

SunSentinel LOCAL & STATE

Southwest Ranches loses jury trial

By Susannah Bryan

South Florida Sun Sentinel

FORT LAUDERDALE — Southwest Ranches won't be getting millions from Pembroke Pines for blocking a lucrative federal immigration detention center from coming to town.

A Broward jury returned a verdict late Tuesday in favor of Pembroke Pines, rejecting the argument that the city killed the deal by refusing to provide water and sewer service to the 1,500-

bed prison.

"I never had doubts this would be the outcome," Pembroke Pines Commissioner Angelo Castillo said Wednesday.

At trial, Pembroke Pines officials argued that federal officials decided there was no need for a new prison and announced in June 2012 they no longer planned to build an immigration detention center in Florida.

Town Attorney Keith Poliakoff says Southwest Ranches plans to appeal.

The town says it's owed more than \$150 million in damages.

Had the detention center been built, Southwest Ranches was to be paid \$1.5 million a year, plus another \$350,000 in annual property taxes.

"The town is incredibly disappointed and heartbroken by the verdict," Poliakoff said. "The town will appeal, which will likely result in a new trial."

The jury deliberated for three hours Tuesday before reaching its verdict in a trial that began Oct. 11.

"The jury initially came back hung," Poliakoff said. "But as the time approached 5:30 p.m., [it] came back with a verdict for the defendant finding that the town somehow did not comply with the terms of the contract, which wasn't even alleged by the defendant."

On Wednesday, Pembroke Pines officials said they plan to ask the court to order Southwest Ranches to pay the legal fees it spent defending the lawsuit.

In June 2011, federal offi-

cials with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced they had tentatively chosen Southwest Ranches as the spot for what would have been one of the nation's largest immigration detention centers.

Private prison contractor Corrections Corporation of America planned to build the prison on land near U.S. 27 and Sheridan Street in Southwest Ranches.

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FORT LAUDERDALE

Critics rage over 14-story condo plan

By Susannah Bryan

South Florida Sun Sentinel

FORT LAUDERDALE — A sleek 14-story condo tower could rise where a two-story 1950s apartment building now stands if a city planning board gives the all-clear.

The new \$60 million tower just south of Las Olas Boulevard on the New River would be the tallest building in Colee Hammock, one of Fort Lauderdale's oldest neighborhoods.

And that has sent nearby residents into a frenzy.

They argue a 77-unit tower at 808 Southeast Fourth Street is way too tall for the area — double the height of the nearby seven-story Chateau Mar condo. They worry about all the extra traffic that will come with their new neighbors, an additional 306 daily trips as estimated by the developer's traffic experts.

"This is going to stick up like a sore thumb in the middle of a nice, quiet neighborhood," says Robert Saugstad, who lives in a five-story condo next door. "They did a traffic study. Common sense tells you it's going to be a nightmare."

Critics also fear the city commission won't get a chance to vote on the project.

It's slated to go before Fort Lauderdale's Planning and Zoning

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Stocking up for school



Wilton Manors Elementary School teacher Cindy Williams stands in line to check out Wednesday after shopping for her classroom. Office Depot and OfficeMax stores in Broward County raised donations with a three-month campaign to support the entire teaching staff at Wilton Manors. Because of the generosity shown by local customers, \$22,000 was collected to benefit the school. MICHAEL LAUGHLIN/SUN SENTINEL

Broward Schools may close for Muslim holiday

By Scott Travis

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Broward could soon become the first school district in Florida — and one of only a few in the country — to close for a Muslim holiday.

Some school board members voiced support during a Tuesday workshop for a 2022-23 school calendar that gives students and teachers a day off on Friday, April 21, which is Eid ul-Fitr, a holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

The school board has considered this option for several years at the request of the Muslim community, and most have supported it in concept, but the holiday has conflicted with certain standardized tests in recent years. In 2023, that's not expected to be an issue, school district officials said.

"We're trying to do the best we can do make it inclusive for all," board member Ann Murray said.

Sarah Leonardi and Nora Rupert also voiced support for the holiday. Patti Good and Rosalind Osgood were absent Tuesday but have voiced support in the past, likely giving the issue majority support.

The calendar option school board members are favoring is actually the least popular of four options so far in a survey of parents, students and teachers. About 25,000 people have responded.

■ About 41% prefer a calendar with the first day of school

Wednesday, Aug. 17, for students and the last day Thursday, June 8, with no Muslim holiday.

■ About 20% prefer a calendar where students start Monday, Aug. 22, finish Tuesday, June 13, and do not get a Muslim holiday.

■ Another 20% prefer a calendar that starts Monday, Aug. 15, and ends Wednesday, June 14, with April 21 as a holiday.

■ About 19% prefer a calendar that starts Wednesday, Aug. 17, and ends Friday, June 9, with April 21 as a holiday. This is the option members of the Muslim community and several school board members say they prefer.

But the last option may not be popular with one group — teachers. Their last day is always a day later than students, and a June 9 last day for students would mean they'd have to give up a summer weekend by returning Monday, June 12, which many don't want to do, said Anna Fusco, president of the Broward Teachers Union.

She said the first option appears to be the most popular.

Board members Lori Alhadef and Debbi Hixon said they want to get more input from teachers before making a decision.

School districts around the country with sizable Muslim populations have started to add the holidays in recent years. These include Detroit and nearby cities, New York City and Montgomery County, Maryland, both Washington, D.C.

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New outdoor comedy picnic series brings blankets and beach chairs to Boca Raton

By Ben Crandell

South Florida Sun Sentinel

The open-air comedy series debuting Friday night at Boca Raton's Mizner Park Amphitheater probably doesn't happen without a pandemic — but it's an idea so good and obvious that its COVID-era origins will someday be an afterthought.

Organized by veteran comedian and TV writer Dave Siegel and wife Stephanie, pre-pandemic transplants from New York to Boca Raton, the series is called Comedy on the Green, with the audience set up on the lawn of the recently reopened amphitheater.

Accentuating its relaxing atmosphere, the series puts a unique spin on social distancing with tiered seating on low-slung canvas beach chairs, pre-positioned blankets, as well as traditional seats. There will be order-by-phone wait-staff bar service for those on beach chairs and blankets, and a walk-up bar for others.

COVID sensitivity is part of the brand of Comedy on the Green, Dave Siegel says. But the couple hopes the unconventional seating appeals to an audience looking for a distinctively fun night out.

"We could have just done all black folding chairs, spaced them out ... But we wanted to do something cool. We wanted it to be a little different experience than a) a typical comedy club and b) just to utilize that beautiful space, with the lawn," he says.

Comedy on the Green opens



Stephanie and Dave Siegel, organizers of Comedy on the Green, at Mizner Park Amphitheater, where the live comedy shows will take place. SUSAN STOCKER/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

with an 8 p.m. Oct. 22 performance by Kurt Metzger, a writer for comic actors Sacha Baron Cohen and Amy Schumer. Miami comedian Kyle Grooms will be the warm-up act.

The VIP beach chairs near the front of the stage, sold in four-person pods for \$71.75 per person,

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