

Hendry-Glades SUNDAY NEWS

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After major, major valuable public service, with integrity, courage treating everyone equitably in the good times and bad, Hendry County Property Appraiser Phil Pelletier last week went into well-deserved retirement.



however, Gail and I plan to do some traveling and visiting family and friends out of state. Thank you for your support and friendships over the years. God Bless each and every one of you as he has me and my family."

*Sincerely,
Phillip Pelletier*

BY RAOUL BATALLER

In many ways, Phil Pelletier showed Hendry county what it's like, to live and breathe integrity.

One day in the county commission room one racist commissioner, Janet Taylor, accused Recreation director Pelletier of holding up renovation of the ancient one-room Daniels school in the black area of LaBelle's Sunset park, in the face of constant theft by neighbors of building materials, insinuating a sense of racial partiality on Pelletier's part, and Taylor was stopped cold with her little stock speech by the towering righteous indignation of the late Mayor Sherri Craichy who strode into the meeting declaring no one in LaBelle would ever tolerate impugning the character of Mr. Pelletier in such an unfair manner.

In his second year as Property Appraiser Pelletier came upon a bit of residue of his now disgraced predecessor, former Property Appraiser Kristina Kulpa. She had made an agreement with U.S. Sugar that in most outrageous partiality resulted in USSC paying \$660,000 less in taxes, which were missing in rough thirds from the allocations among the county, school board and hospital.

The largest third of it hit the Board of Education as it faced a schools budget deficit of more than \$2.7 million, and the board's state-imposed mandate to lower whatever property tax revenue it could muster to meet it.

The deal required appraisal of the new contents of a USSC structure as if it were no different from contents it replaced which no longer existed, and cost less.

Nowhere else in Florida were there to be found skewed arrangements schemed by an elected property appraiser that set the tax rate for a business on the basis of private, secret deals worked out between politicians and business executives who contribute to their campaigns.

Only apparently in Hendry county, the bizarre lair of U.S. Sugar Corporation, was a brand of corporate intrigue that seemed to fit USSC into a rightful role in the conduct of the business of local municipal democracy.

Here end results seemed to trump the people's processes, and Pelletier found himself up against a pervasive powerhouse company with influence and a persistent grudge resentful of paying a 10% share of the tax revenue of a county that the company itself helped keep in the pathetically mismanaged state, and embattled in political standoffs, that the company despised.

(continued on page 2)

SPECIAL TO THE SUNDAY NEWS

LaBELLE, FL (Thursday, Mar. 29, 2018) — Property Appraiser Phillip Pelletier, who served many years as a resourceful and energetic LaBelle area Recreation director and built the West Rec organization into a model agency, and served as Property Appraiser highly regarded for his courage, religious convictions and honesty in two run-ins with the county's largest taxpayer, leaves office this week to enjoy a relaxing retirement.

An appointee of Governor Scott may fill the interim vacancy until the November election of 2018, at which time the two years remaining of his term will be filled by general election.

Pelletier had an announcement letter in February. He said:

**Open Letter to All
Hendry County Residents:**

"I would like to let everyone know that I have decided to retire and have submitted my letter of resignation effective March 30, 2018. I have served Hendry County for 31 years and you elected me as your Property Appraiser nine years ago. I hope I have served you well, but I'm ready to start a new chapter in my life.

My friendly staff is always there willing and able to assist you. As in my first campaign slogan, "Change Begins at the Top," I would not want to go backwards at this time, and would ask you to support my Chief Deputy, Dena Pittman, to continue with changes and improvements. She will be on the ballot in the November election.

On a friendly note, we will be staying in LaBelle;



**On arming school district personnel:
"Clearly, this discussion needs to take place elsewhere, again, and again, and again."**

—Schools Supt. Paul Puletti



Hendry Board of Education Chairman Jon Basquin, left, and Schools Supt. Paul Puletti

SPECIAL TO THE SUNDAY NEWS

LaBELLE, FL (Tuesday, March 27) — Henry County's schools-protection plans publicized early this month have been given a deliberation period for community discussion of another month before a Board of Education go-ahead is sought.

There remains the same exigency the district shares throughout the nation, but tonight's school board meeting in LaBelle High school auditorium, at which arming and training staff were to have come up for a go-ahead vote, saw no vote.

A half-dozen teachers and just as few parents showed up. Sheriff Steve Whidden and the district's deputy superintendents compared details of new State of Florida law governing the protection of school property and students from gunfire, and the details were similar to the district's plan of volunteer enrollees that Whidden drew up with Schools Supt. Paul Puletti last month. A major departure is Florida's disallowing the participation of teachers. Law enforcement training for participants will be extraordinarily rigorous.

Whidden spoke directly to two teachers of a difference in "cultures," some that are comfortable having firearms around the house, and those that are not. One teacher elevated the subject of law enforcement and safety to something higher, interrupting Whidden with, "I don't want to get into a political discussion about this."

"This is exactly the type of thing that should be happening in our community, so that we have some idea of what's going on," said Schools Supt. Paul Puletti.

"But if I polled teachers," he conjectured, "I would not be surprised that this is a very difficult thing for them to say 'yes' to."

"Teachers hope for the best. Teachers teach for the best. And this is something we don't even want to think about."

"I shouldn't be dealing with worrying about children being murdered —I should be worried about test scores, . . . and how to improve schools."

"You know, the fact of the matter is we live in . . . a terrible, tough world. And if I polled teachers, I would not be surprised that a majority are not liking this because that's not how we were trained —that's not what we do."

"But, we need to have this discussion in the community . . . here —wherever— to determine what is the best move forward for Hendry County schools. And that's why I'm not going to make a recommendation tonight."

"I'm surprised there are not more people here tonight. But clearly, this discussion needs to take place elsewhere, again, and again, and again. And then we'll come up with, 'this is what works for Hendry county.'"

"And I have a strong feeling that a lot of districts are watching what we're doing. And once we do whatever we do, others are going to follow suit."

- ▶ 80 hours of firearms instruction
- ▶ 16 hours of instruction in precision pistol
- ▶ 8 hours of discretionary shooting instruction using simulator exercises
- ▶ 8 hours of instruction in active shooter or assailant scenarios

- ▶ Hold a valid license to carry or conceal a firearm
- ▶ Submit to and pass an initial drug test and subsequent random drug tests
- ▶ Pass a psychological evaluation
- ▶ Meet all other requirements of the law
- ▶ Belong to an eligible group to participate