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Tampa seeks to decriminalize marijuana

CAYLA BUSH
Staff Writer
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Between 2010 and 2014, 44,860 marijuana possession cases were closed in Miami-Dade County, accounting for 10 percent of all cases filed in the city's criminal court system.

In response to these numbers, county commissioners took steps to decriminalize misdemeanors infractions and provide officers with the option to forego an arrest, and instead issue civil citations with \$100 fines for people caught with less than 20 grams of marijuana.

"We have better things to do with our police resources," said Commissioner Sally Heyman, sponsor of the ordinance. "For goodness' sakes, we don't have to destroy the lives of so many."

Palm Beach County also made similar changes to county code in 2015, sparking a change within the state, leading to more counties looking at options to

provide police officers with alternatives to the lifelong stigma of a criminal record, a bar to jobs in law enforcement and the armed services, and eligibility for public housing and some college scholarships.

Tampa is the latest in the state to propose a change; under the proposal, a citation would carry a fine and could require mandatory drug counseling but would hold no more weight than a traffic ticket.

Usually, we have to go on bended knee armed with loads of data to make a persuasive argument to change the law.

Allen St. Pierre
Executive Director
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws

"What the country and certainly mayors have realized is incarcerating people, particularly young people, for a very small amount of marijuana absolutely alters their career path for the rest of their life," said Tampa Mayor

Bob Buckhorn. "Once they get into that prison system, they are forever scarred; they forever have a prison record."

Tampa attorneys have for the past six months been drafting a citation ordinance that could go before the city council in the next few weeks. Across Tampa Bay, St. Petersburg is also moving ahead with a similar initiative.

DREAM DOCS



ADRIAN SALGADO/THE BEACON

Members of Phi Delta Epsilon table outside of Green Library in efforts to attract new members to the medical fraternity Tuesday, Jan. 12.

But the cities lag behind other regions of the United States that have used civil citations for decades, said Allen St. Pierre, executive director with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, a Washington, D.C., based advocacy group. Civil citations were adopted by leaders of many college towns --including Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Madison, Wisconsin -- as far back as the 1970s, St. Pierre said.

The move by Florida communities to adopt citations stems in part from concern about the cost of enforcing drug laws. It also may reflect changing attitudes about use of the drug now legal for recreational

purposes in Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and the District of Columbia.

"Usually, we have to go on bended knee armed with loads of data to make a persuasive argument to change the law," St. Pierre said. "Almost all the people leading those efforts are baby boomers; they have a much greater propensity to favor reform than the World War II generation."

Marijuana arrests disproportionately fall on black and Hispanic people, a 2013 American Civil Liberties Union study found.

Between 2001 and 2010, there were 8 million arrests, of which 88 percent were for possession.

The report found that black people were 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for possession than their white counterparts even though marijuana use is roughly the same between the two groups.

A switch to citations would help employment levels in communities with high number of minorities, helping alleviate high poverty levels in those communities, St. Pierre said.

Florida communities that have adopted civil citations levy a range of fines for possession.

Miami Beach and Miami-Dade County fines are \$100. Hallandale Beach has escalating fines from \$200 for the first

SEE WEED, PAGE 2

Group lotto tickets increase as jackpot hits billions

CAYLA BUSH
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A \$1.4 billion Powerball jackpot with chances of winning the jackpot is 1 in 292 million, becomes a lot more likely once friends, office peers, and family members pool in their resources and purchase communal tickets.

Like March Madness, in which office pools capture the frenzy of the nation during the NCAA men's basketball finals, lottery office pools have been around since the lottery began and ramp up each time jackpots soar.

These pools mostly are informal affairs, where a trusted individual agrees to collect a couple bucks from participants, heads to a gas station or Publix, buys tickets and watches the drawing. The idea is that there are more tickets in the pool and that increases the chances of winning, though infinitesimally. If one of the tickets hits, all share in the jackpot.

This idea is one that is particularly of interest to students who want to participate in having a communal pool.

"Anything that I can do to improve my chances of being rich I'll do it," said Carlos Ramos, a junior accounting major. "I trust my friends and family, and the people I'd go in the pool with would be excellent co-winners."

For some students, however, the question becomes how fair and how open would the drawing be.

"I think that having a communal pool is fine, so long as there are established rules as to how the money would be split if we won," said Eric Watt, a senior studying English.

Match	Prize	Odds (based on \$2 play)
●●●●● + ●	Grand prize	1 in 292,201,338
●●●●●	\$1,000,000	1 in 11,688,054
●●●●● + ●	\$50,000	1 in 913,129
●●●●●	\$100	1 in 36,525
●●● + ●	\$100	1 in 14,494
●●●	\$7	1 in 580
●● + ●	\$7	1 in 701
● + ●	\$4	1 in 92
●	\$4	1 in 38
Overall odds of winning a prize		1 in 25

Source: powerball.com Graphic: Star Tribune/TNS

Experts say there could be some pitfalls to this system, particularly if more than \$1 billion is at stake.

"I would say to make sure that everybody is in agreement with doing it jointly," said Wayne Clark, a South Florida attorney who has written scholarly articles about March Madness office pools. "If 10 people are in,

they all have to agree to the terms. Not nine and a friend someone invites in."

The pool organizer should keep everyone up to speed on details, like when the drawings are, how much is collected, how many people are in. That person also should shoot messages with the numbers of the purchased tickets to everyone in the pool.

"When (the pool organizers) get the tickets, they can just scan them and email those images to everyone before the drawing," Clark said. "That way, you have a way to prove these are the 10 tickets. And if the organizer buys 10 more tickets for himself and his family, they clearly are not among the ones in the pool."

Agreements also must be made about what happens to partial winnings; should they be doled out to participants or rolled into future drawings.

If everyone's in agreement, there likely would not be a need to put it all in the form of a written contract, he said.

"I don't know if its necessary to put it in writing," Clark said, Making copies of the tickets available to the pool participants should do the trick, he said. And that's easily done with a smart phone.

"Technology has changed so much these days," he said. "It's so much easier to make sure everyone is on the same page."

SEE LOTTO, PAGE 2

NATION & WORLD BRIEFS

Rhino poaching in Zimbabwe soared in 2015, says activist

The number of rhinoceroses poached in Zimbabwe more than doubled last year, the head of a trust dedicated to protecting the animals said Tuesday. At least 50 rhinos were poached in the southern African country in 2015, up from 20 the previous year, Lowveld Rhino Trust Director Raoul du Toit told dpa. "Until 2015, rhino poaching in Zimbabwe actually declined steadily from its peak in 2008,

when about 150 rhinos were poached," he said. Much of the poaching takes place in private wildlife parks, where most of Zimbabwe's 800 black and white rhinos live after their populations in national parks were decimated by poachers, according to du Toit. Most of the rhinos poached in 2015 were black rhinos, which are classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Donald Trump won't drop birther question, and Ted Cruz is fighting back

Canadian-born Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, continued to come under fire Sunday over whether he is a "natural-born citizen" eligible to be U.S. president. Cruz, a lawyer, has said that his citizenship is "settled law" and on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday said it is "clear and straightforward" that he became a U.S. citizen

at birth in Calgary because his mother was a U.S. citizen. His presidential primary campaign even released his mother's U.S. birth certificate over the weekend after denying she had become a Canadian citizen, although her name appears on a 1974 Canadian federal election voter roll.

Obama's pick for FDA commissioner approved

A Senate panel on Tuesday cleared President Barack Obama's nominee to head the Food and Drug Administration, cardiologist Dr. Robert Califf. While he was approved on a voice vote by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Califf's close relationship to the pharmaceutical industry still raised concerns. "His extensive ties to the pharmaceutical industry

give me no reason to believe that he would make the FDA work for ordinary Americans, rather than pharmaceutical CEOs who are more focused on making obscene profits than saving lives," Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, who sits on the Senate health committee, said in a statement Tuesday.

Tampa reconsidering marijuana legalization

WEED, PAGE 1

offense and \$250 for the next. Leon County limits citations to first-time offenders, who are required to get drug counseling but are not fined.

In most cases, the decision whether to issue a citation is left to the discretion of the arresting officer. Buckhorn said juveniles found in possession would be directed to drug court and counseling.

Of the almost 1,900 cases of marijuana possession in Tampa in 2015, many were in conjunction with other charges so a citation may not be appropriate, said Andrea Davis, Tampa Police Department spokeswoman.

The Tampa ordinance would have to be approved at two public hearings to become law.

Councilman Charlie Miranda said he has mixed feelings about supporting the reduced penalty for a drug still illegal under federal law.

"If they're going to take it apart little by little, what's to say you can't use it all the time?" he said. "I was raised under a

different system. When you did wrong, you pay for it."

Councilman Harry Cohen, who last week called for a report on how other cities are handling the issue, said the move will likely free up police resources and lower court and jail costs without legalizing the drug.

"This is about what is the appropriate penalty, not if there is going to be any penalty at all," Cohen said.

Students who have been keeping up with the changes throughout the country as well as the state are looking to a future in which the drug is decriminalized.

"I'd like to see the state legislature reconsider the criminalization of weed, because there are so many resources that are being drained by penalizing users," said Sofia Barrera, a junior studying anthropology. "At the end of the day, that's taxpayer money that can be better spent. We can bring the arts back to schools, or improve the quality of textbooks with that money."

Additional reporting from TNS Staff

Communal lotto over billion dollar jackpot

LOTTO, PAGE 1

That's not to say problems can't arise.

A group of employees who participated in an office pool and won a California lottery 10 years ago were sued by a handful of colleagues who believed they had an oral agreement to get in on the pool winnings. The suits were eventually dismissed.

In 2012, three employees of a Chicago bakery sued for what they said was their share of a \$118 million jackpot from the Illinois State Lottery. They said they regularly took part in the betting pool that began the year before, but didn't contribute to buy the winning pool ticket because the pool organizer failed to collect from them that week.

The Florida Lottery doesn't keep track of how many tickets are purchased through office and workplace pools, but a lot of ticket purchases are through pools, said Florida

Lottery spokeswoman Shelly Gerteisen.

"We know there are pools that play and we know pools have won," she said. "Sometimes we have group claims and sometimes, even through they play in a pool, they just send just one representative to come up and claim the winnings."

Sales of Powerball tickets are soaring, she said Monday.

Between 6 and 7 p.m. Saturday, a couple of hours before the drawing for what was then a \$900 million prize, Powerball tickets were flying out of the computers across Florida at a rate of 42,000 a minute, she said.

Monday morning, she said, 9,763 tickets for Wednesday's Powerball drawing were being sold each minute.

"That's high for a Monday," she said. "The closer we get to the drawing, that number will continue to rise."

Monday, the estimated jackpot was bumped to

\$1.4 billion, but it likely would jump before the drawing at 10:59 p.m. Wednesday. The winner can opt for a lump sum payout of \$868 million, of which taxes would take about 25 percent, Gerteisen said.

The Powerball jackpot has rolled 19 times, since the Nov. 7 drawing and now it's the biggest jackpot ever offered. Since Powerball first was available to Florida residents in 2009, 10 from the Sunshine State have won jackpots, including Gloria McKenzie of Zephyrhills, who won \$590.5 million in May 2013. At the time, it was the largest jackpot in the game's history.

Florida's 13,000 retail outlets put the state among the top-selling Powerball states, with sales that have exceeded more than \$3.2 billion since 2009.

Additional reporting from TNS Staff

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Discussions about racism must be honest

THE GROWL



ERICA SANTIAGO

With racism and police brutality receiving mainstream attention, it seems as if history is repeating itself. Watching unarmed black citizens gunned down for minor offenses by white police officers and seeing zero justice being served, feels too similar to the days where “white only” signs line the streets of every community. But in reality, history isn’t repeating itself.

The justice system has always been flawed, to the detriment of communities of color. To those who have never experienced systemic oppression, conversations of racism and police brutality are quite new. However, as an Afro-

latina I can guarantee that many black Americans have had these kinds of conversations and have had their own experiences with systemic racism long before it received mainstream attention.

Why is it that decades after segregation was abolished and our government ruled that minorities must be treated with equality, racism still plagues this country?

There are plenty of reasons as to why this is so, but the most basic reason has to do with the way conversations about racism are conducted.

As a black person, I have to tiptoe around the certain buzzwords in order to keep the conversation civil with my white colleagues. Words like “white people,” “white supremacy” and “privilege” must be omitted,

otherwise my rhetoric is mistaken for a personal attack against white people.

However, it’s important to understand that talking about white supremacy and the way it hurts people of color while simultaneously granting white people certain privileges, is not a personal attack against white people. I am not saying all white people are racist or that all white people live a life of luxury. Instead, I am saying that white supremacy benefits white people and allows for them to have certain privileges.

White supremacy allows for white and white passing people to overrepresented in media.

White supremacy allowed a police officer to get away with the murder of a 12 year old black child.

White supremacy allows for so many unarmed black citizens to be gunned down for little to no reason by the very people who are supposed to “serve and protect” them.

It’s an uncomfortable truth and it may be a tough pill to swallow, but the strength and history of white supremacy must be included in conversations about racism; pretending white supremacy doesn’t fuel the system that is racism would only be dishonest.

When I say “white supremacy systematically oppresses black people,” the response from my white colleagues is almost always “But I’m white and I’m not racist.” I’m glad you have basic human decency to not oppress people based on their race, but that’s not relevant.

This isn’t about you. You’re not racist? Great! But white supremacy still exists and it is still harmful. And yes, you still benefit from it. The same why I as a straight woman benefit from homophobia and transphobia. I may not harbor prejudice against gay and trans people, but I still have privileges that allow me to not face the issues they face.

If you’re a white person reading this, know that this is not a personal attack; it’s an honest discussion.

The Growl is a commentary on social justice issues facing college students. Erica Santiago is a staff writer for FIUSM, for more commentary email erica.santiago@fiusm.com

Resolutions are not achieved without hard work

PHILANTHROPY POST



NICOLE STONE

As we all embrace the new year, people everywhere are dragging out notebooks and pens to write down adjustments they want to make in their lives. However, according to a 2015 study conducted through the University of Scranton, only eight percent of Americans succeed in maintaining their resolutions.

These resolutions are made through the decision that something isn’t working, and something needs to change to make it work. We all know change is hard because it interrupts the flow of our lives with something foreign.

Resolutions work fine for the first week of the new year, maybe even the first month. There is all this energy in the air fueling us to establish a fresh start. But after a month, we get tired and run out of steam. Like a machine, we stop and the discomfort of making your dream a reality feels worse than just dreaming about it. Netflix is comfortable and welcomes us back.

Yet, many movies and books tell us that through believing in ourselves and following our hearts, we can succeed and take the wheel to captain our ships. They ultimately tell us to go after our dreams with a club. While this is all very essential, it is simultaneously useless without action.

It isn’t that we don’t dream, it isn’t that at all. People have a tendency to do a lot of thinking about their dreams, then sadly never get past that initial vision. Dreams like to sell themselves. They wear a nice dress or suit on the first date and show us all their good sides, and we’re lured in. We love this idea of what could be, what would be, what should be. We love the way that looks. It’s shiny.

What we don’t initially see is the path that must first be tread in order to reach out and grab the lives we want. We don’t realize how sweaty we have to get to make it all real. When we do, it’s often overwhelming. This is where a lot of people get stuck. It becomes a task best left to tomorrow. Then tomorrow becomes tomorrow’s tomorrow and the promise of tomorrow becomes a cycle until we’re stuck waiting for the right moment to start, to do. But what of the great secret to magically obtaining your dreams?

It doesn’t exist.

As much as I love the idea of magic, there is no magic spell to take you where you want to be. There is no trick, there is no tip. There is just you, and an amount of time.

Some people choose to sleep in, others will choose to wake up before the sun to make time for their goals because they matter enough.

Hard work is hard. Insightful, I know. Hard work is so often overlooked in the shadow of a great dream. There is value in doing the work, people throughout history have proved it time and time again. The most difficult part of it all is starting. Starting something requires us to experience change and consequently feel discomfort. This makes beginnings the most bountiful experiences people have; it takes determination to experience middles, to keep going. Discomfort is just an unfortunate byproduct of the breaking of old, familiar patterns to make way for new ones. It is a necessary step in adjusting our existing routines to include activities that will assist us in achieving larger goals.

Routines are one of the many cycles that dominate life on Earth. We are born, we grow, we learn, we die: circle of life. Spring, summer, fall, then winter: the seasonal cycle. Cycles make things work like gears in a machine, they come naturally to us and are imbedded into our nature. But they can also exist in destructive forms like procrastination. Cycles involve habit, which also has its good or bad variants. The habits you adopt are powerful tools that will either empower you to achieve what you want, or stunt your growth.

From an evolutionary perspective it is natural to resist anything that causes us hardship like putting our procrastination in check. It is easy to watch Family Guy reruns, it is less easy to turn off the television and write a book. You ultimately have to decide if the discomfort of getting up and going for it is greater than the dream or if it’s the other way around.

Instead of telling yourself you want to write a book, tell yourself you will write every single day until you have a book. And then do it.

Maybe Shia LaBeouf was onto something.

Philanthropy Post is a column about the human experience. Nicole Stone is the Opinion Director for FIUSM. She can be reached at nicole.stone@fiusm.com

EASY DAY



SAMUEL PRITCHARD-TORRES/THE BEACON

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BYE BYE SPACEBOY

Legendary musician David Bowie dead at 69

ADRIAN HERRERA
Staff Writer
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On Jan. 10 David Bowie - British singer, songwriter, actor, fashionista, and all-around personification of the word "art" passed away after an 18 month battle with liver cancer, leaving a vacuum in the world of music that could never possibly be filled.

Over the course of five decades and 20 plus albums Bowie helped to pioneer, reinvent or epitomize virtually every style of popular music from rock to soul to electronica, ceaselessly reinventing himself and his modes of expression to adapt to changing times, technology and trends while somehow managing not to lose his essential qualities as an artist.

No matter what kind of music you like, Bowie has something for you, from the glam-rock of "Ziggy Stardust," to the crooning soul of "Young Americans," to the avant garde instrumentalism of his Berlin-era albums like "Heroes", to the drum & bass fueled anthems on "Earthling," there is no sound or style that was the same after Bowie laid his long white fingers on it.

Even hip-hop owes something to the man (besides his collaboration with Freddie Mercury, "Under Pressure" providing the driving sample on one of the best beats for one of the worst rap songs, Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby.")

Before swag was swag, Bowie had it. Just look at his outfits and stage presence (that sneer, though!) Before Two Live Crew, Bowie was scaring the world with his overcharged sexuality. He paved the way

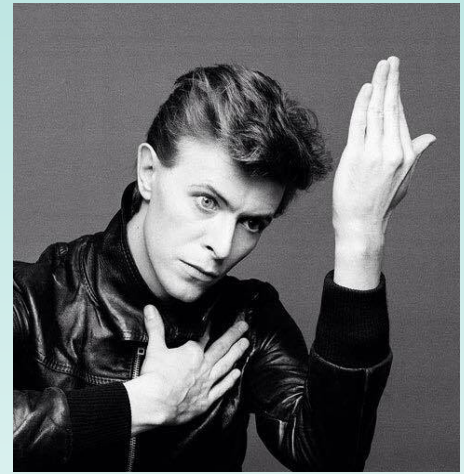
for artists like Kanye West to be able to constantly reinvent themselves and change their image with each release.

He was also the first white person to perform on Soul Train, making it a bit easier for the likes of the Beastie Boys and Eminem to borrow from a traditionally black style of music and actually be respected as peers, bridging a cultural gap that had seemed to have only grown with time. Heavy Metal too is indebted to Bowie. 'The Man who Sold the World' has some of the earliest, truly "hard-rock," guitar riffs recorded and Bowie had shaved off his eyebrows and painted his face white long before Marilyn Manson crawled onto the scene.

But Bowie's legacy is something more profound than the sounds he left behind - he made it okay to be weird, to take on a persona then discard it, to pull from all places, to sing about high-brow themes like literature and space travel while remaining pop-savvy, to walk in between definitions and preconceptions - he made it okay for a man like Prince to dress like a woman and a woman like Annie Lennox to dress like a man.

He was master of his own fate until the end, using his diagnosis as fuel to reinvent himself one last time on his final release, 'Blackstar' which came out on Jan. 8, on his 69th birthday and only two days before his death.

While we mourn the loss of an icon, let us celebrate the fact that in true Bowie fashion, he exhibited total creative control to the end and left us with one final statement and that this swan song is one of his mostly profoundly unique releases and a perfect final chord



symphony of his life.

Bowie passed in peace. His work completed, surrounded by his family, the space oddity returned to the ether, ashes to ashes. He is survived by his wife, Iman, and his children, Duncan and Alexandria.

This week, we mourn for the world's loss but as the planet reverberates with a million stereotypes playing "life on Mars" let all us earthlings turn and face the strange changes together - for The starman waiting the sky.



Cuban Research Institute at FIU hosts book signing

GUETHSHINA ALTENA
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People interested in the life and works of historical figures would be interested in this book presentation.

On Friday, Jan. 22, at 8 p.m., author Jesus Diaz Loyola will be giving a presentation about his recently released book, "Chronicles of the Caribbean: The Life and Work of Manolín Alvarez."

The book presentation will take place in Books and Books, Coral Gables at 265 Aragon Avenue.

Loyola will present the book, provide an overview and conclude with a question and answer session. A book signing session will take place after the event.

The author was born in Caibarién, Cuba, where he studied Journalism in at the University of Oriente. He went on to become the Grand Prize winner of the Radio Villa Clara in 1987 and the Documentary Award at the National Radio and Television Festival of 1987.

For thirteen years, between 1985 and 1998, Loyola worked as an editor and reporter for Radio Progreso, Radio Rebelde, Radio Habana Cuba, Cuba's National Information Agency and the Newspaper "Vanguardia".

The Cuban Research Institute at FIU, also co-sponsored by the Centro Asturiano de Miami, is organizing this event to present and promote Loyola's book. The event is free and open to all.

The book is about Manolín Alvarez, an Austrian immigrant who arrived in Caibarién, Cuba in 1920 and became well known when he created the first

radio station in the country.

Alvarez had the opportunity to meet prominent figures such as Antonio Machín, Federico Gracia Lorca and Gabriela Mistral. Alvarez has also witnessed the transit between Fulgencio Batista Regime and Fidel Castro's, revolution and deception.

Throughout the book, readers will learn about the timeline of commercial radios in Cuba, from their start to the contemporary period.

"People should come to this upcoming book presentation because it is an opportunity to meet the author and hear about this outstanding book," said Aymee Correa, the Public Affairs Manager at the Cuban Research Institute.

For more information, contact the Cuban Research Institute at 305-348-1991 or email them at cri@fiu.edu

BOOK SIGNING

Who
Cuban Research Institute at FIU,
Jesus Diaz Loyola

What
Chronicles of the Caribbean: The
Life and Work of Manolín Alvarez

Where
Books and Books Coral Gables

When
Friday, Jan. 22, at 8 p.m.

Local band speaks on

FIOUSM STAFF
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Cannibal Kids, the South Florida indie band with a beachy twist, graced WRGP's one and only local radio show, The Pipeline, with this exclusive interview.

Diana Moon and Natalie Bojorquez, Hosts of The Pipeline, gets the boys to disclose the reason behind their recent quietness, the meaning of their lyrics and the entire song writing process.

They also announce a new EP in the works, "Cake Daze," that will finally satisfy their starving fans until the band drops their first album.

Diana Moon: This is the Pipeline, locals only, and today we have with us... Cannibal Kids.

Cannibal Kids: Hi I'm Damian Gutierrez, I'm the vocalist of the band. I'm Jordon Hernandez, I'm the bassist. I'm Dustin, I'm the lead guitarist. And I'm Luke I'm the drummer.

Diana: Alright and that's for the people that don't know you.

Natalie Bojorquez: So you can associate the voice with the name.

Diana: Because you know you can't see anyone....

Damien: In case anyone didn't know, we usually dress like Mormons.

Natalie: Today they're dressed in very bright colors, very Miami. Luke is wearing a very stylish teal top with rocking' grey shoes.

Luke: This is definitely not my work shirt.

Natalie: I'm painting a word picture for the audience. They're also very snug on our couch.

Damien: Too tight! Dustin's fingers are way too close to my ear. Gross!

Diana: Do you guys want to talk about the origins of the band before we get into the music?

Natalie: What makes you cannibals?

Damien: Cannibal Kids is a project that the four of us started about two years ago. Luke, Dustin, and I were already previous friends and we had worked in another band and we were doing things with that one, then it came to an end. When we decided to rebrand and rethink our formula Cannibal kids came to be and it was like the man in the sky gave us this boy right here and we got Jordon. Everything worked so fine; we got together; we wrote a couple songs and next thing you know we're here.

Luke: Cannibal kids and No Compromise, really had more of an overlap.

Damien: The idea for our sound started when we were in No Compromise. We



found it there.

Natalie: You guys flow with whatever is going on because you guys have a really cool Indie Rock sound, but then you did Sylvan Esso remix and it blew my mind because I didn't know you had that reach. It was a great remix by the way.

Damien: That was actually a project that Dustin was working on. The indie surf-poppy sound that we have is only one element of what I think we're capable of. It's fair to say that we're good musician but we're all music lovers first. So when it comes to music in general, music news, and what's out there and being created, we're always out on the lookout for what's new and what's happening. We're music fans before we're anything else, which creates all the music that we make.

Diana: every music, and we well ba Nat that a inspire want t genre j so muc artists. Dar has a which becaus little e songs The c write, purpos process inspira and w "we ca as well Nat name into be Dar

Disney embraces Star Wars franchise, releases themed 'Disney Infinity' game

LIFESTYLE POINTS



JOSEPH
CARDENAS

Disney has fully embraced the pop culture juggernaut everyone has at least heard of--the Star Wars franchise. This fact becomes ever more apparent with new announcements about Star Wars in Disney parks and Disney characters decked out in Star Wars costumes.

Disney's wildly popular video game franchise "Disney Infinity" traveled to a galaxy far, far away just last year with their third major update, promising a playset - essentially the equivalent to an actual video game with story modes containing six hours of gameplay - for "The Force Awakens".

Before we move on any further,

please be aware there might be spoilers, this is a complete and honest review.

On the movie's opening day, the playset was out, along with its corresponding characters: Rey and Finn, the protagonists, and Poe Dameron and Kylo Ren. Reminiscent of previously released Star Wars playsets, it's mission heavy, requiring a lot of fighting and leveling up.

The interesting part is that much of the gameplay and missions don't require characters to use the force, allowing a character like Rey to not be force sensitive in order to get the most out of her character. In fact, the story mode doesn't actually give away any spoilers whatsoever. It follows the basic plot of "The Force Awakens" with Finn and Rey needing to escort BB-8 to the resistance in order to deliver a map with coordinates to Luke Skywalker.

Poe Dameron disappears after the TIE Fighter crashes on Jakku, Rey and Finn bump into Han on his freighter with the Millennium Falcon, Rey is captured by the First Order and Finn goes to rescue her from Starkiller Base, which inevitably blows up.

Crucial spoilers, like the identity of Kylo Ren, the killer plot twist that ensues because of his identity, and more importantly Rey's big moment, all are omitted from this playset.

One could argue that it's more of a general plot designed for those who already watched the movie and just want to have fun--and really that's what it was. It was entertaining to play with these characters and to see the things they can do. It wasn't necessary to relive the story, which is really the point of the Disney Infinity franchise.

The gameplay was smooth, while

also fairly well complex in each character's combo attacks.

Though lacking somewhat in diversity in their individual abilities, the playset makes up for it in a variety of activities that require certain characters to achieve three stars on replayable missions. The playset is now available, as well as all other separately sold components. In order to play it, you'll need the Disney Infinity 3.0 game, which can be bought through starter packs or downloaded to the console.

Lifestyle Points is a weekly column covering various life interests. For questions or comments please email life@fiusm.com. For the complete review visit fiusm.com.

Table for Six encourages student discussion

LESLIE OVALLE

Asst. Entertainment Director
leslie.ovalle@fiusm.com

The College of Law has put together a brand new way for fierce in-class discussions to continue in a more intensive setting--Table for Six.

It brings a select professor and five lucky students to share

a table at one of the university's starbucks cafes.

The series of events began in the spring semester of 2015 and has continued since, once or twice a month during fall and spring.

According to Angelique Ortega Fridman, the associate dean for students and assistant professor of legal skills and

values at the university's college of law, the first event of the semester will be on Jan. 21 from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Starbucks in Mango.

"This is a way for students to get to know their professors in an informal setting and expand on their in class discussions" said Fridman.

These events were a

suggestion from a College of Law alumna, Amber Kornreich, and have been a big hit ever since.

"We are really excited about these sort of events," said Fridman, "they have been a success for both the students and the professors."

An email is sent a few days in advance to a student contact

list and the first five to respond will secure their spots at the Table for Six. Students who respond after the first five are chosen will be placed on a waiting list.

"We try to make the process as fair as possible," said Fridman.

For more information contact the college of law.

The Pipeline



someone want to say the story... Basically the name Cannibal Kids is more like a title for a very cool story. It refers to a person who was in a place where we shouldn't have been. We might have done some things that we're not proud of. We stumble across some pretty scary stuff and thus the name was born.

Luke: If we told the whole story, you'd think it was out of a really bad horror movie, one day we'll tell it.

Natalie: Do you guys want to talk about the inspiration for "Where are the People?"

Damien: We wrote that song two summers ago and the whole idea was that we really wanted an energy filled song. We knew that we had the capability for it but we said "we're going to actually do it now." We recorded that song in the studio two summers ago and it was really an organic process. I remember it being that we had the drums down and then came the guitar chords and the last thing was the melody and that's how we built that song. We wrote that song within a few hours, we really got it all molded out after playing it a couple times at shows.

For the full version of this story, visit fiusm.com

Natalie: How did the Cannibal Kids come about?

Damien: Oh... Does

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FOOTBALL

Alabama defeats No.1 ranked Clemson

PETER HOLLAND
Contributing Writer
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University of Alabama once again back on top as they defeated number one ranked University of Clemson 45-40. This will be the Crimson Tide's fourth national championship victory under their head coach Nick Saban. If you follow both teams or college football in general, we all expected it to be a tough yet intriguing match up. Some experts would even

compare this national championship game to the 2005 game when first ranked USC Trojans faced second ranked Texas Longhorns at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. Clemson, known for their explosive offense led by their quarterback and heisman runner-up Deshaun Watson, was the underdog even though they were undefeated and ranked number one in the country. Alabama, however was the more complete team led by running back and reigning Heisman trophy winner Derrick Henry and their unstoppable front seven on defense.

The first half of the game was pretty much a chess match between the two elite teams. Despite a struggling start by the Crimson Tide, they started to build momentum after Henry ran 58 yards for a touchdown eight minutes in the first quarter. The Tigers however, bounced back with two touchdowns passes by Watson to former walk-on Hunter Renfrow.

The highlight of the game was in the second half when Clemson's secondary forgot how to cover tight ends. Bama's QB Jacob Coker connected with starting tight-end/

h-back OJ Howard with two wide open touchdown passes. One was for 53 yards earlier in the third quarter, and the other touchdown pass was for 51 yards in the fourth quarter. Howard finished the game with five catches for 208 yards and two touchdowns, which is a national championship record. What was great about senior was that he never scored a touchdown in two years. What a way to end your final game with your first touchdown in two years.

Alabama pretty much held the lead throughout the whole second

half of the game. Clemson kept fighting until the end, but the Crimson Tide closed the deal with one minute left in the fourth quarter when Henry scored on a one yard run for a touchdown. Henry finished the game with 36 carries for 158 yards and three touchdowns.

College football has drawn to a close with Alabama moved up to number one in the AP polls as the superior team. While tough break for Head Coach Dabo Swinney and his Clemson Tigers just coming up short Monday night.

FOOTBALL

Divisional playoffs predictions

END ZONE



STEFANO RIVERA

For the first time in the history of the NFL, all four road teams advanced past Wild Card Weekend.

Saturday, Jan. 9, we saw the Kansas City Chiefs march into Houston and dominate the Texans to a 30-0 annihilation. The Pittsburgh Steelers managed to pull out an 18-16 victory at Cincinnati in a dirty, controversial ending later that night against the Bengals.

Sunday, Jan. 10, the Seattle Seahawks, joined by Lady Luck, defeated the Minnesota Vikings 10-9, on a shanked 27-yard field goal by Vikings' kicker, Blair Walsh. Remember holders, laces in. To wrap up the weekend, the nation saw a glimpse at the true Aaron Rodgers, as he led the Green Bay Packers to a 35-18 victory against the Washington Redskins.

These teams will find themselves in a familiar position in the Divisional Round of the playoffs: playing on the road. The Chiefs and the New England Patriots will start the weekend playing at 4:35 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 16, followed by the Packers versus the Arizona Cardinals at 8:15 p.m.

The Seahawks and the Carolina Panthers will have the early kickoff Sunday, Jan. 17, at 1 p.m. To finish the weekend and decide the final team to advance to the Conference Championships, the Steelers will travel West and face off against the Denver Broncos at 4:40 p.m.

The last time the Chiefs and Patriots played, the entire nation, aside from the New England organization, started questioning whether quarterback Tom Brady still

had it in him. The Chiefs dominated the game early and Brady was benched. However, as we saw in the Super Bowl last year and throughout this NFL season, Brady clearly still has it in him.

The Patriots have dealt with injuries all season, including All-Pro tight end Rob Gronkowski and wide receiver Julian Edelman, Brady's two favorite targets. Both will be playing this game, though Edelman is coming off a broken foot, so he may be limited. However, if you have a Gronk, you have a chance, and I don't see Brady losing to the Alex Smith-led Chiefs. Don't get me wrong, Smith is a consistent and solid quarterback, but the lack of explosiveness in his offense will prove to be their achilles heel.

To make matters worse, Kansas City's top wide receiver, Jeremy Maclin, left last weekend's game with a sprained knee and is listed as day-to-day. I think the Chief's defense and special teams will prevent this game from being a blowout.

Patriots: 27
Chiefs: 16

The Packers will be looking for revenge against the Cardinals, as they got blown out in week 16 38-8 in a regular season matchup at Arizona. The setting will be the same, but the stakes and environment will be completely different.

I think everyone is in agreement when I say that Rodgers has not been himself this year. His numbers are down and he just does not look like the 2014 League MVP from a year ago. Could it be the injury that sidelined Pro Bowl receiver, Jordy Nelson? Personally, I think Rodgers is dealing with some injury himself, but that's besides the point.

Cardinals quarterback, Carson Palmer, has had an

MVP caliber year and led Arizona to a 13-3 overall record. This team is loaded offensively, including the ageless wonder at wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald, and two emerging, explosive players, wide receiver John Brown and running back David Johnson.

I believe the Cardinals will advance to the NFC Championship in a much more competitive game than their regular season matchup. I think Rodgers will struggle with the Arizona pass rush at times and Green Bay won't be able to establish a consistent running attack.

Cardinals: 31
Packers: 20

The Panthers had their eyes set on an undefeated season going into week 16; however, the Atlanta Falcons were able to knock them off the ranks of the unbeaten. Sorry Carolina, only the '72 Dolphins can have the perfect season.

Carolina quarterback, Cam Newton, is undoubtedly the leading candidate for the MVP award this season. His dual-threat abilities as a passer and runner have left defenses in awe.

However, the Panthers are set to take on a Seattle team that is as physical and determined as ever. The Seahawks know they were one or two runs away from winning back-to-back Super Bowls, but one of the most questionable calls in the history of the game stopped them short.

I think this game can be decided by a coin-flip, that's how uncertain I am of who will win. Both these teams have two things in common: similar play at quarterback between Newton and Russell Wilson and stout defenses. However, I think it's Seahawks kicker, Steven Hauschka, who wins it for them on a late field goal.

Seahawks: 21
Panthers: 20

If you are an avid football fan like I am, you'd know all the drama at the quarterback position in Denver between Peyton Manning and Brock Osweiler. Both have struggled throughout the season, but Manning will be getting the start and a chance at another Super Bowl run.

Denver's saving grace this season has been its defense. The Broncos led the league in total defense during the regular season and are consistently putting pressure on opposing quarterbacks and stopping the run game.

Their opposition, the Steelers were thought to be the dark horse for these playoffs. As the sixth seed, they wouldn't host a single game, but their explosive offense is top-three in the league and quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger is as good as it gets.

In the game against Cincinnati Roethlisberger seemed to injure his shoulder, but is likely to play.

Late in that game, Pittsburgh's star wide receiver, Antonio Brown suffered a concussion and is questionable to play in the Divisional Round.

I think the only way Pittsburgh wins this game is if Brown plays. Without such an important part of their offense, the team will struggle against a top-tier defense. Still, I think Big Ben puts up better numbers than Manning, but Denver will win this game by mixing it up on offense and using both running backs, Ronnie Hillman and CJ Anderson, along with their wide receiver duo of Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders.

Broncos: 30
Steelers: 20

Will all four road teams advanced this weekend? I think I have a better chance at winning the Powerball. But as they say, "anything is possible".

BASEBALL

What he order? Fish Filet

LOU'S HACKS



LOUIS AGUDELO

consisting of intersquad games and exhibitions against other schools, the team only posted a .271 average, which doesn't sound too promising for the spring.

On the bright side, most of Florida International's pitching will be returning, with the exception of last season's late blooming closer Danny Dopico, who took his talents to Lakeshore Drive when he was drafted by the Chicago White Sox organization. FIU also managed to scoop up a right-handed pitcher from their most hated rival's rotation, in Cain Spangler. Spangler was a position player very recently, but managed to finish the fall with a 1.69 earned run average for FIU.

This season looks to be a tough one for FIU, with the rest of the conference looking to dethrone the defending Conference USA champs, and the Panthers not being a poised to defend their crown as one would hope. Head coach Turtle Thomas has roughly a month to get his rotation and batting order figured out, so the pressure is most definitely on the veteran coach. He'll have to make some tough decisions, with a lot of new faces on the field, and some standouts that, according to him, he hasn't seen anything like in his 39 years of coaching.

We'll just have to sit around and speculate, though, up until February 19th rolls around, and FIU travels to Ole Miss to start their season.

My best friend and I once went to McDonald's for lunch, and he ordered a Filet-O-Fish, his favorite sandwich from there at the time. He got fries and a drink too, and couldn't wait to get back to my house to enjoy his meal, but there was a problem. When we sat down, and took out our food, his sandwich was missing one key ingredient; the fish.

That's right. It was just two buns, a slice of American cheese, and tartar sauce.

The fish in the middle of FIU baseball's sandwich is gone now, too, just like my best friend's lunch. With four of its most productive bats from last season having graduated, in Edwin Rios, Brian Portelli, Josh Anderson, and Julius Gaines.

To put this into perspective, the lowest batting average of the four aforementioned players belonged to Anderson, who posted an average of .272 with 7 home runs in the spring, second most on the team, to Edwin Rios, who hit 18.

As a team, the Panthers batted .277 last season, which, when coupled with a conference championship, doesn't sound too shabby at all. The problem is that, in the fall, with a schedule

FOOTBALL

Former student's transfer was 'right fit'

JASON DILL
The Bradenton Herald
TNS Staff

When Jacob Huesman committed to Florida International University last summer, he was set for his next step after completing his senior season at Braden River.

Then last week happened.

Appalachian State, famous for knocking off Michigan when it was a Division I-AA program, offered Huesman last week.

The quarterback, who led Braden River to the Class 7A state semifinals this past season, needed some time to think.

"It all happened so fast," Huesman said. "I did a lot of research about the school and the football program as well. The numbers don't lie. They have a very great school. Really, it was a matter of figuring out which place was better for me as a player and also as a student."

After sleeping on it for a few days and receiving positive feedback from Braden River assistant principal

Melissa Gagnon, who had already toured the school in the past, Huesman de-committed from FIU and chose Appalachian State on Saturday.

He'll take an official visit on Jan. 22.

"It was a really hard decision," Huesman said.

Huesman said he discussed the choice with his parents and Braden River coaches before pulling the trigger to commit to the Mountaineers, which is now a Division I program playing in the Sun Belt Conference.

Appalachian State had a quarterback for next year's class in Zeb Noland, but he flipped to Iowa State in December. That paved the way for the Mountaineers to offer Huesman, who completed 67.8 percent of his passes during the regular season last fall.

"Their fan base is wild," Huesman said. "It's in Boone, North Carolina. So it's a small community and everybody rallies behind the football team. They sell out games and the fans go nuts for them, so that's a really good environment to play in."

Huesman said Appalachian State is expecting him to compete for the backup quarterback job as an incoming freshman next summer.

That's something Huesman, who tossed 14 touchdowns against just three interceptions during Braden River's unbeaten regular season last fall, enjoys.

"If that's what they want from me, then that's exactly what I'm going to go do," he said. "I'm a very, very, extremely competitive person."

Appalachian State finished runner-up in the Sun Belt Conference this past year after going 11-2 on the season and 7-1 in conference play.

For Huesman, though, switching from FIU wasn't an easy choice.

"I was on board completely with FIU until, literally, last week when Appalachian State offered me," Huesman said.

In addition to Huesman's official visit on Jan. 22, the Mountaineers are welcoming his Braden River teammate, tight end Ryan Neuzil, for an official visit on Jan. 23.

BASKETBALL

Heat not strong enough against Golden State

JASON LIESER
The Palm Beach Post
TNS Staff

Dwyane Wade recognized something Monday night, an unflinching self-assurance that used to emanate from the Heat during their run of four straight NBA Finals trips. He saw it in the Warriors' faces during a game that was undecided until the last few minutes, and he missed it.

"I've been there before," Wade said wistfully. "I know how it looks, I know how it feels and I can see that same look on them, just that confident swagger. I see it and I'm like, 'Man, we had that.' When you don't have it no more and you're trying to get back to it, that's the frustrating part about trying to compete for a championship. But they have it."

Wade voiced a reality that permeated the Heat locker room after a game in which they did a lot right and still came up short, falling 111-103 to Golden State at Oracle Arena. They held the Warriors to their worst 3-point performance in nearly a month, reasonably contained reigning MVP Stephen Curry and played clean offense, but it was not enough.

It was a harsh confrontation for a team less than two years removed from the Big Three era. They used to do this to the rest of the league. Now they are plucking positives from an eight-point loss.

"They're an elite basketball team," coach Erik Spoelstra said. "It's interesting seeing it on the other side."

Miami (22-16) came in undeterred by the Warriors' dominance and undistracted by the absence of Hassan Whiteside, who sat out with tendinitis in his right knee. The Heat attacked from the onset, jumping to a 15-8 lead in the first six minutes and staying with Golden State (36-2) even after falling behind at the end of the first quarter.

The game was tied early in the third when the Warriors began testing Miami's resolve. They pushed ahead 69-59, and the Heat quickly worked it back to a five-point game. The game teetered again as Golden State ran up 80-70 in the last two minutes of the third quarter, but Miami countered with seven straight points to close it.

The Heat were on the brink a few times in the fourth, but did not fall fully out of range. Curry's 3 with five minutes left gave Golden State its biggest lead of the game at 101-88, and Miami fought to within six on a 3 by Luol Deng at the 2:35

mark.

"We had great poise today," Chris Bosh said. "When they went on a run, we went right back at them. That's how it has to be. Nobody got frustrated or rattled."

Golden State never wavered, either. As admirably as the Heat battled, the Warriors stayed steady.

"They have the ultimate confidence in their game," Bosh said. "Damn, I miss that."

It was still a six-point game, 107-101, when Curry ended it on a 3-pointer with 26.9 seconds remaining. He lost Tyler Johnson on a screen and got the shot off before Bosh could get there to help.

There were plenty of plays like that by a Warriors team that runs the most ruthless offense in the league. It was good for Miami to get an up-close view of this machine, yet unsettling to experience how overpowering and disorienting it can be.

"We got back defensively and we still made mistakes," Bosh said. "They make the right plays every time. It's a lot."

"You just have to know who you're playing, man. They're the champs. That's how it works... Some mistakes you make, they capitalize and, damn, what do you want me to say on that one? I can't say anything. He made a 3 in my face. Damn, that was a hell of a pass. I didn't even see it coming."

Wade played through a shoulder injury to put up 20 points, a team season-high 11 assists and seven rebounds. Bosh was solid with 15 points, 12 rebounds and four assists. Four other players scored at least 13.

With Whiteside out, Spoelstra went small and gave rookie Justise Winslow his first career start. He scored seven points and had three rebounds in 26 minutes.

Curry scored a game-high 31 points, but shot 11 for 27 to get there. He made 4 of 11 3-pointers, and the rest of his team combined to go 3 for 12. Draymond Green put together 22 points, 12 rebounds and six assists, and Thompson added 17 points and seven rebounds as Golden State won its 36th straight home game.

It was one of the Heat's better offensive games of the year to complement a respectable defensive effort. When that type of performance is insufficient, a team must acknowledge where it stands against a superior opponent.

"Every team that came in this building left the same way that we're leaving," Wade said.

Dysfunctional Dolphins seeking organization

JASON DILL
The Bradenton Herald
TNS Staff

Honesty can be refreshing. In the case of the Miami Dolphins, two of the most telling comments from the past week-plus are ones the organization's circle of trust probably wishes they could take back.

Two important figures in the organization admitted that the franchise has been dysfunctional for the past few years.

New general manager Chris Grier did it in the opening comments of his introductory press conference a day after the season finale.

"The past decade has been unacceptable for this organization," said Grier, who has been with the Dolphins for 15 seasons in numerous roles. "We will earn your trust back, both on and off the field. ... The talk of dysfunction within the organization is over."

And on Saturday, while explaining why former Bears offensive coordinator Adam Gase was the right fit to become the Dolphins' ninth full-time head coach, owner Steve Ross let the dreaded D-word slip out his mouth too.

"When you have dysfunction, when you have the general manager arguing with the coach, and then the players know, they [wonder] who am I really reporting to? Who has got accountability?" Ross said, explaining why Gase was given final say on Miami's 53-man roster.

"If you look at the great franchises that year after year have been winners, it is where the coach is accountable for everything and the players know who to look [to]."

The first step to addressing a problem is admitting one exists, and for far too long the Dolphins have been lying to themselves and their fan base about the soap opera style drama that has engulfed Miami.

NFL insiders routinely chuckled about the gossip that the Dolphins provided the past few seasons.

Former Dolphins coach Tony Sparano, who last four years, and Jeff Ireland, the franchise's general manager for six years, didn't speak to each other for an entire year in 2011.

Ross' misguided commitment to former coach Joe Philbin, who lasted three and a half seasons as Sparano's replacement, and Dawn Aponte's influence in

the organization as executive vice president of football administration, got Miami turned down by at least four general manager candidates before an unemployed Dennis Hickey accepted the job.

Hickey lasted all of one season before Ross concluded he was in over his head, and hired former Jets executive Mike Tannenbaum to serve as the team's czar, overseeing all aspects of football operations as a vice president.

A year later, Tannenbaum fired Hickey because the moves they made together didn't work as the Dolphins struggled to a 6-10 record. Tannenbaum then promoted Grier from director of college scouting to general manager without even interviewing other candidates.

Why give anyone else a chance to turn the Dolphins down?

The organization then hired Gase, a smart, but young coach who is considered a quarterback guru to become the franchise's new head coach, and openly admitted that they have concerns about his lack of experience.

Never mind that the previous coach wasn't much of a leader, and that the locker room doesn't have many of them.

Hopefully someone in Ross' circle of trust will explain why Dolphins fans, and the team's players should believe that this near decade of dysfunction has come to an end?

Is it because Ross and Grier said so?

Didn't the last few regimes, and coaches pledge to work together and avoid finger pointing? I'm certain they did.

The Dolphins need to get their act together because this once proud fan base is losing faith, and careers are being wasted. Miami hasn't made the playoffs in seven seasons, and has gone 15 years without a playoff victory.

"We have to set accountability. It hasn't existed in this organization before," Ross said. "Now we really have that in three people, Chris, Mike and Adam, who will really work together."

We'll see how long this "we're all in this together" approach works when disagreements surface and Miami deals with yet another storm.

Sparano, Ireland, Philbin, and Hickey are no longer around to shoulder the blame for the losses and dysfunction.

SGA BBC opens positions

GUETHSHINA ALTENA
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Student Government Association celebrates the new year and the start of the spring semester by opening positions for students to apply for SGA at the Bay Biscayne Campus.

Positions are currently available in the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch and the Judicial Branch.

The general requirements for the application include, but are not limited to: being a registered FIU student under no academic or disciplinary sanctions as detailed in the Student Code of Conduct, maintaining no less than a 2.5 cumulative undergraduate grade point average and a 2.0 term grade point average and the students should be attending at least half of their classes at the campus he/she represents.

Candidates for the positions can run for and hold only one office at a time. They must be available to meet once a week with the SGA team and staff.

The Student Government Association gives candidates an opportunity to serve student's need and resolve issues while gaining leadership experience.

Students involved with SGA will be involved in

TAKING STOCK AT THE WOLFE CENTER



SUDYEN NAVARRETE/THE BEACON

Lili Gabay (close right), a freshman explorer and Victoria Reyes (back right), a sophomore history major, speak with Monica Castaneda (left), a college success coach for Take Stock in Children Miami-Dade at the Pizza with the Pros event in Panther Square Tuesday, Jan. 12.

activities such as funding student clubs and organizations, programming diverse events, providing services and resources, and addressing all student's concerns.

The application requires a few documents to be submitted, which include: a resume detailing work and extracurricular experience, a personal statement and any additional materials which you believe would be helpful

in the evaluation of the application.

SGA works closely with other councils and student organizations, it is in fact responsible for the distribution and management of about \$10.6 million in student fees, according to SGA's OrgSync page.

For more information, visit the student government website.

Florida manatees may lose 'endangered' species tag

JENNY STALETOVICH
The Miami Herald
TNS Staff

Federal wildlife managers want Florida's manatee, the whiskered lumbering icon that came to represent the fight to save the state's vulnerable wildlife, removed from the endangered species list.

In a news conference at the Miami Seaquarium on Thursday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that a population estimated at just over 6,000 should be reclassified as simply "threatened" despite a record number of deaths in recent years. They called the down-listing a positive move signaling a recovery and stressed that the change would not reduce protections already in place.

"Based on the best available scientific information, we believe the manatee is no longer in danger of extinction," said Mike Oetker, the agency's deputy regional director. "While we're proposing this change in class, we also recognize there are areas we have to do better."

The decision comes under mounting pressure from developers and the boating industry who have long complained that slow speed zones and other protective measures are too strict. Last year, the conservative Pacific Legal Fund sued federal officials after petitioning for the removal in 2012, arguing that boat collisions and other threats have been largely reduced.

But conservationists say the decision directly contradicts the agency's plan to save the manatees by not relying on population counts.

Between 2010 and 2013 the population went backwards and they're not even talking about that.

Pat Rose, executive director of the Save the Manatee Club

"Between 2010 and 2013 the population

went backwards and they're not even talking about that," said Pat Rose, executive director of the Save the Manatee Club. "To suggest the threats are controlled is just not the way to approach it."

They also worry that the change will be echoed around the state, where endangered species and environmental causes are coming under increasing threat.

In a 2014 response to the proposed down-listing, the group raised concerns about the state's willingness to protect manatees: State environmental enforcement cases fell by 68 percent in 2013, the Department of Environmental Protection's budget and staff have been slashed and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission has fallen behind on management plans in key manatee habitats. Even federal wildlife officials ruled a 2007 recovery plan as outdated but have yet to revise it.

According to that plan, success should not be determined by "how many manatees exist," but by how well actions keep the gentle sea cows from harm. Between 2010 and 2013, more than 2,400 manatees were killed, or nearly half the population counted last year.

Critics of recovery efforts also have complained that annual aerial counts conducted by the state are inaccurate.

In reaching their decision, wildlife officials used computer models to calculate the risk of extinction to manatees. They concluded over the next century, the odds were about 2.5 percent. However, those models did not factor in the recent deaths from the 2010 cold snap, a red tide event or an increasing number of boat fatalities in 2015 because the information was not available, said Jim Valade, the agency's manatee recovery coordinator.

They also stressed repeatedly that protective measures would remain in place and any new threats to manatee habitat would

come under federal scrutiny.

"If they want to get a permit from us, we're going to ask do you have a manatee protection plan," said Larry Williams, the agency's Florida supervisor.

Video: Miami Seaquarium veterinarian explains reclassification of manatee

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the reclassification of the manatee from endangered to threatened. Maya Rodriguez, a veterinarian at the Miami Seaquarium, talks about the meaning behind the reclassification.

West Indian manatees, which are found in the U.S. along the southeast coast and Puerto Rico and were first protected at the turn of the century, have long served as a measure of how well booming Florida co-existed with its fragile wildlife. With no natural predators, their biggest threats came chiefly from human activity: Pioneers slaughtered them for hides and modern-day boaters ran them down by the hundreds.

Their numbers started to climb after the Save the Manatee Club, co-founded by Sen. Bob Graham and Jimmy Buffett in 1981, sued the state and federal government in 2000 to force better boating regulations and other measures. In 2007, after counts recorded more than 3,000 manatees, federal managers considered down-listing them but backed off.

The Pacific Legal Fund, a group that advocates for property rights and reduced government regulation, welcomed the announcement but criticized the agency for "sitting on their hands."

"It has taken eight years and two lawsuits to get federal officials to follow up on their own experts' recommendation to reclassify the manatee," attorney Christina Martin said in a statement. "We are glad to see that the manatee is doing well, but all taxpayers should demand that the government do much better, going forward, in following the requirements of the Endangered Species Act."

But conservationists fear the agency is acting too hastily by not including recent deaths in models, which could indicate not enough is being done to protect warm water wintering habitats. Later this year, the U.S. Geological Survey is expected to complete a report that looks at whether the deaths affected the population, Valade said, which will be part of the agency's final decision at the end of the year.

About 60 percent of the state's manatees now winter around power plants. Some worry those habitats aren't sustainable for the future and worry that without manatees to protect them, springs could also come under attack. They also worry the federal decision failed to consider impacts from climate change.

"The manatee is a tugboat species," Rose said. "They pull and push along protections for the whole ecosystem."

While federal officials insist existing rules won't change, Rose said that without the endangered classification, protections could begin to erode. Already, he said legislation has been proposed in Brevard County to undermine the state's Manatee Sanctuary Act.

State officials at the news conference, including Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioner Liesa Priddy, who has argued to lift protections for the Florida panther, say the state's management plan remains "adaptive."

"If things get better or worse, we can change on a case by case basis," said Ernie Marks, the agency's south region director.

Rose said the group may consider its own legal action, but first hopes to persuade state and federal officials to come up with a warm water contingency plan and enforce the Manatee Sanctuary Act, which has established low speed zones around the state.

Thursday's proposal is now open to public comment for 90 days. A public hearing will be held Feb. 20 in Orlando.