FEBRUARY

CASA COASTER

This publication of the Social & Welcoming Committee does not necessarily reflect the views of the Board of Directors nor managing agent of Casa Costa.

February 1, 2024 | Volume III, Issue Two | CasaCoaster.com

What's News

Casa Costa

★ The board finalized an agreement with Valcourt for building repairs scheduled to kick off in March and last 18 months.

Neighborhood

★ City officials hoped to replace an aging post office with a reimagined version down the street. **A6**

FEATURED

OPINION
How to make short-term stays for guests feel like home. **A2**

MARNA'S FAMILY
Helping each other stay afloat. **A7**

WELCOME WAGON
A Queens native can't wait to connect. **A8**

EST. 2022
CASA COASTER
Boynton Beach, Fla.
CasaCoaster.com
SOUTH FLORIDA'S #1 POOLSIDE AMUSEMENT

Street upgrades unleashed



CANDACE AYERS

THIS IS PAWSOME: Boynton officials wrapped up plans to clean up the shoreline of the pond and add parking spaces to Boynton Beach Blvd. by unveiling a dog park at the road's end.



COASTER QUIZ

Casa Costa currently has four pet waste disposal stations placed along the pondside path and in the garage for cleaning up after dogs.

How many poop bags are used in a single month?

What's your guess? Find the answer on page A8 in the classified ads.

Controversies swirl at city hall

Workplace dramas are unfolding inside Boynton Beach's government. Turf wars, hysterics, sparring officials and battles between fresh faces and the old guard have dominated recent public meetings.

An election in 2022 elevated Ty Penserga to mayor. Born in the Philippines, Mr. Penserga made city history by becoming its first mayor from that region, as well as its first to be openly gay. At 34, he's also among its youngest.

Having served as commissioner for over two years before his election, he is a veteran compared to two newcomers also elected that year. All three politicians are in their early 30s. "That's a great deal of instability and change," said Mr. Penserga at the time.

Meanwhile, Woodrow Hay, who represents Casa Costa's district, has served since 2007 and was last re-elected by four votes in a run-off. Mr. Hay turns 80 this year.

While this isn't the first youth movement in city leadership – in 2016, three political newcomers aged 27 to 33 also formed a majority – the dynamic underscores frictions in a city trying to shed its reputation as a sleepy enclave that can't get out of its own way. As Boynton's population has doubled in the last four decades, the median age of residents has crept downward, to 41 years old, according to the last census data.

When Casa Costa was first built, it was called Promenade, named for a theoretical walkway connecting shops downstairs to the marina to a new downtown on Ocean Ave. Five years in, the rebranding under new developers to "beach house" sought to focus buyers instead on the ocean and the property's proximity to airports and other cities like Delray Beach. Another decade

Please turn to page A4

OPINION

My short-term stay story

BY JOHN BATTISTA

Ever since we sold our home in Connecticut, we still wanted to somehow return to New Haven for home-cooked holiday dinners with our sons and social gatherings with friends. We investigated extended-stay hotels and various home rentals on AirBnB and Vrbo before a friend told us about a company called Hyatus Stays.

We've since booked homes with them for our last three trips and could not be more pleased. The company only works with property owners in a few markets, but there are similar services everywhere. They work with unit owners, especially in newly built properties, furnish and book stays, including nightly. The apartment we rented in December is in a building with over 80 permanent residents. The opinion piece last month about the typical check-in process and guest experience at Casa Costa ("Shut the transient cabinet," Jan. 2024) inspired me to share what made our trip memorable for the right reasons.

"Checking in" was seamless, in part because we dealt with zero people. On the morning of our stay, I received an email with the process. A code assigned to me let me into a side door of the building and into the apartment, where I retrieved a key fob, parking pass and instructions on where to park. The welcome email made two key points: To maintain the homey feel of the building, avoid waiting in the lobby before your check-in time. And the front desk is not associated with the hotel program, so is unable to assist with any questions during your stay; instead contact us.

We followed the procedures, never bothered anyone that worked in the building and used the technology to enter and exit. Everything we needed to know was in the email or printed out for us in the apartment. The detailed check-in information included photos and even a video on where to park and how to navigate the property. We used the amenities and felt quite comfortable in our "home away from home." We even put up our own Christmas tree so we could have a traditional Christmas morning and dinner with our sons (now grown-ups, but still get their stockings stuffed).

I don't have all the answers to fix the "resort guest" situation here, but surely it's a combination of technology and hospitality, rather than the status quo of expecting building staff to moonlight as hoteliers. One of my sons stayed here for one Thanksgiving in a short-term unit. As an insider, I was able to show him around the place, but I can only imagine what a confusing and unwelcoming maze it is for first-time guests. As an owner, I was myself confused for months.

In fact, I joined the Social & Welcoming Committee with a mission to create a better orientation process for new residents. We've made great progress, and I encourage the resort suite owners to invest in a better welcome mat too.

When Mr. Battista isn't traveling, he's a wannabe bartender downstairs. Cheers!

LETTERS TO THE PUBLISHER

I don't typically write letters like this, but when I read about potential changes to access security ("Shut the transient cabinet," Jan. 2024), I realized a letter is like a free bonus ad.

I came into the position of installing new door locks for residents of Casa Costa out of necessity. My own unit's lock broke and left me trapped in my apartment. Early warning signs that the original locks that came with the building are beginning to fail include a tell-tale drooping lever handle and a latch that doesn't fully spring back into position on its own.

If you suspect yours might be on the fritz, there is a replacement lock identical to the original. However the cost differential is not much more to upgrade to the board-approved Schlage Encode, which is a modern keyed lock with the same functions as the original, and much more. Give anyone a personal 4-digit access code via the app – it's as easy as adding a phone contact, and is programmed to work only when they're scheduled to be there.

If something unexpected comes up, you can quickly let someone in with your phone, whether you're at Banana Boat or thousands of miles away. I have installed dozens of these new locks for Casa Costa owners, and their reaction has been, without exception, one of delighted surprise at its features and ease of use.

If you are an owner who rents a short-term unit, you would never have to worry about handing keys over to a guest, and you would make the check-in process easier all around, especially for the front desk.

STEVEN MILLS
casacostalocks@gmail.com

I support the ideas for the transient units. It's extremely important to embrace their presence, recognize the challenges they represent and realize their potential. They are here to stay. Now, how do we co-exist?

Casa Costa's situation is not unique; there are other condominiums with a similar setup. Perhaps we could study the design of local condo hotels.

What can we implement and eliminate that would strengthen our connection with resort guests? Improved relations equals improved community!

Eliminating the term "transients" is a good start as it creates negativity. Let's keep this very important conversation going – we can make this work!

ROBERT HALL

CASACOASTERNEWS@GMAIL.COM

ADVERTISEMENT

YOUR CASA COSTA REAL ESTATE TEAM



Andre Apicella



Ivonne Romano



Lisa Fletcher



Over $6 Million in Closed Sales in Casa Costa and Marina Village in 2023

For Sale Now in Casa Costa:









CASA COSTA AND BEYOND:
North Tower 1BR - $299,995
New To Market 1BR - $314,500
Mariner's Cay 2BR Steal - $299,995
South Palm Beach A1A 2BR - $299,000
Sterling Village 1BR 55+ - $117,500

See All Our Listings at WaterfrontHomesTeam.com

561 503 8653

Waterfront Homes and Condos LLC

* Conditions apply. Call for details.

City hall of HR controversies

Continued from page A1

later, plans for an expanded downtown remain empty lots.

Boynton's structure is a "commissioner-manager" style, common to local government and similar to a publicly traded corporation or condominium association. Five elected commissioners, including a mayor, develop an overall vision and budget, much like a corporate or HOA board of directors. An appointed city manager implements the policies, like a chief executive officer or property manager. In Boynton's case, the group of five commissioners also serves as the board for the Community Redevelopment Agency, which was created in 1982. The CRA is a group of 10 that guides construction planning and improvement projects in East Boynton. A portion of property taxes collected in the 1,650 acres within their purview – mostly along N. Federal Hwy. – fund the CRA's revitalization efforts.

Over 800 people work for the city. These are their stories.

CRA TURF WAR

On Oct. 10, board member Aimee Kelley added a last-minute item to the evening's agenda: "Discussion on lack of communication between the CRA staff and City staff." The seemingly innocuous insertion soon turned ugly.

For years, the CRA held events like Pirate Fest. After a 2019 law change limiting such agencies in Florida from paying for events directly, Thuy Shutt, the CRA's executive director said the plan was for city employees to take them over from CRA staff. As the pandemic caused officials to cancel events altogether in 2020, the handoff never happened. At a budget meeting in the summer of 2022, Ms. Shutt suggested a list of eight events, each with a date to be determined, to a frustrated Ms. Kelley.

"The CRA was going to partner with the city to transition [events] and not just say 'we're done,'" said Ms. Kelley. "Nobody has it on their radar, nobody has it on their budget. It just died." City commissioners had fired long-time city manager, Lori LaVerriere, three months earlier, complicating transition plans. The following month the commissioners canceled Pirate Fest, citing logistical and budgetary constraints.

Four months ago, the bungled transition within the walls of city hall resurfaced.

"This is not an easy discussion to have," began Ms. Kelley. She criticized a "tug of war" between departments and recommended a change in CRA leadership. She also blamed the stalled Town Square development on CRA mismanagement. Since the 1990s, the city has planned for a hotel, residential buildings and parking garages along Boynton Beach Blvd.; after completing a new city hall, library and public spaces, the selected developer refused to continue building on the land the CRA gave to it.

In early 2022, a divided city council defied the CRA director's recommendation against supporting Canary Village, a 39-unit affordable housing project in the city's historic black community, ⅓ mile from Casa Costa, three blocks north of Boynton Beach Blvd. At the time, one commissioner criticized CRA staffers for dragging out the project. Thomas Turkin, another board member at the October meeting, declined to "discuss someone's shortcomings from the dais" but said he agrees with the criticism.

"I'm kinda shocked to hear what's happening right now. It's kinda scary."

Two other board members were flabbergasted. "I'm kinda shocked to hear what's happening right now," said Angela Cruz. "It's kinda scary, to be honest."

It took Woodrow Hay over 25 minutes to comprehend the nature of the proceedings. "I'm a little slow sometimes," said Mr. Hay, "But I'm just finding out you guys are talking about Thuy? You guys gotta be kidding me. This is mind-boggling. I will not be a part of this, OK? I don't like it. I don't appreciate it."

Ms. Cruz questioned the motivations of her colleagues, praising Ms. Shutt for standing against sweetheart deals with real estate developers. "A vote against Ms. Shutt tonight is a vote for special interests," she said. Mr. Turkin fired back: "I think everyone in the public should take a look at campaign donations. There's only one person sitting up here that hasn't taken anything from a developer or special interests. That's me."

Ms. Kelley called for a vote and the mayor called for a five-minute recess for a "cool down." In a particularly awkward scene during the pause, Mr. Hay hugged Ms. Shutt as the mayor rearranged chairs, inches away and with no eye contact. When the meeting resumed, an audience member sprang to the executive director's defense. "I've seen Thuy work at Westgate CRA, where they don't have a pot to piss in. She made things happen," he said. "This is repugnant."

Mr. Hay described the pending decision in sensational terms: "This board appears to have a hatchet. They are trying to dismantle Boynton Beach. If we don't get this right, generation after generation is gonna suffer." His wife, Mildred Hay, then approached the podium to lecture the board, saying, "I told you when you all first got started, that you didn't have very much experience. You still don't. You don't hold a candle to Thuy."

The board members voted 3-2 in favor of terminating the executive director, with Ms. Cruz and Mr. Hay dissenting. After the vote, Ms. Cruz left the proceedings. The mayor asked the CRA's assistant director, Timothy Tack, to take the vacant job temporarily. After another five-minute recess, he agreed, but only on the condition he be named "acting" (as opposed to "interim") Executive Director and that he simultaneously remain Assistant Director – distinctions apparently important only to Mr. Tack and Dwight Schrute.

HR COMPLAINTS

It's the kind of workplace drama you might take to Human Resources. This time, it's the head of HR complaining about the boss and the lawyer.

The afternoon before a city meeting on Dec. 19, Boynton Beach HR Director Tennille Decoste emailed the mayor that city leaders made inappropriate comments and swept wrongdoing under the rug. Mayor Ty Penserga asked his colleagues at the meeting how to proceed, and they decided to hold a special meeting a week later after they'd reviewed the allegations.

The *Casa Coaster* has reviewed the complaints and timeline:

- **Nov. 20**: The HR director, who is also a candidate for Delray Beach's city commission, said City Manager Dan Dugger and City Attorney Shawna Lamb told she would be investigated for receiving campaign donations from Boynton Beach employees. Ms. Decoste contends that such donations are neither illegal nor unethical.
- **Dec. 7**: Ms. Decoste emailed the mayor she believes the investigation is "tainted and the outcome is predetermined" and that Ms. Lamb told her "we are not going to fire you, we are going to let you resign."
- **Dec. 11**: Deputy City Manager Andrew Mack notified Ms. Decoste that she was being placed on paid administrative leave while an outside firm investigates. The letter urges her to stay away from City Hall or other city-owned property.
- **Dec. 19**: Ms. Decoste sent another email to the mayor, expanding on allegations, alleging that Mr. Dugger said she was "hiring too many black women" and also ignored her complaints that a city employee showed up to a public meeting drunk.

In both emails to the mayor, the HR director accused the city attorney of working against her – despite the attorney "pinky swearing" to confidentiality.

At the Dec. 27 special meeting, the commission discussed whether they could employ a so-called "shade meeting" exempt from Florida Sunshine laws requiring government officials to deliberate in meetings open to the public. They opted to wait for findings from the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics or Office of Inspector General before taking further action.



CITY OF BOYNTON BEACH

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT: A developer built a new city hall and library before refusing to continue with a planned hotel, parking garages and residential buildings, the latest delay toward piecing together a downtown in the works since the 90s.

Mr. Dugger told the local ABC News affiliate that he stood by his staff and looked forward to resolution by an "independent, unbiased investigation" unaffiliated with the city.

TOWN SQUARE REALITY CHECK

At a Dec. 13 workshop meeting, Robert Singer addressed an audience of 20. Mr. Singer is the director of development at Time Equities, the New York-based developer that city officials selected to reimagine and someday complete Town Square, 15 acres of parcels bisected by Ocean Ave. The latest plan includes 898 units of rental housing, 144 hotel rooms, over 2,000 parking spaces and nearly 40,000 square feet of commercial space. A consultant called the design "Spanish eclectic" with white and taupe colors based on how City Hall is painted.

Mr. Singer said that Boynton's labyrinthine approval process means a long road ahead, starting with nine months of trading construction documents and permit applications. He said, "If we're lucky when we get done with all that, then the financial markets and the rental market and everyone under the sun will stand up, we'll be in a position to move forward. My personal hope is that we're in a position in the first or second quarter of 2025 to really break ground. On the first building. Then we'll be online the second quarter of 2028."

He said that part of the challenge is navigating building codes that are at odds with where city officials actually want things built. For instance, zoning requires 75% of retail storefronts on Boynton Beach Blvd. and Seacrest Blvd. while the CRA prefers them on Ocean Ave. Mr. Singer reminded the audience that his firm stepped in to complete a messy project that was not their design in the first place, but said he is committed: "This will be the biggest investment in Boynton in a long time, if not ever." *CC*

Reporting is based on public records and media reports; the Casa Coaster *makes no allegations of wrongdoing.*

City commissioners meet the first and third Tuesday. The CRA Board meets the second Tuesday. Meetings are held at 100 E. Ocean Ave. and online.

Post office building dreams dashed

Boynton Beach leaders want to move the post office two blocks from one side of Boynton Beach Blvd. to the other, creating two mixed-use buildings.

Instead, they are getting just another post office.

Last February, the city's Community Redevelopment Agency paid $1.6 million for 217 N. Seacrest Blvd., where the current facility has operated for six decades. Prior to that, the first stand-alone post office was built on Ocean Ave. in 1911, and managed by Charlie Pierce, one of the "barefoot mailmen" who walked the beaches and crossed the rivers on a 60-mile trek between Hypoluxo to Miami.

Mr. Pierce is the namesake for the 300-unit apartment building approved to replace the retail strip including Hurricane Alley and stretching to Boynton Beach Blvd. That project is mired in litigation by F. Davis Camalier, who owns a small parcel occupied by The Boardwalk Italian Ice & Creamery, which is not part of the project. Mr. Camalier's complaint regards alley closures but the the would-be developer of The Pierce call the claims "nothing more than a shakedown."

In 1929 a new post office was built on Ocean Ave. Four months later a deadly hurricane destroyed buildings and many residents fled the area. Twenty years later, Mr. Pierce's wife convinced city city officials to number all residences and businesses so that mail carriers could deliver by bicycle and car.

The current facility has operated for six decades.

The current air-conditioned and fire-proof facility opened in 1963 and still looks much the same today. The CRA bought the property a year ago, intending to sell it to a mixed-use developer while moving the postal facility to an empty lot it owns next to the laundromat – just over the tracks from Casa Costa. The plan was for a post office half the size with medical offices and a tourist center on upper floors.



BOYNTON BEACH LIBRARY

Above, the first Boynton post office was built on Ocean Ave. in 1911. CRA officials solicited proposals for a mixed-use multi-story facility on an empty lot two blocks from Casa Costa, below, but recently greenlighted another single-story edition.



GOOGLE MAPS

In May, the CRA Board rejected both bids it had received for the relocated facility because they didn't meet the post office's specifications

"Postal construction is is different from regular commercial construction," said Todd Conley, owner of Maple Tree Investments at a Dec. 12 meeting of the CRA board to review a second round of proposals.

Mr. Conley's firm, based in Greensburg, Ky., says he has built postal facilities in several states and that they must encompass sorting, delivery, retail and a loading dock. He estimated the total project cost at $2.9 million but didn't estimate a completion date.

His proposal is a single-story, stand-alone building. All five CRA Board members agreed to award him the job.

In the meantime, they voted to extend the lease on the current single-story, stand-alone building down the street through Jan. 31, 2025. CC

MARNA'S FAMILY



Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, precisely at 9 a.m., you can find anywhere from six to 18 women (every blue moon a man will join), enjoying an hour of water aerobics, led by Bobby Hall. This is a class where you can do as much or as little as you want (one of Bobby's favorite lines) while still enjoying the music and movement.

Who are these women? We come from everywhere: New York, New Jersey, Canada, Chicago, Greece, Ecuador, Pittsburgh, Baltimore… and that's just a few. We welcome everyone. Many of us arrive at class early to get a head start and of course to catch up on the news of the day. In addition to the obvious benefits like exercise and sun, many of us have developed a comradery and closeness that we wouldn't have had otherwise. Nothing underscores this more than June 2020, when COVID-19 had hit and the classes kicked off. We became each other's lifelines and were truly exuberant when the pool reopened and we were allowed to start water aerobics – of course six feet apart.

Most of us moved into Casa Costa not really knowing many people. Unlike country club living, there is no clubhouse or social director here, so you really need to try to meet people and make your own fun. Thanks to Bobby and his amazing idea to start the class, we have all been provided with this outstanding opportunity.

We know when somebody is sick, when it's a special birthday or when there is a new grandchild. We are all there to give love and support to one another. If someone is absent for a few classes, we all text or call to be sure that everything is OK. Even on the rare occasion that Bobby must cancel a class, most of us show up and do our own version of water aerobics.

We are so lucky to have this extraordinary family within the Casa Costa community. As the author and artist, Jess C. Scott, said it best: "Friends are the family you choose." *CC*

ADVERTISEMENT

HOLIDAY SPECIAL EXTENDED

BY POPULAR DEMAND

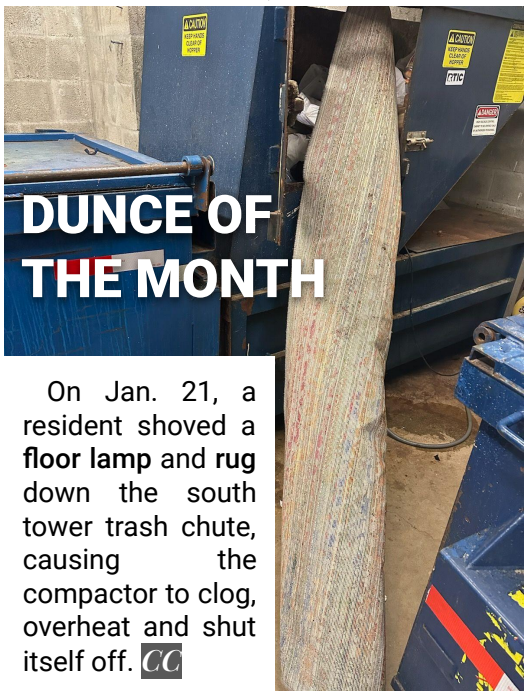
The Casa Costa approved SCHLAGE ENCODE Smart Lock empowers you to monitor and control access from anywhere, assign unique codes for guests and service people, and leave your keys at home.

Previously $499.95,
Now Only $449.95 Installed

Email Steve: **CasaCostaLocks@gmail.com**



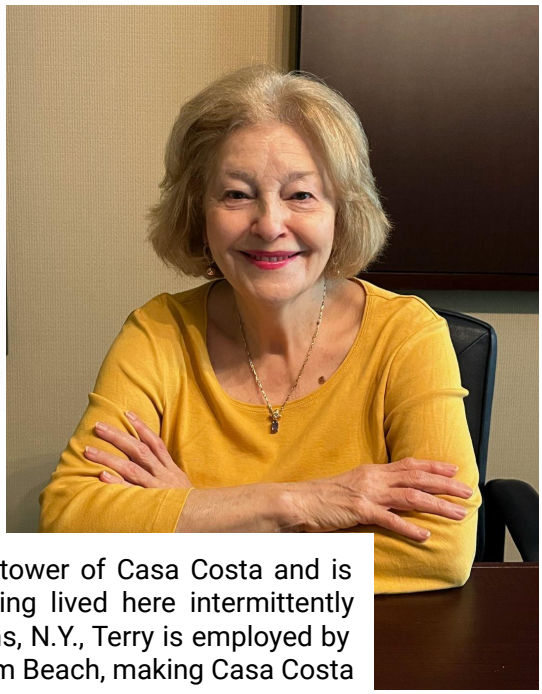
DUNCE OF THE MONTH



On Jan. 21, a resident shoved a **floor lamp** and **rug** down the south tower trash chute, causing the compactor to clog, overheat and shut itself off. *CC*



COASTER WELCOME WAGON



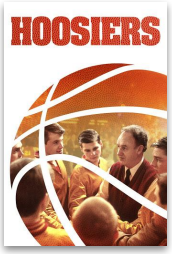
Theresa Paravati resides in the north tower of Casa Costa and is well-acquainted with South Florida, having lived here intermittently since 1998. Originally hailing from Queens, N.Y., Terry is employed by a small investment company in West Palm Beach, making Casa Costa an ideal location for her.

Beyond its convenience for work, the proximity to friends she has made over the years in Florida adds to its appeal. Having frequently passed by the building while living in Delray Beach, Terry was drawn to investigate it further and is now delighted with the building's security measures and available concierge services. She eagerly anticipates engaging with our events throughout the year, recognizing the importance of building connections with her new neighbors.

CASACOSTA SOCIAL

LVIII SUPER BOWL

Sun, Feb 11 @ 6pm
NYPD Pizza



Movie Night V
Thur, Mar 7 @ 7pm
Pool deck

...and many more!

CasaCostaBB.com

Coaster Classifieds

JAY SHAPIRO COMPUTERS

Get **TECHNICAL HELP** for your devices with 10% off when you say you found him here. JayShapiroComputers.com

Maximize returns, not hassles.RHOME brings technology and service expertise in **RENTAL MANAGEMENT** for unit owners: 954-660-1850

Matt Hirsch is the secret weapon for all your **HANDYMAN** needs, from simple fixes to major jobs. He knows the building well, as your neighbors will tell you. 561-444-6315

You probably know that Andre Apicella has a **REAL ESTATE BROKER** office downstairs. Did you know he has a 4% (or less!) commission special for sellers? Stop by the local office or browse online at WaterfrontHomesTeam.com

Steve installs keyless **DOOR LOCKS** or replaces the standard ones: CasaCostaLocks@gmail.com

If you don't know Roberta Mann, you're just not paying attention. She's your go-to Coldwell Banker **REAL ESTATE AGENT**, whether you're buying, selling, renting or leasing: 412-999-2888

Coaster Quiz: How many poop bags does Casa Costa use in a single month? **2,000 BAGS**. Holy shit! Thanks for cleaning up after your pet.

Brian Goldman is our Medicare and **RETIREMENT PLANNING** expert: GoldStandardMedicare.com

YOUR NAME HERE
Hyper-local advertising works. Prices start from $11 to full-page color. CasaCoaster.com/advertise

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR ADVERTISERS