



**That's a Lot of Confetti**

\$2 million  
 — Amount that Gov.-elect Rick Scott had received as of last week to spend on an inauguration party, according to The St. Petersburg Times and the Miami Herald — twice as much as Gov. Charlie Crist spent. He's gotten 55 contributions of the maximum allowed, \$25,000 including Blue Cross Blue Shield, U.S. Sugar and The GEO Group.

**Fight Club**

"It looks like something that might occur in an alley somewhere. It's not good for the game, it shouldn't be part of the game."  
 — Jags Coach Jack Del Rio, talking about the Oakland Raiders' rough play after last week's game. (Ironically, it was Jags cornerback Will Middleton who drew a \$5,000 fine for rough play, for a hit on Raiders quarterback Jason Campbell.)

**Shots Heard Round the World**

Shooters of Jacksonville  
 — No. 10 in the nation, on a list of U.S. gun dealers with the most firearms traced by police after having been used in crimes. The list appeared in The Washington Post last week (<http://wapo.st/eeaxBW>) as part of an investigative series into handguns and crime (<http://wapo.st/emoF9N>). The paper noted that the number of guns traced to a store "does not necessarily signal wrongdoing. The number of traces a store generates is shaped by many factors, including volume, the types of guns sold, geography and clientele."

**Light My Fire**

Ronnie Land still loves his Luminaria. Atlanta artist (and Jacksonville native) Land contacted Riverside Avondale Preservation and offered to create a poster for the 26th annual historic district event held on the Sunday before Christmas. RAP is selling Land's limited edition, signed drawing of a snowman admiring the glowing paper luminary bags for \$20, available at RAP, 2623 Herschel St., Jacksonville.



**News**



**Digital Risk**

**Think texting while driving is bad? Try watching large-screen TV**

Jacksonville voters were so concerned about creeping visual blight in 1987 that they amended the City Charter to forbid the construction of any new billboards. That ban was attacked over years of sign company lawsuits, but was the basis for a series of legal agreements signed by the city, a citizens group and individual billboard companies, which collectively aimed to control visual pollution. The agreements gave companies a timetable to reduce the overall number of billboards and to ultimately restrict them to heavily trafficked roads.

But the Peyton Administration appears poised to undermine the intent of those agreements, and actually add to the city's billboard blight. By reinterpreting a section of the agreement that allows sign companies to rebuild or replace old signs if they've banked credits for removing other signs, the city has agreed to allow ordinary flat billboards to be replaced with digital screens. Basically gigantic flat-screen televisions, digital boards have begun migrating from places like Las Vegas into Middle America, turning highways into busy visual thoroughfares lined with continually changing messages. The signs pose a potential driving hazard, since they are more distracting than regular billboards, but they're hugely profitable to the billboard industry. And they could be coming to Jacksonville in huge numbers.

Earlier this month, the city signaled that it was prepared to grant permits for Clear

Channel to erect eight digital billboard faces — the city's first. Over the next four years, according to the terms of the 1995 Settlement Agreement, Clear Channel Outdoors will be allowed to rebuild or relocate 20 new billboards (actually 40 sign faces, since most billboards are double-sided). If the city's reinterpretation holds, all 40 will likely be digital screens. And at

Brinton notes that the right to rebuild or relocate signs was a negotiating point in the Settlement Agreement. "It sought to cushion the blow for the loss of locations by allowing some to be rebuilt or relocated along certain roadways," he says. But the city's reinterpretation turns this concession into a boon for outdoor advertisers. "But if you can turn [a sign face]

**Digital boards have begun migrating from places like Las Vegas into Middle America, turning highways into busy visual thoroughfares lined with continually changing messages.**

least four other outdoor advertising companies will also be able to replace their existing faces with digital screens.

According to Bill Brinton, a national expert on billboard issues and the lawyer who represented citizen group Capsigns in the Settlement Agreement, the city's reinterpretation could mean that Jacksonville may wind up with more digital billboards than any other city in the U.S.

"We're going to have digital blight on steroids," warns Brinton. "The landscape will not only take a hit, but traffic safety is going to suffer, too." Several of the promised digital signs are planned for busy, signaled intersections. One is even in the flight path for Craig Field.

into a digital billboard, it's actually going to benefit the sign company to a significant degree.

Currently, Jacksonville is home to 529 billboards, according to the city's Planning and Development Department. Each year, a certain number of sign faces must be removed. However, the companies are permitted to rebuild "identical or equivalent" billboards in certain areas, based upon credits earned for those they've taken down.

The digital-sign issue first surfaced last year, when Clear Channel sought permits to use its accumulated credits to erect four digital billboards. Then-City Attorney Shannon Eller shot down the request, noting that digital billboards are a completely different type of sign

– hardly identical or equivalent to the ordinary billboard. But the city reversed itself earlier this month. In a Dec. 2 email, Deputy General Counsel Steve Rohan said that Eller's opinion is "not controlling" and added that the Office of General Counsel doesn't think digital signs violate the 1995 agreement.

That decision seems sure to draw a legal challenge, and it's not clear why the Office of General Counsel would choose that battle, especially given the strong anti-billboard sentiments of citizens, to say nothing of the contrary legal opinion of former OGC lawyer Eller.

It's no mystery, of course, why billboard companies want the signs. In angling for the digital faces in other cities, sign companies typically give up 10 standard billboards to erect a single digital one. To give an inkling of the

value of the signs, Brinton says Clear Channel asked the city of Minneapolis to pay \$5 million to remove one. And while existing rules might limit how often billboard messages could change, Jacksonville City Councilmember Dick Brown coincidentally introduced an ordinance to help. Although Brown lives in and represents the Beaches, where signs are prohibited from changing any more often than once every 24 hours, his bill would allow them to change every eight seconds in Jacksonville. So far, six councilmembers have signed on as co-sponsors — Ray Holt, Art Shad, Johnny Gaffney, Reginald Brown, Don Redman and Stephen Joost.

"It's just friggin' unbelievable," says Brinton. And sure to be expensive. Lawyers, take your mark. □

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### Out of Here

Last week, FW reported that Peter Sleiman had spent a rumored \$30,000 to have the Rev. Al Sharpton perform his wedding ceremony. Apparently those nuptials will cost him in other ways. On Dec. 9, Sleiman resigned from the Police and Fire Pension Board, after 25 years, because he's no longer a resident of Duval County. Questions about his residency were raised during his reappointment on Aug. 24 because he's voted in St. Johns County and has given an address in that county on some of his documents. In his letter, Sleiman wrote he was resigning because he married in December and planned to live in his wife's home in St. Johns County.

## Walter Coker's Through the Lens



Hypolita Street, St. Augustine, December 4

**THIS MODERN WORLD** by TOM TOMORROW

HEY THERE, BUFF! HAPPY HOLIDAYS!! DON'T YOU MEAN "MERRY CHRISTMAS"? OR ARE YOU JUST BRIMMING WITH HOLIDAY FOOT SOLDIER IN GEORGE SORDS' GRAND SCHEME TO DESTROY CHRISTMAS?

WELL, AREN'T WE JUST BRIMMING WITH HOLIDAY SPIRIT? BEEN WATCHING FOX NEWS AGAIN, HAVE YOU?

LOOK--GENERIC HOLIDAY GREETINGS ARE A GESTURE OF BASIC INCLUSIVENESS. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT THIS, BUT OUR JEWISH FRIENDS--FOR EXAMPLE--DO NOT TRADITIONALLY CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSIAH.

BUT MAYBE MORE TO THE POINT--THERE ARE TWO MAJOR HOLIDAYS COMING UP--CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S! GET IT? HOLIDAYS--PLURAL!

I MEAN, IT'S POSSIBLE THAT ANYONE WHO SAYS "HAPPY HOLIDAYS" OR "SEASON'S GREETINGS" IS PART OF A VAST CONSPIRACY TO UNDERMINE CHRISTIANITY ITSELF--

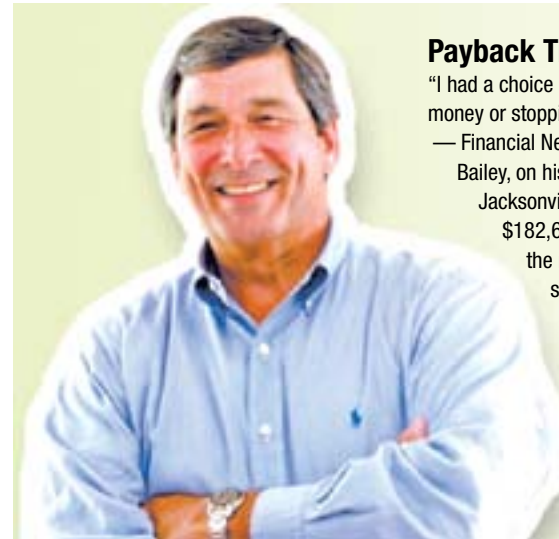
--BUT MAYBE THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO WISH YOU A HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON.

YOU KNOW, THAT ACTUALLY MAKES A LOT OF SENSE.

MY GOD, IT'S A FESTIVUS MIRACLE!

UNLESS IT'S WHAT GEORGE SORDS WANTS US TO THINK. I KNEW IT!

# NewsBuzz



### Payback Time

"I had a choice of going forward and spending a lot of money or stopping and giving it back."  
— Financial News and Daily Record publisher Jim Bailey, on his decision last week to drop out of the Jacksonville mayor's race. Bailey, who raised \$182,685 and spent \$166,303, according to the most recent campaign finance reports, said last week he would give full refunds to any contributors who asked for their

### Sweaty Wisdom

"Saggin Pants and Swagger Talk: Reaching the Bullies and Bad Girls of Hip-Hop"  
— Title of a new book by Jacksonville native Sweat T, whom the T-U noted had originally taken the rap name Sweet T, but changed it after a T-shirt misspelling.



### Haters, NYC Style

"The blandest team in the league, with possibly the most apathetic fan base."  
— How The New York Times described the Jags and Jacksonville, adding that with the team's "8-5 record in mid-December, none of [that] matters."

### Stick This in Your Nose

Jacksonville neurosurgeon Kent New wanted to prevent his children from catching colds, so he invented a gel to swab on their nasal passages. Now being manufactured for sale under the name Swype by the Ponte Vedra company Nuance Health, the gel is suggested for "anytime you feel at risk of getting sick."



## Bouquets & Brickbats

**Bouquets to Jacksonville resident Joseph Strasser** for emptying his pockets to help save the lives of stray cats and dogs. Strasser offered to match any donations to First Coast No More Homeless Pets, up to \$50,000, throughout the month of December. Strasser is a board member of the no-kill shelter.

**Brickbats to the Jacksonville City Council** for continuing to send the same people back to fix a broken system. Though the city officials agree the police and fire pension system needs a complete overhaul or it will bankrupt the city, the council last week reappointed Barbara Jaffe, who's served on the Fire and Police Pension Fund Board of Trustees for 20 years. In August, the council reappointed Peter D. Sleiman, who'd already served 25 years on the board (though he has since resigned).

**Bouquets to Brian DeAlexandris, owner of PrepChefs,** for helping put homeless families back on track. In partnership with the Sulzbacher Center, the company has started the "Freezer Full of Food" program. PrepChefs delivers a week's worth of freshly prepared, flash-frozen meals to all families leaving the Sulzbacher Center's self-sufficiency program and moving into a new home.

