

## Who said anything about fun? Seriously

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On the burg beat:

The mayor of Indian Rocks Beach, a barrier-island town in Pinellas County, has quit in frustration after eight years. Bob DiNicola explained that (among other reasons) his job was "not fun anymore."

Not fun anymore! Have you been to a small-town public meeting? When, exactly would being the mayor of Indian Rocks Beach be fun, except maybe for getting to ride in the annual Holiday Parade?

(Even that parade, which is a fine event, once became a political sore point when DiNicola proposed rescheduling because the usual parade date conflicted with his Bucs tickets. Let's just say his idea was not universally applauded.)

DiNicola is just the latest guy to go in Indian Rocks Beach. The city's director of community development and building quit. So did the city's permit clerk. The building officer was fired, and the city manager who did the firing is now on the hot seat.

In general, the bigger the city, the less likely the mayor is to quit on the spot (not that it wouldn't be fun to see now and then). However, it happened just last year in Madeira Beach, when longtime Mayor Tom DeCesare got fed up with the local doings. The city attorney went, too.

To complete the changing of the guard in Madeira Beach, voters this month refused to elect the former city manager, Jim Madden, to the City Commission. At the first meeting of the new commission, citizens cheered and declared they had "taken back the city." (Folks someplace or another are always taking back their city.)

No word yet on how this taking-back in Madeira Beach will affect the Christ at the Sea Foundation, otherwise known as the house at 13280 Fourth St. E. It is a home-turned-church that has ticked off the neighbors and become somewhat of a national cause among the religious-freedom folks.

The operator, Dr. Miller Newton - known for once running the controversial anti-drug program Straight Inc. - faces fines of as much as \$500 a day and maybe even jail time if he keeps defying the city's order to remove external religious symbols, such as a rooftop cupola and cross.

The biggest beach burg in Pinellas is St. Pete Beach, which changed its name a few years ago from St. Petersburg Beach to create, uh, a more distinct identity. (The name "Mortimer" might have done that job better, but who am I to argue?)

St. Pete Beach is in the middle of a fight over whether to let its downtown get denser and taller. Anti-growth folks don't like it. A few pro-growth folks elsewhere in town want in on the action. There was a public hearing where 85 citizens showed up. Are we talking about a Treasure Island-style voter revolt brewing?

Another current controversy in St. Pete Beach is whether a longtime city employee should be fired for not reporting his DUI arrest to his bosses. His mom called in sick for him. His lawyer drew on his own personal experience to defend him: "I was sicker than a dog from a hangover. Saying that is not sick leave, I don't know what is."

As a fallback position in case that argument falls through, the fired fellow is pointing out that the guy who got him fired, St. Pete Beach's public works director, was himself investigated for accusations of improper racist, sexist and religious remarks.

The boss was cleared in an internal investigation - but then it turned out the investigator was a member of his boss' Bible study group. Perhaps they relied upon Proverbs 30:10 ("Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.")

Crystal River in Citrus County just ran off its ninth city manager since 1990. Several department heads are out too, just in time for the big courtroom showdown over the city's annexation wars with the county. Maybe they should save time by hiring and firing the next city manager with the same vote.

Lastly, Port Richey in Pasco County just had a blast from the past when former City Manager Vince Lupu came back to testify in the arbitration hearing of former police Chief Bill Downs. Lupu had fired Downs before Lupu's elected bosses fired him in turn. Lupu, who won both notoriety and criticism for his passion for big-game hunting, once ordered Downs to walk the streets as a beat cop to take him down a notch or two. Now, see, that's politics.

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