

OPINION

Herald-Tribune

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OUR VIEW

Janie's Garden 'boat' reaches destination

High-quality apartments replace a community eyesore

Seven years ago, when the first Janie's Garden housing complex opened, Sarasota County Commissioner Carolyn Mason said the redevelopment project showed that good things can happen when people "row together in the same direction."

This week, the third and final phase was completed, five years after the second stage was finished.

The completion deserves recognition, and not only because it added good-quality public-housing and affordable private units to north Sarasota's housing stock. A celebration is warranted because the community and its partners rowed the boat ashore.

Hallelujah!

Janie's Garden III is a 72-unit housing complex built for the Sarasota Housing Authority. It contains a blend of units: conventional public housing, voucher-subsidized, reduced-rent and market-priced (the other phases included similar mixes).

All told, the three phases produced 226 brand-new, functional apartments — improving lives, injecting \$44 million into the economy and creating jobs (a special referral and training program helped many local residents fill those positions).

Enhancing all of Janie's Garden are a child-care center, a voluntary pre-kindergarten school and an array of social-service offerings operated in partnership with local organizations. The authority has partnered with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading to promote early-childhood literacy and is working with schools and nonprofits to engage parents in positive family development.

The homes and community assets grew out of the plowed-under Janie Poe public housing project, which had become a symbol of poverty, government failure and social neglect. The conditions that once prevailed in the authority's 128 rundown units were not only bad for residents and neighbors; they denigrated the memory of Poe, a woman revered for championing the right to education for the children of Newtown, Sarasota's historic black community.

The culmination of the three phases represents one of the most significant turnarounds in our entire region. In order to grasp the magnitude of the accomplishments that have occurred, consider the historical perspective.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found that the Sarasota Housing Authority was among the nation's worst. Subsequently, multiple applications for federal grant funding were rejected — in part due to managerial failures. Problems continued.

In April 2005, HUD assumed control and changed management, first bringing in turnaround specialist Carmen Valenti, who began the effective overhaul. One month later, William Russell, a HUD deputy assistant secretary, was named the Sarasota authority's director; he remains in the position, fortunately, and has led an incredible transformation.

Both Valenti and Russell knew they could not achieve success alone or solely by issuing mandates. They engaged public-housing residents, non-profit groups and leaders from Newtown and the greater community. They worked with local, state and federal governments to obtain funding; they and their staff built solid relationships with builders and private-sector funders.

Perhaps most important, members of the community collectively decided that the substandard conditions at Janie Poe, and in some other parts of the city, should no longer be ignored. Public and private support increased as people and institutions were made aware of the challenges and, then, witnessed the new levels of collaboration and accountability.

Today, the Sarasota Housing Authority is considered by HUD as a high-performing agency. Janie's Garden has provided nice housing for thousands of people and added retail space to Newtown. The authority or its nonprofit affiliate has acquired, renovated and improved other housing — apartments and single-family homes — throughout north Sarasota. As was the case with Janie Poe, eyesores and nuisances have been eliminated and replaced by good housing and safer conditions.

A lot of oars rowed in the same, right direction to reach this shore of success. Hallelujah.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Supreme arrogance

So, if Hillary Clinton is elected she will appoint "progressive" judges to the Supreme Court. What ever happened to open-minded, unprejudiced, unbiased, and constitutional?

These judges presumably go to accredited law schools, study the same law, understand the wording of the Constitution, and hear the same arguments in a case. Yet they invariably vote straight down party lines. How often do 300 million-plus people have to live with the decision of one person in the frequent 4-5 votes?

These judges are not elected, are appointed for life, can cast their votes in any stage of illness (mental or physical) if they so choose. They only can be removed by voluntary retirement, death or impeachment. Since only one judge has ever been impeached, and he was acquitted, no judge has ever been removed from the bench involuntarily.

Now they are making decisions over which they have no constitutional jurisdiction. The Tenth Amendment gives states all rights not specifically given to the federal government. This is the most ignored and abused amendment in the Constitution, along with Second.

If this nation is to live with the decisions of nine demigods, the least we should expect is an unanimous vote. If an unanimous vote cannot be reached, the matter should go back to the states or to a national referendum. As it is, it would be cheaper, quicker, and just as effective to flip a coin.

Helen Lawrence

Venice

Checks but no balance

A letter on Wednesday's editorial page advises us to not worry about whom we elect as president, because the system of "checks and balances" will take care of any problems we might foresee.

Our founding fathers were, indeed, farseeing in their deliberations but, if Donald Trump is elected, he will certainly carry a Republican majority with him into the Congress.

Further he will, no doubt, send the name of a

like-thinking jurist to the Senate for approval as the deciding vote on a now-4-4 Supreme Court. The result? President: Check.

Congress: Check.

Supreme Court: Check.

Balance: No Check!

Bill Warren

Sarasota

Holier-than-thou Democrats

I caught a clip of Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Michelle Obama on the morning news. Both aggravated me.

First, Mrs. Obama, who has made it abundantly clear that she is not a fan of our country, pretended to believe that our country is the greatest country in the world. Hm. Only eight years ago she said it was the first time in her adult life that she was proud of our country.

Then, Ms. Warren who announced that this election was "personal," as if that was unique to her. News flash, lady: It is personal to all of us.

I almost can't abide the holier-than-thou attitude and arrogant words. Thank goodness there is a choice. I will chose to be represented by someone who likes us and our county.

Gladys Marsh

Englewood

Trump maligned

The writer of a recent letter ("Scammed by Trump," July 15) is totally in denial about the scam that our current president and his administration has pulled on the entire country.

This president and any potential liberal successor (Hillary Clinton) will likely continue to run us into such a financial quagmire that the country will have no choice but to print so much money that our dollar will become almost worthless.

They will also continue to open our borders to untold millions of people, some of whom are guaranteed to commit heinous crimes against our citizenry such as mass murder, rape, beheadings, drug importation and sales and crimes of unimaginable variety and magnitude.

Who is the letter writer to say

that Donald Trump is a socio-path, a narcissist and a publicity seeker, which would make him a Mini Me of our current president?

Mr. Trump is not these things and, if the letter writer would give it a little less critical view, he would see that it is far different. This man is a patriot who is willing to change his most wonderful life, with his loving family and his safe and comfortable existence, for a life of public service with all of its dangers and scrutiny and problems which are almost unsolvable.

He is willing to apply his unmatched business acumen and experience and brains to getting this country, which he loves, back on track.

The status quo is not acceptable. We need a change.

David Hayes

Venice

'Love' or money

Can the writer of Tuesday's letter ("Trump respects workers") honestly believe Donald Trump's saying "I love you" proves his respect for American workers? Has she never had a man tell her "I love you" to get what he wants?

Ask the people (including "illegal immigrants") who have worked for Trump how much he respected them. After decades of Republican lies, starting with Ronald Reagan's "trickle-down" economics, how can anyone still believe making the rich richer will induce them to share their wealth with the rest of us?

Trump says "I love you" while the Democrats put a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in their platform. Actions speak louder than words.

Steve Warren

Sarasota

Hacking call disqualifies

We are in the throes of an American election. Regardless of how the candidates feel about each other, I seriously question the loyalty to the United States of America of any candidate who advocates that a foreign country should hack the email of his opponent.

That alone is disqualifying for any elected position in this country.

Robert English

Sarasota

A MAIN SOURCE OF VOTER INFORMATION

Election season highlights pros and cons of social media

If there is anything to be learned from this year of divisive politics it is to be careful with electronic communication.

It is the same message that should, but too often does not, resonate throughout the realm of human interaction. Digital messaging clearly provides the chance to have an effective exchange of information with a large group of people in a short amount of time. But the pitfalls are many.

Even with the use of emoticons, the importance of facial expressions and body language is lost when keyboards or even voice-commanded speech are substituted for face-to-face communication.

Secondly, the likely chance that an email or a tweet will fall into the wrong hands should not come as a surprise to anyone. This nation has endured months of discussion over Hillary Clinton's private email server and, even though no criminal charges will result, it has caused her immeasurable pain and could possibly cost her the election. It clearly provided Bernie Sanders a crack in the door that he was able to use to his advantage.



KATHY SILVERBERG

Then there is the issue of hacking, of exposing communication to those who wish to bring harm to a group or even a nation.

And finally, when electronic communication is substituted for honest, in-person dialogue, the chances of finding common ground are significantly diminished. It is too easy to use allegations without any context, to take cheap shots lacking substance and to trivialize important matters or, the opposite, to exaggerate the impact of issues that have little to do with improving the human condition.

None of this is to say that the use of email, Facebook posts, tweets or the like are going away any time soon, nor should they. Clearly, they are effective.

President Obama used electronic media to his

advantage in his two successful presidential campaigns, outdistancing his opponents by a wide margin. He was able to defeat better funded and well-known candidates in 2008 because he reached millions through the use of social media. In 2012, it was more of the same. According to the Pew Research Center, the Obama campaign published 414 posts to the Romney campaign's 168 during a two-week period in June. The messages, apparently, resonated.

In the current presidential election, both candidates took to social media to announce their choices for a running mate. But this week, the Democratic convention has been largely overshadowed by the controversy concerning emails that indicate the Democratic National Committee, a group that is supposed to stay neutral through the primaries, took steps to hamstring the Bernie Sanders campaign in favor of Clinton. Such skullduggery is not new or surprising in the political game, but when email evidence makes it undeniable, the efforts appear more unseemly than ever.

In the coming months, candidates for president will use traditional media, particularly television, to tout their attributes while denigrating their opponent, but clearly they also will continue to push their case directly to the voters thorough social media.

Already Florida, a must-win state for both major-party candidates, has seen the onslaught of television commercials from the Clinton campaign designed to spotlight Donald Trump's unsuitability to be president. Trump, on the other hand, so far has counted on his penchant for attracting the attention of both traditional and social media as his main publicity tool. It doesn't seem to matter to his followers and likely voters how outrageous his statements may be: He is still their guy.

We are some three months from the general election. A lot can happen in that time. When the summer began, who could have predicted that violent attacks at home and abroad would become such an issue, or that economic threats from Britain's exit from the European Union would loom so

large?

One thing is for sure: Social media will be a main source of information on the candidates for a large part of the electorate. How the candidates and their organizations use these tools could well determine the outcome of the election.

But beyond this campaign, the more important issue may be how we as a people communicate using social media while avoiding the many pitfalls that accompany them. Will they help or hurt efforts to find common ground on issues that determine paths to a future that improves the lot of people across the globe or will they only continue to foster stereotypes, false impressions and misunderstanding?

Matters of cybersecurity pose their own set of risks to society, but the dangers are just as great if the value of meeting people in person to exchange ideas and to be open new ways of thinking is lost to social media.

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