**A Note From Our Publisher**

It's been over five years since the Sun Bay Editorial Page on Fort Myers Beach and exiting published to respect a non-compete with the buyers of my former island weekly. While that kept me from publishing the news for the folks of SW Florida, I’ve certainly kept my eye on the horizon and my ear to the ground. The only constant is change and we’ve had our share here on the western peninsula.

When something gets in your blood it's hard to shake it and delivering the news has been in mine for over thirty five years - almost twenty of them here in Lee County.

This first edition of The Sun Bay Paper starts a new chapter in our community. We are living in an age where a high number of people no longer trust the media. There are many reasons for the mistrust – too much political correctness - too many special interests - big money and corporate controlled media with defined agendas, consolidation of media sources, particularly newspapers - too much emphasis on the bottom line and, perhaps the most disturbing reason of all - acceptance by readers of trite sound bites and banal content that avoids the mandates of good journalism. I've long believed that printing real news and hard opinion takes guts because no matter how much we say we want the truth there is an element of lip service in our pronouncement. Often we want the truth that we believe but when all the legally binding facts should go our preconceptions, we dismiss those facts or discredit the source. There is a degree of justifiability for our readers to distrust us, but still exhibit similar trends in growth and development.

The same three Commissioners, who are working so well together, could also be viewed as systematically undermining Lee County land use regulations as evidenced by their support to substantially increase density on the River Hall development in east Lee County, revising the Pine Island Plan that will result in greater density on an island with restricted road capacity for hurricane evacuation, and open up the environmentally sensitive lands in southeast Lee County, known as the Density Reduction Groundwater Resource area, for greater density and intensity of development jeopardizing public water supplies and critical wildlife habitat.

Although, it is widely understood that the state should have used Amendment 1 funds to purchase lands south of Lake Okeechobee to store, treat and convey water south to the Everglades thereby, alleviating excessive releases of polluted water that is devastating the estuaries on the west and east coast of south Florida, Commissioners Kiker and Hamman voted against the County resolution for the land purchase. Their votes should not have been a surprise given the generous campaign funding support they have received from U.S. Sugar Corporation.

For many years, Lee County has benefited from experienced department heads and a strong staff. Rumbling are now being aired that suggest a serious threat to the stability of Lee County government is at hand and that a hostile work environment has resulted in the exit of valued County employees.

Former Animal Services Director Donna Ward was terminated due to her commitment to appropriate regulations and enforcement of deplorable activities including puppy mills and tethering. Administration failed in providing Ms. Ward with the support necessary to continue the growing number of animal cruelty cases in this area. Highly respected Department Directors such as Mary Gibbons and Paul O’Conner, who were primarily responsible in providing oversight over growth and development in Lee county, were unable to perform their professional services with a majority of the Board and County Manager capitulating to the pressure of relaxing land use regulations. County employees are no longer empowered to carry out their responsibilities but labor under the shadow of a heavy handed top down approach.

Furthermore, the majority on the Board failed in their responsibility to their constituents when they gave up on the Community Sustainability Plan, a three year Community-wide effort with established measurable goals that brought people together to address social, economic and environmental issues. This lack of vision has now caused additional valuable employees to leave and the few that are left are afraid to speak out as they saw what happened to those that are innovators. Short sighted and ill advised public policy pushed by the voting block of the three new commissioners coupled with a rigid and dictatorial administration leaves the County vulnerable to the unsustainable growth and deterioration in our community’s quality of life.