



Collier Commissioner Fred Coyle goes head to head with Jeff Lytle
6B

A new way to grow



Arts need your support to survive tough times

By Elaine Hamilton

Executive director,
United Arts Council of Collier County

It has been a challenging couple of years in the arts, to say the least.

As the economy struggles to turn around, our local arts community faces uncertain times. Galleries report that collectors aren't spending freely like they once did.

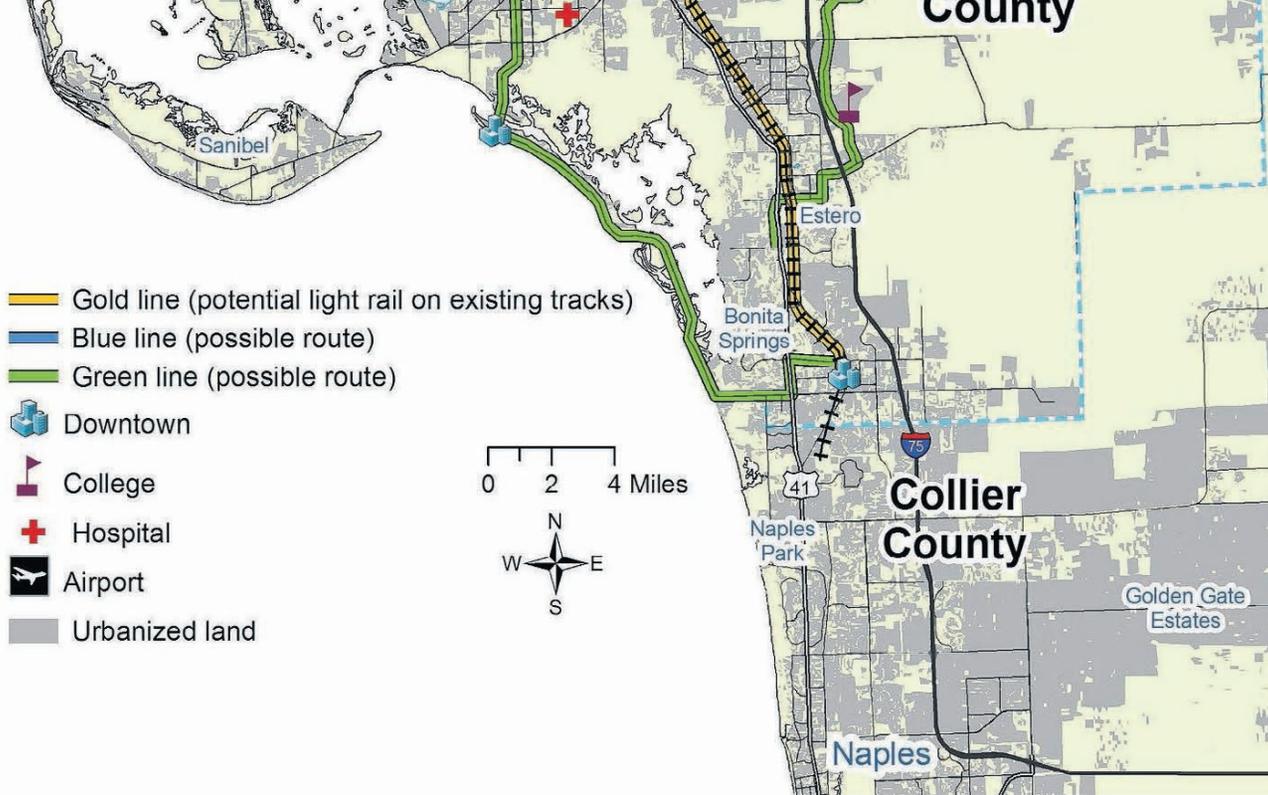
While art festivals may draw crowds, local artists say that sales at these events have declined. Performers are receiving fewer calls for entertainment at private parties and corporate events.

For our nonprofit cultural organizations, grants are much harder to come by. At the United Arts Council of Collier County, for the first time in our history, we will not receive an operating grant from the state of Florida for serving as their designated Local Arts Agency — a victim of budget cuts in Tallahassee.

Performing-arts groups have reported declines in ticket sales in varying degrees. Local cultural organizations are also finding that



Hamilton



Landmark facilities in Collier, such as hospitals, are left off this map focusing on Lee, provided by the Reconnecting Lee County long-range planning movement. Still, readers can see the big picture and how the pieces fit.

Imagine great neighborhoods connected by public transportation: ‘new urbanists’ do

By Bill Spikowski
Fort Myers

Southwest Florida offers us sun, sea and nature. It’s such an enticing place to live that it’s easy to overlook what we no longer create: great towns and cities.



Spikowski

Our economy largely relies on serving newcomers, yet suddenly it’s not clear that the influx will continue even when the recession ends.

Suburban development patterns require affordable fuel and endless road expansions. The outlook for fuel is bleak, and how much wider can our roads get? The days of workers from Lehigh Acres making the daily drive to Collier County may never return.

New construction will be sluggish until the glut of vacant houses and stores are absorbed by newcomers. This economic pause

Great cities are collections of great neighborhoods.

Great neighborhoods have streets that encourage walking and bicycling as well as driving. Great neighborhoods are compact enough to have neighborhood schools, parks and shopping for daily needs.

results from everyone needing to drive long distances to get anywhere.

Second, our local economy can revive if it begins producing the compact communi-

ties that our new era is making attractive again. We can accommodate newcomers by redeveloping abandoned shopping centers, obsolete mobile home parks and skipped-over vacant tracts. We don’t need to keep paving over nature or farmland.

Third, our systems for planning and regulating new development must be reconfigured from the ground up so that they produce great towns and cities rather than the isolated subdivisions of our recent past.

Great cities are collections of great neighborhoods. What makes a neighborhood great? Great neighborhoods have streets that encourage walking and bicycling as well as driving. Great neighborhoods are compact enough to have neighborhood schools, parks and shopping for daily needs.

Great neighborhoods have a variety of

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Organizations are also making that corporate giving is down significantly.

Just a few short years ago, Naples was named the “Best Small Art Town” in the country. We’ve topped many other “best” lists published by magazines, and our local arts community is almost always mentioned as a contributing factor to making Naples a desirable place to live.

Will that continue with the current economic crisis?

The local arts community is certainly making adjustments to deal with the economy. Many larger organizations are cutting expenses and trimming staff and hours. Smaller arts groups are working together and sharing costs.

Many of the performing-arts groups are offering lower-cost options to attract crowds. They are also emphasizing comedy and upbeat entertainment to lift the spirits of their audiences. Some of our visual artists are creating smaller, more affordable works of art. Many cultural destinations now offer discounted admissions to families and year-round residents.

So, is it all gloom and doom in the world of arts and culture? I think not.

It has become increasingly apparent that the sustainability of the arts in our community rests with each one of us individually.

With financial crises crippling local governments and corporate trends moving away from philanthropy, it seems likely that these sources of funding may experience further reductions.

If we, as individuals, wait for business and government to step up and provide funds to sustain our local arts community, we may witness the painful destruction of everything that we’ve worked so hard to build. Or, we can embrace the call to action — we can rise to new levels to support the arts.

The simple truth is this: the fate of our cultural community rests with you and me — those of us who love the arts.

Not the government.

have? I would be confident that when they need an ambulance, they're getting good service and that there's no rivalry or there's no hard feelings among the responders involved.

Who should be that leader to bring peace and civil behavior to this whole discussion? Should that be the County Commission, should it be the governor?

Coyle: It should be the county commissioners, and we are doing that, as a matter of fact. But the problem is far more complex than that. The conflict between the fire departments and EMS are not new. They've been going on for decades. The past EMS director was removed from her position because of the conflict with the fire districts.

So, that's an old, festering problem that will never be resolved until one person is placed in charge of the entire activity.

Now what Dr. Tober attempted to do at one point in time — well, he did it. He made this decision several years ago, and that was to train fire-district employees in advanced-

weeks ago. Will we?

Coyle: Yes, you will. As a matter of fact, we'll probably have a final report concerning that sometime in December, and certainly by the first of the year.

Lytle: You heard it here first from Collier County Commissioner Fred Coyle.

How about the red-light cameras. Is that issue fixed? Is that working now as you envisioned whenever you voted to set it up? And if not, where do we go from here?

Coyle: I can't say I'm entirely happy with the process. I think there's too much of a delay from the time the infraction is discovered until it's actually reported.

We need to solve those kinds of problems. It's just crazy to have 30 to 60 days elapse between those events.

Lytle: Because my second citation could be in the works without me even knowing I had the first one.

they either take our word for it, or they use a trial-and-error process.

Lytle: Because the county can turn that over to a collection agency and that will follow them.

Coyle: It sure will.

Lytle: I could spend a whole half hour on that, but I've to move on.

This next topic might surprise you. I'd like to talk about pet adoptions with Domestic Animal Services. The County Commission has voted to add adoptions into the policy of DAS.

My question to you then for clarity is, what does that really mean? Will there be a deadline for DAS to adopt a pet before the pet is euthanized? Will the pet ever be euthanized?

Coyle: I'm sure it will be. There are certain circumstances where they will be euthanized.

was very upset with the handling by DAS of one pet, and that pet was considered to be dangerous by our staff, and it was euthanized.

Maybe they didn't work as hard at doing it as they should have, but I can't go in and second-guess the decision by an employee who says, we've observed this animal and we believe this animal is dangerous and should not be adopted.

When we do that we expose the taxpayers of Collier County to a lawsuit.

Lytle: So the adoption being put in the mission statement sounds to me like it's still a work in progress on what that means.

Coyle: Everything we do is a work in progress. We are never, ever smart enough to anticipate every circumstance that's likely to arise.

■ **Next week's guest:** *Landscape photographer Clyde Butcher*

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housing — single-family homes, townhouses, garage apartments and condos. Why should every house on a block be the same size and look alike? Why should families or retirees have to move away just because they need a larger or smaller house?

And great neighborhoods have access to public transit, allowing independence to those who don't drive, especially the elderly and the young. Even those with cars shouldn't have to drive for every trip they make.

Can we have convenient public transit in Southwest Florida? Conventional wisdom says you can't have transit without compact neighborhoods — yet history shows that compact neighborhoods emerge around transit.

A new group, Reconnecting Lee County, is exploring a long-range plan for compact, walkable neighborhoods connected with public transportation. The diverse private citizens who formed Reconnecting Lee County

believe that our region's growth cannot rely solely on private vehicles. On first glance we look like the usual suspects — many in politics, law, planning, engineering and real estate — but a fair number of participants are bicycle proponents, civic representatives, environmental activists or "impossible to classify."

One concept for a future transit network for Lee County is presented here.

Today the rail line that connects Bonita Springs to Fort Myers is used only for occasional freight and excursion trains. If electric "light rail" service were added, passengers could travel smoothly and quietly on a route parallel to U.S. 41.

Lee County officials are already seeking grants to acquire the railroad right of way and improve the existing tracks.

Additional transit routes could tie this network to other parts of Lee County such as the beaches, the international airport, Edison State College and Florida Gulf Coast University. These

additional routes could be served by different kinds of vehicles:

■ Standard or express buses.

■ Small European streetcars that operate like buses but are powered by electricity and roll on rails embedded in regular streets.

■ Long, rubber-tired buses that operate like trains on bus-only lanes.

The main north-south light-rail system could extend into Collier County if new tracks were built to replace one of the two rail lines that once connected Naples to the nation's rail system.

Our governments plan boldly for new roads that might be needed in the fu-

ture. Local officials must start planning just as boldly for public transit.

Learn more about compact walkable neighborhoods from the Congress for the New Urbanism, www.cnu.org and www.cnuflorida.org; learn about the potential for public transportation and transit-oriented development at www.ReconnectingAmerica.org.

And keep up with local progress by visiting www.ReconnectingLee.org.

Spikowski is a veteran land-use planner in Southwest Florida. He operates the Fort Myers consulting firm Spikowski Planning Associates and is a founding member of Reconnecting Lee County.

Arts »From 1B

Not corporations.

If you believe in the arts and want to help ensure that they remain strong, you can make a difference.

■ Make a concerted effort to attend every performance you possibly can.

■ Introduce your friends, family and neighbors to the arts and encourage them to step up their support.

■ Get involved in fundraising and volunteering for arts organizations.

■ Speak up at your business to ensure that the arts remain a part of any philanthropic activities.

■ Advocate with elected officials to support continued funding for the arts.

■ Support the arts in our public schools.

Please join me in making a commitment to the arts like you've never done before. Now, more than ever, we need your support. We promise a great return on your investment. We'll entertain you, make you laugh and surround you with the beauty of art.

For more information on the arts in Collier County, visit the United Arts Council's Web site: www.CollierArts.com.

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