

Energy, the environment keys to Florida's future

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Energy efficiency is certainly on the minds of most Southwest Florida residents especially as gasoline prices begin to break the \$4 mark. While solutions may be complex and varied, vital industries such as home building and education are taking leadership roles in exploring alternate ways to conserve.

On May 22, Florida Gulf Coast University in collaboration with the Southwest Florida Chapter of the American Institute of Architects presented, "Greenprint - A Vision for Southwest Florida," featuring Sen. Burt Saunders (R-Naples) and Dennis Gilkey of the Gilkey Organization.

As one of the most rapidly growing universities, FGCU will soon become home to a \$16.4 million dollar solar field. Thousands of solar panels will spread across 16 acres and rotate with the sun, capturing rays and converting them into electricity. They would generate 2 megawatts (2MW) of power per day, exceeding the school's daily average of 1.5MW. A megawatt equals 1,000 kilowatts, the unit of measurement homeowners see on the monthly bills.

Back in 2003, FGCU installed a small 34 solar panel test site on campus through a union between the Florida Solar Energy Center and Florida Power & Light. The test site produced 5-kilowatt hours per day, it was figured that at the current electric rate, the panels saved 52 cents per day.

FGCU's solar field will also be the largest in the Southeast and at any university in the world after state Senate and House both decided to allocate \$8.5 million dollars to the project with the remaining tab being matched by an unnamed benefactor.

Dr. Joe Shepard, vice president for Administrative Services and Finance at FGCU, believes that this project, championed by Saunders, is a wise investment.

"This source of renewable energy will have an annual savings of around \$1 million, and it makes sense from a recurring budget cut," said Shepard in an April issue of FGCU's student paper, Eagle News.

The solar field would be placed at FGCU's main entrance, clearly visible to those driving by to display the university's commitment to the environment.

School officials plan to begin accepting bids in July, commence construction in October, and have the project completed by the summer of 2009.

Although the project carries a hefty price tag FGCU is still expected to save an estimated cool \$22 million within the next 30 years.

Despite the best intentions, many environmental issues remain when governments can't seem to cooperate.

Saunders sponsored the Northern Everglades & Estuaries Legislation that was brought about in 2007. The Everglades restoration project was intended to be a 50/50 split between the state and federal government. Since 2000, the state of Florida has spent \$2.4 billion with the federal government seriously lacking behind, spending only a mere \$363 million. Meaning, the federal government has once again left Florida taxpayers footing the majority of the cost.

"We're really trying to put a lot of pressure on the federal government to continue to honor their commitment to everglades restoration," said Saunders.

Gilkey, whose organization specializes in real estate projects that are environmentally sound and based on sustainable principles, gave an update on the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida.

Gilkey says that he is already seeing an emphasis on green buildings, low-impact development criteria, water and energy conservation, mixed use developments and alternative transportation modes at the state and local review levels.

"Some of these criteria have been applied to new large-scale developments, but we are also seeing them in small in-fill projects," said Gilkey.

"The problem will be making some of the new requirements economical, so that home or commercial prices don't go through the roof."

Bonita Bay, Verandah and The Brooks—all built by the Bonita Bay Group—have set the bar for green construction and design.

The very same day as the "Greenprint" presentation, the Estero Community Planning Panel and Design Review Committee presented the Bonita Bay Group with the David Graham Memorial Award for exceptional development.

"It acts like a benchmark for other developers," Jack Lienesch, acting chairman for the Estero Community Planning Panel, said.

Nathaniel Reed, author of Working to Sustain Florida's Rural and Natural Lands: A Call to Action said that it is projected that if current growth and development patterns continue, by 2060 Florida's population will double to 36 million people, the amount of urbanized land will also in turn double, and roughly seven million acres of Florida land will be converted from rural to urban uses.

Reed believes that, "this dramatic conversion of Florida's working and natural lands provide an unacceptable and unsustainable picture of how we should accommodate the expected population growth." ■

Aulen held a meeting with downtown City Councilman Mike Flanders and others last week at Envie Lounge to discuss the Proprietors Alliance and aspects of his proposal to lift the 18 to 21 ban.

"We're supposed to prepare a position letter that explains what we want to do," Aulen said. "He will present that to council so we can get the city attorney or someone for the city to help us draft up a new ordinance."

Flanders had no comment on the Proprietors Alliance.

Aulen said, "He liked it. He liked what we're doing and he liked the idea."

"I'm talking about setting up an environment," Aulen added. "Dress codes, no letting people in that are visibly intoxicated. It keeps downtown a safe, friendly and fun environment and still caters to all the different age groups." ■

DOWNTOWN

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in the District." Vendors like Downtown House of Pizza, Envie Lounge and The Holiday Inn have all agreed to offer customers some kind of discount in June, July and August.

Saeed Kahn, owner of First Street Jewelers, is participating in the program by offering his customers 20 percent off on all jewelry purchases \$50 and above.

"The idea is just to do something that attracts people downtown," he said. "In my opinion, from what I see, from what I hear, it's just a case of you don't just wanna sit there, you have to make the effort to do something."

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