



JULY 21, 2010

COMMITTED TO THE ORDERLY GROWTH OF PERDIDO KEY

## County tax appraiser asks governor and legislature for property tax relief

*A Letter to Governor Crist from Chris Jones  
Tax Assessor Escambia County  
June 2, 2010*

As a result of the Deepwater Horizon/British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, property values are likely to be adversely affected in the areas along the coastline of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties.

The potential impact of this incident could be staggering. Under existing law, the tentative loss in property values due to the spill will not be reflected until the 2011 tax roll. Therefore, there will be no accounting for this in 2010, unless

executive or legislative action is taken.

We ask you to consider an executive order imposing tax relief for property owners in 2010 in the affected counties.

If you conclude an executive order is not the proper manner for granting such relief, we ask that you call for a special legislative session or include this issue within the call for the special session. The spill is also likely to impact other counties as the oil spreads

Precedent for tax relief as the result of this type of extraordinary event was established when the Legislature passed

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## Boaters should take precautions to protect water-cooled systems from oil

*Courtesy of Dometic Marine Group*

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has created a situation that can be detrimental to the water-cooled air conditioning (A/C) and refrigeration systems typically used on boats. Boat owners and operators with water-cooled systems onboard are advised to take extra precautions to protect their equipment if affected by oil-contaminated waters.

Marine manufacturers do not recommend the operation of any water-cooled equipment in water contaminated by spilled crude oil. The intake of even small amounts of oil into the condenser coils and pumps may cause damage to the equipment.

If your boat has been operated in or exposed to oil-contaminated water, please contact your dealer for service recommendations.

### *Preventive and Corrective Actions*

The effects of crude-oil contamination on water-cooled A/C and refrigeration equipment are not thoroughly known. Based on what is known, however, Dometic Ma-

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## Trying to decide on a visit to the beach?

*By Alan Dennis*

One of the most difficult questions to answer these days is when folks “back home” call to ask what the beaches look like. It’s a difficult question because the answer often depends on so many factors- tides, wind, work of cleanup crews, location of offshore oil, and more.

While resources such as oil tracking charts, web sites, etc., will give an idea of what to expect, sometimes pockets of oil will mysteriously come ashore with no advance warning.

I recently engaged in a conversation with an angry visitor, from Indiana, who had based her family’s visit to Perdido Key on reports and calls to local agencies as well as reviewing several local web sites. I tried to explain that during the two previous weeks the beaches were clean and being enjoyed by visitors, and that the oil had come ashore as she was driving from Indiana to Perdido Key. Still, I felt bad for her as we stood together, on the beach, in the middle of tar balls and tar mats. And today, a week following her departure, the beaches are, once again, clean- at least on the surface.

Those of us who live here year round understand the unpredictability of the beach. . . even when there are no hurricanes and oil spills. The beach is a wonderfully dynamic environment.

*(Continued on Page 3)*

## **Boater precautions. . . continued**

rine recommends the following preventive and corrective actions:

- Boat owners and operators are advised to avoid areas of contaminated water if it can be done safely.
- If a vessel is expected to be in oil-contaminated water, close the sea cock to prevent water entering the pump **and** disconnect power to the water-cooled equipment to prevent unintentional operation of the equipment.
- If oil-contaminated water is expected at the vessel's slip, remove the vessel from the water until the contamination has been contained or removed.
- If oil-contaminated water contacts the vessel, do not start or do not continue operating the water-cooled equipment. This will greatly reduce the amount of cleaning required to get the equipment back in service.
- If a vessel has been in oil-contaminated water with its water-cooled equipment in operation, the equipment's condenser coil and water-delivery pump should be cleaned as soon as possible.

### **Cleaning/Replacement Procedures**

Always dispose of all parts and cleaning materials according to local environmental regulations. If cleaning chemi-

cals are used, choose products with the least impact on the environment.

**Condenser Coil** – If oil-contaminated water has entered the condenser coil, the entire piping system must be flushed or cleaned to remove the oil.

**Water Pump** – If oil-contaminated water entered the seawater pump, follow the procedures below.

- **Pump impellers** exposed to oil must be replaced. Otherwise, the impeller will swell in the pump and fail, which could cause pump or equipment damage.
- **O-rings and gaskets** must be replaced.
- **All hoses and parts** (coolers, seawater strainers, etc.) between the water intake and the pump must be checked for oil. If found, remove all parts and clean of all oil residue. If the oil can not be removed, replace the part, hose, or pump.

### **Return To Service**

The long-term effects of oil on a cooling-system, its pump, parts and hoses are unknown. After the oil spill has been resolved and the system has been cleaned, we advise boat owners and operators to be diligent in monitoring their equipment for symptoms of cooling problems. Watch for high-pressure (HP) faults that are more frequent than before.

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## **County tax appraiser. . . continued**

Laws of Florida, 2004-474, in the wake of the 2004 hurricane season

The following summarizes our view of how property values might be affected:

### **1) Commercial Properties:**

These properties are bought and sold based primarily on their ability to produce income.

When the oil hits the beaches, cancellations will ensue and the income drop is inevitable.

We have already seen a drop in reservations just due to the spill itself. However, when it comes ashore, it will have a divesting effect on commercial property values along the coast.

### **2) Residential Properties- Vacant Land**

These properties are some of the hardest hit in the wake of recession and the stigma associated with the hurricanes of 2004 - 2005. They are also struggling to keep their homes due to the high cost of insurance associated with these properties. When the oil comes ashore, these properties will suffer yet another financial blow.

We are concerned for the taxpayers of our respective counties who are already struggling with the economic down-turn and the resulting declining property values. When property values decline along the coast due to BP's negligence, the affected citizens

should be allowed some adjustment to their tax burden. Moreover, the affected counties should expect reimbursement for the revenue loss. Also, a tax increase or redistribution of the tax burden should not be passed on to the rest of our citizens.

Governor Crist, we, appreciate your commitment to Florida and our counties. The recent influx of over one million dollars for advertising did not go unnoticed. Please consider an executive order or special session to aid our local property owners in the wake of this huge disaster.

*Chris Jones, CFA  
Escambia County Property Appraiser*

### **A visit to the beach. . . continued**

I send you these comments, especially to our out-of-town members, to remind you that it's difficult to predict what you might find on any given visit to the Key. Today, as I look out my window, the beaches are clean. In fact, there are no fewer than two dozen of folks sitting under umbrellas and swimming in the Gulf.

Still, I suspect the stories of disappointment will continue to be replayed many times as experts work to tame this 90-plus-day runaway well.

As for the cleanup efforts- For the past month I have served as a Wildlife Observer for nighttime beach cleanup operations- making sure cleanup activities do not interfere with wildlife activities.

Each night more than 100 workers spend 12-hour shifts removing oil debris from our beaches. On many nights they are joined by mechanical sifters that cover miles of beach- lifting sand from the beach, removing debris, and returning "clean" sand back to the beach. During the day more than 600 day-

time workers continue the work- shoveling oil and debris, by hand, working in temperatures that have to be unbearable.

Being a part of the cleanup process- even though limited to night activities gives me an opportunity to patrol every mile of the Key, from Johnson Beach to the Florida-Alabama line, and to observe the amount of work underway.

And while no one could be more upset with the devastation this disaster has wrought upon our beloved beaches, I'm convinced that every effort is being made to scrub our beaches of this nasty substance and return them to their pristine state. Time and time again, our beaches have shown a remarkable ability to heal following a disaster.

Oil will continue to fall on our beaches in the foreseeable future. Some visitors will experience the oil firsthand- others will delight in the way the beaches appear. Just know that people are working around the clock, doing all they can to make our beaches "whole" again. I am thankful for all they are doing on our behalf.

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## **Local law enforcement assures Perdido Key residents of "immediate access"**

*By Eddie McMillan*

*“This is good news, but we also need to get further clarification from the County Commissioners and the County Administrator who might have further considerations restricting access.”*

After hurricane Ivan a great deal of frustration occurred because Perdido Key residents were denied reasonable access to their homes and condos. This cost people a great deal of money because of the deterioration of their homes due to water and moisture damage that could have been mitigated with prompt response.

Recently, members of the Boards of the Perdido Key Association and the Resi-

dents Forum met with Sheriff Morgan and his immediate staff and were assured that "immediate access" would be provided after a storm given certain conditions were met.

The conditions were:

- 1) Insure all power was cut off to the island, buildings are inspected to insure they are safe [no one would obviously be allowed to enter a condemned building or home]
- 2) the Intercoastal bridge is safe, and
- 3) a release is signed by those wishing to go on the island, indemnifying the county should one get hurt as a result of debris being scattered by the storm.

This is good news, but we also need to get further clarification from the County Commissioners and the County Administrator who might have further considerations restricting access.

## **Help them help us**

Boaters check your speed and pay attention to surrounding activity.

Booms have been placed by the county and by private property associations to protect sections of shoreline in Old River and the Intracoastal Waterway. Small boats are pulling Skimmers daily in the local waterways. Boaters are asked to be mindful of the boom and skimming operations, to use slow speeds so as not to produce a wake that may disrupt or over wash the booms, and to be aware of restricted areas. A flashing light has been attached to all boom to increase visibility to boaters.

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## **Meeting change**

The weekly oil spill informational meetings with BP and local officials have been changed to a bi-weekly schedule.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, July 30, at 5:30 at the Perdido Bay Community Center.

# Escambia County defines Bingo and Adult Arcades

. . . efforts underway to clarify zoning issues on on Key

By Eddie McMillan

In early 2009 Perdido Key residents were made aware of the possibility that a Dallas developer was considering building a “Bingo Casino” in Escambia County and more specifically on Perdido Key at a site adjacent to the WCI property. While rumors of this nature had existed before this time, the involvement of our county commissioner with the project appeared to lend credibility that this might be more than a rumor.

A series of citizen meetings were called and discussions held to determine what this might mean and what might be done to get clarification on what was being planned and how it might impact us. Within a short period of time we became aware that a Development Order was being prepared and citizens would have a chance to voice their opinions at a mid March Development Review Committee meeting. At the DRC meeting on March 18, 2009, a great deal of opposition was voiced concerning the validity of the appropriate zoning and the legality of the Bingo facility proposed. In any case, the Development Order was issued to the developer which allowed them to begin the process to secure building permits and begin clearing the land in preparation of construction.

During this period, several meetings were held in the Perdido Key community led by the developer, Cy Keefer and the District 2 County Commissioner, Gene Valentino. Their purpose was to present to the community their planned development which included a Bingo Casino and at a later date, possibly a hotel. In general terms, their plan met with significant opposition because most people believed

Perdido Key was not suited for this type of business due to traffic concerns and the “family” friendly atmosphere that brought most of the tourist income to the island. The feeling was that a Bingo facility would impair the island’s ability to maintain that “family” friendly position.

Several individuals, the Perdido Key Association and the Residents Forum appealed to Mr. Valentino to drop his support for the Bingo facility. He refused and the group decided to appeal the Development Order to the Escambia County Board of Adjustments. An attorney was hired and the appeal process began with the Board of Adjustments. In the end, the appeal was lost at the Board of Adjustments because, in our view, there was a misunderstanding of Florida law on the part of the BOA concerning “Commercial” Bingo. Chapter 849 of Florida law specifically states that Bingo is an exception to the Florida gaming laws in order to allow charities, churches, veteran’s organization and other miscellaneous non-profits to play charity bingo. It was our view that “commercial” bingo was not allowed in the strict interpretation of the law.

Simultaneously with the appeal, an effort was started to place a moratorium on the future development of “Adult Amuse-

ment” arcades, which was felt to be at the core of future “Bingo” facilities, so that an ordinance could be developed to clearly define the types of machines that could be contained in an establish-

ment of this type. Electronic [use of electronic machines] bingo is not allowed under Florida law; however, after looking at the “Business Plan” for the Perdido Key facility, it appeared that the proposed Casino might attempt to be a combination of

both bingo and Adult Amusement machines.

After much effort, an county ordinance has now been written which would define the machines that can be used in an “Adult Amusement Arcade.” Any machine outside the defines of the ordinance would be classified as a “slot machine” and therefore, illegal. This ordinance also provides the cover needed should someone try to build a “Bingo Casino” where electronic machines would be used to play the game. The ordinance is now in the “public hearing” phase, has had no opposition and appears to be on its way to approval.

Efforts are ongoing to clarify the zoning issue on Perdido Key that would further restrict the development of any Bingo establishments on the island.



## ***Government Contacts***

Chris Jones and his fellow property appraisers in Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties are working to convince Governor Crist and the Legislature to provide property tax relief on 2010 assessments. They must have public support and pressure to achieve this goal in our behalf. It is important that you call or write to the Governor and District Legislators in support of this request.

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### **Governor's Office - Charlie Crist (R)**

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### **Florida House - Dave Murzin (R-District 3)**

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## ***Sunset Rainbow Over Perdido Key***



*Photo by Annie Griffin*

### **Perdido Key Association: Contact- Annie Griffin**

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*KeyNotes is a publication of the Perdido Key Association. Its goal is to bring current, credible, local information and resources to the members of our organization. PKA makes no claim as to the accuracy of the information presented. Most of the information is gathered from public sources and assembled for our readers.*