Mendoza
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

It took nine days, but commissioners are right back where they started: Kevin Van Ostenbridge is still chairman and Jon Mast is not Manatee County's acting administrator.

News that Mast, CEO of the Manatee-Sarasota Building Industry Association, has withdrawn his name from consideration as an interim county administrator on Thursday punctuated a dramatic saga that started last week when commissioners suddenly voted to pursue Mast and to remove Van Ostenbridge from his chairmanship role within a span of a few minutes.

Van Ostenbridge was re-appointed just two days later at the start of the very next public meeting. He addressed the matter directly on Thursday from the dais for the first time, expressing frustration that he had been removed from negotiations with Mast in favor of Manatee County commissioner Jason Bearden only to watch them fall apart.

Bearden offered Mast a base salary offer of \$195,000 per year, which is \$30,000 shy of the proposed \$225,000 offer the board considered but declined on Tuesday. Mast later withdrew his name from consideration and did not negotiate further.

"Six members of the board voted that we wanted to bring in Jon Mast," Van Ostenbridge told Bearden at the meeting. "You made the motion, and I voted for it, to remove me from negotiating the deal. It seemed to be the will of the board, and it was because it was unanimous. Then we decided that you should represent the board in the negotiation, and you voted for that to be clear and took that job on... Now we've come back empty-handed after you

See MAST, Page 11A

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Home

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The City Commission majority's stance left one board member dumbfounded.

"At the end of the day, we're trying to help our citizens," said Commissioner Debbie McDowell, who later added: "It blows my mind. You wonder why government is bogged down, this is a perfect example."

It also left the Rapkins frustrated, angry and dependent on the courts for relief from the damp, moldy home seven months after Ian struck, dumping more than 21 inches of rain in some areas and leaving widespread flooding across North Port in its wake.

"We wake up and we can't breathe," Jeffrey Rapkin said.

City doesn't want manufactured homes on single-family lots

FEMA housing official Linda Bookout left no doubt where the agency stood when she told commissioners earlier this week: "We're interested in providing a safe, habitable place to be."

That mission has included placing thousands of portable units in seven Florida counties in the aftermath of hurricanes Ian and Nicole.

"This is the only city that has not waived the temporary housing ordinances for their citizens," said Bookout, who oversees FEMA's direct housing mission.

But the Rapkins are one of at least three families denied access to the federally provided temporary housing because they need units larger than a typical travel trailer.

FEMA places a temporary home on a site for up to 18 months, and they've become a common sight in Florida after the hurricanes that have slammed the state over the last few years.

Nevertheless, in an April 13 email to FEMA Logistical Systems Manager Simon McMaster and other officials, including Bookout, North Port Neighborhood Development Services Director Alaina Ray wrote that the City Commission did not declare a "housing emergency" and instead passed an emergency order waiving a 30-day time limit for residents to occupy travel trailers and recreational vehicles on their property.

She noted that the housing emergency was not declared "specifically because the City preferred not to have MHUs (manufactured home units) placed on properties throughout the city."

"It is important to note that while FEMA may be able to control the removal of housing units they provide, an emergency housing declaration would have also allowed privately-provided MHUs," she wrote.

"The enforcement of removal of these units once an emergency declaration is lifted is extremely difficult, therefore the City chose not to allow MHUs to be utilized."

A North Port spokesman noted via email that the city has allowed FEMA travel trailers to be placed on properties in the city since Hurricane Ian.

FEMA did deliver a travel trailer to the Rapkins' home on Libby Road. But that featured child-sized bunk beds that were too small for their 27-year-old developmentally disabled daughter to use, so FEMA wants to replace it with a larger unit.

North Port family seeks relief for hurricane-damaged home

The city's spokesman disputed Bookout's assertion that North Port was the exception in handling the emergency housing, claiming that other governments, including Sarasota County and the city of Punta Gorda, did not waive similar ordinances.

Officials at both governments said that's not accurate.

Punta Gorda Assistant City Manager Melissa Reichert said that while mobile homes are not allowed on single-family lots within city limits, there have been seven special use permits allowing mobile homes of any size to be placed there while residents rebuild damaged homes.

"It's not a lot but at least it's an option," she added.

Sarasota County established a temporary, conditional use permit application that allows manufactured homes or RVs on a single-family lot for a year, while the main structure is being replaced.

The city of Venice likewise created a special permit process and application to allow a resident of Country Club Estates – a manufactured home park – to use a FEMA-provided RV for a year, with a possibility of an extension.

Charlotte County suspended the code prohibiting single-wide trailers and RVs on single-family lots where a damaged home is located.

Rapkin, who works as an adoption



Jeffrey Rapkin said that after Hurricane Ian, Libby Road turned into Libby River. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JEFFREY RAPKIN



"At the end of the day, we're trying to help our citizens. It blows my mind. You wonder why government is bogged down, this is a perfect example."

**North Port City Commissioner
Debbie McDowell**

LEFT: Jeffrey and Virginia Rapkin had to throw out most of their furnishings after Hurricane Ian. North Port has refused to allow FEMA to put a two-bedroom mobile home on their property because of a city ordinance that does not allow manufactured homes on single-family lots.

attorney, has lived in the two-story North Port home since 2001. He filed a request 12th Judicial Circuit Court Judge Danielle Brewer to compel the city to allow for the placement of the FEMA trailer on his property.

"The only goal here is to get a roof over my head," Rapkin said.

Hurricane Ian tore holes in the roof that left the interior exposed to the elements. According to Rapkin's court filing the cost to repair the home is in excess of \$200,000.

Rapkin has also had trouble getting payment for his claim from Heritage Property & Casualty Insurance Company, which he said severely understated the repair costs and refused to work with a landlord where he had secured alternative housing.

Heritage offered \$9,000 and when he questioned that, he said the company immediately sought to go to mediation.

The home cannot be repaired while the Rapkins are using it for shelter.

Rapkin, who could not come up with required funds on his own because he is also paying the mortgage on his house, ultimately lost the rental security deposit.

This week, he filed a lawsuit against

Heritage, as well.

The home is damp and mold infested, Rapkin said. "When it rains, it rains inside the house," he said.

On a recent day when the weather forecast called for an 80% chance of rain, Rapkin said he found his wife sobbing.

Family praises for FEMA

As soured as Rapkin is by North Port's response, he has nothing but praise for FEMA.

"They are the best agency known to man," he said of an agency that is no stranger to criticism for its post-disaster responses.

He said officials take his calls on Sunday and they are always supportive. "FEMA is a fantastic agency; they rescue everybody. They are amazing."

"Every single one of them, they are angels."

Rapkin also praises City Commissioner McDowell, who asked for his family's plight to be placed on the board's meeting agenda this week.

During her presentation to the commission, Bookout noted that since Hurricane Katrina, cities typically allow

FEMA trailers to be in place for a specific number of months, as both Sarasota County and the city of Venice have.

Bookout noted that families are allowed to remain in the temporary units only until their primary house is habitable with a safe roof, safe windows, doors that lock and a stove that works.

After Bookout and her colleague Josefina Genao made their presentation, McDowell attempted to get other board members to agree to a motion asking the city staff to develop options to help the displaced residents.

Instead, they spent more time discussing whether the item had been properly noticed so they could take action – technically it hadn't since it was only listed as a "direct temporary housing presentation."

City Manager Jerome Fletcher noted that city staff could not change the October 2022 emergency order that was put in place for travel trailers but the City Commission could.

Though Mayor Barbara Landgdon had briefly seconded a motion by McDowell to allow for discussion, she ultimately withdrew it.

McDowell attempted a second motion that died for lack of a second.



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Lawmakers conclude a divisive session

Deeply conservative bills aimed to aid DeSantis

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE — Florida lawmakers ended a two-month legislative session filled with divisive, conservative policies condemned by critics as cruel but crafted to power Gov. Ron DeSantis' expected bid for the Republican presiden-

tial nomination. In one of the last acts Friday, the House and Senate approved a \$117 billion state budget backed by a \$1.3 billion package of tax cuts which could fuel DeSantis' national messaging about his skills leading Florida's go-go economy.

"You do this political stuff, there's chatter and there's campaigns ... but at the end of the day, it's, 'OK, what are you going to do if you actually get in office?'" said DeSantis, flanked by Republican lawmakers in the Capitol's Cabinet

INSIDE

The legislative session is over. Here's what passed — and what died. **2A**

Democrats score budget victories, make points and lose policy votes. **7A**

room after session.

"Are you going to lead? Are you going to deal with issues that are out there?" he said, adding, "I think this Legislature said, 'We're going to tackle all these is-

sues and take all the meat off the bone.'"

Framing the session with what is a likely theme of his anticipated national campaign, DeSantis said, "A lot of other states can learn a thing or two about how we do it in Florida."

Unlike past years, when the session's final day often lurched past nightfall amid a frenzy of last-minute bill passing, lawmakers finished at 10:59 a.m. Friday, following a low-key finale.

See SESSION, Page 8A

North Port to revisit code block on trailers

City had refused to allow a FEMA unit after Ian

Earle Kimel
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

NORTH PORT — A North Port family forced to live in their Hurricane Ian-damaged home because the city refused to allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency to put a two-bedroom trailer on their property can temporarily call an apartment at home as they await a judge's decision on their lawsuit over the trailer issue.

Jeffrey Rapkin, filed suit in circuit court April 26 asking a judge to compel the city to allow FEMA to put the trailer on his property.

"You get a real perspective for this when you're living in rain."

Jeffrey Rapkin
Code resulted in his family living in damaged home

"We're in great shape. FEMA, I couldn't say enough wonderful things about them. They found us a little two-bedroom place," Rapkin said of the Toledo Club Apartments unit. "... It's clean and there isn't any mold and there's no holes in the ceiling."

While the court has yet to weigh in, City Manager Jerome Fletcher said city commissioners will discuss ways to allow for the larger FEMA emergency housing units on single-family lots at a meeting Tuesday.

"We'll be discussing a special permit on Tuesday," Fletcher said. "I believe that, from my understanding, our team

See NORTH PORT, Page 11A

DEP to renew Piney Point permit years after it expired



The Piney Point phosphogypsum stacks, looking to the east. MIKE LANG/SARASOTA HERALD-TRIBUNE

Clean Water Act step is needed as part of closure for troubled fertilizer plant

Jesse Mendoza
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

More than two decades after its permit first expired, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has issued a draft Clean Water Act permit for the former Piney Point fertilizer plant property — a necessary step in the closure of the troubled facility.

Advocates who have raised concern over the environmental hazard created

by the facility criticized the lack of a permit for years, although the property has operated under the authority of an administrative order issued by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection when HRK Holdings purchased the property in 2006.

Ragan Whitlock, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said the permit provides needed oversight for the problematic Piney Point phosphate facility under the Clean Water Act.

The center is among five advocacy

organizations that filed a lawsuit against the DEP and HRK Holdings after a breach at Piney Point led to about 215 million of polluted wastewater in the Gulf of Mexico in 2021. It was the second breach at the site in a decade.

Plaintiffs seek to hold the two organizations responsible for the mismanagement of the property, pointing toward permitting decisions made by DEP that allowed HRK Holdings to store dredging material from the Berth 12 project at SeaPort Manatee in 2011 as cause for ongoing issues. The case is scheduled for a bench trial in August 2024.

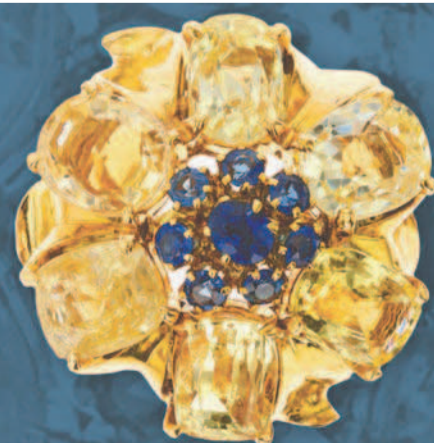
See PLANT, Page 6A

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North Port

Continued from Page 1A

will be prepared to discuss how and what that will look like, if we have a special permit.”

Fletcher said that while some background information is available online, his staff was still finalizing details.

Told about that development May 4, Rapkin said he hopes the city makes the changes necessary to allow for FEMA to put a two-bedroom mobile home on single-family lots. If that’s allowed, he would prefer to live on his property, so another displaced family could use the apartment.

“I hate taking an apartment if the ability to have a trailer becomes available,” Rapkin said. “There are people who can’t repair their homes that could use it.

“You get a real perspective for this when you’re living in rain.”

Living amid destruction from Ian

Last October, Ian caused widespread damage in North Port after making landfall to the south, dumping more than 20 inches of rain and spreading high winds. The Rapkin family’s home had holes in the roof that led to water damage and, later, mold.

In the aftermath, city commissioners passed an emergency order extending a 30-day window permitting the use of recreational vehicles on single-family lots to serve as temporary shelter, but specifically did not include allowance for placement of larger mobile homes, as well as other vehicles and boats.

Current city policy allows FEMA to place travel trailers – typically equipped with one master bedroom sleeping area and small bunk beds designed for children – to residents in need of temporary shelter.

“The board did a very good job of making sure they provided enough opportunities for this city to recover and the travel trailers from FEMA have been well used. We feel like we have done a great job to help this community recover from the storm. The one in question was not supported” by the board, Fletcher said, referring to the larger trailer placement.

Changing that policy requires “a commission conversation and we can permit what they say.”

FEMA housing assistance

North Port is the only local government in the area that has not amended its rules to temporarily allow mobile homes on single-family lots or – in the case of the city of Venice – to allow an RV in a manufactured home community.

FEMA places a temporary home on a site for up to 18 months, and they’ve become a common sight in Florida after the hurricanes that have slammed the state over the last few years.

FEMA actually issued a travel trailer to Rapkin that he and his wife Virginia could not use because their 27-year-old autistic daughter could not fit in a child-



Jeffrey Rapkin, pictured here standing on Libby Road near his home after Hurricane Ian, said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has found an apartment for his family but he still hopes North Port will change its codes so FEMA can put a two-bedroom mobile home on his lot. Rapkin filed in circuit court, asking for a judge to compel that action. The North Port City Commission will discuss a code change Tuesday. PROVIDED BY JEFFREY RAPKIN

sized bunk.

Because of the city’s October decision, FEMA could not help the Rapkins or at least two other families in North Port with the larger units.

FEMA officials presented their case to the City Commission urging allowance for the larger trailers on April 25, but board members – citing the fact that the issue was not placed on the agenda as an item on which they could vote – declined to take action.

In an April 13 email to FEMA Logistical Systems Manager Simon McMaster and other officials, city Neighborhood Development Services Director Alaina Ray noted that the city opted against declaring a housing emergency “specifically because the City preferred not to have MHUs (manufactured home units) placed on properties throughout the city.”

The main concern Ray cited in allowing trailers temporarily was later having to use code enforcement to remove privately placed mobile homes once a housing emergency was rescinded.

Rapkin said he still can’t understand that rationale. “That’s what irks me,” Rapkin said. “You don’t keep

people from having a roof over their heads because you’re worried it might be difficult later to deal with something.

“People need help now. We’re getting rained on now; for six months I’ve had my lungs full of gunk.”

Relief in sight

Rapkin said rains over the April 29-30 weekend brought more misery to their house in Libby Road.

“We were soaked, like we were standing outside,” Rapkin said.

When he learned from a FEMA caseworker that a temporary apartment unit was available, “I burst into tears. I was so grateful – ‘Thank you so much for helping us’ – I was crying my eyes out, I was so relieved.”

A FEMA spokeswoman was attempting to learn whether temporary shelter had been found for the other two families affected by the city’s temporary housing decision last October, but her answer was not immediately available.

While Rapkin hopes the city will allow FEMA to put a larger mobile home on his lot, so he can pay it forward and give the federal agency an opportunity to help another family, he’s grateful for the apartment’s availability.

“It’s a two-bedroom so my girl has her own bedroom and we’ve been putting stuff over there, so it’s all good,” Rapkin said. “It doesn’t smell like mold, it doesn’t stink. It’s fantastic.”

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DeSantis signs new immigrant measure

Florida law being called 'cruel' by some advocates

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE – Gov. Ron DeSantis railed against President Joe Biden over the influx of migrants across the nation's southern border before signing a new state law Wednesday imposing tough penalties and new restrictions on undocumented immigrants in Florida.

DeSantis, expected soon to announce his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination, spoke in

Jacksonville from a podium with a sign proclaiming, "Biden's Border Crisis."

The measure, approved last week by the Florida Legislature, has been condemned by critics as cruel and potentially leading to law enforcement profiling. It's considered among the toughest steps taken by any state to deter illegal aliens from arriving.

"We have to stop this nonsense, this is not good for our country," DeSantis said, adding "this is no way to run a government."

A new surge of migrants is gathering at the U.S.-Mexico border in advance of the looming end of Title 42, a COVID pandemic policy that enabled authori-

ties to quickly oust many migrants who entered the country without permission, rather than letting them stay while courts considered their cases.

Title 42 expires Thursday, as part of the end of the official COVID health emergency.

"We're bracing for some turbulent times ahead," DeSantis said. "And I think when you have a president who has turned a blind eye to what's gone on at the border... you're likely to see it get a lot worse. We're protecting Floridians, to the full extent of our ability."

The federal Department of Homeland Security has unveiled plans aimed at dealing with the border, post-Title 42,

including setting up additional facilities along the border to process migrants, bolstering transportation and leaning on a fast-track deportation process.

Steps called cruel by advocates

But immigrant advocates said Florida's approach targets with new criminal penalties and restrictions a community already struggling to survive. Immigrants, legal and illegal, represent a huge share of the state's workforce, leaders added.

"The immigrant community in

See IMMIGRANTS, Page 5C

Area man gets 15 years for part in fatal crash

To do time for vehicular homicide, fleeing scene

Gabriela Szymanowska
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Bradenton man has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for vehicular homicide and fleeing the scene of a crash related to a 2019 hit-and-run incident and a separate crash that killed one person, according to a 12th Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office news release.

INSIDE

New trial denied for Sarasota man guilty of manslaughter with firearm. **3C**

North Port Police arrest 2 people in home shooting. **3C**

trial at the Manatee County Courthouse, according to the release.

What happened on Feb. 9, 2019, according to reports

A 13-page Florida Highway Patrol report details the events that transpired on Feb. 9 which led to the fatal crash and the investigation that followed.

Previous reporting by the Sarasota Herald-Tribune stated that Soriano Waters was driving an Acura Integra in a reckless manner heading west on 26th Avenue East at about 11:30 p.m.

See CRASH, Page 3C

Adonis Soriano Waters, 28, was convicted by a jury on Oct. 19, 2022, following a three-day

North Port stands firm against mobile homes



North Port staff wants to locate FEMA trailers at Holiday Park, which would take months and a vote of the special district to accomplish. THOMAS BENDER/HERALD-TRIBUNE

FEMA dismisses plan for trailers at Holiday Park

Earle Kimel
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

NORTH PORT — North Port city leaders maintained their opposition to

FEMA placing larger mobile homes on single-family lots, a practice allowed in Sarasota and Charlotte counties, as well as the city of Punta Gorda.

Following discussion Tuesday, city commissioners were amenable to a solution suggested by their staff to allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency to use Holiday Park, an 836-unit 55-and-older mobile home retire-

ment community that sustained severe damage from Hurricane Ian, as a place to temporarily place larger trailers for people displaced by the storm.

But that was news to Cheryl Morris, chairman of the Holiday Park Board of Trustees, and it was quickly dismissed by FEMA.

See NORTH PORT, Page 10C

NEW COLLEGE

School to accept 'classical and Christian' alternative to ACT/SAT

Steven Walker
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

New College of Florida will accept a "classical and Christian" alternative to the SAT and ACT standardized tests for college admission, the college announced in a press release Monday.

New College would be the first Florida public university to accept the Classic Learning Test, which is only accepted by about 200 colleges and universities nationwide, including the conservative, Christian Hillsdale College in Michigan. The test awards a student a

score out of 120 and tests for proficiency in English, grammar, math and comprehension skills, according to the release.

New College Board of Trustees member Christopher Rufo also sits on the CLT's board of directors.

Interim New College President Richard Corcoran said the school's acceptance of the CLT would help extend New College admissions to more home-schooled and "classically educated students"

"As New College strives to become a world-class liberal arts educational institution, adding the CLT as an accepted testing option for admissions will en-

sure we are reaching and welcoming students from all walks of life," Corcoran said.

Jeremy Tate, the founder and CEO of the CLT, said in an interview with the Tampa Bay Times that the test offers an alternative to an "increasingly ideological" SAT exam administered by College Board. The test has been described as "classical and Christian" by Chad Pecknold, one of the CLT's board members.

The college's announcement references new legislation, HB 1537, in which the state is looking at the CLT as an alternate to the SAT for Bright Futures

scholarship eligibility. The legislation also comes as Gov. Ron DeSantis grappled with the College Board over the company's AP African American History course.

DeSantis tasked a newly-appointed Board of Trustees majority at New College to turn the school into a more "classical liberal arts college" akin to Hillsdale College. Since taking over in January, the board fired the previous president, hired Corcoran, abolished diversity, equity and inclusion at the school, denied tenure to faculty members, and launched an athletics department.



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North Port

Continued from Page 1C

She cited deed restrictions, not the least of which is the fact the community caters to people age 55 and older. In addition, concrete pads left empty by Ian have individual owners and the deed restrictions require that any mobile home placed on them be owned by the pad's owner.

The 836 unit owners would also have to approve such changes. Morris speculated that process could take months.

The 2023 hurricane season starts June 1, and some people whose homes were damaged by Ian have lacked appropriate housing for more than seven months.

A FEMA spokesperson said via email Wednesday that based on the agency's contact with Holiday Park on Nov. 16, 2022, "the owner indicated each pad/lot is privately owned and the site is a deed restricted community, and they would not be able to work with FEMA. FEMA has not pursued and will not be pursuing this park."

Neighborhood Development Services Director Alaina Ray told the commission Tuesday that Holiday Park had about 50 vacant pads. She said the city had been in contact with the community's management company and revenue generated from FEMA would ease a financial hardship for the community.

"If the gap cannot be filled in that manner, then we

have to explore something different," City Manager Jerome Fletcher said.

FEMA had proposed a direct solution to the City Commission at its April 25 meeting — allow the federal agency to place two-bedroom mobile homes on single-family lots, just as the city of Punta Gorda and Sarasota and Charlotte counties had done.

At that April meeting, FEMA housing official Linda Bookout told the commission, "This is the only city that has not waived the temporary housing ordinances for their citizens."

Bookout told the board that at least three families were impacted by the city's prohibition.

Nonetheless, the commission declined to take action.

City officials have indicated the reluctance to allow the larger trailers is concern about an increased workload of code enforcement to remove private mobile homes from single-family lots once the emergency need expired.

City Commissioner Pete Emrich, considering the possibility of displaced families being located at Holiday Park, said he would favor the larger mobile homes being placed on lots larger than three acres in North Port Estates, where people may not want to be separated from their animals, which are "family, too."

Ray said no queries had come from that part of the city — only the central portion, such as in Country Club Ridge — which sustained heavy damage.

"I feel for all of them," Emrich said. "But stacking up modulars in there, to me — I've gotten a lot of calls and complaints from people saying, 'I don't want a trailer

"I've gotten a lot of calls and complaints from people saying, 'I don't want a trailer next to my house.'"

Pete Emrich
North Port city commissioner

next to my house."

Meanwhile 12th Judicial Circuit Court Judge Danelle Brewer issued an order giving the city 20 days to show why it shouldn't grant relief to Jeffrey Rapkin and his family in their desire to have FEMA place a two-bedroom mobile home on their single-family lot on Libby Road, after Hurricane Ian devastated their two-story home.

Rapkin filed the suit the day after North Port refused to allow FEMA to put mobile homes temporarily on single-family lots.

He still hopes he will be able to live on his property though, for now, FEMA has found a two-bedroom apartment for him, his wife Virginia and their 27-year-old autistic daughter.

Rapkin said he can't believe North Port still refuses to allow larger mobile homes.

"They think they can tell the federal government what to do," Rapkin said. "Imagine a world where a little Podunk government can tell the federal government what they can do to give their citizens assistance."

Obituaries

TODAY'S DEATH NOTICES

Name	Age	Town, State	Death Date	Arrangements	Service Time	Service Location	Interment
*Ackley, Theresa Marie	-	Jacksonville, FL	01-May	-	--	-	-
*Hughes, Barbara	86	Sarasota	25-Apr	Jones Funeral Home	13-May 1:30 PM	Galilee Cemetery	Galilee Cemetery
*Niewold, Harold Garrett	64	Sarasota, FL	18-Mar	-	--	-	-

*** Additional information in display obituaries**

Obituaries appear in print and online at heraldtribune.com/obituaries



Barbara Hughes

SARASOTA - Bobbie Jean Reese better known as "Barbara Reese Hughes" or "Mema" a beloved mother, grandmother, sister, auntie, cousin and friend passed away at 85 years of age on the Tuesday afternoon of April 25, 2023 at Sarasota Memorial Hospital.

Visitation will be held from 11:00am-1:00pm on Sat., May 13, 2023 at Jones Funeral Home. Services will be held 1:30pm on Sat., May 13, 2023 at Galilee Cemetery. Funeral arrangements by Jones Funeral Home.

Barbara Reese leaves to cherish her memories: her daughter and son in law, Cowates "Coe" Bryant and Joe Bryant of Sarasota, FL; her grandchildren, Marshawna Bryant of Tampa, FL; Jeremy Colston, and Joe Bryant Jr of Sarasota, FL; 5 great grandchildren; a host of other cherished family members, cousins, nephews, nieces and close friends.

Theresa Marie Ackley

JACKSONVILLE - Theresa (Terri) Marie Lussier Ackley, 89, died May 1, 2023 with her children by her side at the Douglas Center For Caring, A Community Hospice and Palliative Care facility at Baptist Health in Jacksonville, Florida.

Terri was born on May 22, 1933, in Peterborough, NH, to Fred and Clara Lussier. After graduating from high school, she enlisted in the US Air Force. Upon completing her military service, Terri worked for several companies such as Remington, before getting married. While raising her family, she also successfully managed numerous real estate and investment properties that belonged to her late husband. Additionally, she played a vital role in managing her late husband's private medical practice in Ohio and Florida. Terri lived in Cleveland, Ohio, and Jacksonville, FL, before moving to Sandusky, OH.

She had a passion for entertaining guests, cooking, traveling, gardening, and music. Her warm and welcoming nature allowed her to easily strike up a conversation with anyone. Terri delighted in sharing stories of social gatherings that she hosted at her home, featuring her exceptional culinary skills and famous 12-course meals. She also reminisced about the incredible trips she took with her late husband and family. Even in her final days, Terri expressed gratitude for having led such a full life, rich with remarkable experiences and memories.

She was the loving wife and widow of Dr. Eugene Edward Ackley, who died in August 2000.

Terri is survived by one son, David Ackley of Florida, one daughter, Michelle Rowan of Florida; two grandchildren; and one great grandchild. She was predeceased by her two sisters Evelyn Jean Rollins, who died in 2012 and Rosemarie Dunant, who died in 1997.

SERVICES: A calling hour will be held at Jellison Funeral Home, 25 Concord Street, Peterborough, on Saturday May 13th from 9:30 to 10:30 AM. Burial will immediately follow at St. Peter Cemetery on High Street, Peterborough NH.

A Celebration of Terri's life will be announced soon and held in Jacksonville, FL.

Flowers are acceptable or memorial contributions may be made in Terri's name to the National Audubon Society.

To share a memory, or to leave the family a message of condolence, please visit Terri's online tribute page at www.jellisonfuneralhome.com

Harold Garrett Niewold

SARASOTA - Harold Pop Pop Niewold, a great chef, advice giver, could fix anything and family guy, left this earth on Saturday, March 18, 2023.

He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Melissa with whom he had 2 children Alyson Ashley and Garrett Michael and 1st grandson Lucas Anthony. He took great pride in stocking their tool boxes, teaching them to marinate meat and making them laugh whenever he could. For Lucas, he always had fruit snacks hidden in his pocket for emergencies. He was known for finding the best food in unusual places. He had so much love for his mom Virginia (deceased) and was close to his sisters and brothers.

He also left behind his little black dog, Luna who would faithfully hang with him all day long waiting to sample his tasty treats and get scratched in all the right places. Harold worked hard most of his life but loved to vacation by the beach, listen to blues and Jimmy Buffet and believed that there was never an ugly Hawaiian shirt. If there was a problem to be solved, he would always extend a helping hand.

Finally, the family asks that in honor of Harold, we would hope that you will do an unexpected and unsolicited act of kindness for someone in his name.

There will be a celebration of life on Saturday, May 27th from 2-4 pm at Jiggs Landing 6106 63rd St E. Bradenton. Bring a lawn chair.



In Memoriam

CALVIN F. "JACK" HENSLEY
7/21/1933 -
5/11/2017



Thank you God!
All my love forever,
Carol



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Calls wane for 2nd COVID query

Some still calling for it; SMH shows no interest

Earle Kimel
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

SARASOTA – Several speakers renewed a call Monday for the Sarasota County Public Hospital Board to empower an independent panel to investigate the public hospital system’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but on a day when fewer than 50 people were in the audience, only 11 spoke dur-

ing public comment. Of those, six continued to question how Sarasota Memorial conducted an internal investigation of its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The speakers did not suggest how a panel would be chosen or compensated. It marked at least the fifth hospital board meeting at which the issue has been raised, though the intensity has waned at the last two. Venice East resident Barbara Vaughn and Osprey resident Ann Vandersteel, who is also co-chair of the Zelenko Freedom Foundation, took the hospital to task, again for following Centers for Dis-

“If you had truly started with the patient first and the patient always being put first, you would have immediately abandoned the protocol fed to you by the CDC.”

Barbara Vaughn
Venice East resident and co-chair of the Zelenko Freedom Foundation

ease Control protocols or for how it treated COVID-19 patients. “If you had truly started with the patient first and the patient always being put first, you would have immediately abandoned the protocol fed to you by the CDC,” Vaughn said, adding: “And you would have done instead what was best for each individual patient.” Dr. Stephen Guffanti, a former emergency room doctor who was treated for COVID-19 at Sarasota Memorial in 2021 and a frequent critic of the hospital, kept his comments brief and praised

See COVID, Page 2C

North Point could lift restrictions on trailers

Larger temporary homes from FEMA for some

Earle Kimel
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

NORTH PORT – North Port city staff have crafted a resolution for an Emergency Housing Declaration that would allow FEMA to place larger mobile homes on single-family lots. The declaration would allow for the mobile homes to be placed providing that the existing home on the lot has been declared substantially damaged. The resolution must still be approved by the City Commission when it meets on May 23.

The move comes after board first refused a direct plea from Federal Emergency Management Agency officials at an April meeting to allow for the larger units on single-family lots.

That was followed by suggestion at the May 9 meeting that FEMA could simply work with Holiday Park, an 836-unit 55-and-older manufactured home community that had roughly 50 vacant pads after it was devastated by Hurricane Ian.

See FEMA, Page 10C

DeSantis dodges question on Trump’s voter fraud claims

Zac Anderson
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Ron DeSantis is pitching himself as a winner as he gears up to run for president and urging the GOP to reject a “culture of losing,” but when asked Monday if he acknowledges Trump lost the 2020 election and there wasn’t widespread voter fraud, DeSantis dodged the question.

“When I look at the last however many election cycles, 2018 we lost the House ... we lost the Senate in 2020, Biden becomes president, and has done a huge amount of damage,” De-

See DODGING, Page 5C



The long-awaited Manatee County location is looking to hire 100 people. PHOTOS BY PROVIDED BY SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

Sprouts Market to host job market for new site



A Sprouts Farmers Market store interior featuring local produce.

Samantha Gholar
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Sprouts Farmers Market, a Phoenix-based grocer best known for its variety and a large selection of natural and organic foods, is nearing the completion of its second location in Sarasota-Manatee and will host a hiring fair this week.

The long-awaited Manatee County location is looking to hire 100 people to fill positions at the new Sprouts Bradenton at 1149 Cortez Rd. West. The Bradenton Sprouts Farmers Market store is slated for a June 30 opening.

Sprouts representatives announced the full-staff hiring fair to be held Wednesday, May 17, and will be taking walk-in interviews at the Hil-

See SPROUTS, Page 2C

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FEMA

Continued from Page 1C

But unbeknownst to city staff, FEMA had already consulted with Holiday Park and determined it unsuitable as a location because the park – which is a special district – would have had to rewrite its deed restrictions and have the changes approved both by the board of trustees and a majority of its residents.

North Port spokesman Jason Bartolone said via email that, “Based on the latest feedback from FEMA and Holiday Park, the solution for these homeowners that was discussed at last week’s City Commission meeting does not appear to be feasible at this time, so the City Manager is presenting another option for the City Commission to consider.”

“Our Development Services team has worked to develop a solution that meets the residents’ needs, is enforceable and avoids the unintended consequences the commission has discussed publicly.

North Port action in response to Hurricane Ian

- After Hurricane Ian, North Port – like other counties and municipalities hit by the Category 5 storm – took several steps to fast-track cleanup and aid residents.

Instead of declaring a housing emergency – which would empower FEMA to more seamlessly help people whose homes were severely damaged – the commission extended a 30-day window for recreational vehicles to be used in a home’s driveway.

- On April 19, Virginia Rapkin emailed City Commissioner Debbie McDowell about the problem her family, including her husband Jeffrey and their 27-year-old autistic daughter, had using a FEMA-provided RV, because their daughter could not use the child-size bunk beds. She also explained how they could not receive a two-bedroom mobile home, because of city ordinances. Subsequently McDowell asked that the item be placed on the April 25 agenda as a discussion item.

- FEMA officials told the commission on April 25 that at least three North Port families had to use a larger mobile



North Port has refused to allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency to put a two-bedroom mobile home on some properties because of a city ordinance that does not allow manufactured homes on single-family lots.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JEFFREY RAPKIN

home, including the Rapkins and one unnamed family that included a woman who used a wheelchair. City officials declined to take action because it was listed as a discussion item. Though the two FEMA officials were available – and rules did not prohibit an open dialogue – neither city staff nor elected officials asked about alternatives, including whether Holiday Park was an option.

- On April 26, Jeffrey Rapkin, an adoption attorney, filed with the 12th Judicial District asking Judge Danielle Brewer to compel the city to allow FEMA to place a trailer on his property. Brewer ordered on May 8 that North Port either allow the larger mobile home or show why it should not have to do so. So far the only stated reason for the refusal is that the city may have to use its code enforcement authority to compel the removal of privately placed mobile homes once an emergency order is lifted.

- On May 9, city commissioners endorsed the prospect of leaving it up to FEMA to negotiate a solution with Holiday Park – a proposal pitched by city staff even though the advertised item in the agenda was a potential change to the city’s land development code. Members of the Holiday Park explained why that was not practical.

North Port commissioners will ultimately decide whether to approve the resolution. At the same time, city officials must still respond to the order issued by Judge Brewer, though that response would hinge on how the commissioners vote.

FAU poll: Trump is way ahead of DeSantis in Fla.

Antonio Fins
Palm Beach Post
USA TODAY NETWORK

This weekend’s anticipated split-screen Iowa showdown didn’t happen, but another poll showed former President Donald Trump with a commanding lead over Gov. Ron DeSantis. This time in their home state, Florida.

The Florida Atlantic University and Mainstreet Research survey of Republican voters released on May 11 showed Trump with an 18 percentage point lead over DeSantis, 59% to 31%. “Former President Trump continues to be a strong candidate for the Republican nomination and his support appears durable and consistent,” Kevin Wagner, professor of political science at FAU, said in a statement.

The poll was completed April 13-14. While DeSantis has refrained from attacking Trump, the former president has not held back in his salvos against the governor. So much so that Trump’s attacks seem as personal and political.

FAU, Mainstreet poll spots key differences among voters by region, age and on issues

FAU pollsters said the poll revealed differences by regional and age groups and on issues.

Trump leads DeSantis in the Tampa Bay area, by 69% to 22%, in Southwest Florida, by 80% to 7% and Palm Beach County, 65% to 33%. In Northwest Florida, however, the two are tied at 43%.

There also appears to be a generational gap. Trump dominates among voters 50 to 64 years of age, with 66%, but his support plummets to 40% among younger voters, those between the ages of 18 and 34.

Voters responded that the economy is their top issue at 38%, followed by immigration at 18% and abortion at 16%.

Why Trump-DeSantis showdown



Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida speaks at an Iowa Republican Party reception in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on Saturday.

HAIYUN JIANG, NYT

in Iowa didn’t happen

While DeSantis has not announced a 2024 presidential White House run, he crisscrossed Iowa on Saturday sounding very much like a candidate. Trump was also scheduled to hold a rally in Des Moines but in a social-media post he canceled the event, citing a tornado warning.

Trump said he was in Palm Beach “ready to go” but called off the event “because of the very bad weather in Iowa.”

DeSantis, however, spoke as scheduled.

“If we make the 2024 election a referendum on Joe Biden and his failures, and if we provide a positive alternative for the future of this country, Republicans will win across the board,” DeSantis said in one speech. “If we do not do that, if we get distracted, if we focus the election on the past or on other side issues, then I think the Democrats are going to beat us again.”

Antonio Fins is a politics and business editor at the Palm Beach Post, part of the USA TODAY Florida Network. You can reach him at afins@pbpost.com. Help support our journalism. Subscribe today.

Obituaries

TODAY’S DEATH NOTICES

Name	Age	Town, State	Death Date	Arrangements	Service Time	Service Location	Interment
*Morgan, Veronica	-	Gloucester, MA	13-May	Greely Funeral Home, Gloucester, MA	--	-	-
*Naughton, Jr., Walter	84	Sarasota	22-Apr	-	--	-	-

* Additional information in display obituaries
Obituaries appear in print and online at heraldtribune.com/obituaries

Walter Naughton, Jr.

SARASOTA - Walter Richard Naughton, Jr., 84, passed away on April 22, 2023 at HCA Doctor’s Hospital in Sarasota, Florida. He was born on March 19, 1939, in Mount Vernon, New York to Walter Richard Naughton, SR. and Carolyn (Nana) Wass.

Walter grew up in Mount Vernon, New York. He graduated from Concordia Preparatory School in Bronxville, New York in 1956. After high school he attended Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana where he received a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry in 1961. He joined the US Army/National Guard Reserve in 1961 and served for 24 years and retired in 1985 and achieved the rank of Sergeant 1st Class. Walter worked at Scott Paint in Sarasota, FL from 1977 to 2007 and then with Nationwide Coatings, Inc in Bradenton FL from 2007 until 2019.

Walter married Ann Folkening in 1963 in Indianapolis, Indiana. They were happily married for 54 years. Walter was preceded in death by his wife, Ann Naughton and both parents. He is survived by his children Joseph (Lynnette) Naughton of North Port, FL; Douglas Naughton of North Ft Myers, FL, and Peggy Naughton of Sarasota, FL; his grandchildren Elizabeth, Rebecca, Travis, Cody, and Justin; and his great-grandchildren Dominic, Katelyn, Jacob, Maximus, Elijah, Cameron, and Lucas.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Concordia Lutheran Church, 2185 Wood St, Sarasota, FL 34237, on Saturday, June 3, 2023, at 10:00AM.

In lieu of flowers the family requests memorial donations be made to Concordia Lutheran Church.



Veronica Morgan

GLOUCESTER, MA - Veronica Morgan, of Gloucester, MA, passed away peacefully on May 13, 2023 at the Sawtelle Hospice House in Reading, MA.

Veronica was born on July 29, 1938, in Springfield, MA to William and Rhea Morgan. She was an artist from her earliest days, creating an elaborate doll house out of three orange crates and furnishing it with handcrafted miniature appliances and furniture. A highly skilled draftsman and painter, Veronica graduated with a BFA from Tufts University, Medford, MA and a Diploma with Distinction in Commercial Art & Interior Design, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.



Veronica’s career as a space planner and interior designer ranged from work with major hotel corporations and financial firms, to designing the Dunkin Donuts Corporation Headquarters in Randolph, MA; dormitories at Harvard University, several major medical facilities; as well as the ward-rooms of US Carriers Wasp, Essex and Lake Champlain.

A life-long interest in the preservation and restoration of historic architecture led to Veronica’s ownership of several unique properties, including an 1895 Firehouse in Newburyport, MA, the 1740 9-room Colonial: The Countess’ House, Rocks Village, Haverhill, with original Rufus Porter murals, as well as several other properties in Massachusetts. A lot of the actual restoration work she did herself. Nothing was more fun for her than getting down to the bare bones of a building to understand its construction. Her sisters teased her about her slide shows of construction in progress.

Veronica spent many years in Sarasota, FL, where she was a key figure in historical preservation. Her award winning projects there included Florida Avenue Studios: 3 1940-era industrial buildings recycled as workspace for artists. The Luke Wood House: Wood frame 1882 pioneer dwelling, relocated, restored for office use. Crocker Church: 1890 era meeting house, relocated, restored, used for public assembly.

In addition to her preservation work, Veronica was also a gifted watercolor painter and multi-media artist. She will be greatly missed by her family and friends in Massachusetts and Florida.

Veronica is survived by her brother, William Morgan of Georgia, her sisters, Martha Lindsay of Gloucester, MA and Linda Coan of Ipswich, MA, niece, Lisa Abitbol and her husband Christian Pierce of Lexington, MA, nephew, Ian Lindsay of Gloucester, and grand-nephew, Kai Pierce, of Lexington.

According to her wishes there will be no funeral services. Donations in her memory may be made to: Manship Artists Residency, MARS, PO Box 7071, Gloucester, MA 01930 or The Historical Society of Sarasota County, HSoSC, PO Box 1632, Sarasota, FL 34230. Arrangements are by the Greely Funeral Home, 212 Washington St. Gloucester, MA. Online condolences may be given at: www.greelyfuneralhome.com