FALL 2025

CASA COASTER

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SUMMERTIME TENSIONS RELAX

Restaurateur feared lockout as family traveled overseas for visa

The Kaada family did not have a relaxing summer vacation.

Mohamed Kaada, the owner of NYPD Pizza and Café de Paris in Casa Costa's promenade, emigrated to Florida in 2017. His wife Karima, kids Shirine, Lyna and Kail, arrived with a non-immigrant E-2 visa based on business investment, a document that renews indefinitely so long as their businesses operate.



MOHAMED KAADA

The Kaadas visited family on the French Riviera, awaiting their fate.

The kids enrolled in school as Mr. Kaada used the business acumen he developed in Paris to develop "virtual kitchen" concepts and an app for food deliveries and other on-demand services.

Mr. Kaada was the operating partner with the Casa Costa pizza and coffee shop tenant before he bought the businesses in 2023. His family's time commitment to the restaurants was so great that they moved into the south tower last year to reduce commute time.

The Kaada family hosted Casa Costa residents for a 4th of July dinner last year with traditional Algerian cuisine that Ms. Kaada prepared. "Independence Day is very emotional for me," Mr. Kaada said last summer. "It was our dream to come to America, to the land of opportunity. We're very grateful."

Mr. Kaada is proud to have arrived in Florida through legal channels. He had long trained his eyes on an EB-5 visa, the original version of the Trump administration's "Gold Card" visa selling for $5 million. Only 10,000

Please turn to page A3

Crackdowns delay construction

Rainy weather wasn't the only factor to blame for summer construction slowdowns in South Florida.

"I've insisted that Florida be the tip of the spear when it comes to state support of federal immigration enforcement," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said late last year. U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officers arrested 1,120 in one week in April. On May 29, ICE arrested more than 100 workers at construction sites in Tallahassee.

Migrant workers across the state were spooked.

"If you say you're going after criminals, you don't have [agents] sitting outside a construction site all day waiting for workers to come out," said Mariana Blanco, the director of a non-profit in Lake Worth Beach that assists uprooted families. She said "a flip switched" after Trump's January inauguration, as cars began patrolling the streets, and cops raided grocery stores, churches and schools.

The impact locally has been less pronounced so far, said J.J. Rodriguez, the project manager at Valcourt Group handling Casa Costa's repair and paint job. He said that one morning this summer, he feared that eight workers had "self deported" when they didn't show up to work. The next day he spotted them at another construction site nearby.

Then on Oct. 2, workers here temporarily fled on rumors that a raid would round up everyone, regardless of their status. Mr. Rodriguez is still confident Valcourt has the manpower to finish ahead of schedule. *CC*

INSIDE

KW TAKES THE REINS
A new management company assumes control after a long summer of interviews. **A7**

OPINION

After a hot summer, it's time to sweat the details

BY J.T. HARRINGTON

When I heard rumors that Casa Costa buyers and owners were somehow blacklisted from the best financing rates, I did some homework.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are giants that buy or guarantee 70% of the mortgages in the U.S. It's not just about the borrower's credentials. The agencies publish guidelines so they don't lend in risky condo properties – projects with low reserves, serious litigation or deferred maintenance. Most loan originators use these rules because they plan to sell the debt to these agencies. They inspect so-called "condo questionnaires" that describe each project's profile.

Freddie Mac typically deals with single-family homes, but I confirmed with them that Casa Costa complies with their standards. I continued to dig.

In March, the *Wall Street Journal* published a front-page story about the secret mortgage blacklist, and I wrote a letter to the editor about my findings.

Casa Costa is blacklisted because of a typo.

Sometime in 2022, Castle Group completed a questionnaire for a lender and checked off a box that we are a hotel – a non-starter for the agency. Fannie Mae added Casa Costa to its banned buildings list, cutting off access to low interest rate financing.

The inaccuracy – and its domino effect – is challenging to reverse because our governing documents are a mess and Boynton Beach zoning requirements are tricky.

"Our association is ahead of many of our condominium peers in ensuring a structurally sound and well-capitalized community," I wrote the *Journal*. "But the owners I represent have a shrunken universe of buyers and lower property values due to an opaque agency unwilling to uncheck a box."

A reporter called me a few weeks later and connected me to a contact at Fannie Mae. I've also engaged the mayor and the city's director of planning for help because of the unusual designation of the guest suites on the lower floors that were originally planned as a hotel. So far, we're still blacklisted.

* * *

This frustrating journey is among the reasons I'm excited for a fresh start with a new professional management company. We're endured too many bad habits, old technology implemented sloppily – and too little attention to detail.

In the transition to KW, we had a choice to hang on to familiar systems like BuildingLink – but why? We've been paying five figures per year to use the glitchy platform, but have never activated included features like payments that would simplify things.

KW developed a bespoke solution for condo high-rises that will be our new online hub. (Same goes for condo questionnaires, so no more typos.) Let's be patient with the changeover and let's remain open to different approaches and processes. I'm betting that in six months, we won't be looking back with nostalgia.

The board deliberately abandoned the hodgepodge of recordkeeping and inconsistency in favor of a hard reset of systems and expectations.

Better a clean break than an open wound.

J.T. Harrington is the president of the board and is still trying to fix the typo.

DUNCE OF THE MONTH

On Sept. 5, someone vandalized both walls of the entire hallway on the south tower's fourth floor with a key or knife. The extensive scratches included an expletive.

CC



RICHARD ALLENDE

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SOUTH FLORIDA'S
#1 POOLSIDE AMUSEMENT

J.T. Harrington, Publisher
John Battista, Head Writer
Gayle Brousseau, Head of Advertising

Send contributions and corrections to **casa.coaster.news@gmail.com**.

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Restaurant family stuck in France

Continued from page A1

EB-5 visas are available annually to foreigners that build businesses and create jobs, but they offer a path to citizenship after five years. He started applying for one years ago, citing his restaurant and technology investments, but his immigration attorney discouraged him. He paid her $38,000 to navigate backlogs and changing policies.

Meanwhile the Trump administration was moving the goalposts on the visa he'd already earned, complicating previously routine renewals with more scrutiny. Approvals became a slower and less predictable process. When his oldest daughter became old enough to drive, the problems began.

The Florida Department of Motor Vehicles refused to consider her for a license because of an expired I-94 form, which is an electronic record of immigration status tied to a visa. The challenge was that only U.S. embassies abroad issue such credentials, so the only recourse was to return to Paris in person.

Such "visa stamping trips" have been stranding many U.S. residents abroad due to increased scrutiny and longer processing times. After reading headlines about getting stuck in bureaucratic and political mud, Mr. Kaada considered the possibility of his family being denied a return trip, but he trusted the process.

He didn't entirely trust his attorney, though. So when the family of five flew to France in early July, he brought 40 lbs. of files that his attorney said she'd filed..

"Our appointment began as a disaster," Mr. Kaada told the *Casa Coaster*. "My lawyer didn't include the rest of my family in the paperwork, so the embassy wasn't ready for all five of us. She told them all I do is make coffee."

.The embassy officer took pity on the Kaada clan because of the three underage children. This entry point gave Mr. Kaada the opportunity to present his business case with his trademark charm.

After he explained his journey from chicken wing joints to a delivery app that created dozens of jobs, the officer was impressed. He deserved an EB-5 visa, if everything checked out after agents reviewed his banking activity. The officer took their French passports and told them to check a website for status updates.

For weeks, the family visited family in France while they awaited a decision. The kids hung out with cousins on summer break but worried themselves about getting back to Boynton in time for the fall semester of school.

When the visa website flashed "accepted," Mr. Kaada went to the authorites, only to be told he needed a tracking number he was never provided, and even then to wait another ten days.

He bought pastries from a bakery across the street and brought them to the embassy to ask again. Three minutes later, he had five passports and the golden visa.

Despite the hefty price, he immediately bought last-minute plane tickets home. It had been six weeks. "I didn't want to stay a single day longer," he said. "It was worth it. A thousand percent." CC

RENOVATION SPOTLIGHT

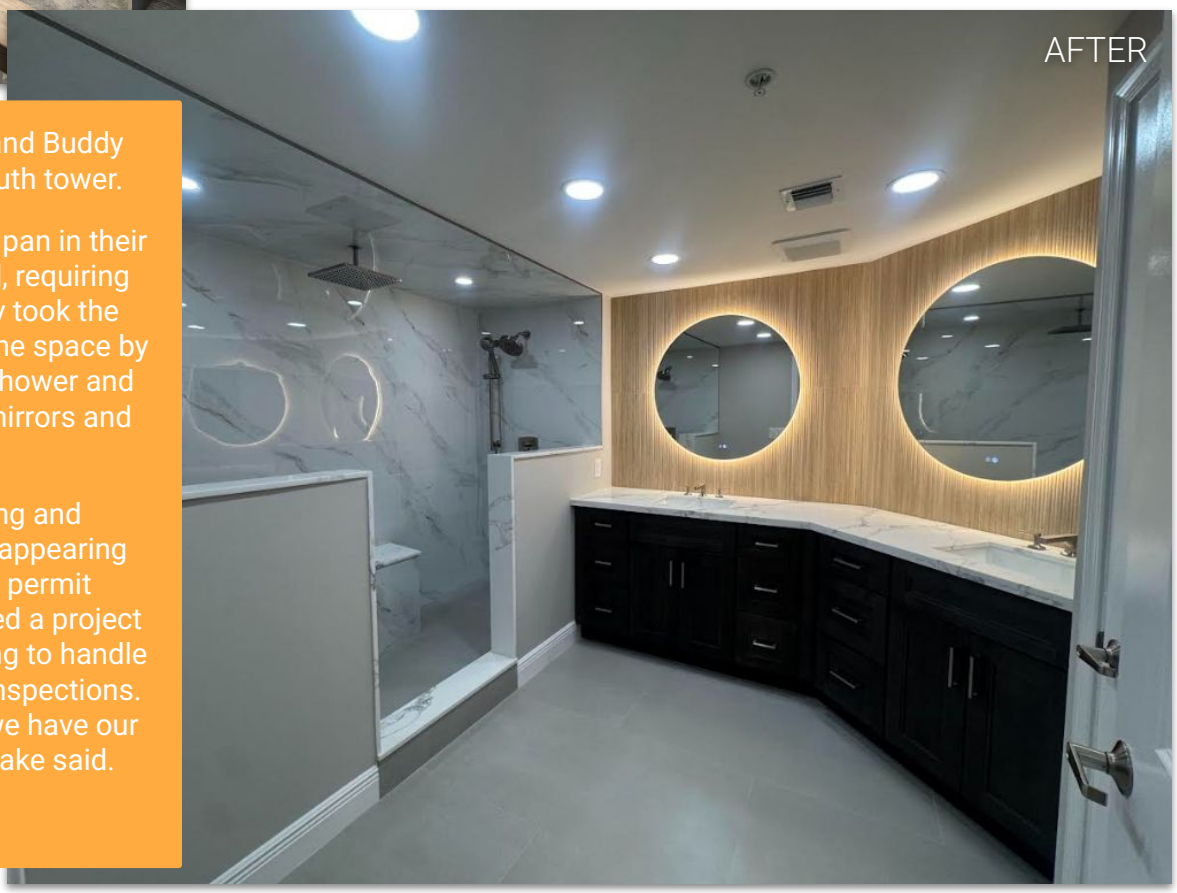
Shower leak inspiration in the south tower





PROJECT
- ❑ Shower fixtures & faucets from Brizo
- ❑ Vanities & quartz from Half Price Kitchen in Ft. Lauderdale
- ❑ LED mirrors from TETOTE
- ❑ Neorest RS bidet toilet from Toto

TEAM
- ❑ Essential Renovation, Sunrise, Fla. (contractor)
- ❑ Steven Mills, Boynton Beach, Fla. (project manager)



In 2013, Annie, Andrew and Buddy Blake moved into the south tower.

Early last year, the shower pan in their primary bathroom leaked, requiring emergency repairs. They took the opportunity to transform the space by doubling the size of the shower and replacing the cabinetry, mirrors and lighting.

The project was a long and frustrating journey of disappearing contractors and failed permit applications until they hired a project manager within the building to handle paperwork, vendors and inspections. “It took forever, but now we have our own private spa,” Ms. Blake said.

CC

CASACOSTA SOCIAL

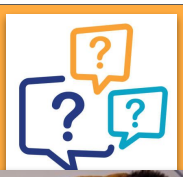


Poolside mingle

The last Thursday of each month @ 5 p.m.

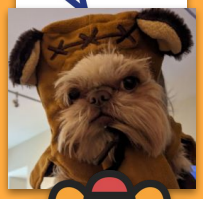
Trivia night

NYPD Pizza: Sunday, Oct. 12 @ 5pm



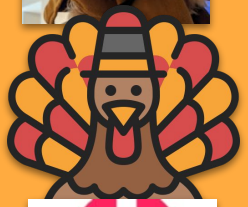
Halloween pet parade

Sunday, Oct. 26 @ 5:30pm



Thanksgiving kickoff

Sunday, Nov. 16 @ 5 p.m.



Hotwire holiday party

Thursday, Dec. 4 @ 6 p.m.



CasaCostaBB.com

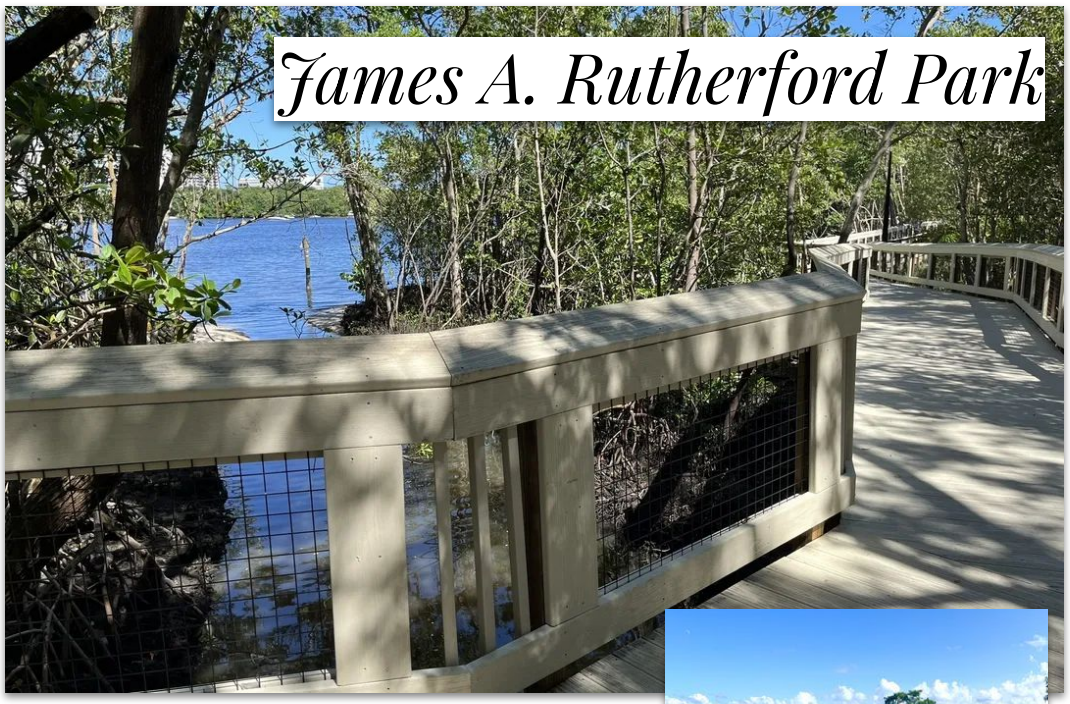
MR. B'S NEIGHBORHOOD

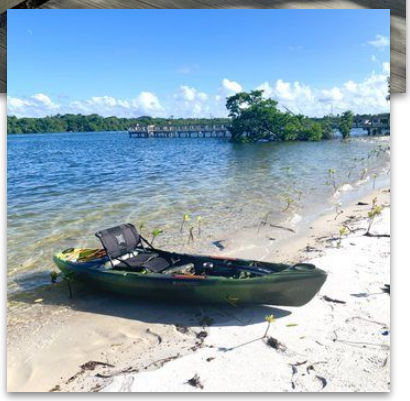


Boynton Beach and its surrounding areas feature a variety of parks and walking trails that showcase Florida's natural beauty and rich diversity. Each park offers a chance to connect with nature and each path tells its own story, from the rich ecosystems of the wetlands to the quiet beauty of native scrub.

As the community continues to grow, these trails remain timeless havens for those seeking tranquility and natural wonder.

James A. Rutherford Park





This Boca Raton park blends recreational facilities with natural beauty. Situated along the Intracoastal Waterway, it features athletic fields, modern playgrounds and scenic waterfront views. Whether walking along paved trails or relaxing in a picnic area, visitors can enjoy the view of the water and the many activities on the intracoastal – a reminder of our area's coastal charm.. CC

BOYNTON BEAT

Mayor advances cleanup promise

In her campaign for mayor, Rebecca Shelton said she was frustrated that parts of the city look like trash.

She told voters that East Boynton, in particular, suffers from a lack of private governance since its streets are primarily independent single-family homes, unlike the planned communities farther west.

"Lacking homeowners' associations or gated patrols leaves many streets with insufficient policing and code enforcement," she said.

Her early efforts to clean up the streets ran into snags. The 150-member police force wasn't focused on the issue and a small, separate team of code enforcement officers relied on an outdated set of laws and standards.

In addition to increased police patrols, Ms. Shelton sought cooperation between departments. "I think code enforcement and public safety should be under the same category, because we're going to get the community cleaned up a lot faster that way," she said.

Cleaning up the rulebook took more time, due to the constraints of the government to enact new laws without public hearings over several meetings. The commissioners first directed its staff to research and recommend changes in March.

At a Sept. 2 meeting, the commissioners voted to amend the city charter – a sort of "constitution" with laws and controls – to clarify rules regarding abandoned property, gambling, loitering and unauthorized parking. The city hadn't updated its parking regulations in over twenty years; the law permitted vehicles to be parked on public and private lawns, and to block driveways.

The city employs ten code enforcement officers, but they typically only investigate when someone complains. The department looks into alleged violations – common ones include strewn



garbage, uncut grass or unpermitted work – and sends a letter to the property owner. If the violation isn't corrected, the city can impose fines and liens on the property owner.

"We now have a dedicated code enforcement officer on the east side seven days a week," the mayor's office told the *Casa Coaster*.

Before the repair and painting project kicked off, enforcement officers sent Casa Costa a violation in late 2023 for having a dirty building. The board appeased the city's concerns by promising to begin the large-scale facade work.

Then, after a resident complained in July, Boynton Beach dispatched inspectors and then sent a warning letter to fix a broken latch on the poolside fence, to patch a tripping hazard in a staff room and to repaint handicap parking spaces that had been converted and assigned to owners under the advice of the association's previous attorney.

Ryan Booker, then property manager, addressed the allegations, but he questioned why city resources were involved in a private community.

"It's bizarre to tattle to the city when Casa Costa has professional managers and a board," he said. *CC*

City buys roach motel

Fears of hypothetical unchecked project drove split decision

The Community Redevelopment Agency bought one of the most visible gateways into the city as officials piece together a new downtown corridor.

The only problem? The 2.1-acre property comes with a seedy motel. The 4-story Inn at Boynton Beach, built in 1981, once operated as a Holiday Inn but is now an eyesore with chipped siding and rusty exterior air conditioning units.

The property, located at 480 Boynton Beach Blvd., rented rooms for as little as $66 per night in recent years and nearly half of its Google reviews are one star.

Over the summer, the CRA board met with the property owner, Ajit Asrani, but balked at the $11 million price tag he was asking. Mr. Asrani threatened to sell the property to a developer for a Live Local workforce housing project if the city didn't act. A new state law allows such projects to circumvent local government control, potentially permitting a project as tall as Casa Costa on the land without needing typical approvals. The CRA members empowered their chair, Rebecca Shelton, a realtor, to negotiate independently with Ms. Asrani.

At an Aug. 12 meeting, the Inn was on the agenda, the price now at $8.1 million. Commissioner Thomas Turkin urged his colleagues to move swiftly, citing a recent arrest at the motel for human

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BOYNTON BEAT

CRA buying Inn at Boynton Beach for $8.1 million

Continued from page A6

trafficking with an underage girl.

"You name the crime, it's happened at the Inn," said board member Aimee Kelly. However, Ms. Kelley declined throw her weight behind the purchase. She suggested that Mr. Asrani had already accepted $3 million from the state Department of Transportation for a slice of the property slated for future highway expansion, making the lot smaller and less valuable.



GOOGLE

SEEING GREEN: The motel pool one reviewer called an "overall spooky experience" sits on a prime lot.

Board member Angela Cruz agreed with Ms. Kelley's thinking and said she doubted that private developers wanted the property.

The owner's attorney pushed back hard. "It's an ideal spot," he told the CRA board. "It's got great visibility off I-95 … There are people looking at it for a number of different uses … it's a desirable property. It's up to you."

Ms. Shelton noted that she was disappointed with the motel owner's stubbornness during negotiations, but the real estate's location is too good to pass up, especially if it means shutting down a dangerous crime zone. Ms. Cruz changed her mind when the assistant director suggested that the city could obtain grants to offset demolition costs. The terms of the purchase include the building being delivered unoccupied.

The board agreed to the purchase in a 4-1 vote. They have no plans for redevelopment, but noted that clearing the land may cost $1 million.

Mr. Asrani called the deal a "poor investment" for him. He bought the building in 2012 for nearly $4 million. CC

KW takes the reins

Board replaces management provider in place since property was built in 2010

Behind the scenes, Casa Costa's board of directors had a very busy summer. They revealed the outcome of a series of closed meetings in a Aug. 27 letter to residents: Castle Group is out.

"It's bittersweet," said Robert Hall, the board secretary and townhome owner since 2015. "I've grown fond of a lot of the staff at the property, but we need to move on."

As detailed in the letter and at a meeting held Sept. 9, the board worked unsuccessfully with its longtime management company to address what it called shortcomings tied to budgeting, bookkeeping, security and corporate support.

The board distributed a proposal packet to over a dozen providers that it identified; the companies spanned from local family-owned businesses to publicly traded giants. Several of the companies toured Casa Costa and told the board that the "request for proposals" was the most detailed and thoughtful presentation they'd seen. The board reviewed over 700 pages of submissions and independently scored them.

This tally winnowed the field to three finalists, who sat for interviews with the board.

"Calculating the all-in price for property management services can be tricky," said Frank Ameo, a board director. "They each have their own method, which makes it hard to compare proposals. We looked for value but we don't need to hire the lowest cost provider."

In the end, the choice was obvious to the board, which voted unanimously to negotiate an agreement with KW Property Management & Consulting. The engagement began Oct. 1.

The fees charged under KW are lower and more predictable than other options, but price wasn't the most important factor, said Jake Harrington, Casa Costa's president, who reluctantly spearheaded the RFP initiative.

"Our property is tough, with a ton of different stakeholders. We need a team that likes a challenge," he said, adding that construction defects, complex mechanical systems and short-term rental headaches add to the management difficulty.

"KW's specialties are high rise engineering, accounting and hospitality," he said. "It's the fresh start we need." CC

Property handoff was trial by fire

Castle Group threw professional courtesies away with the keys, according to the incoming management team.

KW Property Management associates were left without fobs, passwords and up-to-date vendor or resident lists. As they took over management, fire alarms were blaring, elevators were offline and the trash hadn't been taken out.

"It was an unnecessarily tough test," said Sara Forcinio, KW district manager. CC

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