

# SARASOTA COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

PREPARED FOR "SARASOTA COUNTY OPENLY PLANS FOR EXCELLENCE" (SCOPE)  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA, USA

**DRAFT 3 • JANUARY 10, 2000**  
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Sarasota at the Dawn of a New Century.....	1
Basic Facts About the Greater Sarasota Community .....	2
Perceptions About the Greater Sarasota Community.....	7
Selected Community Issues as Seen By Representative Citizens .....	14
Next Steps and Closing Comments from SCOPE Chairman.....	22

# SARASOTA AT THE DAWN OF A NEW CENTURY

The purpose of this document is to help area citizens – in particular, participants in the “Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence” (SCOPE) initiative – define and debate issues of importance to this community’s future.

## Purpose of the SCOPE Initiative

As a citizen of this community, you face decisions that are vital to Sarasota’s future. If you’re an elected leader or public servant, you are already aware of many difficult tradeoffs. If you’re not yet an adult citizen who can vote, you may think you have no influence on these important decisions (even though you do). If you’re a man or woman working hard to support yourself and your family, you may consider yourself too busy to pay much attention to these issues. If you’re a retired individual, especially one who lives here only part of the year, you may prefer to leave these debates and decisions to others – after all, you’ve already “paid your dues up north.” If you’re a native-born Sarasotan, you’re a rare individual in this discussion, for most current residents in the community moved here from someplace else.

***Regardless of your status or viewpoint as a member of the Greater Sarasota community, you will be affected by the issues discussed here.***

Our community today has many strengths. In addition to its beautiful climate and beaches, it has a healthy economy, a lively cultural scene, excellent schools, effective government services, and a host of attractions for both residents and visitors. However, it also has room for improvement.

Although the community faces no major crisis, we know it is much easier to deal with a challenge if one is prepared for it. The SCOPE Visioning Process offers Sarasota-area citizens an opportunity to learn about and share opinions and proposed solutions affecting growth, taxation, public education, cultural activity, environmental planning, and overall quality of life in a cooperative, civic-minded way. The Visioning Process is meant to help citizens prepare for growth and community change in a way similar to that used for the Y2K planning we all heard so much about as 1999 drew to a close. As with that effort, citizens face many challenges and opportunities which they cannot foresee with certainty.

## How the Snapshot Is Organized

This community profile is presented as a three-part document:

- Basic Facts About the Greater Sarasota Community
- Perceptions About the Greater Sarasota Community
- Selected Community Issues as Seen By Representative Citizens

## BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE GREATER SARASOTA COMMUNITY

**[Writer's note: final layout of this information will require some re-keyboarding of text and re-processing of graphics. The present draft is for illustration and content only.]**

### **HISTORY OF AREA AND DESCRIPTION OF URBAN CENTERS**

Source: Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.sarasotachamber.org/locate.html>

The area which today comprises Sarasota County was inhabited originally over 4,000 years ago by native-born people who hunted and fished along the gulf coast. Evidence of their presence is found today at Historic Spanish Point in Osprey, between present-day Sarasota and Venice. About 130 years ago, Americans of European origin began to build homes in the area.

The City of Sarasota, located in north Sarasota County, was settled in 1885 on the shores of Sarasota Bay. Incorporated in 1902, the city covers a 12 square mile area. Sarasota is the county's major business and cultural center with a resident population of nearly 51,000 and a daily influx of 40,000 workers.

The City of Venice, incorporated in 1926, has a population of 18,000 and comprises an area of eight square miles. Venice is a planned community with four miles of gulf beaches and two miles of bay frontage. The city is famous for its charming Northern Italian architecture and beautifully landscaped boulevards.

North Port, incorporated in 1959, is one of Florida's largest cities in land area, encompassing almost 75 square miles. North Port's population has nearly doubled in the last ten years and now stands at 13,500. North Port has a growing business district, several public schools and is linked to the rest of the county by I-75.

Englewood, a 150-square-mile unincorporated area, has a population of 15,000. With 12 miles of gulf beaches and 20 miles of bay frontage, residents enjoy all the benefits of coastal living. Like the rest of the county, Englewood is growing – the community supports a thriving commercial center, a community hospital, and five public schools.

Unincorporated areas of the county contain around 70 percent of the current population of almost 326,000.

### **GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

Sarasota County is located on the west coast of Florida, about 60 miles south of Tampa, at 27° 18' North and 82° 29' West. The county's approximately 600 square miles extend west from rustic ranch land to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay. With more than 35 miles of gulf coastline, most Sarasota County residents are within a 15-minute drive of the area's famous white-sand beaches.

The elevation of the county averages 18 feet above sea level. Temperatures in Sarasota County average 61.5° F. in January and 80° F. in August. The average year-round temperature is a pleasant 71° F. The average annual rainfall is 60 inches.

## POPULATION

### Growth (in Thousands of Residents)

Sarasota County	1985	1990	1995	2000
Unincorporated	161.1	194.5	213.0	228.3
Cities	76.9	83.2	88.5	97.6
Total	238.0	277.7	301.5	325.9

Source: County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999; based on U.S. Census Bureau statistics and Planning Department projections

### Population Distribution by Ethnic Origin (1996)

	Total County	Unincorporated	Municipal	Sarasota	Longboat Key	Venice	North Port
Total Pop	305,848	216,106	89,742	51,311	3,907	18,619	15,905
White	289,398	210,754	78,831	42,071	3,884	18,298	15,064
Black	13,293	3,431	9,686	8,323	3	237	666
Indian/Aleut	532	342	189	119	7	14	59
Asian/Pacific	1,575	1,080	494	352	13	56	61
Hispanic	8,579	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	1,050	500	543	446	0	14	64

Secondary source: Sarasota County Long-Range Planning Services web site, [http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/long\\_range\\_planning/stats/racial.asp](http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/long_range_planning/stats/racial.asp)

Primary sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, Bulletin Special Population No. 4, "Hispanic Population Estimated by Age and Sex for Florida and its Counties, April 1, 1995," Bulletin of Economic and Business Research, College of Business Administration, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611-7145. Note: The U.S. Census Bureau states that "Hispanic" is not a race: consequently, population data for Hispanic persons has already been accounted for in other racial groups.

## PROPERTY AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

Sarasota County residences include over 15,000 homes located on the gulf or bay. Five barrier islands — Manasota Key, Casey Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key, and Siesta Key — feature some of the county's most prized residences. Dozens of planned developments dating from the 1920's within and around the county's urban centers provide housing in a wide range of prices.

### Taxable Property Value, Sarasota County (in Billions of Dollars)

	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98	FY99	FY00
Value	\$16.3	\$17.2	\$18.2	\$19.1	\$20.4	\$21.9

Source: County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999

### Sales Valuations (Sarasota Area Board of Realtors)

	Oct - 98	Oct -99	Change
Number of Sales	519	534	2.9%
Sales valuations	\$94,264	\$112,825	19.7%

Source: Sarasota Board of Realtors, posted by County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999

**QUESTION: ORIGINAL PAGE STATES 'FIGURES ARE IN THOUSANDS' -- IS THAT ACCURATE?**

## EMPLOYMENT

### Sarasota/Bradenton Combined Employment

SECTOR	Oct - 98	Oct -99	Change
Total*	251,800	261,400	3.8%
Services	116,400	122,000	4.8%
Finance/Ins/RE	12,400	12,900	4.0%
Retail Trade	50,500	52,000	3.0%
Manufacturing	21,200	22,400	5.7%
Trans/Util	5,200	5,100	(1.9%)
Government	24,100	24,200	0.4%
Construction	13,300	14,000	5.3%
Wholesale	8,600	8,700	1.2%

Secondary Source: County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999

Primary Source: Florida Dept. of Labor; \*establishment employment only; employment data in thousands and rounded to nearest hundred.

### Unemployment Rates

	1995	1996	1997	1998	Oct - 99
County	3.7%	3.1%	2.6%	2.5%	2.2%
State	5.5%	5.1%	4.8%	4.3%	3.9%
U.S.	5.6%	5.4%	4.9%	4.5%	3.8%

Primary Source: Employment & Earnings (Bureau of Labor Statistics), Florida Department of Labor

Secondary Source: County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999

### Unemployment Detail - Sarasota County

	Oct - 98	Sep - 99	Oct - 99
Labor Force**	147,010	151,600	151,358
Employed	143,422	147,763	148,044
Unemployed	3,588	3,837	3,314
Unemployment Rate	2.4%	2.5%	2.2%

Source: County of Sarasota Administrative Services, Fiscal Planning & Implementation Office, October 1999; \*\* includes establishment and nonestablishment employment

## INCOME (1990)

	Avg Per Capita	Median Family	Median Household	Avg Household
Countywide	\$18,441	\$35,322	\$29,919	\$40,357
Sarasota	16,151	30,236	24,884	35,254
Long Boat Key	51,669	71,069	55,530	94,005
Venice	19,940	33,024	27,834	36,496
North Port	11,391	26,036	23,099	26,585

Source: Sarasota County 1990 Income (U.S. Bureau of the Census), [http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/long\\_range\\_planning/stats/income.asp](http://www.co.sarasota.fl.us/long_range_planning/stats/income.asp)

## PUBLIC EDUCATION (K-12 AND VOCATIONAL)

Source: Sarasota School District, <http://www.sarasota.k12.fl.us/sarasota/disfacts.html>

### Enrollment (1996-97)

	No. of Schools	Student Enrollment
Elementary	20	16,036
Middle	6	6,622
High	4	8,135
Exceptional	2	1,800*
Alternative	5	418**
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33,011</b>

Adult & Community Ed. Center	1	15,888+
Sarasota County Technical Inst.	1	14,000++
<b>TOTAL</b>	34	

\* Exceptional schools include Pine View School for the Gifted and Oak Park.

\*\* There are various alternative programs, both on and off school campuses, and two charter schools.

+ Enrollment for 1996-97

++ Includes job preparation and supplemental classes

### Public School Enrollment by Ethnic Origin

Caucasian	83%
African American	10.3%
Hispanic	5%
Asian/Pacific Rim	1%
Native American	<1%

### School District Budget (1997-98)

General Fund	\$216,748,038
Capital Projects	\$78,332,312
Debt Service	\$12,433,467
Self Insurance	\$9,015,921
Food Service	\$10,318,821
Special Revenue	\$8,904,269
School Internal Funds	\$10,387,339

Approximately 61 percent of the overall school budget is allocated to salaries and benefits. About 62 percent comes from property taxes, three percent from the state lottery, 19 percent from other state sources, five percent from federal sources, three percent from county sales tax, and eight percent from other local revenues.

Sarasota's school system is one of the largest employers in the county. With a total of 4,167 employees, 2,125 are instructional staff, 1,890 are classified staff, and 152 are administrators. Instructional and classified personnel make up 96% of the work force. More than 950 of Sarasota County's teachers have advanced degrees. In 1997-98, the beginning teacher's salary was \$25,126 with a bachelor's degree, \$28,607 with a master's degree, and \$31,870 with a doctorate.

### SELECTED ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

See Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau web site (<http://www.sarasotafl.org/culturalactivities.html>) for directory of major arts organizations)

<b>FILM</b> Project Black Cinema Sarasota Film Festival Sarasota Film Society  <b>MUSIC</b> Florida West Coast Symphony Englewood Performing Arts Series The Gloria Musicae Singers	<b>DANCE</b> Sarasota Ballet of Florida  <b>THEATER</b> Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall Florida Studio Theatre Golden Apple Dinner Theatre in Venice Lemon Bay Playhouse The Players of Sarasota
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<p>Jazz Club of Sarasota  Key Chorale  La Musica  Sarasota Concert Band  Sarasota Friends of Florida Folk  The Sarasota Opera  Sarasota Pops  Venice Symphony</p> <p>MUSEUMS  The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art</p>	<p>Theatre Works  Venice Little Theatre</p> <p>VISUAL ARTS  The Education Center  Friends of the Arts and Sciences  Longboat Key Center for the Arts  Ringling School of Art and Design  Sarasota Visual Art Center  Venice Art Center</p>
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## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE GREATER SARASOTA COMMUNITY

The following summary of attitudes and perspectives on Sarasota is an edited version of a report prepared by Mary Means & Associates, a consulting firm retained by SCOPE. It reflects findings from 83 confidential, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders in Sarasota County held in July 1999. Interviewees were identified and selected by the SCOPE Steering Committee and included opinion leaders, representatives from key organizations and agencies, and spokespersons of traditionally under-represented constituencies. The consultant's aim was simply to report interviewees' opinions, not to prescribe a course of action or point of view.

### Strengths & Opportunities

Virtually all interviewees described the County as a good place to live, a place offering residents the benefits of life in a small town as well as many of the amenities offered in much larger communities. People cited the weather, the beaches and the natural environment as among the qualities most valued. They also talked about the healthy economy, the public schools and the presence of the arts.

Most interviewees mentioned the high level of volunteerism and philanthropy in the community. Many people are extremely generous and truly care about the community. Interviewees shared stories about good work underway in the community. The work of the arts community in helping disadvantaged youth was mentioned as were volunteer efforts to build the Venice Child Development Center and to mentor at-risk students.

People also talked about the many reports, studies, and on-going community forums that have addressed important community issues. COMPASS, the Multi-Stakeholder Group Process, Sarasota Thinks, Venice 2020, School Match, and the Bay Estuary Program were among those mentioned.

### Weaknesses & Threats

The issues people mentioned most often as weaknesses or threats to the community's high quality of life include the lack of opportunities for non-college-bound students, the combination of low wages and high housing costs, and the effects of development on the environment and infrastructure.

The divisions that exist between different sectors of the community were mentioned by most interview participants. Bridging the many divisions in the community was mentioned as a major challenge facing the community. People talked about racial, economic, generational, cultural and geographic divisions in the community.

People also talked about the way problems are solved in the community. Participants talked about the need to have better forums for citizen involvement and better methods of

communication. Several expressed frustration with the low quality of public debate about such issues as growth management, historic preservation, and environmental protection.

Civic leadership seems to be evolving from the traditional business community towards a new model which is much more complex and diffused. While this is generally a good thing, it makes the decision-making process more complicated and difficult to sort through. Some people felt that while candidates for public office are more diverse, they seem to have less capacity than their predecessors.

The phrase “falling through the cracks” was used often to describe the state of the community’s at-risk children, service workers and the elderly with low incomes.

## Issues & Ideas

Captured below are the issues and ideas suggested by the interviewees as important to the community’s future. For the purposes of this summary, comments have been organized in the following categories:

### Quality Places to Live and Work

- Neighborhood Revitalization (Residential)
- Health of City/Neighborhood Centers
- Growing Smart
- Housing for Everyone
- Getting Around
- Community Design

### Natural and Historic Resource Conservation

### Access to Jobs and Opportunities

### Children and Families at Risk

### Economic Diversification

### Arts & Culture

### Different Worlds and Cultures

### Civic Infrastructure

These headings are simply a tool for associating similar ideas and should not be seen as “set in stone” or precedents for organizing other components of the visioning process. It should also be noted that many of the categories overlap and that an issue listed under any one heading is very likely connected to issues under other headings.

## Quality Places to Live & Work

We have grouped a number of issues under this heading, not because they are not important enough to stand on their own, but because they are so intertwined with each other and with creating quality places to live and work. Almost everyone interviewed placed a very high value on Sarasota’s quality of life and were concerned about maintaining and improving conditions. In

general, there was a shared sense that while conditions may appear on the surface to be satisfactory, problems are lurking just below and need to be addressed in a timely manner if the quality of life is to be maintained.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION**

- Condition of older suburbs is deteriorating
- Aging population/aging housing stock
- No reinvestment in declining areas

### **HEALTH OF CITY CENTERS (SARASOTA CITY, VENICE, ENGLEWOOD, OSPREY, FRUITVILLE)**

- Traditional downtowns are not competing successfully against suburban shopping districts.
- I-75 is pulling people and businesses away from downtown and towards the highway interchanges.
- Concern is voiced about the effect new development may have on smaller mom and pop establishments.
- Most poor people are concentrated in Sarasota city, and other pockets.

### **GROWING SMART**

- Capacity and cost of infrastructure: people are concerned about development and the cost of infrastructure/roads, schools, water, sewer, etc. The area east of I-75 will see growth due to pressures of market. In absence of an agreed-upon plan, the results will be something no one wants.
- The impact of development on wetland systems, habitat and bay water quality is a concern.
- Transportation/mobility issues are not adequately addressed.
- Exclusivity: some people consider proliferation of gated communities to be a huge issue.
- Preservation of open space and recreation areas is needed.
- Platted developments like North Port are building out rapidly, were poorly but legally planned and retrofitting to increase livability presents a challenge.
- Framing the debate as growth/no growth is a no-win scenario. The issue should be re-framed possibly around economic vitality, rejuvenating dying areas, etc.

### **HOUSING FOR EVERYONE**

- All we are building is gated communities.
- Affordable housing is needed.
- Concentration of low income housing is an important problem.
- Too much of the housing in the City of Sarasota is renter-occupied.
- Too much attention is being spent managing new growth rather than revitalizing existing, older communities.

### **GETTING AROUND**

- Transit: growing concern about lack of transit and alternatives to automobile. In a community with so many seniors, little concerted effort heretofore to address mobility issues.

- This is a real problem for kids, too. Working parents cannot get kids to after-school youth programs.
- Maintenance of facilities: road maintenance and road building need to keep pace with growth.
- Maintenance of roads is serious issue.
- General concern about traffic and increase in congestion.

### **COMMUNITY DESIGN**

- Concern about the “shabby sameness” of major thoroughfares
- Some efforts at gateway enhancements in County and South Venice, but more needed.
- Urban design issues identified by Arts Council as an important concern.

### **Natural and Historic Resource Conservation**

Many of the interviewees mentioned that they valued the County’s environmental and historic resources, and seemed concerned that status quo development patterns may be jeopardizing these resources. Specific comments included the following:

- Historic resources: little regard for history and older buildings
- Environmentalists are frustrated at lack of concern for fragile Florida environment, born of newcomers’ lack of understanding of an unfamiliar landscape and a tradition of developer-driven politics.
- Open space: fear that growth patterns will consume remaining open space, habitat, and leave endless sprawl. Fear that special interests, business will weaken growth controls and regulations.
- Fiscal and environmental impact of development: fear that growth is outpacing carrying capacity of infrastructure and natural resources (water, sewer, storm water management, etc.).

### **Access to Jobs & Opportunities**

Many interviewees were concerned about the region’s capacity to link residents with good paying jobs. Issues revolved around low wages for service workers, workforce preparedness & skill-building, opportunities for high school graduates, adequacy of transportation to and from employment centers. Some of the specific comments included the following:

- Mobility issues are not being addressed.
- A general concern that community leaders are not concerned about the struggles of working-class residents.
- Local college graduates do not return due to lack of good-paying jobs.
- Schools are not preparing non-college-bound students for the job market.
- Economic development efforts need to focus on attracting high wage jobs.
- Service workers cannot afford decent housing so they have to commute long distance to work.

## Children & Families at Risk

Several interviewees stated that while the quality of life is excellent for the majority of residents, a growing segment of the community is “falling through the cracks.” Specific comments included the following:

- High percentage of single-parent families.
- High drop-out rate for African American high school students.
- Hidden needs of low income seniors (health, mobility, housing).
- Need more support and programs for kids that aren’t college bound.
- Teenage substance abuse.
- Incidents of domestic violence are higher than generally acknowledged.
- Parental involvement in schools (with the exception of sports) is declining.

## Economic Diversification

Many people were very concerned about the stratification of incomes in the county and the economy’s seemingly heavy reliance on service/tourism sector jobs. Among these interviewees there was a shared opinion that the economy should be diversified. Comments included:

- The “dumbbell” economy is problematic: the economy consists of upper bracket retirees with passive incomes from elsewhere and lower-bracket service workers to meet their needs. Little exists in the way of a middle class.
- The county needs to attract higher paying and more skilled jobs.
- The competition for retiree market is increasing; there is much more competition from other sunbelt areas for this sector.
- The county needs a year-round economy.

## Arts & Culture

Almost everyone agreed that the arts and culture are important assets in the community. However, there was some concern that not everyone benefits equally from these assets, and a sense that more could be done to improve this situation. Comments included:

- Access to arts for poorer folks is needed.
- South County has limited access.
- The arts could play a stronger role helping at-risk children.

## Different Worlds & Cultures

Many interviewees spoke about long-standing divisions within the community, divisions based on race, class, age, culture and geography. Among interviewees who identified these issues, there was a concern that these divisions threaten the fabric of the community and that the community needs to bridge them in meaningful ways. Specific comments included:

- East-west division: the coast/inland/new communities/ranches and open lands
- North-south divisions: southern part of county is growing rapidly, feels neglected by more affluent, influential northern area.

- Ethnic and cultural diversity: seems to be a lack of appreciation for cultural diversity among community leaders.
- Hispanic population is growing, especially in south county.
- Other cultures are also appearing: Ukrainian, Russian, in south county.
- Racism and segregation are a persistent problem.
- There is a perception that the community does not offer professional or recreational opportunities for young adults.
- More socio-economic diversity is needed.
- Wide-spread perception that the retiree community does not want to be involved in local issues and will resist anything that may translate into an increase in taxes.
- Agricultural community is often left out.
- Regional relations: some people have suggested SCOPE needs to reach beyond county line.
- City of Sarasota vs. County: Long history of lack of cooperation, friction.

## Civic Infrastructure

Last but not least, a number of interviewees spoke about issues relating to civic infrastructure. While interviewees agree that there is a strong sense of philanthropy in the community, many are concerned that there is not enough productive citizen involvement in the community. Specific comments included:

- Community decision making: low voter turnout, politicians are too influenced by special interests, public hearings are too often relied upon as the model for public participation.
- Few forums for dialogue: communication needs to improve.
- People feel threatened by growth and change.
- Many people are concerned at absence of leaders, yet community seems to have high degree of volunteerism, community engagement.
- Civic void: people are involved in their favorite charity but not involved in community-wide issues.
- There are some very active areas of strong civic leadership, namely arts.
- Several people spoke of tendency of retired people coming here and wanting to start another organization when they find the existing ones do not put them in charge.
- Chronic issue of population in constant flux, lack of rootedness, lack of sense of continuity, no sense of history of the place.
- There's a perception that elected officials have been dodging tough issues (growth, fiscal aspects of infrastructure, schools, etc.) for years.
- County government is not well regarded, long history of micro-management, pride in not raising taxes in a decade or more.
- The increasing organization of groups opposing development is complicating the public dialogue about the location, quality and pace of development in the County.
- Have had several failed efforts to resolve major issues, most recently the Multi-Stakeholder Group on Development East of I-75. Many feel a few people with extreme views were permitted to hijack a process, leading to "no decision."

- Widely held perception that wealthy retirees wield a lot of political power and that they are not interested in collaborating with other segments of the community.

## SELECTED COMMUNITY ISSUES AS SEEN BY REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS

Presented below is a discussion of selected issues as seen through brief character sketches and anecdotes. Our cast includes people you may recognize to some degree. No, they're not "real" people, but they do resemble actual citizens in our community. They share strengths and weaknesses, insights and prejudices, likes and dislikes, commitments and concerns, and hopes and disappointments similar to those of real Sarasotans.

They come from diverse backgrounds, yet share many common traits. Some are rich, some poor, but most are neither. Some have advanced professional degrees, some never completed high school, but most are in between. Some are old, some are young, but most are middle-aged and "young seniors." Some are members of minority groups, but most are not. Some live in million-dollar waterfront estates, some live in modest apartments on small fixed incomes, but most live in middle-class homes. In short, Sarasotans – like Americans in general – can be categorized into many familiar groups. However, for our purposes the most important fact is that each of our characters is a unique individual with his or her own opinions, experiences, and goals.

Because space constraints make it impossible for us to include individual characters who represent every demographic group in the community, we have tried to present those who are concerned with issues affecting large numbers of people. Our objective is for participants in SCOPE visioning sessions and workshops to use these characters' comments and perspectives as springboards for open debate about important community issues. As the SCOPE process moves forward, lengthier and more detailed scenarios involving such characters may be presented.

The characters are introduced as they react to a news story in the local media.

### **HEADLINE: Deputies Arrest Two During Attempted Drug Sale at St. Armands**

**HARRY S., RETIRED POLICE OFFICER:** Sipping his coffee and yawning a bit, Harry S. reads about a drug-related arrest at St. Armands Circle, a well-known commercial area on Lido Key. Harry, a retired detective from Chicago who, with his wife, has lived for the past six years in a two-bedroom Gulf Gate condominium, maintains an interest in crime and law enforcement. He smiles to himself a bit smugly, imagining how the reference to "St. Armands" in the headline will upset not only the merchants selling what Harry considers to be overpriced souvenirs and clothing to tourists, but also the snobbish, wealthy homeowners on Longboat Key who pass through St. Armands on their way to and from the Sarasota mainland. "Bad PR," he mumbles to himself, "can sometimes have good results." Harry's wife Maureen knows that her husband's cynical attitude is often just a front, so she pays little attention. Harry himself, however, is half-serious about his anti-rich feelings. As far as he's concerned, everybody who lives near St. Armands or on Longboat Key deserves the kind of contempt that Harry and many of his Sarasota friends feel.

**HEADLINE: High School Honors Student Injured While Hitching Ride to Work**

**JANET M., TEACHER AT SARASOTA HIGH SCHOOL:** A few miles away, in the Village Green neighborhood, Janet is busy getting ready for school. As a single mother of two kids ages 8 and 10, she has only limited time to read the morning paper. Like most teachers, Janet would like to see stronger community support for new school equipment, more faculty, smaller class sizes, and more extracurricular activities. Having lived in Sarasota for five years, however, she knows that the majority of taxpayers, of whom the largest single group consists of tax-resistant retirees, are adamantly opposed to paying for such “luxuries.” Busy supporting herself and her kids, Janet has little time to lobby for stronger support of public education. However, she does react with concern to the story about a high school student – a young man in her fourth-period history class – being injured while trying to hitch a ride to work a few days ago. “I remember Tommy telling me he wished he could take a bus to his job,” she thinks to herself. There were no buses available because they don’t run on Sundays in Sarasota County.

**HEADLINE: Commissioners Say More Study Needed on Development East of I-75**

**TRENTON W., REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER:** Trenton, a self-made millionaire in his mid-50’s, has lived in Sarasota for the past 20 years. When he arrived here in the late 1970’s, the community offered great opportunities to bright, ambitious, hard-working, people like himself. Having brought a talent for both craftsmanship and salesmanship, Trenton started a small home-remodeling business. For the first couple of years, he struggled to sell small jobs and do them by himself. As he came to know the community, he soon realized he could succeed more quickly by hiring others to do the work while he made the deals. He branched out into new-home construction. Soon he was noticed by some of the biggest developers in the county. A couple of them asked if he would like to sell his business and join theirs. He responded by saying no, but he’d be happy to buy their companies. Such boldness, combined with some lucky breaks, resulted in Trenton becoming one of the most successful developers between Tampa and Naples. When Trenton takes time to read the morning paper, he usually turns first to the business section. He is always on the lookout for stories that highlight new opportunities or that might have a negative impact on his business.

**HEADLINE: South County Residents Still Using Bottled Water While Repairs Continue**

**LAVERNE A., RETIRED DOMESTIC WORKER:** Laverne, a mother of five, grandmother of 16, and great grandmother of 8, has lived and worked all of her life in Sarasota County. She and her late husband, Thomas, saved every penny they could to buy a modest home in the South County neighborhood of Laurel, between Venice and Sarasota. After Thomas passed away, Laverne continued to live in the home. However, because of her weakened health and limited income, she finds it very hard to manage on her own. Her children are begging her to move to subsidized public housing, but Laverne is a proud person who wants to stay independent as long as possible. Her neighborhood, one of the oldest in the county, contains many friends she has known over the seven and a half decades of her life. But when Laverne reads about nearby water pollution problems in the morning paper, she worries about how it will affect her and her neighbors. She’s never been one to complain, so she simply moves on to another story.

### **HEADLINE: Slowdown in Gulf Coast Tourism Hurts Jobs, Tax Base**

**LOUISE P., RETIRED BUSINESSWOMAN AND ARTS ACTIVIST:** Louise and her husband recently sold their travel agency business, which they founded in Sarasota in the mid-1980's after moving here from Long Island, New York. Now in their mid-60's, they live in a high-rise condo near Sarasota Bay, close to downtown. Louise is active in several local arts organizations as a fundraiser and board member. She typifies the energy, enthusiasm, generosity, and cooperative spirit that help make this community the "cultural capital of Florida." As a director of the Sarasota County Arts Council, she is concerned about the news story regarding a decline in tourist tax revenues. These funds provide seed money and ongoing support for many cultural events and arts groups in the area. She checks her calendar and sees she has a meeting soon with a wealthy benefactor on Siesta Key. She thinks of the best pitch to use in persuading him to increase his annual donation to the Beach Center for the Arts, and realizes this morning's news story will help in her mission.

### **HEADLINE: Another 1920's Landmark Bites the Dust**

**JACK T., NORTH PORT FATHER OF THREE:** While his wife Barbara prepares breakfast for herself and her busy family, Jack T. scans the headlines. As a history buff, he is disappointed to see that a county landmark has been torn down to make way for another parking lot near downtown Sarasota. "Look, honey," he tells his wife, "it says here that the old Ringling winter circus buildings are being demolished today. Remember when you and your folks and I went over there to see them a couple of years ago? It's disgusting that nobody here cares about tradition!" Barbara sighs, wishing her husband showed as much interest in helping with the kids as he did in preserving buildings erected 75 years ago. She works part-time as a bank teller, while Jack bounces from one part-time job to another. She often wonders if they made the right decision in moving to the area four years ago to be near her parents, who have since passed away. She doesn't miss the Great Lakes snow storms, but she certainly misses the more secure financial situation they left behind. She is tired of paying what some people here call the "sunshine tax" in the form of lower salaries and fewer good-paying jobs, and she worries about her kids' futures as well.

### **HEADLINE: City Noise Ordinance Will End Local Nightlife, Say Club Owners**

**DAVID M., A STUDENT AT NEW COLLEGE:** Although New College, the Honors College of the Florida university system, attracts students from all over the U.S. and from several foreign countries, David is a local kid. He grew up in Venice in the home of his grandparents, attended Pineview School for the Gifted, and received scholarships to several excellent schools but picked New College for its reputation and for its closeness to family and friends. Although he likes the community, he and his new friends on campus often feel forced to travel 60 miles north to Tampa for entertainment on weekends because, as one of them puts it, "Sarasota is just for old people who turn in at 9:00." Reading the story in the morning paper about the local authorities banning "loud" music after 10:00 p.m. just confirms what he has already experienced. David and his friends belong to what local urban planners consider an "under-represented" group. In a county where residents are on average more than 50 years old, single people in their 20's often feel left out. Despite its reputation as an arts center, the community sees many young people who



continue to see challenges from traffic congestion, crime, and over-crowded schools. What I would like to see, of course, is better planning by government and by private industry, either to limit the influx of more residents or to prepare for that influx more effectively. It seems to me that if you have lots of money, you can live pretty well in Sarasota County, but even wealthy people are facing and will face problems created by over-crowding. I admit that, like many people in my situation, I prefer to leave these decisions to others, but I recognize that citizens' apathy can lead to the victory of special interests. I am willing to participate in a SCOPE workshop because I figure it's time I get involved rather than just complain.

**JANET M.:** I am a teacher in the Sarasota County Public School system. I am also a single mother with two kids who are students in that system, grades 3 and 5. I moved to Sarasota five years ago and expect to make this community my permanent home. As a person whose job is to help young people become self-supporting, responsible adults, I try to be an optimistic person. I admit, however, that I see many potential problems for this community over the coming decade. In particular, I see a growing disparity between the community's tax base and the needs for public services such as education and relief of traffic congestion. The problem here seems to be the gap between the old and young, the rich and poor, and the haves and have-nots. Teachers like me probably see this more clearly than my neighbors who are retired. Maybe it's easy, once your own kids are grown and away from home, to forget what it was like 25 years earlier. The community may, however, pay a high price for problems stemming from such "memory loss."

What I would like to see over the next 10 years is a bridging of gaps among people of different ages, backgrounds, and needs. I would like to see local taxpayers become more willing to pay higher taxes for better schools. I would like to see more attention given to the problems of single parents such as myself, by providing more after-school activities, better daycare for preschoolers, and better public transit systems for people who don't or can't drive a car. What I expect to see happen is a continuation of the problems we have today. I believe this because I think these problems stem from traditions – of tax-resistance by retirees, for instance – which is difficult if not impossible to change.

**TRENTON W.:** I am the owner of TMW Builders. To some "slow-the-growth" people on this panel and indeed throughout the Sarasota community, I may be seen as the enemy because my company and others like it play such a major role in the construction of new residential and commercial developments. From a developer's perspective, however, there is a simple business principle involved. We are merely supplying a product that's demanded by our customers. We are also, I might add, trying to supply what we sell in an effective, competitive, law-abiding, and profitable way. In the American capitalist system, no company can stay in business long without making a profit. And indeed, no company can make a profit without efficient business practices that result in satisfied customers. Most of the people my company serves are smart enough to judge if we are ethical and effective at what we do, and so are most of the government and industry officials that regulate our activities. Unfortunately, however, many of our critics remain unaware of the tradeoffs faced in the growth of a community. They arm themselves only with the "facts" they want to hear, not with a balanced view. I have built my company over the past 20

years from a one-man operation to a business that today employs more than five hundred people and pays millions every year in taxes that support schools, law enforcement, and other public services. I am proud to be a part of this community.

What I expect will occur in greater Sarasota over the next 10 years is continued growth, as more and more retiring Baby Boomers move to this area. The demographic trends point to this scenario for communities throughout the nation's Sun Belt. Sarasota has many attractions to offer, especially to affluent, well-educated retirees. What I hope is that this growth, and the public infrastructure to support it, will be wisely planned and managed by people in my industry, by public officials, and by the voters. For this to happen, however, we need an ongoing process of education and citizen participation, not propaganda and bickering. We need people to understand that the world they live in will eventually be passed on to their children and grandchildren. We need to prepare for that world with at least as much fairness, common sense, and community-mindedness as our parents and grandparents did for us.

**LAVERNE A.:** My family and I have lived in the Laurel community for more than eighty years. I was born there in 1923, and so was my late husband Thomas. I've seen a lot of change in the neighborhood. I guess the rich people in the county have a different view, but as far as my friends and I are concerned, we just want to keep the neighborhood the way it was. I worry about some of these young kids stealing and getting mixed up with drugs. My neighbor Mary had her house broken into a while back, and that scared all of us. And now recently we've been having problems with the water supply in town. They say it's because of over-development, but I guess they must mean what is happening outside of Laurel. Hardly anybody has built any new houses there, except for some being put up now with help from the Laurel Civic Association. The thing my older neighbors and I need help with is keeping up with repairs on our properties. I see that the state government has passed us over in that new Urban Front Porch program. Some people say it's because government people outside of Sarasota think our county is already rich, so why give money for projects down there. What I would like to see happen is for ordinary folks like me and my neighbors to be able to live in our own homes as long as we are able, and not to have to worry about crime or other problems. We've already done a lot of worrying raising our own kids, and now that we've gotten older, we deserve a quiet, peaceful life.

**LOUISE P.:** First off, let me emphasize how glad I am that my husband Peter and I moved to Sarasota about 15 years ago. We had a successful business in this community until last year, when we sold it and retired from that activity. Like a lot of our friends, however, we remain almost as busy now as we did when we had our travel agency. As a person who has been involved in arts activities and organizations most of my life, I find Sarasota a wonderful place to live.

What I expect to see over the coming decade is an increase in arts activity. We have a broad variety of attractions that appeal to many different tastes and preferences. In the performing arts, Sarasota residents and visitors enjoy professional orchestra, opera, theater, and ballet. Annual festivals for jazz and cinema attract large audiences. Remodeling of the Van Wezel Performing

Arts Hall will be completed in October 2000, and this will mean more and bigger national and international acts for local audiences. In the visual arts, we have the Ringling Museum, as well as the Center for the Visual Arts, many local galleries, smaller exhibit spaces in the area, the Ringling School of Art and Design, and of course dozens of professional artists who make their homes in this area. We also have dedicated groups that present poetry readings, reading festivals, and similar events.

None of this would be possible without support from Sarasota taxpayers and patrons. What I hope will happen in the next 10 years, along with a steady growth in arts activities, is an increase in private and public funding for arts programs, especially those that involve local youth and senior citizens. We know that such activities attract not only new year-'round residents but also many tourists and seasonal residents, so the arts are an important factor in the overall economic health and cultural vitality of the community. Many of these newcomers, like residents already here, are affluent, well-educated, sophisticated people who contribute greatly to the Sarasota area's prosperity. In other words, they are the kind of people Sarasota needs in order to thrive as an attractive, stable, and interesting place to live in the future.

**JACK T.:** I appreciate being invited to contribute my opinions to this panel. As a person who has lived in South County for the past four years, I make no claim to be an old-timer. However, I do have an interest in the history of the area, and I am upset that so few residents care about the preservation of older structures. I have worked as a volunteer at Historic Spanish Point and am very pleased that this site dating back to both prehistoric and historic times has received strong support from private and tax-supported funding sources. Generally, people in Sarasota County have settled here from somewhere else, and thus they have few personal or family links with local history. You usually have to go to small towns like neighboring Arcadia in DeSoto County to find many families with Florida roots dating back to the nineteenth century.

What I expect will happen over the next ten years is, I'm sorry to say, a continued disregard of local history by the majority of taxpayers in this county. What I hope will happen, of course, is that more people will join existing local historic societies and other groups that are working to preserve landmarks and artifacts from the past. This requires a consistent education effort, and particularly needs support among schoolchildren. If we can stimulate an interest in history in youngsters, some of these kids will grow up to become adults with an interest in historic preservation. That is my personal goal and the goal of many of my history-minded friends.

**DAVID M.:** As a person who attended public school in Venice from the fourth grade and later went to Pine View for high school, I think I have a good knowledge of the Sarasota area. Now, as a student at New College, I am still part of the community but am very busy with classes and other campus activities. For young people like me, the Sarasota area seems stodgy and too much geared to the interests of families and senior citizens. A lot of my college friends who have come here from cities up north like Chicago or Boston really like the beaches and the sunshine. But most of us go to Tampa or Miami for a fun weekend, if we have the time and money to do that. Almost none of my friends plans to stay in this area after finishing degrees because there just

aren't a lot of opportunities for good-paying jobs here. Except for jobs with companies like Arthur Andersen, most openings seem to be in service positions for restaurants and tourist businesses. Also, the majority of New College graduates go on to graduate school, so they look for the best deals they can find in terms of career interests and financial support, and those are usually far away from Sarasota.

What I expect is that this community will not change much in the next 10 years. According to what I've read, the majority of residents will continue to be retired people. My grandparents, who live in Venice and are now in their mid-70's, are probably typical of people who will continue to reside in this area. What I would like to see is more attention paid to the needs of younger people, especially those of college age. Most people in Sarasota would be horrified if this place became popular with college kids during spring break because they've seen negative stories about Fort Lauderdale and Miami Beach. I'm not saying that this area needs to go to such an extreme, but it would be nice to have music in downtown Sarasota after 10:00 p.m. The way it is today, it often seems as if the whole community were one giant nursing home.

**HELEN R.:** Let me begin by saying that I am both optimistic and realistic about Sarasota's future. As a person who has been elected for three terms to serve as a member of the County Commission, I have seen what can happen when people work closely together to meet common challenges. And I have seen the opposite – the political gridlock and animosity that result when people talk **at** instead of **with** one another.

What I expect will happen over the next 10 years in our community is more of what we have already seen during the past two decades. That is, we will see continued debate over how and where the community should grow. This is perhaps the single most important and divisive issue in our county, and it is largely up to the voters to determine how it will be resolved. What I hope will happen is that the number and variety of citizens who take an active role in understanding and contributing to this debate will increase. I have done an informal survey of individuals who show up at our public County Commission meetings, and I see familiar faces again and again. It would be pleasing to me and, I believe, my fellow commissioners to see new faces at these meetings. Our community depends on fresh ideas from sincere, committed, and informed citizens. Democracy is, of course, hard work. It takes time, attention, and effort. It would be much simpler to have a political system in which we could all relax and depend upon a wise monarch to make decisions about public issues that would please all of us. That of course, exists only in a dream world, not in Sarasota County. So the message remains familiar: if you want to have an influence on the decision-making process, then you have to become involved in and make a contribution to that process.

## NEXT STEPS

This Community Snapshot is merely one of many tools to be used for stimulating open discussion of issues important to the Sarasota area's future. We invite you to use this material as a springboard for formulating and refining your own views as you participate in the SCOPE Visioning Process.

We close with a brief comment from SCOPE chairman Dan Bailey:

*“Without a shared vision of where we want to go, finding solutions to tough issues like hurricane preparedness, funding of arts and music in our schools, and meeting the varied needs of our elderly citizens will become all the more difficult. ... SCOPE is not a one-time event; it will bear no ‘expiration date.’ It will still be going strong 10, 20, 30 years from now, encouraging new leadership, renewing our sense of community, and bringing about positive change for our citizens. Together we can make Sarasota County the finest possible place to live, work and play.”*

Source: Dan Bailey, "Community solutions take more than talk," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, January 9, 2000, page 1-F.