

LOCAL + BUSINESS

WEST PALM BEACH ELECTION

Will mayoral race go to recount?

After election law is parsed, canvassing board to decide Friday whether recount is called

By Tony Doris
The Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH — Even as apparent mayor-elect Keith James set out to create

an action plan Wednesday for his first days in office, the supervisor of elections informed him his win might be subject to a machine recount of Tuesday's ballots.

Unofficial totals Tuesday night had City Commissioner James far ahead, with 50.4 percent of the vote, just enough to avoid a runoff with



James



Ryan

fellow Commissioner Paula Ryan, who pulled in 28.8 percent of the vote. Former

County Commissioner Priscilla Taylor came in at 20.8 percent.

The county's new governor-appointed supervisor of elections, Wendy Sartory Link, determined that because James was less than half a percent over 50, Ryan was entitled to a machine recount. If the recount came in with

James below 50 percent, that would trigger a runoff election between the top two candidates in two weeks.

But the decision on whether to conduct a recount was not clear to city officials Wednesday afternoon and the candidates were left waiting.

See RACE, B10



Manager Michelle Moore, far right, gives a tour Wednesday of the newly relocated National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 24/7 call center, which moved from Virginia to Lake Park. [GREG LOVETT PHOTOS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Call center for missing kids opens in Lake Park



John Walsh speaks to the crowd with his wife Revé on Wednesday during a ceremony to celebrate the relocation of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 24/7 call center.

By Jorge Millian
The Palm Beach Post

LAKE PARK — When young Adam Walsh went missing from a Broward County mall in 1981, his parents say they received no assistance from law enforcement. It wasn't until the 6-year-old boy's severed head was found in St. Lucie County that the FBI got involved, said Adam's father John Walsh.

"No one helped us look for Adam," said Walsh, the host of the TV show "America's Most Wanted" for 25 years. "We had nowhere to turn. It was just a nightmare."

The National Center for Missing and Exploited

See KIDS, B4

Remade water district faces same old battles

Trump budget plan falls short of \$200M sought for Everglades restoration

By Kimberly Miller
The Palm Beach Post

New leaders of Florida's largest water management district charged with the weighty task of preserving water supplies and restoring the famed river of grass meet for the first time Thursday after the dramatic firing of their predecessors by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

There will be no honeymoon period.

Already, the nascent South Florida Water Management District governing board is facing a potential crisis with President Donald Trump's 2020 proposed budget falling woefully short of the \$200 million lawmakers requested for Everglades restoration.

Instead, about \$63 million is earmarked for restoration in the Army



Thurlow Lippisch



Steinle

Corps of Engineers' spending plan with nothing set aside for the planned 17,000-acre reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee that is supposed to alleviate harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

Conservationists are optimistic the diverse backgrounds of the new nine-member board, which includes an environmentalist, a scientist, businessmen and a 26-year Army veteran, will buoy its acumen.

But it seems the volunteers will fight some of the same battles waged by the previous board, which repeatedly bemoaned the lack of federal funding.

See DISTRICT, B5



West Palm Beach commissioners approved plans for Forté, a 24-story condominium proposed for 1309 S. Flagler Drive. [RENDERING PROVIDED]

24-story S. Flagler Drive condo tower approved

Several West Palm residents at meeting object to luxury building

By Tony Doris
The Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH — The West Palm Beach City Commission gave final approval Monday night to a 24-story waterfront condominium at 1309 S. Flagler Drive, overriding the zoning rule that a building that size must have a lot more than seven times bigger than that 1.4-acre site and leave much more space from adjacent properties.

Commissioners said the benefits of the luxury tower offset the need for waivers: tax revenue, contributions for trolleys, corner park, public promenade, underground parking and utilities, electric car chargers and a promised minority hiring and apprenticeship program.

Construction is planned to start this year. Prices will range from \$3.8 million to \$7.5 million.

"It's a great addition to our neighborhood. We are

very happy to have this happen," a resident of the nearby Trianon tower told the commission, dismissing fears the new condo's corner park and fountain would attract the homeless. "All that seems like fluff to me. It's good we're moving forward in an upscale manner."

But the scale of the project, its density and traffic it would add, brought opponents to urge its defeat.

"Your job is to represent the interests of the voters," said Susan Vitek of the El Cid neighborhood just to the south. "Yet I see you, in multiple cases, waging a waiver war against what people in West Palm Beach decided they don't want. Don't you care?" she asked the commissioners.

"I do care very much for this city," City Commissioner Christina Lambert responded. "We all spend countless hours talking to residents and researching and reading and getting as much information as we can to make these decisions."

See CONDO, B5

Gardens man killed in plane crash was loving father, talented singer

By Jodie Wagner
The Palm Beach Post

PALM BEACH GARDENS — Before Matthew Fiorello put his young daughters to bed each night, he would sing them a Billy Joel song.

"Goodnight my angel, now it's time to dream," he'd sing to London, 5, and Arden, 2, as they drifted off to sleep. "And dream how wonderful your life will be. Someday your child will cry, and if you sing this lullaby, then in your heart there will always be a part of me."

Those words have taken on a greater meaning for Rachel Backoff Fiorello, who sings them now in place of her husband.

Matthew Fiorello was one of five people who died Friday when their small plane crashed into Lake Okeechobee as its pilot struggled to make an emergency landing in Pahokee.

See CRASH, B4



Matthew Fiorello, with his wife, Rachel, and daughters, Arden, left, and London. He sang to the girls every night as part of their bedtime routine. [PHOTO PROVIDED BY RACHEL FIORELLO]

"I'm going to do everything that I can to keep every ounce of him living through my daughters." — Rachel Backoff Fiorello



West Palm Beach commissioners approved plans for Forté, a 24-story condominium proposed for 1309 S. Flagler Drive. [RENDERING PROVIDED]

CONDO

From Page B1

She added, however, that while she supported the project at 1309 South Flagler, "I do feel that we've gone about as far south as I would like to see a building of this size."

Neighborhood residents have heard that before.

"We were promised the Bristol would be the end of it," one man said, referring to a 25-story luxury condo nearing completion a few blocks to the north. "Now you're doing it again," he said. The city "is being sold to every developer who comes along with deep enough pockets," he added. "It isn't right."

Commissioner Kelly Shoaf said the board represented not just residents in the City Hall chambers but those not in attendance. "Some of the things I've heard tonight that benefit all the people in that group are a transit plan, minority hiring plan, a housing plan, an art plan, innovative design and preserving green space."

The vote was unanimous.

Forté, with 42 units — only two per floor — would be among the city's tallest. Perhaps the tallest if you count the pedestal atop two below-surface garage levels that set its ground floor well above flood levels near the Lake Worth Lagoon it overlooks.

The project is proposed by Two Roads Development and Alpha Blue Ventures.

Benefits cited by staff and pointed out by the mayor include a rebuilt Acacia Road bordering the tower to the north (valued at \$832,000), a pocket park on Flagler (valued at \$250,000), a \$341,000 contribution to a city fund for transit improvements, and a lushly landscaped "art walk" the length of Acacia leading from Currie Crescent to the Flagler waterfront.

Plans call for private elevators, the option to combine units to buy an entire floor, a sculpture garden, library, wine storage, two dedicated house cars for resident use, and "deep, wraparound balconies" that offer "sweeping, unobstructed city and ocean views from every

residence," according to information provided by the developers.

Designed by Bernardo Fort-Brescia of Miami's Arquitectonica firm, the tower is designed to resemble bows of two sea-bound ships.

"The curved, aerodynamic design connotes traditional naval architecture, dramatically shaped to minimize wind resistance," according to a release from the developer. "Spacious terraces follow the building's sleek elliptical shape, emulating the deck of a yacht."

Units will average 4,200 square feet but buyers have the option to combine two units into a full-floor residence. The development also will have a two-story penthouse, "the first in West Palm Beach to offer a private rooftop infinity pool," the developers said. There will also be two guest suites available to residents to reserve for visitors.

Additional features include a grand lobby and great room, designer-landscaped pool, his and hers spas, a theater room and a fitness center.

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DISTRICT

From Page B1

"I'm not afraid of politics, I'm not afraid of boards and I'm very much used to this situation," said new water board member Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, who served as a Sewall's Point commissioner and mayor. "The main thing I ask is that you talk to me in straight language so I can make real decisions."

Thurlow-Lippisch, a Stuart native who represents the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, also served as an alternate on the district's Water Resources Analysis Coalition for nearly four years.

While Thurlow-Lippisch has experienced firsthand the toxic blue-green algae that plagues the St. Lucie River when Lake Okeechobee water is released, she said she knows the Lake Worth Lagoon, Biscayne Bay and Florida Bay also suffer from too much or too little fresh water.

"I think if all our waters are impaired, we have to take a good hard look at this system, harder than we ever have before," she said.

In January, DeSantis made the unprecedented request that the water management district governing board resign saying the state needed a "fresh start."

Board members had run afoul of the newly minted governor and his environmental transition team chairman U.S. House Rep. Brian Mast, R-Palm City, in November when they approved extending a lease that allowed

sugarcane farming to temporarily continue on land slated for the reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee.

The last of the board members and former Executive Director Ernie Marks resigned Feb. 14.

"Clearly this is going to be a sea change from the past administration," said Everglades Law Center Executive Director Lisa Interlandi about the new board. "I look forward to seeing what a board with a mandate to fix our environmental problems can do."

West Palm Beach resident Jay Steinle represents Palm Beach County on the remade water management board.

Steinle, a saltwater fisherman and hunter, has served as managing director of Lighthouse Investment Group Partners since 2005. He said he hopes his finance experience can help complete environmental improvement projects as well as provide insight into the negative economic impacts that could occur if they are left unfinished.

"As a homeowner who lives and raises his three children on the Lake Worth Lagoon, I am keenly aware of the economic and health impacts of our water quality," Steinle said.

Also representing Palm Beach County as an at-large member is Cheryl Meads, an Islamorada Village Council member and chemist who worked as a contractor for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Meads won a \$96 million federal whistleblower case in 2010 for exposing fraud at her former employer GlaxoSmithKline.

On Wednesday, U.S.

Sens. Rick Scott and Marco Rubio with U.S. Reps. Brian Mast and Francis Rooney issued a joint statement decrying Trump's Everglades budget snub.

"For the third year in a row, the administration's budget request underfunds critical projects in South Florida," the lawmakers said. "It is incredibly short-sighted to continue to underfund a series of projects that are absolutely necessary to ensure the environmental sustainability and economic vitality of one of the most dynamic regions of our nation."

Celeste DePalma, director of Everglades Policy for Audubon Florida, said it's disappointing the president did not prioritize the southern reservoir, which his office approved in July.

But she said she's more concerned with the overall lack of Everglades restoration money, especially following a year where the state was overwhelmed with red tide and blue-green algae.

"We need more investment in green infrastructure, not less," she said.

Two seats remain empty on the new board. DeSantis tapped Ron Bergeron to represent Broward County on the board, but the environmentalist and founder of the Bergeron Family of Companies is undergoing an ethics review after he signed a \$25 million construction contract with the district in February.

No one has been appointed to represent counties north of Lake Okeechobee.

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