

# OPINION

## The Florida Times-Union

Mary Kelli Palka.....Editor  
Michael P. Clark.....Editorial Page Editor

**Editorial Board:** Palka, Clark, Bobby Martin, Lilla Ross and citizen members Issis Alvarez, Michelle Barth, Sarah Boren, Shanna Carter, Ronda Steinke McDonald, Harry Reagan, Buddy Schulz, Paul Tutwiler and Vicki Waytowich

### OUR VIEW

## White House recognizes Operation New Hope

It started in Jacksonville.

In 1998, Kevin Gay began a program to give back. He chose Springfield to begin restoring some of the neighborhood's historic architecture. But housing soon led to people.

Gay found residents dealing with crime, homelessness, disrepair, poverty and drugs. He realized he needed to rebuild lives as well as houses. He began employing neighborhood residents.

To date, Operation New Hope has built or restored more than 80 homes while providing assistance to people such as clothing, shelter, education, jobs and substance abuse treatment.

To date, Operation New Hope is responsible for building and restoring more than 80 homes throughout the Historic Springfield and Eastside neighborhoods and works in concert with community organizations to provide assistance to those requiring treatment for chemical dependency, clothing, shelter, educational training and employment.

The Ready4Work program has taken ex-offenders and prepared them for success in the workforce. Its graduates re-offend at less than half the rate of the state average. Gay realized that though his initial client is the ex-offender, his ultimate customer is the employer. That focus has led to the program's success. Rather than leaving prison lonely and lost, ex-offenders in the Ready4Work program receive an impressive array of services and support. For instance, there is a case manager with an individual release plan, housing, transportation and instant access to job training.

Ready4Work involves four kinds of wraparound support: Case management, supportive services, job training and job placement assistance. Partnerships have been established with faith-based organizations, local businesses, community outlets and the judicial system. The goal is to motivate people to become productive, responsible citizens within the community. Clients are required to be drug-free while participating in the four-week career development training course that focuses on employment and life skills. A dedicated job coach works with the client and employer to place individuals in jobs where there is a match for both parties. There is follow-up, too, as Ready4Work staff remains in contact with the client for a full year.

The success of Ready4Work has been recognized across the political spectrum as one of America's best re-entry programs. In 2003, President George W. Bush selected Operation New Hope as the pilot site for the Ready4Work program. It was applauded by President Bill Clinton in his book, "Giving." It was praised by President Barack Obama and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao. And Gay has been a regular visitor at the White House during the Trump presidency.

Gay worked with legislators to promote the First Step Act, which reformed the criminal justice system with "smart justice" principles. The bill was passed and signed into law by President Donald Trump.

That success led to similar state legislation, the Florida First Step Act. There was even an international honor as the House of Mandela recognized the program as a model for the world.

Gay received the Medal of Honor Award from the Florida Bar Foundation, the highest honor for a non-lawyer. He was instrumental in developing Project Open Door, the JAX Chamber's Ban-the-Box initiative to encourage employers to delay criminal background inquiries to the interview process. This encouraged other cities around the nation to follow suit.

The bottom line is the humanity of this program. Many ex-offenders are eager to find legitimate work but don't know how to prepare. Gay has built a system that employers can trust.

Lives are being changed in Jacksonville and the message is spreading.

### A VERSE FOR TODAY

Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

— Hosea 6:3

### ANOTHER VIEW



## Sunny-day flooding a warning



### Your Turn

Allen Douglas  
Guest columnist

The 2021 legislative session is just around the corner, and a top priority of all lawmakers will be the health and safety of Floridians, as well as Florida's economic recovery from COVID-19.

As Floridians and business leaders, the American Council of Engineering Companies of Florida (ACEC-FL) agrees that COVID-19 legislative priorities should take center stage.

Yet, lawmakers will also be faced with taking bold actions on a number of important issues, including long-term water solutions. Senate President Wilton Simpson and House Speaker Chris Sprowls understand the importance of strengthening Florida's water infrastructure resiliency.

Through careful planning and strong partnerships, they believe Florida can be a national example of resilient communities, where water remains an engine that drives our state's prosperity instead of driving Floridians out during high-tides flooding events.

We couldn't agree more.

The Simpson/Sprowls plan calls for increasing flood mitigation projects, engaging other federal partners, and partnering with cities and counties to get everyone on board and moving in the right direction. This is the right type of long-term resiliency planning Florida needs.

As engineering firms engaged in studies and projects in Florida's 412 cities and 67 counties, we've seen first-hand the negative impacts created by the lack of a unified, statewide plan.

Thankfully, our legislative leaders support a long-term strategy to address this issue with a systematic assessment of long-term needs and a fiscally sound

approach to implementing engineering projects.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein recently explained that Florida needs to be prepared for as much as 2.5 feet of sea level rise by 2050.

And he warned that sea level rise will likely impact 300,000 homes representing \$145 billion in property value.

The reality of increased flooding can be seen from the Keys to St. Augustine – and not just during hurricanes.

We no longer have to wait for a catastrophic event – just for a high tide.

In a state known for its beautiful beaches and waterways, fortifying our infrastructure to make our communities more resilient is essential.

And as the ASCE Report Card shows, just as important are the 1,900 impaired water bodies, including those impacted by blue-green algae, and the need for \$18.4 billion in needed wastewater infrastructure improvements over the next 20 years to help existing septic tanks that are leaching excess nutrients into our canals, lakes, rivers and springs. It's a daunting, but important long-term plan that Florida must prepare for.

One that, according to Florida's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, would need an investment of over \$44 billion to properly address – and that doesn't even include the cost of addressing sea level rise.

Thankfully, Florida's DEP is in position to lead a statewide annual work plan. With the support of President Simpson and Speaker Sprowls this legislative session, lawmakers can begin laying the groundwork for the long-term.

Planning today for Florida's long-term water solutions will help ensure our state continues to prosper for generations to come.

*Allen Douglas is Executive Director for the American Council of Engineering Companies.*

### LETTERS TO EDITOR

#### Lot J deal doesn't need to be rushed

Why is Lot J consuming the majority of the time of our City Council? I am in support of Matt Carlucci wanting a new negotiating team after the JEA fiasco. There is no need to rush it. So many other things are going on between COVID, crime in the city, small businesses needing help from the pandemic and neighborhoods that need a lot of attention. Listen to Matt. He loves the city and wants the best for all of us.

*Melinda Jarman, Jacksonville*

#### The Jaguars cost the city too much

Some cities (San Diego, Oakland and St. Louis) have cut ties with their NFL teams, to let them move to other victim cities. The Jaguars are a losing bet, costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Now, they want hundreds of millions for Lot J and stadium improvements. It never ends. The city and people lose money by keeping the Jaguars. There is no net profit.

Just think of the improvements to infrastructure that could have taken place with that money. Shad Khan, take your team and move to another city.

*Seber Newsome III, Yulee*

#### Lot J is precursor to new stadium

How many of our City's decision-makers were aware, before the Mark Lamping interview, that NFL lease decisions were controlled by a 3/4 majority (24 of 32) of NFL team owners? And, that our current stadium is not up to snuff in the eyes of the NFL. Although the Lot J development and beyond would have some sway with the NFL, it's the state of our stadium that most likely will win the day. Even if Mr. Khan is required to contribute to the stadium upgrade (replacement) to NFL "standards," if we expect to keep the Jaguars in Jacksonville we can also expect to foot the majority of the bill. Start passing the hat if we expect to keep the Jaguars beyond 2030.

*Ralph Wicklund*

### JOIN THE EMAIL INTERACTIVE GROUP

About 4,000 readers already have. Members have their letters instantly verified. They also are asked questions on important news subjects. To join, just send us an email: [mclark@jacksonville.com](mailto:mclark@jacksonville.com).

### LETTERS POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. All letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. Include a name, address, phone number and occupation. **Email:** [letters@jacksonville.com](mailto:letters@jacksonville.com). **Mail:** Letters from Readers, The Florida Times-Union, P.O. Box 1949, Jacksonville, FL 32231.