

Fort Myers' citizens may watch police more closely

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
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Ready or not, the Fort Myers Police Department might get some extra help — and be watched more closely — by a group of independently elected citizens next year. Local activist, Anthony Thomas, 24, succeeded in collecting enough signatures to put his Citizens Oversight Panel to a vote.

“We’ve had whites and blacks, Democrats and Republicans, and even some Independents support our position,” said Thomas, founder of Citizens for a Better Fort Myers Government.

The petition drive to create an oversight panel was precipitated by the idea that the police department should be accountable to a group other than themselves, said Thomas, who also cited the police shooting of an unarmed, mentally ill Fort Myers-man last February. (A grand jury later exonerated the officer involved in the shooting).

The NAACP Lee County Branch Vice President Willie Battle said, “Some cops, every time they come to the black area, they draw blood.”

Interim Fort Myers Police Chief Doug Baker said he has a strong relationship with the Lee NAACP and ultimately supports a review board, as long as the members have adequate knowledge of police procedures.

“I have no issue with this,” Baker said. “I would like to have a group of citizens be involved with the police department and talk about what we do during the day... I think it’s critical for us to be transparent and have open lines of communication between community groups.”

It took Thomas since last April, when he started the petition drive, to collect the signatures: more than the required 2,508. He is also supported by the Lee NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida. The groups held a press conference outside City Hall last Friday to discuss the oversight panel, a

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EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY
Activist Anthony Thomas, center, announcing that a citizens oversight panel may make the ballot.



why you may be witnessing the beginning of Florida's

citrus COLLAPSE



EVAN WILLIAMS / FLORIDA WEEKLY
Alva citrus grower Jim English examines young fruit on one of thousands of his orange trees.

“This is more dangerous by far than canker... and we don’t know how to stop it.”

— Ron Hamel, director of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association

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Signs, predictions and charts on citrus greening
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ranges, it seems, were especially designed for American tastes and production talents, but that might not be enough to save the citrus industry from a complete collapse within roughly 10 years.

Americans have the right farmers with the right agricultural science, citrus champions insist. They have the right mechanical and engineering capacities, the right cheap labor and the right corporate sensibilities, all firmly established in the right climates and soils. They have the right industrial know-how and the right transportation system to juice, package and ship the fruit. They have the right fuel supply — not only to run the factories and the vast fleet of farm and transportation vehicles, but also to produce massive quantities of petroleum-based insecticides or herbicides.

And they’re born marketers, so they have the right temperaments to sell oranges (and other citrus) both here and abroad.

But what Americans don’t have, all of a sudden, is a clue about how to eradicate “greening,” the most dangerous disease ever encountered by citrus growers in the United States or abroad, one that makes canker look mild by comparison, according to farmers and scientists.

In an elegant bio-geographic irony, the disease first appeared in Dade and Broward counties only about 36 months ago, imported from China, the birthplace

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Lee BIA Summit awards

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