

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

Manatee water park aims to be major attraction

By Dale White Sarasota Herald-Tribune

MANATEE COUNTY - A proposal for a water theme park first pitched last fall is ready to be negotiated by the developers and Manatee County, which owns the proposed site.

If a newly formed amusement park business and the county can strike a deal, "Lost Lagoon" - a water theme park to be built at a location visible from Interstate 75 - is expected to become a prominent recreation destination for area residents and visitors.

Plans submitted to the county describe a park with "a dense tropical jungle theme" featuring winding pathways, a simulated beach, a "slow-flowing, lazy river," slides, toddler play pool, children's play area, teenager ropes course, an amphitheater, an adult pool and more - with land set aside for expansion.

"A fun family experience," Manatee Lost Lagoon Development states in its 400-page proposal.

The park's closest competitor would be 25-year-old Adventure Island in Tampa, a distance of about 60 miles. In 2013, that water park reportedly attracted 638,000 patrons.

The Lost Lagoon team thinks it would have a better location: 20 acres of the 200-acre,

county-owned Tom Bennett Park northwest of the I-75 and State Road 64 interchange.

The Orlando-based development team foresees the park attracting customers from south Tampa to Naples.

Elliott Falcione, executive director of the Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, thinks a water theme park at that location would have "a nice regional impact" for Manatee's tourism industry.

"It's another amenity that will give people a reason to add to the length of their stay," Falcione said. "And it helps us focus on all corners of the county, not just the beaches and Lakewood Ranch."

Whether Lost Lagoon becomes a reality depends on the county and the developers' striking a mutually beneficial deal.

In September, the County Commission heard a pitch from the partners behind Lost Lagoon.

The commissioners liked the concept and put out a request for proposals to see if any others wanted to submit ideas for an aquatics-based attraction at Bennett Park. The county received two responses, of which only the Lost Lagoon project met its criteria.

The selection committee - Dan Schlandt, deputy county administrator, Charlie Hunsicker, director of parks and natural resources, and Melissa Wendel, representing the purchasing department - recommends that County Administrator Ed Hunzeker initiate contract negotiations.

County spokesman Nick Azzara said both parties have yet to come to the table and that he did not know how long negotiations could take. "There's no deadline to reach an agreement."

The County Commission will have the final say.

If the commission approves the project, the county would likely receive a percentage of gross sales - as it does now with beach and golf course concessions.

Manatee Lost Lagoon Development would like to have the park in operation by 2017.

The Orlando-based partnership was formed last month by the principals of Mims Construction, Austin Commercial and other firms that reportedly bring more than 100 years of experience in the aquatics, recreation and construction industries.

Their collective credits include projects at Disney's Blizzard Beach and Animal Kingdom, Wet 'n' Wild in Las Vegas, Universal Studios Orlando and Atlantis Paradise Island Resort in the Bahamas.

If Lost Lagoon gets underway and proves to be successful, its operators hope to eventually expand it by another 20 or so acres. Their expansion ideas include miniature golf, a small zoo, a putting and driving course and an aquatics athletics facility.

Englewood office building sold out of foreclosure

By Michael Braga, Herald-Tribune

A subsidiary of Premier American Bank sold a 4,210-square-foot office building and an adjacent lot at 2934 and 2936 S McCall Road in Englewood to JM Assets AMS TIC LLC for \$650,000.

JM Assets is an Austin, Texas company managed by John and Jeralyn Muhich.

The property previously belonged to Lemon Bay Isles Inc., a Placida company managed by Linda and Kerry Keathley.

The Keathleys transferred the property to their lender through a deed in lieu of foreclosure in April 2011.

North Port recognized as Tree City USA

By Josh Taylor, Herald-Tribune

In time for the observances of Earth Day and Arbor Day, the City of North Port again was named a Tree City USA.

The recognition, given by the national Arbor Day Foundation in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, marks the 15th year the city has received the award.

Development is rebounding in North Port, so planning is important.

"Being so young, we have the perfect opportunity to capture and keep the natural environment before it's too late," said Ryian Pieper, the city arborist.

The city must meet four requirements to become a Tree City: Having a tree board or department; a tree care ordinance; an annual community forestry budget of at least \$2 per capita; and host an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. Pieper and students planted trees at the North Port YMCA at Dallas White Park on April 24 for the National Arbor Day

celebration.

FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

- Publix ranked No. 2 by 'Consumer Reports' ([Florida Today](#))
- Growth in jobs, housing boost demand for industrial real estate ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Florida ranks No. 1 for aerospace manufacturing attractiveness ([Orlando Business Journal](#))
- Florida business delegation seeks investment opportunities in Morocco ([Morocco World News](#))
- Vets tech startups offered a home in Florida ([Military Times](#))
- Florida among top states where people want to work from home ([Orlando Business Journal](#))
- Florida agencies will have to buy flags made in USA ([TBO.com](#))
- 98.9M visitors came to Florida last year ([Orlando Business Journal](#))

US ECONOMIC NEWS

- U.S. home prices accelerated in February as sales rose ([Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#))
- Job satisfaction jumped in 2014 ([Orlando Sentinel](#))
- Consumer spending rises, jobless claims at 15-year low ([Reuters](#))

ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

- How to find the right partners for your business ([Forbes](#))

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