



ALSO INSIDE



Clearwater Beach

A new restaurant on Clearwater Beach is banking on its cryptocurrency theme. 2A

Madeira Beach

Another beach bash that had been muffled by the pandemic is back at full strength, with the John's Pass Seafood Festival invading the Madeira Beach fishing village and tourist center Jan. 20-23. 9A



Tarpon Springs

Thousands flock to Tarpon Springs to witness a joyful Epiphany celebration. 11A

Events

Are you still unsure what to do this weekend or next? Then check out our community calendar. 6A

Entertainment

The Dunedin Fine Art Center's latest exhibit proves small works can be a big deal. 2B

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Dunedin

The city's tennis players say pickleball is causing them a problem.

E-edition

Want to share the paper with family or friends? Check out an electronic version of this week's paper that you can download.



Pinellas County Schools

Schools chief set to retire

Superintendent Grego, who led district out of turmoil 10 years ago, will end tenure on July 1

By JEFFREY S. SOLOCHEK
Tampa Bay Times

Pinellas County school superintendent Mike Grego announced Jan. 6 that he will retire from the district on July 1, ending an education career that spanned more than four decades.

"It's a culmination of 42 wonderful years in public education, all in the state of Florida," said Grego, who emailed friends and supporters with the news early in the day. "I've loved every minute of it."

Grego has led the Pinellas district

for the past 10 years. Before joining the district, he worked as superintendent of Osceola County schools, state chancellor of K-12 schools and assistant superintendent of Hillsborough County schools, where he spent 28 years, mostly as an administrator.

He said the timing is right for him to go. He'll turn 65 in the spring, and he feels good about the district's situation and direction.

"It's time to pass the baton off," Grego said in an interview, adding he



Grego

plans to remain in the community after retirement. "I see only bright things for Pinellas."

Superintendent turnover in Florida has been high lately among Florida's largest districts.

Broward and Miami-Dade counties have superintendent searches ongoing, as does Lee County, which this week announced five finalists for its top job. The Palm Beach and Polk school districts hired new superintendents within the past year.

School Board chairperson Eileen Long praised Grego — Florida's 2018 superintendent of the year — for bringing stability and success to the district. She cited his efforts to help increase graduation rates and upgrade school buildings among other improvements.

"Dr. Grego has put us in such a wonderful spot," said Long, a retired teacher who didn't always hold the superintendent in such high regard. "Now we're looking forward."

See GREGO, page 4A

Community Pride



File photo by CHRIS GEORGE

This home at 1791 S. Belcher Road was one of several targeted by the city of Largo's Nuisance Abatement Program in 2019. The home, which was a target of suspected arson after becoming vacant, was demolished as part of the city's efforts to crack down on derelict homes.

City makes gains in battle against blight

By CHRIS GEORGE • Tampa Bay Newspapers

In past 2 years, Largo has collected over \$1.1M and many properties have been cleaned up as a result of efforts including the foreclosure program

LARGO — Two years ago, the city's code enforcement division had exhausted its options when addressing Largo's 100 derelict homes.

To crack down on the blighted properties, the city stepped up its efforts and introduced a foreclosure program.

That program has paid off, Community Standards Manager Tracey Schofield told city commissioners Jan. 4.

"In today's dynamic real estate market, when we bring neglected properties into compliance, it helps enhance the city through many different economic ways," he said.

Some of those ways, he said, include increased tax revenue, property values, attracting property owners and new development. The program also helps violators by resolving code liens on property titles.

"Since the program's inception, over \$1.125 million in money owed

See BLIGHT, page 5A

March Elections

Voters to have lots of choices

Plenty of municipal races on ballot around Pinellas

Tampa Bay Newspapers

With the new year comes a new election season, and from St. Pete Beach to Tarpon Springs, Pinellas County has plenty of races coming up.

Municipal elections will be held March 15. The voter registration deadline is Feb. 14. According to the Supervisor of Elections, municipalities have chosen not to conduct early voting. The deadline for a mail ballot is Feb. 10. To request a mail ballot, email mailballot@votepinellas.gov or call 727-464-8683.

Here's a look at the contested races and those already decided.

Belleair

Deputy Mayor Tom Kurey and Commissioner Tom Shelly were automatically appointed to commission seats when no one qualified to run against them.

A charter amendment on the ballot intends to make the potential abolishment of the police department more difficult by requiring a 5-0 vote from the commission as well as more than 60 percent of voters.

Belleair Beach

The mayor has an opponent, and

See RACES, page 7A

Belleair

COVID keeping town officials on their toes

Leaders adjust policies, cancel events due to rise in positive cases

By JEFF ROSENFIELD
Tampa Bay Newspapers

BELLEAIR — If you feel like 2022 is more like 2020, too, you're not alone.

With positive COVID cases, fueled by the highly contagious omi-

cron variant, rapidly rising to early pandemic levels, Pinellas County officials are scrambling to keep pace with changing CDC guidelines while attempting to maintain safe and healthy work environments for employees and staff.

In Belleair, the Town Commission recently discussed revising its employee COVID policy after the CDC's recent recommendation to reduce

See COVID, page 5A



Axios!

Alexander Makris, 16, of New Port Richey emerged from the murky waters of Spring Bayou with the white and gold cross during Tarpon Springs' 116th annual Epiphany celebration Jan. 6. Thousands head to Tarpon Springs each year to witness largest such event in the western hemisphere. Read more on Page 11A.

Photo by JEFF ROSENFIELD

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