SUMMER 2024

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.

June 26, 2024 | Volume III, Issue Six | CasaCoaster.com

What's News

Casa Costa

★ Owners responded to a survey on garage bins and gained convenient options for paying dues and other charges. **A6**

FEATURED

OPINION
Behold. The Podray interview. **A2**

LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER
Keyless door entry skeptics reflect on their decision. **A3**

MISTER B'S NEIGHBORHOOD
Our columnist on how the sausage gets made… or doesn't. **A4**

DUNCES OF THE MONTH
Fresh hallway paint for the first time in 15 years; a week of fire alarm tests. What could go wrong? **A6**

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

Commencement exercises



DANILO CAJINA

FAÇADE FACELIFT: Permits in hand, a crew from Valcourt Building Services began assembling equipment early this month to repair and paint the south tower.

Fire marshall greenlights grills

After over a decade of rejecting the idea outright, Boynton's fire marshall approved the installation of outdoor grills on the fifth floor common area.

The decision caught association leaders by surprise, as many had given up on the idea and no one budgeted for the potential expense. But the Social Committee kept asking – and its volunteers were encouraged by the

Please turn to page A6

Plastic fork lands Boynton man in Rikers

Detectives from New York's cold case squad joined officers from the Boynton Beach Police Department earlier this year. They were tracking Anthony Scalici in hopes of getting a DNA sample.

Fifteen years prior, Mr. Scalici's uncle, an Italian immigrant in Queens, N.Y., was found face down in a pool of blood at his home. The murder was especially brutal – the uncle was beaten with a shovel and stabbed 16 times – but the cops never had a suspect.

Then two years ago, the Queens district attorney's office sent blood evidence found at the scene to a lab, uploaded the profile to genealogical websites and created a family tree of suspects.

The process led them to Boynton Beach in February, where Mr. Scalici, 41, had since relocated. The stakeout lasted weeks until detectives say they retrieved a plastic fork from a restaurant the suspect used and discarded. New York City's chief medical examiner tested the utensil and it matched DNA found under the victim's fingernails. Officers arrested the suspect on May 14 and extradited him north two weeks later, where a grand jury indicted him.

The shock arrest is the first time public genealogy databases have helped solve a murder in New York City. The suspect is being held at Rikers Island and faces 25 years to life in prison if convicted. *CC*

OPINION

The Podray interview

AS TOLD BY ANDREW PODRAY

For years, there have been whispers of a young Lex Luthor lurking around Casa Costa's ground floor. He owns the storefronts, he fights dirty, he sues our board members, even a senator called him a slumlord. Occasionally he would surface, run for a seat on the board, sling insults, then return to his tennis club.

A myth is a lie that conveys a truth. And when repeated often enough, it becomes reality. What, then, is to be made of the specter of Andrew Podray?

The facts are indisputable. In November 2016, Mr. Podray acquired the commercial units here from Related Group after all the condominiums upstairs were sold. Five months earlier, the association had filed a lawsuit against Related and the tenant in the biggest commercial space, CrossFit, for thuds that sounded like a war zone, according to a resident at the time. Mr. Podray didn't take long to file lawsuits of his own, alleging a pattern of malice from the board to over-charge him, steal parking spaces and de-value his investment. With trial dates looming earlier this year, Mr. Podray and the board settled their differences.

Writers from the *Casa Coaster* met with Mr. Podray for 90 minutes to understand the man behind the maleficent myth – or reality, depending on whom you ask.

* * *

His Toyota Corolla pulled up and he wore a dirty T-shirt and flip flops, explaining he was just on a job site.

Andy, as he introduced himself, is a lifelong resident of Boynton Beach. He graduated a year early from Atlantic High School. He skipped prom and enrolled at Florida Atlantic University, which he zoomed through in 1½ years using credits by testing out of some coursework.

Mr. Podray, 45, talks fast. "It's lonely at the top but it's also lonely when you're in a hurry to get there," he said, reflecting that college frat boys weren't eager to invite him to parties as he was barely old enough to drive.



Boynton bad boy

Out of school, he flew through jobs at a similar pace: door-to-door insurance salesman, bank teller, Kmart manager, real estate agent, stock trader. He says the job cold-calling people to pitch them "incredibly sketchy" investments gave him a creepy feeling, and he quit when he discovered he was smarter than his boss. The common thread in his early career was salesmanship. "To be successful in life, you have to sell someone something," he said. "I found companies that I could tolerate but I was always gunning for the top job."

His other goal was a contingency plan, as he aimed to stick with one employer for six months to qualify for unemployment benefits. Then his rich uncle convinced him to become his own boss. Taxes will eat you alive, but with property, you have a fighting chance.

At 18 years old, he made his first real estate investment: a fourplex rental building in Riviera Beach, a small city north of Palm Beach. He paid $9,600 – 10% down – which he made back each year in rents. "That's 100% return," he said. "I was addicted."

The fledgling entrepreneur didn't quit his day jobs yet, though he says that dashing out to fix leaking pipes at his first investment property didn't endear him to bosses. "It made me a horrible employee," he said

He started working night shifts as a waiter because his days were increasingly filled with real estate closings and calls from tenants. Mr. Podray poured every dollar earned in tips to the next deal. "It was crazy risky, but if I was going to go bankrupt, I'd rather do it at 18 or 19 years old," he said.

In his early 20s, he would drive the streets, on the hunt for run-down properties or desperate sellers. At age 21, he "risked it all" on one property, maxing out credit cards to close on a below-market deal that he flipped months later, making him a millionaire.

"In real estate, you make all your money on day one," he said, explaining his philosophy that unexpected expenses wipe out any profits unless you can buy the deal cheap to begin with. Over a dozen years, he grew his apartment empire to 720 apartments in Florida.

His company focuses on buying properties in "distressed condition" due to low occupancy, high crime or structural problems. In his early apartment deals, he twice had a gun pointed at his face. One tenant paid the rent in gold jewelry.

"I had more sleepless nights than everyone I know combined," he said, "By the grace of God I survived it."

After nearly a decade of playing Florida Monopoly, Mr. Podray was bored. He took a ballroom dance class and married the instructor. Their son, now 16, beat his dad by graduating high school early and heading to FAU. The couple have two other kids and go to church every week.

By the time Casa Costa was built, Mr. Podray was buying distressed shopping malls and had developed a niche for turning around sites with environmental problems such as contamination from leaking gas tanks, dry cleaner solvents and lumber treatment chemicals.

"I take dirty sites and I clean them,"

he said, noting that most banks are unwilling to support properties with pollutants. "There's competition to buy these deals, but banks are grateful I can close in two weeks with cash."

The one apartment complex he retained became, as he put it, the toughest lesson he ever learned. In 2007 he acquired two low-income complexes in Jacksonville. The projects were bound by a long-term government agreement that set the rents artificially low, subsidized by taxpayers through the federal department of Housing and Urban Development. For 13 years, Mr. Podray managed the properties, but he says as the rules changed during the pandemic, and the math for landlords no longer worked.

Evictions were halted and gangs moved in. His costs skyrocketed while government-set rents did not. Conditions at the Jacksonville properties deteriorated under his watch to the point that Florida Senator Marco Rubio cited terrible building inspection scores, labeled him a "slumlord" in the press and urged the government to stop working with him.

"I'm disappointed with Marco Rubio. Marco Rubio seems to be naive about the way HUD actually works and I feel as if I'm being railroaded in this endeavor," Mr. Podray told a news station at the time, referring to the ordeal as a "press stunt" inspired by tenants that deserved to be booted but took advantage of COVID rules.

He sold the properties last year for more than double what he'd paid, but less than they were worth, he says. "If Trump picks Rubio as his V.P. candidate, I might just vote for Biden," he told us.

Indeed, Mr. Podray's politics are unabashedly conservative. He posted on Facebook: "The government cannot give to anybody something it doesn't first take from somebody else."

As his interests shifted to retail properties, he raises doubts they should still be built. At Casa Costa, they were an afterthought by a builder forced by the city to include storefronts.

Amazon has been killing malls for years but some city planners are stuck on including large retail build-outs before they approve new housing, he says, pointing to stalled projects in Boynton Beach as doomed to fail.

The Boynton native contrasts the government approach here with other cities nearby. "Starting in the 1990s, Boca Raton and Delray Beach were hands-off, and actually loosened their codes to allow private developers to redesign downtowns and maximize property values. Officials in Lake Worth Beach, on the other hand, wanted to micromanage paint colors and over-regulate everything. Boynton Beach seems to have chosen that path too. This is the way cities are going."

He's rallied for decades against heavy-handed government, at one point serving on the city's Building Board of Adjustment and Appeals, to which property owners could apply for latitude regarding city ordinances. Mr. Podray says he always tended to side with the property owner.

His father was a Boynton Beach fireman and he remembers going to city hall holiday parties with Santa. He had a good relationship with the former mayor, but has since given up politics and large-scale dreams in Boynton. "To run for office here, PTA mom types go door-to-door in Leisureville, talking about 'reasonable growth' but they really aren't expert in the fields they should be to build a city," he said. "These politicians talk a lot to justify their existence when they should being saying yes to property owners willing to invest here. With all the red tape, only big developers with deep pockets stand a chance of navigating it all."

The opportunity to own the retail units at Casa Costa checked all the boxes for Mr. Podray. He acquired the mostly vacant units for $2.2 million. As part of the deal, he inherited an agreement with the city to reimburse him what he paid in exchange for charging below-market rents and providing public parking for a few years.

His lawsuits with the association now settled, he sees "a much brighter day" for the 12 commercial units here, including their future sale to owners of the businesses that inhabit the spaces. "No landlord will ever have the pride of ownership to make improvements that a business owner will," he said. "The parking is still tight, but when the cycle is right, my current plan is to sell."

Meanwhile, Mr. Podray is working on a restaurant project in Riviera Beach, where he's partnered with a next-door property owner in order to maximize – you guessed it – parking spaces. *CC*

LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER

Keyless is a no-brainer

This past week Steve Mills came by and installed the remote Schlage keypad lock. When we first learned about it months ago, we weren't interested but we have friends in the building who had one installed.

It was absolutely a great decision. The convenient features are amazing and we definitely believe our unit is more secure now. Steve has loads of experience in residential housing and the installation was smooth and quick. He walked us through every step on getting to know the lock features and made sure our phones were synced by Bluetooth and working before he left.

You will appreciate the added security and being able to unlock your door remotely before arriving with both arms carrying groceries.

PAUL FERWERDA
CHRISTY FERWERDA

Contact Steve Mills at CasaCostaLocks@gmail.com.

All politics is local and local politics is nasty



MISTER B'S NEIGHBORHOOD

For the past couple of years, we have all driven by at least three areas nearby slated for new construction projects. Yet there's still nothing.

I've heard various rumors about what's happening at these sites to our south and west. All in, these projects promise thousands of new units, parking spaces and restaurants. As revealed in these pages last year, the projects are all approved by one branch of city hall, only to be stuck in another.

Trying to get accurate information, I reached out to the city's Community Redevelopment Agency. The CRA is a special district created by Boynton Beach 42 years ago and governed by a board that consists of the same five elected city commissioners. The mayor is the CRA chair. The agency focuses on building affordable housing, holding free business promotional events like Rock The Plaza, funding small businesses and creating a vibrant downtown core.

The CRA's charge is to improve 1,650 acres, mostly on Boynton's eastern edge along N. Federal Hwy. They just started a long project to widen sidewalks and plant trees (including in a new median) on what they call the "Corridor" – Boynton Beach Blvd. between Interstate 95 and us.

The Corridor project began to remind me of a bridge to nowhere, so I went to city hall to ask what's up with the still-empty lots.

When I arrived, I was directed to call the CRA from a phone in the lobby. I spoke with the administrative assistant, who promised someone would call me back.

Unfortunately, when one of the nine CRA public employees did return my call, she was most unhelpful. I explained that I wanted to provide accurate information to *Casa Coaster* readers, and that I didn't need details, just a basic update. She refused to answer a single question – out of fear of being misquoted, she said.

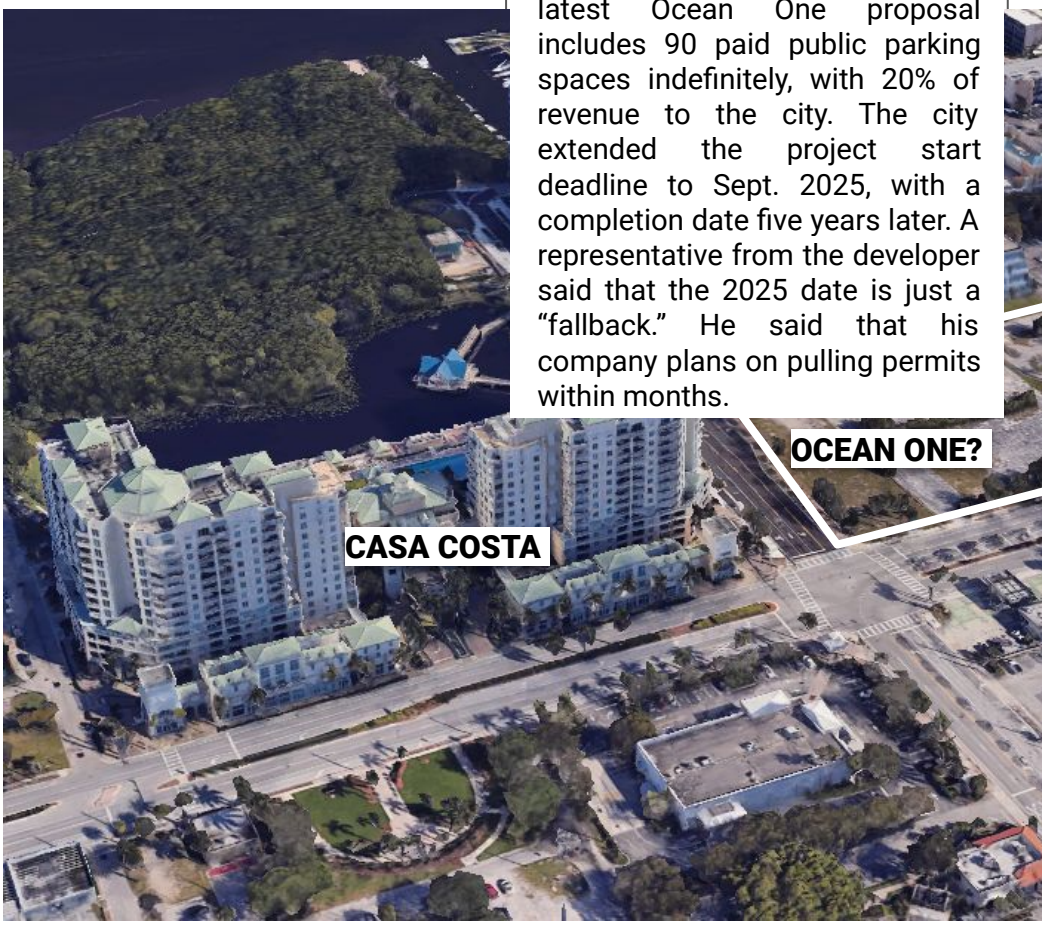
As a former public school administrator, I've had more than my fair share of rude demands from entitled citizens, so I was very careful to be polite and positive. I could have asked why one of the "current" construction projects listed on your website was approved decades ago but it's still a vacant lot. I might have engaged in some wordplay. In 2015 the mayor called one building a "*springboard* of more development comin' down the pipe" and in 2018 the city manager called a $500 million downtown makeover a "*renaissance*."

With virtually zero done since, what word would she use today?

But no, I was nice. Even so, she told me to go away and read the minutes from the CRA meetings. Well, since they've been talking about building on the empty lot to our south for 19 years, and the CRA has two meetings a month, that's 6,000 pages – triple the size of the longest American novel ever written.

I thanked our so-called "public servant" for the homework assignment and hung up. This lack of transparency from the city is disappointing.

Through reading committee meeting minutes and additional research, including the *Coastal Star*, a local monthly paper with (*ahem!*) paid reporters. I managed to uncover some details.



Discussed in a May meeting, the latest Ocean One proposal includes 90 paid public parking spaces indefinitely, with 20% of revenue to the city. The city extended the project start deadline to Sept. 2025, with a completion date five years later. A representative from the developer said that the 2025 date is just a "fallback." He said that his company plans on pulling permits within months.

I became curious about the CRA's role and funding.I was still pretty annoyed that they forced a retired taxpayer to hunt for basic information that's literally their job to keep tabs on.

The CRA spends on infrastructure improvements, façade renovations, streetscaping, public art installations and affordable housing initiatives. Sometimes they receive grants or loans for specific projects. For instance, the Corridor improvement budget is $3.5 million, but 85% of it came from federal and county sources.

But the CRA derives most of its funding from tax increment financing. When owners improve real estate within the CRA zone, city and county property taxes increase, and the CRA takes a cut of them. The more that property taxes increase compared to 1982, the year the agency was created, the more funding they receive.

It turns out that TIF is also a bargaining chip. For example, to move the Ocean One project along – finally! (maybe!) – the CRA agreed to refund up to $9 million of the TIF back to the developer. At first I thought this seemed shady, but then again, taxes don't increase if they don't break ground, so it's not just a handout.

TIF refunds are common in big deals, but Ocean One's is Boynton's biggest so far. Two of five commissioners voted against it. "There is a lot of discomfort in this room," the mayor said after throwing his support behind the deal. "But the reality is there is a cost to doing nothing. Zero tax revenue. Zero impact fees. Zero parking."

* * *

As frustrating as it has been to see delay after delay of these city projects, I've heard discussions about a project at Casa Costa since I moved in nearly three years ago: outdoor grills.

After speaking with others, grills have been a smoldering topic for at least for 10 years. So, when I saw that the grills were an agenda item for the Grounds Committee, I attended the meeting. This committee, comprised of six resident volunteers selected by a board liaison, met to discuss various projects and ideas concerning our community. Topics included the bulk trash area, lighting in the front of the building, pool deck toys and recycling bins.

At last, grills came up. Turns out that after some convincing, the city fire marshal approved grills for our pool deck, which I'd been continually told was an impossibility. What's more, the Social Committee had proposed splitting the installation cost with the Grounds Committee. Was this really happening?

The committee's liaison pushed back. We'd need time restrictions, plans to keep the areas clean and safe, fees and deposits, reservations and locks. This all seemed overkill to me, but she was ultimately supportive and maybe even excited. The proposal passed.

With two committees agreeing to pay for grills, and now the city's green light, it's now up to the board to figure out the grilling details and conditions… or not to.

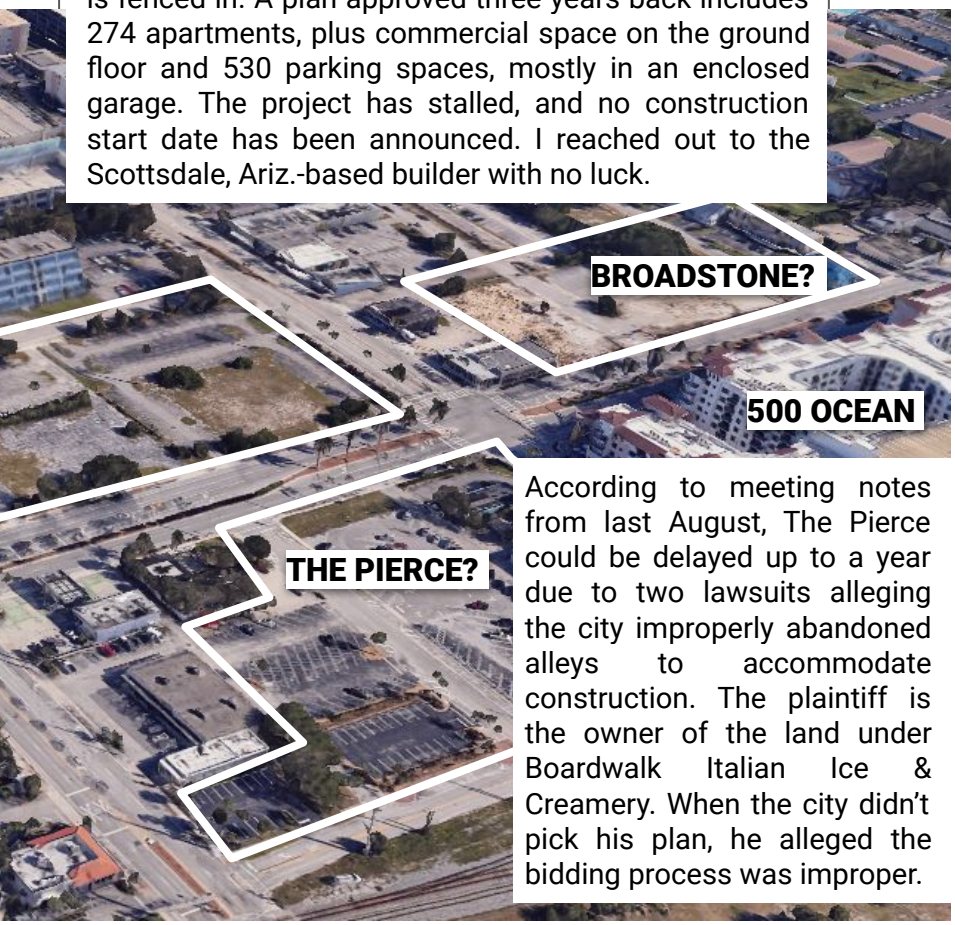
* * *

I once heard a phrase: "All politics is local and local politics is nasty." In digging through CRA meeting minutes and news reports, I read about how many locals oppose changes of any kind, as if empty lots of trash and vermin are something historic to preserve. Perhaps the city is moving so slowly because its leaders cater to people for whom no plan will be good enough.

But what about us? I hope our board at Casa Costa will act more swiftly and decisively than its Boynton Beach city hall counterparts. City planning is complicated with high stakes. Let's not over-complicate a couple of Webers by locking them down to the point that they are useless as amenities.

The reality is there is a cost to doing nothing. Zero burgers. Zero hot dogs. Zero grilled chickens. *CC*

This 2.76-acre Broadstone site behind the smoke shop is fenced in. A plan approved three years back includes 274 apartments, plus commercial space on the ground floor and 530 parking spaces, mostly in an enclosed garage. The project has stalled, and no construction start date has been announced. I reached out to the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based builder with no luck.



According to meeting notes from last August, The Pierce could be delayed up to a year due to two lawsuits alleging the city improperly abandoned alleys to accommodate construction. The plaintiff is the owner of the land under Boardwalk Italian Ice & Creamery. When the city didn't pick his plan, he alleged the bidding process was improper.

CASA COSTA CHRONICLES

Residents ponder grills

Continued from page A1

popularity of a Fourth of July cookout last year, where they rented a grill from a party supply warehouse and grilled barbecue.

"It was a hassle last year," said Gayle Brousseau of the committee. "The vendor made us rent a U-Haul truck to move the grill back and forth, and someone even threw his back out loading the thing. We deserve a more permanent solution."

Renting a grill for a single afternoon is also expensive, she said – similar in price to buying one outright.

After Danilo Cajina, the building's chief engineer, confirmed with the city that grills 10 feet from the wall were OK, the Social Committee voted in May to allocate $1,250 toward grills and fire extinguishers – so long as the Grounds Committee matched their contribution.

Volunteers from both committees toured similar buildings with grills as far south as Fort Lauderdale, and shopped for options at both home improvement stores and outdoor kitchen specialists.

Questions remain regarding what to buy and how best to maintain grills. Logical locations for the equipment are outside the doors leading to the club room, but residents are torn on whether to invest in an outdoor kitchen with a countertop and fridge – or simple standalone grills. Some worry about residents or guests abusing the equipment or making a mess. Should reservations be required? What about charging fees or deposits?

With an eye toward a future remodeling of the entire pool deck – outdoor kitchen included – some residents advocate for a cheaper, temporary solution.

"It doesn't make sense to put it off till we can fix everything all at once," said Bobby Hall, chairperson of the Grounds Committee. "Let's find a high-quality interim solution with commonsense rules. We've already waited a long time for grills. What are we waiting for?"

GARAGE STORAGE BINS

Owners at Casa Costa overwhelmingly support a rule change to permit 100-gallon storage bins in their parking spaces. Ron Hirsch of the north tower advocated for the option at a May 1 board meeting. Others denounced the idea as unfair to residents with long vehicles that cannot fit the bin. The board suggested a survey to gauge interest in the bin plan.

Over four of five respondents approve of the option, with nearly ⅔ indicating they would buy a bin themselves. Building rules currently prohibit anything other than vehicles in parking spaces.

BUILDINGLINK PAYMENTS

With delinquencies rising, board members and office staffers are looking for ways to make it easier for owners to pay.

Castle Group plans to enable a new payment option inside BuildingLink so owners can view their balances and pay online in one place without logging in elsewhere. The platform also now accepts credit card payments for reservations, valet fees, fines and other one-off charges. Previously the office only accepted checks for most of these payments. CC

DUNCES OF THE MONTH

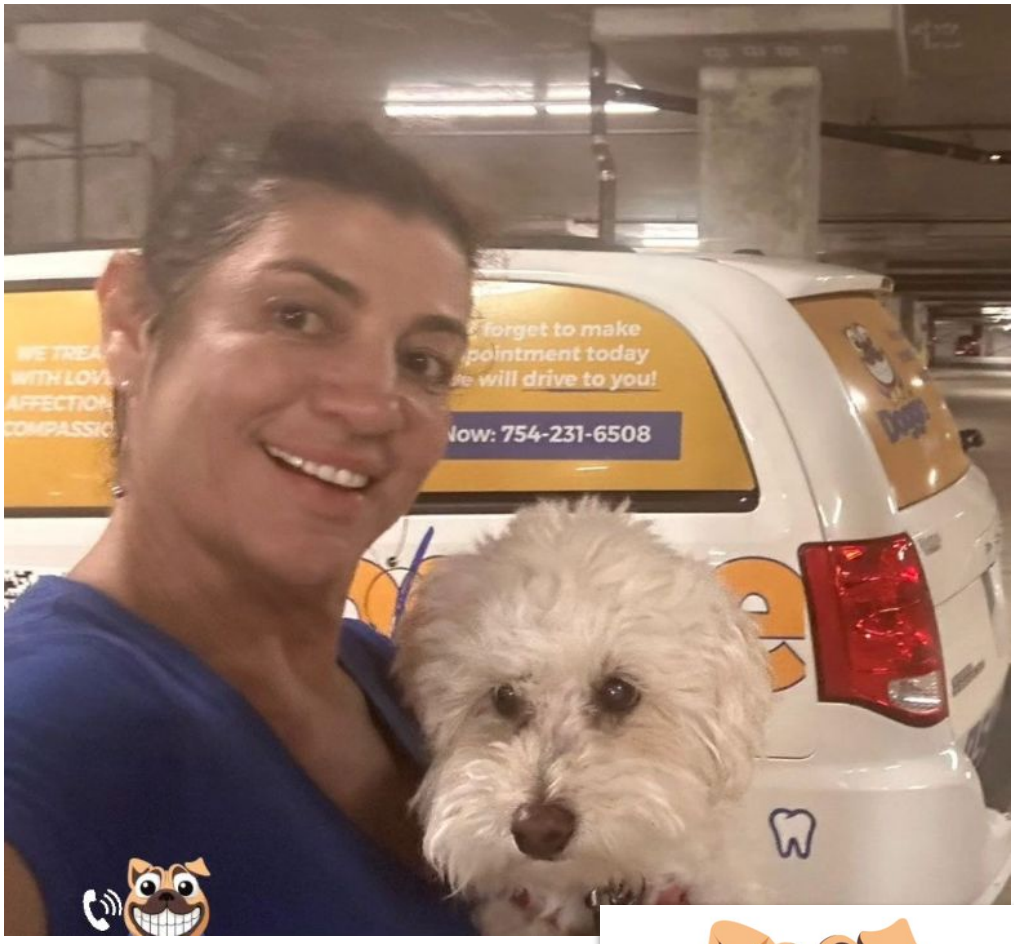


JUNE GLOOM: After countless announcements about the annual fire safety inspection, on the fourth consecutive day of music and alarm tests blaring through the speakers, a resident called the fire department. The fire marshall texted our chief engineer. Then, two weeks after being freshly painted, someone ripped off part of the wall on the seventh floor of the south tower. CC



DANILO CAJINA

ADVERTISEMENT





What is tartar on dogs?

Also called dental calculus, tartar is when dental plaque builds up. Bacteria begin to organize and produce toxins that can lead to gingivitis. Due to the fact that the animals do not have their teeth brushed correctly, this plaque buildup becomes larger until it calcifies, forming the tartar

.Besides the visual issue, the first symptom that shows the existence of tartar is bad breath. This condition can progress to chronic gingivitis, leading to tooth loss and in more chronic cases, vital organs such as kidneys, liver and heart can be affected.

What is Doggie Smile?

Our licensed experts are patient specialists in canine tooth health. Unlike most veterinarians, we clean your dog's teeth without anesthesia, so the process is safe for dogs of all ages.

Our fully-equipped van comes to you and your dog! We are a local woman-owned business.

Join the pack of happy Casa Costa customers!

doggie-smile.com

doggiesmileflorida

754-231-6508

CASACOSTA SOCIAL



NEIGHBORHOOD PICNIC & CONCERT
featuring Jeff Goffman
Sun, July 21 @ 6pm | Pool deck

Bring dinner and beverages with live music from an award-winning resident.

HELLO
MEET & GREET
Sun, Aug 11 @ 6pm
Pool deck

Join new neighbors and old friends.

ADVERTISEMENT

Gold Standard Financial Group

GoldStandardMedicare.com
(412) 897-0760

Come find our tent at the **Boynton Beach fireworks show** from 5-9 p.m. on **July 4 at Intracoastal Park** (2240 N Federal Hwy)



ADVERTISEMENT

JAY SHAPIRO COMPUTERS
SERVING SOUTH FLORIDA & NEW YORK SINCE 1998
"YOUR PERSONAL COMPUTER REPAIR TECHNICIAN IS HERE"



CALL JAY TODAY
FOR 10% OFF
917-318-5659

Cracked screen? Slow system? Any brand, any problem: JayShapiroComputers.com