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SUN NEWSPAPERS

OPINION

OUR VIEW

This could be breakthrough in homeless stalemate

In the 1980s, the city of Miami decided the best way to deal with the problem of homelessness was to run homeless people out of town. Police simply busted people for sitting on sidewalks or sleeping in parks and sent them off to jail.

The ACLU sued — arguing the homeless could hardly avoid these behaviors — and eventually won a settlement.

From that emerged something called the “Pottinger” agreement. It was a set of rules police were bound to follow when dealing with vagrancy and homelessness.

Most important were protocols that said police could arrest someone for a simple misdemeanor — like sleeping in a park after hours — only if they first offered alternative shelter. If no shelter beds were available, homeless individuals would have to be left alone.

Jailing the homeless for the fact of homelessness is a dumb, expensive proposition to begin with; it doesn't address underlying problems. People just cycle in and out of jail.

But the Pottinger system does allow police or social service providers to deal with immediate problems, like

homeless people sitting in downtown doorways or making noise after hours in public parks.

And it does direct the homeless into shelters, where they may get further help getting their lives on a better track.

For three years now, Sarasota County has been grappling with homelessness through a coalition of county and city governments, courts, police and social service agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations and foundations. They've made tremendous strides.

A tight network has been set up to provide case management for the homeless. The Family Haven Alliance now offers emergency housing and longer-term help for families in need of permanent housing. From late 2014 to March 2017, 804 adults and 1,339 children have been served.

A Comprehensive Treatment Court began last month. A program called SHIFTS, operated with the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, has dealt with 125 transients in nearly two years — 61 percent of whom have remained in housing.

Still, due to disagreements between the city of Sarasota and the county

over a proposed large, “come-as-you-are” shelter — long seen as key to a comprehensive “solution” — problems of chronic homelessness have persisted, particularly in downtown Sarasota.

That situation may soon change, thanks to what appears to be a breakthrough.

Last week, Sarasota County commissioners signed on to a city-sponsored study conducted by the Florida Housing Coalition that suggested a slightly different approach. The plan calls for the creation of “permanent supportive housing” with 20 beds in various places and 40 at a single site; and “Rapid ReHousing,” 80 rental units for shorter-term housing and case management.

For emergency, overnight stays, the city would use 20 dedicated beds at the existing Salvation Army shelter in Sarasota, and the county would contract for another 30.

The city agreement with the Salvation Army is already in place. Last week, the county agreed to sign on also.

The immediate importance is that the available emergency bed space will allow authorities to make

Pottinger-compliant, jail-alternative offers to the homeless. It is a large step toward taking care of problems on the streets and in the parks in a legal, compassionate, constructive way — something much more difficult now.

County officials noted the Housing Coalition report concentrated primarily on the chronic problem in northern Sarasota County, and that more study was needed to address South County's needs. That is true, and we're pleased to see that fact was acknowledged. But officials also noted relief in Sarasota City — where the problem is acute — likely will improve conditions in the south, too.

The 50 designated emergency beds may seem a small number, but project manager Susan Pourciau of the Housing Coalition said it would make a real difference.

As she told county commissioners, “Those communities (in Florida) that have a system like this have seen drastic declines in chronic homelessness in their downtown areas. It will happen, but it will take a little time.”

After three years of difficult effort throughout the county, with real successes and unfortunate roadblocks, this seems to be a significant advance.

Readers support editor in column about video

Editor Ronald Dupont Jr.'s column published this past Saturday elicited many letters and phone calls. Dupont's column was about the video in which two people accuse a Venice flight training school of knowingly training terrorists.

Dupont said the video was slanderous and racist and provided no proof of its accusations. He accused those who created the video of using racism to spread fear.

Here is how the readers of Dupont's column responded:

Taking a stand

Editor:
I am glad to be a subscriber to a paper that takes a stand against bigotry, hatred and fear. Thank you for the editorial in today's *Gondolier*. I wish more people felt the same way.
Pam Rathmell

Column was uplifting

Editor:
Your article in today's *Gondolier* was excellent. I agree with you and found this article to be uplifting.
I have a multicultural family and find that generally people judge the face of a person different from them as an outsider and not American.
We should all celebrate the diversity in our country as that is what makes our country so special.
Thank you for bringing that subject to the forefront.
Sandy McGowan
Venice

I hope it encourages others

Editor:
I absolutely loved your column today. Thank you so much! I hope it encourages others to openly object to bigotry and lies.
Janet Martin
Venice

Thank you from a fellow American

Editor:
Thank you for your excellent

article today in rebuttal to the amateur videographers who are attempting to spread hate and racism.

Some days, I just want to give up on the state of this world we're living in and then bam!

Along comes a rational, intelligent journalist who refuses to give in to the lies and smear campaign being waged in our country.

A great big thank-you from a fellow American!
Claire MacFayden

It needed to be said

Editor:
Bravo!
Bravo to you for saying what needed to be said.
Bea Holt
Venice

I liked your column

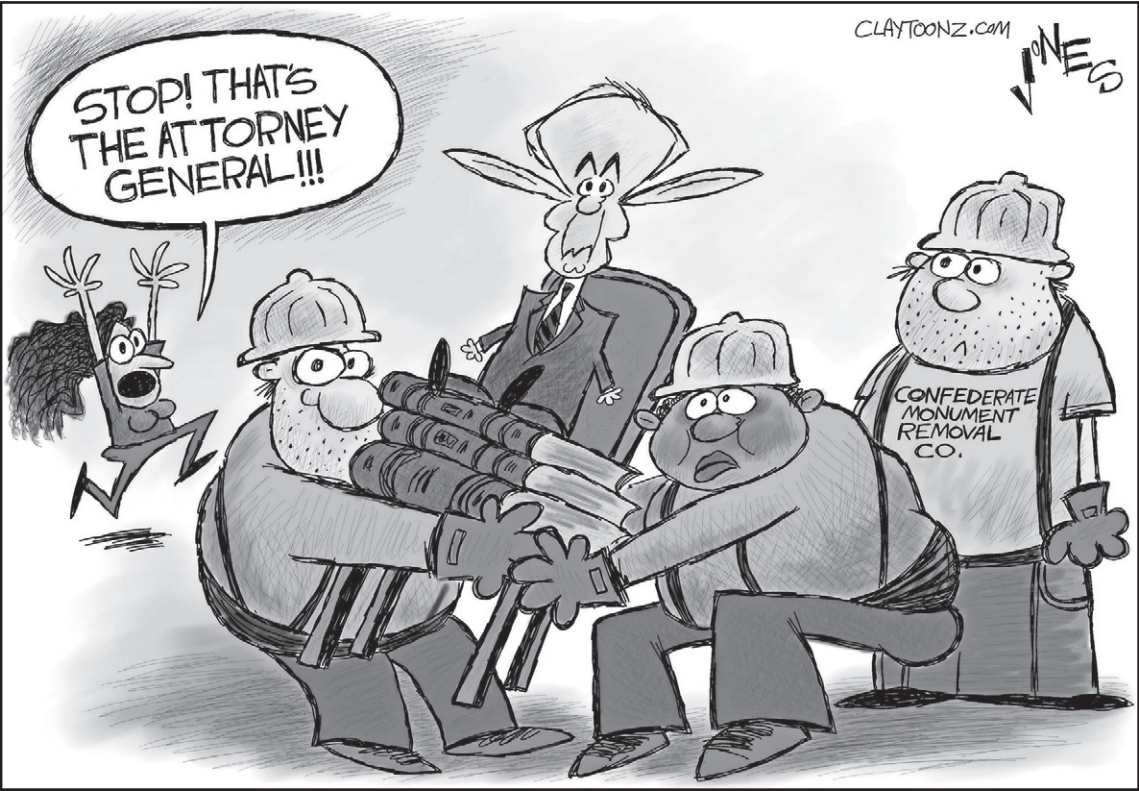
Editor:
I like your write-up about “how to spread lies and racism.”
Thanks.
Kristie Tedford

I look forward to teaching flight students

Editor:
Thank you for the article you wrote regarding treating others with respect and kindness no matter their background. Working with young, bright students that are invested in growing mentally and becoming contributing members of society is something I look forward to doing daily.

Every student that we have is here for a reason: to receive excellent flight training from one of the best flight training academies in the state of Florida. I agree that this should be supported by members of our community so they feel safe at the school they pay to attend.

Camille Seiler
Office Manager
Florida Flyers Flight Academy Venice



MORE AND MORE RESTAURANTS ARE BECOMING 'PET-FRIENDLY.' WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS? CALL US AT 941-207-1111.

Editor's Note: The number for the Let 'em Have It Line is once again 941-207-1111.

Gridlock. Stop promoting tourism! We can't handle what we've got right now. Traffic is horrendous. Route 41 and 75 are often in total gridlock. And this is paradise?

Festivals Are Great. I love our downtown festivals. It's one of the things that makes Venice such a charming place. Seems like there is always something fun to do and they're free! What could be better?

Landscape Plans? Remarkable progress has been made on the 41 Bypass and Venice Avenue project as it nears its completion. Please tell me, better yet, tell all of us, in detail, what landscape plans are in place when this work is completed. Will we look and present an attractive image like the Naples-Fort Myers corridor by working with our friends in the county or will we leave it as it is and get just another tired old beach town?

School Streets Too Dark. We noticed Bahama Street near the high school and elementary school was very dark. Hopefully, the city can put some more lighting in that area. Kids walk to school in the morning and the sidewalks are very dark. Hopefully the city will put more street lights in.

Indian Avenue is very dark. Also, I'm very disappointed in our city manager. The city needs to buy a showmobile that has been used for Venice High School and other sporting events in the past. It's an asset to the community. I was very disappointed in the way this was handled and his communication to the City



Let 'em Have It

Council.

When people need to use it, we won't have one. So, the showmobile needs to be replaced. It was the city manager's decision to do away with that, not the City Council.

Bad Drivers. There is no problem with the Jacaranda roundabout. The problem is ignorant drivers. I never thought I would see it, but the other day an elderly woman was driving the wrong way, then stopped and made a U-turn in the circle.

Moving of the Post Office. I could be way off base, but there doesn't seem to be any activity at the police station on Capri Isles Boulevard. Why not move the post office to that location in that building and do whatever you want with the post office on Venice Avenue. However, for all the excuses to reduce the traffic on Venice Avenue, it seems to me that the post office there provides extra parking for people who use Venice Avenue. So, if you're

going to get rid of the post office, just move it to the police station because there's an alternate site for that anyway.

Giving Respect to Golf Carts. I'd like to complain that people don't respect golf carts. They have every right on the road. They have everything a car has. It's the handicapped people that do have them. The Beall's store on the island has only one handicapped parking spot. My gosh, they could have a few more. I don't know who could take care of that, but a little respect. We're not bicycling; we're not in a big truck; we're in a golf cart.

We do the legal speed and we have insurance and everything a car does. They treat you like you are a pig. They pass you so fast on the road like they are annoyed that you are there.

No Accountability. It's shocking to see the complete lack of accountability displayed by Coach Peacock. Not only is this a terrible example for the students, but it also perfectly reflects football rules behavior that is all too common in high school football programs.

The Let'em Have It line allows readers to sound off on issues of local interest. Opinions expressed here are solely those of the callers. Personal attacks on private individuals; attacks on or commercials for specific businesses; local candidate endorsements or attacks during election season; or opinions or comments otherwise unfit for publication will not be printed. If you would like to participate, call the line at 941-207-1111. Call no more than once a week. Please keep your comments brief. The line is available all hours. Caller identification is not required.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters to the editor are welcome on virtually any subject. They must be signed and give the writer's address and telephone number for verification. Letters of more than 250 words may be edited for length. We do not publish letters that condemn or praise business service. We do not publish poetry, open letters or letters to third parties. Letters from the same person will not be published more than once a month. Send or bring your letter to the Venice Gondolier Sun, 200 E. Venice Ave., Venice FL 34285. You can also fax signed letters to 941-484-8460 or email them to rdupont@venicegondolier.com. For more information, call 941-207-1000.