

Commission conundrum: getting along

Old balance upset with addition of two new members

BY ROGER WILLIAMS
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So who is it? Who is the most powerful person in Lee County, the one most likely to affect your life or the lives of your children — who is the local He-Coon, as the late and deliciously provincial Gov. Lawton Chiles used to say? The answer is, one of the following: A: Bob Janes. B: Brian Bigelow. C. Ray Judah. D. Tammy Hall (a She-Coon,

perhaps). Or E: Frank Mann. But which one? The five powerbrokers form a brand-spanking-new Lee County commission — new with the additions last fall of Bigelow and Mann.

Beginning almost the day the two newest good-ol'-guys arrived in the spacious offices of the old County courthouse downtown, the once go-along, get-along commission,

fresh from a decade of business-as-usual, has struggled, sometimes publicly and contentiously, to create a consistent vision, and to make that dog hunt.

There is one thing all of them agree on, however: Resources

are limited and growth isn't. But what should they do about the problem, and which voice will become the clarion call to rally a consistent voting bloc of three?

"I don't think we know that yet," says Charlie Bigelow, the father of District 2 Commissioner Brian Bigelow, who once sat in the same spacious corner

office as his son. The senior Bigelow has weighed in publicly in the face of sometimes sharp criticism of the new commissioner like an anxious parent shouting from the sidelines of a big sporting event.

"As long as I've been watch-

SEE COMMISSION, A6 ▶



Brian Bigelow



Frank Mann

Fort Myers water may be too salty

Drought causing high sodium levels

BY MICHELLE L. START
Correspondent

Fort Myers residents on salt-restricted diets may have to cut back on drinking tap water thanks to a severe drought that is sending high levels of sodium into the Caloosahatchee River.

Lee County Utilities will be sending a notice to some 13,000 customers in mid-April explaining that sodium levels in drinking water from the Olga Water Treatment Plant have exceeded the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's limit of 160 parts-per-million.

Typical sodium levels for the area aver-

age 13.5 to 97.1 parts per million.

"The highest point we recorded was on March 26 at 171 parts-per-million," said Patricia DiPiero, spokeswoman and compliance officer for Lee County Utilities. "It is a very specific area and deals with older water treatment plants that take from the

Customers do not need to boil water or take any precautions unless they are on salt restricted diets.

Then, they should consult with their doctors.

Caloosahatchee. Because of the drought, there have been no water releases from Lake Okeechobee. Salt water has been intruding on the Caloosahatchee, which is increasing the sodium and chloride levels."

The Keetch-Byram drought index measures moisture in the soil. The scale ranges from 0 to 800, which indicates severe drought conditions. Lee County is in the 700 - 749 range.

Gary Maier, an environmental engineer with the Lee County Department of Health, said most people do not think about sodium levels in their drinking water, but it is important information for those who are on restricted or reduced salt diets.

Sodium helps regulate body fluid. Too much sodium can be harmful for people with high blood pressure or heart disease.

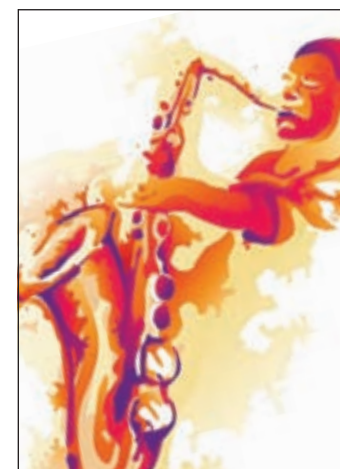
SEE WATER, A6 ▶



This week's events
Check our calendar for arts and entertainment." C6 ▶



BUSINESS
Local handbag designer creates wearable art. A27 ▶



ARTS
River & Blues Festival Sunday at Centennial Park. C7 ▶



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REAL ESTATE
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