

Sarasota County's oil spill response

by **Lourdes Ramirez**

Recently, Siesta Key's Crescent beach was named the 2nd best beach in America according to Dr. Stephen Leatherman (aka *Dr. Beach*). County officials are determined to improve that status and not let oil get in its way. The oil spill in the Gulf has caused a lot of concern among the citizens and the County is not waiting for an indication of tar balls before they act. The good news is that we have no oil on our beaches and the closest oil sheen is over 230 miles away. We are also learning a lot from the beaches affected in the Panhandle; learning about what to do and not do if oil shows up on our shores.

According to Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson, the County will work with the Feds and BP but if they find their response too slow or insufficient, the County will dip into their emergency funds to buy equipment they need. The County is working with companies now on finding the resources they need.

The Siesta Key Association's directors have monitored and been in contact with the County's officials to ensure we are kept up to date on the status of the oil spill as well as the County's plans to handle it if it came to our shores. Towards that effort, SKA has volunteered to change our next monthly meeting agenda to focus mostly on Sarasota County's oil spill preparedness. In addition, SKA has agreed to sponsor a Community Forum that will include local, state and federal agencies in order to obtain answers to our many questions. Both of these meetings, whose details are listed below, are open to the public.

Community Forum – Answering questions on the oil spill

Sarasota County officials and representatives from the Coast Guard, NOAA, DEP, Fish and Wildlife Commission will be available to answer questions about the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, expected impacts on our area, and plans for protection and recovery

Date: Monday, June 28th
Time: 6:30 – 8:00 PM
Location: St. Boniface Church, Community Center
5615 Midnight Pass Road

The forum is also being videotaped for replay on Access Sarasota (Comcast Ch 19 and Verizon Ch 32). Check the Sarasota County website at www.scgov.net for the replay schedule.

Sarasota County Preparedness on Oil Spill and Hurricane Response

Speakers: County Commissioner Nora Patterson and Emergency Management Chief Ed McCrane will provide a power point presentation on Sarasota's proactive plans on handling possible oil spill impacts and hurricanes.

Date: Thursday, July 1st
Time: 4:30 – 6:00 PM
Location: St. Boniface Church, Parish Hall
5615 Midnight Pass Road

Inlet Management/ Big Pass

by Peter van Roekens

The County recognized, in 2004, the need for an Inlet Management Plan (IMP) that covered all of our inlets and treated them as an interrelated set of dynamic forces. Several studies and many reviews later, the IMP is scheduled to be presented to the County Commissioners on July 27. The focus of the plan has been to consider the possibility of dredging our shoal as a sand source for re-nourishment while insuring no damage to our beaches. A secondary effect could benefit navigation and provide better access for deep draft vessels. Probably the greatest benefit to possibly dredging the outer shoal is the likelihood that this may reverse the erosion on north end of Siesta Key at Beach Road. As many of you may have noticed, the channel has moved back and forth over the years from a course running along the beach to the current western route. The Boaters' Coalition, which has monitored Big Pass since 2004, has taken over 4 million depth soundings and have used it to chart the course to provide safe transit for boats with up to 5.5 – 6 feet of draft. At the County's presentation on July 27th, Dr. Truitt will be making recommendations on managing the inlets along with the associated costs. SKA will be monitoring this closely.

Changes at Turtle Beach

By Ron Flynn and Lourdes Ramirez

Turtle Beach Park is going through a methodical and slow transformation. Although the County has plans to completely renovate the Turtle Beach Park area in the future, they have made several changes now that will greatly enhance our enjoyment of the park. The changes include an updated public meeting room which can be rented for events and improved landscaped area near the boat ramps. The biggest change will be parking along Turtle Beach Road. The County Commission decided last month to install 'no parking' signs on one side of Turtle Beach Road. When cars were parked on both sides of the street, the road became too narrow. Concerns arose that emergency vehicles, such as fire trucks and ambulances, would not be able to drive down the congested road, which forced the County to decide that one side of the street needed to be available in case of an emergency. Another change to the area is the condition of the beach where severe erosion can be seen with a deep 1-2 foot slope. County officials are aware of this erosion and have assured SKA that they expect this dynamic beach to naturally accrete new sand in the future.