

Little River Band's voice uses music to help others



IN ACCENT

Boats, birds, bliss

Riverwalk links coastal Jupiter to homes and stores



IN LOCAL

HOUSING COSTS STUNT GROWTH?

Experts: Economy rising, but concerns endure

IN BUSINESS

BREAKING NEWS AT PALMBEACHPOST.COM

WEATHER

TODAY
Chance of rain
HIGH: 75 LOW: 60



MONDAY
Chance of rain. 70/60

TUESDAY
Chance of rain. 73/67

LIVE RADAR PALMBEACHPOST.COM, WEATHER PAGE BACK OF SPORTS

The Palm Beach Post

Sunday, January 3, 2016

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Midwives open non-hospital birth center in Charlotte

IN THE NEWS

Midwest flood cleanup begins

A massive cleanup gets underway now that the Mississippi River and its tributaries have started to recede. **A4**

NATION & WORLD

Al-Qaida uses video of Trump to recruit

Terrorist group's branch in Somalia uses footage showing the GOP front-runner announcing proposal to bar Muslims from entering the U.S. **A3**

Ramadi battle: Islamic State militants launch counterattacks against Iraqi government. **A3**

LOCAL

FAU soccer player is held without bail

Donovan Henry, 19, faces first-degree murder charges in the slaying of Nicholas Max Acosta, 19. **B1**

Arson: Intentionally set fires occurred at a rate of about three per week in county last year. **B1**

Boynton Beach: For 2016, growth appears to be the dominant theme in the city. **B3**

BUSINESS

Long-term care insurance useful

Having the coverage can help preserve people's estates for their heirs, and also ensure high-quality care for an aging loved one. **D1**

SPORTS

Dolphins' GM out after two-year stint

On the eve of the season finale against the Patriots, Dennis Hickey says he and team are parting ways. **C1**

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SPRING TRAINING HARDBALL:

Foley seeks redemption through baseball deal



Former U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, next to his sister, Donna Winterson, holds a bat shovel during the groundbreaking ceremonies for the new spring training complex Nov. 9. Foley and former County Commissioner Karen Marcus had introduced the Washington Nationals to the 45th Street site. LANNIS WATERS / THE PALM BEACH POST 2015

Former congressman, who fell from grace in 2006, brought both tension, opportunity to stadium talks.

By Joe Capozzi
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

On the Tuesday morning before Thanksgiving 2013, former Congressman Mark Foley got in his car and drove to The Breakers hotel on Palm Beach. It had been seven years since Foley fled Washington in disgrace, resigning for sending sexually explicit messages to a former male page. Now, he was looking for redemption. He was hoping to find it at The Breakers. Standing at the curb, as Foley's Audi SUV emerged from the rows of stately royal palms lead-

FROM THE FIRST PITCH

Track The Post's complete coverage of the effort to bring a second spring-training complex to Palm Beach County myPalmBeachPost.com/spring-training-stadium

ALSO INSIDE

- » Spring training project many times at edge of death, **A15**
- » Why the Blue Jays left: Did council vote matter? **A15**

ing to the hotel's portico, was Mark Lerner, co-owner of the Washington Nationals baseball team. He held a satchel and

wore a red baseball cap with a scripted "W."

What happened next would play a critical role in preserving South Florida's place in baseball's Grapefruit League, a collective behind-the-scenes effort to pull off what for many months seemed impossible: getting often-clashing political bodies to agree on plans for a \$144 million, two-team spring training stadium.

Most of the heavy hitting was done by others, most notably Houston Astros lawyer Giles Kibbe and Martin County pub-

Baseball continued on **A14**



A rendering shows the Houston Astros and Washington Nationals' new spring training baseball complex. Built at the site of an old landfill, it is scheduled to open in February 2017. CONTRIBUTED BY HKS SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

POST IN TALLAHASSEE FLORIDA'S FUTURE

Fight over hunting, grazing, logging looms at state parks

Environmentalists say commercialization is bad land management.

By John Kennedy
Palm Beach Post Capital Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Rick Scott's bottom-line focus on state government is stirring environmentalists across Florida wary of the upcoming legislative session and another wave of efforts to make state parks help pay for themselves. Scott's Department of Environmental Protection chief, Jon Steverson, sparked a firestorm of opposition earlier this year by discussing park management plans that could include

expanding hunting, grazing and logging activities at some of Florida's 174 state parks. Thousands of petition signatures emerged from those against the idea, along with a call for Steverson's ouster.

But Steverson said he stands by the approach, and he has a supporter in state Rep. Matt Caldwell, R-North Fort Myers, who sponsored legislation in last spring's session that could have opened parks and other conservation lands to "low-impact agriculture."

"Do I think it would be good if we could make some more money off parks, and make them a little more self-sustain-

Parks continued on **A12**

CONSUMER ALERT INVESTMENTS

Boca-based call line helps seniors avoid bad brokers

Area leads nation with highest proportion of shady advisers.

By Charles Elmore
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BOCA RATON — It is not quite an accident that a national securities industry regulator chose to base a new telephone helpline in Boca Raton. The subtropical magnet for well-off retirees also attracts what one retiree identified as the largest concentration of brokers with troubled regulatory records in the nation.

"Since we started the helpline in April, we've had more than 2,500 calls," said Susan

POST INVESTIGATION OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS

Key tests await over shootings by police

New year will see big developments in cases that upended county.

By Lawrence Mower
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Like the country overall, one of the dominant stories in Palm Beach County in 2015 was the actions of police officers.

From a sweeping investigation by The Palm Beach Post and WPTV NewsChannel 5 to the death of Corey Jones at the hands of a Palm Beach Gardens officer, the last year saw local officers receive plenty of unwanted national attention.

But 2016 promises new tests for the institutions tasked with overseeing police actions: the state attorney, the courts and the sheriff.

State Attorney Dave Aronberg faces tough decisions about whether to charge officer Nouman Raja, who killed Jones in October.

In the federal courts, PBSO faces perhaps its toughest test in recent memory in the Seth Adams lawsuit.

And a massive review of PBSO and its internal affairs unit by an outside think tank should be due soon, and it will likely present Sheriff Ric Bradshaw with recommended reforms and choices.

Looming over all three events is a question of trust in law enforcement, mostly generated by the actions of questionable police actions and prosecutors' decisions.

The Post's investigation in May revealed that since 2000, PBSO has only once faulted a deputy in a fatal shooting — and only after that deputy committed suicide — and the state attorney's office has never brought charges against an officer for shooting someone.

In some of those cases,

Shootings continued on **A10**



WHAT THE POST FOUND

In an unrivaled look at more than 250 police shootings in Palm Beach County since 2000, The Post found "disturbing" patterns and practices at PBSO. Read the investigation at myPalmBeachPost.com/policeshootings

FINRA SECURITIES HELPLINE FOR SENIORS

844-57-HELPS (844-574-3577) Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority says seniors can use the toll-free number to get assistance or raise concerns about issues with brokerage accounts and investments.

Axelrod, executive vice president of regulatory operations for the New York-based Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. "One investor said, 'How come it took you so long to do this?'"

Fraud continued on **A12**

SPRING TRAINING HARDBALL

Foley: Lerner got a kick out of Piersall tie

Baseball

continued from A1

lic-relations consultant Tom McNicholas, who both shepherded the project from its earliest days in Palm Beach Gardens in 2012 to the groundbreaking ceremony for the Ballpark of the Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach in November.

But of all the players who pitched in, Foley stood out as the most intriguing: a disgraced former politician tapping what Washington connections he still had for a chance to get involved in a high-profile project in his old congressional district.

His involvement would create anxiety and tension for some participants, The Palm Beach Post has found, but in the end he would help push the project home.

Foley, 61, stepped up when the baseball proposal, originally involving the Astros and Toronto Blue Jays, was dying in Palm Beach Gardens. He helped keep it alive by introducing the owner of a new team to a new site, a site now in position to host spring training for the next 30 years.

Lerner met Foley in person for the first time when he stepped into the SUV that day in front of The Breakers. After an introductory phone conversation arranged by mutual friends, Lerner had agreed to break away from his family's Thanksgiving vacation in Palm Beach for a few hours to join Foley on a driving tour of an old landfill south of 45th Street.

Lerner had incentive to see the land. The Nationals faced a deadline to move out of Viera after the 2016 spring training season and they needed a new home. They thought they had found one a few months earlier in Kissimmee but were stung when Osceola County rejected the deal at the last moment.

Foley didn't know exactly what Lerner looked like. But as his car pulled up to the curb, Foley said, he knew he had found him when he saw the bright red Nationals cap.

Lerner held blueprints for the team's Osceola County plan when he took off with Foley across the bridge to downtown West Palm Beach to pick up one other passenger, former Palm Beach County Commissioner Karen Marcus. During a 28-year reign that ended in 2012, Marcus played a key role in building Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, where the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals train.

"I told Karen, 'I need you on this mission. You will add incredible expertise and knowledge,'" Foley recalled.

Marcus got in the back seat, and they all headed down 45th Street, west of Interstate 95, to the old trash dump.

A light rain was falling as Lerner, through the window in the front passenger's seat, laid eyes on the undeveloped land for the first time. The car made several loops around the 160-acre site, passing rows of Australian pines, cabbage palms and broken fences, as Foley and Marcus pitched the baseball idea.

"I love it," Lerner replied, according to Marcus and Foley.

Scott on board 'from the get-go'

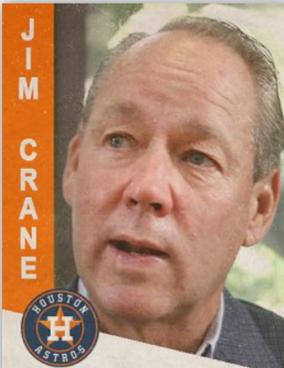
Five weeks later, the Nationals hired Foley as a lobbyist. The timing was ideal: Palm Beach Gardens had just killed the original proposal, prompting Toronto to drop out and forcing Houston to scramble to find both a new partner and a new site.

The Gardens rejection was a blow to Astros owner Jim Crane. More than a year earlier, in early 2012, he had focused on 117 acres in that city with help from McNicholas, a former television reporter who did public relations work for Crane's Floridian, a golf club resort in Palm City.

And Crane had garnered the support of Palm Beach Gardens City Manager Ron Ferris, who had taken secret trips in 2013 to Houston, Toronto and Arizona for negotiations that reinforced his excitement about the economic benefits and prestige a Major League Baseball complex could bring.

Although the rejection prompted the Astros to look closer at sites in Arizona's Cactus League, Florida's spring training rival, Crane didn't

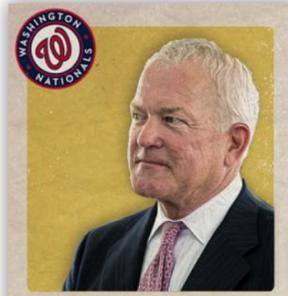
KEY PLAYERS IN THE STADIUM DEAL



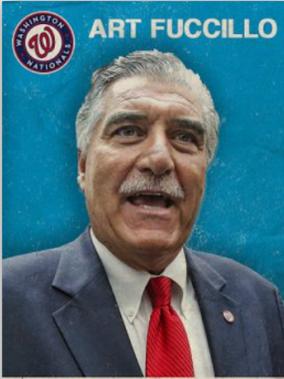
JIM CRANE
Houston freight magnate bought The Floridian National Golf Club in Palm City in 2010 and Astros baseball team in 2011.



RON FERRIS
CITY MANAGER
PALM BEACH GARDENS
Planted roots for the baseball project with initial negotiations with Astros and Blue Jays.



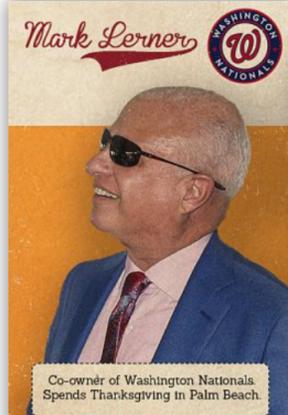
Mark Foley
Former Republican congressman from Lake Worth. Hired as Nationals lobbyist in January 2014. Introduced Lerner to West Palm site in driving tour in November 2013.



ART FUCCILLO
Nationals partner who led team's search for site in Palm Beach County.



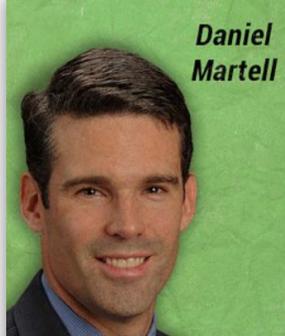
GILES KIBBE
General counsel for Crane and Astros. Overaw renovations at Floridian. Launched search for new spring training site in January 2012.



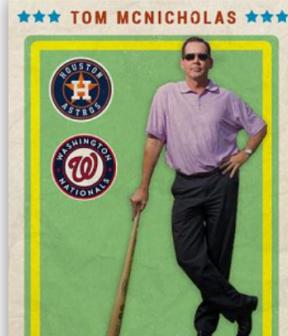
Mark Lerner
Co-owner of Washington Nationals. Spends Thanksgiving in Palm Beach.



Karen Marcus
Palm Beach County commissioner from 1994 to 2012. Helped open Roger Dean Stadium in 1998. Political foe of Ferris. Joined Foley on 2013 driving tour with Lerner of the West Palm site.



Daniel Martell
Director of county's Economic Council. Brokered secret meetings of Muoio and County Commissioner Priscilla Taylor to encourage land swap for baseball site.



TOM MCNICHOLAS
Stuart public relations man. Worked with the Astros since 2012. Played a prominent role in pursuing baseball sites in Palm Beach Gardens and West Palm Beach.



Wanted to move to Palm Beach Gardens. Deal fell through. Leaving Kissimmee after 2016 to share West Palm complex with Washington Nationals in 2017.



JERI MUOIO
MAYOR
West Palm Beach mayor. Initially opposed baseball land swap, then supported it when county agreed to give up prime downtown land in exchange.



Originally sought move to Osceola County. Deal fell through. Leaving Viera after 2016 to share West Palm with Houston.

want to give up on Palm Beach County. He said he had met with Florida Gov. Rick Scott "early on" in 2012 to gauge the chances of the state chipping in millions of dollars for baseball.

As part of Scott's mission to prevent teams from leaving, the Legislature in 2013 approved a bill allowing up to \$50 million for a two-team stadium, a move that would give Palm Beach County incentive to contribute millions more from a local hotel tax. If the county and the state contributed, the teams would have to spend less.

"The state was in it from the get-go," Crane said. "(Scott) was very supportive of the deal. He had a clear understanding of how important it was."

As the project started shifting into what the Nationals jokingly would refer to as "an arranged marriage" with the Astros in West Palm Beach, Foley became a player in the negotiations.

His involvement, though, wasn't always embraced by other key players – and not just because of his scandalous fall from Capitol Hill, which reverberated as intensely in Palm Beach County as it did in Washington.

Foley's resignation, stunning disclosure

Well-liked and affable, Foley served two terms on the City Commission in Lake Worth, his hometown, before winning a Florida House seat in 1990 and moving to the state Senate in 1993.

He won election as a Republican to Congress in 1995 and

was seeking his seventh term in 2006 when the bombshell landed – ABC News released graphic messages Foley had written to a former male page over several years.

Although Foley never was charged with a crime, he quickly resigned from Congress amid a series of Republican scandals that contributed to the party's loss of the House majority in November.

Four days after his resignation, his attorney held a news conference in downtown West Palm Beach to announce that Foley had been molested by a priest as a teenage altar boy in the 1960s.

"Mark does not blame the trauma he sustained as a young adolescent for his totally inappropriate emails," his attorney, David Roth, said.

Foley also announced publicly for the first time in his life that he is gay.

After completing treatment for alcoholism in Arizona, Foley slowly re-emerged in South Florida, launching a radio show in 2009 and dabbling in real estate. There were rumblings in 2011 that he might run for West Palm Beach mayor. But for the most part, he kept a low profile.

Until he stepped into the baseball fray.

A curveball: Foley for mayor?

The baseball project hinged on the county getting West Palm Beach Mayor Jeri Muoio to back a land swap for the old dump site. But the negotiations were often contentious

because the county didn't want to part with the prime downtown land that Muoio demanded.

Muoio, who was running for re-election, announced in the fall of 2014 she would negotiate the sale of the old landfill only to a private developer, who had proposed townhouses and stores.

The teams, though, weren't convinced the competing project was real. They held out hope it would fizzle, forcing the city to reconsider the swap with the county.

That's when the teams heard whispers that Foley wanted to challenge Muoio in the March 2015 election.

Foley, in an interview, said he never seriously considered a run and never did any polling. He said any discussions about running for mayor were started by people who broached the idea to him.

But two people who spoke on condition of anonymity said Foley approached them and others for financial support.

The Astros and Nationals were shocked to even hear the suggestion. The last thing the teams wanted was their lobbyist challenging the mayor, a move that also would generate national media attention.

"I heard the teams told him to back off," Muoio said.

Foley did not run but he supported Muoio's challenger, City Commissioner Kimberly Mitchell, a longtime friend.

Muoio, who won re-election, said the prospect of Foley challenging her nev-

er threatened the land negotiations, which reconvened in early 2015 after the developer pulled out.

But she said Foley at times made the negotiations difficult. She said she suspected Foley of leaking confidential information from baseball negotiations to others, including Mitchell.

"I was at the point of saying 'I'm not going to go to a meeting if Mark is there.' I didn't trust him," she said.

Foley and Nationals 'like longtime friends'

Foley's involvement also created anxiety at times for the Nationals' partner, the Astros.

Astros' owner Crane, a newcomer to Palm Beach County politics, wondered if Foley's past might jeopardize the teams' request for millions.

"If I said I wasn't concerned, I would be fibbing. We had some concern with his history as anybody would," Crane told The Post.

The scandal did not surface as an issue in the baseball deal. The County Commission would earmark \$116 million in hotel tax revenue over the next 30 years to help finance the project.

But not long after Houston agreed to pair up with Washington, the Nationals were asked why they had hired Foley, Crane said.

Lerner, whose family bought the Nationals for \$450 million nearly six months before Foley resigned from Congress, would not comment for this story.

Crane said he had heard that Lerner either may not have known about Foley's past or might have forgotten about it when Foley called him for the first time in 2013.

That would be remarkable considering that Lerner's family is the largest private landowner in the Washington, D.C., area, with roots reaching back to 1952 with his father, Ted, founded the real estate company Lerner Enterprises.

"Listen, we had nothing to do with Foley. He didn't work for us. We never hired him," said Crane, a Democratic donor who has twice hosted President Barack Obama at The Floridian. "(Foley) is an interesting character. I mean, certainly, you know, people can look at his Washington record, but we didn't hire the guy."

In his conversations with Lerner, Foley said, the Nationals' co-owner never asked about the scandal.

"I was frankly very impressed that they didn't have to have a sit-down meeting with me or vet all this stuff," Foley said. "They never brought it up. It was like we were longtime friends. 'We got a deal to do, let's do it.'"

Lerner's point person on the spring training project, Arthur Fuccillo, said he didn't know if the subject of Foley's past ever came up.

"I'm not going to judge him by what I read in the paper. He is well-liked in this community. He has always been there for us," said Fuccillo, a Nationals partner and a vice president with Lerner Enterprises.

"He has been a consummate gentleman through the entire process. Everywhere I've gone with him he has been well-liked and very popular," he said.

Foley's godfather: ballplayer Jimmy Piersall

Foley said he spoke with Lerner for the first time in March 2013 in a 20-minute phone call to discuss a potential real estate deal near Fort Pierce. The call was arranged, Foley said, through a mutual friend of attorney Michael Cardozo, who was deputy counsel for former President Jimmy Carter.

Cardozo is married to Harolyn Cardozo, an executive assistant in the Nationals' front office and childhood friend of Mark Lerner. She once worked in the Clinton White House and testified to a federal grand jury during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Foley said he wanted to talk to Lerner because Michael Cardozo had mentioned that the Nationals were looking for spring training sites.

Lerner told Foley he wasn't

Continued on next page

SPRING TRAINING HARDBALL

BEHIND THE SCENES

Political will repeatedly pulled deal from the brink

By Joe Capozzi
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Millions of dollars in public money weren't the only reasons the Houston Astros and Washington Nationals are building a new spring training complex in West Palm Beach.

Sheer political will made it happen, too.

"It has died literally a thousand deaths and it has been resuscitated each time," Palm Beach County Commissioner Hal Valeche said about the project.

Among the twists and turns the project took after county officials took over negotiations in early 2014:

■ Bob Weisman, the county administrator at the time, said he thought the deal was dead after a negotiating session with the teams and county budget officials at the Gov-

ernmental Center in May 2014. At the meeting, the Astros and Nationals were insisting on a \$160 million facility, far more than Weisman was authorized to endorse.

"I thought it was over. We were hopelessly apart," Weisman recalled. "I thought that was our last meeting and they were going to leave."

The County Commission would keep the negotiations alive later that year by agreeing to consider more money but not all of the teams' request.

Ultimately, government sources will pay roughly half of the \$144 million project's cost, including interest over 30 years.

"At every stage of the game, the County Commission kept it going," Weisman said.

■ Tourism officials wouldn't endorse the teams' original

request for \$155 million in hotel tax revenue. Commissioners eventually signed off on \$113 million, even though at the time of the vote the new project still had no home.

■ When it looked like the city might not trade the 160-acre site to the county, the Nationals considered moving to the Minto West development, now called Westlake, west of Florida's Turnpike. The Astros balked because it was too far from the coast.

■ Palm Beach County Commissioner Priscilla Taylor at one point marched into Weisman's office and demanded the county consider giving up its downtown land so the county could secure the baseball site from the city – something county staff had recommended against.

Taylor has been perhaps the most vocal baseball support-

er because the project is in her district.

■ Daniel Martell, executive director of the Economic Council of Palm Beach County, in 2014 hosted private meetings in his office with Taylor and West Palm Beach Mayor Jeri Muoio to encourage a dialogue between the two leaders at a time when both governments were at odds about the land swap. He also hosted a meeting between Muoio and County Commissioner Shelley Vana, who declared "pigs will fly" before the county ever approved the swap.

■ At a 2014 Christmas party on Clematis Street, hosted by the Economic Council, Muoio and Vana, who was county mayor at the time, agreed to try to make the land swap work. Also at the party was one of Gov. Rick Scott's Cabinet members, Jesse Panuccio,

executive director of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, whose office would sign off on \$50 million in state money for the ballpark.

■ A bill to shrink a protective zone north of the M Canal – a move that gave the teams 27 acres on the south end of the site – nearly died before its final vote April 29 because of concerns from Miami-Dade County legislators. Those legislators had issues about sports teams benefiting from public money, even though the bill had nothing to do with financial incentives, said Rep. Lori Berman, D-Delray Beach, the bill's sponsor.

"At the end, it was a little nerve-racking, but it worked out," Berman said.

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Continued from previous page

interested because he was close to a deal in Osceola County. The telephone conversation, though, gave Foley a chance to introduce himself. To break the ice, he said, he mentioned his personal baseball connections.

Those connections include Foley's godfather, former Boston Red Sox player Jimmy Piersall, whose battle with bipolar disorder was the subject of a book and 1957 movie, "Fear Strikes Out."

Foley's dad was a Newton, Mass., cop who got to know Piersall while getting him out of trouble a few times during his career with the Red Sox from 1950 to 1958. Foley reminded Lerner that Piersall also played for the old Washington Senators.

Lerner got a kick out of the Piersall connection, Foley recalled, but five months would go by before they talked again.

In August 2013, Foley was on vacation in Orlando with his sister, Donna, when he saw a TV news story showing Lerner in Kissimmee after Osceola County rejected the Nationals' spring training proposal.

"I turned to my sister and I said, 'Donna, my life may have just changed,'" Foley recalled.

At the time, the Astros were still negotiating in Palm Beach Gardens with the Blue Jays, but public opposition was starting to percolate in part from residents angry about the city negotiating major changes in their neighborhood in private for more than a year.

In hindsight, Gardens City Manager Ferris told The Post, the secrecy might have contributed to the project's defeat. But at the time, city officials said, confidentiality was needed to avoid losing the teams to competing communities.

The secret deal even had a code name. The county's Business Development Board mashed up baseball and comic book imagery to call it "Project Robin."

"In baseball you have a batboy. So we were thinking, 'Batboy,' 'Batman,' 'Batman and Robin,'" business board director Kelly Smallridge explained.

But after seeing Lerner on TV in Orlando, Foley wondered if he could lure a third team to the county – the Nationals.

"I thought I could make something happen in Palm Beach County," he said.

Billionaire owner: Let's dine at Cracker Barrel

On Nov. 10, 2013, Foley saw a story in The Palm Beach Post about the Astros rebuffing an overture to consider a 15-acre site in downtown West Palm Beach.

The site would prove too small but the article got Foley talking to City Commissioner Shanon Materio, who suggested he talk to Muoio about the old dump site.

A week later, Foley was at a Human Rights Council dinner at the Four Seasons when he ran into Muoio. "I beelined up to her: 'Mayor, how interested would you be in bringing baseball back to West Palm Beach?'"

She said she would be open to the idea.

A few days later, Lerner was stepping into Foley's car for a driving tour of what would turn out to be the Nationals' new spring home.



Debris from a test pit sits on the site of the planned spring training complex near 45th Street last March. "Mark Foley deserves credit for putting the (45th Street) location on the roster," said the Washington Nationals' point person for the project. BRUCE R. BENNETT / THE PALM BEACH POST 2015

As the car made several loops around the site, Marcus and Foley also pointed out a disadvantage: The neighborhood wasn't the best.

But that didn't dampen Lerner's enthusiasm. He bragged about how Nationals Park, the team's regular season Major League Baseball home, opened in 2008 in a Washington neighborhood that was considered undesirable at the time and is now making a comeback.

"When we wanted to build Nationals Park in D.C., everybody snickered," he told Marcus and Foley. "I don't mind a site that has challenges. We like to come into communities and turn things around."

As they drove away, Foley, eager to continue the talks, suggested they all go back to The Breakers for coffee. Lerner, whose father's net worth in 2015 was estimated at \$6.9 billion by Forbes magazine, had a better idea.

"I saw a Cracker Barrel on the way," Lerner said, referring to the country-style roadside chain at 45th Street and Interstate 95. "I love Cracker Barrel. I eat at Cracker Barrel all the time."

At the restaurant, Lerner rolled out blueprints for Washington's failed Osceola County project and talked with Foley and Marcus about how it could work on 45th Street.

At the time, it seemed like a long shot. The Nationals were looking at two or three other locations on Florida's West Coast "in a very serious way," Fuccillo said. "We were negotiating with other people much further along."

But Foley's driving tour prompted Lerner to eventually shift the Nationals' focus to 45th Street.

'Outside influences playing politics'

On Jan. 9, 2014, the Palm Beach Gardens City Council, with two members running for re-election, voted to formally reject the baseball project. Sitting in the packed audience at City Hall that night were Marcus and Foley. Earlier in the day, Foley registered with the county as a lobbyist for the Nationals.

For Ferris, it was a tough learning experience.

"I love what we went through, even as painful as the end was. It was a dream come true just to get this close," Ferris said. "Everything went right from a business perspective. We had a good deal going. (The site) was

tight, but it would work. What went wrong? Outside influences playing politics got involved through certain lobbying efforts."

Ferris wouldn't elaborate. But the most vocal opponents included Larry Brown, a retired beverage distribution executive who lives in Old Palm, a gated community near the Palm Beach Gardens site.

Brown, a longtime member of the Economic Council – a group of the county's top business executives – became so incensed by the group's support for Palm Beach Gardens that he resigned from the council.

Marcus, who often was at odds with Ferris during her years on the County Commission, was listed as a potential opponent to the Palm Beach Gardens site in a confidential "Project Robin" strategy plan, written for the city by McNicholas.

Ferris and Marcus had clashed over the Palm Beach Gardens site in 2006 when the county wanted it for a regional park. But Marcus said she never tried to kill the city's spring training deal.

Marcus, who serves on the Roger Dean Stadium advisory board, said she wants additional teams in the area so the Marlins and Cardinals don't leave Jupiter. The teams had the right to leave if the number of nearby teams dropped.

She said she only warned McNicholas, when he reached out to her early on, that the baseball project would be difficult to pull off at the Gardens site.

But insiders wondered privately if Marcus and Foley worked together behind the scenes to kill the Gardens project.

After the Gardens vote, Foley and Nationals officials met with Muoio and West Palm Beach staff. "Why don't you guys think about pairing up with the Astros?" Chris Roog, the city's economic development director, said.

Around that same time, Assistant County Administrator Shannon LaRocque said she suggested the dump site to the Astros – not knowing that Foley had pitched it to the Nationals.

Other sites popped into contention, including one pushed by Lake Worth officials, but the old landfill had the momentum. The negotiations would survive several more twists and turns over the next 22 months before the county voted on the final step Oct. 20,

to sell construction bonds.

Foley's role gradually would diminish, in part because of concerns raised early in the negotiations by Muoio and others. Some people privately poked fun at how Foley, during ceremonial photo sessions in February and July, seemed to position himself in prominent spots near Gov. Scott and the team owners.

At a groundbreaking ceremony on Nov. 9, Foley was among the consultants Lerner mentioned by name for helping deliver the project. McNicholas, in remarks while hosting the ceremony, thanked LaRocque, the assistant county administrator, for suggesting the 160-acre site.

"Mark Foley deserves credit for putting the (45th Street) location on the roster," Fuccillo said in an interview. "It wasn't the location we had in the roster ourselves. We were introduced to the possibilities and to staff by Mark Foley."

On Nov. 10, bulldozers started clearing the land, launching construction expected to last until spring training in February 2017.

When it opens, the ballpark's main entrance off Haverhill Road will be lined with mature royal palms, mimicking the grand Breakers entrance familiar to Lerner.

Foley said he was honored to work on The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches, which will help preserve Florida's Grapefruit League by giving it something it has never had – four teams on the East Coast within a 15-minute drive of one another.

He emphasized that he was just one of many people who pitched in. But he said he hopes his role helped improve his public image.

"In this particular instance, I think I have proven what I am capable of doing but I don't expect to use it as a spring board. This is not like I am slowly trying to rebuild a life plan of politics. I am very happy as it is," he said.

"All of us wish we could still get back to where we used to be, that one place where we had position of power and influence and respect, where your thoughts mattered," he said.

"This is like one more step in the process of just feeling like I am back in the community I love, the place that I never left."

Staff writer Gurman Bhatia contributed to this story.

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WHY BLUE JAYS LEFT

Blue Jays backed out of deal in Gardens

Team officials worried they would be forced to help pay for the facility.

By Joe Capozzi
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Neighborhood opposition played a significant role in Palm Beach Gardens' decision to withdraw its site from consideration for a spring training baseball stadium in January 2014. But it wasn't the only reason.

The Toronto Blue Jays, who were supposed to share the site with the Houston Astros, rejected the deal.

Gardens City Manager Ron Ferris had traveled to Toronto, Houston and Arizona in 2013 to hammer out a proposal for a \$100 million spring training facility off Central Boulevard near two public schools.

The Toronto trip in September – with Natalie Crowley, the city's planning and zoning director; Daniel Martell, the Economic Council director; and Tom McNicholas, a consultant – included a tour of Rogers Centre and seats with team officials in a luxury suite to watch the Blue Jays beat the New York Yankees, 2-0.

The Astros had been focusing on Palm Beach Gardens since 2012. The Blue Jays had been considering a move to Gardens as early as March 2013, city records reviewed by The Palm Beach Post showed. Ferris said he went to Toronto "to show them I was serious. I'd like to think they were serious."

But in December 2013, a month before the City Council voted to reject the baseball deal, the Blue Jays on Dec. 12, 2013, sent Ferris a letter signaling the team's intent to stay in Dunedin, Toronto's spring home since 1977.

The Blue Jays were worried the Gardens facility would cost more than \$114 million and force the teams to kick in money, something Toronto officials claimed was never part of the deal.

"Clearly this is not in line with a commitment to construct a facility 'at no cost to the teams,'" Paul Beeston, the Blue Jays president, and Matthew Shuber, the Jays' vice president of business affairs, wrote.

The Palm Beach Gardens plan "would not justify our moving our Florida operations out of a community in which we have maintained such operations on an uninterrupted basis since 1977," the Blue Jays officials wrote.

The Astros were always on board with the project, Ferris said in an interview, while the Blue Jays seemed to be "dragging their feet. If they had gotten on board like Houston did, the outcome might have been a little different."

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