

# GULF COAST

Manatee and Sarasota



## Woman sues Cosby and Hefner

A former model who claims Bill Cosby sexually abused her at the Playboy Mansion in 2008 has filed a lawsuit against the comedian and Playboy founder Hugh Hefner. **B7**

QUESTIONS? Contact Editor David Hackett at 941-315-0631

## ONLINE



## A renaissance at Sarasota National

The renaissance of Sarasota National, an upscale golf-course community in Venice, is a welcome sign of the vitality in South County. Reporter Chris Angermann provides a market snapshot of the 2,400-acre development, which has beautiful views of fairways, scenic lakes and large nature preserves.

Read more and see a photo gallery at [realestate.heraldtribune.com](http://realestate.heraldtribune.com).

## NEWS DIGEST



## Bradenton candidate to get Lightning tattoo

Bradenton mayoral candidate Warren Merriman said he will go on the The Mike Calta Show, a syndicated sports radio show broadcast on the Tampa Bay's 102.5 "The BONE," and get a Tampa Bay Lightning tattoo, all in an effort to bring back visitors to Bradenton, "The Friendly City."

The Bradenton Convention & Visitors Bureau recently

## SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

# Q: Who should lead schools?

Answer: Someone who listens and who works well with others

By Shelby Webb  
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Two clear qualifications have been outlined by the community and Sarasota County School Board members as the district begins its search for a new superintendent: Someone who respects staff input and recognizes the importance of

community partnerships.

Board members discussed their search for Superintendent Lori White's replacement at a School Board workshop Tuesday. White must retire in February 2017 to collect her retirement benefits.

Officials with the Florida School Board Association, which was paid \$5,000 to help the district conduct its search, and Deputy Superintendent Scott Lempe reviewed public feedback with the board and discussed logistics.

"There are some emerging

## What do you think?

Want to give the Sarasota County School Board your thoughts as it searches for a new superintendent? Go to [www.sarasotacountyschools.net/departments/superintendent-search](http://www.sarasotacountyschools.net/departments/superintendent-search) and click on the link "Click here to start Community Survey."

themes already: grace under pressure and listening to staff and community input," Lempe said.

The district has an online survey to garner public input and

has hosted three superintendent search forums, including one held at Venice High School Tuesday evening.

Feedback from the Venice High School forum was not available at press time, but comments at forums held at North Port and Booker high schools offered board members some guidance.

At each forum, participants are asked about the district's strengths, weaknesses and qualities they would like to see in a

SEE SEARCH, B6

## DUETTE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

# End of an era



At Duette Elementary School, teacher assistant Lauren Lanier, far left, works with kindergartner Hector Benitez, 6, and second-grader Cutter Swint, 8, on right, with first-grader Kayden Vetzal, and second-grader David Benitez, 8, wearing a baseball cap. When classes end this year, the school will close. STAFF PHOTOS / THOMAS BENDER

## LAKEWOOD RANCH

# Board approves \$3.7M budget

Will be reviewed by CDD boards

By Christi Womack  
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LAKEWOOD RANCH — Governing representatives for the first phase of Lakewood Ranch are finalizing their budgets for the next fiscal year, and the lead authority is proposing only a slight increase in spending.

The Lakewood Ranch Inter-District Authority approved its proposed \$3.7 million budget Tuesday and will send it along to the five Community Development District boards, which scheduled budget workshops



# Open since 1930, one-teacher school closes this year

**By Christi Womack**  
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**DUETTE** — Farmer Gary Reeder is a familiar and welcome sight at Duette Elementary, dropping off cases of tomatoes to be sliced up and salted for a lunchtime treat or helping the 11 students plant peppers and potatoes in a small plot behind the school.

Just days remain for traditions like that at the country school, which is closing at the end of the school year.

The school, which opened during the early years of the Great Depression in 1930, is one of the last schools of its kind in Florida, with just one teacher instructing kindergartners seated next to fifth-graders.

Teacher Donna King is ending her career at a school that kept the farming community's children close to their northeastern Manatee County homes, alleviating the need for long bus rides to town.

"It's like a homeschool, because we are like a family,"



**Donna King, 68, became the school's teacher in 1993, when Ada Bilbrey retired after 35 years.**



Source: maps4news.com/@HERE  
GATEHOUSE MEDIA

said King, 68, who became the school's teacher in 1993 when



## Online

To see a timeline of significant dates for Duette Elementary School, go to [HeraldTribune.com](http://HeraldTribune.com) and click on the link to this story.

Ada Bilbrey retired after 35 years.

Times changed over the years, though, and parents started sending their children to bigger schools. Duette

**SEE SCHOOL, B3**

# SCHOOL

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Elementary lost the support of the Manatee County School District, which found the expenses hard to justify for such a small student body. The private Duette Education Foundation took over in 2009, but attracting children became a challenge, and King longed to retire.

Fearing the historic building that contains the community's history would be razed, the Duette Community Association hoped to gain control and chart a plan for the future that would include making it a gathering spot for meetings and celebrations. King dreamed that a charter school might one day make use of the building.

As King prepares to empty the building over the summer, she has a sense of relief.

"It's a feeling that it's not ending," she said.

Manatee County Schools Superintendent Diana Greene came up with an innovative idea, and School Board members showed their support.

"I want to see it utilized by the community," board member John Colon said. "I don't want to see it bulldozed like a lot of Florida history."

Greene recommended that the school district retain control of the property when the school closes June 30, establish it as a historical model and take schoolchildren there on field trips. The district also could work with the community association to make it available for meetings and celebrations.

"I emailed Dr. Greene right away and told her I want to volunteer," King said. "I want to stay involved. I don't live in this community, but my heart is in this community."

The community association also pledges its support.

"As long as the school is being used and not being razed, I'm just fine with that," said Betty Glassburn, association co-president, who lives minutes away on property her family has owned for 134 years.

Glassburn said the association will continue to work to get the site listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a move that could open up additional lines of grant funding.

"We'll continue to have



The Manatee County School District will retain control of the property when the school closes June 30 and take school children there on field trips. STAFF PHOTO / THOMAS BENDER

two fundraisers a year and use that facility and hope to bring in a good crowd to show off the building," Glassburn said.

The school on State Road 62, just west of State Road 37, is often incorrectly referred to as the last one-room schoolhouse in the state. More accurately, it is a one-teacher schoolhouse.

The 4,976-square-foot building has several rooms, including four classrooms, a former library and an auditorium that once seated 200, but now has 72 of the original wood folding seats.

Historical records are a tad confusing. The 1930 deed says the original property was 19.2 acres, while Manatee County Property Appraiser records cite 15 acres, and King's school records note 11 acres. Her records show the building is 5,765 square feet, but property records indicate it is 4,976 square feet under roof.

Size doesn't really matter for the 11 children ages 5 to 12 who study there. Four girls are fifth-graders heading to large middle schools next year. The seven younger children also now need to enroll in new schools.

Parent Rob Ross and his wife, Alicia, have three children, ages 12, almost 9 and 8, who have attended the school for three years. He said they like the wholesome atmosphere, the individualized attention and the cooperative environment of the older children helping younger students. Although the transition will be difficult, King prepared them.

"She builds up their self-esteem so much to give them the confidence to be able to handle it," Ross said.

Fifth-grader Lina Benitez, who attends with her younger brothers, David, a second-grader, and Hector, who is in kindergarten, said she is nervous.

"It's going to be really difficult because I've never been to a big school, and I won't be able to see my

brothers," she said.

She will miss Miss Donna, too, she said, because the teacher makes learning easy.

Barbara Harvey, who was the district's director of elementary education and later became a School Board member, hired King for the position.

"It was my dream to come here," King said. "I have been able to practice the best practices for children to learn."

She retired once, in 2009, then began working for the foundation to lead the school. King quit taking a salary after the 2013-2014 school year and collects a \$500 monthly allowance to help pay for driving 26 miles and 30 minutes every day from her home in eastern Manatee County to the school.

King, a Manatee County native who graduated from Southeast High School, then-Manatee Junior College and the University of South Florida, previously taught at Southeast and at Wakeland, Moody and Palma Sola elementary schools. When she arrived in Duette, she immersed herself in studying multiage teaching, continuous progress and nongraded schools.

To furnish Duette Elementary, she made regular trips to the school district's surplus warehouse, picking up chairs, shelves and desks over the years. Over the summer, she will get help from school district employees to remove "everything formica" and all of the modern learning tools, such as computers, and organize memorabilia, such as programs and photos from special events like the Christmas "Nutcracker" show.

King's family will break up come June 9, but King relishes the idea of returning as a volunteer docent to lead scores of Manatee County children through activities that show them what it is like to attend a one-teacher school in the country.