

Sarasota

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PEOPLE

OSMONDS IN VEGAS?

The wholesome brother-sister duo are destined to turn Sin City into Sincere City. Page 9B



MUSIC

Local or new music on its own. A rock range? Back to Bernstein and beyond. Page 8B

www.heraldtribune.com/sarasota | Tuesday, September 9

TOM LYONS
COMMENT



Rewards are lacking for a local veteran

The story of a homeless Iraq war veteran who helped Sarasota police catch a prison escapee, and who now says he's being shorted on the reward money, is really a bigger story.

But let's keep this simple. Forget about Earl Coffey coming back from combat in Iraq prone to self-medicate to escape flashbacks, often about the day he shot an enemy who turned out to be just an unarmed Iraqi child.

And forget about Coffey's Army court martial and prison sentence for looting many thousands of dollars he and another soldier found in a Baghdad palace. Forget how his less-than-honorable discharge cost him his veteran benefits, which he could really use now that he's a damaged and homeless former soldier.

He has since spent time in jail in Sarasota for trying to sell stolen property. Some like.

Herald-Tribune reporter Billy Cox wrote all about this stuff back in May.

It is just too complicated to even guess who is or should be responsible for what, and what could or should be done to help the man.

And Coffey's own plan for helping himself — get back home to Kentucky, find coal mining work — could be bogus talk. Relatives have sent him money before.

So even if Coffey's aid to police had gotten him the \$2,000 reward, which he says a detective told him and a group of people about before the arrest, I'd tend to bet that the money would have changed very little.

But I'm getting calls, suggesting that what matters is that it isn't right for the police to scam Coffey, who deserves that reward. And that's easy to grasp.

After all, the state was looking for an escaped prisoner, Dmitri Sinilnikov, described in fliers as an accomplished computer hacker and identity thief.

Intersection to get city help

RIVER ROAD: North Port votes to use impact fee revenue for roadwork

By JOHN DAVIS
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NORTH PORT — City leaders cleared the way on Monday for spending \$5 million revamping the busy intersection of U.S. 41 and River Road, a major south county corridor and hurricane evacuation route.

The North Port City Commission voted 5-0 to approve spending millions from Sarasota County impact fees collected in North Port on the road work.

The two governments have

disagreed about who ultimately controls the revenue from the fees, charged by the county but collected by the city under a contract.

The fate of the money has been in doubt for six months. "This is going to help the city of North Port, not just Sarasota County," said Commissioner Fred Tower.

About 16,000 vehicles daily pass through the River Road-U.S. 41 intersection, one of the county's most crash-prone.

In March, North Port asked the county to proceed with intersection improvements using the city-collected money. But, frustrated over a

SEE ROADS ON 2B

DEFICIT BUDGET MAY BE ADOPTED

Spending drops in county's general fund



The fiscal year starts Oct. 1 of the previous year.

NOTE: Law enforcement, fire protection and other basic county services are paid for through the general fund.

SOURCE: Sarasota County
STAFF GRAPHIC / JENNIFER H. A. BERGSEN

SARASOTA: County to use reserves to avoid more layoffs or service cuts

By DOUG SWORD
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VENICE — Sarasota County is considering a deficit budget for the first time in memory due to a falling tax base and a voter-approved hike in the homestead exemption.

While savings of about \$65 million will flow to the owner of a home with a taxable value of \$200,000, the county will spend about \$16 million more than it will take in to make up

for the cuts. The equate reserves cut, but some fear that a prok downturn co county's saving tax hikes.

County officials plan to get the limited to be tough economy the housing bo increased its r

ough a rainy day enough more funds to run d years without



STAFF PHOTO / L. DEILAN LUTHEPLAND / davis@heraldtribune.com

Creative process

Abstract artist Beverly A. Smith scrapes a combination of oils from her palette as she works on a piece Friday at her Towles Court Art Center studio.

Smith is gearing up for a grand opening of her space.

A former gymnastics coach, Smith began experimenting with paints just a few years ago. One of her

pieces was recently chosen in a juried exhibition at the Art Center Sarasota.

For the opening, Smith is presenting a collection of works with the theme "North meets South" as the longtime New Englander adapts to life in the Sunshine State.

The grand opening reception is scheduled for 6 to 10 p.m. Oct. 17 at the studio.



YMCA may spar new

MANATEE: Rethinking the for student p

By CHRISTOPHER O'CHRIS
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MANATEE County for a protest fire officials, the 3 district may be plan to incre YMCA pays to programs at n

The 40 percent cost the YMC County about year, officials jeopardize the care of the p children can t study until the by their parent

The nonprofit dizes many of the program, p able before-a care for families ties such as On and Samoset.

YMCA leads only received tice about the leaving them t hold fundrais