



# Longboat Key News

December 27, 2024

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## InsideLook



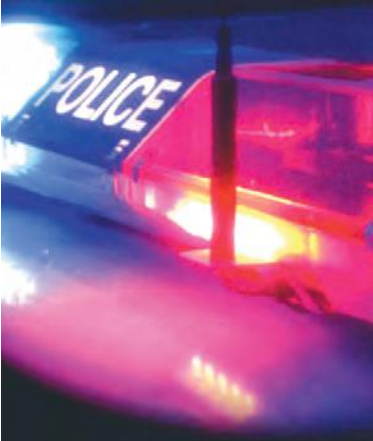
Mayor Battie  
under fire  
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\$3.875 million  
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Going slightly  
postal for mail  
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*This was the year of the Hurricane on Longboat Key and in Sarasota. Many lives were altered and many businesses affected. Yet we have seen resilience and rebuilding is underway. Other major events include the opening of the St. Regis on Longboat Key, the fight to not privatize and commercialize City Island, the battles Battie faced as Mayor in Sarasota and much more.*



2024  
YEAR IN REVIEW

## Trio of storms take toll in 2024

*Year after year, Longboaters and Sarasota residents brace for storms. They do so watching frenetic newscasts and make a decision whether to stay or go. And 2024 could be known as the Year of the Hurricane.*

In August, Hurricane Debby before making landfall whirled past Longboat Key's coast, bringing with it heavy winds, 12 inches of heavy rainfall and storm surge.

See Storms on page 12



## Milestone reached: Longboat Key St. Regis opens

*Whittall spent a decade battling with former Colony unit owners.*

The year 2024 saw the historical opening of the St. Regis on Longboat Key. In September the St. Regis finally opened with a grand opening that included music, food speeches and acrobats.

Unicorp President and the inimitable personage behind every aspect of the resort and condominium project, Chuck Whittall, was in charge of bringing the St. Regis to Longboat Key.

Whittall spent a decade battling with former Colony unit owners, the ex-Colony President Murf Klauber and his interests and the Town of Longboat Key all to arrive at this year's fruition.

A walk into the hotel lobby goes beyond the usual superlatives of travel and real estate brochures. A grand piano plays jazz, hand painted murals and elegance straight out of Gatsby is apparent. The focus on the view and light and marriage of materials take you away into another world. The cost to be whisked starts at about \$1,100 per night and \$25,000 for the Presidential Suite.

When asked how the market has responded to the hotel, Whittall was happy to point out that November was completely sold out and nine wed-

See St. Regis on page 15



## Residents against City Island development plan

*Another concern was the fact that Longboat Key has added traffic with the opening of the St. Regis this year and for the future hotel and condominium allowances that approved at the Longboat Key Club Islands development.*

Jeffrey Koffman of Ride Entertainment this year proposed to the Sarasota City Commission in February, a public-private partnership to convert the City Island Park into a venue offering a food court, splash pad, topiary gardens, nine-hole golf course and an Aerobar. An Aerobar is a gondola that lifts passengers 120 feet into the air to provide a view.

Koffman faced mounting opposition and questions from concerned residents. The president of the St. Armands Circle Residents' Association, Chris Goglia, had several foundational questions and issues.

Goglia questioned whether residents wanted to remove the quiet relaxing ambiance and trade tranquility for tourism attractions, rides and entertainment.

"Do we want our city's parks to be mostly peaceful community gathering places, playgrounds, and open space, or do we want them to become non-stop tourist attractions, festivals, markets, etc.?" Goglia said at a City Commission meeting.

Another concern was the fact that Longboat Key has added traffic with the opening of the St. Regis this year and for the future hotel and condominium allowances that have been approved at the Longboat Key Club Islands development. Residents on Longboat and on Lido have historically been sensitive to creating traffic draws in public parks except for special events.

The area surrounding Ken Thompson Park has been the home to Mote Marine Aquarium, The Sarasota Sailing Squadron, Save our Seabirds the Salty Dog Restaurant, boat ramp, walking trails and more for years.

Koffman of Ride Entertainment, subsequently hired Kimley-Horn to perform a traffic and site survey to appease these concerns. The consultant concluded that the kind of features proposed would enhance the park.

Kimley-Horn wrote in the report's conclusion: "City Island Park is

See City Island on page 15

# Longboat residents fight push by Jewfish Key to unincorporate fearing tourism, development



This past year, Jewfish Key homeowners wanted to increase tourism and development rights by de-annexing from the restrictive Town and becoming unincorporated.

The Village on Longboat was concerned that the unincorporation of Jewfish Key will bring noise and over-commercialization to their lives. Their ire was fueled by the fact that access to Jewfish Key is by boat only and most residents and visitors park at Longboat near the boat ramp in the Village.

Residents in the Longbeach Village on Longboat as well as Longboat Key's Land's End community joined together in January of 2024 with a petition drive. Florida Statutes require the town to undertake and evaluate a feasibility study within six months of receipt of the petition.

"We urge the Town Commissioners to reject de-annexation of Jewfish Key," wrote Sensabaugh, Jr. on behalf of the Lands End Homeowners Association.

Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton said to the commission at the April 30 meeting, "There is a possibility you may have an unusual enclave for county services within the Town of Longboat Key."

Denial based on deficiency

Town staff recommends that the commission deny the petition on its face because by State Law 15 percent of qualified voters in any area desiring to be excluded from municipal boundaries must propose such an ordinance. As of May 10, there were three registered voters on Jewfish Key. According to the Town, one voter is designated as active while the other voters are designated as inactive. A review of the qualified voters on Jewfish Key shows that none of them signed the petition. Further, the Jewfish Key Preservation Association, Inc. is itself not a qualified voter. Therefore, Town Staff says, "As submitted the petition currently fails to meet the threshold requirement for consideration of the feasibility study. Accordingly, the petition should be rejected."

During June of this year, Town Staff recommended that the commission vote against the unincorporation of Jewfish Key. The staff noted that another reason the petition should be denied is that one of the fundamental components of state law as defined in the Municipal Annexation or Contraction Act is an intent not to create what are referred to as "enclaves." An enclave is defined in State Statute as an isolated, unincorporated area that is surrounded by the territory of the municipality. The reason is because it creates numerous governance and administrative challenges between municipality and county government. In fact, State Law encourages existing enclaves be annexed into municipalities to reduce such administrative challenges.

Town Staff says that if Jewfish Key were to secede from Longboat Key, numerous complexities relating to land use, public safety and code enforcement would result.

Perhaps the greatest difference that would arise if Jewfish Key were to become unincorporated is that numerous restrictions in land use would be lost. Primarily, the Town does not allow the addition of increased density or number of dwelling units whereas Manatee has no such restriction. Also, Longboat Key has strict land use controls on tourism restricting the rental of residential properties for tourism units. On Longboat Key, residentially-zoned areas such as Jewfish Key and the Village cannot rent out their homes for less than 30 days. Manatee County has no restrictions on tourism uses in residential areas. Staff says if Jewfish Key were allowed to become part of unincorporated Manatee County, the increased tourism usage on the island would create "nuisance impacts" to the surrounding residences on the north end of Longboat Key within the Village community. Manatee County also has a far weaker noise ordinance than Longboat Key and Staff said this too could have an immediate impact on Longboat.

Then in June of 2024, the Jewfish Key Preservation Association withdrew the petition for unincorporation before the Commission's Public Hearing could be held, so the matter is no longer an issue.



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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.

## Topics

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold  
I am a resident of Seaplace and wanted to see if you can provide an update on a couple of Longboat Key topics.  
1. Is the St. Regis in compliance with the turtle code? If not, how can we move them to do so outside of fines. They have deep pockets and this involves the preservation of nature/the lives of future turtles.  
2. As drones become more popular, can we restrict their use on our beautiful island and fine those who do not comply?  
3. Has there been any discussion of a water taxi from the St. Regis or anywhere else on the island to the mainland or to Siesta Key? Thank you for your time. Happy Holidays.  
Vicki Smith  
Longboat Key

## Drywall permit

To: Longboat Key Commission  
The ridiculous and unnecessary delay in issuing drywall permits at Windward Bay (WWB) Condominium Association has caused nothing but grief and anxiety for the residents of our 25 villas. These units were gutted and remediated from Hurricane Helene floodwaters and we have been waiting weeks for drywall permits. The Town of Longboat Key Building Department has taken weeks to approve simple drywall permits, that most municipalities in this country don't

require. Our residents have gutted units, that cannot be restored without drywall. They cannot return to their homes, run the risk of losing scheduled contractors and possibly lose thousands of dollars in rents. I implore you to expedite these drywall permits and allow the good people of LBK to start to rebuild their homes.  
Robert Sehlhorst  
Longboat Key  
Drywall Permits for Windward Bay Condominium Association  
To: Robert Sehlhorst  
If the only work being done is drywall replacement no permit is required. Teo weeks ago I communicated with Windward residents - some hadplumbing and electrical work as well. Those permits were filed for December 10. Our staff stayed late to address the Windward permits Dec. 20. 10 days is a good turn around and exceptional with 2700 badly damaged homes on island.  
BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Drywall Inspection Extensive Delay

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton  
Thanks much. The extra dimension for condos was the piece of the puzzle I was missing. I know all of you are going all out to get this work done. Much appreciated. Happy holidays to all.  
Ken Schneier  
Mayor  
Town of Longboat Key

See Letters, page 8



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# WineTimes

## Sparkling wines for the New Year

*More affluent wine buyers continue to buy the premium wines they prefer, whereas price sensitive wine buyers looking for bargains on sparkling wines enjoy the benefits of fierce price competition among producers of Charmat Prosecco with producers of Methode Champenoise California Champagne, Spanish Cava, and French Crémant at \$10 to \$40 lower prices than Champagne made in the Champagne region of France*

S.W. and Rich Hermansen  
Guest Writers  
wine@lbknews.com

IWSR© (International Wine and Spirits Record) statistics show that about one-fifth of Champagne sales occur during the month of December.

While sales of sparkling wines in general have outpaced sales of still wines in recent years, data from the first three quarters of 2024 indicate increases in the market share of Prosecco, a more modestly priced sparkling wine from Italy, relative to Champagne.

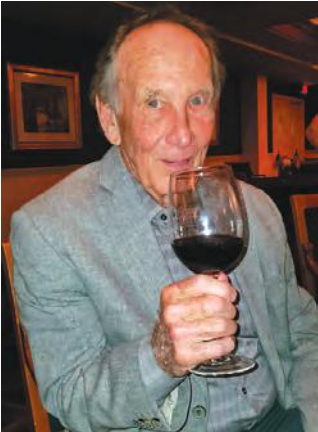
At the moment it seems that lower prices of Prosecco, a sparkling wine produced using the cheaper Charmat method in tanks instead of the better regarded Methode Champenoise within the bottle, may be winning the day; nonetheless, the Champagne makers' strategy of limiting prices decrease by increasing quality standards, and thus reducing quantities of Champagne on the market, usually serves to preserve what the wine industry calls "Premiumization" of Champagne and other acclaimed wines. Wines considered premium may sell fewer bottles yet make up for the decrease in volume sales with higher dollar sales.

Producers of premium wines such as Champagne do not routinely engage in price competition with other premium wines, relying instead on brand promotion and reviews in print publications and social media. More affluent wine buyers continue to buy the premium wines they prefer, whereas price sensitive wine buyers looking for bargains on sparkling wines enjoy the benefits of fierce price competition among producers of Charmat Prosecco with producers of Methode Champenoise California Champagne, Spanish Cava, and French Crémant at \$10 to \$40 lower prices than Champagne made in the Champagne region of France. Although most countries have agreed to restrict the Champagne label to wines produced in the Champagne region, California has carved out an exception to this rule for "California Champagne". According to an agreement between the USA and France in 2005, only sparkling wine producers in California that used the "California Champagne" label prior to 2006 could continue to do so in the future. These sparkling wines are not to be confused with true Champagne

It may help those of us shopping during the few days remaining before New Year's Eve to have an overview of the price tiers of sparkling wines. Here goes.

The under \$10 tier of sparkling wines compete with cans of hard seltzer and carbonated wines. Cook's California Champagne (\$8) in one of its Brut (dry) versions uses the juice of Zinfandel grapes, sans the black skins, to make a Methode Champenoise sparkling wine of no distinction yet great for mixing with fresh orange juice in a Mimosa. A bargain Prosecco, the Costellore Prosecco (\$8) from Glera grown in Veneto Italy rates above its price in the tier. Also look for Spanish Cava in this price tier.

Moving up, better sparkling wines in a broad \$10 - \$30 tier offer quality comparable to true Champagne. The \$15 - \$20 sweet spot in the middle usually has the best values. Excellent California sparkling wines made by French Champagne houses, say the Chandon Brut or the Gruet Brut Rosé (actually from New Mexico) compete head-to-head with Valdobbiadene



Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., and the Louis Bouillot Crémant de Bourgogne grande reserve (\$20).

The brand name non-vintage (NV) Champagnes dominate the \$30 - \$50 price tier. Supermarkets in some areas as well as wine shops sell large quantities of the popular brands of Champagne during December. Look for specials.

Better wine shops and the larger retailers may have some of the smaller house's Champagnes in stock. Alas, we drained the last bottle of Maison de Penet that we shipped home from Reims this past Christmas Day and have found that producer does not export to the USA. Other selections available here likely have the fine mousse and bubbles that release the aroma and taster of a baguette fresh from the oven.

The higher price tiers of Champagnes soar beyond \$50. Standard Champagne mixes wines from different vintages. Winemakers separate the exceptional vintages and use them to make vintage Champagne. Grand Cru Champagne from the best plots of land in Champagne join the vintage Champagne in the highest tier.

We hope you will find the perfect sparkling wine for your New Year's Eve toast to the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025! Cin cin!

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 4

St. Regis Parking Structure a blight

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold

I am writing to you in your capacity as a fellow Seaplace resident and member of the Longboat Key City Council. I wonder if you and/or the council are able to communicate with the appropriate people at the St. Regis to ask them to install further greenery along the sides and in the front of the huge white parking structure on the north side of their complex. Its behemoth-like size and starkness is out of keeping with the rest of the St. Regis, which is lovely and relatively low-key, despite its size. But the massive white structure for parking and other uses is a real blight. I would think the residents of Aquarius are upset about it and our G7 and G8 residents also. Anyone driving along Gulf of Mexico Drive views that unfortunate white structure as they pass by. More trees, climbing vines going along the entire building, and other ways to hide it would be very welcome. I would be happy to contact the appropriate persons at the St. Regis with this inquiry/request. But I also think that your voice is far more meaningful than mine. Please contact me if you would like to discuss this further. I appreciate anything you can do. In the meantime, I hope you have a very happy holiday.

Barbara Bankoff  
Longboat Key

St. Regis Parking Structure

To: Barbara Bankoff

Thank you for your note about the St. Regis. I know many of the new plantings are still taking root and will be growing over the next few years. I do recall that the possibility of flowering planters at the top were discussed at earlier Commission meetings, but there were irrigation challenges to live plants. The idea of vines may have merit and I'll be happy to bring this up when I have the opportunity to speak with the hotel manager.

Penny Gold  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

St. Regis Parking Structure

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold

Thank you for this prompt reply. I appreciate any efforts you and the council can make. Best wishes, and happy holidays.

Barbara Bankoff  
Longboat Key

Police Chief Turner

To: Longboat Key Town Commission and Town Manager Howard Tipton

An article in the December 19th edition of the newspaper indicates Longboat Key Chief of Police George Turner was told that he is "stepping down." While I do not know the reasoning behind this action, and I understand Chief Turner's employment is "at will," I would, as a Town resident, like to express my support for the Chief's continued employment. As a Florida law enforcement officer of over 30 years and retired Police Chief, I have known George Turner for over 20 years, primarily through our participation in the Florida Police Chief's Association. It is through this that I know him to be a highly respected and accomplished police executive in Florida law enforcement. Since Chief Turner returned to Longboat Key in 2021, he has improved service delivery and enhanced safety in our community by recruiting and hiring qualified personnel, upgrading equipment, and professionalizing our police department, to include achieving state law enforcement accreditation. I know you are aware that obtaining accreditation is difficult and requires a great deal of work and commitment. From his tenure with the Town of Longboat Key, Chief Turner is knowledgeable of local issues and has formed relationships with business owners, residents, and members of other public safety agencies in our area that are invaluable in policing efforts and response to natural disasters, as we recently experienced with Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Chief Turner has demonstrated the experience and leadership needed to serve as our Police Chief and it is my understanding he wishes to remain in that position. For the reasons stated in this correspondence, I for one believe Chief Turner should remain in place. I am hopeful similar support for the Chief has been presented to you since the news of his departure became public, and that said support guides you to a position of reconsideration.

Bart Connelly  
Longboat Key

Banyan tree confusion

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

The grounds Committee at the Seaplace Condominium complex has been discussing the possibility of replacing the Banyan trees recently lost in the hurricanes. The committee has received conflicting information about whether these can be included in a post-storm landscaping plan, or if Banyan trees (ficus benghalensis) are considered invasive and restricted on the Island.

Do you know whether Banyan trees can be replaced on Longboat Key? If not, is there someone I can reach out to help settle the matter?

Penny Gold  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key



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# OnPatrol

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

## Dec. 20 Driver’s license

12:22 p.m.  
Officer Troyer while on patrol in the 3500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and noticed a license plate attached to a trailer. Officer Troyer conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle in the 3500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. As Officer Troyer walked up to the truck, he spoke to the driver and informed him the reason for the reason for the stop. The man informed Officer Troyer that the trailer was his, but he never got around to getting the trailer registered. The man also did not know of a vehicle identification number location on the trailer and did not have any proof of title paperwork either. The driver provided the officer with his Florida ID card and when Officer Troyer asked if there was any driver’s license issue, he informed the officer that his license privileges were suspended. The driver also said he usually doesn’t drive, but he needed to work today. Officer Troyer asked the driver if he had anyone whom could pick him up due to not having a license. The man contacted a friend to drive him home. Officer Troyer informed the man he could not drive until his license was reinstated. Based upon the investigation, Officer Troyer issued the man a citation for driving while license suspended with knowledge. Case clear.



and repairing the dock. The answer sufficed for the man and he walked away before pedigree information could be obtained. No crime committed. Case clear.

## Driver’s license

9:00 p.m.  
Officer Butler received a license plate recognition camera alert for a southbound vehicle from Bay Isles Parkway with the registered owner having a suspended/canceled/revoked driver’s license. An FCIC/NCIC check was performed and confirmed that the driver’s license was suspended. The vehicle was located and a traffic stop was performed at the 200 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. The driver was the suspended license owner and seen operating the vehicle. Officer Butler made contact with the driver and identified himself and explained the reason for the stop. The driver said that he was aware that his driver’s license was suspended. He was notified that his license was suspended. Officer Butler asked him why he was driving and he said that he had to work and was transporting his equipment. He added he is a musician and indicated his equipment was expensive. Based on the facts presented, Officer Butler found the driver/operator was issued a citation for driving with a suspended license. Case clear.

## Parking

10:49 p.m.  
Officer Maple and Officer Tillman were dispatched to Broadway for an illegal parking call. Upon their arrival, one of the driver’s was in the process of moving her vehicle which was blocking a very small section of a driveway but parked in a legal spot. The vehicle was cleared of the driveway and no further police involvement was required. Case clear.

## Dec. 24 Kayak

11:02 a.m.  
Officer Tillman was dispatched to 4100 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive for a report of found property. Upon arrival, Officer Tillman found a 12 foot Hobie Mirage kayak. After speaking with the security guard who stated that the kayak washed ashore during the most recent hurricane on Oct. 5. The kayak had a cracked hull, sun damage, missing void hatch covers, and was full of sand. Officers were unable to locate the owner due to no serial numbers or markings.

## Post Office

12:26 p.m.  
Officer Maple, Sgt. Smith, Officer Nazareno and Officer Tillman were dispatched to Bay Isles Road post office for a call in reference to a 70-year-old man banging on the front door and yelling. Upon arrival, Officers met with the complainant who said she observed an elderly man banging on the front door of the U.S. Post Office trying to get inside and yelling about his check. The complainant advised that he then left the post office in his vehicle, a two-door Ford headed toward Gulf of Mexico Drive. The vehicle was located at the 3400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and a traffic stop was conducted by Officer Nazareno and Sgt. Smith. It was determined the man was upset about not receiving a FEMA check he was expecting for compensation with the recent hurricane damage. The man did not pose a threat and was not considered a concern for law enforcement. The man left the area with no issue. Case clear.

## Dec. 25 Boat

11:00 a.m.  
Sgt. Montfort was notified by Officer Barrett that a boat was scheduled for removal from Bayside Drive. Officers Barrett, Mathis and Sgt. Montfort patrolled to the area to assist with crowd and traffic control. Officers arrived on scene and met with the removal company. Officers provided assistance until the vessel was removed by crane and barge. The vessel will be disposed of at the staging site in Bradenton Beach. Case clear.

## Dec. 27 Burglary

12:00 a.m.  
Officer Mathis was dispatched to Falmouth Drive for a burglary complaint. Upon his arrival, Officer Mathis met with the complainant who advised that someone had been in the residence since her last visit. The complainant and Officer Mathis checked the residence which was on the second floor and was secured. There were no signs of tooling or forced entry on the dead-bolt lock or door knob. The complainant gave the officer a tour of the residence which was apparently not cleaned since the unit was last rented or occupied. The complainant explained that she normally checks and cleans the unit after renters leave. The owner advised that she had not been there since before the hurricanes and the complainant was the one who cleaned the unit. There seemed to be miscommunication on who was expected to clean the unit after the last renters. The owner advised that she lives out of state and rents the unit out periodically and that only she and the complainant are the only ones that have keys. The complainant advised nothing was missing and everything seemed as it should except it not being cleaned. The owner further explained that she would be in touch with the HOA to verify it had not been rented out since the last renters had occupied the unit. There are no security cameras present and maintenance staff advised no one has been in the unit for some time. At this point in time, a report was created to document the incident and response to the location. Case clear.

## Fraud

6:51 p.m.  
Officer Van Dyke responded to L’Ambiance Drive in reference to a suspicious incident. The complainant advised Officer Van Dyke that a man with an accent called her and identified himself as a Special Agent from the Office of the Inspector General. According to the complainant, the man mentioned gift cards and advised her not to contact local law enforcement. Although the complainant didn’t give out any personal information to the man, she sought confirmation from law enforcement that the man was illegitimate. Case clear.

## Dec. 21 Water

12:33 p.m.  
Officer Mathis was dispatched to Marbury Lane in reference to a water leak. Officer Mathis contacted the complainant who advised that she had turned the water off at the backflow and stopped the leak. The complainant explained that Frontier had just left he property after burying new cable line to her residence and that they had caused the leak. The complainant was advised to contact a plumber. Case clear.

## Driver’s license

3:51 p.m.  
Officer Troyer while on patrol was flagged down by a good Samaritan who said he was cycling in the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he found a New York Driver’s License on the side of the roadway. The Samaritan handed the officer the license and he saw the name and searched the system, however he did not observe any local addresses or information. Officer Troyer also did not locate any recent lost reports regarding a driver’s license. Officer Troyer entered the driver’s license into evidence. Case clear.

## Dec. 22 Debris

12:12 p.m.  
Sgt. Montfort while on patrol was flagged down by a FEMA monitor who was overseeing debris removal at the Linley Street boat ramp. A man was irate and demanded to know if the removal of debris from Jewfish Key to the boat ramp was authorized by the town. While speaking with the man, the foreman of debris removal arrived on scene and stated he and equipment was authorized to use the boat ramp by Longboat Key officials. Moreover, the foreman stated that upon completion of the project, he will be removing any debris left at the boat ramp

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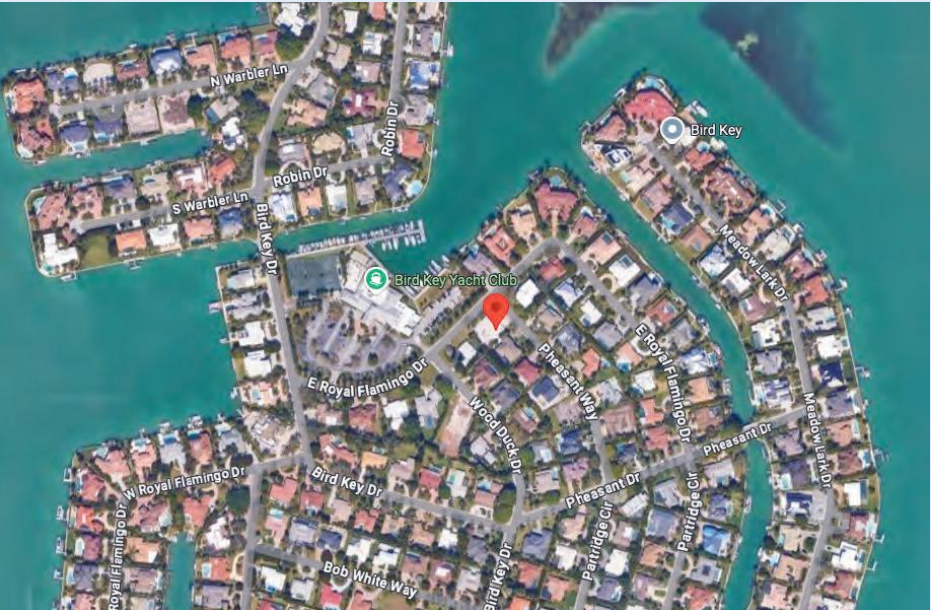
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# KeyRealEstate

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|---------------------------------|---------|--------------|--------------------|---|---|----------------|--------------|
| 404 PHEASANT WAY                | 2,757   | \$3,975,000  | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 0              | \$3,875,000  |
| 2110 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#547    | 2,105   | \$929,000    | 3                  | 2 | 0 | 251            | \$900,000    |
| 230 SANDS POINT RD Unit#3505    | 634     | \$1,118,000  | 1                  | 1 | 0 | 41             | \$950,000    |
| 5930 EMERALD HARBOR DR          | 2,986   | \$1,500,000  | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 206            | \$1,350,000  |
| 3040 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#252    | 2,250   | \$1,575,000  | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 352            | \$1,450,000  |
| 2185 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#212 | 2,448   | \$1,999,000  | 3                  | 3 | 0 | 48             | \$1,850,000  |
| 1211 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#205 | 1,598   | \$2,299,000  | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 238            | \$2,033,000  |
| 3464 MISTLETOE LN               | 3,367   | \$3,500,000  | 4                  | 3 | 0 | 4              | \$3,500,000  |
| 1591 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#214 | 2,249   | \$6,900,000  | 2                  | 2 | 1 | 0              | \$6,900,000  |
| 1561 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#501 | 5,895   | \$12,512,637 | 3                  | 4 | 1 | 0              | \$12,512,637 |



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2024

YEAR IN REVIEW

Storms take a toll in 2024

Storms, from page 1

The storm became a Category 1 hurricane and made land-fall in Steinhatchee of Florida’s Big Bend region early Monday morning.

Many of Longboat’s low-lying areas in the north end Village and mid-Key were among the most impacted by rainfall and storm surge. Surrounding areas in Sarasota and Manatee counties also saw similar impacts with flooded roads and debris from high winds. Floodwaters submerged a large portion of the Bobby Jones Golf Course. Water was covering entire fairways and spilled over a concrete wall and sidewalk, covering two of the three lanes of westbound Fruitville Road, forcing traffic into a single lane.

Firefighters, paramedics and law enforcement were inundated with rescue calls, some that required boats to reach stranded people. The Sarasota County Emergency Operations Center had logged 402 incidents involving water rescues, vehicles in water, or evacuations from flooded houses throughout Sarasota County, including Longboat Key, Venice and Englewood.

Then in September, Hurricane Helene brought an unprecedented storm surge that inundated homes along Longboat Key, Lido Key and Siesta Key. The storm started as something of an anomaly as an amorphous and unorganized system south of the Yucatan Peninsula. Within a week, the storm turned into a Category 4 hurricane with sustained 140 mph winds and became the most devastating system to literally wash over the islands around Sarasota with Siesta Key, Lido and Longboat Key damaged to an extent not witnessed in our lifetimes.

To put the destruction into perspective, our area only received wind gusts of about 60 mph, but the forecast of a 4-7 foot storm surge held true with most of the above-named areas nearing 7 feet.

The tremendous volume of sea water flooded countless homes on the barrier islands, left Gulf of Mexico Drive on Longboat Key a veritable sand dune, destroyed and left impassable the state road leading to Longboat Key on Bradenton Beach and cut off access for residents to Lido Key and Longboat Key following the storm.

Longboat Fire Chief Paul Dezzi led an update less than 24 hours after the storm on Friday afternoon. He spoke of how the entire island was impassable except with high water vehicles supplied by emergency crews.

“It is shocking what we found. Numerous homes were damaged and some destroyed. There is debris everywhere and construction materials strewn about and as we moved to the north end of the island it got worse,” said Dezzi.

On Friday after the storm, Dezzi and the police department along with public works and other staff made sure those who decided to stay and weather the storm survived.

“The people who stayed were calling us and we could not get to them,” said Dezzi. “They could not leave the north end because of the road destruction and mounds of sand, and then there were three feet plus of water on the south end. Lido was flooded and the water had nowhere to go,” said Dezzi.

Dezzi told almost 200 listeners on the virtual meeting that the town would not allow residents back until it was deemed safe. He pointed out that the water was not up to pressure, much of the island was without power and some streets were filled with debris.

He said the town had to place a bus at Bird Key Park and had brought about 20 residents who had stayed through the storm to the bus and then to a shelter. It took a lot of time and coordination and energy away from readying the island for those who had evacuated.

Another concern for Dezzi was the prospect of electric vehicles left charging in garages that likely flooded. Town Manager Howard Tipton spent the entirety of the previous evening on the Key and said the storm surge was up to six feet and that Gulf of Mexico Drive was “left like a sand dune. Our beach is

largely on Gulf of Mexico Drive now.”

Tipton said 20 cars were found stuck on Gulf of Mexico Drive and that the state road would have to be rebuilt and the north entrance will be compromised and impassable for some time.

St. Armands Circle and its numerous businesses stood in several feet of water during the height of the surge. The impact on Siesta Key was equally severe with most every home built on grade flooded unless it was above seven feet in elevation.

Florida Power and Light could not give any forecast as to when power would be restored and the county was struggling to operate the nearly two dozen lift stations on the island, which were overrun and needed to be reenergized and repaired.

Midnight Pass accomplished through storm that which could not be accomplished through politics and government – it opened once again, connecting the Gulf of Mexico and the Bay.

Then in October, Hurricane Milton landed directly onto Siesta Key and Longboat Key. The forecast for Milton put Sarasota, Longboat Key and Siesta Key directly in the bullseye of a then Category 5 Hurricane with storm surges of up to 15 feet fast approaching. The forecasts and the spaghetti models continued to agree and it appeared inevitable that another storm would disfigure and devastate the shoreline.

Millions of Floridians fled Milton from Fort Myers north to the Tampa Bay region to get out of the way of what would likely be an epic storm surge and lethal winds.

On Wednesday evening, Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton and Fire Chief Paul Dezzi along with FEMA and County Emergency Personnel all watched the storm from the Emergency Headquarters on Cattlemen Road. The winds were too high for emergency personnel to perform last minute assistance and the manager as well as all the evacuated residents feared the worst.

Within hours it became clear that even though the storm directly hit Siesta Key, the storm surge was not as high as that of Hurricane Helene. Sustained winds of topping 110 mph damaged fences, manufactured homes and foliage. But, with the exception of power outages and numerous trees that snapped, there was a collective sigh of relief from emergency officials, the Longboat Key Mayor as well as residents, who received word that their homes were intact and not flooded.

“It’s as good news as we could have hoped for, a lot less damage than we expected,” exclaimed a tired yet overjoyed Longboat Key Mayor Ken Schneier following the storm.

Tipton says that Debby was a rain event, Helene a surge event, and Milton was all wind. Tipton said the first sign that there was not tremendous flooding was that the lift stations were not suffering the same level of inflow as with Helene.

Tipton credits the luck for Longboat on the fact that the storm wobbled to the south slightly just before hitting, leaving Longboat on the dry side of the rotational axis.

Tipton said the north end of the island took a beating from the wind with some roofs damaged as well as some of the homes in the mid-key trailer park.

“The newest construction held up to both the surge and the wind,” said Tipton.

Tipton said more than 50 trucks were stationed near Spanish Main mid-key, attempting to splice a major electrical connector in order to restore power to the rest of the island.

Tipton was glad that residents listened to the danger that was forecast and that more than 98 percent of the residents evacuated.

“It could have been so much worse. At 5 o’clock before the storm hit, Fire Chief Paul Dezzi and I called the weather service and we were told that the storm was going to hit Longboat Key directly,” said Tipton.

“Reports started to emerge as early as 10 p.m. with an email from a resident who stayed on the key saying that the surge was not worse than during Helene. At 4:30 a.m., the first rescue teams made it out to Siesta Key and reported back that the situation did not look as bad as feared. The Coon Key Bridge, which connects St. Armands and Bird Key had a problem on one lane, and St. Armands was flooded, but there was no 10 or 15 feet of storm surge.

“The storm broke up just when it needed to and the storm went south just as we needed,” said Tipton.

Tipton was impressed with the dedication of the Longboat Key staff who showed their dedication to the community and to their jobs.

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# Lawsuit filed against City Commissioner Kyle Battie



2024  
YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2024 a Sarasota City Commissioner faced a lawsuit after publicly singling out a private citizen at a Commission meeting. During a Commission meeting in January, Commissioner Kyle Battie displayed a screenshot of a post by a woman named Kelly Franklin that equated him to a gorilla, and therefore he accused her of racism. Battie described the screenshot he was presenting as “sick, abhorrent, and egregious.”

Later in the meeting, commissioners received emails that led them to conclude the image Battie presented was likely fake.

Kelly Franklin’s attorney, Richard A. Harrison, says his client did post a picture with a cap-

## St. Regis, from page 1

dings were booked for the ballroom in the Fall.

“St. Regis said it is the nicest luxury resort in their brand,” Whittall said.

The past two years brought a strong market response for the condominiums, with a pent-house selling for \$25 million. The lowest price paid for a unit was \$2.2 million.

The residences and the resort are connected through amenities and a series of pools, fountains, an aquatic tank, lazy river and of course restaurants and bars.

C.W Prime steakhouse is one of the restaurants on the property with a balcony looking out on the Gulf of Mexico.

Whittall explained that owners of condominiums have full access to everything — the spa, fitness center, all the pools and restaurants and beach area. Hotel guest will also have access to all the amenities.

Of interest to Longboaters and anyone wanting to visit the St. Regis, all of the restaurants are open to the public and beach walkers can stroll up and hang out at the Monkey Bar and eat at the beachside grill. The beachside grill is to be named “Aura” and Whittall describes it as “Latin-inspired with a Miami retro feel.”

The Tiki or “Monkey Bar” will be homage to Murf Klauber, the legendary owner of the former Colony Beach & Tennis Resort that operated on the site for more than four decades before collapsing under the burden of lawsuits and deferred maintenance.

The St. Regis beach will be for the condo owners and hotel guest and owners of one of 400 memberships. Whittall said 400 St. Regis memberships will be available for about \$125,000 and will allow full access to all including the spas, the tennis court and pickleball courts, bars, taverns and speakeasy, and the beach area.

A major part of the operation and appeal is the ballroom of almost 12,000 square feet. Whittall waves across the hall to the far wall where a \$500,000 LED screen can be implemented into events and conferences.

“The whole look of the ballroom and all of its colors can change through the LED lighting system,” Whittall says.

Like an endless brochure of amenities, the spa has a steam room, a snow room, a cold plunge pool, and every other feature one could find. But this spa also has waterfront views and a fireplace.

Walking outside the hotel, the space between it and the residences are filled with paths along a lazy river, a grotto that the lazy river flows through.

“I saw that in Mexico and thought we had to do it here,” says Whittall of the grotto.

Around a bend is the resort’s \$10 million saltwater lagoon that is divable and has sting rays, coral and two, 600-pound gopher tortoises named Will and Astor. A marine biologist is on staff to supervise the care.

“We will be able to rehabilitate marine life here as well” Says Whittall.

Designed by SB Architects, Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA), and Dutch East Design, the new resort will be the only St. Regis to open in the U.S. this year.

The St. Regis Longboat Key Resort’s reception area and the hotel’s interiors, crafted by HBA, pull inspiration from the area seascape, as well as circus showman and promoter John Ringling’s imprint on Sarasota’s performing arts culture.

Throughout the property, design elements nod to Ringling and the circus—from rope-like chandeliers to an oval-shaped ballroom that’s reminiscent of a circus tent. In the St. Regis Bar, a lattice cage wraps around a mural by artist William Savarese, which pays homage to the King Cole Bar at St. Regis’ iconic New York flagship.

Contemporary artwork includes a mosaic at the front entry of over 350,000 mosaic pieces, while a second on the rooftop features more than 750,000 hand-laid tiles.

The property boasts 800 feet of beach, a sea lagoon wildlife reserve, multiple swimming pools, cabanas. In addition, a 475-foot winding river with cascading waterfalls leads into the grotto, a private sanctuary complete with Jacuzzi jets and champagne service. The property also houses the 20,000 square-foot St. Regis Spa.

## City island, from page 1

significantly under-utilized relative to other similar parks in the area. The lack of diverse amenities, programmed spaces, clear way-finding, and shade are all factors that contribute to lack of activation of the Park. The low density of the Park gives the sense of the spaces being undesirable. The lack of users or natural surveillance after the business hours of the adjacent properties along with the absence of modern safety features such as cameras or blue light call boxes contributes negatively to the comfort and image of the space. ... With additional programmed spaces and more variety in amenities, City Island Park has the potential to become a great asset to the community of Sarasota.”

According to Koffman, the proposed partnership will require no financial investment by the city. The private organization has the necessary capital funds for all enhancements. Ride Entertainment will be responsible for all maintenance of the park and will create and execute a national and local marketing strategy for City Island Park.

Later in the year, Sarasota City Commissioner Eric Arroyo was accused of a potential conflict of interest with his vote on the proposal to allow Ride Entertainment to operate the amusement attraction and golf course at City Island, since Commissioner Arroyo is was a registered agent for Park Golf Entertainment — formerly Ride Entertainment — and Park Golf Entertainment Orlando. Park Golf Entertainment owners and brothers, Jeffrey and David Koffman, proposed the public-private partnership to commercialize City Island Park.

It was suggested commissioners reconsider their approval to allow an advisory board instead to consider the park plan. Arroyo voted in favor of allowing the Parks, Recreation and Environmental Protection advisory board to vet the plan at its April meeting. Sarasota City Attorney Robert Fournier advised Commissioner Arroyo in a memo that his law firm must sever all business relationships with Ride Entertainment if he is to ultimately vote on the proposal.

tion referring to gorillas, but the picture of Battie was photoshopped by an unknown individual over Franklin’s actual picture of gorillas that she posted while in Africa.

Franklin’s suit alleges defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

“What happened on Jan. 16th was a performance. It was scripted, orchestrated, and probably rehearsed over nearly a month. It was not unfortunate, it was intentional and deliberate,” said Franklin’s attorney Richard Harrison.

According to the lawsuit, texts show Battie was sent an edited picture and the original post from Franklin’s Facebook page of real gorillas about a month before he brought it up at the meeting, saying the texts were taken out of context.

“I did my due diligence in terms of trying to vet it. It’s something to sit here and have people lodge stones at you right to your face,” Battie said.

The four-complaint lawsuit alleges that Battie has defamed Franklin in multiple ways — including committing conspiracy to defame her — and intentionally inflicted emotional distress upon her:

Franklin is seeking damages in excess of \$50,000, “exclusive of interest, court costs, and attorneys’ fees” and is demanding a jury trial, the complaint adds.

A private citizen, Franklin is a retired publishing executive who has resided in downtown Sarasota since 2011, the complaint says. She is civically active, and has advocated for public parks and greenspace and human rights,” the complaint continues.

At all times material to this action,” the complaint contends, “Battie was acting beyond the scope of his employment or function as a City Commissioner, in bad faith and with malicious purpose and in a manner exhibiting wanton and willful disregard of Franklin’s rights.”

“As such, Battie is personally liable in tort for his actions,” the complaint contends.

Quoting from both Section 166.021(1) of the Florida Statutes and then from Article IV of the Sarasota City Charter, the complaint argues that the “Hoax Post, if taken at face value as presented by Battie, was unrelated to any City-permitted or City-regulated activity by Franklin.”

Further, the complaint says, the Hoax Post “did not reflect, suggest, or relate to the commission of any criminal offense by Franklin,” nor did it “include any incitement to imminent lawless action (incitement), threats of serious bodily harm (true threats), or speech that would cause an immediate breach of the peace (fighting words).”

The complaint also argues, “Neither the City Commission nor Battie has any lawful or legitimate governmental function that involves monitoring, policing, regulating, analyzing, calling out, or legislating over the private speech of citizens — even speech that is hurtful or offensive, or that would full under what is colloquially referred to as ‘hate speech.’ Such speech is fully and robustly protected under the First Amendment.

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