

Your guide to TV, streaming entertainment – Inside and online \$2.00

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CAYO CONCH



"A new month — maybe, just maybe, some cooler temperatures, please?"

Heat advisory continues

The Florida Department of Health in Monroe County is urging residents to take necessary precautions and follow safety measures during the current heat advisory. With temperatures soaring and heat indexes reaching dangerous levels, it is important to prioritize the well-being of individuals and communities.

The Health Department recommends people stay hydrated, drink plenty of water and avoid excessive consumption of caffeine or alcohol, as they can lead to dehydration. People should avoid direct sunlight and long exposure to the sun and spend time in air-conditioned environments. People should wear lightweight, loose-fitting, and light-colored clothing and protect their heads with a wide-brimmed hat and use sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

People should minimize outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day and never leave children, vulnerable individuals, or pets unattended in vehicle. For information about heat related health issues, visit <https://monroe.floridahealth.gov>.

ON THE RADIO



Dr. Jonathan Gueverra, President and CEO of The College of The Florida Keys, joins News Director Joe Moore and Chuck Thomas with news of new programs at CFK and the upcoming fall registration for classes. Also on Morning Magazine,

- **Andrea Leal**, Florida Keys Mosquito Control District Executive Director
- **Justin Martin**, Key West High School Athletic Director
- **Marty Jenkins**, Navy League President
- **Shelly Krueger**, Marine biologist and Florida Sea Grant Agent
- **Sarah Fangman**, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent
- **Capt. Beth Regoli**, Commanding Officer, NAS Key West
- **Steve Estes**, The News Barometer Editor/Publisher

On Evening Edition, host Ron Saunders talks with Monroe County Commissioner Holly Raschein

NEWS: 7:30, 8:30 a.m., noon, 5 & 6 p.m. Evening Edition 5-5:30 p.m.

FLORIDA KEYS
keysnews.com

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Group challenges KCB hall plans

BY RICHARD TAMBORRINO
Special to The Citizen

Following the 3-2 Key Colony Beach City Commission vote on July 20 to award a City Hall rebuild to Hands on Builders, a group of residents has retained a local attorney to file a temporary injunction asking a judge to prohibit the city from taking any action until enough signatures are secured to request a referendum vote.

A group called Concerned in KCB, headed by long-standing resident Laurie Swanson, filed the injunction Thursday, July 27, against the city of Key Colony Beach. Filing No. 178350859 in the 16th Judicial Circuit in Monroe County is classified as a constitutional challenge regarding a statute or ordinance. It is a non-monetary declaration seeking injunctive relief. Swanson and the group have

retained the services of law firm Hershoff, Lupino and Yagel of Tavernier, and are represented by their attorney, Matthew Hutchinson, who filed the injunction. Concerned in KCB has paid the firm \$10,000 as a retainer, with more than 10 residents contributing toward this effort. The petition states that "the city never meaningfully pursued an option to make permanent repairs to the existing building and,

instead, focused exclusively on the construction of a new city hall building." It goes on to state that KCB Code of Ordinances, Sec. 2-16(b), allows its residents "to approve or reject at the polls any measure passed by the city commission or submitted by the city commission to a vote of the electors, such power being known as the referendum."

See **PLANS**, Page **5A**

SHOW TIME



Photos provided by Destination Dive

The Discovery television network will air a five-part series of its 'Destination Dive' program about diving in the Florida Keys, including a segment on those trying to save the reef, beginning Sunday, Aug. 6.

Florida Keys dive show airs this month on Discovery

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA
Keys Citizen

At a time when the Florida Keys reef is facing one of its most severe bleaching events in recent history, the Discovery television network will air five-part series about diving in the Florida Keys, which includes a segment on those trying to save the reef.



At a time when the Florida Keys reef is facing one of its most severe bleaching events in recent history, 'Destination Dive' emphasizes conservation and protection and takes viewers on exciting adventures as unique as the Florida Keys itself.

The five-episode series of "Destination Dive" is slated for broadcast on Discovery each Sunday from Aug. 6 through Sept. 3. The series follows the airing of a successful television pilot in 2022.

"Destination Dive" emphasizes conservation and protection and takes viewers on exciting adventures as unique as the Florida Keys itself. The chain of subtropical islands is both an intriguing setting for viewers to explore and one of the global epicenters for environmental conservation and renewal.

The wrecks and reefs of the Florida Keys are spectacular and each section of the Keys offers divers something different, Mike Zimmer, the program's executive producer,

told The Keys Citizen this week. "The Florida Keys is an area teeming with amazing diving, marine life and people passionate about protecting our oceans," Zimmer said. "Destination Dive's stories are unique and our audience will be captivated by their content, characters and the visual beauty of the Florida Keys."

The first episode will focus on diving off Key Largo and air at 8 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 6. Key Largo, often

called the dive capital of the world, features extraordinary shipwrecks and spectacular coral reefs with a focus on innovative coral restoration efforts.

The second episode takes viewers on dive trips in Islamorada and airs at 8 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 13. Islamorada offers a wealth of shipwrecks and reefs, crystal-clear water teeming with sea life, and a unique

See **SHOW**, Page **5A**

Marathon sets its tentative tax rate

BY RICHARD TAMBORRINO
Special to The Citizen

The Marathon City Council covered a variety of topics at its Tuesday, July 25, special session, with the focus centered on a review of the fiscal year 2024 city budget.

City Finance Director Jennifer Johnson initiated discussion on the millage rate — the amount of tax payable per dollar of the assessed value of a property. She proposed to the council a rate of 2.72, which is the same as fiscal year 2023. Johnson said afterward the council would like to see the millage even lower. She said it's possible they arrive at a lower millage rate closer to 2.5, or even rollback. The public will have an opportunity to attend two public hearings on that and the overall budget in September.

Johnson reminded the council and attendees that the millage heavily supports the city's General Fund, which at this rate, will generate \$10.8 million. She also outlined that the fiscal year budget is expected to generate \$21.5 million in revenue against \$20.5 million in expenses, adding \$1 million to reserves. Last year, the city was able to add \$5 million to reserves.

Setting this millage rate will result in an 11.12% tax increase for non-homesteaded properties, while homesteaded Marathon property owners will only see a 3% tax increase, which is the highest state law allows. Council members seemed reasonably satisfied this increase would not adversely impact city residents.

Johnson then highlighted several line items that are driving the overall budget. She pointed to a projected health care cost increase of 15%, a 9% cost-of-living increase, and merit increases for staff. Councilman Jeff Smith reminded her and the council he had requested salary reviews for all city staff, as opposed to

See **MARATHON**, Page **7A**

Florida Keys to add 645 area code beginning Friday

SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN

It looks like the singer Pitbull is going to have to add some digits to his ode to South Florida's area code, "305 Anthem."

That's because the Florida Keys and Miami-Dade County are getting a new area code, "645," starting this week.

Beginning Friday, Aug. 4, area customers who request new phone numbers will be assigned the "645"

area code, the Florida Public Service Commission said in a news release late last week.

The new area code will supplement the existing codes of "305" and "786," which already are used for the Florida Keys and the Miami area.

"While minimizing the impact to current customers, the Commission must plan for the continuing influx of new residents and businesses to the region — a testament to South Florida's growing economy,"

Andrew Giles Fay, the commission's chairman said in a statement. "The new 645 area code will ensure that customer demand for new lines is met."

Existing customers will keep their current telephone numbers, but new customers, or requests for additional lines, will be assigned the new area code. Everyone will continue to dial the area code plus the seven-digit phone number to make local calls.

The Keys tried to hold onto its 305 area code for the entire island chain as long as it could, but added the 786 code in 2014, which also brought 10-digit dialing to phone customers.

Florida was first assigned 305 as the state area code in 1947.

For information on the area code change, call the PSC's customer assistance line at 1-800-342-3552 or visit <http://floridapsc.com>.

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

FROM PAGE 1A

Plans

FROM PAGE 1A

According to the code, "If the referendum petition is signed by twenty-five (25) percent of the registered electors within the city, the filing of the referendum petition shall serve to suspend the effective date of the measure."

The injunction also requires that a performance bond by any builder be required, and demands the city be prevented from retaliatory measures against the group because of its efforts.

Swanson is confident that the group, which has more than 220 names on its mailing list, many of which are interested in challenging this vote, will

support the petition.

The city charter allows a vote to be formally challenged within 10 days. The group then has 45 days to return a petition to the city with the 185-200 registered voter signatures needed to meet the 25% threshold. If the injunction is granted by a judge, it would give the group sufficient time to file the petition for a special vote.

Hutchinson said by phone the injunction was filed and will be assigned to one of the judges seated in Key West. He expects a hearing to be set quickly. He stressed the goal is not to merely block the construction, but also to allow time for petition signatures to be gathered, paving the way for a referendum vote in a special election.

"We are covering the legal side of this and assisting the group with getting the referendum process going," Hutchinson said. He added the judge may take testimony to understand what work has been done and whether contractor efforts to demolish City Hall are imminent.

There are concerns among many residents and two of the five commissioners about the decision to forge ahead with the City Hall rebuild. Questions have been raised as to why the commission proceeded after only two bids were received and one was eliminated because of a math error in the bid packet. Consequently, a contractor who hasn't handled a project of this scope was selected. Residents also fear

the city will end up spending \$10 million or more despite the \$8.375 million bid due to costs they say are not included in the bid, such as landscaping and parking.

Concerned in KCB, characterized as a "kick the can" crew by supporters of the rebuild, has consistently maintained that the current City Hall, largely closed since Hurricane Irma, is repairable at a fraction of the cost. Swanson also said the contract with an inexperienced builder gives residents even more concern. And the fact there may be no performance bond included in the contract makes the project extremely difficult to accept.

"We need to let the voters decide. This petition is to require a referendum in a special

election," Swanson said.

Swanson and the group are in the process of preparing the petition. The petition process is clearly defined, requiring each signee to complete the petition identically, and the city has the right to exclude petitions that are not completed accurately. But Swanson and many of the group members are retirees and unfamiliar with this process, which means they could fall victim to a technicality given the narrow window they are operating within.

The injunction also includes language stating that the petitioner "is reasonably concerned that if the city is not temporarily enjoined from moving forward ... permanent and irreparable damage will

be done to the existing city hall building, which would frustrate any meaningful consideration by the residents of Key Colony Beach to pursue a referendum and/or an initiative to solicit bids to repair the existing city hall."

Hutchinson was asked what would happen if a crew arrived on-site to begin demolition of the existing building before the case was heard. He said that "a judge will treat this case expeditiously, since the harm might be imminent," but that "few construction projects move that fast."

"The legal process provides the time so voters can be heard," he said. "Group members feel like the voters will side with them, but it's about votes." **rtamborrino123@gmail.com**

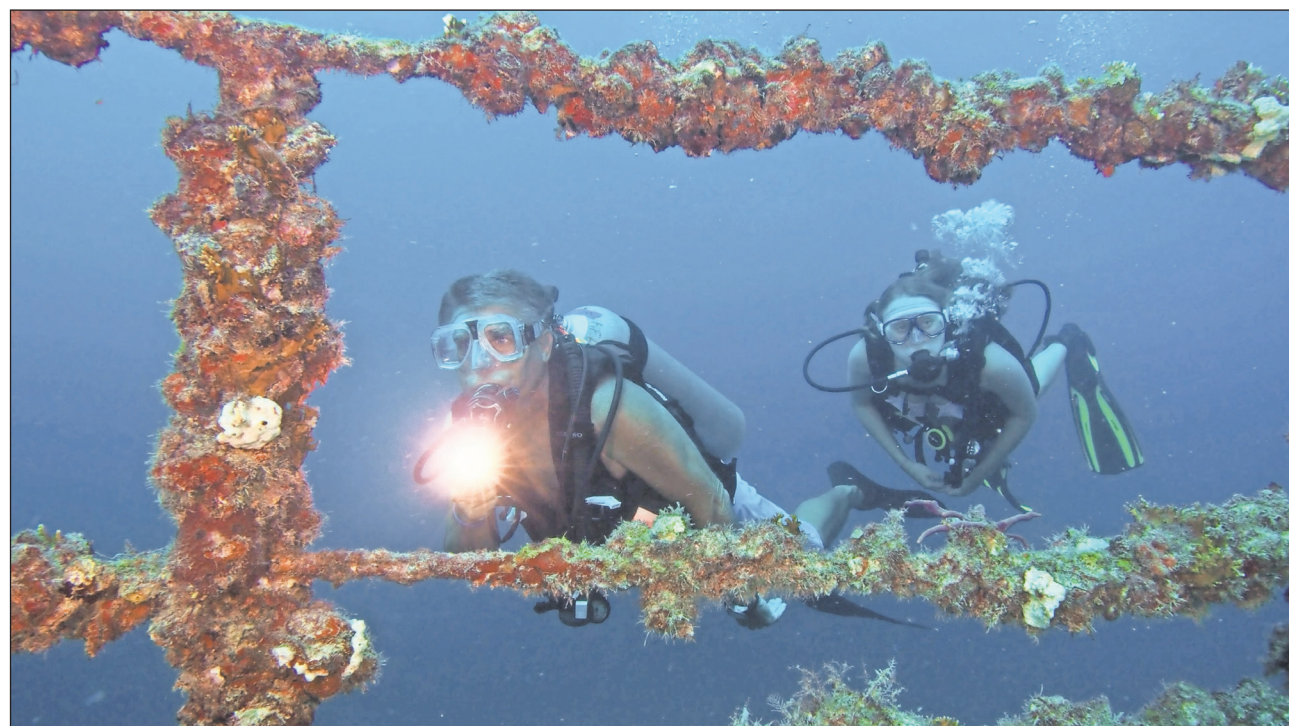


Photo provided by Destination Dive

The wrecks and reefs of the Florida Keys are spectacular and each section of the Keys offers divers something different, according to 'Destination Dive' executive producer Mike Zimmer, adding the chain of subtropical islands is both an intriguing setting for viewers to explore and one of the global epicenters for environmental conservation and renewal.

Show

FROM PAGE 1A

program designed to educate divers about the benefits of coral restoration and regeneration.

The third episode moves farther south to Marathon and will air at 8 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 20. Notable elements in the Middle Keys include a shipwreck hit by 500 lightning strikes, spectacular reefs filled with marine life and Special Operations veterans on a mission to save corals.

The episode featuring Big Pine Key, the Lower Keys and Key West will air at 8 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 27. Off Key West lies the Vandenberg, an awe-inspiring shipwreck that was a missile-tracking ship during the Cold War and subsequently tracked Florida space launches. Big Pine Key is home to spectacular reefs including Looe Key, widely regarded as a Top 10 dive site. There, a one-of-a-kind underwater concert entertains divers and boaters while promoting eco-conscious diving and conservation.

The fifth and final episode, "Noah's Ark," will be at 8:30 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 3. The show documents a race against time as a disease threatens Florida's corals. The Florida Keys are at the epicenter of coral research and conservation, where scientists created and carried out a pioneering plan. In a unique move, experts from across the United States joined forces. They rescued, grew and replanted corals that now reside on Keys reefs. It started with one idea and turned into a national movement.

"Destination Dive" is the next generation of dive shows and it's about protecting the world's oceans, Zimmer said.

"The goal of the show is to recognize people doing spectacular work that is helping the most," Zimmer said. "We could bury our heads in the sand and do nothing, but these people are doing iconic things that are really helping the reef."

For a sneak peek, visit <http://www.destinationdive.tv>.

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Michael Marrero

The Duel, 24 x 11.5, Intaglio

Michael Marrero is a Cuban-American artist, playwright, and filmmaker born and raised in Key West. His award winning short films Buzzcut and Riley Was Here have been showcased in over 100 festivals worldwide. He is the author of several original plays including productions at Guild Hall Center (NY), Repertorio Español (NY), Teatro de Centre (Havana), and the Studios of Key West (FL). His original play, Locura, was part of a historical theatrical exchange between Cuba and the United States. Recently his project, Orisha: The Lost Saints, was awarded a prestigious Knight Foundation Grant and officially selected to be exhibited at the 2021 Havana Biennial.

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