



# Longboat Key News

January 9, 2026

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## InsideLook



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## Sarasota and Longboat Execute ‘Luxury Reset’ and Challenge Naples Dominance for 2026

*“The quiet hurricane season in 2025 gave our barrier islands the breathing room they needed. We aren’t just ‘open’—we are upgraded.”*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
[sreid@lbnnews.com](mailto:sreid@lbnnews.com)

As the first cold fronts of 2026 push northern travelers south, the tourism economy in Sarasota, St. Armands Circle, and Longboat Key is entering a defining season. Shaping up to be a year of “stabilized optimism,” the region is capitalizing on a quiet 2025 hurricane season and a massive consolidation of luxury inventory to pivot its strategy from volume to value.

While visitor headcounts are

projected to remain strategically “flat”—a deliberate strategy by local tourism officials—economic yield is trending upward. This shift is driven by record-breaking capacity at Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) and a coordinated elevation of the hospitality market that is effectively narrowing the gap with rival destination Naples.

### The ‘Quiet Season’ Dividend

After the volatility of the 2024 hurricane season (Helene and Milton), which caused significant

disruption, the relative calm of late 2025 has been a decisive economic factor. The absence of major storm impacts this past autumn allowed businesses to focus on capital improvements rather than emergency repairs, setting the stage for a confident, high-polish reopening.

“We are seeing what we call a ‘stabilized optimism,’” said a representative from Visit Sarasota County. “The quiet hurricane season in 2025 gave our barrier islands the breathing room they needed.

See **Tourism, page 3**

## Why the 2026 Australian Open Belongs to the New Ruling Class

*The air in Melbourne tastes like ozone, cheap sunscreen, and impending violence.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
[sreid@lbnnews.com](mailto:sreid@lbnnews.com)

The air in Melbourne tastes like ozone, cheap sunscreen, and impending violence. It is January 2026, and the blue courts of Melbourne Park are already radiating a heat that feels less like a weather pattern and more like a personal vendetta from the sun.

As the circus descends on the Yarra, we are witnessing the dawn of the Separation Season. The hierarchy of professional tennis is no longer fluid; it has calcified into a cruel and beautiful binary system.

See **Tennis, page 15**

## Stick Figure Drummer Kevin Offitzer Hosts Meet-and-Greet at Cirque St. Armands

*One of the primary reasons Offitzer left Maryland for Sarasota was the search for a vibrant musical ecosystem.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
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For fans of American reggae, the name Stick Figure is synonymous with a movement.

They are the band that redefined the genre, selling out amphitheaters like Red Rocks and consistently topping the charts. Usually, seeing them requires a ticket to a massive festival and a view from the back of a stadium.

But this January, the “Stick Family” on the Sun Coast is get-

ting a rare, face-to-face opportunity right in their own backyard.

Kevin Offitzer, the 37-year-old rhythmic anchor of the chart-topping juggernaut, will host a special two-day pop-up meet-and-greet at the Cirque St. Armands Beachside Hotel on January 14 and 15, 2026.

While the event offers a chance to shake hands with a world-class musician, it also serves as a welcome party. Offitzer has quietly traded the Pacific swells for the Gulf Coast, moving to Sarasota full-time with

See **Drummer, page 2**



## End of the “Purple War”? Van Wezel Heirs Back New \$300M+ Performing Arts Center as Project Pivots

*For Sarasota’s business community and tourism sector, the stakes are high. A Renzo Piano-designed facility would place Sarasota in an elite tier of global cultural destination.*

The ambitious, often contentious effort to build a world-class performing arts center on Sarasota’s Bayfront has cleared a significant hurdle. Following years of community debate regarding the fate of the city’s iconic, purple-hued landmark, the grandchildren of its original benefactors have officially thrown their support behind the new project.

The announcement marks a pivotal moment for the Sarasota Performing Arts Center (SPAC), a project that has faced headwinds over costs, environmental resilience, and historical preservation.

Dr. Anthony (Tony) Van Wezel Stone and Katherine Van Wezel Stone, Esq., grandchildren of Lewis and Eugenia Van Wezel, issued a statement this week backing the project following months of private negotiations with the Sarasota Performing Arts Foundation. The endorsement effectively neutralizes one of the most potent arguments against the new center—that it would dishonor the family legacy of the original 1969 hall.

“Our Grandfather and his wife, Eugenia, loved Sarasota and believed in the power of the arts to strengthen community,” the family said in a joint statement. “After meeting with the Foundation, we are pleased that the Performing Arts Center project will build on their vision while ensuring our family’s legacy continues to serve our community.”

### The “Purple” Controversy and The Compromise

For the last three years, the project has been mired in a “preservation vs. progress” battle. The original Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, designed by William Wesley Peters of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, is beloved for its quirky, seashell-inspired architecture.

Critics, including the local “Purple Ribbon Committee,” feared the new center would lead to the demolition of the historic hall. However, the agree-

See **Van Wezel, page 4**

**Drummer, from page 1**

his wife and three young children.

**The Kings of American Reggae**

To understand the significance of Offitzer's arrival, one must understand the sheer dominance of Stick Figure. What began as frontman Scott Woodruff's solo DIY recording project has exploded into the undisputed heavyweight champion of the American reggae-rock scene.

For years, the Billboard Reggae Albums chart was immovable, ruled perpetually by the legend himself, Bob Marley. Stick Figure changed the math. They became the only artist to effectively unseat the King, logging historic runs at No. 1 that have turned the industry on its head.

"When we topped the Billboard charts, it was the most amazing, coolest event," Offitzer recalls. "The charts have always been ruled by Bob Marley. To be the artist to unseat the legend is surreal."

Today, Stick Figure is a touring leviathan, commanding a fanatically loyal fanbase that sells out major venues worldwide. Offitzer, who joined in 2012 as the first permanent live member, has been the engine behind this rise, traveling everywhere from Europe and South America to Alaska and Hawaii to bring the music to the masses.

**Chasing the Sun to Sarasota**

Offitzer's journey to Sarasota was driven by a simple, non-negotiable need: light. Originally from California, Offitzer and his wife—a Maryland native—initially settled in her home state.

"I needed sunshine. I'm from California," Offitzer explained. While his wife's parents had long frequented Sarasota, the drummer didn't need to "discover" the city so much as surrender to it. Once he visited, he fell in love.

Now, the Offitzer family—including kids aged seven, five, and 15 months—are local fixtures. When not on tour, they can often be found taking "barefoot hikes" through the scrub at Oscar Scherer State Park, embracing a lifestyle that mirrors the "Sun Soaked" vibes of the music.

**From "Rambunctious" Kid to the Big Leagues**

Offitzer's path to the global stage began at age nine, when he became obsessed with the drums. Growing up in Southern California, he describes himself as a "hybrid of discipline and rambunctiousness".

He had a massive advantage at home: his father was a bass player.

"In many ways, he's the equivalent of a baseball dad, and I'm the kid who made it into the big leagues," Offitzer said. His parents were endlessly supportive, providing a home large enough for a dedicated music room where he could hone the skills that would eventually take him around the world.

"The drum is the heart," Offitzer says. "Historically, it is the basis of music."

**The Art of Restraint (and Speed)**

While Stick Figure requires Offitzer to exercise "restraint and leaving space" within the deep pocket of reggae, the drummer hasn't lost his roots in punk and metal.

"I started off playing as fast as I could play," he admits. To satisfy that need for speed, he is also a member of Algorithm, a three-person group (plus their manager, whom he calls the "fourth member") that specializes in high-energy festival after-parties. It is there that he unleashes the full, rapid-fire arsenal of his drumming.

But whether playing fast or slow, his focus remains the same: the crowd. "All I ever wanted to do was be in a band on tour," he said. "I wanted to see the world."

**Building a Local Music Community**

One of the primary reasons Offitzer left Maryland for Sarasota was the search for a vibrant musical ecosystem. "There was really a lack of access to a music community there," he noted.

In Sarasota, he has found the opposite. He says the local scene is "great," and he has wasted no time diving in, playing gigs everywhere from Fort Myers to Anna Maria Island. Whether on a world tour or at home, he is also dedicated to the next generation, giving countless music lessons both online and in person.

**Event Details: Up Close & Personal**

Hosted at the hotel's retro-chic Midway Lounge, this rare appearance is strictly a meet-and-greet engagement—a chance to talk music, get an autograph, and meet the man behind the kit without the barrier of a stage.

- Dates: Wednesday, Jan. 14 & Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026

- Time: 4:00 PM EST

- Location: Cirque St. Armands Beachside (233 Benjamin Franklin Dr, Lido Key)

- Activities: Meet-and-greet, photo ops, and drumstick signing.

To learn more about Kevin's latest art projects, tour updates, and local adventures, you can follow him on Instagram at @koffitzer.



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# Infrastructure Upgrades Begin on St. Armands Artery Despite Concerns

*Commuters and residents traversing the John Ringling Causeway—the primary artery connecting downtown Sarasota to the barrier islands—are facing a new logistical reality this week.*

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has commenced the first of two significant infrastructure projects along State Road 789.

While the initiatives promise long-term improvements in drainage and multi-modal transit, their launch coincides with the height of Sarasota's tourist season, prompting scrutiny regarding the timing.

Here is an analysis of the impending changes and the long-term objectives for the corridor.

## Project I: The Causeway Overhaul

### Scope and Timeline:

Budgeted at \$12.3 million, this primary initiative focuses on the stretch between Sunset Drive and Bird Key Drive. Preliminary mobilization began on January 5, with full completion projected for early 2027.

### Strategic Objectives:

According to FDOT filings, the project aims to reduce travel friction and enhance climate resilience. Key components include:

- Multi-Modal Expansion: The addition of dedicated bicycle and transit lanes on the Ringling Causeway Bridge to alleviate vehicular congestion.
- Flood Mitigation: Raising the seawall cap near Sunset Drive and upgrading drainage systems to address chronic flooding at the bridge's base—a topographic low point notoriously susceptible to rain events.
- Signalization: Installation of new traffic signals at Sunset, Golden Gate, and Bird Key Drives.

### Operational Impact:

While current lane configurations remain temporarily intact, drivers should anticipate significant shifts:

- Speed Limit Reduction: The speed limit on Gulfstream Avenue and John Ringling Causeway has been lowered to 35 mph.
- Strict Enforcement: Fines are doubled within the construction zone.
- Schedule: Work will occur primarily during daylight hours, though occasional nighttime operations (9 p.m. to 7 a.m.) are scheduled.

## Project II: St. Armands Circle Traffic Calming

### Scope and Timeline:

Beginning January 13, a secondary, short-term project will address safety within St. Armands Circle itself.

Crews will replace the existing modular speed humps—which have caused pavement distress over time—with permanent asphalt speed tables. The goal is to create a smoother, more predictable environment for pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

To mitigate disruption to the commercial district, this work is restricted to overnight hours (9 p.m. to 7 a.m.). The process, including curing time for the asphalt, is expected to span approximately 12 days, weather permitting.

The commencement of heavy civil engineering work during January—when the local population swells with seasonal residents and tourists—has drawn sharp criticism from the public.

City officials, however, argue that the project's scale necessitates a year-round schedule. In correspondence regarding the timeline, City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch noted that the duration of the project (projected at one year) made overlapping with "season" unavoidable. She emphasized that the drainage improvements are critical, noting that the roadway floods severely during rain events, and that the redesign is essential for future traffic flow efficiency.

Drivers are advised to utilize FL511.com for real-time updates and to exercise heightened caution as the corridor undergoes this substantial transformation.

## Tourism, from page 1

We aren't just 'open'—we are upgraded."

### Aviation: The SRQ Boom

The strongest indicator of a healthy season comes from the tarmac. Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) has shattered previous records, with passenger traffic for the 2025 calendar year projecting to hit an all-time high of 4.5 million passengers, a massive leap from the 1.9 million seen in pre-pandemic 2019.

Data indicates that while drive-market traffic has softened slightly, fly-in traffic is surging. March 2025 set the tone early as the busiest month in the airport's history (up nearly 8% year-over-year), and carriers have responded by maintaining capacity. The opening of the new five-gate Concourse A has been instrumental in handling this influx, facilitating new nonstop routes that are feeding high-spending visitors directly into Longboat and Lido Key resorts.

### Market Consolidation: The Walsh Family Portfolio

The most significant structural shift in the local market is the dominance of the Opal Collection, owned by the Walsh family (Ocean Properties). Their portfolio now controls the premier inventory across Longboat and Lido Keys, creating a "resort corridor" that allows for coordinated yield management similar to corporate strategies seen in major urban centers.

By controlling the "Opal" assets on both keys, the group ensures that revenue stays within the same ecosystem, regardless of the traveler profile:

- The Resort at Longboat Key Club: Continuing as the volume and revenue anchor for the islands, this property has leveraged substantial renovations to its golf and marina facilities to attract corporate groups and extended-stay wealth, moving beyond the traditional vacationer.
- Zota Beach Resort: On Longboat Key, Zota has successfully pivoted to a contemporary boutique model. Since rebranding from a Hilton property, it is commanding rates competitive with top-tier Miami hotels, capitalizing on new nonstop flights from New York and Boston.
- Lido Beach Resort: Positioning itself as the premium family-centric option, this property is benefiting heavily from the spillover of the nearby St. Armands Circle renaissance.
- The Newcomer: Cirque St. Armands Beachside Hotel: The most buzzed-about addition is the Cirque St. Armands, which opened in early 2025. Now entering its first full peak season, the 135-room property pays homage to Sarasota's Ringling circus heritage with Art Deco design. It fills a critical market gap for travelers seeking high-end "city-style" lodging within walking distance of the Circle's dining scene.

### Longboat Key: The "St. Regis Effect"

Complementing the Walsh portfolio is the headline driver for the 2026 season: the St. Regis Longboat Key Resort. With room rates frequently exceeding \$1,000 per night, the property is generating outsized returns on the county's 6% Tourist Development Tax (the "bed tax").

"One suite at the St. Regis can generate the same tax revenue as a dozen budget rooms elsewhere," noted a local hospitality analyst. This "luxury shift" allows the region to maintain economic impact numbers without overcrowding the beaches—a key goal for sustainable tourism in the county.

### St. Armands Circle: A Commercial Renaissance

The commercial hub of St. Armands Circle is entering the busy season with fresh concepts that signal a complete recovery from past storm damage.

- Nōnnō Umberto (formerly Le Colonne): In a symbolic win for the Circle, the longstanding Italian staple Le Colonne reopened in January 2026 under the new name Nōnnō Umberto. The reopening, led by the next generation of the founding family, drew over 800 diners in its opening week, signaling strong pent-up demand.

- Tommy Bahama: After suffering storm damage, the iconic retailer and restaurant reinvested rather than retreating. The brand has reopened in a prominent new location (formerly the Shore restaurant space), upgrading its footprint and reaffirming confidence in the Circle's commercial viability.

### Regional Competitiveness: Sarasota vs. Naples

For the 2026 fiscal year, the Sarasota-Longboat cluster is aggressively challenging Naples for the Gulf Coast's luxury market share. While Naples still commands the highest Average Daily Rate (ADR) in the region, Sarasota is winning on demographic shifts and accessibility.

- The Vibe Shift: Naples remains the epicenter of "refined tranquility" and golf-centric retirement wealth. In contrast, Sarasota is capturing the "active affluent"—travelers aged 40-60 who prioritize cultural density (opera, ballet, nightlife) alongside beach access.

• Logistics: The expansion of SRQ gives Sarasota a distinct advantage over Naples, which relies heavily on Fort Myers (RSW) for commercial traffic. The "convenience premium" of flying directly into Sarasota is allowing hotels to push rates higher.

- Product Diversity: The ability to pair a resort stay at the Longboat Key Club with the urban walkability of St. Armands (anchored by the Cirque hotel) provides a dual-experience value proposition that the more singular Naples market lacks.

### Forecast: Value Over Volume

Heading into February and March—the traditional peak of the "snowbird" season—bookings remain strong for premium inventory. While budget travel faces headwinds from inflation, the Sarasota region's pivot toward an affluent demographic appears to be insulating it from broader economic slowdowns.

"The recovery is in the rearview mirror," said a St. Armands business owner. "We are now in growth mode."

The strategy appears to be working. Sarasota and Longboat Key have successfully moved up-market, shedding the "budget beach" image for a polished, resort-driven identity led by the Opal Collection.

"We aren't trying to be Naples," said one Longboat Key general manager. "Naples is where you go to retire. Sarasota is where you go to live."

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**Van Wezel, from page 1**

ment with the Van Wezel family codifies a “dual-venue” strategy.

According to the family, discussions led to an appreciation that the project is now an “evolving concept” where the historic hall “will continue to serve the City as a venue for the arts in harmony with and alongside the new Performing Arts Center.”

Tania Castroverde Moskalenko, CEO of the Sarasota Performing Arts Foundation, confirmed this pivot toward a “unified cultural campus.” She stated the Foundation is prepared to steward multiple venues, with the original hall hosting specific artistic performances and educational opportunities, while the new center handles large-scale Broadway productions and contemporary acoustics.

**“Concept 2.0”**

The family’s support comes as the project undergoes a significant structural and financial “right-sizing,” dubbed Concept 2.0.

Following a pivotal and tense City Commission meeting on March 17, 2025, city leaders demanded the project align more closely with financial realities and environmental concerns. The original concepts presented by the Pritzker Prize-winning architecture firm Renzo Piano Building Workshop were criticized by some segments of the public for potential cost overruns and placement vulnerabilities.

**Key changes in Concept 2.0 include:**

- Relocation: The new center moves to the south side of the Centennial Park canal. This shifts the building away from the most vulnerable flood zones—a critical adjustment following the storm surge anxieties raised during the 2024 and 2025 hurricane seasons.

- Cost & Capacity Alignment: The project has been recalibrated to match the seating capacity and budget constraints of the original 2023 Request for Proposal (RFP). While exact figures for the new concept are pending a spring reveal, the project is targeting a budget in the \$275 million to \$300 million range, funded through a 50/50 public-private partnership.

- Resiliency: The new design prioritizes “climate-adaptive” architecture, essential for a major capital asset sitting on the Gulf Coast waterfront.

**The Financial Outlook**

The Sarasota Performing Arts Foundation is tasked with raising the private half of the funding, a massive capital campaign that required the Van Wezel family’s blessing to proceed

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effectively.

“More than 50 years ago, Lewis and Eugenia Van Wezel gave Sarasota a gift that shaped its cultural identity,” said Moskalenko. “Today, Tony and Katherine are ensuring their family legacy lives on through a new, inclusive, and resilient Performing Arts Center.”

The City of Sarasota’s portion of the funding relies largely on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenue generated by rising property values in the district surrounding The Bay park. With the family dispute resolved and the location settled, the Foundation and City anticipate releasing updated renderings and financial models later this spring.

**Next Steps**

The Van Wezel family has committed to participating in upcoming engagement efforts, including the “Center Stage Conversations” series, to rally public support.

For Sarasota’s business community and tourism sector, the stakes are high. A Renzo Piano-designed facility would place Sarasota in an elite tier of global cultural destinations, potentially rivaling the architectural draw of museums and halls in Miami and Los Angeles. However, keeping the budget in check while maintaining two aging waterfront facilities (the new center and the historic hall) will be the City Commission’s next major challenge.

“Their support reflects a shared belief in honoring our legacies while embracing our future,” Moskalenko added, signaling that for the first time in years, the project is moving forward with a unified front.

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# EditorLetters



Longboat Key News and Sarasota City News encourages Letters to the Editor on timely issues. Please email to: [letters@lbknews.com](mailto:letters@lbknews.com) or mail to PO Box 8001, Longboat Key, FL 34228. We also print letters sent to Town Hall that address Longboat Key issues. We reserve the right to edit.

## E-bikes on our Sidewalk

To: Editor

The town needs to figure out how to keep E-Bikes away from pedestrians and bicyclists that use the ONLY sidewalk on the island along Gulf of Mexico Drive. It's a gem of our town.

E-Bikes are becoming more popular all the time, and their speed and weight can be deadly when in collision with pedestrians and regular bicycles.

One suggestion on how to deal with this while we wait for the enhanced roadway scenario:

Create a speed limit on the sidewalk 5 - 10 mph and enforce it with fines. The police on patrol have excellent visibility and access to the sidewalk.

Stacie Steinke

Owner, Windward Bay

## Briefing Offer

To: Longboat Key Commissioner-elect Nicholas Gladding

Good morning, Nick! It's January and we're fully back in the swing of things and looking forward to a busy season. If you would like to be included in the agenda briefing process prior to you being sworn in in March, just let us know and we'll work to schedule you into our briefing schedule. You certainly don't have to do anything prior to taking your seat, but we just wanted to give you the option in case you felt it will help you in your preparation.

Just let us know and we can schedule something over the phone or in person.

Howard N. Tipton

Town Manager

Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

Wow, great news, hoping for the best.

Gary Coffin

Commissioner

Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

Interesting development to your question. We'll keep you posted on what the analysis shows but could be really good news.

Howard Tipton

Town Manager

Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

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Tip, could be a huge savings and a bunch less impact to the community. We will keep you updated after the discovery process. Either way, we would still target the end of April/May to move forward with the next steps (outside of season).

Charles Mopps

Public Works Director

Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

The short answer is that we were initially planning to start this project in April 2026. As you know, this project is very important to the town because it concerns the last of the AC pipe on the island.

During our discussions and when reviewing the current As-Builts, we discovered that the AC pipe from the 1970s may have been upgraded to C900 plastic pipe. I want to note that C900 is a standard type of pipe used in water distribution systems, recognized industry wide.

To confirm this, we are currently in the process of field verification. We have conducted vacuum excavations on a few streets and have found evidence of the updated C900 pipe.

We expect to have more definitive information within the next month, which will help us determine the best course of action moving forward. If it turns out that the entire system, or at least the sections we've examined, are indeed made of C900 pipe, this would be a significant advantage for the town. It could mean that we only need to replace the water services rather than the entire water system within those streets. I will keep Charlie updated as the exploration and verification process continues.

Jessie Camburn

Utilities Manager Public Works Department

Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Public Works Director Charlie Mopps

Hoping you can help with an answer. Thank you.

Howard N. Tipton

Town Manager

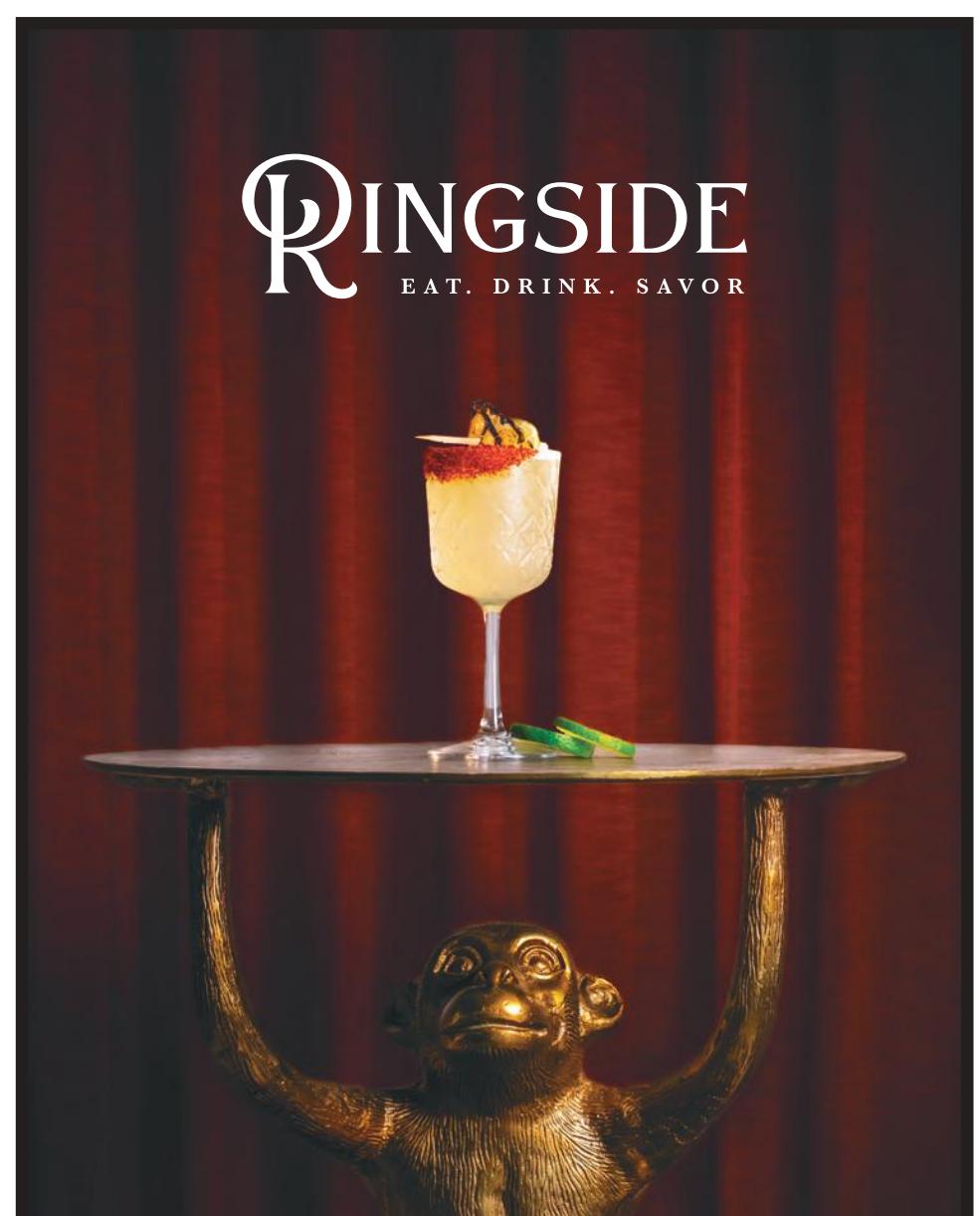
Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

Tip, A neighbor stopped by yesterday regarding the timing or start date of the construction

**See Letters, page 6**



**Sarasota's Newest Dining Spectacle - Now Open!**

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# Editor Letters



## Letters, from page 5

for the Country Club Shores phases 1 & 2 and 3 water main project. I know it's on our strategic plans initiatives to begin this year, just wondering if we have a closer date.

Gary Coffin  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

Wow, great news, hoping for the best.

Gary Coffin  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

Interesting development to your question. We'll keep you posted on what the analysis shows but could be really good news.

Howard Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Jessie Camburn

Tip, could be a huge savings and a bunch less impact to the community. We will keep you updated after the discovery process. Either way we would still target the end of April/May to move forward with the next steps (outside of season).

Charles Mopps  
Public Works Director  
Town of Longboat Key

## Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Public Works Director Charlie Mopps

Hoping you can help with an answer. Thank you.

Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

Country Club Shores water line project

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Charlie Mopps

Tip, A neighbor stopped by yesterday regarding the timing or start date of the construction for the Country Club Shores phases 1 & 2 and 3 water main project. I know it's on our strategic plans initiatives to begin this year, just wondering if we have a closer date.

Gary Coffin  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## To: Vicki Morton

I received information from our Public Works Director concerning the sidewalk problem. It appears the damage is the result of some Comcast work. The department is on it.

Also, the newest Tip Talk video, featuring Police Chief Maher, is devoted to e-bike and sidewalk safety. This is being released Town-wide. I've included a copy of the release and link to the video below:

[View the full video here: Tip Talk Featuring Police Chief Russ Mager](#)

With increased activity on our sidewalks and multi-use paths, this short video serves as a helpful reminder of key safety guidelines designed to keep everyone safe:

- The speed limit on sidewalks and multi-use paths is 10 MPH.
- Bicyclists and riding equipment should keep right and pass on the left.
- Riders are asked to ring a bell when passing pedestrians or other cyclists.
- All riders should reduce speed and use due care at intersections, especially near sudden driveways and potentially blind crossings.
- For faster-moving e-bikes and equipment, please consider using the designated bicycle lane on Gulf of Mexico Drive, while remaining mindful of roadway hazards such as parked vehicles or vehicles entering traffic.

Additionally, as a friendly reminder for e-bike owners, we would like to share a few tips on the proper care of lithium batteries in our island's salt and saltwater environment. Recommendations include proper elevation and storage, or preferably, not leaving lithium-powered devices on the island during extended absences.

Penny Gold  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Longboat Key sidewalk issues

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold

Ma'am, Julie got the response from FDOT already.

**See Letters, page 12**

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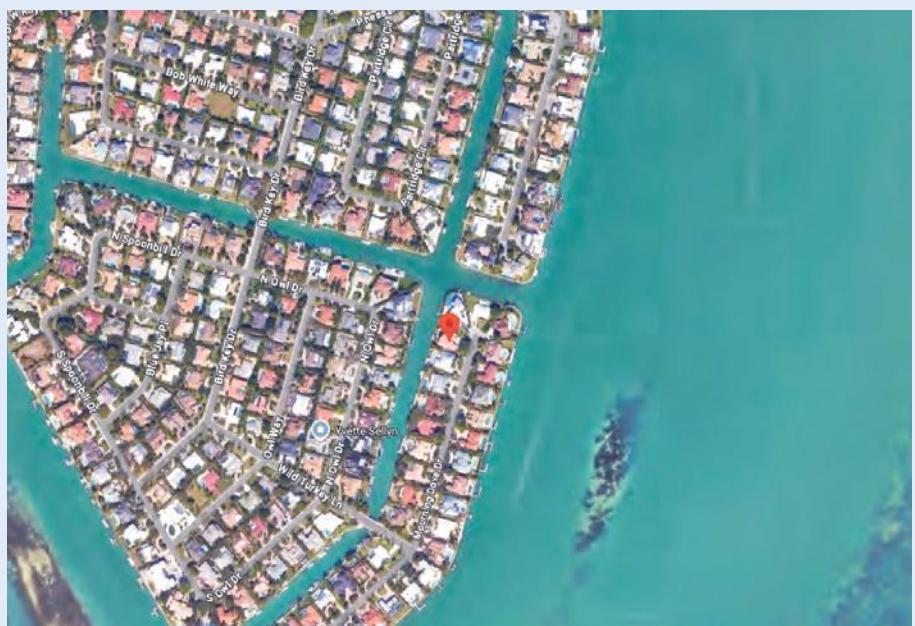


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# KeyRealEstate

## Bird Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key latest sales

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath	Days On Market	Sale Price
604 MOURNING DOVE DR	5,240	\$5,295,000	5 5 0	22	\$5,100,000
2333 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#1A2	3,060	\$4,500,000	3 2 1	217	\$4,300,000
655 LONGBOAT CLUB RD Unit#16B	3,139	\$4,250,000	3 3 1	48	\$3,875,000
560 SCHOONER LN	3,666	\$3,500,000	4 3 1	242	\$3,310,000
435 L AMBIANCE DR Unit#K506	2,820	\$3,299,000	3 3 1	12	\$3,100,000
535 SANCTUARY DR Unit#A602	2,580	\$2,599,000	3 2 1	225	\$2,300,000
1281 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#906	2,655	\$2,495,000	2 3 0	221	\$2,200,000
4241 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#202	1,660	\$1,350,000	3 2 1	117	\$1,150,000
691 LINLEY ST	1,820	\$1,200,000	2 2 1	235	\$915,000
1465 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#402	1,668	\$999,000	2 2 0	51	\$890,000
4234 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#H1	1,150	\$695,000	2 2 0	11	\$695,000



604 MOURNING DOVE DR



JEFF  
RHINELANDER

941-685-3590

Jeff@jeffrhinelander.com

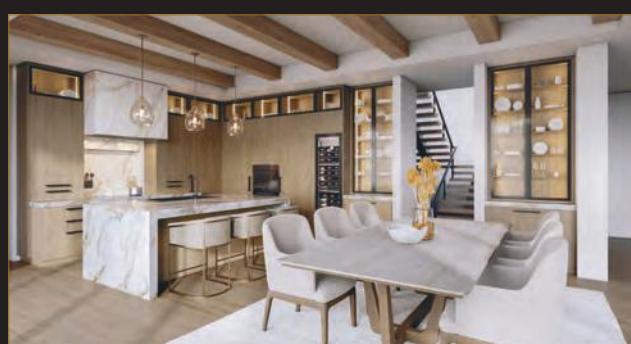


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3BR/2BA/1HB • \$4,795,000

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259 Robin Drive  
3BR/3FB/2HB • FULL BAYFRONT • \$8,900,000



BEACHES • LONGBOAT KEY  
775 Longboat Club Rd #203  
3BR/3BA • Gulffront • \$1,999,000



COUNTRY CLUB SHORES • LONGBOAT KEY  
510 Wedge Lane  
4BR/3BA • Canal front • \$2,215,000



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KEPECZ  
HAYS  
Team



Leah  
George  
941-780-0597



Judy  
Kepcz-Hays  
941-587-1700



Steven  
Kepcz  
941-376-6411

### Casa del Carnevale on St. Armands



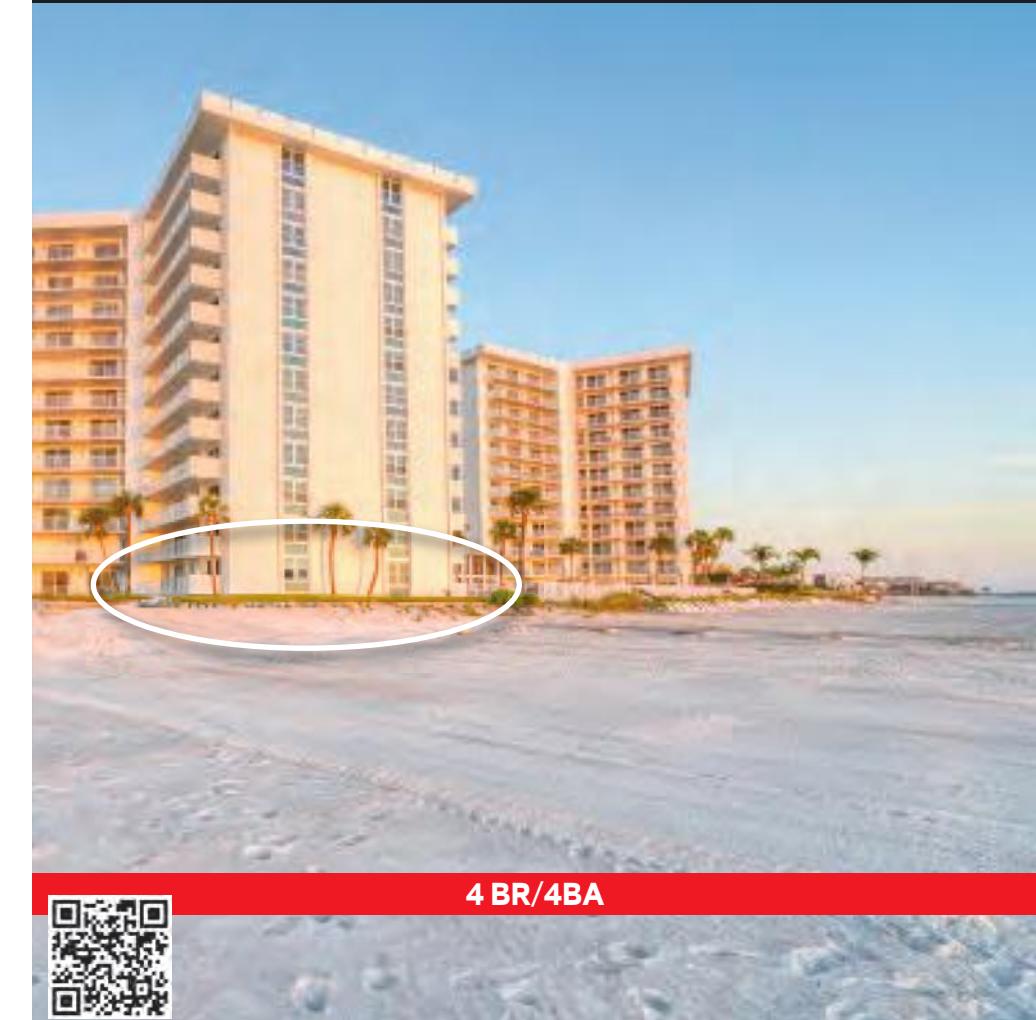
139 S Washington Drive  
\$16,850,000  
[CasaDelCarnevale.com](http://CasaDelCarnevale.com)

### Hideaway Bay



757 Hideaway Bay Drive  
\$7,488,000  
[757HideawayBay.com](http://757HideawayBay.com)

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415 L'Ambiance Drive #B202  
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### Tangerine Bay Club



350 Gulf of Mexico Drive #211  
\$938,500  
[Tangerine211.com](http://Tangerine211.com)

### Longboat Key Towers



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### Promenade



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### Golden Gate Point



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\$849,000  
[MarinaView32.com](http://MarinaView32.com)

# On Patrol



The following are actual police reports as written by Longboat Key Police Officers. They are edited for length, punctuation and to protect privacy.

## Jan. 2

### Alarm

Officer Van Dyke responded to Bay Isles Parkway in reference to a duress alarm. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke and Officer Pescuma approached the business from the rear, no indication of a disturbance was observed. Upon approaching the business from the front entrance, Officer Van Dyke was met at the door with a woman dressed in a Publix uniform stating that she just opened the store and didn't realize an alarm was triggered. A canvass of the interior and exterior property was conducted to ensure the validity of the incident. Nothing unusual was observed during the canvas. Therefore, the alarm appeared to be accidental.



## Vehicle

3:24 p.m.

Officer Pescuma responded to the 4400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to an abandoned vehicle in a parking spot. Upon arriving on scene, Officer Pescuma located the vehicle with a Kentucky license plate. Officer Pescuma conducted an FCIC/NCIC query on the vehicle in which it did not come back as stolen. Officer Pescuma notified the caller and HOA staff member and advised the same. The man stated that the vehicle is parked in another homeowner's assigned parking space and the association will tow it since it is on private property. Officer Pescuma was able to locate the owner who is a guest at one of the condominiums and will be returning in a couple of weeks. The vehicle was accidentally parked in the wrong assigned spot. Case clear.

## Jan. 3

### Vehicle

5:15 p.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to Bayview Drive in reference to a suspicious vehicle. The caller reported two or three vessels in the canal behind his residence and the occupants were drinking and fishing. While enroute, Officer Troyer contacted the complainant by phone and he only had questions about the legality of the occupants being in the canals, and did not wish for him to respond. Based upon what the complainant reported, Officer Troyer did not hear any statements to believe any crime was committed and the occupants were engaged in lawful fishing activities. Case clear.

## Trespassing

9:30 p.m.

Officer Troyer while on patrol observed people on a closed golf course. Having recent trespassing calls from the same location referencing fishermen trespassing, this was the incident occurring. The resort security officer was contacted and he investigated the incident. The security officer was able to get the men off the property. Officer Troyer observed the two vehicles parked at the gas station with fishing poles in them. Officer Troyer believed this to be the violators vehicles. Eventually the men all showed up at the vehicles and were identified. Security Officer from the resort informed Officer Troyer he did wish for the three men to be trespass forever. Officer Troyer completed three trespass warnings issued to the men on behalf of the resort. Officer Troyer also explained to the men the meaning of the trespass warnings and how they could not return to the property. All the men left the area after receiving their trespass warnings without incident. Officer Troyer contacted the dispatch center and advised them to enter the trespass warnings. Case clear.

## Jan. 4

### Property

12:55 p.m.

Officer Van Dyke responded to Bayou Sound in reference to a woman who advised she thinks she left her driver's license on an American Airlines flight. Officer Van Dyke provided her with the state's website for issuing replacement for her driver's license. Additionally, she

advised that she had already contacted American Airlines and Sarasota/Bradenton Airport regarding the property. Additionally, the item was last seen outside of Longboat Key jurisdiction therefore, no property has been added to this case and no further investigation. Case clear.

## Jan. 5

### Trespassing

3:00 p.m.

Officer Martinson was dispatched to the police department on a call of a trespass. Upon arrival, Officer Martinson was met by the complainant inside the front lobby and he stated that on Jan. 3, he was

doing some home construction work inside his condominium unit. He said that at 12 noon he left the unit with the door closed but unlocked and went to the hardware store for supplies, and when he returned at 3 p.m. he found the door open and his neighbor inside his unit. The complainant stated he confronted the man about why he was inside his unit and the man said he heard construction noise and believed it was workers doing work on the weekend which is not allowed. The complainant said he yelled at the man and told him to leave and never enter his property again. The man apologized to the complainant for entering his unit and left without further incident. The complainant stated he did not want the man trespass from his property and only wanted the incident documented. Case clear.

## Vehicle

6:30 p.m.

Sgt. Smith responded to the beach in reference to a suspicious vehicle complaint. Dispatch advised that a woman called and reported a vehicle had turned around and shined a light in her direction while she was walking on the beach. Upon arrival, Sgt. Smith made contact with the caller who advised that the vehicle did not approach her, no words were exchanged and no criminal activity occurred. The caller stated she was concerned due to the light being shined in her direction but did not report any further suspicious behavior. Sgt. Smith conducted a check of the surrounding area and did not observe any suspicious vehicles, persons or activity. No suspects were located and no further action was required. Case clear.

## Jan. 6

### Property

11:28 a.m.

Officer Zunz responded to the front lobby of the police department with a request to file a lost property report for an item lost while on vacation. As the person is now at home in Georgia, Sgt. Puccio instructed Officer Zunz to take the report over the phone. The man advised that he and his wife spent this past holiday weekend at the moorings. He believes that his wife lost her bracelet on the evening of Jan. 2 when she went over to say goodbye to friends staying at a neighboring slip. The bracelet is described as a 14 k/white gold ladies tennis bracelet, with a diamond weight of 15 carats. The subject stated it has an insured value of \$9,000 for the bracelet. Case clear.

## Jan. 7

### Citizen assist

12:05 p.m.

Officer Barrett while on patrol observed a woman aboard a white sailboat that was anchored just east of the Linley Street boat ramp and it appeared to be a live aboard vessel. Officer Barrett approached the vessel and asked her if she lived on the vessel and if the vessel was hers. She advised that the vessel was owned by her friend. She telephoned the man and placed the phone on speaker. Officer Barret identified himself and advised that live aboard vessels could only be stationary for 72 hours within a 30-day period and that he was in violation of Longboat Key Town Ordinance. The man advised that he could not move the vessel at this time, but advised he would work on it. Officer Barret warned the man that he needed to comply with the town ordinance or he would be cited. Case clear.

## Jan. 7

### Citizen Assist

5:33 p.m.

Officer Van Dyke was dispatched to the 200 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive to a citizen assist call. Officer Van Dyke called the complainant and she advised that sewage belonging to the restaurant is backing up into her business but they refused to cooperate. According to the complainant, staff from the restaurant is pouring grease down the drains. Officer Van Dyke then called the restaurant and spoke to the manager who advised that his staff has no responsibility for the sewage but the landlord is aware of the situation and actively sending contractors to work on the issue. Officer Van Dyke advised the woman that the incident is a civil issue therefore she should contact the court system. The woman advised that she will be contacting the EPA regarding the matter. Case clear.

## Jan. 8

### Citizen assist

5:35 p.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to the police department regarding a lost backpack with a driver's license inside. The complainant was not in the State of Florida anymore. Upon contacting the complainant by phone, the woman reported the couple last saw their black backpack at the Linley Street boat ramp. The woman said they were currently back in Ohio and were curious if their backpack was turned in. Officer Troyer spoke with Officer Pescuma on dayshift, whom reported there was nothing turned in. Case clear.



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# WineTimes



## Drink Less But Drink Better

*Observers of trends in the alcoholic beverage sector have no illusions about the headwinds their industry is facing.*

**S.W. and Rich Hermansen**

**Guest Writers**

wine@lbknews.com

Observers of trends in the alcoholic beverage sector have no illusions about the headwinds their industry is facing. Tariffs are forcing exporters and importers alike to look for new markets. US exporters have lost the lucrative Canadian market. Importers of European Union wines and liqueurs are being priced out of the market. Long term trends show decreased volumes of alcoholic beverages sold. Dry January resolutions in the 2026 New Year have taken a bite out of 2026 sales. Health risks of moderate and heavy drinking have raised concerns among young women, senior citizens, and automobile drivers. The drinks and dinner with wine evenings of the pandemic years have reverted to workouts and early evening events followed by sober drives home for the night.

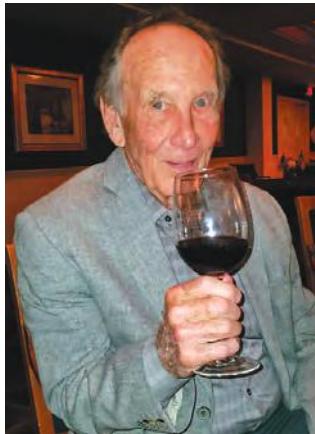
The strategies for the alcoholic beverage industry going forward seem inclined to compensate for lower volumes of sales by shifting consumers to better quality beverages at higher prices. Here's how that might work.

Take sales of spirits such as Scotch, Kentucky Bourbon, or Tennessee whiskey as an example. These classic spirits as a rule have a higher proof (ABV – Alcohol by Volume) than cheaper alternatives. Drinkers of these spirits may pay more per bottle than buyers of cheaper bottles, but, as we learned while in bars in Scotland and watching locals, diluting a single malt Scotch with about one-third cool water not only increases the volume of the drink but also enhances the taste of the whiskey. One may drink less whiskey but drink better following this practice of people who know best from a long tradition of Scotch and water, barrel-aged Bourbon and Branch, and "Whiskey in my water" as famously recommended in the country song "Tennessee Whiskey", by David Allan Coe and made popular by George Jones and Chris Stapleton.

Buyers of supermarket lower price tier white wines have to realize that high local, state, and federal taxes on wines, increased even more by tariffs, mean that buying a good but cheap Chenin Blanc or Pinot Gris/Grigio and mixing it with Topo Chico sparkling mineral water or another non-alcoholic soda will reduce the amount of alcohol consumed and make a better drink. Wine from authentic wine producers will taste better even if mixed with sparkling water or fruit drinks.

Of course, the strategy of buying better wines and drinking less of them will help reduce health risks and increase pleasure. If that proves difficult, try exploring high quality wines that have not become popular as yet. Australian Shiraz and Grenache blends, South African Chenin Blanc, and German Pinot Noir come to mind. Drink better but less, my friends.

*S. W. Hermansen has used his expertise in econometrics, data science and epidemiology to help develop research databases for the Pentagon, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Agriculture, and Health Resources and Services. He has visited premier vineyards and taste wines from major appellations in California, Oregon, New York State, and internationally from Tuscany and the Piedmont in Italy, the Ribera del Duero in Spain, the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale in Australia, and the Otago Valley in New Zealand. Currently he splits time between residences in Chevy Chase, Maryland and St. Armand's Circle in Florida.*



*Rich Hermansen selected his first wine list for a restaurant shortly after graduating from college with a degree in Mathematics. He has extensive service and management experience in the food and wine industry. Family and friends rate him as their favorite chef, bartender, and wine steward. He lives in Severna Park, Maryland.*

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# Editor Letters



## Letters, from page 6

"Hello Julie,

I just received an email from my team who investigated this. They have said it appears it was done by a utility contractor as the pull box looks new and we are trying to coordinate with the utility company (Comcast) to get this resolved as they would be the responsible party for repairs because they caused the damage.

My team has been asked to timestamp pictures and contact any vehicles they see parked on the sidewalk to please remove them as they would be reasonable for any damage and repairs.

Would you be willing to pass this information along to see if the town would help with vehicles on the sidewalk as it could help us both on this matter going forward."

If we get anything further we will pass it along.

Charles Mopps  
Public Works Director  
Town of Longboat Key

## Longboat Key sidewalk issues

To: Longboat Key Public Works Director Charlie Mopps

Please let me know how FDOT responds, so I may get back to Ms. Morton in a timely manner.

Thank you!  
Penny Gold  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Longboat Key sidewalk issues

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman

Thanks sir, Julie will pass it on to our FDOT contact.

Charles Mopps, PMP  
Public Works Director  
Town of Longboat Key

## Longboat Key sidewalk issues

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold

We are owners at Seaplace and often go bike riding on the sidewalk to the north end of the Key. We noticed a significant issue at 4000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. There is a split

in the sidewalk the entire width and it drops off a couple of inches into some sand. It is very dangerous if you are not expecting it. It would also be good to post the maximum speed limit as we noticed a few electric bikers flying by, which I am sure were faster than the 10 mile an hour maximum. Thank you for your service.

Vicki Morton  
Longboat Key

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Project

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin  
Good Morning, Gary. Happy New Year!

Check out our updated pool and deck work, post hurricanes, image attached. Thank you for your help in that permit process. We have so many great things happening at Sea Horse. We were recently on the 6 p.m. news on Fox Tampa.

I'm forwarding you an email which my boss sent to Neil Mazzeo. We're planning to do some balcony construction, in stages, at the Sea Horse.

Any assistance you can give would be amazing.  
Thank you!  
Christine Rothberg  
Longboat Key

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Project

To: Mr. Mazzei & Ms. Klahr

Your office has been helpful to us in the past, and we are reaching out again for advice and assistance on another Sea Horse building project.

### Background

The Sea Horse Beach Resort (via licensed contractor) is preparing a permit application for reconstruction work on its building. The permit will be for the demolition of the existing second floor concrete balconies and replacement with a steel framed structure. The existing balconies date back to the building's original construction and are in need of a modern facelift.

The plan is to complete reconstruction over time, allowing the Sea Horse to remain open during the project and to raise the required funding. The balconies follow the exterior walls of the building, divided into 6 separate sections. The project would be split into 6 consecutive phases – one for each balcony section.

Since Hurricane Helene, the Sea Horse has had one significant project after another, and thus is hopeful to receive approval to move forward on this project as quickly as possible. The cumulative projects have had a significant impact on rental business, and the goal is to minimize the impact going forward.

### Request

Please provide guidance for: 1) obtaining the required approvals for Phase One demolition as quickly as possible (followed reasonably soon thereafter with the re-build), and 2) splitting the remaining project in phases. We are anxious to get started with demolition because it will have the biggest impact (primarily noise) on visiting guests. We would like to complete the demolition before the peak rental season, which begins in about a month.

We look forward to hearing from you. I will be at the Sea Horse until January 17th and would be happy to meet with you to discuss or answer any questions.

Sam McCarter  
Longboat Key

## Dog on beach

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

The attached photo was sent by a neighbor clearly showing the dog that is never leashed on Buttonwood running loose on the road. The police have visited these people with no results and I am tired of mowing and stepping in poop. The last name is Satnick - address Buttonwood Drive.

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Dog on beach

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

One of my officers responded, checked the entire area behind St Regis and there were no dogs observed on the beach.

Chief Russ Mager  
Longboat Key Police Department  
Town of Longboat Key

## Dog on beach

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop

PD did respond to the St. Regis the other day regarding your other complaint about dogs on the beach at that location but did not find any animals out at that time.

Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Dogs on beach

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop

Good morning. We have not received any calls regarding the St. Regis, but I'm sending one of my officers over there now to inquire and educate.

Russ Mager

See Letters, page 13

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# Editor Letters



## Letters, from page 12

Police Chief  
Town of Longboat Key

### Dogs on beach

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

On tennis court this morning I was told dogs on beach without leashes continues to be an issue in area of St. Regis. When they spoke to dog handler the response is no leashes are required on "their private beach". I believe ordinance is clear. Dogs leashed and no dogs on beach. Can we ask management to help over there?

Ryan Gandy  
Executive Director  
Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

### Need Municipalities to weigh in New Offshore Drilling Proposed Off Florida

To: Longboat Key Commission

Reaching back out on a critical and time sensitive issue regarding new offshore drilling proposed off Florida's Gulf Coast. As you may know, in November 2025, the Department of the Interior released the Draft Proposed Program (DPP) for the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

The federal government has proposed expanding offshore drilling to include a massive area off Florida's Gulf Coast. One incident in this area could send oil and pollution to our region's beaches and estuaries wrecking our environment, beaches, and tourism industries. Given the federal comment deadline of January 23, I am reaching out to all Florida coastal leadership simultaneously to ensure a coordinated regional response.

#### How Your Municipality Can Help

Oceana is working tirelessly to prevent this expansion, but the voices of our coastal cities and counties are the strongest defense we have. We are asking your municipality to take two critical steps:

Submit a Public Comment: The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is currently accepting public comments on the DPP until January 23, 2026. You can submit your municipality's official stance via the Federal Register here: (Regulations.gov).

Pass a Formal Resolution: We urge your council to consider passing a new resolution formally opposing any new offshore drilling leases. This sends a powerful message to federal leaders that California's coast is not for sale. If you are unable to pass a resolution in this time frame, please consider uploading your most recent resolution to the Federal Register at the link above.

If you have already passed a resolution and do not have time to pass a new resolution, I encourage you to submit a previously passed resolution as your comment here: Regulations.gov

Florida's local opposition has successfully held back proposed drilling for decades. We hope you will join us in calling on federal leaders to end new leasing and protect Florida's coastline for generations to come.

I have attached a fact sheet and a template resolution for your review. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information or speak virtually at an upcoming council meeting.

Hunter Miller  
Senior Field Campaigns Manager  
Department of the Interior

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Denise Kowal

I just spoke to the city manager, and he has Broxton Harvey, our parking manager, looking into what can be done. We can't guarantee there will be a solution by this weekend, but they are working on trying to find one. If you have any other suggestions, let us know.

Liz Alpert  
Commissioner  
Sarasota City Commission

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Liz Alpert

I failed to request to be copied on directive emails to staff to pursue this matter so that I can know exactly which commissioners are following through with efforts on our behalf.

Denise Kowal  
BCC Burns Square Stakeholders

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Liz Alpert

This issue is urgent, not something that can wait as businesses that have their life's savings invested into. Every day that we cannot tell our customers where to park is a loss of millions and possible loss of important clients. I do not need staff to walk with us, I need to speak with you and walk around with you. This is your district and those in the neighborhood deserve your attention immediately to this dire situation.

In the meantime, could you please direct staff with urgency to negotiate with the owners of the 'Williams Parker' and 'County' parking immediately so we can maybe have a temporary solution by this weekend. Awaiting your response.

Denise Kowal  
BCC Burns Square Stakeholders

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Denise Kowal

I am not sure how good it would do for me to walk around with you in Burns Square. I live in the 400 block of Palm, so I am very familiar with Burns Square. Do you have suggestions as to where parking could go that you would like to show me? If you still would like me to come, I can do the morning of 1/14 around 9:00 or 10:00. I will see if any of our staff can accompany me.

Liz Alpert  
Commissioner, City of Sarasota

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Liz Alpert

I would appreciate a walkabout this week with you in Burns Square. Please let me know a time that works for you. I am up super early so a morning stroll or late, either are nice times for me.

Denise Kowal  
BCC Burns Square Stakeholders

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Liz Alpert  
Nobody has provided any solutions today, why?  
Denise Kowal  
BCC Burns Square Stakeholders

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: BCC Burns Square Stakeholders Denise Kowal

I hope you have already received a response. But, if not, I am copying the interim city manager and deputy city manager with this email so the appropriate staff can respond.

Liz Alpert  
Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

### Burns Square Public Parking

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice  
Hello Mayor Trice, City Commissioners, City Manager, City Parking Manager,  
Following up. Urgent! We have three days until January 5th. We need a plan from you on where to tell our customers to park.

Denise Kowal  
BCC Burns Square Stakeholders

### To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice

For the past several years, Burns Square businesses, their employees, shoppers, guests, and residents have relied on the former "Verizon" lot at the corners of Laurel Street, South Orange Avenue, and Morrill Street as a vital parking resource. No longer - please see the attached notice.

To date, the City has not invested in or created the public parking infrastructure outlined in the adopted Parking Plan, which called for a Burns Square public parking garage to be completed in the Tier 1 phase by 2008. A plan many of us who own property and businesses here relied on.

As we are now entering peak season and anticipate increased activity in the district, it is critical that clear direction be provided immediately. Please advise where everyone should direct employees, customers, and visitors to park once use of the above-referenced lot is no longer permitted.

Timely guidance is essential to ensure continued access, economic vitality, and safety for Burns Square. We respectfully request a prompt response. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Denise Kowal, Resident/Business Owner  
Burns Square Businesses & Property Owners

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# BreakPoints



## Tennis, from page 1

On both the ATP and WTA tours, a duopoly has separated itself from the pack with the efficiency of a guillotine blade.

For the ruling class—Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner, Aryna Sabalenka, and Iga Świątek—this Australian Open is not a tournament. It is a hostile takeover. It is a crucible designed to strip away the Nike marketing varnish and reveal which of these freaks has the stomach for total, absolute domination. The gap between them and the field isn't just a points spread anymore; it's a different tax bracket. And they are here to collect.

### The ATP: The Artist vs. The Algorithm

On the men's side, the numbers are frankly obscene. Carlos Alcaraz enters Melbourne as the World No. 1, sitting on a mountain of 12,050 points. He isn't just leading the tour; he is lapping it. His closest rival, Jannik Sinner, sits at roughly 11,500.

And the rest? Alexander Zverev, the world No. 3, is languishing more than 6,000 points behind. Do the math. The gap between No. 2 and No. 3 is wider than the Pacific Ocean.

#### Carlos Alcaraz (World No. 1)

The Spaniard arrives with the swagger of a man who conquered the world in 2025, bagging both Roland Garros and the US Open. He leads the head-to-head against Sinner 10-6. Alcaraz is the Artist—tennis by jazz improvisation on a lethal dose of mescaline. He wants to paint the Mona Lisa when a stick figure would do. His test here is discipline. The Australian hard courts punish hubris. If he gets bored, if he starts playing for the applause instead of the jugular, the Machine will eat him alive.

#### Jannik Sinner (World No. 2)

Sinner is the Algorithm. He arrives as the defending champion (AO 2024 & 2025), a man who has turned unforced errors into an extinct species. He doesn't play "fun" tennis; he plays suffocation tennis. He hits the ball with a flat, concussive violence that removes the oxygen from the stadium. His 2025 season was a masterclass in efficiency, but he lost the No. 1 spot to Alcaraz's brilliance. For Sinner, this fortnight is about reclamation. He needs to prove that his robotic precision can still short-circuit Alcaraz's chaos and secure the coveted "Three-Peat."

### The WTA: The Butcher vs. The Architect

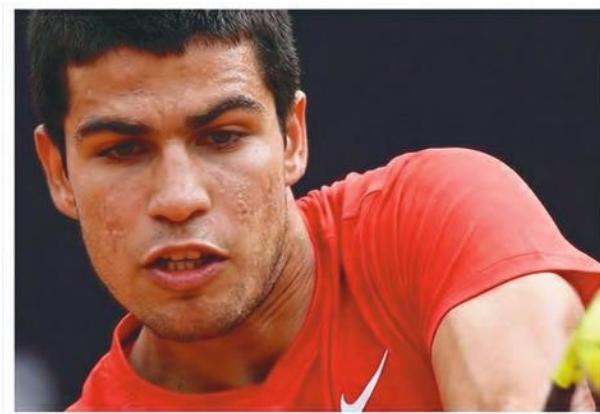
On the women's side, the violence is even more pronounced. Aryna Sabalenka has seized the No. 1 ranking by the throat, currently sitting nearly 4,000 points clear of Świątek.

#### Aryna Sabalenka (World No. 1)

Sabalenka walks through Melbourne Park like she owns the deed to the land. She treats this tournament like her personal living room and the tennis ball like it owes her money. The "Queen of Melbourne" is the two-time defending champion, and her game has evolved from reckless power to calculated brutality. She is the Butcher. She doesn't outthink you; she bludgeons you until your will to live evaporates. Her test is complacency. Can she keep the hunger of a starving wolf when she's wearing the crown and sitting on a dynasty?

#### Iga Świątek (World No. 2)

Then there is the Polish Architect. After finally exorcising her grass demons to win Wimbledon in 2025, Świątek has



only one box left to check: The Career Grand Slam. She is a genius of geometry, a player who turns defense into offense faster than anyone alive. But Melbourne has historically been a puzzle for her—the courts are too fast for her clay-court slide, too slick for her obsessive setup. She is desperate to close the gap on Sabalenka, and nothing less than a title here will satisfy her. If she wins, she joins the immortals. If she loses, the gap at No. 1 widens to a canyon.

### The Verdict

What makes the 2026 Australian Open so compelling is

the sheer cruelty of the math. The pretenders have been weeded out. The "dark horses" have been sent to the glue factory. We are entering an era of tyrants.

Sinner and Alcaraz have turned the ATP Top 10 into a VIP section of two. Sabalenka and Świątek have done the same to the WTA. They have raised the floor of what is required to win a major so high that the rest of the tour needs an oxygen mask just to compete.

The Melbourne sun is unforgiving, the flies are biting, and the new ruling class is here to collect.

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