

HOMETOWN CONNECTION

A NEWSLETTER FOR RESIDENTS OF DELRAY BEACH



HOMETOWN HERO



Receptionist Monique Burton is often the first person to greet City Hall visitors and goes out of her way to offer a warm smile and a kind word.

GREETING CITY HALL VISITORS WITH A SMILE

Marcia Paige had time to kill and was getting bored.

A member of the Delray Art League, Paige had just helped set up a display of paintings in the lobby of City Hall but had to wait for the person who was coming to judge the exhibit. Time could have easily dragged.

But before too long, City Hall Receptionist Monique Burton, often the first face people see, struck up a conversation.

"She acted like she was my friend," said Paige, who was offered magazines to read while she waited. "She made it like a social visit. It was pretty unusual."

Whether she is assisting residents who want resolutions to an issue, helping to get mail to the post office or taking the time to help a resident in need, Monique Burton often takes the extra step in providing customer service.

"She has a very pleasant personality," says Lt. Michael Coleman of the Delray Beach Police Department. "She comes from a great family that will make you feel welcome, no matter what."

A Delray Beach native, who served on the City Youth Advisory Board as a teenager and helped come up with the concept of a neighborhood teen center, Burton understands that there is a special importance attached to her job.

How she greets visitors to City Hall often is their first impression and it can be a last-

ing one.

"This is Delray Beach," she says. "We want to be sure our City is presented in a positive way."

Of course there's a lot more to it, as far as Burton is concerned. There's also the sense of satisfaction she gets from lending a hand.

"I really like helping people," says Burton, who shares front-desk duties with "Kappy" Kaplan, a part-time employee. "I go above and beyond to help them."

There was the time, for example, when a woman came into City Hall to pay her water bill and ended up telling Burton about legal trouble she was having with

the owners of the home where she was living. Burton contacted the city attorney's office and eventually helped connect the woman with the Legal Aid Society.

"She's always looking for a better way to do her job," says Nancy King, who works in the City's Human Resources Department.

There was the time, King remembers, when Burton agreed to take important mail to the Post Office on her way home after King missed the afternoon pickup.

For visitors like the Art League's Paige, Burton's attitude and approach to her job is a bit of fresh air.

"It's just me," Burton says. "If you come into City Hall, I'm going to try to make you feel welcome."

"If you come into City Hall, I'm going to try to make you feel welcome."

PROPOSED TAX REFORM AMENDMENT COMES WITH PROS AND CONS

When Delray Beach residents go to the polls in January to vote for or against a proposed constitutional amendment on tax reform, they will be casting ballots on a complicated issue that could benefit some property owners and negatively impact others.

City leaders are hoping residents will fully understand the impact of the amendment before casting their votes.

Under the proposal, the current \$25,000 homestead exemption on assessed property value would increase to \$50,000. In Delray Beach, there are close to 17,000 properties that currently receive a homestead exemption. An increase in the exemption would likely result in a tax reduction on many of those properties, although an estimated 2,412 parcels with an assessed value below \$50,000 will not qualify for the exemption. Another 2,496 parcels with values between \$50,000 and \$75,000 will only qualify for a portion of the exemption.

Under the current proposed structure of the amendment, an estimated 4,900 homes will not see the full exemption.

The amendment would also provide for portability of the Save Our Homes provision, which could benefit those planning to move.

At the same time the amendment could have a negative impact on property owners who do not have a homestead exemption. In Delray, about 45 percent of properties, about 14,000, do not have a homestead exemption.

"Our City Commission and many other cities agree that tax reform is badly needed because there are inequities," City Manager David Harden said. "We don't feel that what's on the ballot accomplishes that."

Among the concern of City leaders is that the amendment could create greater inequities and shift even more of the tax burden to new homebuyers, part-time residents and owners of businesses and commercial properties.

While it is still unknown what impact the amendment could have on the city's overall revenue, Harden said the City Commission could decide to increase the tax rate, if needed, to ensure revenue in the next fiscal year is the same as the current year. That could further increase the tax burden on those non-exempt properties.

For now, Delray Beach is waiting to see what voters decide and City leaders are hoping that residents will consider both sides of the issue before making their choice.



FIRE STATION OPEN HOUSE ALSO OPENS EYES TO ROLE OF FIRE SERVICE

There was, of course, what you would expect to find at an open house put on by Delray Beach Fire Rescue.

There were lots of fire trucks for children to tour. Paramedics were nearby to explain what they do and youngsters could even put on a plastic fire helmet and watch a few demonstrations here and there.

But this open house, held at the City's temporary Station 4 on Barwick Road, was also different than what you might expect.

At this open house, there were representatives from a local hospital offering cholesterol screenings and representatives from the American Cancer Society. There were even representatives from the Police Department on hand giving out free bicycle helmets while representatives from Delray Ocean Rescue



Almost 700 people visited the city's temporary fire station on Barwick Road during an open house.



Several youngsters received free bicycle helmets at the Fire Rescue open house.

provided beach safety tips.

"We believe the firehouse should be a place where people can come and get information on health and wellness," said Delray Fire Rescue Chief David James. "We want to continue to develop collaborative efforts with other organizations."

Chief James, who took over the department earlier this year, plans to have a series of open houses throughout the year. He believes the opportunity to have residents come to the fire station and see what the department is doing serves several purposes.

"It's important that the fire service take a step to demonstrate our commitment to the

community," he said. "This is their fire station."

In all, close to 700 residents – many from the area served by the fire station – came by to check out the open house and to learn more about the department. A number of those visiting were youngsters and that's important, according to James.

"One of our goals is to inspire young people to consider this as a profession," he said.

By reaching young people at an early age, James said, the department is hoping to discourage behavior that could prevent youngsters from becoming a firefighter or paramedic down the road and at the same time encourage them to do well in school.

"We think it's important for us to reach out early," he said.

The chief, who took a shift at the grill cooking up hotdogs and hamburgers for visitors, says he's looking forward to additional open houses.

"We really want to educate the community about what the fire department does," he said.

Residents served by the temporary station also had a chance to look at plans for the new station at Barwick Road and Lake Ida Road that will replace an older station, which suffered damage during the hurricanes of a few years ago.

DELRAY WORKING TO BECOME MORE CLEAN AND GREEN

The price of oil is going through the roof and gas prices are soaring.

Concerns about the environment are mounting as scientists continue to warn of dire consequences from continued pollution.

In Delray Beach, City officials are taking a variety of steps designed to help increase efficiency and become even more environmentally friendly.

"We have to be looking at more ways to save energy," says Mayor Rita Ellis, who recently received Commission support for a residents' task force that will be in place by early next year. "We have to start looking ahead."

Throughout the City, there are increasing signs that Delray Beach is greening up. In recent weeks, Engineering Inspector Steve Warren has been driving a Ford Escape Hybrid during his regular rounds and a new Toyota Prius will soon be assigned to the City's Community Improvement Department.

Several more hybrid vehicles will be purchased in upcoming months to replace conventional vehicles. They will be assigned to those areas where they will have the most impact, according to Environmental Services Director Richard Hasko.

Other vehicles in the city, including many

of the trucks in the City's fleet, are now running on more environmentally friendly, low-sulfur diesel fuel and there are 17 vehicles in the fleet that run on propane.

"We're always looking for ways to maximize efficiency and preserve resources where it makes sense," Hasko said.

Visitors to City Hall may notice that there are now motion sensors in many of the offices and conference rooms so lights automatically go out if the room isn't in use. In addition, the City has been replacing florescent light fixtures with more energy efficient ones and checking thermostat settings to make sure they are set properly.

When it comes to new buildings, the City is working to ensure that the ones it builds are environmentally friendly. Steps are also being taken to ensure that

debris from demolition of city buildings is recycled. In addition, the City has been increasing its water reuse project for irrigation. Recently City Engineer Randal Krejcarek received a LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, certification and is helping to ensure that City buildings are as energy efficient as possible.

"One of our goals is to be leaders in this effort so we can encourage others to follow," Hasko said.



Engineering Inspector Steve Warren drives a Ford Escape hybrid.

CODERED HELPS KEEP RESIDENTS INFORMED IN EMERGENCIES

When there's an emergency situation, getting the word out in a hurry can be critical.

In Delray Beach, residents can be sure they're informed by making certain they're registered for the City's CodeRED system, which is used for telephone notification of situations such as a boil-water order or missing persons who might be in the neighborhood.

"Through CodeRED you can get immediate notification if there's an emergency," said Amanda Solomon, the City's telecommunications systems manager.

In the past, she said, the system has been used to let residents know that police were searching for a burglary suspect in their area and other emergency situations.

While many City residents are automatically included in the database, the best way to make sure you receive the telephone alerts is to sign up for CodeRED Alerts.

By visiting the City's Web site and going to the CodeRED Alert page, you can not only be sure you're signed up but can also add an alternative number, including a cell phone number or an out-of-state number to make sure you're contacted in an emergency.

To sign up for CodeRED Alerts go to www.mydelraybeach.com and click on "Public Safety" on the left side box. Then click on Emergency Notification CodeRED. If you do not have a computer, contact the City at (561) 243-7000.

"This system provides residents with just another level of communications with the City," Solomon said.



PROJECT HOLIDAY SHOWS COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT FOR TROOPS OVERSEAS



As a member of the military stationed far away, Dave Smith always looked forward to the packages he received.

"Anytime I got a box from home it was special," said Smith, a retired Air Force colonel who now makes his home in Delray Beach.

This holiday season, dozens of troops overseas with Delray Beach connections will be receiving a package from home, thanks to the generosity of residents and the support of the City of Delray Beach.

Smith, a member of the non-profit organization "You Are Not Alone," knows the packages and the supplies they contain will be greatly appreciated.

"It's not so much what it is, it's that you're getting something from someone who doesn't know you but still cares about you and about what you're doing," Smith said.

For the second consecutive year, members of You are Not Alone with the help of city officials, including Mayor Rita Ellis, packaged up donated items collected from throughout the city and sent them to service members in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of Project Holiday.

In all, more than 35 boxes were sent to units of military personnel with Delray Beach connections. Another 31 boxes were sent to other individuals.

"We collected more than \$17,000 worth of merchandise and about \$1,500 in donations," said Delores Rangel, a city employee and member of You Are Not Alone whose daughter



Mayor Rita Ellis, former Commissioner Alberta McCarthy and City Commission Assistant Delores Rangel helped pack boxes.



More than \$17,000 worth of items were collected for troops overseas.

Church of the Palms, which covered several thousand dollars in postage costs.

"We really are a community that cares," Rangel said.

ter Melissa is serving with the Air Force in Iraq.

Rangel, who helped start Project Holiday last year, said this year's donations were significantly more than last year.

"The donations came from throughout the community," she said.

Rangel said city employees helped with the collection of items and that many city departments have collections of their own. Several City Commissioners also took part in the packing process.

"A lot of soldiers do not receive a care package during their tour and we wanted to make sure some of them receive our love and our thanks," Rangel said.

Youngsters in the community also got to show their support with students sending more than 700 letters and drawings to the troops overseas.

In addition to individual donations, several organizations and businesses were instrumental in helping to make this year's Project Holiday a success. Among those that teamed up with the City were Crane's Beach House, Oh My Bod and Shore Restaurant, which teamed up for a fund-raising event and fashion show, and Pizza Rustica, which donated pizza for those who packed boxes. Also instrumental in the success of this year's program was the

CITIZEN SERVICE REQUESTS PROCESS MAKES COMMUNICATING WITH THE CITY EASIER

Residents who want to make sure the City is aware of everything from burned out street lights to code violations are finding that the new Citizen Service Requests process is making it easier than ever.

In its first full month of operation the program, which launched on Oct. 1, received more than 150 requests from residents for assistance with the vast majority of those requests coming via the Internet.

"That's a pretty good response for just one month," said Amanda Solomon, the city's telecommunication systems manager.

Designed to help improve communications, the Citizen Service Requests process not only notifies residents their request has been received, it also gives them periodic updates on the status of the request, if they choose to receive them. In addition to giving residents a chance to voice their concerns about issues, the system also makes it possible for residents to pass compliments on, all with just a phone call or a few strokes on

the computer keyboard.

"It's convenient and residents receive better updates than they had in the past," Solomon said.

For the City, the new system has the added benefit of collecting data that can be mapped and sorted.

"This system is going to help us determine problem areas," Solomon said. "It can also help us budget for areas that need improvement."

Thanks to database analysis functions built into the new response system, City officials can keep track of what area seems to be having a problem with, for example, street lights, and can take actions to be proactive.

The new system also makes it possible for the City to do year-to-year or month-to-month comparisons of problems by issue and also allows City officials to track the time it takes for problems to be resolved.

To learn more about the system or fill out a request, visit www.mydelraybeach.com and scroll down to Citizen Service Requests or call (561) 243-7012.

LA FRANCE APARTMENTS



The La France Apartments on NW Fourth Avenue.

The Delray Beach Community Redevelopment Agency recently completed renovations to the historic La France Hotel, once one of the few hotels in South Florida open to African Americans.

With 14 units geared to low-income seniors, an underserved population, the La France Apartments incorporate the original building from the 1940s into the modern facility.

Designed and built by local firms, the La France Apartments were created as a result of input from local residents.

For more information call the CRA at 276-8640.

FORMER ROCKS PLAYER RETURNS TO COACH YOUTH TEAM

Neal Collins has come full circle.

Back in the 1970s, when he was growing up, Collins was a pulling guard on the 105-pound Delray Rocks team and later was a running back on the 135-pound team.

Collins went on to play a little football at Boca Raton High School and then started working for the city of Boca Raton, where he has been for 26 years.

But now, Collins is back on the field at Pompey Park, where the Rocks practice, this time as head coach of the Rocks 90-pound team.

A storyteller, who will get kids laughing with tales of getting in trouble as a youngster for not listening to his mother's instructions, Collins is good at teaching the youngsters who come to practice about football.

During practice, he'll rattle off plays and watch how the youngsters in his charge carry them out. He's quick to correct them – without berating them – if they make a mistake.

Yet Collins knows from experience that his biggest responsibility is not teaching these youngsters football. It's teaching them how to navigate through the challenges of life.

"I want to see these kids learn more than just sports," he says. "It's life in general. Our kids need to know that education is important and they need to know how to respect themselves as young men."

Collins says he learned those lessons growing up, first from his mother – his toughest coach – and then from his football coaches.

"Each one of my coaches, I learned something from them," he said.

Collins will tell you that the reason he is on the field at night and on weekends has a lot to do with his love of kids. But you'll soon discover that Collins is also there as a role model and as a coach whose responsibilities don't end once the whistle sounds.

"I want these kids to know that someone is there to listen to them," he says.



Coach Neal Collins and members of the 90-pound team.

DELRAY ROCKS YOUTH FOOTBALL PROGRAM TEACHES MORE THAN JUST THE GAME

It's been a good 30 years since Kent Thomas played football for the Delray Rocks, yet the city's youth football team is still a big part of who he is today.

A sergeant first class in the U.S. Army, Thomas will tell you that he played for the Rocks at first to kill some time. What he found instead were role models that had a profound impact on his life.

"The Rocks allowed me as a kid who might not have had role models to meet great people," Thomas said. "If it weren't for those role models, I can't tell you where I'd be."

For more than 40 years, the Delray Rocks Youth Football program has been providing kids with an opportunity to learn about football and to learn about the responsibilities of life.

"The Rocks have given a lot of kids a purpose," says Bill Smith, the football coach who created the program for the City back in 1965 and has long since retired. "It was never about winning. It was always about doing the best you can. If you do that, you'll win."

And win, the Rocks have done. Among those familiar with youth football programs across the country, the Delray Rocks are legendary. The teams are always known for being well coached and playing hard. And

they are known for having winning records.

But the success that Smith and now Coach Ben Leonard, Smith's protégé, who currently runs the league for Delray's Parks and Recreation Department, are most proud of is the character of former players like Kent Thomas.

"When I played for the Rocks, I was learning to make the right decisions," Thomas said. "The coaches I played for, they demanded a lot out of you."

The demanding ways of the coaches have paid off in many ways for individuals as well as the community.

At least a dozen former Rocks players have gone on to play in the National Football League and a few more have played in the Canadian Football League.

Many, probably in the hundreds, have gone on to college, some to play football or some because of what they learned with the Rocks. And countless numbers have stayed out of trouble, in large part because of the discipline that comes from being part of a team.

"The Rocks teaches kids how to work together toward a common goal," Leonard says. "They learn that there are often consequences to their actions."

Leonard says that sometimes teachers, who know a student plays for the Rocks, will contact the coach if

there is an issue.

"We had one player who was being disruptive in class," Leonard said. "The teacher called the coach and the coach sat the kid down. We never got another call."

Featuring teams in five different groups, starting as young as 6 and 7 and going up to 14 and 15, the Rocks play in a league against other youth football teams in South Florida. But in November, three of the teams traveled to Daytona to play in a national invitational tournament.

With cheerleaders and a large fan base, the Rocks continued to draw crowds of 300 people or more during this last season. That community support has helped the program gain a reputation as one of the best of its kind in the country.

For Kent Thomas, and hundreds of youngsters who followed him, what they learned about football from the Rocks was important. But what they learned about character and discipline was the most valuable lesson of all.

"We teach the kids that you can't play football all your life," Leonard says. "You have to set yourself up to be successful."



Over the years cheerleaders have helped the more than 300 fans who come to home games support their local teams, which have earned a national reputation for excellence.



The city's Delray Rocks youth football program has sent at least a dozen players to the pros and more than 100 to college.



COACH BEN LEONARD HAS GUIDED THE ROCKS FOR 33 YEARS

Every year for 33 years, Ben Leonard has been coming to the football field knowing that among the crop of new kids playing for the Delray Beach Rocks there will always be a kid with amazing potential.

"You can always walk out and say 'that one there, he's going to be something special,'" says Leonard, a Rocks coach for three decades who now coordinates the program.

Over the years, Leonard has seen those special kids rise to the top. He's seen kids who had the odds stacked against them go on to college and get an education. He's seen a dozen or so go on to play professional football, either in the NFL or the Canadian League.

"I enjoy seeing our kids going from here to high school, then to college and in some cases the NFL," he says.

He's proud of those kids, no doubt. But there is also disappointment in Coach Leonard's voice when he talks about the kids who had the talent but didn't listen to coaches who stressed the importance of academics as well as discipline.

Even now, after all the years, he still preaches the importance of keeping the grades up so the kids can play in high school and perhaps in college.

Coach Leonard knows that there are kids who are listening and he knows that even those who don't make it beyond the Rocks, usually walk away with a little more discipline and a little more respect for those who have helped them along the way.

"I look forward to football season every year," Leonard says.

Leonard will tell you that he is proud of his teams and the way they've represented Delray Beach and themselves. He'll also tell you that he's very proud of the coaches.

"I've had four coaches at Atlantic High School that I've coached," he said. "That means a lot to me."

What also means a lot to him is when some of his players come back as adults to coach the Rocks.

"I'm very happy anytime one of our kids comes back because he knows what was given to him and now he's giving it back," Leonard says.



Coach Ben Leonard

PRINCIPAL FOR A DAY PROGRAM PROVIDES UNIQUE VIEW OF SCHOOLS

In his half dozen years on the City Commission, four of them as mayor, Jeff Perlman had the chance to go to many schools in the city, read to dozens of children and meet with many top school administrators.

But nothing was quite like what he experienced in early November during a few hours as "Principal for a Day" at Carver Middle School.

"It was a very eye-opening experience," he said.

Rather than go from classroom to classroom, Perlman spent several hours attending an important meeting with Principal Lena Roundtree and school administrators that fo-

cused on improvements to the school.

"I got to see the attention to the data and the amount of resources that were being poured into the school," Perlman said. "I also got to hear about the challenges the school faces."

For Perlman, who had welcomed "Principals for a Day" to annual town meetings on education in the past but never as a principal, this year's event was an opportunity to see a local school from a new vantage point and to learn what he and other members of the business community could do to help.

Coordinated by the City of Delray Beach and the Delray Beach Education Board, the City's Seventh Annual Principal for a Day Program saw more than 20 community leaders participating in local schools.

For some, the day was an opportunity to go into classrooms and read to youngsters. For others, the day started outside an elementary school at 7:30 a.m. as they, along with teachers and administrators, greeted youngsters getting off their school bus.

The program ended with a lunch and town meeting where principals and "principals for a day" had a chance to listen to a presentation from Katherine Bray Murphy of

the Murphy Education Group.

The goal of the Principal for a Day program, according to Cathy DeMatto, who chaired this year's event, is to encourage continued involvement in schools and Perlman says he plans to stay involved with Carver.

Already he is looking into ways to fund two scholarship programs, one for the student who shows the most improvement and another for outstanding community service by a student.

And Perlman's already making plans to come back next year. "If they'll have me, I'll do it again," he said.



Jeremy Office of Merrill Lynch at American Heritage.



John Tollemer (right) from Commerce Bank visited Orchard View Elementary School and spent time with Principal Gerald Riopelle (left).

DELRAY POP-UP BOOK AVAILABLE IN LIMITED SUPPLIES

Looking for a holiday gift that will not only be a great conversation piece but will also help local schools?

If so, you'll want to be one of the first to get a copy of "A Pop-Up Story of Delray Beach - The All-American Village by the Sea," which will be available in limited supply near the Famous 100-Foot Christmas Tree.

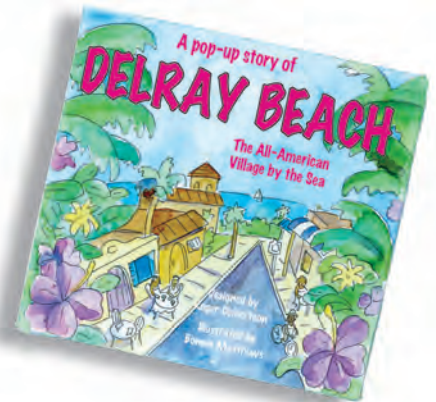
Selling for just \$28, including tax, the pop-up book includes pages that highlight several aspects of the City from cultural heritage and history to recreation and education.

"This book is about all the things we love in Delray Beach," says Janet Meeks, the

City's education coordinator, who worked with the Education Board and the Greater Delray Beach Chamber of Commerce's Education Foundation to make the pop-up book project a reality.

Because money to cover the costs of producing the book was raised from throughout the community, the vast majority of proceeds from sales will be funneled back into local public and private schools through the Chamber's Education Foundation.

For more information about the book, which will be widely available in January, visit www.delraypopupbook.com.



ANNUAL TOY DRIVE HELPS MAKE HOLIDAYS POSSIBLE FOR MANY

Sometime just before Christmas, several dozen families will answer a knock on the door and discover a police officer in front of their home.

But these officers aren't there responding to a call. Instead they're responding to a growing need in the community.

To ensure that children in families struggling financially have a holiday this year, Delray Beach's Kids and Cops program will be stopping by several homes, dropping off toys and in some cases, gift certificates to Publix.

And that's just a small part of the 17th Annual Delray Beach Holiday Toy Drive. In all, thanks to the generosity of the community



More than 2,000 children will receive presents thanks to the toy drive.

and proceeds from a recent fishing tournament, more than 2,000 children will be receiving toys this year.

Many of the children will receive presents at toy parties held for youngsters in the City's after-school program. Others will be receiving toys during parties held at the Achievement Centers for Children & Families.

The Holiday Toy Drive, the signature event of the Kids and Cops program, is one more way for police officers to interact with youngsters in the community in a positive way.

"The whole purpose of the program is to break down the barriers between kids and cops," says Jennifer Buce, a City employee

who serves on the organization's board.

Over the years, the holiday toy drive has continued to grow as more businesses, organizations and individuals donate toys.

Still, the need continues and more donations are needed. You can help by donating a new, unwrapped toy for a youngster between the ages of 5 and 16. Several drop-off sites are located throughout the City, including the police department and fire stations.

All toys must be received before Dec. 17. Toy guns will not be accepted. Checks made payable to Delray Citizens for Delray Beach Police will also be greatly appreciated.

For more information, visit the City's Web site at www.mydelraybeach.com or call Jennifer Buce at 243-7138.



HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS GET A HELPING HAND FROM MIDDLE-SCHOOL STUDENTS



Jessica Saul is just a seventh-grader at the Village Academy Micro Society School but already she is developing a strong sense of community.

One of several seventh and eighth-graders from her school who took part in a community-wide effort to get 13 and 14-year olds involved in the City's holiday festivities, Jessica spent a few hours in early November helping with the construction of the City's Famous 100-Foot Christmas Tree.

"This tree is mostly for the community and I think it was a great honor for all of us to be able to come out and help," she said.

For many youngsters in the community there will be a great sense of pride this year when they see the lights of the tree glowing.

From fluffing branches to checking lights, seventh and eighth graders will be leaving their literal fingerprints on the City's holiday events, thanks in large part to a grant from the Office Depot Foundation and a challenge that comes with it.

This season, the local schools that have the highest percentage of participation among seventh and eighth graders in three specific events will receive cash prizes that can be used for additional programs.

"We're really hoping to encourage civic pride in the community among this age group," says Marjorie Ferrer, executive director of the Downtown Marketing Cooperative, which works with the City to present a variety of events, including activities surrounding the Famous 100-Foot Tree and First Night@ 2008.

For some students – including 13-year-old Jessica – the chance to work side by side with other volunteers offers an opportunity to learn more about the tree and how it is put together.

"This gave all the people who thought the tree was boring a chance to think differently about it," she said.

Other students will have a chance to participate in the holidays this year by either providing entertainment at a special tent set up at the tree or by helping out during First Night activities.

While much of the holiday celebration this year will be centered around the tree and Old School Square – from the skating rink to the carousel to Kids Day at the Tree, complete with snow – there will be a new twist to the City's celebration that should brighten up the holidays for many.

This year residents will see brightly lighted displays throughout the downtown, Pineapple Grove and the Historical West Settlers' District that are designed to make the City even more festive than usual. Visitors will discover holiday lights on the beach pavilion at Atlantic Avenue and A1A as well as displays throughout the downtown area.

The holidays in Delray Beach wouldn't be complete without a chance to have Breakfast with Santa, a tradition that will return Dec. 22.

For many youngsters like Jessica Saul, this year is an opportunity to start a new tradition of being a part of a community activity – a tradition that they will be proud of for many years to come.

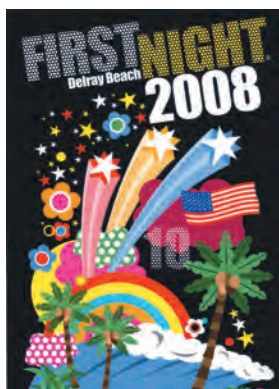


NEW PARKING GARAGE SITE OF "COUNTDOWN TO FIRST NIGHT"

This holiday season, the new downtown parking garage near Old School Square will be used for much more than parking. It will also serve as the backdrop for one of the largest community art projects ever created in Delray Beach.

Since the lighting of the Famous 100-Foot Christmas Tree on Nov. 29, the south side of the garage is being transformed into a concrete canvas of sorts, as the "Countdown to First Night" gets under way. As part of the project, 33 canvases, painted by community groups, schools, companies and individuals, will be unveiled one at a time on each evening until New Year's Eve.

The canvases will be hung in calendar formation on the side of the garage facing the Tree. When the final



Delray Beach's new downtown parking garage will be decorated with works by local artists, like the one above, during "Countdown to First Night."

canvas is unveiled on New Year's Eve, the entire garage will truly be a sight to behold.

The goal of the project, according to organizers at the Downtown Marketing Cooperative, is to encourage community support for the First Night@ celebration, which is a visual and performing arts festival created by and for the entire community. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of First Night in Delray Beach.

The events will kick off at 4 p.m. with children's activities followed by the People's Procession at 6 p.m. Throughout the evening there will be a wide variety of events that celebrate the arts in the community.

Sponsored by the Office Depot Foundation, First Night is a non-alcoholic family event with activities for everyone. Admission to events will require a First Night button, with buttons going on sale following the Tree Lighting Ceremony.

EVENTS CALENDAR



Dec. 2

Performance in the Park
3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Veterans Park
Call 243-7277

Dec. 7

Annual Boat Parade
6:30 p.m.
Intracoastal Waterway
Call 735-7955

Dec. 8

Kids Day at the Tree
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Old School Square
51 N. Swinton Avenue
Call 279-1380, ext. 3

Dec. 8

Holiday Parade
6 p.m.
Downtown Atlantic Avenue
Call 243-7277

Dec. 8 - 18

13th Annual "Lite Up Delray"
Citywide Holiday
Decorating Contest
Call 276-1715

Dec. 17-18

Santa's Calling
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Delray Beach Parks and
Recreation
Call 243-7277

Dec. 22

Breakfast with Santa
8 a.m. and 10 a.m. seatings
Delray Beach Marriott
10 N. Ocean Boulevard
Call 279-1380, ext. 17

Dec. 29-30

Howard Alan Craft Show
10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Delray Beach Tennis Center
201 W. Atlantic Avenue
Call (954) 472-3755

Dec. 31

First Night@ 2008 New Year's
Eve Celebration
4 p.m. - midnight
Downtown Atlantic Avenue
Call 279-1380, ext. 3

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City of Delray Beach
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Delray Beach, FL 33444

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