PLAYING IT SMART

Delphinus watches are offered in the Keys and throughout Florida, but few spotted concerns about turnover.

New NOAA program promotes responsible dolphin tours

BY TIMOTHY J. VANCE

KEY WEST — A friendly agency is launching a program that will evaluate, inspect and report all operators who claim to be responsible dolphin watching tours off the Florida Keys.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Dolphin SMART program will kick off with six introductory meetings starting next week. In the Keys, the meeting will offer the opportunity to learn about program requirements, how to incentivize participation, provides the Dolphin SMART logo.

Super Bowl matchup set — Page 1B

Cristo to push Congress to live up to Everglades pledge — Page 3A

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WEATHER

Friday, 11:13 a.m.
Sunny. Highs in the upper 70s.

Groundhog Day featured in story on page 26

LOWER KEYS

Body found at Ocean Walk

KEY WEST — A woman checking the grounds of Ocean Walk Apartments on Saturday morning found the body of a 23-year-old woman, possibly a resident of the apartment complex.

The woman reported the discovery at 9:34 a.m. to the Key West Police Department.

"It looks like the woman was trying to get into the water," Phillips said. "It looks like she was trying to jump over and his identity was not clear.

The coroner's report will determine the cause of death, she said.

INTERNATIONAL

Earthquake rattles Indonesia

MARINA, Indonesia — An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.3 shook buildings for several minutes in northeastern Indonesia Sunday and caused minor damage, the U.S. Geological Survey and witnesses said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or injuries after the underwater tremor off the eastern coast of Sulawesi island.

Serbs vote to determine future

BUCHAREST, Serbia — Serbia voted Sunday in presidential elections that could determine whether the troubled Balkan nation will continue with its Western alliance or return to its nationalist past.

Annex offers street for rent

Law suit continues over Southard access

BY TIMOTHY J. VANCE

KEY WEST — A proposal for the city to pay $20,000 annually to the Truman Annex Master Property Owner's Association appears to have faltered on dead ends. Tom Tuhey, president of the Truman Annex Master Property Owner's Association (TAMPOA), said Monday that Tuhey and would resolve the dispute about who owns and regulates the section of Southard Street that passes through the Truman Annex neighborhood.

Tukey ordered that Verge ask for a closed session meeting with his fellow commissioners and City Attorney Shawn Smith to consider the proposal, which in effect cedes control ownership of the street to TAMPOA. The plan calls for TAMPOA to maintain two-way public access to the street in exchange for the city paying a $20,000 annual fee for 30 years.

Verge said he brought the proposal to closed session to determine if the city would consider the proposal to build a special meeting, because the proposal would set the best interests of the city.

The proposal was an attempt to settle a disagree over TAMPOA's access to the city but also over Southard Street and rent of a legal deposition process that has spanned several years.

"We want a traffic solution that is fair to us and to the city," Tuhey said.

TAMPOA is suing the city to explore a 2000 agreement the previous City Commission approved that the city give up all of Southard Street. The current City Commission has tried to negotiate a plan of a two-way traffic plan that would remove traffic away from Southard Street and into neighboring Bahama Village.

The latest round of legal maneuvering in the case has prompted subpoenas to 26 people who city officials say are unlikely to have insight on the Southard Street ownership question.

Among those subpoenaed are Hauser Tours of America founder and developer Ed Swid, Bahama Village Community Center president Bob Kelly, Nery's Apartments, Inc., Tropical Financial Attorney Hugh Morgan and a Citrus newspaper reporter and photographer.

"We all think the machinery has any bearing on what the dispute is," Swid said.

"We are just trying to resolve the case.

"They have to be here at 10 o'clock in the morning."

The details sparked a controversy in September, when the city's attorney, Tom Riddle, said that the city was not the best interests of the city.

Health fair to offer free and low-cost exams

BY MARCY BALEN

Great staff

KEY WEST — The Keys saw a surge of interest on Monday night in the annual health fair.

Community Hospital of the Florida Keys, the Florida Keys Healthy People's Fair, on Saturday to promote prevention and awareness while offering medical residents hands-on experience with patients and life-saving procedures.

"It's a learning experience for us," said Maureen Basile, a second-year medical student who will be managing the depression screening in the facility at Key West High School.

Available tests include skin cancer screenings, blood glucose, breast exams, eye exams, prostate screenings, vision and cholesterol tests.

Most services are performed at no charge for anyone interested regardless of their ability to pay.

A $5 fee will be charged for pap tests.

Heritage House and Museum to open up for more events

BY MARCY BALEN

Great staff

HERITAGE HOUSE AND MUSEUM

The Heritage House and Museum in Key West will open up for more events.

The museum and other locations areas at the Heritage House on Caroline Street are now available for formal and informal gatherings, including weddings, reunions and community functions.

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New NOAA program promotes responsible dolphin tours

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA
Citizen Staff

KEY WEST — A federal agency is launching a program that would recognize and promote eco-tour operators who conduct responsible dolphin watching trips off the Florida Keys.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Dolphin SMART program will kick off with an introductory meeting from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center at the Truman Waterfront. The meeting will offer the opportunity to learn about program requirements, hear about incentives for participation, preview the Dolphin SMART logo, and sign up for the first Dolphin SMART training. The program is entirely voluntary.

"No permits will be issued," said Cheva Heck, spokeswoman for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, which is part of NOAA. "This is about building public awareness."

The program sets a series of criteria for eco-tour boats to follow that promote responsible viewing of wild dolphins and prevent harassment, Heck said. The acronym SMART signifies the basic principles of viewing etiquette: stay at least 50 yards away; move away slowly if the dolphins shows signs of disturbance; always put the vessel engine in neutral; refrain from swimming with, touching or feeding wild dolphins; and teach others to follow these practices, Heck said. The program could serve as a national model.

Operators who participate will be given an annual Dolphin SMART sticker and flag for their boats. Operators must go through a renewal process each year, said Celeste Weimer, Dolphin SMART program coordinator.

Weimer will start training classes in February and conduct on-board inspections and reviews in March. There are between 25 to 30 dolphin watching boats in Key West.
The rise in the number of dolphin watching boats since the late 1990s caused concern among some conservationists and charter operators. Allegations of dolphin harassment were made in Panama City in the 1990s, when some eco-tour operators were accused of feeding and chasing dolphins to give tourists a closer look.

NOAA also will help provide booking agents and concierge services for Dolphin SMART operators. NOAA is also creating a Dolphin SMART Web page.

"Dolphin SMART recognizes that tour operators and their customers share our concern for ensuring that wild dolphin populations in the Florida Keys National Marine continue to thrive," sanctuary Superintendent Dave Score said. "We're pleased to join with our partners to launch a program that recognizes businesses for conducting their tours responsibly and helps visitors make an informed choice when booking a dolphin trip."

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Dolphin Ecology Project teamed up to establish the program, with partial funding from Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. For more information on Dolphin SMART, contact Weimer at 305-743.2437, ext. 22.

tohara@keysnews.com

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It doesn't get any better than this. Watch the sunset from Mallory Square, even if you are stuck in Wisconsin. Or enjoy a virtual Margarita at Sloppy Joe's. Check out our Keys Web Cams.