



PACA News

April - June 2011

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Ballantrae: a 'homey, neighborly' and cost-effective community

*By Jim Flateau, PACA president
& Ballantrae CDD Board chair*

"A homey, neighborly atmosphere, with lots of amenities and good schools," is how the St. Petersburg *Times* described Ballantrae in an Aug. 29, 2010 article.

Ballantrae is "a successful CDD," where homeowners "feel they are getting quality services," according to a Nov. 12, 2010 *Times* op-ed article by William Rizzetta, president of Rizzetta & Co., one of Florida's largest CDD/HOA management firms. Rizzetta is the Ballantrae CDD's district manager.

Both statements are good descriptions of our built-out community of 969 residences, located on the north side of SR 54 about a mile east of the Suncoast Parkway. Construction began in 2003 on Ballantrae's six small villages, ranging in size from 74 to 222 homes.

With a nearly half-mile causeway leading from SR 54 to our residences, about one-third of Ballantrae's 436 acres is covered by our 35 lakes and ponds, plus our conservation areas and wetlands, and 80-plus acres of manicured community lawns.

When resident landowners took over our CDD Board in 2007, they found its budget lacked a plan to build reserves or set-aside funds. In 2008, residents attending the budget public hearing overwhelmingly endorsed the CDD Board's plan to raise assessments, primarily to begin funding such reserves.

The Board has avoided any fee increase since then. We have competitively bid down our community landscaping costs, which represent nearly a quarter of our operating budget. We've also bid and thereby reduced costs for our pond maintenance contract and district management services.

That's helped to provide funding for projects supported by the community, such as paying the Pasco Sheriff's Office for part-time security coverage on CDD property, additional sidewalk construction, the cleaning and painting of community privacy walls, improved community pool security systems, plus the purchase of park benches, exercise stations and other amenities.

It has allowed us to respond without assessment increases to such unanticipated expenses as \$120,000 to renovate two storm water containment structures and \$25,000 to replace a weir.

At the same time, the District maintains a \$100,000 emergency reserve fund. Since 2008, we've added about \$25,000 annually to a capital reserve fund that is driven by a long-term maintenance and repair schedule established in 2010.

As the Pasco County community grew around Ballantrae,



our residents requested a state transportation traffic study of the intersection of Ballantrae Blvd. and SR 54. It documented the existing traffic volume warranted the need for a signal. County planners delayed spending for the light, citing a lack of funds.

However, through the persistent lobbying of the CDD Board and with the active cooperation of the Pasco Board of County Commissioners, the light was finally approved in late 2009 and became operational in early 2010. It now eases traffic problems not only for Ballantrae's motorists, but for those in our connected communities of Suncoast Meadows, Suncoast Pointe, Oakstead and Concord Station as well.

Limits on CDD irrigation can spell disaster for St. Augustine and other lawn grasses during droughts. The CDD worked with the Southwest Florida Water Management District in 2009 to obtain a five-year variance. That allows us to water community lawns over six days each week. We are also working with the county to identify more drought-tolerant sod.

It can be cumbersome for any CDD to call the Alligator Hotline on each nuisance reptile found in the community. We then await the completion of state paperwork and assignment of a harvesting permit before a trapper appears on the scene. The Ballantrae CDD applied this year for its own five-year permit under the state's Nuisance Alligator Targeted Harvest Area program. Now, the CDD calls the trapper directly, who can respond as soon as possible to remove nuisance gators.

Since we are one of the newer communities in Pasco County, we continue to look to the experiences of PACA's membership for ideas on how we can improve Ballantrae.

As we do so, we remain ever-mindful of our obligation to maintain our "homey, neighborly atmosphere" on a cost-effective basis.

PACA, county working to save trees, sidewalks

The county's plan was a good one: require the developers of most new communities to plant trees in the lawns between the streets and sidewalks.

As the trees grew, their branches would form a canopy high over the streets. It would project a neighborhood sort of charm, officials hoped.

In reality, some of the trees planted in those narrow lawns had root systems too large for those locations.

Now, the growing roots are raising sidewalks and causing them to shift, creating an unsightly tripping hazard for pedestrians and cyclists, amongst others.

In many communities, it is the adjoining landowner's responsibility to pay to replace the damaged sidewalk and remove the tree.

PACA members reporting sidewalk problems include Lake Heron, Stagecoach Santa Fe, Meadow Pointe II Lettingwell, Collier Place, Asbel Creek, Oakstead, Meadow Point II Sedgwick and Country Walk.

Now, as the county rewrites its Land Development Code, it is working on new rules for future developments and tree placement.

County officials call it a new policy of "right tree, right place" – requiring trees be planted in areas large enough to accommodate growth.

Websites the county uses on tree locations are <http://lyra.ifas.ufl.edu/FloridaTrees/> and <http://www.floridayards.org/fyplants/index.php>



PACA President Jim Flateau and Government Affairs Director Fred Krauer met with county officials to discuss how the "tree issue" can be dealt with in existing communities. County Commissioner Pat Mulieri convened the meeting, which included staff from development review, zoning, the county attorney's office, code compliance and development services.

Officials expressed interest in working with PACA on an ordinance affecting existing communities. They expect to offer language at upcoming hearings on land use code changes.

In that initial discussion, the county and PACA agreed to look at, among other things:

- Leaving trees in place if that is a landowner's preference.
- Continuing to have landowners seek county approval before removing a tree, and to determine if it must be replaced.

- Limiting replacement trees to a list of those with a root system that fits the space being vacated.
- Planting an approved replacement tree on community property, if the lot from which an overgrown tree is to be removed is too small to add a tree.
- Allowing communities to write their own plans for tree removal and replacement, and deciding how to pay for it.
- Having the county review and approve those plans. If approved by the county, the community could implement its plan with county oversight.

Welcome to new members!

PACA welcomed three new members to our ranks since the last edition of the PACA News:

- Lake Dorothea Grove HOA in Zephyrhills. Its representative to PACA is its president, Dr. Randall H. Stovall.
- Lake Bernadette CDD in Zephyrhills. Its representatives are Chairman Robert Robertson, Vice Chairman Gary Glassman and Supervisors Elaine Sebastian, Michael Berman and Chris Black.
- Pasco Schools Superintendent Heather Fiorentino joined as a Class B individual member.

If PACA members have any issues that they cannot find a solution to and would like PACA to help, they can email PACA President Jim Flateau at JFlateau@mypaca.org or Government Affairs Chair Fred Krauer at FKrauer@mypaca.org.

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Meeting Info

Second Thursday of
Every Month
at 7pm
Land O'Lakes
Community Center
5401 Land O'Lakes
Boulevard
(US Highway 41)

Website

www.myPACA.org

Pasco Emergency Director details fire rescue operations

Pasco Emergency Services Director/Fire Chief Anthony Lopinto opened his Jan. 13 remarks at PACA by saying he wanted us to see his entire department, its budget and the struggles it must overcome and how it accomplishes its goals.

He described the operation of his agency that offers 400 paid and 150 volunteer staff to protect 700 of Pasco County's 745 square miles (the balance being served by local fire departments). He noted Pasco has been cross-training firefighters as rescue personnel since 1985 to increase chances of survival for those they find injured.

He said the average response to a fire is 6.89 minutes and 7.01 to a rescue call. Rescue calls make up 81 percent of the calls received annually. He said 15 of the 33 firefighter positions lost to budget cuts in 2007-08 are recouped in the current fiscal year. The workload of the balance is being made up for in overtime as necessary.

He added the agency is finding ways to save tax dollars as part of the county's overall requirement to reduce spending. Despite budget cuts, he noted that 11 fire rescue stations have been built and opened since 2001. He also discussed various aspects of agency operations, service areas and the role of volunteers.



Chief Lopinto (right) and PACA Program Director Wayne Mooney.



Superintendent Fiorentino

Schools Superintendent explains challenges

Pasco Schools Superintendent Heather Fiorentino presented PACA members at our Feb. 10 meeting with a rundown of the challenges facing the district in these tough economic times.

She said the school district's budget exceeds \$1 billion, but the district is still spending \$540 less per year for each of nearly 67,000 students than it was in 2007.

Ms. Fiorentino said the district's 9,800 employees have gone three years without raises. She said salaries account for 86 percent of the budget. A freeze she imposed on filling central positions has kept 88 posts vacant.

On the academic front, she reported that engineering, computer and mechanics programs leading to certificates are now available at all high schools.

Ms. Fiorentino also noted student visions are being expanded by academic partnerships with schools in 22 countries. Pasco students are now working with them on global learning projects. She said it is important to show Pasco students how to work with their peers around the world as well as around the corner – the same as they will face as adults in the work force.

Newest County Commissioner discusses goals

Henry Wilson, Pasco's newest county commissioner, made his first presentation to PACA at our March 10 meeting. He represents District No. 4 in west-central Pasco.

Mr. Wilson noted his decade of experience in medical insurance and managed care helps to prepare him for the complexity and range of issues that he now faces.

He said he believes a reduction is necessary in the impact fees that the county assesses on new construction. He explained that would make the county more "business friendly" and help to bring in the high-paying jobs he wants as part of Pasco's future.

Mr. Wilson said he is working to eliminate the "this is the way we have always done it" attitude in county operations. He wants to look at new and fresh approaches to accomplishing goals and conducting county business. For example, he said he supports cost-effective and more productive operating systems and wants to maximize the use of technology. "We need to advertise Pasco County," Mr. Wilson added.



Commissioner Wilson (left) and PACA Treasurer Jerry Lynn.

Programs for this Quarter

April 14
Pasco Code Enforcement
Debra Zampetti

May 12
T. Rowe Price executives on expansion in Land O' Lakes

June 9
Michael Fasano
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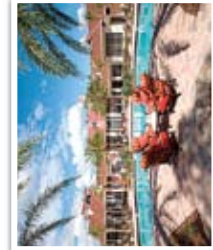


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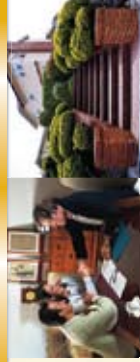
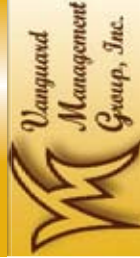
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